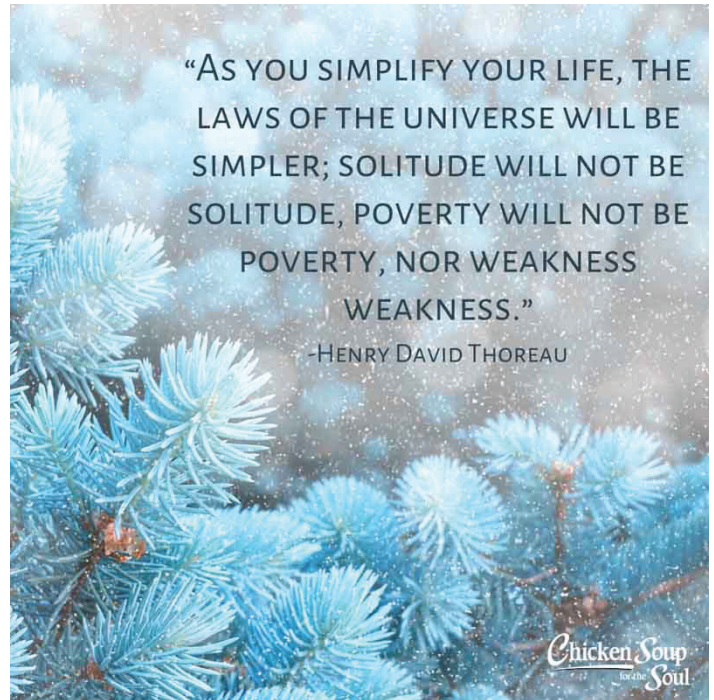


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Thursday, December 10, 2020

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

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
10 a.m.
Livestreamed Only
GDILIVE.COM
AND LOCALLY ON GDIRADIO AT 89.3 FM

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Groton Area School District

Active COVID-19 Cases

Updated December 4, 2020; 11:49 AM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3

Updated December 7, 2020; 11:21 AM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3

Updated December 8, 2020; 1:38 PM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3

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Middle School Christmas Concert



Groton Area Middle School held its Christmas Concert Tuesday evening in the GHS Gym. The junior high band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh, performed, "Holiday Chips and Salsa," "Untitled," and "Bell Carol Rock." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The sixth grade band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh, performed, "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," "Cool as a Cucumber," and "Ancient Hunters." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The junior choir, under the direction of Kayla Duncan, performed, "In Winter," and "Deck the Halls and Swing it." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The sixth grade choir, under the direction of Kayla Duncan, performed, "Born, Born in Bethlehem," and "My Favorite Things." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Noem budget offers spending on variety of projects

By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — South Dakota's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has put it on a sounder financial footing than many other states. That was part of the message Tuesday from Gov. Kristi Noem as she presented her annual budget address to a joint session of the Legislature.

Rather than issuing orders for lockdowns and mask mandates, Noem has emphasized personal responsibility, often criticized for her approach to the coronavirus. At the start of her address, she contrasted the state of South Dakota's finances with other states that will be raising taxes or seeking federal assistance.

"South Dakota is entering 2021 in one of the strongest financial positions in the country," Noem said. "South Dakota won't be raising taxes on our citizens or our businesses. We will not be borrowing billions of dollars to cover our budget shortfall. And we won't be looking to Congress to send us stimulus money."

Noem noted that the state closed the 2020 budget year in June with a \$19 million surplus and general fund revenues are up 19.4% compared with the same time last year.

For the fiscal year 2022, Noem offered her suggestions for the state's \$5 billion budget. It will be funded by \$1.7 billion in general funds, \$1.8 billion in federal funds and \$1.4 billion in other funds. She broke the state's budget needs into three categories: paying off debt from 2010, retiring and reinvigorating the state's infrastructure and strengthening communities.

Highlights of the budget included:

- Dedicating \$21 million to pay off two technical college bonds resulting in \$1.7 million in ongoing debt service savings.

"Unburdening the tech schools from this debt will allow them to refocus their attention," Noem told legislators. "Their dollars can instead be used to further improve the caliber of their programs."

- Investing \$100 million over the next few years to fully connect the state to broadband internet. Federal, state and industry funds have already invested \$89 million in South Dakota, Noem said.

Noem estimates the cost of connecting all South Dakotans to broadband at \$200 million. She said the state's \$100 million investment should be enough to leverage more federal and private investments to pay for the project.

- Proposing \$12 million to help replace the State Fair Livestock Complex that was destroyed by fire in October. With a \$3 million insurance payment and \$4 million from fundraising, Noem said the new 200,000 square foot facility should be open in time for the State Fair in 2022.

"Like an old-fashioned barn raising, it will take all of us to get this project done, but I know it's worth it," Noem said.

- Recommending \$10 million for the Bureau of Information Technology to fight cyber crime.

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South Dakota state government computers had 14 billion attacks from 165 countries in July, according to Noem. The funding would be used for system upgrades to protect state and employee data from cyber attacks.

"This will also allow us to develop a comprehensive plan to replace many of our oldest and most critical applications," Noem said.

- Spending \$3.2 million on upgrades for the State Radio system, particularly in Rockerville, Keystone, Hill City, Hot Springs and Reliance. Upgrading the system in the Black Hills is important for better communication between responders during wildfires, Noem said.

- Investing \$3.4 million for equipment upgrades at the state's four technical colleges. That funding would be matched by \$1.6 million from the tech colleges for a \$5 million investment.

"It will include programs identified as both high-need and high-demand, ensuring that we are investing in the careers we need most in the coming years," Noem said.

- Starting a grant program with \$5 million in one-time funds for processors to upgrade their facilities and increase capacity.

- Allocating \$5 million for dam maintenance including \$4 million for repairs to the Elk Lake Dam in Brown County.

- Using \$5 million to purchase a new state airplane and selling two other state planes.

- Providing 2.4% inflationary increases for medical providers, K-12 education, technical colleges and state employee salaries.

In addition to the inflationary increase for K-12 education, Noem's budget offers a one-time investment of \$11 million to offset funds schools would lose because of lower enrollments due to the effects of COVID-19.

"Our hope is this will help provide a final bridge for schools past the pandemic," Noem said.

- Using \$1 million to expand the Access Critical Nursing Facility Program to facilities in Platte, Sisseton and Madison.

- Recommending \$8.3 million to establish small-scale, private, adult intermediate care facilities in Rapid City and Sioux Falls for residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- Investing \$3.2 million for the creation, in partnership with the Department of Defense and Pennington County, of a \$12.7 million recreation center near Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Noem is also recommending an extra 2% on top of the usual 10% budget reserves as well as \$50 million for a trust fund to protect the state from future economic hardships.

The governor predicted states would have a tough time under the Biden administration. She said she expects Biden to try to raise taxes, eliminate fossil fuels and "drown us in new regulation."

In the new administration, "I expect federal agencies will see South Dakota not as a partner but as a subordinate," Noem said.

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The pieces of the new water tower were assembled yesterday. The big crane was brought to town Monday night, was assembled and they started raising the pieces right away Monday morning. By midday Tuesday, the crane was packed up and ready to leave town. That will be basically the extent of the work for this year. A new pump house will be erected next year. The entire new system should become active late next year.

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South Dakota 2020 Budget Address (as prepared for delivery)

By Governor Kristi Noem
December 8, 2020

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, and my fellow South Dakotans.

We meet today with yet another incredible year behind us.

When I stood before you last year, I presented a prudent and cautious budget proposal. We were coming off a historic year of blizzards, flooding, and tornadoes. Fortunately, as the session went on, our projections showed promise. Then, we were thrown another unexpected challenge – COVID-19.

Before we begin today, I'd like to ask that we all please stand for a moment of silence to remember all the South Dakotans we have lost to this horrible virus.

Thank you.

Today, I will walk you through the state's response to the virus. Outline the state's economic position, including revenues and expenses. And lay out my proposals to set up South Dakota's families, workers, and businesses for success for many generations to come.

Following months of economic lockdowns, sheltering in place, and huge numbers of businesses being forced to close permanently, many of my peers are likely not looking forward to standing before their legislatures like I am today. Some will propose tax increases, others will take on billions more in debt, and a few will be forced to make significant budget cuts.

In South Dakota, as we have done throughout this pandemic, I am pleased to report that we will be forging a different path.

Rather than following the pack and mandating harsh rules, South Dakota provides our residents with information about what is happening on the ground in our state—the science, facts and data. Then, we ask each South Dakotan to take personal responsibility for their health, the health of their loved ones, and – in turn – our communities. The state hasn't issued lockdowns or mandates. We haven't shut down businesses or closed churches. In fact, our state has never even defined what an "essential business" is. That, quite simply, is not the government's role.

Since March, many of my peers have attempted to stop the spread of the virus without considering their citizens' social or mental wellbeing or the state of their economies.

Even amid a pandemic, public policy ought to be holistic. Daily needs must still be met. People need to eat and keep a roof over their heads. And they still need purpose. That means policymakers cannot have tunnel vision. They must balance public health concerns with people's mental and emotional needs, their economic livelihoods and social connections, and liberty, among many other important factors.

Many in the media have criticized this approach, labeling me ill-informed, a "denier," and reckless. Some have even asserted that South Dakota is "as bad as it gets anywhere in the world" when it comes to Covid-19—a demonstrably false statement. At the same time, my critics praise states that issued lockdowns, mandated masks, and shut down businesses—lauding these states as having taken the "right" steps to mitigate the spread of the virus.

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As we continue to see spikes move throughout the country, the course of the virus does not seem to be quantifiably different in the states that, according to the media, did everything "right."

Despite harsh lockdowns in Illinois, coupled with a mask mandate since May 1, that state sadly experienced a new single-day record in Covid-19 deaths on December 2nd. And, its active case counts are higher, on a per capita basis, than South Dakota's has ever been.

New Jersey, which still has had the most deaths in the country per capita, has had a mask mandate in place since June and has imposed \$15,000-a-day fines on businesses that refuse to close. Still, over the last two weeks of November, its hospitalizations increased by 34%, a six-month high.

California passed a mask mandate in June and has some of the harshest lockdown orders in the country, including shutting off residents' water if they have too many visitors. Despite that, the AP recently reported their COVID hospitalizations have increased nearly 90% and could triple by Christmas.

Until we have an effective and widespread vaccine, the virus will spread – science tells us that. That's one of the reasons why, at the outset, the nation's goal was to manage hospital capacity.

In South Dakota, we have kept our focus on this goal and continued to ensure our hospitals are not overwhelmed and can serve their communities well. To date, we have less than 500 individuals in the hospital for Covid, the first time since November 6, and we are on a steady downward trajectory.

We've continued to work with communities across the state to fight the virus. We have kept an open dialog with our county, city, and tribal communities to offer information, resources, knowledge, mass testing events, and PPE. We recently wrapped up mass testing events in 11 communities across the state and are continuing to fight this virus together.

South Dakota is entering 2021 in one of the strongest financial positions in the country. And today, I will be unveiling ways in which we can further improve our state by investing in infrastructure, paying off debt from 2010, and bolstering our rainy-day fund, as good stewards of the public's money should do.

In contrast, Illinois plans to borrow \$2 billion from the Federal Reserve. New Jersey, which already has the highest debt per taxpayer in the nation, is issuing an additional \$4.3 billion in bonds. And New York is looking at a nearly \$60 billion dollar revenue shortfall. It likely goes without saying that each of these states is also counting on federal bailouts to keep them afloat.

South Dakota won't be raising taxes on our citizens or our businesses. We won't be borrowing billions of dollars to cover our budget shortfalls. And we won't be looking to Congress to send us more stimulus money.

When I travel across the state and around the country, people often congratulate us on how strong South Dakota's financial position is compared to the rest of the nation. Like you all, I take pride in the fact that we structurally balance our budget and have a AAA credit rating, and I'm committed to maintaining it.

Though our fight against COVID-19 is not over, our unique approach to the virus has left us in a strong fiscal position today. When the virus first hit, every state's economy shrunk. But South Dakota overcame that quickly. We closed the 2020 budget year in June with a \$19 million surplus, and our general fund revenues are up by 19.4% right now, compared to the same time last year. We took steps last year to cut spending and be cautious with taxpayer money, and we are seeing the fruits of that today.

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In addition to higher-than-expected revenue, the influx of stimulus money from the federal government has allowed for further general fund savings, and I'll go into that in more detail in a moment.

But we are seeing this approach pay off, right now, in the everyday lives of South Dakotans.

After peaking at 11% in April, our unemployment rate as of October was 3.6%, the third lowest in the country.

Perhaps an even more important number to consider is total employment. This chart looks specifically at nonfarm employment, a statistic that can better capture our current business climate. It shows a year over year percentage change so we can see an apples to apples comparison.

This chart compares South Dakota to the United States and all the states in our region. Michigan is the worst performing state in the Midwest region, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Throughout the pandemic, as you can see, South Dakota has fared much better than the rest of the country, including states in our region.

To fully understand our current economic climate, and the money we have available this year, it's important to take stock of the federal dollars we received and how they were used.

This chart illustrates all the estimated direct payments South Dakotans and businesses have been able to take advantage of. That includes the PPP program for small businesses, the food assistance program for farmers and ranchers, the stimulus checks for families, and unemployment assistance for those who lost their jobs. In total, that's about \$3.9 billion in federal stimulus.

This does not include any other grant funding the state received, like the \$1.25 billion from the coronavirus relief fund.

This next slide shows quarterly personal income in the state. As you can see, we saw a sizable aberration in the second quarter this year. This is due in large part to that federal stimulus I just talked about. As I stated, many South Dakotans received direct payments from the government. Additionally, many small businesses received assistance from grants or other relief programs.

The gold line here is our forecast for income growth moving forward. As you can see, we are projecting that this spike will be a one-time event, and there will be a downward adjustment. That means people will feel the impact when federal money runs out -- even though we are in a much stronger situation than most other states.

The important takeaway here is a message of caution: we should remain prudent and conservative moving forward. We need to carefully consider these unusual circumstances as we project revenue. We cannot recklessly spend every taxpayer dollar that we have. When we do invest in our state, we must invest wisely and strategically.

Before I dive into my recommendations, I do want to call out one budget provision related to the disappointing votes on marijuana at the ballot box this year. There are significant safety and regulatory costs associated with both the medical marijuana measure and the recreational one.

Given the latter is currently facing constitutional challenges, we're going to have to present two courses of action. A path forward with both recreational and medical. And a second with just medical.

I want to be very clear, we will not see any revenue from marijuana until at least April of 2022. Though it could be longer.

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And in the meantime, to comply with the predetermined timeline, the Department of Revenue needs to get to work now. This funding would go toward staff, technology, consultants, and other costs, until revenues from the program are enough to sustain it.

But there will also be a number of other collateral costs, like safety, training, and enforcement, among many others.

On top of this, the Department of Health has specific needs related to the medical marijuana program. My budget recommends just over \$136,000 over three years to cover staff and other costs related to setting up a program. That should be enough to support program costs until revenue starts coming in.

To implement just medical marijuana, the Department of Health will need additional resources -beyond the \$136 – though, the Department of Revenue would need much less.

Over the coming weeks, we hope to know more about which path we need to take.

By now, I am fairly confident that people all across America know that South Dakota is open for business. In the next few minutes, I'm going to walk you through some of the specifics of what we're looking to do to build on this pledge.

My recommendations fall under three primary categories: paying off debt from 2010, restoring and reinvigorating our state's infrastructure, and strengthening our communities across the state.

First, as it relates to paying off inherited debt.

In 2010, the state issued bonds to finance expansions in key programs at Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls, Mitchell Technical College, and Lake Area Technical College in Watertown. This project has led to investments in stronger auto body and maintenance programs, effective student services, and modern facilities. Our students are better prepared to be leaders in their industries because of these upgrades.

I recommend that we dedicate just over \$21 million to pay off two of the technical college bonds. This will save \$1.7 million in ongoing debt service. That would result in a savings of \$500,000 to the general fund and \$1.2 million for the technical colleges.

Unburdening the tech schools from this debt will allow them to refocus their attention. Their dollars can instead be used to further improve the caliber of their programs. They are already receiving well-deserved national attention for their high-quality offerings, and this unleashes their potential even more.

Next, we should focus on restoring and reinvigorating our state's infrastructure. Sound infrastructure is closely tied to economic opportunity. The most important investment we can make this year is to finish connecting the state to broadband.

As I said during my State of the State last January, in America's early days, mail was delivered via post road. The Founders thought communication was so important to the business of the people and the nation that they included a provision in the Constitution to allow for the government to establish post roads.

Well today, in the modern economy, technology allows for the transportation of goods and services over the internet – a whole different kind of post road. We must create an environment where people aren't forced to choose between the modern economy on the one hand, and life at their hometown on the other. We must make sure our people can harness the latest technology to take advantage of what has become

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the modern equivalent of a post road.

As I said, we've made significant strides thus far. But we must bring it over the finish line. I'm recommending we invest \$100 million to fully connect the state over the next few years.

The benefits of this investment are hard to overstate. It makes it easier for our farmers and ranchers to communicate with their suppliers, access weather forecasts, and participate in online marketing and auctions. It ensures that the next generation of entrepreneurs stay in small-town South Dakota to start their business. It tangibly improves the lives of our students by making it possible to do schoolwork at home. The same is true of our employees, who would be able to telework. And of particular importance this year – it would allow even the most remote residents, including folks in the Black Hills and those in tribal communities – to access telehealth opportunities.

Over the last two years, the Connect SD program has devoted nearly \$17 million to broadband projects, which in turn leveraged roughly \$35 million in federal money and \$37 million in industry money, for a total investment of just shy of \$89 million in broadband in South Dakota.

This is an impressive return of more than \$5.50 for every \$1 invested in broadband by the state.

The estimated cost of providing high-speed internet to every remaining unserved or underserved South Dakotan is \$200 million. I believe this \$100 million dollar investment from the state can leverage enough federal and private dollars to get the job done.

In the early hours of October 31st, a fire destroyed the State Fair Open Class Beef Complex. Fortunately, no people or animals were injured, but the building was a total loss. Thank you to our State Fair staff for their response and to the firefighters and first responders who were on the scene that day. We are grateful for your service.

The beef complex held many memories for fairgoers. It truly was a special place.

In South Dakota, we know out of adversity comes opportunity and a chance to build for the future. Immediately after the fire, we began discussing plans to rebuild a new and improved complex. Our goal is to become the number one choice for equestrian and livestock events in the country, and for attracting new opportunities to South Dakota.

It is my pleasure to present to you our plan for the State Fair Livestock Complex. The new, multi-purpose facility will be 200,000 square feet. That's more than 100,000 square feet larger than the old beef complex.

This new space will be capable of housing up to 2,000 head of cattle, and allow for indoor regional and national rodeos, equestrian events, and livestock exhibitions. In addition, the new livestock complex will enable us to replace the sheep barn. Many of you here know that the sheep barn has long outlived its useful life. This step will minimize livestock transportation safety issues within the fairgrounds.

This state-of-the-art facility will position us to better compete for national rodeo and equestrian events and provide new opportunities for the city of Huron and the state of South Dakota. Like its predecessor, the new livestock complex will be a special place, and I can't wait to see families and fairgoers making new memories.

To fund this project, my budget proposal includes \$12 million in one-time general funds to supplement the \$3 million dollar insurance claim and \$4 million raised through fundraising efforts.

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Like an old-fashioned barn raising, it will take all of us to get this project done, but I know it's worth it.

I look forward to seeing you all in the new livestock complex at the 2022 State Fair.

Next, we must address the growing cyber risks facing our state. Cybercrime is one of the biggest threats of the modern era, and state and local governments are among the biggest targets. In July alone, South Dakota sustained more than 14 billion attacks from 165 different countries. Let me repeat that: 14 billion attacks. Without significant investments to protect our state, it is only a matter of time before one of these attacks becomes a disastrous data breach.

I recommend \$10 million in one-time funds be allocated to upgrade vulnerable infrastructure throughout the state. This funding would allow the Bureau of Information Technology to conduct significant system upgrades to protect our state and employee data from malicious attacks in the future. This also will allow us to develop a comprehensive plan to replace many of our oldest and most critical applications.

One of my top priorities is keeping South Dakotans safe. One component of that is equipping our first responders with the tools they need to protect our communities. After September 11th, Governor Janklow created the state radio system - forming a single, uniform communications system for first responders in every corner of this state. However, with the aging infrastructure and software, our current system needs further upgrades.

We have invested in this system over the last two years, and I recommend we build on this investment with an additional \$3.2 million in one-time money to ensure that first responders can continue to serve and protect our residents and visitors.

This investment will target three key areas.

In the Black Hills, a heavily trafficked tourist area, we would build new towers in Rockerville, Keystone, and Hill City. These towers will work together to provide comprehensive coverage across the entire region.

In Hot Springs, this funding would allow us to further leverage the existing tower to cover a wider area. The lack of reliable communication in Hot Springs is particularly pressing given the issues with wildfires as of late.

Likewise, in Reliance, this investment would leverage another existing tower to enhance and improve our state, local, and tribal response in cases of emergency.

We must continue to prioritize this system and ensure that it is functioning at the highest possible level to support the efforts of our first responders.

We must also invest in our training programs for the next generation at our technical colleges. From agriculture and manufacturing technology programs to health sciences and law enforcement studies – our colleges are preparing our future workforce today.

I am recommending investing \$3.4 million in one-time money to provide much needed equipment for the four tech colleges. The state's funding, coupled with a \$1.6 million-dollar match from the technical colleges, results in a \$5 million dollar investment.

It will include programs identified as both high-need and in-demand, ensuring that we are investing in

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the careers we need most in the coming years.

A key vulnerability that the pandemic exposed is that our nation and our state does not have enough processing capacity to meet demand. As we've seen, this can lead to disruptions for producers and consumers.

To address capacity, we are developing a grant program to provide funds needed to improve the state's capacity to process and store South Dakota-raised meat products.

This program is for the small processors that our local producers rely on. Through this program, processors can apply for grants to pay for facility upgrades like new freezers or processing equipment, make facility improvements to manage increased capacity, or work to expand their operations.

I am recommending \$5 million in one-time funds to facilitate these grants.

We are also working with USDA to give our farmers and ranchers another option to be able to sell their products across state lines. These efforts could dramatically improve South Dakota's meat processing options in the coming months.

This past July, a major storm swept through Brown County and dealt significant damage to the area. Its impact on the Elm Lake Dam, which provides one-third of the water supply for Aberdeen, has been particularly concerning.

The state appropriated an emergency \$521,000 for the dam in 2019 after an engineering report noted that the concrete in the dam was unfixable. That fix worked for a time, but it no longer meets state safety guidelines for capacity. After this summer's storm, it is clear that the time has come to replace the dam entirely before more damage is inflicted on the area.

I recommend allocating \$4 million in one-time money along with another \$1 million for critical maintenance on other dams in the state.

Like virtually all other states, South Dakota maintains a small fleet of aircraft for use by state officials and employees. The fleet is also used to respond to fires in the Black Hills.

Our state currently has three aircraft that are an average of 26 years old.

To help ensure the safety of all state officials who utilize this fleet, I recommend that we purchase a newer plane. Simultaneously, I am recommending that the state sell two of our older planes. This downsizing from three to two planes will be much more efficient for the state in the long run. As planes age, they require more frequent, complex, and very expensive maintenance.

The State's top priority when considering aircraft must be safety. We all know that South Dakota tragically lost a governor, two state commissioners, three chief executives, and two pilots, 27 years ago. They died in service to our great state. While our state lost profound dignitaries in that crash, their families lost so much more. The plane we currently fly is the same plane purchased after that crash.

I'm recommending we invest \$5 million to purchase a newer airplane. Combined with the sale of two older planes, again, this will be a safer and more cost-effective path forward for the state's air fleet.

Finally, I would like to turn to our third category: strengthening our communities. We are entering the next year in an extremely strong financial position, but it is vital that we take this opportunity to strengthen

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our communities for the next economic downturn.

Accordingly, I am also recommending targeted investments in key industries, with both ongoing and one-time money. This money will help meet the needs of our communities moving forward.

This starts with funding inflationary increases for medical providers, K-12 education, technical colleges, and state employees.

My budget includes an inflationary increase of 2.4% for medical provider reimbursement rates, along with additional targeted rate increases for community-based providers.

Also, I am recommending a 2.4% increase for state aid to education, as well as a 2.4% increase to the per student allocation for the technical colleges. To be clear, this is above the statutorily required 1.5%.

This investment will help ensure that local school districts have the resources necessary to educate our children and grandchildren.

My budget also includes a 2.4% increase for state employee salaries.

Last year, I announced a plan to offer paid family leave to state employees when they welcome a new child to their family through birth or adoption. That new leave option took effect July 1st and has given nearly 100 of our employees support and flexibility to get a strong start with their new children.

I also asked my human resources team to reassess the health benefits we offer. The challenge I gave them was 1) to create benefits that are competitive with those offered by other large employers in the state; 2) to make the health insurance plan financially sustainable for the state; and 3) to simplify our plan's administration.

The result of this effort, as reflected in my proposed budget, meets this challenge.

This plan will also create \$12 million in healthcare savings. We will reinvest those funds directly into employee pay, especially for positions where the state's base pay hasn't offered competitive wages.

Individuals and their families face complex decisions, particularly when it comes to their health insurance. Providing several options that fit their financial and health needs is an important part of our strategy. My proposal keeps a premium-free insurance plan for state employees with the opportunity to purchase a plan that offers additional coverage.

My budget provides improved benefits to our employees and moves us forward in our ability to compete for top talent, all without adding any dollars to the budget.

I also want to allocate some additional ongoing money to support our health care facilities and providers across the state. These exceptional individuals work around the clock to provide needed medical care for our state's residents, and I am incredibly grateful for the time they put in every single day.

Here in South Dakota, we must ensure that our rural residents have easy access to skilled nursing care. The Access Critical Nursing Facility Program, implemented in 2011, does exactly that by reimbursing rural facilities to keep them financially viable.

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There are currently nine rural nursing facilities supported by this program. I recommend allocating an additional \$1 million in ongoing funds to expand the program to three other facilities in Platte, Sisseton, and Madison. This investment will ensure that these areas have access to the high-quality nursing care.

Finally, we must look out for our residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities who require specialized care. I am committed to providing these individuals with care that allows them to live their lives to the fullest every day.

I recommend \$8.3 million in one-time funds to establish small-scale, private, adult Intermediate Care Facilities for these individuals in both Rapid City and Sioux Falls. These facilities will create regional access to top-tier care and allow these individuals to be served much closer to their homes. In addition, these facilities will reduce capacity and costs at the South Dakota Development Center and allow them to focus more on the residents in their geographical area.

Switching gears now to some other uses of one-time money. I want to start with a new facility to improve the quality of life and community for our servicemen and women at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The base will be undergoing extensive mission growth in the very near future. Preparations have begun in support of the next generation bomber, the B-21 Raider, and its placement at Ellsworth. We are honored that the Air Force selected Ellsworth as the site for the first operational squadron as well as the training mission.

This selection comes with a high level of investment from the Air Force. Specifically, we're looking at a \$1 billion-dollar construction investment into the state of South Dakota. As a result, Ellsworth will no longer be able to use a large hangar on base that is currently being used as a recreation facility.

To replace this loss and enhance the local and military community, I recommend using \$3.2 million in one-time funding to support a new recreational center near the base. In conjunction with funding from the Department of Defense and Pennington County, this \$12.7 million facility will offer a year-round space for the community.

It will be a place for community and connection, which anyone in our military, along with their spouses and children, will tell you is critical for a family that is constantly on the move.

Continuing in the spirit of strengthening communities, in addition to the 2.4% inflationary increase to K-12 education, I am also recommending an additional \$11 million-dollar one-time investment.

Traditionally, once we have final enrollment numbers for the school year, we adjust the budget to reflect actual enrollment versus what we projected last year. This year, COVID-19 has led to declines in enrollment across the state. This means that if we follow the traditional model, we would cut \$11 million from the school funding formula.

I do not want to do that this year. Instead, we will propose that we invest this \$11 million on a one-time basis. Our hope is this will help provide a final bridge for schools past the pandemic.

South Dakota's future is very bright. But we've faced real challenges this year. And we will face more in the future. To safeguard against unforeseen economic setbacks, we must continue to take a prudent and conservative approach to state government.

Again, we need to carefully consider our present unusual circumstances as we project revenue.

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To be prepared, we need to save.

For this year, I am recommending we add an extra 2% to our regular 10% budget reserves. In addition, I am also recommending that we put \$50 million in a trust fund in order to protect ourselves against any future economic hardships.

These two strategic investments will create one-time and ongoing funding streams for the future.

Frankly, I expect the road could be rough under a Biden administration.

We can expect him to try and raise taxes. Similarly, we can expect him to try and eliminate fossil fuels by passing the Green New Deal. And, whatever else a Biden administration might do, it would certainly drown us in new regulation. I expect Biden's federal agencies to see South Dakota not as a partner but as a subordinate.

So, we must be prepared.

As with years past, I have presented a high-level overview, rather than touching on everything in my budget. If you would like to review all the details, please read through my budget book and the deck of slides attached to this presentation on the Bureau of Finance and Management's website.

I'll close with the wise words of President Calvin Coolidge: "I want the people of America to be able to work less for the government and more for themselves. I want them to have the rewards of their own industry. This is the chief meaning of freedom."

I cannot think of anything more descriptive of my administration's hope for the people of South Dakota. Under God, the people rule. All of us here are stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars. And the budget I have proposed sets up our children and grandchildren for decades of prosperity.

I firmly believe our mission is the same: a safer, stronger, healthier South Dakota. I look forward to working with you all in the coming months to accomplish this mission.

Thank you all for your work as public servants. God bless you. And God bless the great state of South Dakota.



**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

#289 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

This was not a great day, not for the most part record-setting, but not great. We're up to 16,242,700 cases, 1.5% over yesterday's total. There were 220,300 cases reported today, our third-worst day in history. We've had five weeks running with daily new-case counts above 90,000, which is genuinely depressing. We did have a record-setting number of hospitalizations for the second consecutive day with 102,148. We've been at record levels here for 26 of the past 28 days, which means that, in four weeks, we have failed to set a record on only two of those days.

You can tell the weekend's over when the death toll jumps by 1000 overnight. We had 2574 new deaths reported today, which puts us at 286,372. This is 0.9% more than yesterday's total. We could hit 300,000 deaths over the weekend; if not, then early next week. That's a number I never wanted to see.

OK, we have the FDA's take on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine candidate. The news is as good as we've been expecting. Quick summary of their analysis:

(1) There are "no specific safety concerns identified that would preclude issuance of an EUA." Side effects are common—seen in a majority of participants, but serious ones are rare. The common effects were reactions at the site of injection, headache, and fatigue.

(2) The agency concurs with the company's finding of 95% effectiveness at one week after the second dose, which was given 21 days after the first. Additionally the data suggest the first dose may provide 82% effective protection as well; although there was not enough information available to make a call on this for sure.

So we're on to the open meeting on Thursday. The committee is being asked to decide whether "the known and potential benefits of the vaccine outweigh its known and potential risks in people 16 and older." They will also come up with a list of whatever additional studies they think the companies should do to provide further information on safety and effectiveness. According to Dr. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the FDA, if the committee has significant questions or additional analyses they believe are relevant to a decision, then the FDA will have to decide whether to take up those concerns and recommendations. If so, this may delay a decision on the emergency use authorization (EUA). So far, so good. Keep your fingers crossed. And beware there will almost certainly not be enough vaccine available and delivered in this country to stem the growth in new cases until spring at the soonest; so we have a long winter of precautions ahead of us. Let's not let up now when we're so close.

We have a new paper from the Oxford University team working on that vaccine candidate with AstraZeneca; they've published their full clinical trial data in a peer-reviewed journal, *The Lancet*. This was likely a smart move: You may recall this is the candidate which had some issues with its clinical trial and the data set from it. The early data indicated there had been a problem with manufacturing which caused some doses of vaccine to be light, that it was weeks until that error was discovered and that the team changed the trial design on the fly to accommodate it, that the best results came from a very small sample, that they did not break down their clinical cases according to groups by dosing, that they pooled results from two arms of the clinical trial with different designs, and that the excellent results seen in the half-first-dose group turned out to be all in people under the age of 55, a basketful of problems which need to be resolved.

This vaccine candidate uses a harmless cold virus, an adenovirus, which bears the gene for viral spike protein. This gene is delivered to the patient's cells which then make the protein in sufficient quantity to trigger an immune response, rendering the person immune.

From the paper, it appears that 70 percent efficacy finding holds up and both dosing regimens did protect participants from hospitalization or severe disease; but the small sample size in that group receiving the alternate dosing regimen and pooled results are still at issue. There is a chance, based on what we've seen, that this vaccine prevents asymptomatic infection, something we do not know about the Pfizer and Moderna candidates; but more data is needed to confirm this finding.

It is still not clear how well the candidate works in those over 55 years of age, which matters because this is an at-risk age group. Too few of the clinical trial participants were in this age group, so more se-

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niors are being enrolled in the trials to meet this need. Once a sufficient number of cases is reported in this age group, the statistical work can be done to determine efficacy. There is still work being done to establish which dose regimen works best. The scientists did say "further work is needed to determine the mechanism of the increased efficacy" (in the half-first-dose group of participants).

What we do know from these data is that the candidate is safe, well-tolerated, and effective. It is much cheaper than the RNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, and it is also easier to manufacture, transport, and store because it can be held for long periods under refrigeration. You will recall that the Pfizer candidate requires ultra-low-temperature freezing and the Moderna requires freezing in the long term and refrigeration in the short term. We expect full data from the phase 3 trial in January or February.

On the subject of human-to-animal transmission, we have more large cats infected with this coronavirus. This time, it's four lions at the Barcelona Zoo who've tested positive. Three females named Zala, Nima, and Run Run and a male named Kiumbe were tested in November after showing flu-like symptoms. They have been treated with anti-inflammatory drugs and are doing well. Importantly, two zookeepers also tested positive; they're presumed to be the source of the infection in the cats, but investigations are underway to confirm. These animals have had no contact with other animals at the enclosure. The only other known cluster of infections in large cats was at the Bronx Zoo in April, where four tigers and three lions became ill and were confirmed to be infected with this coronavirus. There is a cooperative project commencing among zoo authorities to assure other animals are safe and we don't see a repeat.

There is unsettling news from the Amazon in Brazil. Covid-19 was permitted to spread relatively unchecked in the city of Manaus, Brazil, and it appears more than 70% of the population has now been infected. Estimates in this population went from 66 percent who had been infected in July to 76 percent in October. The city has a young, mobile population, household crowding, and a lot of travel on crowded boats, which may account for the penetrance into the population. This certainly puts paid to the notion floated by a group of scientists a few months ago that we would achieve herd immunity at 10 to 20 percent infected people and then be home free, something I discussed back on July 10 in my Update #138 at (12) Facebook). So much for that theory.

Britain began its Covid-19 vaccination program today, and there was a surprising member of the public lined up for his shot, actually second in line in the entire country. He's an old guy, as you can guess from his name, William Shakespeare. I am not making that up: 81-year-old William Shakespeare was vaccinated today. No, not that William Shakespeare; this guy's old, but not that old. And as far as I can tell, he is neither an actor nor a playwright, just a retired guy, although he is from a part of England only about 20 miles from the home of the Bard. After receiving his vaccine, Mr. Shakespeare said, "It could make a difference to our lives from now on, couldn't it?" I guess it could.

Of course, the world had some fun with this. There were Twitter references to "The Taming of the Flu" and "The Gentleman of Corona." (And if you don't get these, go look up a list of the plays on Wikipedia because these are pretty clever.) Another Twitter user posited this: If the first Briton to get the shot was Patient 1A, "would William Shakespeare be 2B, or not 2B?"

The National Theater got into the act too:

"Casting director: So what would you bring to the role of second patient? We want a sense of real drama and patriotism here.

"Auditionee: I'm literally called William Shakespeare.

"Casting director: Fair enough, the part's yours."

One more, courtesy of the New York Times: "Mr. Shakespeare received the shot in his left arm and wore a hospital gown and bright red socks. History records that he was pricked, but it was not clear if he bled." You will forgive me if I find this all vastly amusing. Also heartwarming: Mr. Shakespeare had a stroke a few weeks ago and has been hospitalized and separated from his family for quite some time. His niece said, "He wants to see his wife, his children, and his grandchildren, who can't visit him at the moment." This vaccine can be the thing that ends that separation. I wish him well.

The rest of us too: Stay safe. We'll talk again.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Dec. 3	Dec. 4	Dec. 5	Dec. 6	Dec. 7	Dec. 8	Dec. 9
Minnesota	327,477	333,626	338,973	345,281	350,862	356,152	359,203
Nebraska	132,530	134,710	136,325	138,568	139,834	141,127	142,603
Montana	64,340	65,122	66,436	67,069	67,875	68,591	69,346
Colorado	241,172	247,209	252,222	257,347	260,581	264,618	268,589
Wyoming	29,966	30,518	31,047	31,250	31,561	32,196	32,555
North Dakota	80,135	81,105	81,949	82,504	82,981	83,342	No Update
South Dakota	82,203	83,348	84,398	85,304	85,991	86,500	87,038
United States	13,925,350	14,147,754	14,373,720	14,584,706	14,761,576	14,955,025	14,823,129*
US Deaths	273,847	276,401	279,008	281,206	282,323	283,746	282,785*
Minnesota	+5165	+6,149	+5,347	+ 6308	+5,581	+5,290	+3,051
Nebraska	+2,336	+2,180	+1,615	+ 2243	+1,266	+1,293	+1,476
Montana	+1135	+780	+1,314	+ 633	+806	+716	+755
Colorado	+3862	+6,037	+5,013	+ 5125	+3,234	+4,037	+3,971
Wyoming	+577	+552	+529	+ 203	+311	+635	+359
North Dakota	+480	+970	+844	+ 555	+477	+361	NA
South Dakota	+1291	+1,145	+1,050	+ 906	+687	+509	+538
United States	+199,044	+222,404	+225,966	+ 210986	+176,870	+193,449	NA
US Deaths	+3,156	+2,554	+2,607	+ 2198	+1,117	+1,423	NA
	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

* These numbers are from the CDC which may be delayed. The previous source of where we acquired the numbers is not operational.

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December 8th COVID-19 UPDATE

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from State Health Lab Reports

A 60 year old male from Stanley County was the only casualty from COVID-19.

South Dakota:

Positive: +539 (87038 total) Positivity Rate: 9.4%

Total Tests: 5705 (653,277 total)

Hospitalized: +49 (4921 total). 491 currently hospitalized -12)

Deaths: +1 (1111 total)

Recovered: +568 (69,144 total)

Active Cases: -31 (16,783)

Percent Recovered: 79.4%

Beadle (32) +2 positive, +8 recovered (424 active cases)

Brookings (20) +6 positive, +25 recovered (432 active cases)

Brown (30): +22 positive, +25 recovered (698 active cases)

Clark (1): +2 positive, +2 recovered (69 active cases)

Clay (11): +17 positive, +3 recovered (266 active cases)

Codington (57): +25 positive, +22 recovered (533 active cases)

Davison (42): +7 positive, +12 recovered (484 active cases)

Day (11): +7 positive, +3 recovered (128 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +1 positive, +2 recovered (55 active cases)

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

Grant (15): +7 positive, +7 recovered (195 active cases)

Hanson (3): +0 positive, +2 recovered (78 active cases)

Hughes (21): +9 positive, +9 recovered (320 active cases)

Lawrence (23): +11 positive, +21 recovered (428 active cases)

Lincoln (55): +43 positive, +28 recovered (1049 active cases)

Marshall (3): +6 positive, +3 recovered (64 active cases)

McCook (19): +3 positive, +5 recovered (111 active cases)

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

Minnehaha (204): +179 positive, +146 recovered (3923 active cases)

Pennington (90): +40 positive, +70 recovered (1898 active cases)

Potter (2): +2 positive, +5 recovered (63 active cases)

Roberts (22): +8 positive, +3 recovered (185 active cases)

Spink (19): +6 positive, +5 recovered (141 active cases)

Walworth (13): +4 positive, 3 recovered (151 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 8:

- 9.8% rolling 14-day positivity
- 586 new positives
- 4,617 susceptible test encounters
- 337 currently hospitalized (+33)
- 4,774 active cases (+16)
- 1,064 total deaths (+30)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	380	298	736	7	Substantial	30.77%
Beadle	2386	1937	4809	32	Substantial	18.98%
Bennett	331	278	1044	5	Substantial	16.22%
Bon Homme	1408	1263	1787	20	Substantial	28.04%
Brookings	2620	2153	9079	20	Substantial	19.73%
Brown	3915	3187	10491	30	Substantial	19.87%
Brule	596	507	1617	5	Substantial	20.45%
Buffalo	393	351	826	10	Substantial	25.00%
Butte	771	637	2678	14	Substantial	17.73%
Campbell	107	94	197	1	Minimal	12.50%
Charles Mix	976	701	3387	6	Substantial	24.12%
Clark	280	210	799	1	Substantial	12.12%
Clay	1458	1181	4259	11	Substantial	17.47%
Codington	2936	2346	7735	57	Substantial	31.98%
Corson	423	362	855	5	Substantial	38.46%
Custer	596	464	2235	7	Substantial	23.68%
Davison	2520	1994	5392	42	Substantial	23.42%
Day	424	289	1446	11	Substantial	24.55%
Deuel	353	259	919	3	Substantial	38.03%
Dewey	1102	629	3276	6	Substantial	23.81%
Douglas	322	250	772	5	Substantial	32.14%
Edmunds	278	222	867	3	Substantial	14.29%
Fall River	380	314	2157	10	Substantial	13.04%
Faulk	289	254	566	10	Moderate	13.64%
Grant	728	518	1803	15	Substantial	33.33%
Gregory	452	371	1018	23	Substantial	9.73%
Haakon	175	134	457	3	Substantial	4.94%
Hamlin	530	386	1408	19	Substantial	25.50%
Hand	296	243	672	1	Substantial	11.76%
Hanson	285	204	547	3	Substantial	39.13%
Harding	83	65	138	0	Moderate	63.64%
Hughes	1762	1421	5118	21	Substantial	8.29%
Hutchinson	620	449	1894	13	Substantial	29.13%

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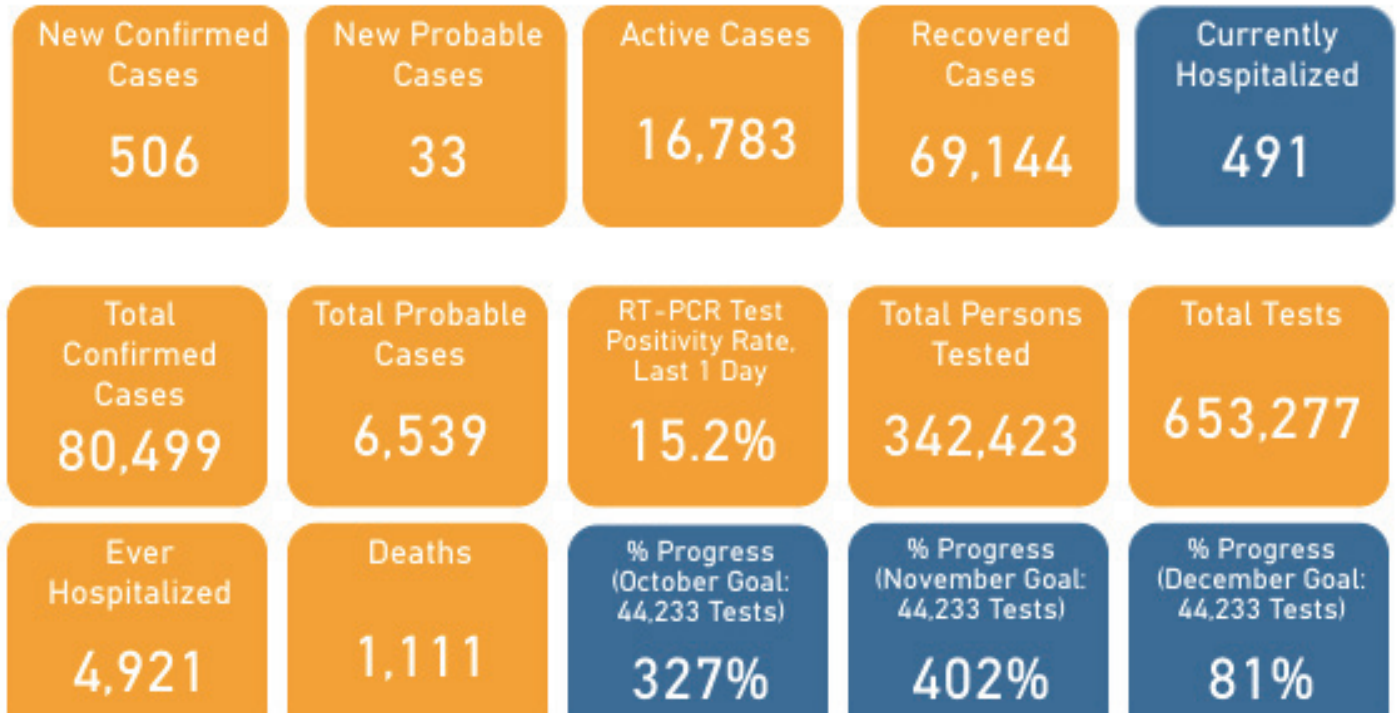
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Hyde	126	101	343	0	Moderate	8.33%
Jackson	222	176	835	8	Substantial	24.56%
Jerauld	246	201	462	13	Moderate	12.50%
Jones	63	54	163	0	Moderate	11.11%
Kingsbury	467	373	1308	12	Substantial	13.54%
Lake	918	735	2585	12	Substantial	29.01%
Lawrence	2230	1779	7184	23	Substantial	21.71%
Lincoln	5835	4731	16079	55	Substantial	25.35%
Lyman	478	398	1616	8	Substantial	18.39%
Marshall	216	149	925	3	Substantial	32.94%
McCook	617	487	1317	19	Substantial	26.58%
McPherson	157	111	477	1	Substantial	4.13%
Meade	1914	1502	6279	16	Substantial	19.60%
Mellette	201	161	619	1	Substantial	21.05%
Miner	206	166	465	5	Substantial	36.36%
Minnehaha	22081	17954	62793	204	Substantial	23.46%
Moody	461	353	1517	12	Substantial	30.30%
Oglala Lakota	1741	1382	6023	27	Substantial	20.18%
Pennington	9447	7459	31522	90	Substantial	22.91%
Perkins	228	144	592	2	Substantial	36.21%
Potter	286	224	672	2	Substantial	12.90%
Roberts	800	593	3625	22	Substantial	27.24%
Sanborn	290	204	571	3	Substantial	15.15%
Spink	617	457	1785	19	Substantial	17.18%
Stanley	243	200	707	2	Substantial	9.52%
Sully	98	82	217	3	Moderate	17.65%
Todd	1029	872	3638	15	Substantial	26.10%
Tripp	564	429	1262	9	Substantial	23.29%
Turner	851	684	2192	46	Substantial	25.66%
Union	1345	1074	4978	25	Substantial	21.75%
Walworth	546	382	1554	13	Substantial	24.90%
Yankton	2098	1421	7734	15	Substantial	27.84%
Ziebach	242	135	575	7	Substantial	36.84%
Unassigned	0	0	1787	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	3098	0
10-19 years	9503	0
20-29 years	16259	3
30-39 years	14497	12
40-49 years	12433	20
50-59 years	12395	61
60-69 years	9777	147
70-79 years	5086	234
80+ years	3990	634

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	45500	544
Male	41538	567

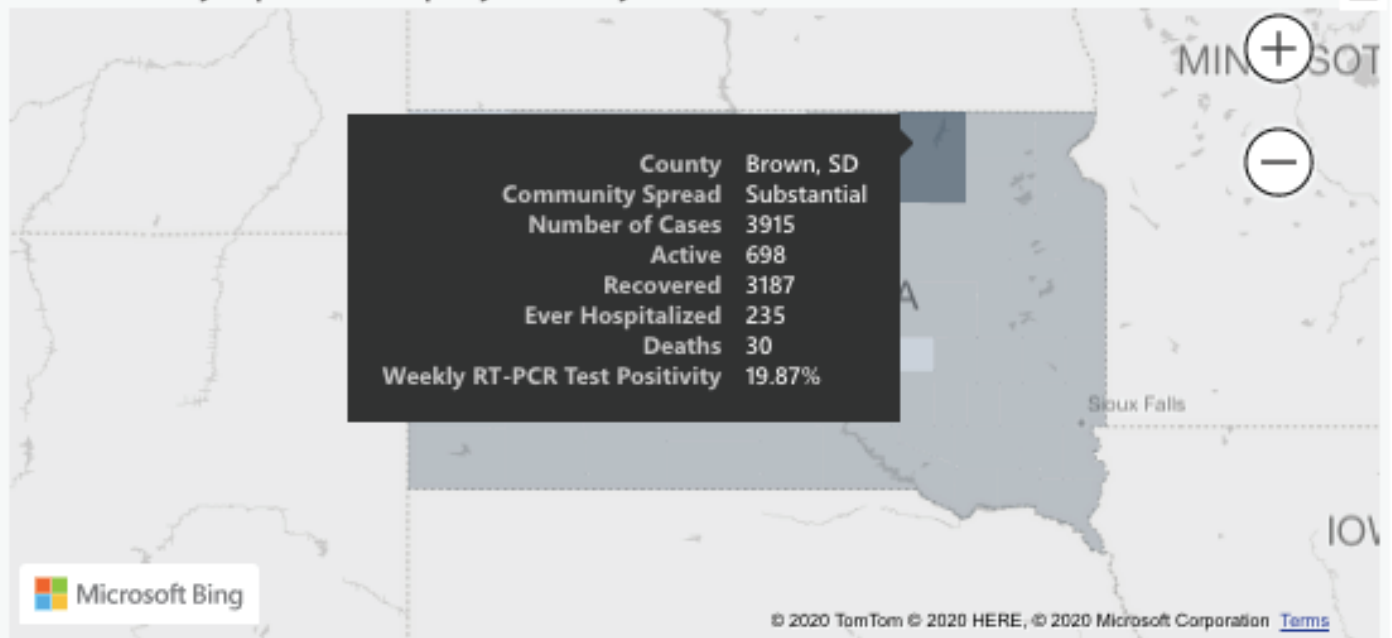
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Brown County

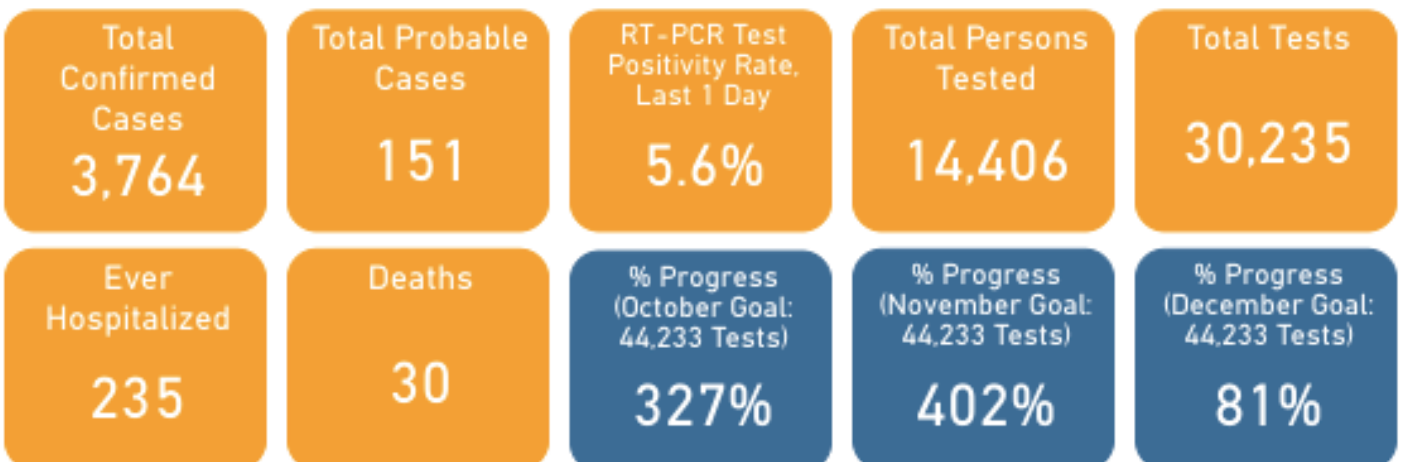


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



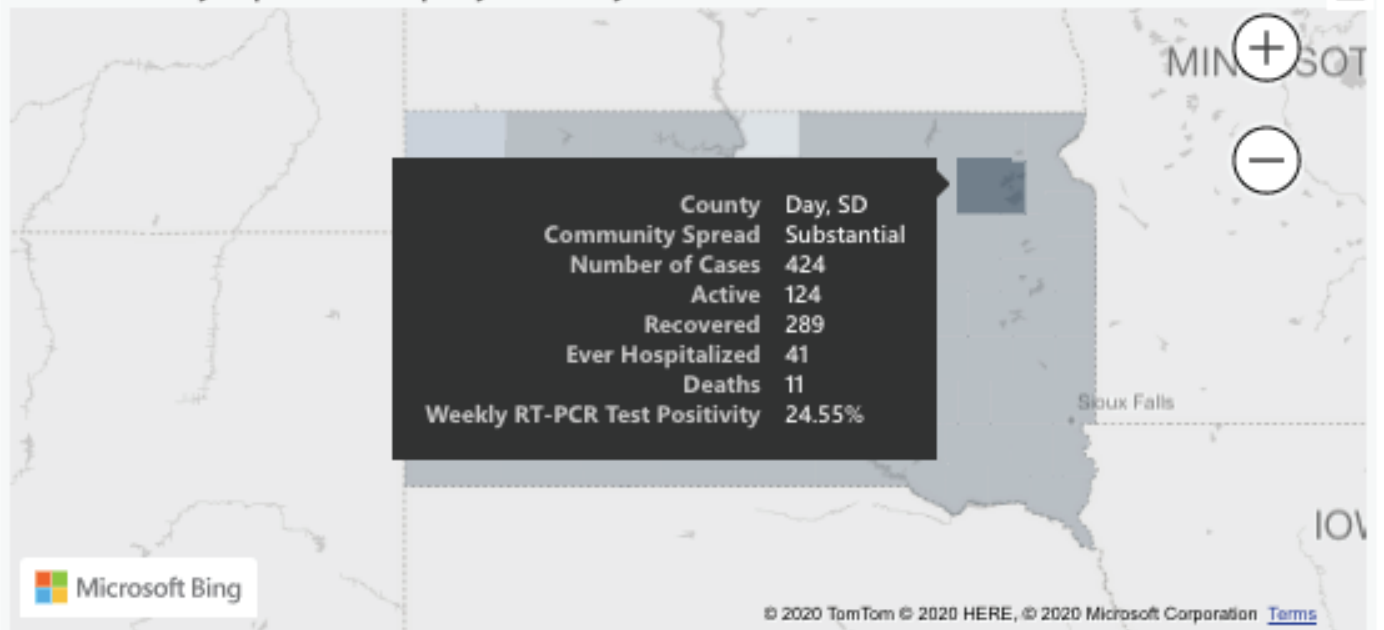
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Day County

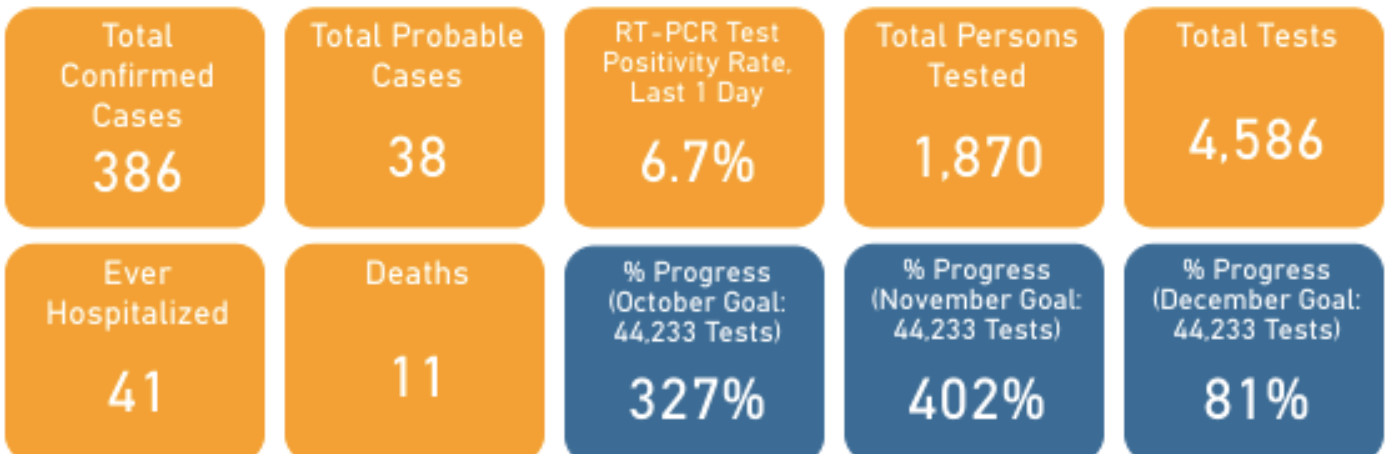


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

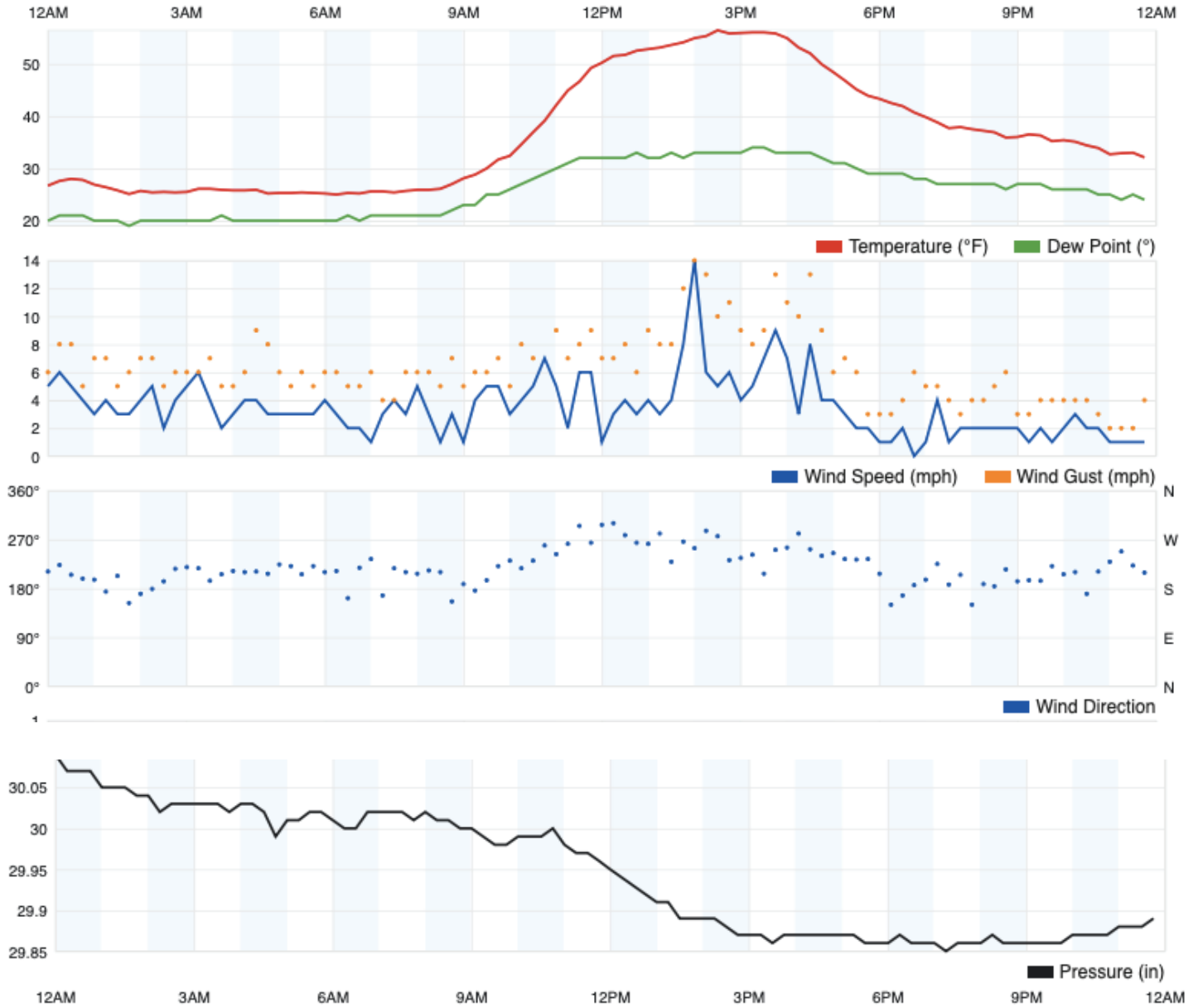
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 54 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 27 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 41 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Cloudy


Low: 21 °F

Friday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 34 °F



Our Last Very Warm Day of 2020!
Highs in the 50s to low 60s
15 to 30 degrees above average for this time of year

Day	High-Low Range	Weather Description
Thu	37-43°	BREEZY
Fri	31-35°	
Sat	28-34°	

Dry Weather Continues

Created 12/9/2020 3:28 AM

Today will likely be our last Very Warm day of 2020, with highs 15 to 30 degrees above average for this time of year. Expect highs in the 50s to low 60s, warmest over south central South Dakota. An area of low pressure will cross the area tonight, ushering in colder, more seasonal air. Highs on Thursday will be in the upper 30s to low 40s, and mainly in the low 30s Friday and Saturday. Dry weather looks to continue for the next several days.

Today in Weather History

December 9, 1961: A snowstorm moved through the area and dropped 3 to 6 inches of snow east of the Missouri River and 1 to 3 inches to the west of the river from late afternoon on the 8th through late afternoon on the 9th. The storm was accompanied by high winds, blowing snow, icy highways, and temperatures falling to near zero. Three men were killed and one injured in a two-car crash near Watertown as snow and blowing snow sharply reduced visibilities. A skidding accident on a slippery highway near Winner resulted in an automobile fatality of one man. In a rural area near Vale, in Meade County, one man abandoned his stalled vehicle and was found the next day, frozen to death. 6 inches of snow fell at Sisseton and Wheaton, with 5 inches at Aberdeen and Watertown and 3 inches at Mobridge. Only an inch fell at Pierre.

December 9, 1917: A severe winter storm struck the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes Region. It produced 25 inches of snow and wind gusts to 78 mph at Buffalo NY. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Vevay Indiana, with drifts fourteen feet high.

December 9, 2003: Although it never threatened land, a subtropical storm became Tropical Storm Peter approx. 700 miles WNW of the Cape Verde Islands. Combined with Tropical Storm Odette from earlier in the month, this is the first time since 1887 that two tropical storms formed in the Atlantic Basin in December.

1786 - A second great snowstorm in just five days brought another 15 inches of snow to Morristown NJ, on top of the eight inches which fell on the 7th and 8th, and the 18 inches which fell on the 4th and 5th. The total snowfall for the week was thus 41 inches. New Haven CT received 17 inches of new snow in the storm. Up to four feet of snow covered the ground in eastern Massachusetts following the storms. (9th-10th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A severe winter storm struck the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes Region. It produced 25 inches of snow and wind gusts to 78 mph at Buffalo NY. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Vevay IND, with drifts fourteen feet high. By the 16th of the month people could walk across the frozen Ohio River from Vevay into Kentucky. (8th-9th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The fifth storm in nine days kept the northwestern U.S. wet and windy. Winds along the coast of Washington gusted to 75 mph at Oceans Shores and at Hoquiam, and the northern and central coastal mountains of Oregon were drenched with three inches of rain in ten hours, flooding some rivers. Snowfall totals in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State ranged up to 36 inches in the Methow Valley. High winds in Oregon blew a tree onto a moving automobile killing three persons and injuring two others at Mill City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter storm blanketed the Southern and Central Appalachians with up to ten inches of snow. Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. bringing subzero cold to Minnesota and North Dakota. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A strong storm produced wind gusts of 40 to 65 mph from the Alaska Peninsula to the North Gulf Coast of Alaska. Southeasterly winds gusted to 75 mph in the Anchorage hillside. Gusty winds associated with a strong cold front caused a power outage across much of the island of Hawaii. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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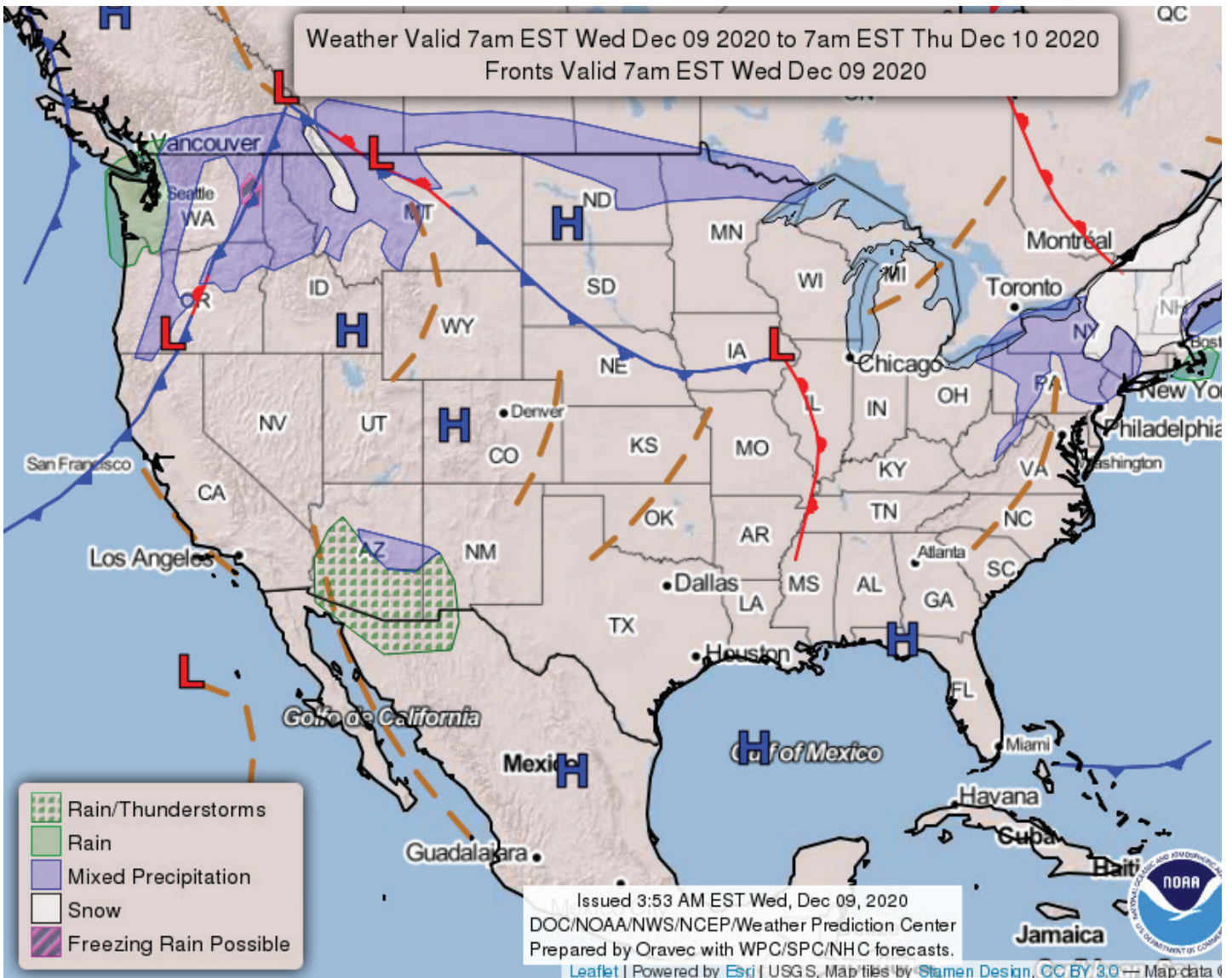
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 57 °F at 2:28 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:10 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 2:00 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 61° in 1939
Record Low: -27° in 1955
Average High: 27°F
Average Low: 8°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.14
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.34
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 4:50 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03 a.m.



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THE PROMISE OF PEACE

A professor stood before his class and boasted, "The Bible is false. It cannot be believed. It says, 'Peace and goodwill toward men.' History cannot account for a time when there were no wars!"

Disturbed, Arthur went to his pastor and related the incident. Calmly, his pastor said, "Art, that's not what the angels said. They said, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased.'"

Politicians speak of peace through treaties and boundaries, threats and sanctions, wars and rumors of wars. But that is not the peace that God speaks of in His Word. His Word speaks of a peace that comes through salvation and surrender to the Prince of Peace. It is a peace that comes from the new heart that He implants within us. It is a peace that Christians enjoy when we open the door to our hearts and allow Him to come in and rule our lives.

The peace that Scripture speaks of will never come from a non-peaceful source. It is a peace that comes through the risen Christ and has its source in God Himself.

We cannot find peace in a turbulent, war-torn world until we make peace with God through Jesus Christ. Only when we go to Him in humility and with faith, trust, and surrender, repent and ask for His forgiveness will He grant us His peace.

Prayer: We pray, Father for Your peace – a peace that comes from the God of all comfort Who gives us His peace that assures us of His presence in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

15-19-33-39-68, Mega Ball: 25, Megaplier: 3

(fifteen, nineteen, thirty-three, thirty-nine, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: twenty-five; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$264 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$262 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Canistota 38, Centerville 36

Chamberlain 47, Stanley County 20

Dakota Valley 61, Lennox 38

Hanson 57, Gregory 52

Ipswich 52, Sully Buttes 47

Lakota Tech 48, Kimball/White Lake 40

McCook Central/Montrose 57, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 44

West Central 88, Huron 81, OT

Wolsey-Wessington 45, Wessington Springs 30

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

Noem defends handling of coronavirus with budget address

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem defended her coronavirus response Tuesday in a budget address to lawmakers, laying out proposals to spend millions in excess funds after federal aid bolstered the state's budget.

The Republican governor, whose name has circulated as a potential 2024 GOP presidential candidate, compared both the state's virus situation and financial outlook to states such as Illinois, New Jersey and New York.

While South Dakota is currently suffering through one of the worst virus outbreaks in the nation, the state's economy and budget forecast are rosier. A combination of using federal aid to offset state expenses tied to the pandemic and a \$19 million budget surplus allows Noem to propose over \$230 million in state-funded projects, along with a 2.4% increase in funding for teachers, state employees and government-funded medical providers.

"When I travel across the state and talk to people and I travel around the country, people often congratulate us on how strong South Dakota's financial position is compared to the rest of the nation," Noem said.

Though she has spoken and raised money across the country, Noem has said she is not interested in running for president.

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The final budget and revenue forecast must be ironed out by the Legislature, which will convene in January. Noem opened her speech with a moment of silence for the 1,111 people who have died from COVID-19, which Noem described as a "horrible virus." The state currently has the nation's ninth-highest number of deaths per capita, with roughly one out of every 800 people dying from COVID-19. The death rate has been particularly devastating in the last two weeks as the state reported the nation's highest number of deaths per capita.

Although the state has seen declining rates of new cases and hospitalizations, it is still dealing with the nation's second-highest number of new cases per capita over the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

But Noem, who has eschewed government-enforced lockdowns and mask mandates, claimed that the virus does not seem to be any worse in states that have taken aggressive measures to prevent infections from spreading, pointing to places like California and New Jersey that have recent spikes in COVID-19 hospitalizations.

However, some of the statistics the governor used for her comparison have been called into question. For example, Noem pin-pointed Dec. 2 as a day when Illinois reported a record-number of COVID-19 deaths despite having a mask mandate in place. But even on that day, South Dakota's number of deaths per capita was more than double that of Illinois.

Noem also claimed that Illinois' active case count is currently higher per capita than South Dakota's ever was, but the data she used to make that claim does not line up with some of the most-respected pandemic datasets from Johns Hopkins and the COVID Tracking Project. South Dakota has reported more cases per capita than Illinois in the last week, according to Johns Hopkins.

Ian Fury, the governor's spokesman, said she used a count of active cases in Illinois from a website called Worldometer, which says it aggregates data from "thousands of sources" but does not list a specific source for its Illinois active case count. The website claims that Illinois has 356,433 active coronavirus infections, but that's over three times the number of people who have tested positive in the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins data. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guides that people with moderate COVID-19 cases are infectious no longer than 10 days after symptoms begin.

However, Noem appeared on firm ground in asserting that her state's budget outlook appeared healthier than many other states, which have faced the prospect of deep cuts amid the pandemic.

"South Dakota will not be raising taxes on our citizens, or our businesses," she said. "We will not be borrowing billions of dollars to cover our budget shortfalls, and we won't be looking to Congress to send us more stimulus money."

The governor said the billions of federal aid that have flowed into the state were a one-time windfall, which she said means the state should be "prudent and conservative" moving forward. Her proposals for spending over \$230 million centered around infrastructure, with a \$100 million proposal to expand broadband internet access to rural areas taking up the largest chunk of money. She argued the investments would serve South Dakotans for years to come.

Some other notable proposals included a new livestock complex at the state fairgrounds, information technology upgrades and a new state airplane.

Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat who holds one of his party's only seats on the legislative committee that handles the budget, said he would have liked the governor to "focus more on people" than infrastructure improvements. He pointed out that many people are hurting from the pandemic, whether from job losses, medical bills, or the stresses of providing essential services while the virus has run rampant.

Many Republicans agree the state is hurting, though they have been concerned with businesses hard-hit by the pandemic. Rep. Chris Karr, the Sioux Falls Republican who will chair the House Committee on Appropriations, said lawmakers will have a difficult task shaping the budget because the influx of federal relief is temporary.

Amount of water released into Missouri River to be reduced

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The amount of water being released into the Missouri River from a key dam on the Nebraska-South Dakota border has been reduced to winter levels, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Omaha said Tuesday.

The Corps began reducing water flow from Gavins Point Dam late last month and has now reached its winter level of about 17,000 cubic feet (481.4 cubic meters) per second, the release said.

That's down significantly from the reduction seen a year earlier, after heavy rain and snow melt in the spring sent the river to record levels and flooded parts of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri. Last year, the Corps waited until mid-December to reduce the fall output to 27,000 cubic feet (765 cubic meters) per second.

Gavins Point Dam winter releases normally range from 12,000 to 17,000 cubic feet (340 to 481.4 cubic meters) per second.

Runoff in the upper Missouri River Basin above Sioux City, Iowa, was 1.2 million acre-feet (1.48 billion cubic meters) during November, or 116% of average, the Corps said. The 2020 calendar year runoff forecast is 30.6 million acre-feet (37.74 billion cubic meters), or 119% of average. Average annual runoff is 25.8 million acre-feet (31.82 billion cubic meters).

Rapid City City Council tables mask mandate ordinance

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A mask mandate drew a capacity crowd to Rapid City Hall where public comment and debate on the proposed ordinance lasted nearly two and a-half hours Monday night.

In the end, the City Council voted to table the mask ordinance, which was a revised version of one discussed at a Nov. 19 special meeting.

Mayor Steve Allender cast the tie-breaking vote to effectively kill the ordinance that would have allowed businesses to post signs requiring customers to wear face coverings. But, Allender said after he voted that he didn't think there was anything for opponents to celebrate.

Nearly every seat in council chambers was filled and about half of those in the crowd weren't wearing masks, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Additional people were in the lobby of City Hall and cheered and applauded after hearing public comments they supported.

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.

UK, EU head for supper showdown over Brexit trade deal

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The leaders of Britain and the European Union were meeting Wednesday for a dinner that could pave the way to a post-Brexit trade deal — or tip the two sides toward a chaotic economic rupture at the end of the month.

Early-morning comments from both sides insisting that it was for the other to compromise only highlighted the difficult task ahead for U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. They have just a few hours over a multi-course meal to unstick negotiations that are deadlocked on key aspects of the future relationship for the EU and Britain.

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British officials said they hoped political pressure from the top could break the logjam, but room was limited.

"Unless we see some movement on the EU side, then it will be very difficult," U.K. Cabinet minister Michael Gove told Times Radio.

The bloc, however, insisted the U.K. must to move to secure a trade agreement.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "there is still the chance of an agreement," but stressed that the EU would not compromise on its core principles. Merkel told the German parliament that the bloc would "take a path without an ... agreement if there are conditions from the British side that we can't accept."

The U.K. left the EU on Jan. 31 after 47 years of membership, but remains within the bloc's tariff-free single market and customs union until the end of the year. Reaching a trade deal by then would ensure there are no tariffs or quotas on trade in goods on Jan. 1, although there would still be new costs and red tape for businesses.

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.

Months of trade talks have failed to bridge the gaps on three issues — fishing rights, fair-competition rules and the governance of future disputes.

While both sides want a deal, they have fundamentally different views of what it entails. The EU 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 in exchange for access to its markets.

Merkel said "the integrity of the single market must be preserved."

"We must have a level playing field not just for today, but we must have one for tomorrow or the day after, and to do this we must have agreements on how one can react if the other changes their legal situation," Merkel said. "Otherwise there will be unfair competitive conditions that we cannot ask of our companies."

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 non-EU countries and is trying to bind Britain to the bloc's rules indefinitely.

"We've been clear throughout — the prime minister's been admirably clear - about what the United Kingdom needs as a sovereign independent country," Gove said. "And I think President von der Leyen will want to ensure that all EU member states recognize that a deal is in everyone's interest and that will require a degree of movement for some on the EU side."

Amid the gloom, one area of tension has been resolved. The British government has dropped plans to break international law after reaching an agreement with the EU on rules governing trade with Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. that shares a land border with the bloc.

The Brexit divorce agreement struck by the two sides last year promised there would be no customs checks or other trade barriers along Northern Ireland's border with EU member Ireland. As the two sides tried to hammer out the details, British government introduced legislation in September giving itself powers to breach the legally binding withdrawal agreement in order to keep goods flowing to Northern Ireland in the event of a "no-deal" Brexit.

Britain claimed the bill was needed as a safety net, but the move infuriated the EU, which saw it as an act of bad faith that could imperil Northern Ireland's peace settlement.

Gove said resolving the Northern Ireland issue provided a "smoother glide path" towards a broader trade deal with the EU, though the bad feeling generated by the lawbreaking move still lingers.

Jill Lawless reported from London. Geir Moulson in Berlin contributed to this story.

Follow all AP stories about Brexit and British politics at <https://apnews.com/Brexit>

India experts find traces of lead, nickel in patients' blood

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian health officials have found traces of nickel and lead in a few blood samples taken from hundreds of patients who have been hospitalized by a mysterious illness in a southern state, officials said.

The Andhra Pradesh state government said in a statement Tuesday night that investigations by experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences has not be able to ascertain the possible source of excessive nickel and lead particulate matter in the patients' blood.

Reports from other tests by experts at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, including toxicology reports and blood cultures, are being awaited, the statement said.

Health officials and experts are still baffled by how the heavy metals got into the patients' blood, and whether it is indeed the cause of the mysterious illness that has left over 585 people hospitalized and one person dead in Andhra Pradesh. The illness was first detected Saturday evening in Eluru, an ancient city famous for its handwoven products.

People with the disease started convulsing without any warning, said Geeta Prasadini, a state health official.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy held a virtual meeting Wednesday with officials who included experts from India's top scientific institutes. Reddy said 502 people with the illness were discharged after showing improvement.

The patients showed symptoms ranging from nausea and anxiety to loss of consciousness.

What is confounding experts is that there doesn't seem to be any common link among the hundreds of people who have fallen sick. All of the patients have tested negative for the coronavirus and other viral diseases such as dengue, chikungunya and herpes. The patients aren't related to each other and don't all live in the same area. They're from different age groups, including about 70 children, but very few are elderly.

Initially, contaminated water was suspected. But the chief minister's office confirmed that people who don't use the municipal water supply have also fallen ill, and that initial tests of water samples didn't reveal any harmful chemicals.

A 45-year-old man who goes by the single name Sridhar was hospitalized with symptoms resembling epilepsy and died Sunday evening, doctors said. Prasadini said his autopsy didn't shed any light on the cause of death.

Andhra Pradesh state is among those worst-hit by the coronavirus, with over 800,000 detected cases. The health system in the state, like the rest of India, has been frayed by the virus.

UK investigates possible allergic reactions to COVID-19 shot

LONDON (AP) — U.K. regulators said Wednesday that people who have a "significant history" of allergic reactions shouldn't receive the new Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine while they investigate two adverse reactions that occurred on the first day of the country's mass vaccination program.

Professor Stephen Powis, national medical director for the National Health Service in England, said health authorities were acting on a recommendation from the Medical and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

"As is common with new vaccines the MHRA have advised on a precautionary basis that people with a significant history of allergic reactions do not receive this vaccination after two people with a history of significant allergic reactions responded adversely yesterday," Powis said in a statement. "Both are recovering well."

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The comments came as Dr. June Raine, head of the MHRA, told a Parliamentary committee that regulators had received reports of two allergic reactions from the vaccine.

"We know from the very extensive clinical trials that this wasn't a feature," she said. "But If we need to strengthen our advice, now that we have had this experience with the vulnerable populations, the groups who have been selected as a priority, we get that advice to the field immediately.

Raine's comments came as part of a general discussion of how her agency will continue to monitor people who receive the vaccine authorized for emergency use last week.

Poles voice fears of 'Polexit' as govt defies EU over budget

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — As the Polish government plays a game of chicken with the European Union over its next long-term budget, some Poles are voicing fears that a drawn-out conflict could put their country on a path toward an eventual departure from the bloc, or "Polexit."

Poland's conservative government, led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice party, denies that it has ever wanted to leave the 27-member bloc and popular support for EU membership runs extremely high.

But critics fear the combative tone of Polish leaders — who have recently compared the EU to the Soviet Union and used terms like "political enslavement" to describe Poland's predicament in the standoff — could create momentum, which if unstopped, could accidentally bring the nation to the exit door.

The fears are rooted in a threat by the Polish and Hungarian governments to block the EU's 1.82 trillion-euro (\$2.21 trillion) budget for the next seven years, including a coronavirus recovery package. The veto threat comes after other EU members voted to introduce a new rule that would allow the bloc to cut funding to EU nations that violate the rule of law.

Both countries, under their nationalist right-wing governments, have eroded judicial and media independence, creating concerns about democratic backsliding.

That issue will be debated at a summit of EU leaders on Thursday and Friday.

Similar concerns about a "Huxit" are mirrored to a lesser extent in Hungary, where the government has often portrayed the EU in Brussels as a foreign, despotic power that aims to bend Hungary to its will — especially on immigration.

In November, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban echoed Polish parallels between the EU and Soviet Union, saying the EU budget's rule of law conditions resembled the "ideological blackmail" practiced by the USSR.

But both Poland and Hungary are so dependent on EU funding — and their populations so favorable toward the freedom it gives their workers to cross borders — that it seems unlikely they would ever truly take the self-defeating step of leaving.

Still, Polish critics have been urging the government to chose a more conciliatory path, arguing that if Poland ever finds itself outside the EU, its difficult geographic position in central Europe would leave it vulnerable like Ukraine and Belarus, exposed to the Kremlin's considerable influence.

"Due to its position, Poland cannot be neutral," Senate Speaker Tomasz Grodzki of the opposition Civic Platform party said in a nationally televised address on Nov. 27 in which he appealed to the government to drop its tough position. "Either it is in the family of Western civilization or among the authoritarian dictatorships of the East."

The ruling party countered that Grodzki has no authority to conduct foreign policy and that his position is harmful because it contradicts the government's official negotiating position. Both Polish and Hungarian governments argue they are actually the ones upholding rules set out in the EU treaty, which does not contain a mechanism to link funding to rule of law.

As the governments in Poland and Hungary dig into their stance, other EU countries have begun consid-

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ering options that would allow the bloc's 25 other nations to launch the coronavirus recovery plan without them.

The fears of a hypothetical Polesxit are fueled by Brexit, Britain's messy divorce from the EU, which is seen as accidental. It was set in motion when former British Prime Minister David Cameron called for a referendum, actually intending to keep the EU in, but lost the vote.

Those who see Polesxit as extremely unlikely point to the very different national perceptions of EU membership.

For the British, EU membership mainly brought access to a larger market, and with that came regulations and costs deemed burdensome by many.

But for Poles, joining the EU in 2004 — five years after joining NATO — ushered them fully into the Western fold after decades of Soviet-imposed authoritarian rule. It also opened up enormous opportunities for Polish workers to earn higher wages abroad.

"Our emotional attachment is stronger than in the UK," said Piotr Buras, director of the Warsaw office of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

If the Polish government would ever decide to leave the EU for ideological and political reasons, it would essentially mark the rejection of the Western democratic model of society and politics, he said.

"I cannot imagine Poland outside of the European Union remaining a democratic and liberal country," Buras said. But he also argued that "Poles would never tolerate a government that would basically decide to leave the European Union in order to stay in power."

Warsaw stands to lose billions of euros if it is bypassed in the coronavirus recovery fund. Also at risk are study abroad plans by Polish students for the next academic year as part of the popular Erasmus exchange program.

Poland's three living former presidents, noting their own long efforts to build a democratic nation, asked the government in a joint appeal this week "to stop blackmailing other European Union countries."

"This is harmful to Poland and its place in a united Europe," Lech Walesa, Aleksander Kwasniewski and Bronislaw Komorowski wrote.

Last week 50 Polish cities turned off lights on key buildings, bridges and other landmarks, symbolically showing the darkness that would come if municipalities are stripped of EU development funds.

Grodzki, the Senate speaker, had a warning for the nationalist government.

"If you cause Poland to lose gigantic money for further development and reconstruction, if you also lead us out of our European home, history and the people will not forgive you," he said.

Justin Spike contributed from Budapest.

EXPLAINER: Why did Mount Everest's height change?

BEIJING (AP) — The world's highest mountain is now officially a little higher, and that might not be the end of the story.

China and Nepal agreed this week on a new standard height for Mount Everest, the rugged Himalayan peak that straddles their border.

As definitive as that sounds, geological changes, the complicated business of measuring a mountain and varying criteria for determining the world's highest peak will likely ensure the question isn't settled for good.

GEOLOGICAL UPS AND DOWNS

The mountain's height changes. The movement of tectonic plates can lift it up ever so gradually, while earthquakes can bring it down.

The countervailing forces may help maintain a degree of stability over time, said Dang Yamin, a member of a Chinese team that surveyed Everest's height earlier this year.

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"Nature tends to strike a balance," he told the official Xinhua News Agency. As an example, Dang cited a massive 1934 earthquake that wiped out 150 years of steady height increase in a few moments.

MEASURING MOUNTAINS

There's more than one way to measure a mountain.

Last year, a Nepalese team set up a satellite navigation marker on Everest's peak to gauge its exact position via GPS satellites. A Chinese team undertook a similar mission this spring, though it used the Chinese-made Beidou constellation of navigation satellites, along with other equipment.

At the same time, Nepalese crews took measurements with modern, laser-equipped versions of instruments called theodolites, first used to gauge the mountain's height in 1856 by measuring angles using trigonometry.

The Nepalese team also used ground penetrating radar to measure the amount of snow and ice that sits on top of its highest rock.

AND THE ANSWER IS ...

China and Nepal presented a new official figure of 8,848.86 meters (29,031.69 feet) above sea level. The agreement announced Wednesday was heralded as a sign of the growing political, economic and cultural ties between the two countries.

The new height is 0.86 meters (more than 2 feet) above the higher of the countries' two previous figures, that given by Nepal. The two had diverged for year over the mountain's actual height.

Measuring the height above sea level has always been tricky because ocean levels vary considerably depending on tides, magnetism and other factors. Rising sea levels are creating another factor for future measurements.

HAWAII'S UNDERWATER GIANT

How high above sea level is just one way of measuring a mountain's height. One reason Everest wins the prize is that its base sits high up on already lofty foothills.

As measured from the Earth's core, Ecuador's Mount Chimborazo is the world's highest, standing more than 2,072 meters (6,800 feet) above Everest. Because the Earth bulges in the middle, mountains along the equator are farther from the core.

Measuring from the foot of the mountain to the peak, Hawaii's Mauna Kea is the tallest. Most of it, however, is under the sea.

Ethiopia rejects independent probes into Tigray conflict

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's government is rejecting calls for independent investigations into the deadly conflict in its Tigray region, saying it "doesn't need a baby-sitter."

The declaration comes amid international calls for more transparency into the month-long fighting between Ethiopian forces and those of the fugitive Tigray regional government that is thought to have killed thousands, including civilians. At least one large-scale massacre has been documented by human rights groups, and others are feared.

Senior government official Redwan Hussein told reporters on Tuesday evening that Ethiopia will invite others for assistance only if it feels that "it failed to investigate." To assume the government can't carry out such probes "is belittling the government," he said.

Frustration is growing as the northern Tigray region remains largely cut off from the outside world, with food and medicines desperately needed by the population of 6 million — some 1 million of them now thought to be displaced.

The lack of transparency, as most communications and transport links remain severed, has complicated efforts to verify the warring side's claims.

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It also hurts efforts to understand the extent of atrocities that have been committed since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Nov. 4 announced that fighting had begun with the TPLF, which dominated Ethiopia's government and military for nearly three decades before he came to power and sidelined it.

Each government now regards the other as illegal, as the TPLF objects to the postponement of national elections until next year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and sees Abiy's mandate as expired.

Ethiopia's government has pushed back against what it calls outside "interference," from efforts at dialogue to delivering aid, drawing on its history as the rare African country never colonized, a source of deep national pride.

The government has made it clear it wants to manage aid delivery, and on Tuesday it said its forces had shot at and detained U.N. staffers who allegedly broke through checkpoints while trying to reach areas where "they were not supposed to go."

Sporadic shooting remains in Tigray and humanitarian assistance must be escorted by defense forces, Redwan said.

The United Nations, alarmed, said it is "engaging at the highest level with the federal government to express our concerns" more than a week after it and the government signed a deal to allow humanitarian access.

The deal, crucially, allows aid only in areas under federal government control. While Ethiopia's government says the fighting has stopped, the leaders of the fugitive Tigray People's Liberation Front have asserted that the conflict continues.

With growing allegations of massacres and attacks on refugee camps inside Tigray, the U.N. human rights office has not responded to a question about whether it has begun investigating possible war crimes.

Meanwhile, the need for aid is being called critical. The Tigray capital, Mekele, a city of a half-million people, is "basically today without medical care," the director-general of the International Committee for the Red Cross, Robert Mardini, told reporters on Tuesday.

The city's Ayder Referral Hospital has run out of supplies, including fuel to power generators, he said.

"Doctors and nurses have been forced to make horrible life and death decisions," Mardini said. "They suspended intensive care services and are really struggling to take care like delivering babies or providing dialysis treatment."

A joint ICRC-Ethiopian Red Cross convoy with supplies for hundreds of wounded people is ready to go to Mekele, pending approval, he said. It would be the first international convoy to reach the city since the fighting began.

While the risk of insecurity remains in the Tigray capital, there is no active fighting, Mardini said.

Overall, he said, "People in Tigray have been cut off from services for nearly a month. They have had no phone, no Internet, no electricity and no fuel. Cash is running out. This of course adds to the tension."

Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

President-elect? GOP may wait for January to say Biden won

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans waiting for Republicans in Congress to acknowledge Joe Biden as the president-elect may have to keep waiting until January as GOP leaders stick with President Donald Trump's litany of legal challenges and unproven claims of fraud.

Tuesday's deadline for states to certify their elections — once viewed as a pivot point for Republicans to mark Biden's win — came and went without much comment. Next week's Dec. 14 Electoral College deadline may produce just a few more congratulatory GOP calls to Biden.

Increasingly, GOP lawmakers say the Jan. 6 vote in Congress to accept the Electoral College outcome may

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be when the presidential winner becomes official. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has signaled Jan. 20 as the certain date when the country is "going to have the swearing-in of the next president."

The result is a risky standoff like none other in U.S. history. The refusal to agree upon the facts of the election threatens to undermine voter confidence, chisel away at the legitimacy of Biden's presidency and restack civic norms in still-unknowable ways.

Yet some GOP officials see the dragged-out process as their best shot at answering the fiery questions, calls and complaints of their constituents who voted for Trump and refuse to believe he legitimately lost the race to Biden.

"The country needs to understand, at least, it was fair," Rep. Alex Mooney, R-W.Va., said in an interview.

Mooney said he was being pressed by voters back home, including Republican Party activists at an event last month in Harper's Ferry, demanding to know why no one was helping the president. They were "very concerned," he said, and so he stepped up. He introduced a House resolution Tuesday that encourages neither Trump nor Biden to concede until all the investigations are completed.

"The end is when the roll call is put up here," he said about the Jan. 6 vote in Congress.

Trump sent his party down this unprecedented path by claiming the election was "rigged," but Republican officials enabled doubts to swell through their past four weeks of silence. He personally called on some local elected officials to reconsider the results. Now, the disputed election has taken on a political life of its own that the party's leadership may not be able to squash, even as Trump's legal challenges crumble.

Republicans say it makes little political sense at this point for them to counter Trump's views lest they risk a backlash from his supporters — their own constituents — back home. They're relying on Trump voters to power the Georgia runoff elections Jan. 5 that will determine control of the Senate. And while some GOP lawmakers have acknowledged Biden's victory, most prefer to keep quiet, letting the process play out "organically," as one aide put it, into January.

But election experts warn of long-term damage to the long-cherished American system.

"It clearly hurts confidence in the elections," said Trey Grayson, the Republican former secretary of state for Kentucky and a past president of the National Association of Secretaries of State.

"My hope," he said, is by Dec. 14 "there will be some more voices, but my gut is it won't be until the 6th" (of January).

Edward Foley, an elections expert and constitutional law professor at Ohio State University, said it's true that the election winner is not officially the president-elect until the Congress declares it so with its vote on Jan. 6 to accept the Electoral College results.

"I'm less concerned about the timing, but that it happens," he said.

For Americans to "have faith" in the elections, the losing side has to accept defeat. "It's very, very dangerous if the losing side can't get to that," he said.

"It's essential for the parties to play by that ethos — even if one individual, Mr. Trump, can't do it, the party has to do it," he said.

"What's so disturbing about the dynamic that has developed since Election Day is that the party has been incapable of conveying that message because they're taking their cues from Trump."

In the House and the Senate, the standoff is playing out in ways large and small as lawmakers prolong the instability, some boosting their own profiles to pick up the mantle with Trump's movement of voters and others fighting more broadly for an overhaul of election systems.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, announced on Sean Hannity's Fox News Channel show that he was prepared to deliver oral arguments for Pennsylvania lawmakers' legal challenge to the elections if the Supreme Court takes up the case.

Cruz said in a statement he believes the court "has a responsibility to the American people to ensure, with its powers, that we are following the law and following the Constitution."

The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected Republicans' bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of Biden's victory.

Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., is delivering daily House floor speeches ahead of his planned formal protest during the Jan. 6 voting that he believes will show Trump was reelected.

"Others are joining me," he said in an interview. And back home, "I have had a lot of pats on the back." Even the Republicans, led by McConnell, on the bipartisan inauguration committee refused to allow a Democratic motion Tuesday to publicly announce that planning was underway. The committee that has organized every inauguration since 1901 is planning COVID-19 health and safety protocols for the traditional Jan. 20 swearing-in ceremony next year.

Committee chairman Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said, "It is not the job of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies to get ahead of the electoral process and decide who we are inaugurating."

Former congressman David McIntosh, who now heads the conservative Club for Growth, said in the new year there should be an independent, bipartisan commission established to investigate the 2020 election.

Until then, his group is trying to push Georgia's Trump voters to the polls, even as the president disputes Biden's win of the state.

Iraqis slowly rebuild Mosul, with little aid from government

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — Anan Yasoun rebuilt her home with yellow cement slabs amid the rubble of Mosul, a brightly colored manifestation of resilience in a city that for many remains synonymous with the Islamic State group's reign of terror.

In the three years since Iraqi forces, backed by a U.S.-led coalition, liberated Mosul from the militants, Yasoun painstakingly saved money that her husband earned from carting vegetables in the city. They had just enough to restore the walls of their destroyed home; money for the floors was a gift from her dying father, the roof a loan that is still outstanding.

Yasoun didn't even mind the bright yellow exterior — paint donated by a relative. "I just wanted a house," said the 40-year-old mother of two.

The mounds of debris around her bear witness to the violence Iraq's second-largest city has endured. From Mosul, IS had proclaimed its caliphate in 2014. Three years later, Iraqi forces backed by a U.S.-led coalition liberated the city in a grueling battle that killed thousands and left Mosul in ruins.

Such resilience is apparent elsewhere in the city, at a time when Baghdad's cash-strapped government fails to fund reconstruction efforts and IS is becoming more active across the disputed territories of northern Iraq.

Life is slowly coming back to Mosul these days: merchants are busy in their shops, local musicians again serenade small, enthralled crowds. At night, the city lights gleam as restaurant patrons spill out onto the streets.

The U.N. has estimated that over 8,000 Mosul homes were destroyed in intense airstrikes to root out IS. The nine-month operation left at least 9,000 dead, according to an AP investigation.

Memories of the group's brutality still haunt locals, who remember a time when the city squares were used for the public beheading of those who dared violate the militants' rules.

The Old City on the west bank of the Tigris River, once the jewel of Mosul, remains in ruins even as newer parts of the city have seen a cautious recovery. The revival, the residents say, is mostly their own doing.

"I didn't see a single dollar from the government," said Ahmed Sarhan, who runs a family coffee business. Antique coffee pots, called dallahs, line the entrance to his shop, which has been trading coffee for 120 years. An aging mortar and pestle, used by Sarhan's forefathers to grind beans, sits in his office as evidence of his family's storied past.

"After the liberation, it was complete chaos. No one had any money. The economy was zero," he said. His business raked in a measly 50,000 Iraqi dinars a day, or around \$40. Now, he makes closer to about \$2,500.

But even as Sarhan and other merchants are starting to see profits — despite the impact of the coronavirus

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pandemic — ordinary laborers are struggling. Sarhan employs 28 workers, each getting about \$8 a day. “It is nothing ... they will never be able to rebuild their homes,” he says.

Since the ouster of IS in 2017, the task of rebuilding Mosul has been painfully slow. Delays have been caused by lack of coherent governance at the provincial level; the governor of Nineveh province, which includes Mosul, has been replaced three times since liberation.

With no central authority to coordinate, a tangled web of entities overseeing reconstruction work — from the local, provincial and federal government to international organizations and aid groups — has added to the chaos.

The government has made progress on larger infrastructure projects and restored basic services to the city, but much remains unfinished.

Funds earmarked for reconstruction by the World Bank were diverted to help the federal government fight the coronavirus as state coffers dwindled with plunging oil prices. Meanwhile, at least 16,000 Mosul residents appealed for government cash assistance to rebuild their homes.

Only 2,000 received financial assistance, said Zuhair al-Araji, the mayor of Mosul district.

“There’s no money,” he said. “They have to rebuild on their own.”

Mosul residents eye government policies with suspicion and suspect local officials are too corrupt to help them.

“Whatever funds are provided, they will steal it,” said Ammar Mouwfaq, who spent all his savings to re-open his soap shop in the city last year.

A photo of his father hangs inside the shop, which he took over in the 1970s. Neat stacks of the region’s famous olive oil soap, imported from the Syrian city of Aleppo, tower above him.

“What you see now, I did alone,” he added.

On one thoroughfare the ruins of cinemas bombed by IS — the militant group’s strict interpretation of Islam banned such forms of entertainment — are a stark contrast to the shops and restaurants abuzz with customers.

The Old City, with its labyrinth of narrow streets dating back to the Middle Ages, now serves as an eerie museum of IS horrors. Misshapen iron rods jut out of what’s left of houses they were designed to fortify. Smashed pieces of alabaster stone and masonry, once extolled by historians for architectural significance, lie among the debris. Signs of a former life — a pair of women’s shoes, a notebook covered in hearts, shells from exploded ammunition — are untouched.

“Demolition is forbidden” reads a graffiti written on a slab of wall surrounded by rubble, a testament to Mosul’s unwavering dark humor.

The Mosul Museum, where IS militants filmed themselves smashing priceless antiquities to dust, partially re-opened in January. But apart from occasional contemporary art exhibits such as that of Iraqi sculptor Omer Qais last month, there is nothing to see.

On the other side of town, Sarhan, the coffee trader, invites anyone who cares to see his collection of antique swords, plates and bowls he painstakingly hunted down. In the 12th century, Mosul was an important hub for trade; a century later, its intricate metalwork rose to prominence.

“This is our history,” said Sarhan, holding up a rusting bronze plate, engraved with 1202, the year it was made.

“If I don’t protect it, who will?”

UAE says Chinese vaccine 86% effective, offers few details

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United Arab Emirates said Wednesday a Chinese coronavirus vaccine tested in the federation of sheikhdoms is 86% effective, in a statement that provided few details

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but marked the first public release of information on the efficacy of the shot.

The announcement brought yet another shot into the worldwide race for a vaccine to end the pandemic, a scientific effort that has seen China and Russia compete with Western firms for an effective inoculation. While questions remain about the Sinopharm shot, already at least one country outside China plans to roll it out in a mass-vaccination campaign.

The UAE, home to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, conducted a trial beginning in September of the vaccine by Chinese state-owned pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm involving 31,000 volunteers from 125 nations. Volunteers between 18 and 60 years old received two doses of the vaccine over 28 days.

The UAE's Health and Prevention Ministry announced the results via a statement on the state-run WAM news agency, saying they "have reviewed Sinopharm CNBG's interim analysis of the Phase III trials."

"The analysis shows no serious safety concerns," the statement said, without detailing whether any participant suffered side effects.

It wasn't immediately clear if the announced results included only those taking part in the testing in the UAE or if they also include results from China and elsewhere. The statement described the vaccine as receiving "official registration" without elaborating on what that meant.

Emirati officials and Sinopharm did not respond to questions from The Associated Press.

However, calls Wednesday to SEHA, the Abu Dhabi health authority, included an option for individuals to schedule an appointment to receive a "COVID-19 vaccine." The center was swamped with calls following the announcement on the vaccine's efficacy.

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. 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 the Sinopharm vaccine.

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 shot made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, use newer, less-proven technology to target the coronavirus' spike protein using RNA. The United Kingdom already has begun vaccinating people with the Pfizer shot.

Top officials in the UAE, including Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, have publicly receive the shots as part of the vaccine testing.

Already, Pfizer reports its shot as being 95% effective, while another RNA candidate from Moderna appears to be 94.5% effective. Results suggest a third vaccine from Oxford University and AstraZeneca is safe and about 70% effective, but questions remain about how well it may help protect those over 55.

In transport, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines must remain at cold temperatures — negative 70 degrees Celsius (negative 94 degree Fahrenheit) and negative 20 degrees Celsius (negative 4 degrees Fahrenheit), respectively.

The Sinopharm vaccine is believed to be able to travel at a temperature of 2 to 8 degrees Celsius (35 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit), a major draw for areas of the world where nearly 3 billion people live without stable electricity and refrigeration. In November, the Communist Party secretary for Sinopharm said almost 1 million people in China had received its vaccine.

Meanwhile Wednesday, Abu Dhabi announced it would resume "all economic, tourism, cultural and entertainment activities in the emirate within two weeks." It attributed the decision to "successes" in halting the spread of the coronavirus.

Abu Dhabi has required those traveling into the emirate from the UAE's other six sheikhdoms to take a coronavirus test within 48 hours prior to arrival.

Since the pandemic began, the UAE has detected over 178,000 cases of the virus, with 160,000 recoveries and nearly 600 deaths. Its aggressive testing policy has seen over 17 million tests conducted in a country home to just over 9 million people.

In Iran, meanwhile, President Hassan Rouhani angrily blamed U.S. sanctions for making it difficult for Tehran to purchase medicine and health supplies amid the pandemic.

And in Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the first shipment of doses of the Pfizer vaccine, calling it a “big day of celebration” for the country.

“I believe in this vaccine. I expect it will receive the appropriate approval in the coming days,” Netanyahu said, adding that he intended to be the first to receive it. “We see the end of the pandemic.”

Associated Press writers Huizhong Wu in Taipei, Taiwan; Nasser Karimi in Tehran, Iran, and Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Soccer players lay down ‘marker’ in fight against racism

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

Players have taken a knee, unfurled slogans and demanded tougher action only to find soccer — their working environment — remains infected with racism.

The tipping point might just have come, with elite players in Paris taking the extraordinary step of refusing to continue playing.

At the end of a year of striking gestures against racial injustice and discrimination, the Champions League produced one of soccer’s most powerful shows of solidarity against racism on Tuesday when players from Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir left the field and didn’t return.

“The walk off by both Basaksehir and PSG together lays down a marker in Europe,” Piara Powar, executive director of the anti-discrimination Fare network, told The Associated Press. “Many players are fed up with half measures to tackle racism and are more prepared than ever to exercise their right to stop a match.”

The flashpoint came 14 minutes into the game when the fourth official — Sebastian Coltescu of Romania — was accused of using a racial term to identify Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo before sending him off for his conduct on the sidelines. Webo is Black.

“You are racist,” Basaksehir coach Okan Buruk said to Coltescu.

An enraged Webo demanded an explanation from Coltescu, repeating at least six times: “Why you say negro?”

The exchanges were broadcast live around the world from soccer’s biggest club competition.

“Why when you mention a Black guy, you have to say ‘This Black guy?’” asked Basaksehir substitute Demba Ba, who is Black.

The Fare network helps UEFA prosecute discriminatory acts like Tuesday’s incident at the Parc des Princes.

“Our colleagues at the Romanian state anti-discrimination organization have confirmed it is racist in Romanian to refer to a player by using his race as an identifier,” Powar said. “There is no ambiguity. This incident shows the need for much better training of match officials. Unintentional racism is still racism.”

Racism at soccer games has typically come from the stands, but matches in countries such as France are being played without fans because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high-profile incidents tend to highlight the inadequate responses, like in the Portuguese league in February.

Porto striker Moussa Marega tried to walk off the field after being the target of racist abuse from fans in a game against Guimarães and demanded to be substituted. But he faced attempts by his own teammates and opposing players to prevent him from leaving the field.

The referee then gave Marega a yellow card for refusing to continue in the game — the type of action that dissuades players from walking off.

The Romanian referee who was in charge of the game in Paris on Tuesday — Ovidiu Hategan — was in the same role for the 2013 Champions League game when Manchester City player Yaya Toure complained about the lack of action against monkey noises he heard from CSKA Moscow fans.

“If officials cannot set the standards by their own behavior,” Powar said, “they cannot be relied on to

deal with racism on the pitch or in the stands.”

Referees have often been criticized for not leading players off the field, instead leaving them to take the decision themselves. England’s national team decided to continue playing a game in Montenegro last year after Callum Hudson-Odoi and Danny Rose were targeted with monkey chants.

The Champions League game in Paris will resume on Wednesday with a new refereeing team.

“The players walking off is a step in the right direction,” former Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand said on Britain’s BT Sport television. “But it can’t just be left to them.” _____

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/Soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

High court takes on Fannie, Freddie presidential power case

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is hearing a case Wednesday that could make it easier for the president to fire the head of the agency that oversees government-controlled mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

The case could also mean undoing an agreement between the companies and the government that has sent about \$246 billion in their profits to the Treasury. That was compensation for the taxpayer bailout they received after the 2007 housing market crash.

The case before the justices involves the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which oversees Fannie and Freddie and was created following the housing market crash. One of the questions for the court, which is hearing arguments by phone because of the coronavirus pandemic, is whether the agency’s structure violates the Constitution.

The case is in many ways similar to one the justices decided earlier this year involving the FHFA’s companion agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The CFPB, the government’s consumer watchdog agency, was created by Congress in response to the same financial crisis.

In the case involving the CFPB, the court struck down restrictions Congress imposed that said the president could only fire the agency’s director for “inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office.” Just as the head of the CFPB was, the head of the FHFA is nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate to a five-year term. The director is then only removable by the president “for cause.”

That structure can leave a new president with a director chosen by the previous president for some or all of the new president’s time in office.

In their decision earlier this year, however, the justices suggested a potentially important difference between the CFPB and the FHFA. The CFPB’s regulatory and enforcement authority is much greater, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote.

In the case before the justices, which involves Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac shareholders, the verdict could have major consequences.

In 2008, in response to the housing crisis, the FHFA put both Fannie and Freddie in so-called government conservatorships and arranged a government bailout that ultimately amounted to \$187 billion. Four years later, the government and Fannie and Freddie adopted new terms of their financial agreement for paying the money back. Under that agreement, Fannie and Freddie gave the government nearly all of their profits each quarter as a dividend, some \$246 billion. The shareholders have objected to that agreement. They argue it should be set aside because it was imposed by an unconstitutional agency.

The Trump administration, for its part, is arguing that the shareholders are barred from challenging the agreement. But the government is not defending the constitutionality of the FHFA’s structure, and the Supreme Court has appointed a lawyer to argue that position.

The two consolidated cases the court is hearing are *Collins v. Mnuchin*, 19-422, and *Mnuchin v. Collins*, 19-563.

Jackson, Ravens run past Cowboys 34-17 to end 3-game slide

By DAVID GINSBURG AP Sports Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — Back in action after a 15-day layoff, Lamar Jackson directed a relentless rushing attack that the Baltimore Ravens hope will be the first big step in a run to the playoffs.

Jackson ran for 94 yards and a touchdown, and the Ravens returned from a COVID-19 outbreak to amass 294 yards rushing in a 34-17 rout of the Dallas Cowboys on Tuesday night.

Playing for the first time since Nov. 22 following a positive test for the potentially deadly virus, Jackson carried 13 times and threw for two scores. He was one of 23 Ravens to spend time on the reserve/COVID-19 list while four different strains of the virus swept through the organization.

"I still can't really taste or smell, but I'm good," Jackson said. "I feel good to be back with my guys. It was like two weeks I ain't seen them."

Although the Ravens still have a half-dozen players on the COVID-19 list, the team felt complete for the first time in weeks.

"It's like when you go on a family vacation and one of your family members get sick and you can't bring them," rookie linebacker Patrick Queen said. "You're down in the dumps."

The game was played on Tuesday night because Baltimore's previous game — against Pittsburgh last Wednesday — was pushed back three times while the Ravens had at least one player test positive for 10 consecutive days.

Gus Edwards ran for 101 yards on just seven carries and rookie J.K. Dobbins — who also missed time on the COVID-19 list — added 71 yards rushing and a TD to help Baltimore (7-5) break a three-game skid and stay alive in its quest to reach the postseason for a third straight year.

"It's a win we really, really had to have. It was a must-win," coach John Harbaugh said. "Running game was excellent. That was the key on offense."

Dallas came in with the worst rush defense in the league, and it showed. The Ravens averaged 7.9 yards per carry and prevailed despite getting only 107 yards passing from Jackson.

"I think today was obviously a different challenge than we've seen," Dallas coach Mike McCarthy said. "This is a unique offense. A very physical offensive line and the dynamic of the combination of the running backs and Lamar."

The last-place Cowboys (3-9) have lost six of seven. Andy Dalton went 31 for 48 for 285 yards and two touchdowns, and Ezekiel Elliott rushed for 77 yards.

"I thought Andy managed the game very well," McCarthy said. "We needed to throw some bigger punches there and we needed to get on the board with touchdowns and we didn't get that done."

Greg Zuerlein missed three field goal tries and Dallas yielded 20 straight points after taking an early 10-7 lead.

The game was supposed to feature Ravens receiver Dez Bryant going against his former team, but Bryant left during warmups and was scratched with what Baltimore termed "an illness."

Bryant wrote on Twitter that he tested positive for COVID-19 and later posted: "Yea I'm going to go ahead and call it a quit for the rest of the season... I can't deal with this."

He subsequently posted a series of tweets, including, "Yea I'm coming back... I'm being smart."

Bryant scored 73 touchdowns with the Cowboys from 2010-17. He was signed by the Ravens in October and saw his first action in two years, catching four passes in three games.

On his first series following his unwanted week off, Jackson threw a pass that was tipped and intercepted. That led to a Dallas field goal, but Jackson answered with a 37-yard touchdown run on a fourth-and-2 play.

Tony Pollard took the subsequent kickoff 66 yards to set up a 13-yard touchdown pass from Dalton to Michael Gallup. It would be the last time Dallas led.

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An interception by Queen set up a 38-yard touchdown pass from Jackson to Miles Boykin for a 14-10 lead. Jackson's second TD pass of the game, a 20-yarder in the third quarter to Marquise Brown, made it 24-10. If Jackson was rusty or stale after missing a game, it was tough to tell by his performance. "The one thing you do know about Lamar: You're going to get everything he's got," Harbaugh said. "That's all you can ask for."

RAVENS STREAKS

Baltimore's Justin Tucker missed a 36-yard field goal in the second quarter, ending his NFL-record run of 70 straight successful FGs from inside 40 yards. ... The Ravens have rushed for 100 yards in 35 straight games, third-longest streak in NFL history. ... Baltimore has won nine straight over NFC foes, the longest active streak for one team against the other conference.

INJURIES

Cowboys: LT Cameron Erving (knee) was inactive.

Ravens: Fullback Patrick Ricard left in the third quarter with a possible concussion but returned.

UP NEXT

Cowboys: Another road game against an AFC North foe, at Cincinnati on Sunday.

Ravens: More prime-time action for Baltimore, against the host Cleveland Browns on Monday night. It's a rematch of the season opener won by the Ravens, 38-6.

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

Minneapolis eyes deep police cuts after Floyd's death

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minneapolis City Council members who tried unsuccessfully to dismantle the police department in response to George Floyd's death are voting Wednesday on whether to shrink it, a move that could imperil the entire city budget because the mayor is threatening to use his veto to protect public safety amid soaring crime rates.

The plan, which supporters call "Safety for All," is the latest version of the "defund the police" movement that Minneapolis and other cities have considered since Floyd's May 25 death ignited mass demonstrations against police brutality and a nationwide reckoning with racism.

Eleven of the 13 council members have already cast committee votes in favor of the largest parts of the plan, signaling that passage is likely. It would cut nearly \$8 million from Mayor Jacob Frey's \$179 million policing budget and redirect it to mental health teams, violence prevention programs and other initiatives.

"I am actively considering a veto due to the massive, permanent cut to officer capacity," Frey said in a statement Monday night. Reducing the authorized size of the force by 138 officers before enacting alternatives is "irresponsible," he said.

Cities around the U.S., including Los Angeles, New York City and Portland, Oregon, are shifting funds from police departments to social services programs in an effort to provide new solutions for problems traditionally handled by police. Such cuts have led some departments to lay off officers, cancel recruiting classes or retreat from hiring goals.

In Minneapolis, violent crime rates have surged since the death of Floyd, a Black man who was handcuffed and pleading for air for several minutes while Derek Chauvin, a white former officer, pressed his knee against his neck. Chauvin and three others were charged in Floyd's death and are expected to stand trial in March.

Police have recorded 532 gunshot victims this year as of last Thursday, more than double the same period a year ago. Carjackings have also spiked to 375 so far this year, up 331% from the same period last year. Violent crimes have topped 5,100, compared with just over 4,000 for the same period in 2019.

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"This summer happened because George Floyd was murdered by the Minneapolis Police Department and it wasn't an accident, it's because the system of policing we know now is not just racist, but it doesn't create safety for all," said Oluchi Omeoga, a cofounder of Black Visions, which supports "Safety for All" as a step toward more transformational change.

Due to austerity forced by the coronavirus pandemic, the mayor's proposal already bakes in a \$14 million cut to the department compared with its original 2020 budget, mostly through attrition. Frey aims to hold the number of sworn officers around 770 through 2021 with hopes of eventually increasing the force to 888. "Safety for All" would cap the number at 750 by 2022. The department is already down by about 120 — partly due to officers claiming post-traumatic stress disorder from a summer of unrest — with more preparing to leave amid retirements and poor morale.

Passions ran hot on both sides as more than 400 citizens signed up to speak during a marathon hearing last week that ran into the early hours Thursday, with many expressing alarm that the council was even contemplating cuts.

"I think we need to make bold decisions on a path forward," said Council Member Steve Fletcher, a co-author of the proposal. While acknowledging that it would mean fewer officers, he defended the plan by saying it would reduce the department's workload by shifting 911 calls away from armed officers to other specialists such as mental health professionals.

"Combined those investments add up to a safer city for everybody and an approach that creates a more sustainable public safety system for our city," Fletcher said in an interview.

On the other side are those like Frey and Police Chief Medaria Arradondo who say there's no need for an either-or decision — that it's possible to reform policing without cutting officers. The mayor and 12 of the 13 council members are Democrats; one council member is from the Green Party.

If the council approves the plan Wednesday night, Frey would have five days to veto if he chooses. The council could override him with a two-thirds majority, or nine council members.

A proposal over the summer to dismantle the department and replace it with a "Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention" initially had support from a majority of the council but faltered when a separate city commission voted against putting it on the November ballot. The city was paying \$4,500 a day at one point for private security for three council members who reported getting threats after supporting defunding.

Bill Rodriguez of Minneapolis, part of a community group called Safety Now Minneapolis that formed recently in response to rising crime, said his group supports police reform by funding many of the programs the council wants to fund: expanding violence prevention programs, programs aimed at intervening safely with people suffering mental health issues and finding ways to respond to some 911 incidents without police officers.

But he said cutting police officers is a bad idea and was sharply critical of council members who he said "can't get beyond" their vow this summer to abolish or defund police.

"They are hell-bent on their agenda," Rodriguez said. "Everything they do has that taste on it. ... They're still making this up as they go along. We've got a City Council being run by a bunch of inexperienced activists who have never run anything in their lives."

New Zealand marks one year since volcanic eruption killed 22

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A woman whose son was killed in a volcanic eruption in New Zealand a year ago said that as she stood crying, wailing and calling out his name on a beach soon afterward, a stranger came up to her and held her.

"To this day, I do not know who that lady was," said Avey Woods during a televised service held Wednes-

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day in the town of Whakatane to mark the first anniversary of the tragedy. "I hope she's listening, because that just shows you what a community we are, and how powerful that felt that day."

Woods' 40-year-old son Hayden Marshall-Inman was a tour guide and among 22 people killed in the Dec. 9, 2019, eruption on White Island. The island had been a popular tourist destination and 47 people were visiting when superheated steam spewed out from the crater floor. Most of those who survived suffered horrific burns.

Woods said she continues to go to the beach each day to remember her son.

"No-one can tell us how to grieve," Woods said. "Because we grieve in our own time. And I believe that no-one ever gets over the loss of a loved one. You go through so many emotions. It's shock, denial, tears, pain, anger, depression."

Many people now question why tourists were ever allowed to visit the island, especially after experts monitoring seismic activity had raised the volcano's alert level two weeks before the eruption.

New Zealand authorities last month filed safety violation charges against 10 organizations and three individuals in relation to the eruption. The charges brought by New Zealand's WorkSafe agency are separate from an ongoing police investigation that could result in more charges. And families of some of those killed and injured have also filed their own lawsuits.

But Wednesday's service was a time for those who lost loved ones or who were injured to pay tribute to the heroic rescue efforts by other tourists, who returned to the island in a boat to pick up the injured, as well as to police and hospital staff. People at the service stood in silence at 2:11 p.m., the moment the eruption took place.

Lauren and Matt Urey, who were injured in the eruption while visiting New Zealand on their honeymoon, spoke in a prerecorded video clip from their hometown of Richmond, Virginia.

"It is difficult to believe that a year has gone by already when it feels like this just happened yesterday," said Matt Urey. "While we have been forever changed by that day and will certainly never forget it, we are doing our best to move forward."

Lauren Urey said that from the shadow of the tragedy they had met amazing people, including the tourists who consoled them and provided emergency first aid on the boat trip back to Whakatane, and other survivors who have continued to be part of a support network as they recover.

Many of those killed and injured were tourists who had been traveling from Australia aboard the Royal Caribbean cruise ship Ovation of the Seas. Of those killed, 14 were Australian, five were American, two were New Zealanders and one was German.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was among the dignitaries who attended the service.

"I want to send a message of aroha (love) and support to the survivors overseas, their families and those who lost loved ones as well as those who are here with us in the room today," Ardern said. "We share in your sorrow."

White Island is the tip of an undersea volcano and is also known by its indigenous Maori name, Whakaari.

New White House offer adds \$600 checks to COVID-19 relief

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration dove back into Capitol Hill's confusing COVID-19 negotiations on Tuesday, offering a \$916 billion package to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that would send a \$600 direct payment to most Americans — but eliminate a \$300 per week employment benefit favored by a bipartisan group of Senate negotiators.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin made the offer to Pelosi late Tuesday afternoon, he said in a statement. He offered few details, though House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy said it proposes the \$600 direct payment for individuals and \$1,200 for couples, which is half the payment delivered by the March pandemic

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relief bill.

Mnuchin reached out to Pelosi after a call with top congressional GOP leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who remains at odds with Democratic leaders over COVID-19 relief. Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., responded to Mnuchin's entreaty with a statement that said they would prefer to let a bipartisan group take the lead.

The bipartisan group, led by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, among others, is seeking to rally lawmakers in both parties behind a \$908 billion framework that includes a \$300-per-week pandemic jobless benefit and \$160 billion for states and local governments. It is more generous than a GOP plan that's been filibustered twice already but far smaller than a wish list assembled by House Democrats.

McConnell had earlier proposed shelving a top Democratic priority — aid to state and local governments — in exchange for dropping his own pet provision, a shield against lawsuits for COVID-related negligence. Democrats angrily rejected the idea, saying McConnell was undermining the efforts of a bipartisan group of Senate negotiators and reneging on earlier statements that state and local aid would likely have to be an element of a COVID-19 relief agreement given Democratic control of the House.

The \$916 billion Mnuchin offer, the separate ongoing talks among key rank-and-file senators, and the shifting demands by the White House all add up to muddled, confusing prospects for a long-delayed COVID-19 aid package. The pressure to deliver is intense — all sides say failure isn't an option.

The Mnuchin plan resurrects direct payments that are popular with Trump and the public but which are disliked by many Republican lawmakers who say they are costly and send too much aid to people who do not need it. Democrats generally embrace the idea.

"Right now we're targeting struggling families, failing businesses, health care workers and we don't have a stimulus check to every single person, regardless of need," said Collins.

McConnell said Congress will not adjourn without providing the long-overdue COVID-19 relief. He had previously said he would not put any pandemic relief bill on the floor that does not include the liability shield, which is being sought by businesses, universities, nonprofits, and others that are reopening during the pandemic.

"Leaving here without a COVID relief package cannot happen," McConnell said. "Why don't we set aside the two obviously most contentious issues. We know we're going to be confronted with another request after the first of the year. We'll live to fight those another day."

Top Senate Democrat Schumer immediately rejected the entreaty, saying the state and local relief is sought by many Republicans, too, including some conservatives like Bill Cassidy of Louisiana and Mitt Romney of Utah. Pelosi blasted McConnell's offer as an attempt to undercut the bipartisan group whose framework she supports as a foundation for the negotiations.

Pelosi initially demanded more than \$900 billion for state and local governments this spring, but the fiscal situation in the states hasn't been as bad as feared and Democratic leaders could be willing to accept a \$160 billion proposal by the moderate group.

Already, Capitol Hill leaders are moving a government shutdown deadline to the end of next week, but progress is slow and key decisions are yet to be made. The House has scheduled a vote on a one-week temporary government funding bill for Wednesday. Without the measure, the government would shut down this weekend.

Separately, Pelosi and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby, R-Ala., spoke by phone on Monday to try to kick start talks on a separate \$1.4 trillion government-wide spending bill. That measure is held up over issues like protections for the sage grouse, the Census and accounting maneuvers being employed by lawmakers to squeeze \$12 billion more into the legislation.

McConnell initially proposed a sweeping five-year liability shield, retroactive to December 2019, to protect companies and organizations from COVID-19-related lawsuits. Democrats, along with their allies in labor and civil rights groups, roundly dismissed that approach as a danger to workers. And there hasn't been a wave of lawsuits.

"Contrary to the majority leader's dire predictions, there has been no flood of COVID lawsuits. In fact, quite the opposite," said Schumer, D-N.Y. "Far from the pandemic of lawsuits, there's barely been a trickle."

High court rejects GOP bid to halt Biden's Pennsylvania win

By MARK SHERMAN and MARC LEVY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected Republicans' last-gasp bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the electoral battleground.

The court without comment refused to call into question the certification process in Pennsylvania. Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf already has certified Biden's victory over President Donald Trump and the state's 20 electors are to meet on Dec. 14 to cast their votes for Biden.

In any case, Biden won 306 electoral votes, so even if Pennsylvania's results had been in doubt, he still would have more than the 270 electoral votes needed to become president.

The court's decision not to intervene came in a lawsuit led by Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly of north-eastern Pennsylvania and GOP congressional candidate and Trump favorite Sean Parnell, who lost to Pittsburgh-area U.S. Rep. Conor Lamb, a Democrat.

"Even Trump appointees & Republicans saw this for what it was: a charade," Lamb said on Twitter.

In court filings, lawyers for Pennsylvania and Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, had called the lawsuit's claims "fundamentally frivolous" and its request "one of the most dramatic, disruptive invocations of judicial power in the history of the Republic."

"No court has ever issued an order nullifying a governor's certification of presidential election results," they wrote.

Republican U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas had offered to argue the case, if the high court took it.

Having lost the request for the court to intervene immediately, Greg Teufel, a lawyer for Kelly and Parnell, said he will file a separate request to ask the court to consider the case on its underlying merits on an expedited basis.

Still, hopes for immediate intervention concerning the Nov. 3 election "substantially dimmed" with the court's action Tuesday, Teufel said.

"But by no way is this over," Kelly said on Fox News.

Republicans had pleaded with the justices to intervene immediately after the state Supreme Court turned away their case last week.

The Republicans argued that Pennsylvania's expansive vote-by-mail law is unconstitutional because it required a constitutional amendment to authorize its provisions. Just one Republican state lawmaker voted against its passage last year in Pennsylvania's Republican-controlled Legislature.

Biden beat Trump by more than 80,000 votes in Pennsylvania, a state Trump had won in 2016. Most mail-in ballots were submitted by Democrats.

The state's high court said the plaintiffs waited too long to file the challenge and noted the Republicans' staggering demand that an entire election be overturned retroactively.

In the underlying lawsuit, Kelly, Parnell and the other Republican plaintiffs had sought to either throw out the 2.5 million mail-in ballots submitted under the law or to wipe out the election results and direct the state's Republican-controlled Legislature to pick Pennsylvania's presidential electors.

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Biden calls for action on virus as he introduces health team

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday called for urgent action on the coronavirus pandemic as he introduced a health care team that will be tested at every turn while striving to restore the nation to normalcy.

Biden laid out three COVID-19 priorities for his first 100 days in office: a call for all Americans to voluntarily mask up during those 100 days, a commitment to administer 100 million vaccines and a pledge to try to reopen a majority of the nation's schools.

"I know that out of our collective pain, we will find our collective purpose: to control the pandemic, to save lives, and to heal as a nation," Biden said.

The president-elect also said he would use the power of the federal government to require people to wear masks in federal buildings and when traveling from state to state on planes, trains and buses.

Mostly that would codify policies already in place. But Biden said he would urge governors and mayors to impose similar requirements.

Topping the roster of Biden's picks was health secretary nominee Xavier Becerra, a Latino politician who rose from humble beginnings to serve in Congress and as California's attorney general. Others include a businessman renowned for his crisis management skills and a quartet of medical doctors, among them Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious-disease specialist.

The usual feel-good affirmations that accompany such unveilings were overshadowed by urgency, with new cases of COVID-19 averaging more than 200,000 a day and deaths averaging above 2,200 daily as the nation struggles with uncontrolled spread.

Vaccines are expected soon. Scientific advisers to the government meet Thursday to make a recommendation on the first one, a Pfizer shot already being administered in the United Kingdom. Indeed, President Donald Trump held his own event Tuesday, to take credit for his administration's work to speed vaccine development.

But having an approved vaccine is one thing, and getting it into the arms of 330 million Americans something else altogether. Biden will be judged on how well his administration carries out the gargantuan task.

On Tuesday, the president-elect warned that his team's preliminary review of Trump administration plans for vaccinations has found shortcomings. And he called on Congress to pass legislation to finance administration of vaccines as they become more widely available next year. That would effectively close the loop, from lab to patient.

The rest of Biden's extensive health care agenda, from expanding insurance coverage to negotiating prices for prescription drugs, will likely hinge on how his administration performs in this first test of competence and credibility.

Becerra, Biden's pick to head the Department of Health and Human Services, will be backed in the White House by businessman Jeff Zients, who will assume the role of coronavirus response coordinator. Running complex, high-risk operations is his specialty.

Alongside Fauci, the other medical doctors selected include infectious-disease specialist Rochelle Walensky to run the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vivek Murthy as surgeon general and Yale epidemiologist Marcella Nunez-Smith to head a working group to ensure fair and equitable distribution of vaccines and treatments.

Participating by video, Fauci called Biden's 100-day plan "bold but doable, and essential to help the public avoid unnecessary risks and help us save lives."

Ever the straight talker, he admonished: "The road ahead will not be easy. We have got a lot of hard and demanding work ahead."

HHS is 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.

In choosing Becerra to be his health secretary, Biden tapped a prominent defender of the Affordable Care Act. But Becerra, 62, will face questions in his Senate confirmation about whether he possesses sufficient health care and management experience.

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Becerra as a congressman played an insider role helping steer "Obamacare" to passage, and as California attorney general he leads a coalition of Democratic states trying to block the Trump administration's latest attempt to overturn it. He has been less involved in the day-to-day work of combating the coronavirus.

Becerra would be the first Latino to serve as U.S. health secretary. In announcing his pick Tuesday, Biden initially stumbled on the Spanish pronunciation of Becerra's name.

But Biden was drawn to Becerra's working-class roots, his longtime effort to increase access to health care and his willingness to work with Republicans to solve problems like getting patients access to COVID-19 treatments.

Accepting his nomination via video link, Becerra called it a "breathtaking opportunity" to help shape the future of health care.

"I share the president-elect and vice-president-elect's determination to rebuild unity and civility in America," he added.

Biden is under pressure from fellow Democrats to ensure that his Cabinet is diverse.

Then-California Gov. Jerry Brown appointed Becerra as California's top prosecutor in late 2016. Becerra instantly struck a combative tone toward the incoming Trump administration.

Defending California's implementation of the Affordable Care Act was a key priority, but he also focused on protecting young immigrants from deportation and defending California's climate change laws.

As HHS secretary, Becerra would be responsible for overseeing the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which cares for unaccompanied minors who enter the U.S. illegally. Becerra has helped lead a coalition of fellow state attorneys general who sued over the Trump administration's child separation policies.

Republicans immediately made clear their attack lines. Sen. John Cornyn of Texas argued that Becerra was unqualified because he lacked ties to the health care or pharmaceutical industries. Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana blasted his support for "Medicare for All," which is not Biden's policy. Abortion opponents have called Becerra "unacceptable."

The HHS secretary's job requires political connections, communications skills, managerial savvy, a willingness to learn about complex medical issues and a creative legal mind to use vast regulatory powers without winding up on the losing end of lawsuits.

Becerra will need to establish ties with governors who will play outsized roles in distributing the coronavirus vaccine.

Alonso-Zaldivar reported from Washington.

Players walk off in protest against alleged racism in CL

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

In a powerful protest against alleged racism, players from Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir walked off the field during a Champions League game on Tuesday and didn't return after a match official was accused of using insulting language about a Black coach.

On a night when English giant Manchester United was eliminated after a 3-2 loss at Leipzig, the PSG-Basaksehir game in the same group never finished as the players from the visiting Turkish team refused to come back out on the field because the same group of officials would still be in charge.

The remaining minutes of the match will be played on Wednesday with a new set of match officials, UEFA said, following discussions with the clubs after one of the most controversial incidents in the competition's history.

The score was 0-0 after 14 minutes when the game was stopped because Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo accused the fourth official, Sebastian Coltescu of Romania, of using a racial term to describe him. It sparked a commotion in the technical area that led to Webo being sent off by the referee.

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Players and coaches discussed the incident in heated fashion on the field — Basaksehir striker Demba Ba asked the fourth official whether he would have referenced a player's color if he was white — before the referee pointed for the players to leave for the locker room.

UEFA said it would be looking into the matter, while stating the match would restart with a different fourth official inside an empty Parc des Princes stadium.

That never happened.

"A thorough investigation on the incident that took place will be opened immediately," UEFA said in a second statement that announced the remainder of the match was being pushed back a day.

A top official at anti-discrimination network Fare, which helps UEFA investigate cases, said the decision by players to walk off "lays down a marker in Europe."

"Many players are fed up with half measures to tackle racism," Piara Powar, Fare's executive director, told The Associated Press.

PSG's players will return to their stadium knowing they have already qualified for the knockout stage. That's because United was beaten by Leipzig and dropped to third place in Group H — tied for points with PSG, regardless of its result against Basaksehir, but behind the French team courtesy of an inferior head-to-head record.

In a result that weakens Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's position as manager and further damages United's financial state amid a pandemic, his team made a customary slow start and was 2-0 down after 13 minutes. When Justin Kluivert added a third in the 69th, Leipzig looked certain of advancing but United pulled goals back through Bruno Fernandes in the 80th and Paul Pogba in the 82nd.

A draw would have been good enough for United to progress — Solskjaer's team beat Leipzig 5-0 in the first game between the sides — and there was drama in the final seconds when Leipzig goalkeeper Péter Gulácsi showed great reflexes to prevent an own-goal by Nordi Mukiele.

"We didn't perform as a team well enough and that's always the manager's responsibility, to get everyone ready," Solskjaer said.

"We just didn't turn up until they scored the second goal."

Lazio was the other team to advance Tuesday, courtesy of a 2-2 draw with Club Brugge, though the Italian team would have been eliminated at the expense of the Belgians had a shot by Brugge's Charles De Ketelaere in stoppage time gone in rather than rebound off the crossbar.

Lazio advanced from the group stage for the first time in 20 years.

RONALDO OUTSHINES MESSI

Cristiano Ronaldo got the better of great rival Lionel Messi as Juventus beat Barcelona 3-0 away to seal top spot in a group from which they had both already qualified.

Ronaldo converted spot kicks for Juventus in either half, after briefly embracing with Messi before kickoff when the pair — who have combined for 11 World Player of the Year awards — also exchanged a few words.

Juventus clinched first place in Group G because of a better head-to-head record with Barcelona after both finished level on 15 points.

Dynamo Kyiv secured third place and a spot in the Europa League knockout stage by beating Ferencváros 1-0.

UNBEATEN CHELSEA

Chelsea finished the group stage unbeaten after a weakened team drew 1-1 with Krasnodar at home.

Chelsea coach Frank Lampard fielded a virtual second-string lineup because his team had already qualified for the knockout stage as Group E winner, while Krasnodar knew it would finish third and play in the Europa League.

Sevilla, which was assured of second place, beat already-eliminated Rennes 3-1.

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/Soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Steve Douglas is at <https://twitter.com/sdouglas80>

House approves defense bill with veto-proof margin

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled House on Tuesday easily approved a wide-ranging defense policy bill, defying a veto threat from President Donald Trump and setting up a possible showdown with the Republican president in the waning days of his administration.

The 335-78 vote in favor of the \$731 billion defense measure came hours after Trump renewed his threat to veto the bill unless lawmakers clamp down on social media companies he claims were biased against him during the election.

Trump tweeted Tuesday that he will veto “the very weak National Defense Authorization Act,” or NDAA, unless it repeals so-called Section 230, a part of the communications code that shields Twitter, Facebook and other tech giants from content liability. Trump also wants Congress to strip out a provision of the bill that allows renaming of military bases that now honor Confederate leaders.

Congressional leaders vowed to move ahead on the hugely popular bill — which affirms automatic 3% pay raises for U.S. troops and authorizes other military programs — despite the veto threat.

The final vote represented approval from more than 80% of the House — well above the two-thirds support required to override a potential veto. A total of 140 Republicans joined 195 Democrats to back the bill, which now goes to the Senate.

Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a member of the House Republican leadership, urged Trump not to follow through on his veto threat, but added that if he does veto it, “We should override.”

If Trump vetoes the bill, “we will come back to vote to override,” said Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

But with Trump pressuring Republicans to stand with him, it was unclear until the final tally whether the bill would receive the two-thirds support needed to override a veto. The House Freedom Caucus, a bloc of roughly three-dozen conservatives, backed Trump’s position Tuesday and opposed the bill.

“We stand with the president,” said Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., the group’s chairman. “This particular NDAA bill is filled with flaws and problems,” including limitations on troop withdrawals ordered by Trump in Afghanistan and Germany, Biggs said.

Smith and other lawmakers noted that many defense programs can only go into effect if the bill is approved, including military construction. The measure guides Pentagon policy and cements decisions about troop levels, new weapons systems and military readiness, military personnel policy and other military goals.

Troops should not be “punished” because politicians failed to enact needed legislation to ensure their pay, said Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the Armed Services panel. The \$731 billion measure increases hazardous duty pay for overseas deployments and other dangerous job assignments, hikes recruiting and retention bonuses and adjusts housing allowances.

The dispute over social media content — a battle cry of conservatives who say the social media giants treat them unfairly — interjects an unrelated but complicated issue into a bill that Congress takes pride in having passed unflinchingly for nearly 60 years. It follows Trump’s bid to sabotage the package with an earlier veto threat over Confederate base names.

Measures approved by the House and Senate would require the Pentagon to rename bases such as Fort Benning and Fort Hood named for Confederate generals, but Trump opposes the idea and has threatened a veto over it. The fight erupted this summer amid widespread protests over police killings of unarmed Black men and women, and Trump used the debate to try to appeal to white Southern voters nostalgic about the Confederacy.

Smith and Thornberry said in a joint statement last week that lawmakers had “toiled through almost 2,200 provisions to reach compromise on important issues affecting our national security and our military.”

For 59 straight years, they added, the NDAA has passed because lawmakers and presidents agreed to set aside their own preferences “and put the needs of our military personnel and America’s security first.

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The time has come to do that again.”

The powerful Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, said he had spoken to Trump and explained that the defense bill is not the place for the big tech fight.

“I agree with his sentiments — we ought to do away with 230,” Inhofe told reporters. “But you can’t do it in this bill.”

Trump’s veto threat in the final months of his administration is his latest attempt to bend the norms. From redirecting money intended for military bases to build the border wall with Mexico to installing acting nominees in administrative positions without Senate confirmation, Trump has chipped away at the legislative branch throughout his term.

If he does veto the defense bill, Congress could cut short its Christmas recess to hold override votes, senior House members said.

“I think we can override the veto, if in fact he vetoes,” House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said Tuesday before the vote. “I hope he does not veto, I hope he reconsiders. And I think he will get substantial pressure, advice (from Republicans) that, you know, you don’t want to put the defense bill at risk.”

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Trump’s attempt to pressure Congress on Section 230 was justified.

“Twitter has become a publisher, choosing to fact-check content,” she said. “And when you’re a publisher, there are certain responsibilities with that and you should not be immune from liability.”

Past presidents have certainly threatened to veto defense bills, which set annual policy with troop levels, equipment priorities, pay raises and other matters.

The defense bill is typically a widely bipartisan measure, one of the few areas of common ground. Over the summer, the Senate approved its version, 86-14, while the House similarly passed its effort, with opposition coming mostly from the liberal and conservative flanks.

Trump’s allies on Capitol Hill, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, have railed against the social media companies, especially during the heated November election. McCarthy, R-Calif., voted for the bill Tuesday but said he would not support overriding the veto.

Some Democrats, including Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, agree the Section 230 provision could be revisited, even as they disagree with Trump’s tactic of attaching it to the defense bill.

‘A new movement’: Trump’s false claims take hold in states

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — President Donald Trump’s campaign to subvert the will of voters and reverse his re-election loss to Democrat Joe Biden is taking hold among state and local Republicans even as it marches toward imminent failure — a demonstration of Trump’s power to bend the GOP to his will even as he leaves office.

Dozens of state lawmakers, elected officials and party leaders in recent weeks have endorsed and advanced Trump’s false claims, and in some cases called for undemocratic actions to reverse results. None of the moves have had an impact on the election results — and even Republican governors have certified Biden’s win. Still, activists say they see the so-called “stop the steal” campaign as the animating force behind the next wave of Trump-era conservative politics.

“I definitely see a brand new movement taking shape,” said Monica Boyer, a former lobbyist in Indiana and early national voice of the tea party movement. “Was this election stolen? I don’t know. But people have the right to know.”

Signs of the power of that burgeoning political force have been building: In Pennsylvania, 64 Republican lawmakers — including leadership — have signed a statement urging members of Congress to block the

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state's electoral votes from being cast for Biden. In Texas, the state's Republican attorney general has filed a lawsuit to the U.S. Supreme Court demanding that other states' Electoral College votes be invalidated.

Even in liberal Massachusetts, five GOP candidates who lost their races filed a federal lawsuit Monday trying to decertify the state's election results, recycling claims about irregularities and voting machines.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in Michigan, Arizona and Georgia all hosted meetings with Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani where they allowed hourslong airing of grievances over the election as the states certified results for Biden.

To be sure, such efforts have done more to build political support than overturn results. Trump and his allies have lost more than 40 times in federal and state courts. Tuesday is "Safe Harbor Day," the federal deadline for Congress to accept the electoral votes that will be cast next week and sent to the Capitol for counting on Jan. 6. Biden has already secured the 270 electors needed to win.

Meanwhile, Trump's attempts to personally persuade GOP lawmakers, governors and state election officials to intervene have failed.

The president reached out twice last week to Pennsylvania House Speaker Bryan Cutler, a Republican, to press the state's legislature to replace the electors for Biden with those loyal to Trump. Cutler told him state law prevented such a move, according to a spokesman.

Still, Trump has succeeded in using his unfounded grievances to build political power. The president has already raised more than \$170 million since losing to Biden, requesting donations for an "election defense fund." Most of that will become seed money for his post-presidency political career, going to a Trump-founded political action committee called Save America.

The president has shown he's willing to attack state Republicans who don't back his cause. Trump tweeted Monday that Georgia Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, who had worried publicly about the spread of election misinformation, was "too dumb or corrupt to recognize massive evidence of fraud" and said he should be replaced.

Duncan replied Tuesday: "Thank you for 4 years of conservative leadership," adding that Trump had proven that a "business minded outsider can be effective in DC."

Some Republican groups, including state GOP committees, have grabbed hold of the Trump team's claims with both hands.

The Arizona Republican Party late Monday appeared to ask supporters to consider dying to keep Trump in office. The state party's official Twitter account retweeted conservative activist Ali Alexander's pledge that he was "willing to give my life for this fight."

"He is. Are you?" the Arizona GOP added.

Some Republicans have spoken out against Trump's fight to subvert the results. "It's completely unacceptable and it's not going to work and the president should give up trying to get legislatures to overturn the results of the elections in their respective states," U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania told the Philadelphia Inquirer. Toomey has said he does not plan to run for reelection in 2022.

Many of those seeking a political future in the Republican Party have been far more careful in their criticism. Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler this week repeatedly refused to acknowledge Biden's win, as she hopes to persuade Trump supporters to support her in her January runoff election.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Trump ally, filed his lawsuit as he is under investigation by the FBI for allegedly using his office to help a wealthy donor, and while the president is said to be considering a slew of pardons and commutations before he leaves office.

Legal experts dismissed the filing as a long shot. The lawsuit repeats numerous false, disproven and unsupported allegations of illegal mail-in balloting and voting in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Dale Carpenter, a law professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, noted that Texas typically files federal cases with a coalition of other states but in this case was alone. Texas Solicitor General Kyle Hawkins did not sign the petition, which is also rare for a state filing to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"I do not believe this effort will be successful. In fact, I'm certain it will not be," Carpenter said. "But the fact that it was even attempted is an indicator of some degree of erosion of our norms of politics."

Trump celebrated the lawsuit Tuesday, tweeting thanks to Texas for "COURAGE & BRILLIANCE!"

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press journalists Jake Bleiberg in Dallas; Kate Brumbach in Atlanta; Alanna Durkin Richer in Boston; and Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.

'First Cow,' 'Nomadland' top AP's best films of 2020

By JAKE COYLE and LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writers

Good movies kept coming in 2020, even when everything else stopped. In a year that often felt like its own kind of cataclysmic Hollywood production, the movies — even if relegated to smaller screens — were as necessary as ever. It was the year of the drive-in, the backyard-bedsheet screening and the streaming service. But wherever they played, the best films of the year offered some escape and connection: the possibility of grace, a spark of fury — and something the rest of the world couldn't offer: the assurance of an ending. Here are our picks for the best movies of 2020:

JAKE COYLE

1. "First Cow": Any sweetness in life in Kelly Reichardt's radiant frontier fable is both fleeting and eternal. Set in the Oregon Territory of the 1820s, it's a portrait of a friendship forged, as it ought to be, on kindness and baked goods. The movie's harsh Western landscape, where two poor travelers (played by John Magaro and Orion Lee) suggests a critique of capitalism as much as Ken Loach's also excellent modern-day gig economy drama "Sorry We Missed You." But the tenderness between them, despite it all, could hardly have felt more suited to the times.

2. "Small Axe": It's five films not one, but I'd have as hard a time splitting up Steve McQueen's anthology as I would "The Decalogue." It functions best a whole, as a cycle of racism and resistance stretched over two decades of London history. The second chapter, "Lovers Rock," is a bass-thumping standout, and may be the best house-party movie ever made.

3. "Mank": It's so delightfully full of contradictions. A clear-eyed ode to Old Hollywood, made for a streaming service. An anti-auteur theory drama about the many minds that go into making a movie, crafted by maybe America's most skillful and obsessive director. Leaving aside its much-debated history, it's simply a head-spinning, gorgeously atmospheric and wonderfully acted character study about a guy who finally gave something his all — and out came one of the greatest movies ever made.

4. "Dick Johnson Is Dead": Kirsten Johnson has made two films as a director, both masterpieces of human connection. Following her collage documentary "Cameraperson," her father, Dick, began slipping away to dementia. Johnson resolved to make a film with him, rehearsing elaborate death scenes and reminiscing in between as a way to spend time together and preserve something of him on film. Both of Johnson's films urge you to open your eyes to the world around you, and pick up a camera.

5. "Minari": Lee Isaac Chung's richly detailed, autobiographical film is a classic immigrant tale and a compassionate family drama about his Korean immigrant parents (Steven Yeun, Yeri Han) after they moved to rural Arkansas. Its warmth and gentleness slowly but steadily bowls you over.

6. "David Byrne's American Utopia": Spike Lee's fiction films make more noise but he's quietly one of the best documentary filmmakers we have. He may have made the best film of the year in his short film "New York, New York," a tribute to an undefeatable pandemic-stricken city. But aside from his impassioned Vietnam War drama "Da 5 Bloods," Lee's concert film of Byrne's Broadway show — an exuberant, dancing celebration of togetherness — encapsulated so much of what was off limits in 2020.

7. "Never Rarely Sometimes Always": Eliza Hittman's film, about a 17-year-old Pennsylvania young woman (newcomer Sidney Flanigan) having to travel to New York for an abortion, is a delicately restrained, heart-breaking neo-realistic drama. It's about the hurdles to abortion in much of the U.S., but it's also paints a

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vivid picture, through countless fraught interactions, of what its like growing up a teenage girl.

8. "Soul": A legitimate double-feature to pair with his "Inside Out," Pete Docter's latest Pixar marvel spins deep existential troubles into a wonderous and wise family film. It's also, with a glorious rendering of Harlem, one of the best New York movies in years.

9. "Collective": This piercing Romanian documentary, about corruption in the country's health care system, is one of the most powerful journalism dramas you'll see this side of "All the President's Men." And unlike any film I can recall, it shifts midway to examine — after an unlikely team of reporters exposes rot within the system — change within the system, following an idealistic insider's attempts to respond to the journalists' work.

10. "Sound of Metal": Riz Ahmed's potent performance as a punk-metal drummer with a heroin habit who loses much of his hearing paces this sometimes uneven, always unpredictable drama of recovery and self-realization. In a year of social distancing, intense and raw performances like Ahmed's (and Carrie Coon's in "The Nest") telescoped the space between.

Honorable mentions: "The Nest," "Nomadland," "The Forty-Year-Old Version," "Promising Young Woman," "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Let Them All Talk," "The Dissident," "Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution," "Palm Springs," "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm"

LINDSEY BAHR

1. "Nomadland": There is an unfortunate, inevitable hurdle when you come to something that already has scores of accolades, but Chloe Zhao's "Nomadland" is that rare creation that not only lives up to the hype but also makes you forget about it. This is a gentle, humane and dizzily poetic ode to the people on the fringes of American society, the ones who choose to wander and drift across the great Western landscape. Frances McDormand gives a performance that is so alive and unguarded that it feels like non-fiction. Many want to be the next Terrence Malick, but "Nomadland" proves Zhao is it.

2. "Kajillionaire": Miranda July's "Kajillionaire" is also about people on the fringe, but her protagonists aren't highway exiles. The Dynes, Robert (Richard Jenkins), Theresa (Debra Winger) and Old Dolio (Evan Rachel Wood), are lousy small time con artists hiding in plain sight in sunbeaten, concrete Los Angeles. Original and dazzlingly surreal, you may be surprised at the emotional punch this odd and lovely story packs and you'll never look at a pancake the same way.

3. "Lovers Rock": All you really need to know is that "Lover's Rock" is a pulsating, 68-minute dance party directed by one of our living greats, Steve McQueen. It is sweaty, glittery, heady and, like a great guest, doesn't overstay its welcome.

4. "Collective": It's hard to recommend something that is likely to enrage, this year especially, but "Collective," a searing Romanian documentary about the aftermath of a deadly Bucharest nightclub fire is just too good and eye opening to deny.

5. "Mank": Movies about the movies are an easy target for anyone wanting to criticize Hollywood's naval-gazing tendencies, but "Mank," about the man who almost didn't get credit for writing "Citizen Kane" does something different. Directed by David Fincher and written by his late father Jack, this film is nostalgic but not mawkish, reverent but not blind. It is a stylish and wry look at a man who came to Hollywood to sell out and ended up creating something he was proud of. Gary Oldman as the titular character and Amanda Seyfried as Marion Davies are splendid.

6. "On the Rocks": Sofia Coppola's latest goes down so easy, it might seem a little insubstantial. But although its surface pleasures are many — I'll tour ritzy Manhattan haunts with Bill Murray and Rashida Jones in a convertible with caviar and champagne any day — it's also a work of subtle power. It's an accessible, thoughtful and wonderfully adult treatise on men and women in the most unlikely of packages — a father/daughter comedy.

7. "Tenet": "Tenet" was one of the only films this year that I saw on the big screen, having spent the first few months of the year on maternity leave and the rest in pandemic lockdown. Although it's hard to separate from the experience of simply being in a theater, there was no more thrilling, glamorous and purely cinematic film this year.

8. "Never Rarely Sometimes Always": One of the year's quietest but most devastating films looks at the decidedly unempowering experience of existing in a female teenage body, especially for a teenage girl living in rural Pennsylvania who needs an abortion. From director Eliza Hittman, "Never Rarely Sometimes Always" is a tremendous exercise in mood and a beautiful showcase for some up and coming talents.

9. "Promising Young Woman": A messy, bold movie about a messy, bold woman (Carey Mulligan) who has given up on her own life to become a kind of #MeToo vigilante, scaring strangers and enemies into seeing that there are no gray areas when it comes to sexual misconduct. The bubblegum pink brainchild of writer-director Emerald Fennell (who also plays Camilla Parker-Bowles on "The Crown") is garish, beguiling and unapologetically itself. Mulligan is terrific, as is Bo Burnham.

10. "Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga": No film made me laugh more this year than "Eurovision," a knowingly silly lark about an Icelandic pop duo (Will Ferrell and Rachel McAdams). Its songs and one-liners still echo in my head nearly six months later (in a good way).

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

Source of money behind GOP's new Georgia super PAC a mystery

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new Republican super political action committee, Peachtree PAC, is starting a \$43 million TV ad campaign in Georgia on Wednesday, adding to the surge of money being poured into two Senate runoff elections that will determine control of the chamber and the trajectory of President-elect Joe Biden's agenda.

But the funding behind the group will likely remain a mystery until well after ballots are cast in the Jan. 5 election.

The millions of dollars that the group plans to spend represents just a small portion of more than \$245 million in TV and radio advertising the GOP already plans to unleash, according to data from the ad tracking firm Kantar/CMAG.

Yet unlike other similar outside groups operating in the state, Peachtree PAC has taken steps to mask who its donors are until Jan. 31, according to Federal Election Commission records. It's just the latest example of how secretive groups can spend millions trying to influence an election with little disclosure before ballots are cast.

"Voters have a right to know who is trying to influence their vote," said Brendan Fischer, the director of federal reform at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center in Washington. "Disclosure of donors tells voters who is trying to influence them, and also who potentially stands to benefit from the election of a particular candidate."

Peachtree PAC will be operated by Senate Leadership Fund, a group affiliated with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, said SLF spokesman Jack Pandol. He declined to say who was funding the group.

Groups like Peachtree PAC are often referred to as "pop up" PACs, which have been embraced by Republicans and Democrats alike. They typically are formed by national party committees, or affiliated groups, in the middle of a fiercely contested election. Often they are given local sounding names that belie their Washington origins.

"The fate of our country hangs in the balance in Georgia. This new activity through Peachtree PAC will articulate the stakes couldn't be higher as the future of freedom is on the ballot," SLF President Steven Law said in a statement.

Georgia's two runoff races kicked off in November after Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler failed to get more than 50 percent of the vote on Election Day. They are now locked in tight contests,

with Perdue facing Democratic challenger Jon Ossoff, while Loeffler, who was appointed to her seat, is battling Raphael Warnock to complete the remainder of Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson's term.

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

CNN was first to report that Senate Leadership Fund was operating Peachtree PAC.

14 Fort Hood soldiers fired, suspended over violence at base

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army on Tuesday said it has fired or suspended 14 officers and enlisted soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, and ordered policy changes to address chronic failures of leadership that contributed to a widespread pattern of violence, including murder, sexual assault and harassment.

In a sweeping condemnation of Fort Hood's command hierarchy, Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy fired three top commanders and suspended two others pending a further investigation. He also ordered a separate probe into staffing and procedures at the base's Criminal Investigation Command unit, which is responsible for investigating crimes on Fort Hood.

The actions come after a year that saw at least 25 soldiers assigned to Fort Hood die due to suicide, homicide or accidents, including the bludgeoning death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen. Guillen was missing for about two months before her remains were found.

Speaking to reporters at the Pentagon, McCarthy said based on an independent panel's review, he concluded that the issues at Fort Hood, including major flaws in the response to sexual assault and harassment, "are directly related to leadership failures." He said he was gravely disappointed in the commanders there, adding, "without leadership, systems don't matter."

Gen. James McConville, the chief of staff of the Army, told reporters that he spoke to Guillen's mother on Tuesday morning and told her, "We are holding leaders accountable, and we will fix this."

Gloria Guillen, Vanessa's mother, said during an emotional press conference in Houston that she spoke with McCarthy and told him the administrative actions were a step in the right direction, but she wanted to see those who had failed her daughter serve jail time.

"Nothing is going to take away the pain I feel as her mother all day and all night," Guillen said in Spanish through tears.

Natalie Khawam, the Guillens' attorney, said Criminal Investigation Command (known as CID) officers were among those fired or suspended Tuesday. The panel found that Fort Hood was used as a training ground for new CID officers, and there was a lot of turnover and many of the officers were inexperienced and overassigned.

McCarthy also ordered a new Army policy that changes how commanders deal with missing soldiers. The panel found there were no detailed procedures for what commanders of small units should do if a soldier is missing, but not necessarily AWOL, or absent without leave. The new policy requires leaders to list service members as absent-unknown for up to 48 hours and to do everything they can to locate the soldier to determine if the absence is voluntary before declaring anyone AWOL.

The firings include Army Maj. Gen. Scott Efflandt, who was left in charge of the base earlier this year when Guillen was killed, as well as Col. Ralph Overland, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment commander and his Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Knapp. Among those suspended were Maj. Gen. Jeffery Broadwater, the 1st Cavalry Division commander, and his Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas C. Kenny. The administrative actions are expected to trigger investigations that could lead to a wide range of punishments. Those punishments could go from a simple letter of reprimand to a military discharge.

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The Army did not provide the names of the other lower-ranking soldiers who face possible discipline. The base commander, Army Lt. Gen. Pat White, will not face any administrative action. Asked about that, McConville said White was deployed to Iraq as the commander there for much of the year so wasn't at the base. "Leadership is about presence," said McConville.

Army leaders had already delayed Efflandt's planned transfer to Fort Bliss, where he was slated to take over leadership of the 1st Armored Division. Efflandt's move was paused while the team of independent investigators conducted its probe into whether leadership failures contributed to the killings of several people, including Guillen, and who should be held accountable.

Army leaders and members of the independent panel acknowledged that the death of Guillen, 20, earlier this year was a catalyst for a deeper look into what have been longstanding crime and other problems at the base.

According to investigators, Guillen was bludgeoned to death at Fort Hood by Spc. Aaron Robinson, who killed himself on July 1 as police were trying to take him into custody. Her family has said Robinson sexually harassed her, though the Army has said there is no evidence supporting that claim.

Also in July, the body of Pvt. Mejhor Morta was found near a reservoir by Fort Hood. And in June, officials discovered the remains of another missing soldier, Gregory Morales, about 10 miles from that lake.

The five-member panel spent three weeks at Fort Hood and conducted more than 2,500 interviews, including 647 in person. More than 500 of those were with female soldiers. They also collected more than 31,000 responses to a sexual assault and harassment survey. They said they found a deep dissatisfaction with the sexual assault and harassment reporting and response program.

They said female soldiers told them they were afraid of retaliation for complaints, including fears they would be moved to other jobs, their confidentiality would be compromised and their careers would be derailed. They also complained about long delays in investigations, and many said they didn't report incidents of sexual assault or harassment due to lack of confidence in the program.

Panel member Carrie Ricci, a retired member of the Army's Judge Advocate General's Corp who served for three years at Fort Hood, had a message to the female soldiers there. "I want them to know we believe you," she said.

Chris Swecker, the committee chairman and retired head of the FBI's criminal investigation division, said the panel concluded there was a significant lack of emphasis on the sexual assault response program, and that, more broadly, Fort Hood has a serious crime problem that largely goes unaddressed. He said commanders are guilty more of "acts of omission" rather than acts of commission.

Swecker said there was little visible deterrent or plan to prevent crimes that range from assaults to drug use. Fort Hood, he said, has the highest rate of positive drug tests in the Army.

At Fort Hood, White told reporters that the panel's report gave him a "historically unprecedented" granular look at the base's problems, and "what was made abundantly clear is that we have to fix our culture." He said he will immediately implement some of the report's suggested actions and has already held two sexual assault review board meetings. He also said he ordered a "compassion team" to meet with all of the soldiers who were fired or suspended.

Associated Press writer Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas, contributed to this report.

Biden makes pitch for retired general to be Pentagon chief

By ROBERT BURNS and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday made his case for retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin to be secretary of defense, urging Congress to waive a legal prohibition against a recently serving military officer running the Pentagon.

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With concern rising in Congress about maintaining civilian control of the military, Biden suggested he felt a need to counter an emerging narrative that Austin's nomination blurs the lines between civil and military roles.

"Given the immense and urgent threats and challenges our nation faces, he should be confirmed swiftly," Biden wrote in *The Atlantic*. It was his first public confirmation that Austin is his pick for Pentagon chief, although word had leaked out Monday, prompting criticism and skepticism from some in Congress.

Biden countered the concerns by arguing that Austin knows that a Pentagon chief's duties are different from those of a military officer. He said Austin is aware that "the civil-military dynamic has been under great stress these past four years," an allusion to President Donald Trump's hiring of numerous retired generals for key posts early in his administration, including retired Marine Gen. Jim Mattis as defense secretary.

Biden argued that Austin would work to put the civil-military balance "back on track." He said the main reason he picked Austin was because he reacts well under pressure.

"He is the person we need in this moment," Biden wrote.

Austin would be the first Black leader of the Pentagon, and the historic nature of the nomination, particularly in a year of extraordinary racial tension in the country, adds an intriguing dimension to the debate in Congress over one of the key members of Biden's Cabinet.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., followed Biden's lead, announcing her support and calling Austin "particularly well-positioned to lead during this precarious moment."

Austin was an unexpected choice. Most speculation centered on Michele Flournoy, an experienced Washington hand and Biden supporter. She would have been the first woman to run the Pentagon. Flournoy issued a statement Tuesday congratulating Austin and calling him a man of deep integrity.

Austin is widely admired for his military service, which includes leading troops in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and overseeing U.S. military operations throughout the greater Middle East as head of Central Command. But the requirement for a congressional waiver makes getting him installed as Pentagon chief more complicated than usual. Austin retired in 2016 after 41 years in the Army and has never held a political position.

Such a congressional waiver has been granted only twice: in 1950 for George Marshall and in 2017 for Mattis. Some prominent Democrats opposed the Mattis waiver, and among those who voted for it, Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island expressed doubts.

"Waiving the law should happen no more than once in a generation," Reed, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said then, adding, "Therefore, I will not support a waiver for future nominees."

Asked Tuesday about an Austin waiver, Reed seemed open to the possibility.

"I feel, in all fairness, you have to give the opportunity to the nominee to explain himself or herself," he told reporters.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the current chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said he had no problem voting for the waivers. "I always support waivers," he said. But he said he doesn't know Austin well.

Civilian control of the military is rooted in Americans' historic wariness of large standing armies with the power to overthrow the government it is intended to serve. That is why the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces, and it reflects the rationale behind the prohibition against a recently retired military officer serving as defense secretary.

Some Democrats who agreed to the 2017 waiver saw Mattis as tempering Trump's impulsive nature and offsetting his lack of national security experience. Now the Mattis period at the Pentagon is viewed by some as an argument against waiving the seven-year rule for Austin. Mattis critics say he surrounded himself with military officers at the expense of a broader civilian perspective. He resigned in December 2018 in protest of Trump's policies.

Similar concerns may emerge with an Austin nomination.

Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said despite the historic nature of the nomination, he would not vote for a waiver because it "would contravene the basic principle that there should be civilian

control over a nonpolitical military.”

“That principle is essential to our democracy ... I think (it) has to be applied, unfortunately, in this instance,” he said.

Rep. Elissa Slotkin, a Michigan Democrat, said she has mixed feelings, including deep respect for Austin, with whom she worked as a Pentagon official during his years in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“But choosing another recently retired general to serve in a role that is designed for a civilian just feels off,” she said. “The job of secretary of defense is purpose-built to ensure civilian oversight of the military.”

Slotkin said the last four years have thrown that out of balance. She said she wants to know how the Biden administration will address her concerns before she votes for a waiver.

One of the people who confirmed Biden’s decision on Monday said the selection was about choosing the best possible person but acknowledged that pressure had built to name a candidate of color.

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 troops from 2010 through 2011.

Among Austin’s many military assignments, in 2009-2010 he ran the joint staff during a portion of Navy Adm. Mike Mullen’s term as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said Lloyd would make a “superb” secretary of defense.

“He knows firsthand the complex missions our men and women in uniform conduct around the world,” Mullen said in a statement. “He puts a premium on alliances and partnerships. He respects the need for robust and healthy civil-military relations. And he leads inclusively, calmly and confidently.”

Austin, a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, served in 2012 as the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army. A year later he assumed command of Central Command, where he fashioned and began implementing a strategy for rolling back the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Del. AP writers Lisa Mascaro, Matthew Daly and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Trump hails vaccine ‘miracle,’ with millions of doses soon

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump celebrated the expected approval of the first U.S. vaccine for the coronavirus Tuesday as the White House worked to instill confidence in the massive distribution effort that will largely be executed by President-elect Joe Biden

Trump said the expected approvals are coming before most people thought possible. “They say it’s somewhat of a miracle and I think that’s true,” he declared.

Trump led Tuesday’s White House event celebrating “Operation Warp Speed,” his administration’s effort to produce and distribute safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19. The first vaccine, from drugmaker Pfizer, is expected to receive endorsement 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.

“Every American who wants the vaccine will be able to get the vaccine and we think by spring we’re going to be in a position nobody would have believed possible just a few months ago,” Trump said.

Pfizer developed its vaccine outside of “Operation Warp Speed,” but is partnering with the federal government on manufacturing and distribution.

England began its first vaccinations earlier Tuesday, to great fanfare, as the world mounts its fight against the pandemic that has killed more than 285,000 Americans and some 1.5 million people worldwide.

Trump and his aides hope to tamp down skepticism among some Americans about the vaccines and

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help build the outgoing Republican president's legacy.

However, Trump's administration was also facing new scrutiny Tuesday after failing to lock in a chance to buy millions of additional doses of Pfizer's vaccine, which has been shown to be highly effective against COVID-19. That decision could delay the delivery of a second batch of doses until Pfizer fulfills other international contracts.

Trump used Tuesday's event to sign an executive order in which the secretary of Health and Human Services is directed to ensure that Americans have priority access to the vaccine.

A senior administration official said the order would restrict the federal government from delivering doses to other nations until there is excess supply to meet domestic demand, but it was not immediately clear what the practical impact would be.

Tuesday's "Operation Warp Speed" event featured Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and a host of government experts, state leaders and business executives, as the White House looked to explain that the vaccine is safe and lay out the administration's plans to bring it to the American people. But officials from 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.

Biden, who was rolling out his senior health team on Tuesday, said last week that in meetings with Trump administration officials his aides have discovered 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 local governments to ensure their most vulnerable populations are vaccinated first. In all, about 50,000 vaccination sites are enrolled in the government's distribution system.

But career officials insisted it was still too early to declare victory.

"We don't want to get out in front of ourselves," said Army Gen. Gustave Perna, responsible for overseeing the logistical and distribution efforts. "As my father used to say, 'You can only spike the football when you're in the end zone.' Well, what is the end zone described to us here? Shots in arms."

Speaking in Wilmington, Delaware, Biden promised to distribute "100 million shots in the first 100 days" of his administration — roughly on pace with Trump's projections for vaccination.

Introducing his pandemic response team on Tuesday, Biden laid out his priorities for the start of his new government. He repeated his previous calls for all Americans to wear masks for 100 days to prevent the spread of the virus and said he'd mandate doing so in federal buildings and on public transportation. Biden also said he believed the virus could be brought under enough control to reopen "the majority of schools" within his first 100 days as president.

Those pledges came even as Biden struck a somber tone about the toll the coronavirus has already taken. He said that, after about nine months of living with the pandemic, the U.S. is "at risk of becoming numb to its toll on all of us" and "resigned to feel that there's nothing we can do."

Trump, meanwhile, defended his decision to hold indoor holiday parties at the White House this December, though they have attracted hundreds of largely mask-less supporters contrary to his administration's warnings that the American public should avoid such settings.

"Well, they're Christmas parties," he told reporters Tuesday.

Though Trump was taking credit for the pace of vaccine development, much of the groundwork was laid over the past decade, amid new research into messenger RNA, or mRNA, vaccines — of the sort developed by both Pfizer and Moderna.

"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 this month. "That's what the public has to understand."

Fauci, who will serve as a chief scientific adviser to Biden's administration, appeared virtually at the president-elect's event, but did not attend the White House summit. The White House did include early clips of Fauci predicting a longer development time for the vaccines in a round-up of skeptics of Trump's timetable.

The Trump administration insists that between the Pfizer vaccine, the vaccine from Moderna and others

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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 Food and Drug Administration's panel of outside vaccine experts is to meet Thursday to conduct a final review of the Pfizer vaccine, and it will meet later this month on the Moderna version.

FDA decisions on the two vaccines 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.

The decision not to secure 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."

Dr. Moncef Slaoui, who is leading the government's vaccine effort, noted the Trump administration had been looking at a number of different vaccines during the summer. He told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Tuesday that "no one reasonably would buy more from any one of those vaccines because we didn't know which one would work and which one would be better than the other."

AP writers Jonathan Lemire in Wilmington, Delaware, Luran Neergaard and Kevin Freking in Washington and Linda Johnson in Trenton, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Pfizer vaccine moves closer to getting the OK in the US

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators Tuesday released their first scientific evaluation of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine and confirmed it offers strong protection, setting the stage for the government to green light the biggest vaccination effort in the nation's history.

The analysis by Food and Drug Administration scientists comes ahead of a Thursday meeting where the agency's independent advisers will debate if the evidence is strong enough to recommend vaccinating millions of Americans. A final FDA decision and the first shots could follow within just days.

They are among a whirlwind of developments that are expected to make multiple vaccines available by early next year, in the U.S. and beyond.

Britain on Tuesday began vaccinations with the shot made by Pfizer and German partner BioNTech. The FDA later this month will consider one developed by Moderna. Also Tuesday, a medical journal published early data suggesting a third vaccine candidate, AstraZeneca's, also protects people, though not as much as the two other frontrunners.

The vaccines emerged from an all-out worldwide race and are reaching the market less than a year after the virus was even identified — a remarkable scientific achievement that shaved years off the usual process.

The encouraging developments come as the coronavirus continues surging across much of the world. The scourge has claimed more than 1.5 million lives, including over 285,000 in the U.S., the highest toll of any country.

FDA scientists reanalyzed data from Pfizer's huge, still-unfinished study and found that so far, the vaccine appears safe and more than 90% effective across patients of different ages, races and underlying health conditions. The FDA specifically confirmed it works well in older people, who are especially vulnerable to the virus.

Thursday's public meeting will be closely watched by health authorities around the world and is considered key to bolstering confidence in the shots amid skepticism about vaccine safety among many Americans.

"We want people to see this discussion, to see the issues that are brought up, and have a vigorous

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discussion of the data elements by the outside experts," FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn said in an interview. "That will be an important part of showing what goes into our decision making."

The FDA is expected to follow its committee's advice, and first in line once vaccinations begin would be health care workers and nursing home residents.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla declined to predict how quickly FDA might issue a decision.

"They need to take as much time as they need to feel comfortable. It's very important for the trust of the vaccine from the people," he said.

Pfizer and BioNTech previously reported the shots appeared 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease, based on the first 170 infections confirmed after participants' second dose. Only eight of the infections were among volunteers who had been given the real vaccine; the rest were among those who had gotten a dummy shot.

Moderna has reported nearly identical protection in tests of its vaccine, which was developed with the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

A third option, from AstraZeneca and Oxford University, appears safe and about 70% effective, according to early test results from Britain and Brazil. But that report, in the medical journal *Lancet*, showed that questions remain about how well it helps protect those over 55.

Still, British regulators are considering emergency use of that vaccine, too, and if it pans out, it could become the vaccine of choice in the developing world because it doesn't need to be kept in the deep freeze like Pfizer's formula.

A big question for all the coming vaccines is how long protection lasts.

FDA said partial protection appears two weeks after the first dose of the Pfizer shot, and greater protection seems to last at least two months after the second and final dose.

As for safety, the FDA found no serious side effects among the more than 37,000 volunteers who have been tracked for at least two months after their last dose, the period when vaccination problems typically appear.

The main side effects were injection-site pain or flu-like reactions that tend to last a day or two: More than half of adults under 55 experienced fatigue or headache, about a third reported chills or muscle pain, and 16% had a fever. Older adults were less likely to experience those reactions.

Once mass vaccinations get underway, the government intends to conduct unprecedented monitoring of recipients to watch for any side effects that didn't show up during testing. Even studies of tens of thousands of people can't spot a complication that strikes, say, 1 in a million.

Among the additional questions ahead of Thursday's meeting:

--Were the shots adequately tested in Black, Hispanic and other communities hard hit by the pandemic?
--Does the vaccine protect against infection with no symptoms, or could the vaccinated still unknowingly spread the virus?

--What should pregnant women be told about vaccination, since they weren't tested in Pfizer's study?

Studies in children as young as 12 are just beginning.

Answering some of those questions may require keeping Pfizer's 44,000-person study going even after vaccinations begin. Health authorities are wrestling with how to do so in a way that's fair to participants who got a dummy shot but would want the real thing now.

Associated Press writers Jamey Keaten in Geneva and Marilyn Marchione in Milwaukee contributed to this report.

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Family: Black man shot by deputy held a sandwich, not a gun

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Report for America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Civil rights and FBI investigators will help look into the fatal shooting by an Ohio sheriff's deputy of a Black man whose family says that he was holding not a gun, but a sandwich, and that he was shot in front of two toddlers and his grandmother while inside his home, not outside it, as authorities assert.

The office of U.S. Attorney David M. DeVillers in Ohio said Tuesday that it would step in — along with the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the FBI in Cincinnati and the Columbus police — after the state attorney general's office declined to investigate the shooting of Casey Goodson Jr., 23, because it said the police department didn't ask soon enough.

"My grandson just got shot in the back when he came in the house," Goodson's grandmother told a dispatcher Friday, according to 911 recordings obtained by The Associated Press. "I don't know if he's OK."

Goodson had just gone to the dentist, she told the dispatcher, and she didn't know what had happened or who shot him.

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office first reported Friday the fatal shooting of a man that day on the north side of Columbus. The case was given to city police because the Sheriff's Office does not oversee investigations of its own deputies in fatal shootings, and the police department did not release such details as the names of Goodson and the deputy who shot him until Sunday.

Since then, Goodson's relatives and law enforcement officials have given conflicting details. Visible evidence of the events is lacking because the Sheriff's Office does not provide officers with body cameras, and the deputy's SWAT vehicle did not have a dash-mounted camera.

The deputy, Jason Meade, a 17-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office, had been assigned to a U.S. Marshals Office fugitive task force. The task force had just finished an unsuccessful search for a fugitive Friday afternoon when Goodson, who was not the suspect, drove by and waved a gun at Meade, according to U.S. Marshal Peter Tobin.

Meade confronted him outside Goodson's vehicle in front of the man's home, Tobin said.

One witness heard Meade command Goodson to drop his gun, and when he didn't, the deputy shot him, Tobin said. Goodson was taken to a hospital, where he died.

But attorneys for Goodson's family say that he was shot while walking in his home, and that his grandmother and two toddlers, who were not his own children, witnessed the shooting.

Tobin's narrative leaves out "key details that raise cause for extreme concern," the attorneys' statement reads, including the object Goodson was holding. Police say it was a gun that was later recovered from the scene; Goodson's family says he was holding a Subway sandwich.

"At this point, witness testimony and physical evidence raise serious concerns about why Casey was even confronted, let alone why he was shot dead while entering his own home," the lawyers added.

Even if Goodson had been carrying a gun, the statement read, he had a license to do so.

The Sheriff's Office and a police union declined to comment on behalf of Meade.

Mayor Andrew Ginther had sought Monday to send the probe to the state Bureau of Criminal Investigation, which the attorney general's office oversees, to ensure "another layer of independence." Protests in Columbus and elsewhere over the police killings of George Floyd in Minnesota and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky included, among other things, criticism of law enforcement officers investigating their own.

But the bureau declined to take the case because it believed Columbus police should have called for help immediately, according to the office of Attorney General Dave Yost, a Republican.

"Three days later after the crime scene has been dismantled" and witnesses have dispersed "does not work," a spokesperson for Yost said in a statement Monday night.

On Tuesday, DeVillers' office made the announcement that it would work with other agencies to "review the facts and circumstances" of Goodson's shooting and "take appropriate action if the evidence indicates any federal civil rights laws were violated."

Meade's personnel file shows that he is a former Marine who received small arms training before joining

the Sheriff's Office, and that he has had a generally good performance.

Two missteps stand out: In March 2019, he was reprimanded for misusing a stun gun on a suspect and failing to notify his supervisor of his use of force. And in September 2007, the Sheriff's Office prohibited Meade from having contact with inmates but did not disclose what conduct prompted it.

Associated Press writer Andrew Welsh-Huggins contributed to this report. Amiri is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

UK starts virus campaign with a shot watched round the world

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A nurse rolled up 90-year-old Margaret Keenan's sleeve and administered a shot watched round the world — the first jab in the U.K.'s COVID-19 vaccination program kicking off an unprecedented global effort to try to end a pandemic that has killed 1.5 million people.

Keenan, a retired shop clerk from Northern Ireland who celebrates her birthday next week, was at the front of the line at University Hospital Coventry to receive the vaccine that was approved by British regulators last week.

The U.K. is the first Western country to deliver a broadly tested and independently reviewed vaccine to the general public. The COVID-19 shot was developed by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. U.S. and European Union regulators may approve it in the coming days or weeks.

"All done?" Keenan asked nurse May Parsons. "All done," came the reply, as hospital staff broke into applause and also clapped for her as she was wheeled down a corridor.

"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 with a cartoon penguin in 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 second injection, in a fitting bit of drama, went to an 81-year-old man named William Shakespeare from Warwickshire, the county where the bard was born.

The fanfare was good cheer to the nation, if but for a moment. 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. The U.K. has seen over 61,000 deaths in the pandemic — more than any other country in Europe — and has recorded more than 1.7 million confirmed cases.

"This really feels like the beginning of the end," said Stephen Powis, medical director for the National Health Service in England. "It's been a 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."

But it is important beyond these shores. Britain's program is likely to provide lessons for other countries as they prepare for the unprecedented task of vaccinating billions.

On Saturday, Russia began vaccinations with its Sputnik V vaccine, and China has also begun giving its own domestically made shots to its citizens and selling them abroad. But those are being viewed differently because neither countries' vaccines have finished the late-stage trials scientists consider essential for proving a serum is safe and effective.

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.

Documents released by U.S. regulators Tuesday confirmed that Pfizer's vaccine was strongly protective against COVID-19 and appeared safe. New results on a possible vaccine from Oxford University and

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drugmaker AstraZeneca suggest it is safe and about 70% effective, according to early test results from Britain and Brazil. But that report, in the medical journal *Lancet*, showed that questions remain about how well it helps protect those over 55.

British regulators approved the Pfizer shot Dec. 2, and the country has received 800,000 doses, enough to vaccinate 400,000 people. The first shots are going to people over 80 who are either hospitalized or already have outpatient appointments scheduled, along with nursing home workers and vaccination staff.

Others must wait, and health officials have said that those who are most at risk from the virus will be vaccinated in the early stages. For most people, it will be next year before there is enough vaccine to expand the program.

U.K. health officials have worked for months to adapt a system geared toward vaccinating groups like school children and pregnant women into one that can rapidly reach much of the population.

Questions arose about when the country's most prominent senior couple — Queen Elizabeth II, 94, and her husband, Prince Philip, 99 — would get the vaccine and whether it would happen on camera.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab appeared nonplussed when he was asked about it by NBC.

"I'm not sure whether they'd do it on camera," Raab said. "But I'm sure arrangements will be made according to the phased approach that I set out, and like any family, they would have felt the pressures and all the worries that surround this pandemic as well."

The 800,000 doses are only a fraction of what is needed in the U.K. 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 at highest risk from the virus.

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

In England, the vaccine is being delivered to 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 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 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 these logistical challenges culminated Tuesday in Keenan's vaccination by Parsons, a nurse originally from the Philippines who has worked for the NHS for 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>

Legal panel: Free Minneapolis man jailed for life as teen

By ROBIN McDOWELL and MARGIE MASON Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A national panel of legal experts recommended the immediate release of a Black man sentenced to life in prison as a teenager nearly two decades ago.

The panel also said Minneapolis police appear to have suffered from "tunnel vision" while investigating the case of Myon Burrell, who was convicted of killing a little girl hit by a stray bullet in 2002. In addition,

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the panel said, among the other serious flaws in the high-profile case, police ignored witnesses and evidence that might have helped eliminate Burrell as a suspect.

The panel, which was created to examine Burrell's conviction and sentence, released its report Tuesday. Many of its findings mirrored those uncovered by an Associated Press and APM Reports investigation earlier this year. They included unreliable testimony from the sole eyewitness; a heavy reliance on jailhouse informants who received "extraordinarily generous" sentence reductions in exchange for their testimonies; and a failure to retrieve surveillance video from a corner store — footage that Burrell, now 34, has always maintained would have cleared him.

The eight-member panel was unable to address Burrell's guilt or innocence, saying its work was hampered by Hennepin County Prosecutor Mike Freeman's failure to provide all of the evidence the panel requested. It recommended that the case be handed over to the state's new conviction review unit for further investigation, noting that the missing police and prosecution files, witness interviews, tape recordings and details about deals cut with jailhouse informants "may yield new evidence of actual innocence or due process issues."

In the meantime, the panel members said they supported Burrell's release from prison, noting his age at the time of the crime, that he had no prior record and that he behaved well behind bars. They pointed out that the U.S. Supreme Court in recent years has argued against overly harsh sentences for juveniles, saying their brains and decision-making skills are not fully developed.

"The extensive work of this outstanding legal panel supports the immediate release of Myon Burrell," said Nekima Levy Armstrong, who heads the Minneapolis-based Racial Justice Network, adding that the case "represents everything that is wrong with the criminal justice system and the ease with which an innocent person can be convicted."

Burrell was accused of pulling the trigger that killed Tyesha Edwards, a sixth grade Black girl who was shot through the heart while doing homework at her dining room table with her sister. Her death enraged the African American community, which was tired of losing children to guns and gang violence.

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who was then the city's top prosecutor, has held up Burrell's conviction throughout her political career as an example of her tough-on-crime policies that helped put away young, dangerous offenders in the name of justice.

After she raised the case again on the Democratic presidential debate stage last year, the AP published the findings of its investigation, which raised several red flags surrounding the case. They included:

- No hard evidence: No gun, DNA, or fingerprints were found.
- Video footage showing the lead homicide detective offering a man in police custody \$500 for Burrell's name, even if it was just hearsay.
- Burrell's co-defendants saying the teenager wasn't at the scene that day. And one of them, Isaiah Tyson, said he, not Burrell, was the actual triggerman.

The investigation's findings sparked national outrage and gave Burrell's family and community organizers the ammunition needed to get Klobuchar's attention. She said the case deserved a fresh look and called for the creation of the state's conviction review unit — which received federal funding two months ago — to examine other questionable cases. Protecting the innocent was just as important as punishing the guilty, she said.

Laura Nirider, co-director of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University, and Barry Scheck, co-founder of the national Innocence Project, served as advisors to the panel, which included a former state attorney general, a former federal prosecutor, a member of the country's first conviction integrity unit, and the past president of the national Innocence Network.

Several Minnesota organizations, including the state's chapters of the NAACP and American Civil Liberties Union, also supported the panel's efforts.

The report acknowledged the devastating impact that Tyesha's death had on her family and the community, and said most of her surviving relatives chose not to comment about his recommended release from prison. One family member explained that the issue was "super touchy."

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But Tyesha's biological father, Jimmie Edwards, said he hoped Burrell, who has already served 18 years, would remain behind bars.

"If you do the crime, you do the time," he was quoted as telling the panel. "The guy is a thug, and his whole family is thugs ... he should have had his ass in school. I hope and pray they will not release him."

Throughout the report, the panel pointed to troubling examples of "tunnel vision," a term used when authorities build a narrative early in an investigation and zero-in on evidence that supports their theory of guilt while ignoring or suppressing anything that goes against it.

"It's very common, especially when it comes to high-profile cases," said Richard Rivera, a former New York police officer who exposed wrongdoing in his own force. "When something does get in our head, and pieces start to fall in place, then we have a tendency to either pursue those pieces or kind of make the square pegs fit in round holes sometimes."

Though not speaking specifically about Burrell's case, he said such a closed-minded mentality by investigators can shape the criminal proceedings as a whole, from prosecutions to plea deals.

Burrell's name was first brought to police two hours after the shooting. They got a jailhouse call from a well-known confidential informant, Isaac Hodge, who said the intended target of the shooting — a low-ranking member of Hodge's gang — had implicated the teen. Panel members note that these jail calls to the eyewitness and police should have been recorded, but there is no indication they were, which was another key failing.

When Burrell was arrested and interrogated four days later, he told detectives he was at Cup Foods — the same store George Floyd visited in May just before his death in police custody.

Though Burrell told detectives to pull the store's surveillance footage, there's no evidence that ever happened, which the panel highlighted as another troubling example of tunnel vision. If Burrell was seen on the video, it could "only disconfirm" investigators' theory that he was the killer, the panel wrote.

However, it was evident early on from jailhouse calls between Burrell and his mother that the teen believed the tapes had been recovered and that he would soon be going home. His mother — who died in a car crash after visiting him in jail three weeks later — reassured him, saying she had gone to Cup Foods with his sister and his girlfriend. She said the store owners told them the footage had already been handed over to the police.

"I bet you they already know I'm innocent!" Burrell is heard telling his mother on the recorded call from jail. "They just don't know ... they ain't found the right person. And they don't want to let me go until they find him."

The panel review also raised serious questions about the inconsistent testimony from the sole eyewitness. He was 150 feet (46 meters) away from the shooter, who was partially concealed behind a wall. And they were skeptical about the stories collected by six jailhouse informants, all of whom also had ties to Hodge, the man who gave police their first tip.

All of the informants stood to benefit by cooperating with authorities and some were considered "serial informants" who provided police information on several cases. One, who said his 16-year sentence was cut to three years, recently told the AP he was lying when he implicated Burrell. Another said he agreed to work with detectives on 14 other cases.

According to the panel, police and prosecutors often turn to "snitches" when they don't have enough evidence to close a case. Once authorities are married to a theory, it can be difficult to evaluate the reliability of their own informants, sometimes called "falling in love with your rat." Other cases involving the same informants used to secure Burrell's conviction also should be considered for review, the panel wrote.

The panel also was concerned that other jailhouse calls and four witnesses with no vested interest were ignored, even though they had information that could have helped exonerate Burrell. One of the most credible was the getaway driver's girlfriend, who called 911 and pointed to Isaiah Tyson, the self-confessed shooter.

She later told detectives she had been assured Burrell was not at the scene.

Two other eye witnesses also identified Tyson as the shooter, the panel noted, but police appear to have ignored their accounts and never ran ballistics or gunshot residue tests on his jacket.

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Burrell's case has also raised questions about the handling of other criminal investigations, particularly some involving young Black men and women.

"This is not an isolated incident, and we need to free the countless other men and women who have been wrongfully convicted," said Leslie Redmond, the former president of the Minneapolis NAACP and founder of Don't Complain, Activate. She said what happened to Burrell was "a shame and should be a crime."

Freeman released a statement last month maintaining that Burrell was the triggerman. However, he said he would be willing to cut 15 years off Burrell's prison time, which would make him eligible for release when he's 46, because the current sentence "is too long of a penalty for someone who was convicted as a teenager."

That angered many community members.

"He's being vindictive," said Mel Reeves, of The Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder, the state's oldest continuously operated Black newspaper. "Because the evidence doesn't support that. He's made serious statements about Myon Burrell which border on slander."

Burrell's case will be brought before the Minnesota Board of Pardons next week. Whatever it decides, Burrell's lawyer, Dan Guerrero, said he will continue to fight in court, arguing that Burrell is innocent and deserves a full exoneration.

Cybersecurity official fired by Trump sues over threats

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. cybersecurity official who was fired last month by President Donald Trump filed a lawsuit Tuesday over threatening remarks by a lawyer for the president that prompted a wave of death threats against him.

Christopher Krebs says in the suit that he has been "bombarded" with threats since attorney Joseph diGenova appeared on the pro-Trump TV network Newsmax and called for Krebs to be killed.

"The defendants' threats have upended plaintiff's life, as well as his family's security, and caused serious fear, distress, suffering, and even physical damage," he said in the lawsuit, filed in diGenova's home state of Maryland.

Amid the threats, Krebs, a Republican and Trump appointee, was forced to move out of his home in Virginia for several days and hire private security. He still keeps his children from playing in their front yard out of fear, attorney Jim Walden said.

"It has fundamentally uprooted their lives," Walden said. "He and his family feel terribly threatened."

Krebs was director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency until he was fired in a Nov. 17 tweet by Trump after he and other officials who oversaw the election determined it was free of major fraud or interference, contradicting the president's unsubstantiated assertions to the contrary.

DiGenova said in a Nov. 30 appearance on Newsmax that Krebs should be "drawn and quartered" and "taken out at dawn and shot" for his defense of the November election won by Joe Biden and his participation in what he portrayed as a "coup" against the president.

He later said he had been joking in the interview but the lawsuit calls the remarks "shockingly irresponsible and dangerous," in the tense political climate. Walden said it's part of a broader effort by the president's allies to intimidate public officials, especially Republicans, to prevent them from refuting baseless allegations about the vote.

"No one should be targeted and defamed as a 'traitor' for faithfully performing the duties of public service," he said. "That is what happened to Chris and to Republicans all across the country, who truthfully, and based on their substantial experience, are upholding the integrity of the election in the face of a false narrative regarding its results."

Krebs is seeking financial damages from diGenova, Newsmax and the Trump campaign.

Newsmax said in response to questions about the suit that it has no official ties to diGenova, who was appearing on a syndicated radio program whose content is licensed by the network. It noted that his remarks about Krebs were "inappropriate" but that he did not intend for them to be taken seriously and

he has apologized.

"Newsmax believes that claims made by Mr. Krebs in his suit of a 'conspiracy' and defamation against him are a threat to free speech and his legal action endangers all media organizations that seek an open discourse of ideas and news," the network said.

The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

A former Microsoft executive, Krebs ran the agency, known as CISA, from its creation in the wake of Russian interference with the 2016 election through the November election. He won bipartisan praise as CISA coordinated federal state and local efforts to defend electoral systems from foreign or domestic interference.

CISA issued a statement in November with a coalition of government and industry election officials from around the country that defended the 2020 election as the "most secure in American history." It was widely viewed as a direct repudiation of Trump's efforts to undermine the integrity of the contest.

US virus deaths hit record levels with the holidays ahead

By LISA MARIE PANE and RACHEL LA CORTE Associated Press

Deaths from COVID-19 in the U.S. have soared to more than 2,200 a day on average, matching the frightening peak reached last April, and cases per day have eclipsed 200,000 on average for the first time on record, with the crisis all but certain to get worse because of the fallout from Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's.

Virtually every state is reporting surges just as a vaccine appears days away from getting the go-ahead in the U.S.

"What we do now literally will be a matter of life and death for many of our citizens," Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said Tuesday as he extended restrictions on businesses and social gatherings, including a ban on indoor dining and drinking at restaurants and bars.

While the impending arrival of the vaccine is reason for hope, he said, "at the moment, we have to face reality, and the reality is that we are suffering a very dire situation with the pandemic."

Elsewhere around the country, North Carolina's governor imposed a 10 p.m. curfew, and authorities in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley sent a mass cellphone text alert Tuesday telling millions about the rapid spread of the virus and urging them to abide by the state's stay-at-home orders.

The virus is blamed for more than 285,000 deaths and 15 million confirmed infections in the United States.

Many Americans disregarded warnings not to travel over Thanksgiving and have ignored other safety precautions, whether out of stubbornness, ignorance or complacency. On Saturday night, police in Southern California arrested nearly 160 people, many of them not wearing masks, at a house party in Palmdale that was held without the homeowner's knowledge.

Before his death Friday from complications of COVID-19, 78-year-old former Alabama state Sen. Larry Dixon asked his wife from his hospital bed to relay a warning. "Sweetheart, we messed up. We just dropped our guard. ... We've got to tell people this is real," his friend Dr. David Thrasher, a pulmonologist, quoted him as saying.

Although Dixon had been conscientious about masks and social distancing, he met up with friends at a restaurant for what they called a "prayer meeting," and three of them fell ill, Thrasher said.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus task force coordinator, offered what sounded like a subtle rebuke of the way President Donald Trump and others in the administration have downplayed the disease and undercut scientists.

"Messages need to be critically consistent," Birx said Tuesday at a Wall Street Journal conference of CEOs. "I think we need to be much more consistent about addressing the myths that are out there — that COVID doesn't really exist, or that the fatalities somehow are made up, or the hospitalizations are for

other diseases, not COVID, that masks actually hurt you.”

On Thursday, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel is widely expected to authorize emergency use of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine, and shots could begin almost immediately after that. Britain on Tuesday started dispensing the Pfizer vaccine, becoming the first country in the West to begin mass vaccinations.

Still, any vaccination campaign will take many months, and U.S. health experts are warning of a continuing surge of infections in the coming weeks as people gather for the holidays.

California officials painted a dire picture as more than 22,000 residents test positive for the coronavirus each day, with about 12% inevitably showing up at hospitals in two to three weeks. They fear the spike could soon overwhelm intensive care units. Southern California’s Riverside University Health System Medical Center went so far as to open an ICU in a storage room.

For the sixth day in a row and 11 of the last 12 days, North Carolina hit new highs in the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19. The patient count has doubled over the past month to nearly 2,400.

In Georgia, the number of confirmed or suspected coronavirus infections has soared more than 70% in the past week, and hospitals are sounding alarms about their ability to absorb new COVID-19 patients.

The state is averaging more than 5,000 confirmed or suspected cases per day. Even then, Georgia ranks only 44th among the states for the most new cases per capita in the past 14 days because infections are spreading so rapidly everywhere else.

More than 2,500 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized Monday statewide. That’s below the summer peak of 3,200 but more than double the most recent low point in mid-October.

“We are effectively reversing the gains we made after the summer surge,” said Amber Schmidtke, an epidemiologist who does a daily analysis of Georgia’s COVID-19 numbers.

Pane reported from Boise, Idaho. La Corte reported from Olympia, Washington.

‘Full warning’: Older basketball coaches at work in pandemic

By CLIFF BRUNT AP Sports Writer

Rick Barnes thought he was in the clear early in his bout with COVID-19.

The Tennessee coach should have known better, given his texts with Tom Izzo, his Michigan State counterpart who also went through it. About a week into his quarantine, Barnes lost his appetite and started feeling lethargic.

Just like Izzo said.

“He gave me full warning,” said Barnes, who is 66 and has been a head coach the past 33 years. “He texted me almost every day — just don’t be surprised when this stuff happens. And I would tell you, it probably took me 12 days to where I felt really good.”

Barnes, Izzo and Syracuse’s Jim Boeheim are among the coaches 65 and up who have contracted COVID-19, which can be a greater threat the older one is. While many elderly people are isolating at home, college basketball coaches are required to travel, work indoors and be around crowds — all among the most risky behaviors amid a pandemic.

Lon Kruger knows he is taking a chance. Oklahoma’s 68-year-old coach has been spared so far, even with his Sooners having to briefly shut down because of cases within the program.

He said hearing about his colleagues got his attention.

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"It's just a reminder to do what we can to avoid it," Kruger said. "Not to say that anything's 100% guaranteed. But the university continuously reminds us to be careful and follow the recommendations. Especially with the masks. It's a pretty easy thing to do to wear a mask."

Dr. George Monks, president of the Oklahoma State Medical Association, said fans wearing masks, washing and sanitizing their hands, and keeping their distance from others when they are away from the arenas will play a key role in protecting coaches — even with attendance at games limited or barred altogether.

"We need to all do our part to lower the spread of the virus in the community," Monks said. "When it's going like crazy in the community and there's a lot of cases, that puts those players and those coaches more at risk."

C. Vivian Stringer, the 72-year-old coach of the Rutgers women's basketball program, worries that her daughter who lives with her might be especially vulnerable because she had spinal meningitis at age 2 and still deals with the effects.

"I'm concerned about myself and definitely Nina," Stringer said. "We've got to look out for everyone surrounding us. This is crazy."

North Carolina coach Roy Williams, 70, said he respects the virus, but he can't focus on it too much.

"The biggest thing is, if you spend all your time worried about that, you're not ready to get the job done or not spending your time preparing your team," he said. "We've got to do everything we can and be able to handle the new information, and be able to handle the next new information and be able to handle the next information."

Adjustments have become the norm. Oklahoma opened the season at home Dec. 3 against UTSA in a game that was supposed to be played the previous week. Players wore masks in warmups. Seats on the bench were separated and spread out over rows rather than one long row. There were just a few socially distanced cheerleaders on hand, next to a small band.

Kruger said it was a different experience.

"You're always trying to do the right thing, but it's not normal to be wearing a mask all the time," he said of being on the bench. "We don't wear it during timeouts, but when play starts, we're wearing it."

Izzo, 65, tested positive for COVID-19 on Nov. 9 and isolated at his home for 11 days. He said it was hard to be away from the team. Izzo was thankful afterward he got through it.

"While some people who have tested positive have not been affected too much by it, I am here to tell you that this virus is no joke, and everyone must take this seriously," he said.

Even if all the proper precautions are taken, the risks remain.

"I'm sure a lot of people have gotten COVID without understanding why or it just happened, and we may get it as well," Kruger said. "But we do everything possible to increase our chances of not getting it."

AP Sports Writers Aaron Beard, Larry Lage and Teresa M. Walker contributed to this report.

Follow Cliff Brunt on Twitter: www.twitter.com/CliffBruntAP.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25.

Tuesday's safe harbor deadline is boost for Biden

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A deadline set Tuesday under federal law essentially locks in President-elect Joe Biden's victory, even though President Donald Trump is still falsely claiming he won reelection.

Other than Wisconsin, every state appears to have met the safe harbor deadline, which means Congress has to accept the electoral votes that will be cast next week and sent to the Capitol for counting on Jan.

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6. Those votes will elect 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 insulate its electoral votes against challenges in Congress by finishing up certification of the results and any state court legal challenges by the 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. The safe harbor deadline is six days earlier.

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 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 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 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 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.

Ethiopia's forces shoot at, detain UN staffers in Tigray

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's security forces shot at and detained United Nations staffers as they tried to reach part of the embattled Tigray region, a senior official said Tuesday, and he blamed the U.N. staffers for trying to reach areas where "they were not supposed to go."

The shooting occurred amid soaring frustration among humanitarian officials as desperately needed aid is still not freely reaching the Tigray region more than a week after the U.N. and Ethiopia's government signed a deal for access.

The senior government official, Redwan Hussein, told reporters that the U.N. employees "broke" two checkpoints and were trying to go through a third when they were fired upon. He said the staffers have since been released.

"They were told in some areas they were not supposed to move. But they indulged themselves in a kind of adventurous expedition," he said.

United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric called the report "alarming" and said U.N. officials "are engaging at the highest level with the federal government to express our concerns and avoid any such incidents in the future."

He said the four U.N. staffers on Sunday had been trying to assess roads, a key step before larger aid convoys can go in. Another U.N. spokesman, Farhan Haq, said the staffers were stopped at a military checkpoint near Sheraro. The town is near the Eritrean border.

Ethiopia's government is making it clear it intends to manage the flow of humanitarian aid, but the U.N. has openly sought unfettered and neutral access according to international principles.

"The situation on the ground is complicated" at the local level, Dujarric said, and discussions continue with the government "to try to get where we want to be."

Crucially, the deal allows aid only in areas under Ethiopian government control. The government on Tuesday said 44 truckloads of food aid had been delivered to Shire, the main town near the refugee camps.

Ethiopia's government late last month declared victory in the conflict in the Tigray region against the Tigray People's Liberation Front. The government asserts that the fighting has stopped except for some "sporadic shootings," but the TPLF has said fighting continues. The TPLF leaders are on the run.

Food, medicines and other aid for some 6 million people — some 1 million of them now displaced — are in the balance. Of special concern are camps that are home to nearly 100,000 refugees from Eritrea amid reports that they have been attacked and abducted. The camps are near the border with Eritrea, which some fleeing people have accused of entering the conflict, a charge that Ethiopia denies.

Food ran out at the camps days ago.

"Regaining access to refugees and others in need is urgent and critical for UNHCR and humanitarian organizations," the head of the U.N. refugee agency, Filippo Grandi, tweeted Tuesday.

The head of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland, said his organization is "deeply concerned to find that humanitarian access to the region is still significantly constrained. ... These people can no longer be made to wait. Aid must not be left at a standstill. We have been standing ready to deliver food, emergency shelter and other essential materials for weeks, and we expected this deal to clear the way."

The U.N. announced the deal with Ethiopia's government last Wednesday, saying it was signed on Nov. 29.

The fighting in the region erupted Nov. 4 between Ethiopia's government and the government of the Tigray region following months of rising tensions. Since then, aid-laden trucks have waited at the borders of Tigray, even as warnings have become increasingly dire about the lack of food, fuel, clean water, cash and other necessities.

"Full access for humanitarian actors must be guaranteed," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted Tuesday.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's office said Monday it was working with the U.N. and others to extend humanitarian assistance "with a well-coordinated framework led by the federal government."

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On Tuesday, Redwan repeated that message and added: "No entity, multilateral or unilateral, is supposed to supplant the government. ... We, the government, would call the shots."

Humanitarian assistance must be escorted by defense forces, he said.

Even after Abiy declared victory on Nov. 28 in what he called a "law enforcement operation" against a Tigray government he now considers illegitimate, fighting has been reported in parts of the region, further complicating access for aid.

Thousands of people are thought to have been killed in the power struggle between the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which dominated Ethiopia's government and military for more than a quarter-century, and the government of Abiy, who sidelined the TPLF soon after taking power in 2018 and introduced dramatic political reforms that won him the Nobel Peace Prize.

Now Abiy rejects dialogue with the TPLF. Both sides began the conflict heavily armed, leading to fears of another drawn-out conflict in the strategic Horn of Africa nation that is the continent's second-most populous country.

Nearly 50,000 Ethiopians have fled into neighboring Sudan, where another humanitarian crisis is growing as aid workers set up food, shelter and other care from scratch.

"It has been a month since I have taken my pills," said one refugee, Aksamawee Garazgerer, who said she has HIV and needs antiretrovirals. "I would go every day (to the clinic) and they say tomorrow it will come, the day after tomorrow it will come. But it has not come yet."

Edith M. Lederer in New York and Fay Abuelgasim in Umm Rakouba, Sudan, contributed.

UK, EU leaders to meet Wednesday amid Brexit no-deal signals

By JILL LAWLESS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The leaders of Britain and the European Commission will make a last-minute push for a post-Brexit U.K.-EU trade deal over dinner on Wednesday, with both sides warning that the chance of reaching agreement by a year-end deadline is slipping away.

With just over three weeks until an economic rupture that threatens upheaval for businesses on both sides of the English Channel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that she looked forward to welcoming U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Brussels on Wednesday evening.

Johnson's office confirmed the two leaders would hold a dinner meeting "to continue discussions on the future relationship between the U.K. and the EU."

The warm words masked a deep political divide between Britain and the EU over what their relationship will look like once a post-Brexit transition period ends on Dec. 31.

Johnson and von der Leyen, head of the EU's executive arm, spoke by phone Monday to take stock of trade talks that have ground to a halt after months of tense negotiations. The two leaders said afterwards that "significant differences" remained on three key issues — fishing rights, fair-competition rules and the governance of future disputes.

Johnson said Tuesday that "the situation at the moment is very tricky," though he added that "hope springs eternal."

German European Affairs Minister Michael Roth, whose country currently holds the U.K.'s rotating presidency, said "we are really in a very difficult situation."

The U.K. left the EU on Jan. 31 after 47 years of membership, but remains within the bloc's tariff-free single market and customs union until the end of the year. Reaching a trade deal by then would ensure there are no tariffs and quotas on trade in goods on Jan. 1, although there would still be new costs and red tape for businesses.

Failure to secure a trade deal would mean tariffs and other barriers that would hurt both sides, although

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most economists think the British economy would take a greater hit because the U.K. does almost half of its trade with the bloc.

There was a breakthrough in one area, as the two sides announced they had reached agreement on how trade will work with Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. that shares a land border with the EU.

The Brexit divorce agreement struck by the two sides last year contains specific provisions for Northern Ireland to ensure there are no customs checks or other trade barriers along the border with EU member state Ireland.

Not all the details were hammered out before the U.K. left the bloc in January, and as trade talks foundered the British government introduced legislation in September giving itself powers to breach the legally binding withdrawal agreement.

Britain claimed its Internal Market Bill was needed as an "insurance policy" to protect the flow of goods within the U.K. in the event of a no-deal Brexit. But the move infuriated the EU, which saw it as an act of bad faith that could imperil Northern Ireland's peace settlement.

On Tuesday, British Cabinet Minister Michael Gove and European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic said they had reached an agreement on how trade to and from Northern Ireland would work, whether or not there is an overarching U.K.-EU trade deal.

Britain said as a result it would scrap its law-breaking measures, and Sefcovic said he hoped the accord would "create a positive momentum for the free trade agreement."

The meeting between Johnson and von der Leyen comes on the eve of a two-day summit in Brussels starting Thursday — one the EU hopes will not be overshadowed by Brexit.

EU officials suggested negotiations could continue past Jan. 1, even as the two sides tumbled into a no-deal trading relationship. But the U.K. insists the talks must finish this year.

While both sides want a deal, they have fundamentally different views of what it entails. The EU 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 in exchange for access to its markets.

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 and is trying to bind Britain to the bloc's rules indefinitely.

With both sides seemingly entrenched in their positions, it was unclear what Johnson's trip to Brussels could achieve.

Fabian Zuleeg, chief executive of the European Policy Centre, said it was a piece of political theater.

"But what we don't know is whether it is positive theater or negative theater," he said. "Is it coming to Brussels and then claiming to have hard won a deal maybe with some symbolism around that? ... Or the other option is he comes here to make the political point that no agreement is possible.

"At this moment, we simply don't know which theater Boris Johnson is going to play."

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

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'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.

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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 stomach surgeries to treat obesity. When the pandemic was burning through France's health system, the women's operations 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.

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.

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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.

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

Chicago 7-year-old raises money for hospital's pandemic gear

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Hayley Orlinsky has made so many bracelets, looping colorful rubber bands over her thumb and index finger again and again, that she no longer must watch her hands.

The spunky 7-year-old from Chicago has spent most of the coronavirus pandemic crafting the creations as a fundraiser to buy personal protective equipment for a children's hospital.

So far, the endeavor has generated nearly \$20,000 for Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, prompting praise and purchases from Chicago politicians, a Broadway actor and her beloved White Sox.

Hayley's initial goal was \$200, which she quickly surpassed, charging \$3 a bracelet or \$5 for an added charm.

It's hard for the second grader to grasp how much more \$20,000 is by comparison — but she figures it's a lot.

"It's more than the tooth fairy gives," she said.

It all started when she heard news stories about PPE shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic and was inspired to help. The money Hayley raises goes directly to Lurie through a fundraising office. Lurie

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hasn't had any problems getting gear and has used the money to pay for masks, goggles, face shields, gloves and other items for medical workers and visitors, said Tracey McCusker, an associate director at the hospital's foundation.

While many enterprising young people are raising funds for causes close to the heart, the amount Hayley has brought in is unusual.

"Her fundraiser is exponentially more than our typical kid fundraiser," said McCusker who estimates \$500 to \$1,000 is about average.

For Hayley, the mission is personal. She spent her first days of life at Lurie's neonatal intensive care unit after experiencing breathing problems. She wanted the doctors, nurses and medical staff working with kids to "protect themselves."

Her mother, children's book author Lori Orlinsky, estimates the effort has created roughly 8,000 bracelets, most of them made by Hayley. The fundraiser has been a family project: A 4-year-old sister helps organize the bands by color and both parents help mail the finished products nationwide.

Family friend Alysson Bourque, who lives in Sunset, Louisiana, purchased some before joining the project, looping bracelets with her own children.

"We were excited that bracelets were a symbol of hope and goodwill and brought people together in a time where people feel disconnected," said Bourque, who also writes children's books.

Others have pitched in, too.

Over the summer, Hayley introduced the idea at Apache Day Camp, a summer program she's attended for years. After Hayley's pitch, campers of all ages were on board.

"It just became a thing that everyone wanted to do," said Beth Miller, a camp director. "It bonded the kids."

Hayley, who loves gymnastics and dancing, makes bracelets throughout the day, between online classes and often while watching television or listening to Taylor Swift and Kelly Clarkson. Sometimes her hands get sore.

"I need a manicure," she said.

Her high-profile donors include Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and actor Miguel Cervantes, who played the lead role in the Chicago production of "Hamilton" and has appeared in plays in New York. The White Sox recognized her at a game.

Hayley, whose experience in sales includes selling the most cookies in her Girl Scout troop, has no immediate plans to stop making bracelets. The entrepreneur is continually dreaming up ways to bring in more money. She's done holiday themed-bracelets, sports teams colors and red and light blue bracelets to represent the Chicago flag.

"I want to do it until coronavirus is over," she said. "It feels like I'm helping a lot of people."

Follow Sophia Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>

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

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 9, the 344th day of 2020. There are 22 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

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On Dec. 9, 2000, the U-S Supreme Court ordered a temporary halt in the Florida vote count on which Al Gore pinned his best hopes of winning the White House.

On this date:

In 1854, Alfred, Lord Tennyson's famous poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," was published in England.

In 1911, an explosion inside the Cross Mountain coal mine near Briceville, Tennessee, killed 84 workers. (Five were rescued.)

In 1940, British troops opened their first major offensive in North Africa during World War II.

In 1958, the anti-communist John Birch Society was formed in Indianapolis.

In 1962, the Petrified Forest in Arizona was designated a national park.

In 1965, the James Bond film "Thunderball," starring Sean Connery, had its world premiere in Tokyo.

In 1987, the first Palestinian intefadeh, or uprising, began as riots broke out in Gaza and spread to the West Bank, triggering a strong Israeli response.

In 1990, Solidarity founder Lech Walesa (lek vah-WEN'-sah) won Poland's presidential runoff by a landslide.

In 1992, Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana announced their separation. (The couple's divorce became final in Aug. 1996.)

In 2001, the United States disclosed the existence of a videotape in which Osama bin Laden said he was pleasantly surprised by the extent of damage from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In 2013, scientists revealed that NASA's Curiosity rover had uncovered signs of an ancient freshwater lake on Mars.

In 2014, U.S. Senate investigators concluded the United States had brutalized scores of terror suspects with interrogation tactics that turned secret CIA prisons into chambers of suffering and did nothing to make Americans safer after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

Ten years ago: In Britain's worst political violence in years, student protesters rained sticks and rocks on riot police, vandalized government buildings and attacked a car carrying Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, after lawmakers approved a controversial hike in university tuition fees. Actor Wesley Snipes began serving a three-year sentence at a federal prison in Pennsylvania for failure to file income tax returns. Florida's Clemency Board pardoned Jim Morrison for indecent exposure and profanity charges stemming from a Doors concert in 1969. John du Pont, the chemical fortune heir who killed Olympic gold medal wrestler David Schultz in 1996, died in prison at age 72.

Five years ago: Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel apologized for the 2014 police shooting of a Black teenager during a special City Council meeting that he called to discuss a police abuse scandal at the center of the biggest crisis of his administration, and promised "complete and total" reform to restore trust in the police.

One year ago: At a hearing by the House Judiciary Committee, Democrats outlined the impeachment case against President Donald Trump by saying his push to get Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden while withholding U.S. military aid ran counter to U.S. policy and benefited Russia as well as himself. A long-awaited report from the Justice Department's internal watchdog said the FBI was justified in opening its investigation into ties between the Trump presidential campaign and Russia. A volcano on New Zealand's White Island erupted as 47 people visited the tourist destination; the eruption killed 13 people initially and eight more died later from severe burns. The Supreme Court left in place a Kentucky law requiring doctors to perform ultrasounds and show images to patients before abortions. Former college baseball player Pete Frates, whose battle with Lou Gehrig's disease helped inspire the ice bucket challenge, died at 34. (The challenge raised more than \$200 million worldwide for research into ALS.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dame Judi Dench is 86. Actor Beau Bridges is 79. Football Hall of Famer Dick Butkus is 78. Actor Michael Nouri is 75. Former Sen. Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., is 73. World Golf Hall of Famer Tom Kite is 71. Singer Joan Armatrading is 70. Actor Michael Dorn is 68. Actor John Malkovich is 67. Country singer Sylvia is 64. Singer Donny Osmond is 63. Rock musician Nick Seymour (Crowded House) is 62. Comedian Mario Cantone is 61. Actor David Anthony Higgins is 59. Actor Joe Lando is 59. Actor Felicity Huffman is 58. Empress Masako of Japan is 57. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., is 54. Rock singer-

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musician Thomas Flowers (Oleander) is 53. Rock musician Brian Bell (Weezer) is 52. Rock singer-musician Jakob Dylan (Wallflowers) is 51. TV personality-businessperson Lori Greiner (TV: "Shark Tank") is 51. Actor Allison Smith is 51. Songwriter and former "American Idol" judge Kara DioGuardi (dee-oh-GWAHR'-dee) is 50. Country singer David Kersh is 50. Actor Reiko (RAY'-koh) Aylesworth is 48. Rock musician Tre Cool (Green Day) is 48. Rapper Canibus is 46. Actor Kevin Daniels is 44. Actor-writer-director Mark Duplass is 44. Rock singer Imogen Heap is 43. Actor Jesse Metcalfe is 42. Actor Simon Helberg is 40. Actor Jolene Purdy is 37. Actor Joshua Sasse is 33. Actor Ashleigh Brewer is 30. Olympic gold and silver medal gymnast McKayla Maroney is 25.