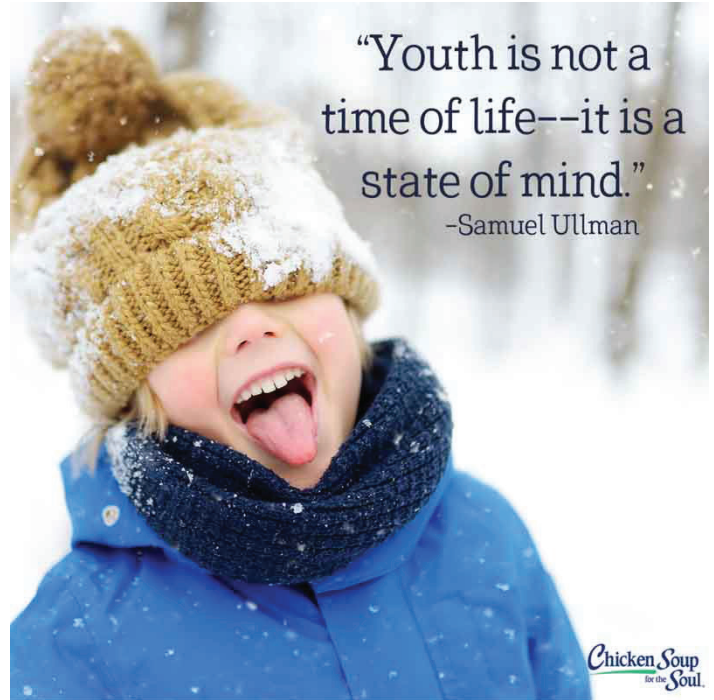


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“Youth is not a time of life--it is a state of mind.”

-Samuel Ullman

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

## 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

## Council meeting date change

The Groton City Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 15, has been moved to Tuesday, Dec. 29, at the Groton Community Center.



**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

Updated December 9, 2020; 11:20 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	1	0	1	3



## The Life of Lucille Von Wald

A private family Mass of Christian Burial for Lucille Von Wald, 96, of Aberdeen, formerly of Groton, will be 10:30 A.M., on Thursday, December 10, 2020, at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Groton. Concelebrating will be Father Tom Hartman and Father David Janes. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton, SD. The Mass will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and will also be broadcast on GDIRADIO at 89.3FM within one mile of Groton.

Lucille passed away peacefully on December 6th with family at her side at Avera St. Luke's Hospital in Aberdeen.

Lucille was born January 4, 1924 to John and Ina (Klapperich) Bertsch. She graduated from Conde High School in 1942 and was united in marriage to Lyle Von Wald on December 1, 1942. Lyle died on September 8, 2012 after almost 70 years of marriage.

Lucille was extremely outgoing and took a genuine interest in everyone she met. She had a soft spot in her heart for anyone in need. Lucille enjoyed dancing immensely. One of the high points of her life was when she and other audience members, tap danced on a Broadway theater stage in New York City. Lucille's faith in God was very strong. It was her wish to be buried in a simple wooden casket that she designed and her husband, Lyle, made by hand. She was quite proud of that as it represented the distillation of her view about the relative importance of the material vs the spiritual in life, which was one of her tantamount concerns. She was an inspiration to her entire family whom she loved dearly. She will be sorely missed.

Surviving her are her sons, Jack (Diann) Von Wald of Aberdeen, Dave (Sheila) Von Wald of Hoven, Greg (Nancy) Von Wald of Rapid City, and Jeff Von Wald and Michael Levy of Mt. Kisco, New York. She is also survived by her grandchildren John (Lisa) Von Wald of Selby, Monica (Scott) Kuck of Aberdeen, Tiffany Von Wald (Jason Knudtson) of Sioux Falls, TJ (Jane) Von Wald of Sioux Falls, Jacqueline (Joe) Beadle of Mobridge, Amy (Bill) Hohenecker of Plymouth, Minnesota, Stephanie (Pete) Schwartzbauer of Edina, Minnesota, Heather (Zach) Baymiller of Sioux Falls, Sarah Von Wald of Aberdeen, and Ryan Von Wald of Rapid City, along with 29 great grandchildren. Also surviving her are her brothers, Jerry (Mavis) Bertsch, Tom (Edith) Bertsch, and brother-in-law Jim Rentz.

Preceding her in death was her husband, her parents, her brothers, Leo, Floyd, Lyle, and Jim Bertsch and her sisters, Genevieve Hoops, Dorothy Schley, Alice Rentz and Veronica Bertsch.



## Groeblinghoff Death Notice

Robert Groeblinghoff, 87, of Groton passed away Wednesday, December 9, 2020 at Avera St. Lukes Hospital, Aberdeen. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

## Doeden Death Notice

Douglas Doeden, 76, of Groton passed away Wednesday, December 9, 2020 at his home. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. His service will be held Saturday, Dec. 19, 10 a.m. at the school gym. The service will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

## Spotlight on Groton Area Staff



**Susan  
Fjeldheim**

**Name:** Susan Fjeldheim

**Occupation:** 4th Grade Teacher

**Length of Employment:** 2012-Present

Susan Fjeldheim has been working in Groton Area Elementary School for eight consecutive years. Before the beginning of her tenure at Groton Elementary, she worked at the Langford Kindergarten for ten years. However, Susan Fjeldheim has lived in the town of Groton for fifteen years. Susan studied to acquire her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education at Northern State University before working in Langford.

While Mrs. Fjeldheim has lived in South Dakota for much of her life, she was technically born in North Dakota!

Mrs. Fjeldheim enjoys teaching her students about the solar system, chemistry, and the sciences with hands-on activities. She believes that students generally learn best when seeing the effects of the principles they are studying. When she is not teaching, Susan Fjeldheim can be found playing the piano for her local church or strolling the streets of Groton!

- Benjamin Higgins

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Left - if you look closely, you can see a welder just under the tank doing his work.

Bottom photo features more supplies that arrived on Wednesday.

(Photos by Paul Kosel)



## GROTON AREA CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

The modified schedule for the Groton Area School District Christmas programs is listed below:

### **High School (Grades 9-12)**

Thursday, December 10, 2020, 7:00 PM

Groton Area High School Gym

In-Person and Live Stream on GDILive.com

### **Elementary (Grades JK-5)**

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

10:00 AM

Live Stream Only on GDILive.com

The public is welcome to attend the Middle and High School concerts. Individuals at risk for developing complications from COVID-19 should stay home and view the live stream on GDILive.com. We ask those in attendance to please follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and South Dakota Department of Health:

Stay home if you're ill or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or any other infectious illness.

Please wear a mask.

Physically distance from others not in your household.

Wash your hands/use hand sanitizer regularly.

## **South Dakota Democratic Party responds to Attorney General joining Texas lawsuit**

Sioux Falls, SD (December 9, 2020) – Today, Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg announced South Dakota was filing an Amicus Brief in support of Texas' lawsuit against four battleground states in a last-ditch effort to overturn the 2020 election. The Trump administration has already lost or withdrawn 50 post-election lawsuits and had the Supreme Court unanimously refuse to take up the most recent case.

"The facts just don't support any widespread election fraud and the President's personal attorney, Guiliani has said as much, under oath in court. This is a desperate attempt to obstruct the democratic process and the will of the people. Not only is it wrong to waste taxpayer money this way, it is wrong to erode the tenets of democracy through this frivolous lawsuit." – Randy Seiler, Chair

Both Attorney Generals in Texas and in South Dakota are currently under investigation in unrelated cases.

"I believe this is all a red herring. The Attorney General was caught driving recklessly and he took a man's life. The details and any charges are going to come out soon. I believe he's looking for any way to try to win some goodwill back as the public awaits this information. The fact that our AG is willing to sue Republican run states and undermine trust in democracy tells me this is an act of desperation." – Nikki Gronli, Vice Chair

The South Dakota Democratic Party would like to see transparency and oversight of this lawsuit.

"How much time and what resources will our Attorney General waste on this lawsuit? He has signed onto a lawsuit that just repeats the unfounded allegations of other suits that have already been tossed out. Despite lack of evidence of fraud, he has committed our state and our taxpayer money to defend it. The State of South Dakota should be embarrassed by this action from the AG's office. - Seiler

###

## **GFP Commission Proposes Addition to Big Game Ammunition Allowance**

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed to add non-toxic fluted copper bullets to the currently allowed soft point bullets to expand the types of bullets allowed for big game hunting.

The proposal came from a petition submitted by Jeremy Silko of Rapid City at the November meeting, with the intent of giving hunters more options when looking for non-toxic ammunition.

“There’s been discussion on this topic in recent years, in particular on non-toxic ammunition,” said Tom Kirschenmann wildlife division director for GFP. “This proposal will allow the commission to hear from the public and do more research before making a decision on whether to approve this ammunition for big game hunting.”

To hear the discussion on this proposal, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

Individuals can comment on this proposal by visiting [gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions](http://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions). Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and meet the submission deadline of 72 hours before the public hearing (not including the day of the public hearing).

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held Jan. 14-15 in Pierre.

## **GFP Commission Proposes Navigation Lane Procedures on Nonmeandered Waters**

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission (GFP) proposed a new rule establishing a procedure for the public to request a navigation lane through a closed nonmeandered body of water when no alternative legal public access is available.

The proposal also explains that, if a navigation lane is approved by the commission after a 60-day public comment period, individuals using the navigation lane would be required to take the most direct path to the open nonmeandered lake and not recreate in any manner while in the navigation lanes. The proposal also requires the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks to mark established navigation lanes.

South Dakota continues to see water levels rise and inundate private property at unprecedented levels, particularly in the northeast region. While today’s landscape is different than it was a decade ago, or even in 2017, balancing the public’s interest in recreation and respect for private property rights remains a top priority for GFP.

To hear the discussion on this proposal, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

Individuals can comment on this proposal by going online to [gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions](http://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions). Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

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The next GFP Commission meeting will be held Jan. 14-15 in Pierre.



## **GFP Commission Proposes Simplifying Aerial Hunting Application Process**

PIERRE, S.D. – At their December meeting, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission proposed to remove the requirement to submit pilot and medical certification as part of the aerial hunting application process.

“Applicants will still need the certifications, but will not be required to submit copies to GFP,” said GFP Wildlife Director, Tom Kirschenmann. “As we prioritize efforts for coyote control, this proposal simplifies the process for pilots to file their annual application with the Department to hunt coyotes from the air.”

To hear the discussion on this proposal, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive. To see the proposal in its entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

Individuals can comment on this proposal by going online to [gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions](http://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions). Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and meet the submission deadline of 72 hours before the public hearing (not including the day of the public hearing).

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held January 14-15 in Pierre.



**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**

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**#290 in a series**

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

It's ugly, folks. We have 219,800 new cases today, our 4th— worst day ever and a 1.4% increase in total cases from yesterday. We are now at 15,462,500 cases, which means we're probably not looking at 16 million until the weekend, maybe a bit better than the last million. Hospitalizations are at another record level today for the third consecutive day and for the 27th of the last 29 days with 104,590. We'll talk more about hospitalizations in a bit, but this just looks like it is not sustainable for much longer.

Thus far in this pandemic, 289,472 Americans have lost their lives, 1.1% more than yesterday. We set a record for daily deaths with 3100; this is our first time over 3000 deaths in a single day.

Those who are old enough to remember, cast your minds back to September 11, 2001. In a single day, 2977 Americans died. More than this—over 100 more—died from this coronavirus today. Back in 2001, we recognized we had a crisis and agreed to all kinds of curtailments on our liberties in order to make us feel safer. We agreed to let the government listen in on phone calls. We agreed to the expanded use of National Security Letters which permit all sorts of unannounced searches—of telephone records, of e-mails, of our Internet browser history, and of financial and business records—without court order and without justifying it to anyone. We let ourselves be patted down and X-rayed before getting on an airplane. We agreed to let a TSA worker feel our underwire bras and the rivets in our jeans. We agreed to having our luggage searched and our beverages tossed out. We have to take off our jackets and our sweaters and our shoes before we get on an airplane, for God's sake! All because less than 3000 people died one day almost 20 years ago. Yet when hundreds of thousands of us have died this year, over 3000 in a single day, we're still hollering our heads off over a damned mask. Over not being able to gather in a church for a superspreader event which might endanger the guy next to us or the old man in the local nursing home far more than it endangers us. Over not being able to enjoy a night out at the restaurant or bar. Over all these perceived slights and infringements and "overreach." Why the hell isn't having someone feel up your underwire bra seen as an infringement, an invasion of your privacy? Why is spending an extra hour or two on each end of a flight—over and over and over again for nearly 20 years—seen as just the price of liberty while wearing a 5X7" piece of cloth over our mouths is seen as the end of democracy and a threat to our way of life? We're not just hollering either; we're going to the home of a public official and threatening her child by banging on the door, calling her parents and threatening them with harm, sending some random data guy death threats, carrying guns to public meetings just so the elected officials there "get our meaning." Why is a temporary loss of the freedom to spew germs all over everyone and sundry we encounter viewed as a larger loss of liberty than the permanent inability to get on a damned airplane without a convoluted security process—laptop out, nothing in your pockets, get your bag X-rayed? It is my opinion that our values have become ridiculously skewed. And as a result, the dying just keeps on coming.

Remember how awful things were in the spring in the Northeast, the packed hospitals and the bodies piling up? We figured it would never be worse anywhere than it was right then in New York City. We were wrong. While New York still has more deaths than any other state, they also have a whole lot of people; when you control for population, over seven percent of counties in the US have more deaths than Manhattan. One-third of the counties in South Dakota fit into this category; eight of our 66 counties exceed NYC's overall deaths per capita, which were worse than Manhattan by quite a lot. Five have passed the Bronx, the worst-hit borough in the city. With the benefit of seven months' lead time and all the things we've learned about keeping people alive since then plus very low population density, there is simply no excuse to be in this condition now. The reason we are is simple: more cases. Lots and lots more cases. A handy tool for estimating, one which has been pretty close since early August, although it is slowing down a bit now, is to take 1.6 percent of the number of new daily cases; that will give a reasonable estimate of the number of daily deaths 21 days later. Three-week lag is on the money, and the numbers don't look good.

He federal government has just this week begun to publish hospitalization information for Covid-19 on a very granular level rather than just state-by-state summaries, which is all we've ever had until now. Public health officials have been saying for a while that this information is essential to an effective response, so

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this is a welcome change.

One way to look at the strain on hospitals is the ratio of Covid-19 hospitalizations to total beds. There's no clear threshold, but it's generally considered a worry when that number goes over 10 percent, according to hospital capacity experts. Over 20 percent would be a sign of "extreme stress," and over 50% would simply be off the charts. At that level, Ali Mokdad from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, said, "It means the hospital is overloaded. It means other services in that hospital are being delayed. The hospital becomes a nightmare."

So where are we? Well, 55 counties in the US are at or over that 50% mark. Almost every city with a hospital in my state is over 20%. There's a swath down the middle of the country that then swoops west through Texas on its way to Nevada that looks pretty rough and then another pocket that runs around the Great Lakes and heads east to the Atlantic from there. Lots of trouble in these parts of the country.

We have 126 counties where hospitals are, on average, 90% full. States with the most counties in this group are Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota, Kentucky, and Georgia.

Examples, as of last week: In El Paso, 13 of 400 ICU beds were available; in Fargo, ND, there were three, and in Albuquerque there were none at all. More than a third of us live somewhere that hospitals are critically short of ICU beds with fewer than 15 percent available, and a tenth of us (pretty much Midwest, South, and Southwest) live in an area where ICUs are at capacity or have less than 5 percent of beds available. I heard a radio story today about a hospital which is at 200% of capacity; I don't actually know how this is even possible. And that means staffing is certainly in even more critical supply because, while most hospitals can staff a full-up situation in short bursts, none of them have the people to do it day after day after day. Rural hospitals are in particular trouble because they don't have so much capacity to begin with.

When hospitals run at or near capacity over time, especially for intensive patients, death rates will rise. And when they have to start turning people away, more will die.

When it comes to vaccine approval, it may turn out not being first confers some advantages; you get to see how things play out elsewhere and put that into your considerations. Regulators in the United Kingdom are warning people with a history of severe allergies not to get the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine after a couple of patients, both with such history, had "anaphylactoid reactions" following vaccination yesterday; this warning was labeled a precautionary measure. Anaphylactoid reactions are non-allergic, just histamine-initiated, and aren't typically life-threatening (and the people are both doing fine); but I'm guessing (don't know for sure) this is being viewed as an indication the vaccine could cause worse trouble with actual allergic reactions. For now, UK authorities are recommending people who carry an EpiPen to delay vaccination until the reason for these reactions is clarified. I imagine the experts will work out just what the risk is and whether they think it will be safe to go ahead with these people at a later time. Whatever the outcome in the UK, we'll have the benefit of their experience for whatever use we wish to make of it. For the record, Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert who sits on the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biologic Products Advisory Committee (the one that will be meeting tomorrow to make a recommendation about any EUA for this vaccine) said allergic reactions to vaccines aren't all that unusual and suggested, rather than a "blanket recommendation" for people with allergies like the one in the UK, "the smarter thing to do would be to try and look at these two patients and see what specific component of the vaccine they were allergic to." I think I hear him saying he'd prefer to go ahead with vaccination for these people in a medical setting where any reaction could be treated, not to withhold it, except for those with allergies to specific vaccine components. Makes sense to me. If you're an allergic person, don't freak out; give it some time to see how things go tomorrow and in coming weeks.

Remember how I told you that, if the full data set from these vaccine clinical trials was published, experts all over the country would comb through it and let us know what we have. Well, it's starting. After the brief comments I provided last night, I've looked at an analysis from a woman who writes as "Your Local Epidemiologist," Katelyn Jetelina, a Ph.D. in epidemiology and biostatistics who teaches at a school of public health and a medical school. Here's a summary of her analysis:

-Benefit starting 14 days after first dose, efficacy at this point is 52%. [This is quite remarkable.]



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- Efficacy after two doses is 95% with a high degree of statistical confidence it is in the 90-98% range.
  - Efficacy is the same irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, and comorbidity, so it works in everyone.
  - Most common adverse events are mild to moderate: injection site reactions (84.1%), fatigue (62.9%) headache (55.1%), muscle pain (38.3%), chills (31.9%), joint pain (23.6%), fever (14.2%). If you are in the very small subset of people who experience all of these, you're going to feel pretty terrible, but much less terrible than you might feel if you get the actual Covid-19 infection. Totally worth it, in my opinion.
  - Probability of a serious adverse event is less than 0.5%, lower among older adults.
  - Swollen lymph nodes occurred in 64 people in the vaccine group (of 15,000), 6 in the placebo group (also 15,000); could be related to vaccine, but not certain. This would be unpleasant, but not scary.
  - Bell's palsy developed in 4 of the vaccine group and 0 of the placebo group. This bears watching, but the rate at which this showed up is about the same as in the general population in the normal course of events, so it could well be unrelated to the vaccine. Nothing that scares me off at this point.
  - Six people died during the trial, 4 in placebo group and 2 in vaccine group. No deaths were related to the vaccine; most were heart attacks. [I will note here that in any group of 30,000 individuals in the US, something like 21 would be expected to die in any one-month period. Now some fair number of those 21 would likely be people who've been very ill and would not have been signing up for vaccine trials anyhow, but I still am going to guess that six over the course of this trial isn't more than expected from other causes.]
  - We do not know how long protection will last.
  - We do not know whether vaccine prevents transmission.
  - We do not know whether the vaccine is safe or effective in young children, pregnant or breastfeeding women, or the immunocompromised because there were not enough of any of these groups in the trial to be able to draw conclusions.
  - The FDA concludes those with prior Covid-19 can benefit from vaccination.
- Bottom line, she thinks these findings are "not just good, they are looking great. This trial was as clean as it can get." And she predicts this is going to be authorized.
- We will also note here that Canada authorized this vaccine today. Health Canada says they expect vaccinations to commence next week. No one's wasting any time here.
- Robbie Fairchild is a dancer and actor who has experienced some success—dancing as a principal with the New York City Ballet for eight years after several years in the company, starring in films and on Broadway, and nominated for a Tony. And yet, like almost every performer, he found himself idled when the pandemic hit. Fortunately, he had something to fall back on: A year or so ago, he was living in London during the West End run of *An American in Paris*, and the Covent Garden Academy of Flowers was right around the corner from his flat, so he "just rolled into class. Then I realized: Oh my god, this is therapy. I need more of this." That's how he came to learn flower arranging. "It was so fun. I became friends with the ladies, I got them free tickets to the show, and they let me into different classes. . . . Whenever I get in front of flowers it's like a pas de deux with mother nature."
- Then, when he was back in New York City, the pandemic began and his work disappeared. A fan had sent him a sampling of flowers from the Dutch flower distributor where she worked as a thank you for inspiring her children to dance. Gorgeous flowers showed up on his doorstep. He said, "Then the next thing I knew, I had these incredible options. I hadn't seen flowers like this before." So he started making bouquets and giving them away to health care workers outside Mount Sinai West Hospital during the City's nightly thank-you to these folks. He said this was satisfying; "Things were really bad in New York City, and it was 7 p.m., and I thought, I'm going to arrange these, and bring them to health-care workers. The look on their faces was just so wonderful" He began going to New York's flower markets twice a week to pick up whatever looked great, arranging them creatively, and handing them out.
- It was July when he realized he could turn this into something and his business, boo.kay, was born. He started out spending his days hand-tying bouquets in his bedroom, filming flower-arranging tutorials, and hand-delivering flowers around the City. It has grown. He took a fellow out-of-work performer in to work with him in creating arrangements. I've looked at photos of his work, and these are not your average

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bouquet; they're different and creative and gorgeous. He explains, "I kind of feel like when I go to the flower market in the morning, it's like casting. I am seeing who's showed up for the audition call and who is ripe and ready, and there is usually that one inspiration flower that dictates the whole entire thing. You find your feature flower and then you create a cast of characters. There's so much about the process that feels theatrical."

He has taken on other performers needing work until he has quite a group of employees, sees it as a gift to provide work for them. He is adding a walk-in flower cooler in his back yard. He has a monthly subscription service, the bou.kit; you receive the flowers and a private Vimeo link for a tutorial where he arranges the flowers with you. Meanwhile, he's slowly getting back to dance, going to auditions, working with dancers, choreographing, and directing a film for Ballet X's digital season. "Now I know there are opportunities, there are options." He is keeping his flower business going, employing those who need work, as he goes back to dance. This is resilience and caring for others in action. Quite beautiful, really, probably more so than the flowers themselves. There's a lot to admire here.

I think, if we commit to looking, we can find beauty in our everyday too, even in the midst of this damned pandemic. I encourage you to try; it will help you come out the other end of this thing whole.

Take care. I'll be back.

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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
	Dec. 10						
Minnesota	363,719						
Nebraska	143,924						
Montana	70,133						
Colorado	272,346						
Wyoming	32,889						
North Dakota	86,149						
South Dakota	88,023						
United States	15,821,363						
US Deaths	296,715						
Minnesota	+4,516						
Nebraska	+1,321						
Montana	+787						
Colorado	+3,757						
Wyoming	+334						
North Dakota	+473						
South Dakota	+985						
United States	+226,762						
US Deaths	+3,260						

\*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 9th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent  
from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota:

Positive: +985 (88023 total) Positivity Rate: 15.5%

Total Tests: 6342 (659,619 total)

Hospitalized: +53 (4974 total). 501 currently hospitalized +10)

Deaths: +36 (1147 total)

Males: 17, Females: 19

Ages: 60s=5, 70s=7, 80+=24

Counties: Bon Homme-1, Brookings-1, Brown-2, Butte-1, Charles Mix-1, Davison-5, Day-1, Deuel-1, Hamlin-2, Hughes-1, Herald-2, Kingsbry-1, Lawrence-2, Lincoln(-1), Lyman-1, Meade-1, Minnehaha-4, Moody-1, Oglala Lakota-2, Pennington-5, Tripp-1, Turner-1.

Recovered: +1584 (70,728 total)

Active Cases: -635 (16,148)

Percent Recovered: 80.4%

Beadle (32) +10 positive, +56 recovered (371 active cases)

Brookings (21) +22 positive, +56 recovered (412 active cases)

Brown (32): +47 positive, +62 recovered (682 active cases)

Clark (1): +4 positive, +7 recovered (66 active cases)

Clay (11): +10 positive, +21 recovered (255 active cases)

Codington (57): +52 positive, +57 recovered (528 active cases)

Davison (47): +10 positive, +60 recovered (429 active cases)

Day (12): +17 positive, +13 recovered (127 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +6 positive, +3 recovered (56 active cases)

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

Grant (15): +11 positive, +15 recovered (191 active cases)

Hanson (3): +1 positive, +9 recovered (70 active cases)

Hughes (22): +24 positive, +27 recovered (316 active cases)

Lawrence (25): +30 positive, +51 recovered (405 active cases)

Lincoln (54): +51 positive, +88 recovered (1013 active cases)

Marshall (3): +3 positive, +7 recovered (60 active cases)

McCook (19): +1 positive, +14 recovered (98 active cases)

McPherson (1): +0 positive, +2 recovery (43 active case)

Minnehaha (208): +210 positive, +343 recovered (3786 active cases)

Pennington (95): +161 positive, +212 recovered (1842 active cases)

Potter (2): +2 positive, +4 recovered (61 active cases)

Roberts (22): +8 positive, +22 recovered (171 active cases)

Spink (19): +9 positive, +14 recovered (136 active cases)

Walworth (13): +7 positive, 14 recovered (144 active cases)

### NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 9:

- 9.4% rolling 14-day positivity
- 473 new positives
- 5,557 susceptible test encounters
- 284 currently hospitalized (-53)
- 4,554 active cases (-220)
- 1,080 total deaths (+16)



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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	381	307	738	7	Substantial	30.77%
Beadle	2396	1993	4825	32	Substantial	18.98%
Bennett	334	286	1048	5	Substantial	16.22%
Bon Homme	1412	1273	1792	21	Substantial	28.04%
Brookings	2642	2209	9110	21	Substantial	19.73%
Brown	3962	3248	10514	32	Substantial	19.87%
Brule	602	508	1616	5	Substantial	20.45%
Buffalo	394	354	827	10	Substantial	25.00%
Butte	786	651	2688	15	Substantial	17.73%
Campbell	107	94	197	1	Minimal	12.50%
Charles Mix	987	718	3403	7	Substantial	24.12%
Clark	284	217	802	1	Substantial	12.12%
Clay	1468	1202	4270	11	Substantial	17.47%
Codington	2988	2403	7762	57	Substantial	31.98%
Corson	423	369	856	5	Substantial	38.46%
Custer	612	479	2243	7	Substantial	23.68%
Davison	2530	2054	5405	47	Substantial	23.42%
Day	441	302	1434	12	Substantial	24.55%
Deuel	359	265	917	4	Substantial	38.03%
Dewey	1121	684	3325	6	Substantial	23.81%
Douglas	328	257	781	5	Substantial	32.14%
Edmunds	284	225	867	3	Substantial	14.29%
Fall River	382	320	2162	10	Substantial	13.04%
Faulk	289	256	567	10	Moderate	13.64%
Grant	739	533	1803	15	Substantial	33.33%
Gregory	453	377	1029	23	Substantial	9.73%
Haakon	181	136	454	3	Substantial	4.94%
Hamlin	533	394	1419	21	Substantial	25.50%
Hand	297	246	676	1	Substantial	11.76%
Hanson	286	213	552	3	Substantial	39.13%
Harding	85	66	138	0	Moderate	63.64%
Hughes	1786	1448	5143	22	Substantial	8.29%
Hutchinson	628	461	1898	13	Substantial	29.13%

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Hyde	126	103	343	0	Moderate	8.33%
Jackson	229	179	840	8	Substantial	24.56%
Jerauld	248	204	464	15	Moderate	12.50%
Jones	63	55	169	0	Moderate	11.11%
Kingsbury	469	377	1319	13	Substantial	13.54%
Lake	923	749	2594	12	Substantial	29.01%
Lawrence	2260	1830	7208	25	Substantial	21.71%
Lincoln	5886	4819	16129	54	Substantial	25.35%
Lyman	485	413	1624	9	Substantial	18.39%
Marshall	219	156	931	3	Substantial	32.94%
McCook	618	501	1326	19	Substantial	26.58%
McPherson	157	113	478	1	Substantial	4.13%
Meade	1951	1537	6305	17	Substantial	19.60%
Mellette	204	162	626	1	Substantial	21.05%
Miner	210	170	468	5	Substantial	36.36%
Minnehaha	22291	18297	63094	208	Substantial	23.46%
Moody	465	355	1517	13	Substantial	30.30%
Oglala Lakota	1757	1418	6048	29	Substantial	20.18%
Pennington	9608	7671	31678	95	Substantial	22.91%
Perkins	229	148	595	2	Substantial	36.21%
Potter	288	228	670	2	Substantial	12.90%
Roberts	808	615	3641	22	Substantial	27.24%
Sanborn	292	210	569	3	Substantial	15.15%
Spink	626	471	1792	19	Substantial	17.18%
Stanley	244	205	711	2	Substantial	9.52%
Sully	99	84	220	3	Moderate	17.65%
Todd	1045	889	3657	15	Substantial	26.10%
Tripp	570	436	1270	10	Substantial	23.29%
Turner	862	698	2208	47	Substantial	25.66%
Union	1358	1087	4994	25	Substantial	21.75%
Walworth	553	396	1556	13	Substantial	24.90%
Yankton	2124	1457	7743	15	Substantial	27.84%
Ziebach	256	147	600	7	Substantial	36.84%
Unassigned	0	0	1801	0		

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## South Dakota



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

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	3148	0
10-19 years	9607	0
20-29 years	16418	3
30-39 years	14652	12
40-49 years	12557	20
50-59 years	12529	61
60-69 years	9879	152
70-79 years	5177	241
80+ years	4056	658

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	46022	563
Male	42001	584

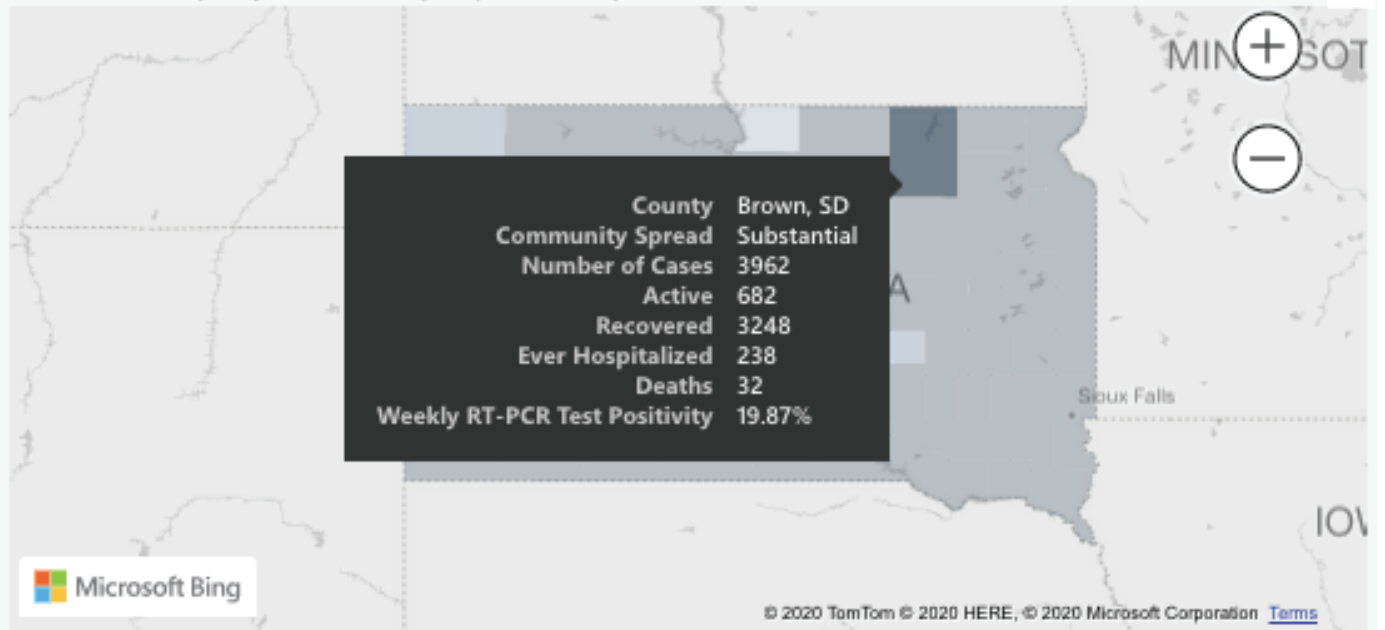
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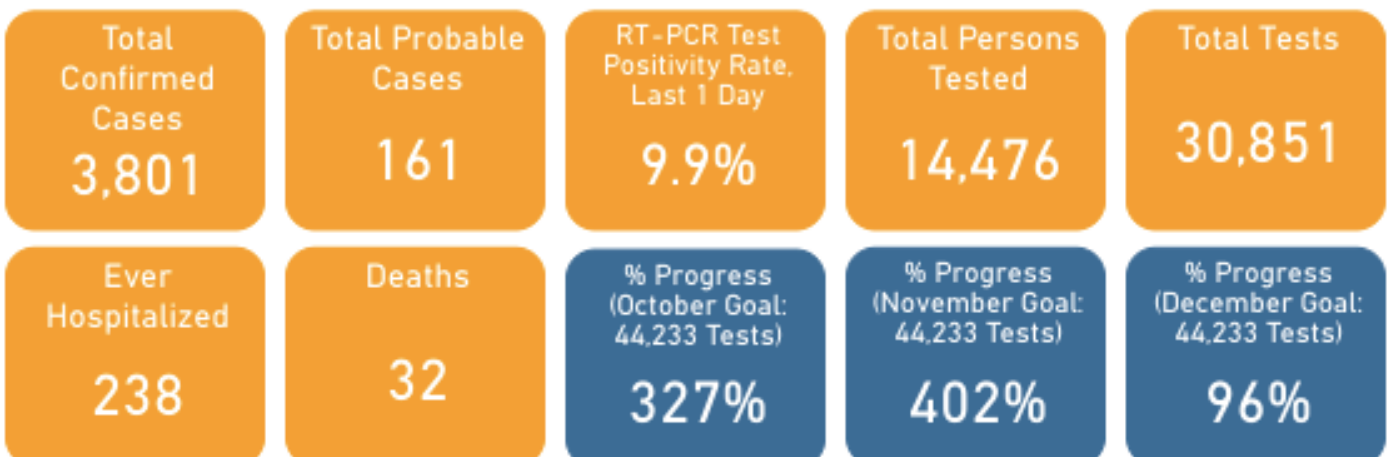
## Brown County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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





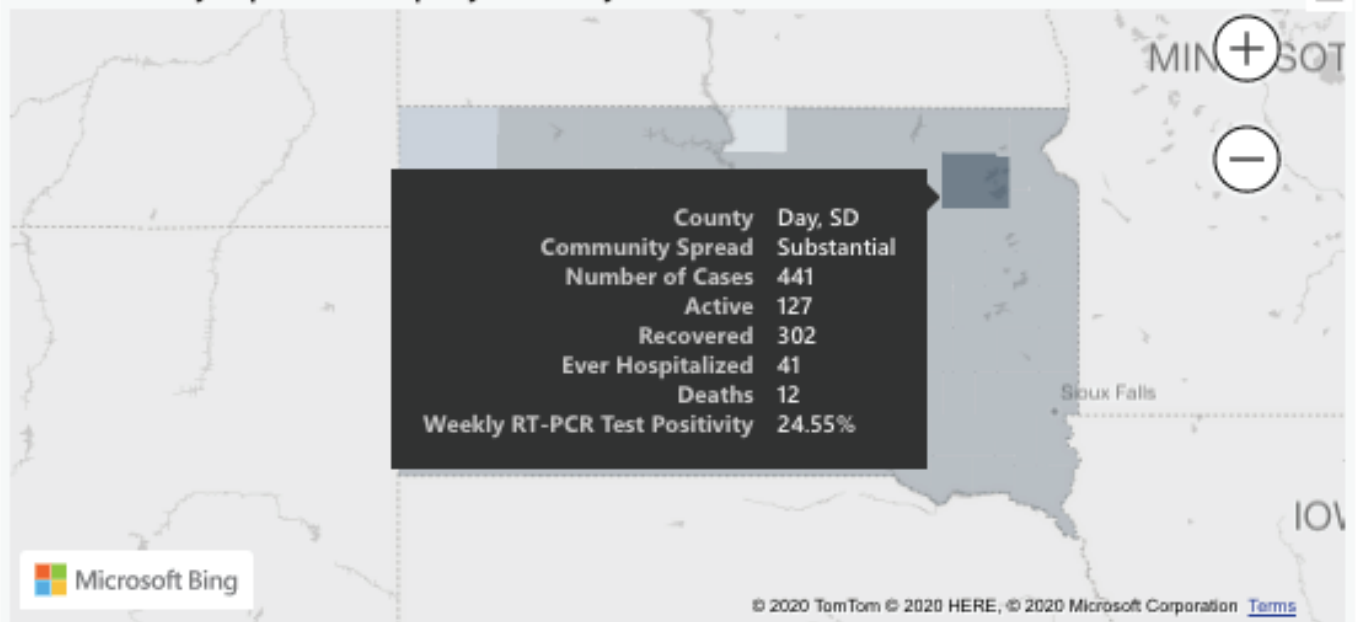
# Groton Daily Independent

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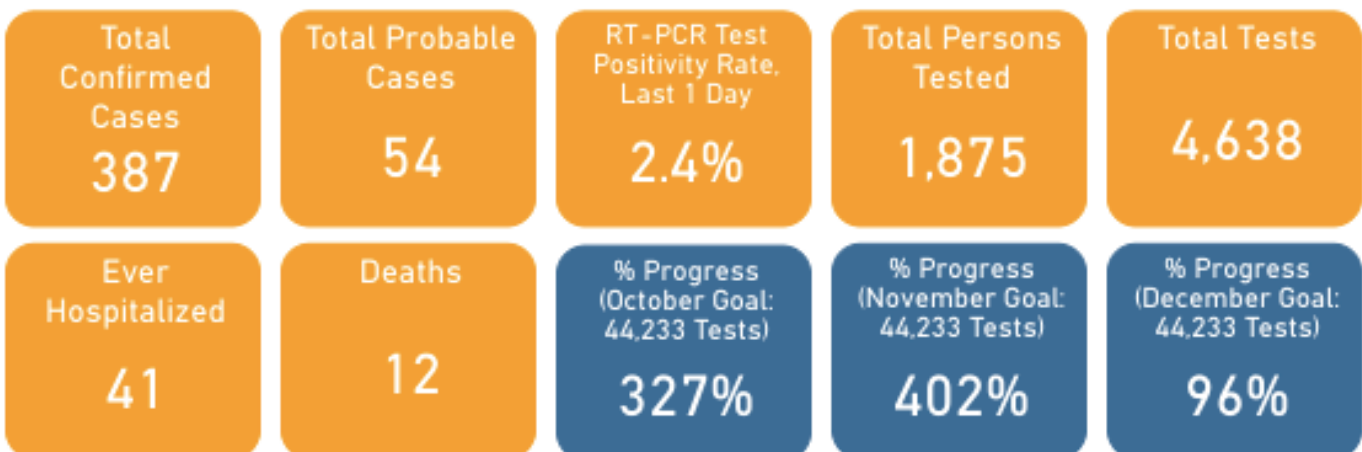
## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



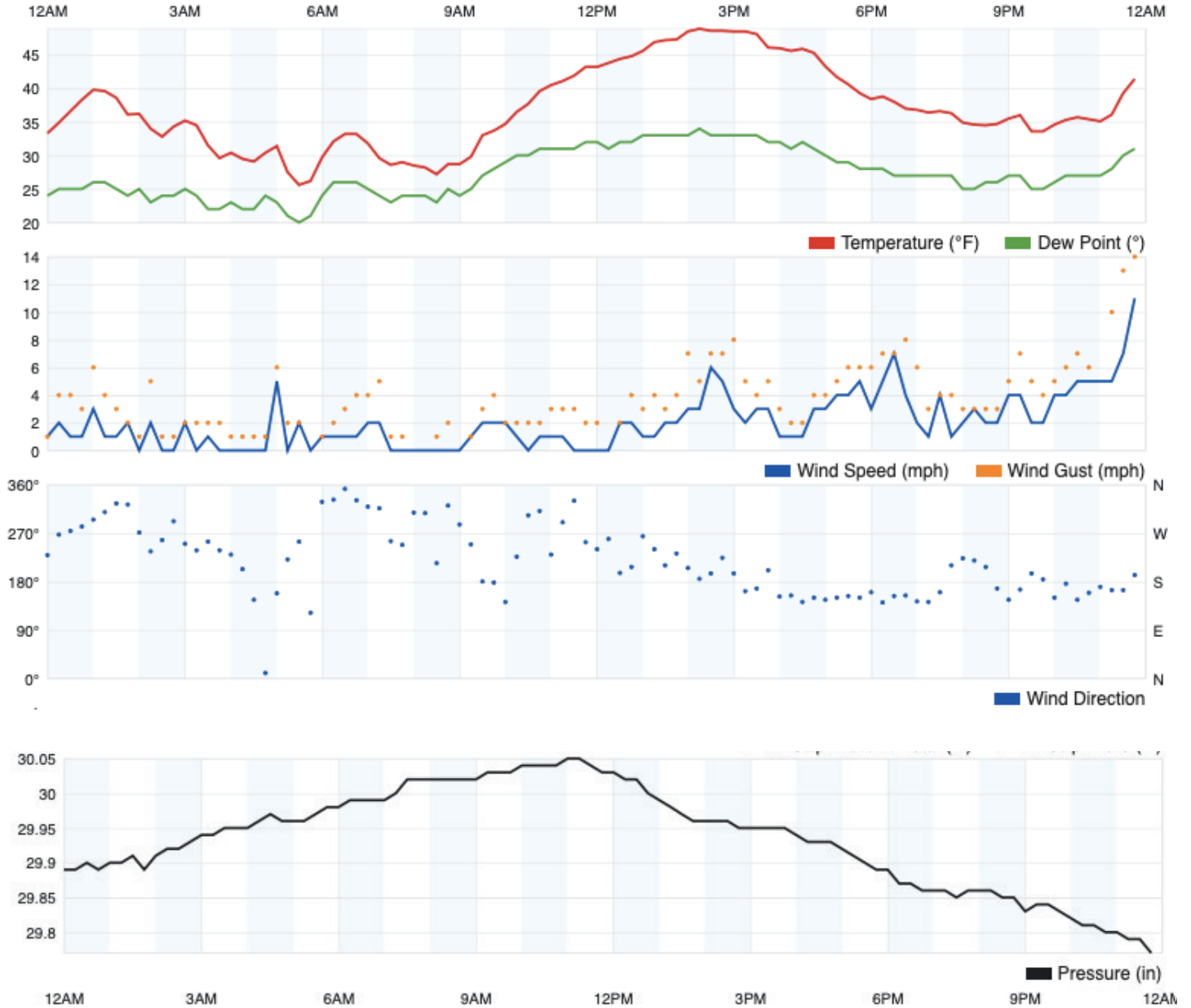
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday  
Night

Saturday



Mostly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy



Mostly Cloudy



Partly Sunny

High: 41 °F

Low: 22 °F

High: 33 °F

Low: 17 °F

High: 32 °F

NWS ABERDEEN



DECEMBER 10-13

Cooler Air has Returned



BREEZY

38 to 43°

Friday



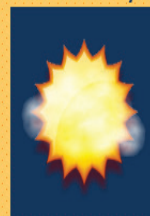
29 to 35°

Saturday



27 to 33°

Sunday



30s

Continued Dry!

Cooler air will be moving in on breezy northerly winds today. Afternoon highs in the upper 30s to low 40s are still around 10 degrees above average for this time of year. Expect highs mainly in the 30s Friday through the weekend, as dry weather continues.

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## Today in Weather History

December 10, 2000: Heavy snow of 6 to 8 inches fell across parts of Lyman and Jones Counties on the 10th and 11th. Some amounts included 6 inches at Kennebec and Okaton and 8 inches at Murdo.

December 10, 1699: A severe ice storm hit Boston, Massachusetts causing much damage to orchards.

December 10, 2002: A shower of tiny fish rained down on Korona, a village in the mountains of northern Greece. A Greek television reported a waterspout caused the incident on Lake Doirani.

1699 - A severe ice storm hit Boston, MA, causing much damage to orchards. (The Weather Channel)

1946 - The temperature at New York City soared to 70 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1949 - The barometric pressure at Las Vegas, NV, reached a record low reading of 29.17 inches (987.8 millibars). (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front brought high winds to the eastern slopes of the Northern and Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 97 mph at Mines Peak CO. In Wyoming, up to a foot of snow blanketed the Teton Village Ski Resort, northwest of Jackson. Strong chinook winds in the Central High Plains Region, gusting to 61 mph at Scottsbluff NE, warmed temperatures to near 70 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Squalls produced heavy snow in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Totals in northeastern Ohio ranged up to 14 inches at Harpersfield, and totals in western New York State ranged up to 14 inches at Sodus. In the snowbelt of Upper Michigan, the Ontonogon area reported two feet of snow in two days. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Heavy snow fell across the northern and central mountains of Colorado, with 24 inches reported at Steamboat Springs. Six to twelve inches of snow fell in the Denver and Boulder area delaying plane flights and snarling traffic. Heavy snow also spread across the Central Plains into the Mississippi Valley. Winner SD received 11 inches of snow, and more than ten inches of snow was reported north of Sioux City IA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992 - A slow-moving Nor'easter storm batters the northeast U.S. coast killing 19 people.



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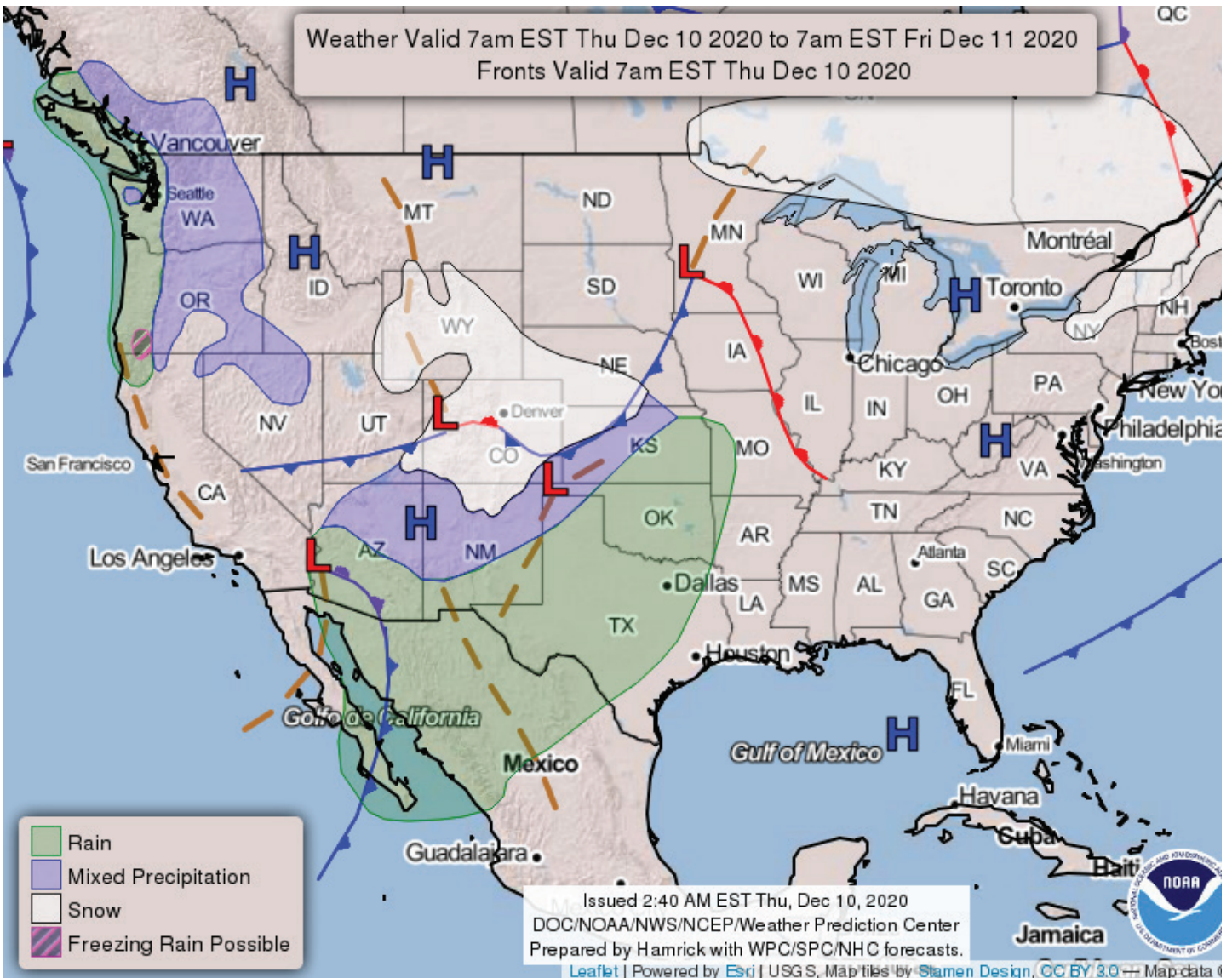
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 48.9 °F**  
**Low Temp: 25.6 °F**  
**Wind: 14 mph**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 58° in 1979**  
**Record Low: -29° in 1972**  
**Average High: 27°F**  
**Average Low: 7°F**  
**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.16**  
**Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.36**  
**Precip Year to Date: 16.52**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:50 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04 a.m.**



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## WHOSE PARTY?

Competent! Outstanding! Careful! Friendly! Supportive! Bright! Cheerful! Caring! Gracious! And the list of words to describe Beth, the secretary to the president of the company, could go on and on. She was loved by everyone who knew her.

When it came time for her birthday one year, her co-workers decided to honor her with a lavish party. They rented a beautiful ballroom, hired the best caterer, designed a special cake, had special napkins with her name printed on them, and collected money to buy a gift.

All went well. The tables were beautifully set, the caterer was on time, the guests arrived, and there was excitement in the room. Everyone kept looking at the entrance awaiting the arrival of Beth. After waiting for fifteen minutes, the co-worker who organized the event said to Beth's best friend, "Where is she?"

"I'm not sure," she replied. "I'll phone her."

She did – and discovered that she was at her favorite sandwich shop enjoying her lunch - alone. No one thought to invite Beth to her own celebration!

There will be many parties this Christmas. And as usual, the Guest, Whose birthday we celebrate, will not be invited. Tables will be set, lights will blink, guests will arrive, laughter will ring out, gifts will be exchanged, everyone will have fun – but Jesus will not be present. No one will think to invite Him – the One who should be the main attraction.

Prayer: Lord of the season, may we place Your Son, our Savior, at the center of everything we do this Christmas. May we never forget, "It's all about Him." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 2:11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

05-06-15-16-32

(five, six, fifteen, sixteen, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$28,000

Lotto America

04-08-20-23-50, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 3

(four, eight, twenty, twenty-three, fifty; Star Ball: six; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$276 million

Powerball

11-14-31-47-48, Powerball: 4, Power Play: 3

(eleven, fourteen, thirty-one, forty-seven, forty-eight; Powerball: four; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$262 million

### Tensions rise over masks as virus grips smaller US cities

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and RYAN FOLEY Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — Arguments over mask requirements and other restrictions have turned ugly in recent days as the deadly coronavirus surge across the U.S. engulfs small and medium-size cities that once seemed safely removed from the outbreak.

In Boise, Idaho, public health officials about to vote on a four-county mask mandate abruptly ended a meeting Tuesday evening because of fears for their safety amid anti-mask protests outside the building and at some of their homes.

One health board member tearfully announced she had to rush home to be with her child because of the protesters, who were seen on video banging on buckets, blaring air horns and sirens, and blasting a sound clip of gunfire from the violence-drenched movie "Scarface" outside her front door.

"I am sad. I am tired. I fear that, in my choosing to hold public office, my family has too often paid the price," said the board member, Ada County Commissioner Diana Lachiondo. "I increasingly don't recognize this place. There is an ugliness and cruelty in our national rhetoric that is reaching a fevered pitch here at home, and that should worry us all."

Boise police said three arrest warrants were issued in connection with the demonstrations at board members' homes.

In South Dakota, the mayor of Rapid City said City Council members were harassed and threatened over a proposed citywide mask mandate that failed this week even as intensive care units across the state filled with COVID-19 patients.

The tensions are flaring amid an epic surge in U.S. deaths, hospitalizations and infections over the past several weeks.

The U.S. topped 3,000 deaths Wednesday in what is a single-day record, according to the COVID Tracking Project. That's surpassed the level seen during last spring's peak in and around New York City. New cases per day have rocketed to more than 200,000 on average, and the number of patients in the hospital with COVID-19 stood at almost 105,000 on Tuesday, another all-time high.

The grim figures led the usually stoic health director of the nation's most populated county to become emotional. Barbara Ferrer described "a devastating increase in deaths" in Los Angeles County, with the

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total hitting 8,075 on Wednesday.

"Over 8,000 people who were beloved members of their families are not coming back," Ferrer said, fighting back tears.

Meanwhile, protesters in Montana's Gallatin County have gathered for two consecutive weeks outside the Bozeman home of county health officer Matt Kelley to decry regulations, including a statewide mask mandate. They have carried signs reading, "We refuse to be your experiment" and "Oxygen is essential."

Last week, around 80 people lined Bozeman's Main Street to support Kelley and other health officials.

In Montana's Flathead County, where officials recorded 17 coronavirus-related deaths over 18 days and resistance to masks runs strong, the interim public health officer is resigning when her contract is up at year's end, citing a lack of support from local authorities for measures to control the scourge.

In Helena, Republicans who control both chambers of the Montana Legislature denied a request by Democratic lawmakers to require masks be worn inside the Capitol during the legislative session next month.

In Missouri, Greene County officials recorded 51 COVID-19 deaths in the first eight days of December as hospitals overflow and hundreds of health care workers are quarantined. The area's two major hospitals asked the city of Springfield, the county seat, to renew the city's mask mandate before it expires in January. The county itself does not have a mask mandate, nor does the state.

As the deaths pile up, Springfield Mortuary Services owner Brian Simmons is overseeing the embalming and cremation of COVID-19 victims as his own 48-year-old daughter battles the virus. She spent the past week hospitalized on a ventilator in one of the city's overwhelmed hospitals.

"You are just helpless," he said. "There is nothing you can do about it. We haven't seen her since she's gone in."

South Dakota has suffered through the country's worst rate of COVID-19 deaths per capita over the last week, but Gov. Kristi Noem has been ardent in her opposition to mask mandates or other aggressive efforts to slow infections.

That hands-off approach drew vocal support at Rapid City Council meetings, even as doctors warned that the only large hospital in the western half of the state is facing a crisis and patients are being flown out of the state. The meetings drew hours of testimony from people who said the dangers of the virus are overblown and that mask requirements violate their liberties.

Dr. Stephen Neabore, who works in the biggest hospital system in the region, said he has been frustrated as he tries to persuade people to wear masks. After working in New York City and studying medicine in England, he said, he sees a distinct skepticism toward government around him.

"I still see people out here that will tell me that they don't believe it's any worse than a common cold," he said.

The City Council in Palmer, Alaska, rejected a mask mandate Friday for the community of 7,300 residents about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Anchorage.

Opponents questioned the effectiveness of masks, wondered why a mandate more common in larger communities was even being considered, and threatened to take their business online or to the neighboring city of Wasilla, which doesn't have a mask order.

Many implored the City Council not to follow the steps of "liberal" Anchorage in forcing residents to require face coverings.

"We are not Anchorage and should not be treated as if we are," Rhonda Hayhurst said in an email to the council. "I moved out here to get away from tyranny as being imposed by the Anchorage administration."

Coronavirus deaths also have been rising rapidly in rural parts of Iowa, where many people disdain masks. Among the hardest hit is O'Brien County, population 13,800, where 42 deaths have been blamed on the virus.

Ty Rushing, who covers the region as managing editor of the Northwest Iowa Review, said obituaries in his newspaper have been piling up.

"It's sad to say, but I think people are just numb to it or they are sticking their head in the sand about it," Rushing said.



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In Iowa's Harrison County, 47 deaths have been attributed to the virus out of population of about 14,000. Most of the deaths have resulted from outbreaks at nursing homes in small towns like Dunlap.

Dunlap City Clerk Meredith Van Houten said almost everyone in the town of about 950 people has a connection to those who have died. She said one was her old neighbor.

"It's a horrible time right now," Van Houten said.

Associated Press journalists from around the globe contributed to this report.

## Trump looks past Supreme Court loss to new election lawsuit

By MARK SHERMAN and MARC LEVY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday asked the Supreme Court to let him join an improbable lawsuit challenging election results in Pennsylvania and other states that he lost, a day after the justices rejected a last-gasp bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

The high court has asked for responses by Thursday. Out of the roughly 50 lawsuits filed around the country contesting the Nov. 3 vote, Trump has lost more than 35 and the others are pending, according to an Associated Press tally.

The suit from the Texas attorney general, Republican Ken Paxton, demands that the 62 total Electoral College votes in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin be invalidated. That's enough, if set aside, to swing the election to Trump. Paxton's suit repeats a litany of false, disproven and unsupported allegations about mail-in ballots and voting in the four battlegrounds.

Repeating many of those claims, Trump lawyer John Eastman wrote, "The fact that nearly half of the country believes the election was stolen should come as no surprise." Biden won by more than 7 million votes and has a 306-232 electoral vote edge.

"We will be INTERVENING in the Texas (plus many other states) case," Trump said hours before the high court filing. "This is the big one. Our Country needs a victory!"

Legal experts dismissed Paxton's filing as the latest and perhaps longest legal shot since Election Day, and officials in the four states sharply criticized Paxton. "I feel sorry for Texans that their tax dollars are being wasted on such a genuinely embarrassing lawsuit," Wisconsin's attorney general, Josh Kaul, said.

Seventeen states Trump won last month joined Texas in urging the court to take on the lawsuit less than a week before presidential electors gather in state capitals to formally choose Biden as the next president.

They are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and West Virginia.

The Supreme Court, without comment Tuesday, refused to call into question the certification process in Pennsylvania. Gov. Tom Wolf, D-Pa., already has certified Biden's victory and the state's 20 electors are to meet on Dec. 14 to cast their votes for the former vice president.

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.

Shortly before tweeting about joining Paxton's case, Trump distanced himself from the Pennsylvania challenge, saying it wasn't his. "The case everyone has been waiting for is the State's case with Texas and numerous others joining," he said.

The court's decision not to intervene in Pennsylvania came in a suit led by Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Pa., and GOP congressional candidate and Trump favorite Sean Parnell, who lost to Rep. Conor Lamb, D-Pa.

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

In court filings, lawyers for Pennsylvania and Wolf, said the suit's claims were "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.

Having lost the request for the court to intervene immediately, Greg Teufel, a lawyer for Kelly and Parnell,

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said he would request that the court consider the case on its underlying merits on an expedited basis.

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

In their underlying suit, 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.

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 the 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.

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Associated Press writer Nomaan Merchant in Houston contributed to this report.

## Health officials expect 22,400 vaccines for medical staff

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's initial allotments of coronavirus vaccine will be quickly spent on immunizing frontline medical workers, state health officials said Wednesday.

Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said the state is expecting enough vaccine for over 22,000 people to arrive in the coming weeks. The first vaccines will go to frontline medical workers. After that, the state is expecting a slowdown in supply, meaning vaccines won't be widely available for the general public until April or May.

An estimated 19,000 health care workers who tend to COVID-19 hospital wards and longer-term care facilities will be the first in line for the vaccine. Next, an approximate 11,000 people in elderly care facilities will be prioritized, said Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon.

The state is expecting to receive 7,800 doses of a vaccine manufactured by Pfizer as early as next week if it is authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration. An additional 14,600 doses of a vaccine manufactured by Moderna have also been reserved for the state. The FDA will begin meeting on Dec. 17 to decide whether to grant it emergency use authorization, and the state expects to receive those within a day or two of its authorization.

The vaccines require two doses separated by several weeks, and the federal government will reserve the second doses of the vaccines to make sure that everyone can get a second shot.

The news of vaccines comes at a time when the state desperately needs relief from the pandemic. It has reported the nation's highest average number of deaths per capita in the last week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health officials reported an additional 36 deaths Wednesday.

The state has seen a decline in the rate of new cases and those hospitalized by the virus, but still saw the nation's third-highest number of new cases per capita in the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. One in 144 people in the state has tested positive in the last week. The Department of Health reported 985 more people tested positive statewide.

State epidemiologist Josh Clayton said the state has not yet seen a feared Thanksgiving spike of new cases, but said people needed to remain vigilant in preventing infections during the holidays.

## Tiny earthquake felt in northern South Dakota

BOWDLE, S.D. (AP) — The United States Geological Service says it detected a small earthquake in northern South Dakota late Tuesday night.

The USGS says the earthquake just before midnight registered at 3.2 on the Richter scale, which is just above the threshold for feeling a tremor.

The agency says three people within 15 miles of the epicenter near Bowdle reported feeling minor shaking.

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While earthquakes are rare in South Dakota, they are not unheard of. The USGS has records of 67 earthquakes that were either in South Dakota or close enough to be felt within the state's borders since 1900, KSFY-TV reported. Most were located along the Missouri River and James River valleys or in the Black Hills region.

One earthquake actually took place earlier this year, near Platte. But, at 2.5 on the Richter scale it was too small to be felt. The most recent quake that was likely strong enough to be felt was a 3.0 earthquake near Onida in 2017.

## Lebanese judge charges caretaker PM in port blast

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Lebanese prosecutor probing last summer's port explosion in Beirut filed charges on Thursday against the caretaker prime minister and three former ministers, Lebanon's official news agency said.

Judge Fadi Sawwan filed the charges against Hassan Diab and former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, as well as Ghazi Zeiter and Youssef Fenianos, both former ministers of public works.

All four were charged with negligence leading to deaths over the Aug. 4 explosion at Beirut port, which killed more than 200 people and injured thousands. The explosion was caused by the ignition of a large stockpile of explosive material that had been stored at the port for years, with the knowledge of top security officials and politicians who did nothing about it.

The four are the most senior individuals to be indicted so far in the probe, which is being conducted in secrecy. Anger has been building up over the slow investigation, lack of answers and the fact that no senior officials have been indicted.

About 30 other security officials and port and customs officials have been detained in the probe.

Diab, a former university professor, resigned few days after the blast, which leveled the port and destroyed large parts of the city.

Zeitar was transport and public works minister in 2014, followed by Fenianos in 2016, who held the job until the beginning of 2020. Khalil was finance minister in 2014, 2016 and until 2020.

Both Khalil and Fenianos were sanctioned by the U.S. in September this year, the first two officials to be subjected to those outside of Hezbollah group

## The Latest: Hahn: FDA meeting 'important day for America'

The Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON — Commissioner Stephen Hahn says Thursday's meeting of the Food and Drug Administration's vaccine advisory panel is "an important day for all of America."

The FDA head hopes it will lead to the beginning of the end of the pandemic and a return "to a more normal and healthy life."

Hahn says the FDA is working to understand the allergic reactions that turned up when the United Kingdom began vaccinations this week and that FDA would include recommendations in any emergency use authorization as to who should and should not get the vaccine. Hahn, addressing public skepticism of the vaccine, says if one authorized, it's important for people to get vaccinated to arrive at herd immunity.

He says: "I have 100% confidence, and I think the American public should as well, with respect to our review of the safety and efficacy of vaccine."

He spoke Thursday morning to ABC, CBS and NBC.

### THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine faces last hurdle before U.S. decision
- U.S. lawmakers act to avert shutdown, buying time for COVID talks
- UN chief warns 'vaccine nationalism' is moving at full speed

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— EU drug regulator hacked, data on COVID-19 vaccine accessed

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

**BERLIN** — Germany has reported its highest one-day total of new coronavirus cases, while the number of deaths linked to COVID-19 has climbed above 20,000.

The national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said Thursday that 23,679 new cases were confirmed over the previous 24 hours. That's just above the previous record of 23,648 from Nov. 20.

A partial shutdown that started Nov. 2 has succeeded in keeping the surge from picking up speed, but the number of daily new cases have remained around the same high level in recent weeks rather than falling. Momentum is building for a harder lockdown over Christmas and New Year, and some regions already are introducing new restrictions.

That's partly because deaths, which have been relatively low in Germany compared with several other European countries, have increased markedly. Another 440 deaths were reported on Thursday, following a single-day record of 590 on Wednesday.

That brought the total so far to 20,372. Germany has reported some 1.24 million coronavirus cases since the pandemic began.

**TOKYO** — The number of new coronavirus infections in Japan's capital have topped 600 in a day for the first time.

Experts on Tokyo's virus task force say the surge in infections has placed an added burden on hospitals, making it difficult for many of them to carry out treatment for ordinary patients.

Tokyo reported 602 new cases Thursday, while the daily tally for the entire nation was 2,810. Japan has reported 168,573 infections since the pandemic began, with 2,465 deaths.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike is urging residents to avoid non-essential outings, especially senior citizens and their families. Tokyo has issued a request for drinking places to close early until Dec. 17.

**NEW DELHI** — India is reporting 31,521 newly confirmed coronavirus infections in the past 24 hours, dropping to just over a third of the peak level seen in mid-September.

India's single-day cases have remained below 50,000 for more than a month.

The health ministry also reported 412 deaths Thursday, raising India's total fatalities to 141,772.

India's health ministry says some coronavirus vaccines are likely to receive licenses in the next few weeks. It has outlined an initial plan to immunize 300 million people.

Three vaccine companies have applied for early approval in India: Serum Institute of India, which has been licensed to manufacture the AstraZeneca vaccine, Pfizer Inc., and Indian manufacturer Bharat Biotech.

**AUSTIN, Texas** — A Texas state official who has been critical of measures ordered by Gov. Greg Abbott in efforts to slow the coronavirus pandemic says he has tested positive for the virus.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller was among an estimated 200 people who rallied outside Abbott's home in October to protest his pandemic orders, including a continued statewide mask mandate and lockdowns.

In a statement Wednesday, the 65-year-old Miller says he has been quarantining at his ranch.

In his words: "Not feeling my best, but I've survived rodeo injuries, broken bones, hip, double knee and shoulder surgery, west Nile virus and cancer, and I'm going to beat this too."

**UNITED NATIONS** — U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says "vaccine nationalism" is moving "at full speed." He says that is leaving people in developing nations around the world watching preparations for the rollout of inoculations against the coronavirus in some rich countries and wondering if and when



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they will be vaccinated.

The U.N. chief has repeatedly called for vaccines to be treated as "a global public good" available to everyone on the planet, and he appealed Wednesday for \$4.2 billion in the next two months for a World Health Organization program to buy and deliver virus vaccines for the world's poorest people.

The United Kingdom and Russia are already vaccinating people. In the United States, the Pfizer vaccine could get a green light for emergency use in the coming days. The vaccine was approved by Canada on Wednesday.

Guterres says that "what we're seeing today is an enormous effort by several countries in order to ensure vaccines for their own populations."

**HONOLULU** — Hawaii will furlough more than 10,000 state workers two days a month to balance the state's budget as tax revenues decline due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Gov. David Ige said Wednesday the furloughs will take effect Jan. 1 and cut payroll spending 9.2%. The governor says he and members of his Cabinet will get the same percentage salary cut.

Nurses, firefighters, prison guards and others whose jobs involve around-the-clock operations won't be required to furlough. Employees at airports and harbors whose pay is covered by federal funds will also not be furloughed. About 4,600 employees fall into this exempt category.

**AUSTIN, Texas** — For a second day this week, hospitalizations of people with the coronavirus in Texas topped 9,000.

The Texas Department of State Health Services says 9,053 were hospitalized Wednesday. The state reported 9,028 hospitalizations Tuesday.

Last week marked the first time Texas surpassed a daily count of 9,000 hospitalizations since a deadly summer outbreak.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University say the death toll in Texas is at more than 23,000, the second highest in the country.

**WASHINGTON** — The founder of the Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium says she has concerns about the availability of potential coronavirus vaccines.

Dr. Ala Stanford said Wednesday that "everyone who needs a test cannot get a test. So, I do have concerns about the vaccine availability."

She says it is important that vaccines are received by people "going to work every day in contact with the public, bringing it home to their communities and transmitting it." She recommends hospitals "be required to have a culturally competent education program in place" about potential vaccines.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration will decide whether to approve a Pfizer vaccine within days. If approved, the first recipients are likely health care workers and nursing home residents.

**LOS ANGELES** — The usually stoic health director of Los Angeles County became emotional while describing "a devastating increase in deaths," with the total hitting 8,075.

Barbara Ferrer said Wednesday that this week the county recorded an average of 43 daily deaths — up from about 12 a day in mid-November.

Ferrer fought back tears as she called the deaths "an incalculable loss to their friends and their family and the community."

Hospitals in Los Angeles are dealing with a surge in COVID-19 patients, with new admissions running near 500 a day. Officials anticipate that number will increase to 700 a day by next week.

**JACKSON, Miss.** — Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves is defending his decision to hold Christmas parties at the Governor's Mansion after repeatedly warning people to avoid social gatherings as coronavirus cases surge in the state.

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Reeves said Wednesday that he has invited family, friends and state officials to the multiple parties, but he expects many will choose not to attend.

The governor has often told people not to host gatherings as the virus spreads. He issued a new executive order Wednesday that restricts social gatherings statewide to 10 people indoors and 50 outdoors when social distancing is not possible and has issued a mask mandate for all Mississippi schools and for 61 out of 82 counties with the highest number of new coronavirus cases.

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** — The greater Sacramento region will be placed under California's most restrictive coronavirus rules this week because capacity in hospital intensive care units has fallen below 15%.

The 13-county region encompassing the state capital has an ICU capacity of 14.3% and will face a regional stay-at-home order at 11:59 p.m. Thursday, according to the state Department of Public Health website.

Under the restrictions, restaurants must stop outdoor dining, personal care businesses such as barbers must close and the number of people allowed inside stores is reduced. Residents are asked to stay home except for essential activities.

The huge Southern California and San Joaquin Valley regions are already in the strictest category, and several counties in the San Francisco Bay Area chose to implement their own voluntary orders independent of the state. The state is divided in to five regions for purposes of determining restriction levels based on ICU capacity.

**NEW YORK** — A study out of Italy is seen as added evidence that COVID-19 virus may have been spreading in late fall of 2019, before an outbreak was first reported in Wuhan, China.

Researchers identified the new coronavirus infection in a specimen taken in early December from a 4-year-old boy who lived near Milan. The boy first developed a cough and other symptoms in November, months before COVID cases were identified in Italy.

In the study, the researchers went back and looked at back-of-the-throat swab specimens that had been collected from 39 patients between September and February. One from the boy tested positive for the new coronavirus.

The researchers noted that the Italian child developed cold and flu-like symptoms in November and then a measles-like rash in early December. But they don't detail where the child had been or who had been around.

Scientists at the University of Milan led the study and the medical journal Emerging Infectious Diseases this week posted it online. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes the journal, but it is editorially independent of the agency.

**ANKARA, Turkey** — Turkey's health minister says his country has no plans to make vaccination against the new coronavirus mandatory but will work to convince the public about the safety of the vaccines.

Speaking to reporters following a meeting of the country's scientific advisory council on Wednesday, Fahrettin Koca also said people who contracted the virus in the past four to six months, children, and pregnant women would not be vaccinated.

Turkey has ordered 50 million doses of the vaccine developed by Chinese company Sinovac Biotech, with the first shipment due to arrive in the coming days. Turkey is also engaged in talks to obtain other vaccines and hopes that a Turkish vaccine will be ready for use in April.

Turkey is experiencing a surge in infections with confirmed cases of COVID-19 hovering above 30,000 per day. The country's death toll since March has topped 15,000.

The government will assess the effectiveness of recently imposed weekend and evening curfews before deciding whether to impose stricter lockdowns, the minister said.

Koca said a total of 216 health workers have died since the start of the outbreak.

## UK says EU trade talks face 'moment of finality' on weekend

By JILL LAWLESS and RAF CASERT Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's foreign minister said Thursday that negotiations on a trade deal with the European Union will reach a "moment of finality" this weekend, with both sides assessing chances of an agreement as slim.

To prepare for a possible no-deal exit on Jan. 1, the EU on Thursday proposed four contingency measures to make sure air and road traffic can continue as smoothly as possible for the next six months.

It also proposes that fishermen will still have access to each others waters for up to a year, to limit the commercial damage of a no-deal split. The plans depend on the U.K. offering similar initiatives.

"Our responsibility is to be prepared for all eventualities," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

Von der Leyen and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a three-hour dinner meeting Wednesday in hope of unblocking stalled talks, but came away without making substantial progress.

"We understand each other's positions. They remain far apart," von der Leyen said.

They told their negotiators to keep talking, but set Sunday as decision day.

U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said the Sunday deadline set by Britain and the EU for a decision was final — though he added "you can never say never entirely."

Without a deal, the bloc and Britain face a tumultuous no-deal split at the end of the month, threatening hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in losses.

Britain left the EU on Jan. 31, but remains in its economic structures until the end of the year. That means a serious economic rupture on Jan. 1 that could be chaotic if there is no trade agreement. A no-deal split would bring 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.

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 trying to bind Britain to the bloc's rules indefinitely.

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Raf Casert reported from Brussels.

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

## China restricts US official travel to Hong Kong

BEIJING (AP) — China is imposing restrictions on travel to Hong Kong by some U.S. officials and others in retaliation for similar measures imposed on Chinese individuals by Washington, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday.

U.S. diplomatic passport holders visiting Hong Kong and nearby Macao will temporarily no longer receive visa-free entry privileges, spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

U.S. administration officials, congressional staffers, employees of non-governmental organizations and their immediate family members will face "reciprocal sanctions," Hua said.

She was apparently referring to U.S. sanctions that bar certain Chinese and Hong Kong officials from traveling to the U.S. or having dealings with the U.S. financial system over their roles in imposing a sweeping National Security Law passed this summer that ushered in a crackdown on free speech and opposition political activity in Hong Kong.

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Hua said the move was taken "given that the U.S. side is using the Hong Kong issue to seriously interfere in China's internal affairs and undermine China's core interests."

Those sanctioned "have performed egregiously and are primarily responsible on the Hong Kong issue," she said at a daily briefing.

"China once again urges the U.S. side to immediately stop meddling in Hong Kong affairs, stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and not go further down the wrong and dangerous path," Hua said.

China had long threatened to retaliate against the U.S. sanctions and other actions seen as hostile.

Earlier, China's official Xinhua News Agency said Trump administration officials are "digging a hole" for the next U.S. administration's relationship with China through actions targeting the country and its officials.

Steps such as restricting visas for the 92 million members of the ruling Communist Party and their families have "again exposed the sinister intentions of extreme anti-China forces in Washington to hijack China-U.S. relations for their own political gain," Xinhua said in an editorial.

The U.S. State Department last week cut the duration of such visas from 10 years to one month, another example of the increasingly hard-line stance adopted by the administration in its waning days. That came in addition to the sanctions targeting specific Chinese and Hong Kong officials over their actions in Hong Kong, the northwestern region of Xinjiang and elsewhere.

While President-elect Joe Biden has signaled he intends to keep pressure on China, he's also expected to seek a return to more conventional, less confrontational style of diplomacy. Rolling back Trump-era measures could be difficult however, while giving Republicans the chance to renew accusations that Biden is softening Washington's stance toward Beijing.

"By relentlessly challenging the bottom line of China-U.S. relations on issues concerning China's core interests, anti-China politicians are not only digging a hole for the next administration's relationship with China, but also eyeing their own personal political gains," Xinhua said.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has castigated China on almost a daily basis over its policies toward Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and the South China Sea.

Dozens of officials from mainland China and Hong Kong have been hit with visa bans and other sanctions and new restrictions have been imposed on Chinese diplomats, journalists and academics. Chinese tech giant Huawei has been shut out of the U.S. market and the U.S. has lobbied other countries to follow suit, often successfully.

On Wednesday, Pompeo accused U.S. universities of caving to Chinese pressure to blunt or bar criticism of the the Chinese communist party, which he said was "poisoning the well of our higher education for its own ends."

Chinese responded by vowing to impose countervailing measures against American officials, saying U.S. accusations and punitive measures only solidified the Chinese people behind their leaders.

Perhaps with an eye toward Biden, who takes office Jan. 20, Xinhua held open the possibility of better relations if Washington changed its approach.

"Today, China and the United States should also uphold the spirit of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation," Xinhua said. "The two must focus on managing their differences, with the top priority being a smooth transition toward stronger China-U.S. relations."

## Despite Trump's venting and threats, Biden's win is sealed

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's plenty of noise but no cause for confusion as President Donald Trump vents about how the election turned out and vows to subvert it even still.

This truth is self-evident: Joe Biden is on track to become president Jan. 20. The machinery of government and democracy is moving inexorably toward that end despite Trump's attempts to undermine the voters' will.

Trump on Wednesday demanded an "OVERTURN" of the outcome in a collection of tweets arguing he could only have lost the election if it were "FIXED." He attempted to support his case by saying odds-



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makers on election night heavily favored his reelection, "the so-called 'bookies,'" as if a gambler's bet mattered. It doesn't.

Americans who don't wish to get caught up in the nitty gritty of Trump's attempts to undermine the election can take their cue from one of the many judges who have dismissed the complaints of his team or his allies that the voting or counting was corrupt.

"This ship has sailed," said U.S. District Judge Linda Parker in throwing out a lawsuit challenging Biden's win in Michigan this week.

Not only has the ship sailed but it has reached safe harbor and dropped anchor.

Biden's victory was essentially locked in Tuesday by the so-called safe harbor deadline set by federal law for states to finish their certifications and resolve legal disputes. It's an insurance policy to guard against Congress trying to manipulate the electoral votes that will be cast next week and sent to the Capitol for counting on Jan. 6.

These steps — the deadline, the convening of the Electoral College in state capitals, Congress' count in early January — are rituals that are routinely ignored by the public at large. They became less ignorable when Trump began exploring any and all avenues to stay in power.

But the election is over and has been for weeks. Here's why:

—Biden won a decisive majority of electoral votes in states that certified their results.

—The Democrat is set to finish with even more electoral votes, 306, a total Trump called a landslide when he won the same in 2016.

—No systemic fraud or even consequential error has been established in an election that state monitors and courts have repeatedly found was run fairly. More than that, the election played out with striking efficiency given that it was held in the middle of a deadly pandemic.

—Trump's attempts to browbeat Republican officials in Georgia and Michigan into upending Biden's victory in those states came to nothing.

—Trump's legal arguments in favor of overturning the result have been shredded by judges across the country, including by some he appointed and hoped would therefore side with him.

Trump reshaped much of the federal bench with his own nominees during his term and placed three justices on the Supreme Court. None of that has helped him reverse his defeat by Biden.

Altogether, Trump's campaign or his allies have seen more than 35 of their court cases fail. Trump has won one, concerning deadlines for proof of identification for certain absentee ballots and mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania, and it did not change the outcome.

This week the Supreme Court turned aside a bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of Biden's victory. Trump now says his campaign will join a case in the Supreme Court led by the Texas attorney general, who bases the case on false and unsupported allegations that have been discredited in other courts.

—Even as Trump cries foul over Biden naming his Cabinet and other senior personnel, the Trump administration is working with the incoming Biden administration on the transition. Republican lawmakers are adjusting to the transfer of power while still declining for the most part to acknowledge Biden's victory out loud.

## Trump virus coordinator Birx seeks role in Biden government

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Dr. Deborah Birx was brought into President Donald Trump's orbit to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, she had a sterling reputation as a former U.S. Army physician, a globally recognized AIDS researcher and a rare Obama administration holdover.

Less than 10 months later, as Trump's time in office nears its end, the White House coronavirus task force coordinator's reputation is frayed. And after serving every president since Ronald Reagan, her future in the incoming Joe Biden administration is uncertain.

Over the course of the pandemic, Birx drew criticism from public health experts and Democratic lawmakers for not speaking out forcefully against the Republican president when he contradicted advice from

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medical advisers and scientists about how to fight the virus.

On everything from Trump's aversion to masks to his dangerous suggestion that ingesting bleach might ward off the virus, critics and backers say Birx stepped carefully to try to maintain her influence in hopes of pushing the president to listen to the scientists.

"The president's departure from reality become so extreme that it put her and others on the task force in an untenable position," said Michael Weinstein, who heads the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and got to know Birx professionally after she was named the global AIDS coordinator in 2014.

"History will have to judge whether they enabled the president by giving him credibility based on their expertise or whether she and the others did more in helping prevent more people from being hurt by the craziness," he said.

Birx has made clear that she wants to stick around to help the Biden administration roll out vaccines and persuade the American people to be inoculated.

She has reached out to Biden advisers in recent days as she tries to make the case for a role in the incoming Democratic president's virus response effort, according to a person familiar with the Biden team's personnel deliberations and a Trump administration coronavirus task force official. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal discussions.

Birx has conveyed that, at best, she envisions herself in a scaled-back role as Biden shapes his own team. Biden has already appointed transition co-chair and Obama administration alumnus Jeffrey Zients to serve as White House coronavirus coordinator. But Birx's reluctance to publicly challenge Trump when he downplayed the virus has left some in Biden's transition skeptical that she retains credibility with the public, according to the person familiar with Biden transition deliberations.

Speaking at a Wall Street Journal CEO conference on Tuesday, Birx, a public servant for 40 years, said she planned to remain in government but has yet to hear from the Biden transition team about how or if she'll be used on the pandemic.

Birx was pulled away from her ambassadorial post as the U.S. global AIDS coordinator to assist the task force. She worked alongside her mentor, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious-disease expert, who was less hesitant to directly contradict questionable statements by Trump. She was appointed to the AIDS post in 2014 by President Barack Obama, and it is up to Biden whether to return her to that position.

"I think the one thing I bring to this is really understanding epidemics around the globe," she said.

The Biden transition team declined to comment. A White House task force spokesman said Birx was unavailable for comment.

Birx certainly had fans in Biden's orbit before and immediately after she was tapped to serve as coronavirus coordinator in the Trump White House.

Biden's chief of staff, Ron Klain, called Birx "great." Former Secretary of State John Kerry, who will serve as a special envoy on climate for Biden, described Birx at her 2014 swearing-in ceremony to serve as the U.S. global AIDS coordinator as someone who "embodies the best of what it means to be a pioneer, to be a practitioner, and a public servant all rolled into one."

In her coronavirus task force role, Birx faced criticism for defending Trump after he suggested during an April briefing that ultraviolet light and ingesting disinfectants could serve as treatment for the virus. Birx explained that Trump "likes to talk that through out loud and really have that dialogue."

Birx urged Trump to follow the data as he pushed to relax social distancing restrictions. She wasn't above flattering the president. She faced criticism after she said in a television interview early in the crisis that Trump's "ability to analyze and integrate data that comes out of his long history in business has really been a real benefit during these discussions about medical issues."

Jeremy Konyndyk, now a member of the Biden transition's Health and Human Services team, applauded Birx's appointment early in the crisis. But Konyndyk, who led USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance in the Obama administration, soon became a critic.

"My confidence in Dr. Birx has been eroding in recent weeks," Konyndyk tweeted after Birx defended Trump's decision in April to suspend funding for the World Health Organization. "But with this, it is lost."

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This statement is not credible as public health analysis, and is clearly not intended to be.”

Weeks later, Konyndyk tweeted that Birx “has repeatedly undermined her scientific credibility, publicly, in order to shield the President.”

By late summer, Birx’s stock in Trump’s eyes also diminished.

Trump was irate with Birx for what he called a “pathetic” response to criticism from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The Democratic speaker said in early August that she had “no confidence” in Birx for not pushing back harder on the president as he repeatedly diminished the impact of the virus.

Days later, Trump brought on as a pandemic adviser Dr. Scott Atlas, a neuroradiologist and fellow at Stanford University’s conservative Hoover Institution and a critic of virus-related restrictions on the economy. Birx’s public role at the White House was sharply reduced after that, and she spent recent months traveling the country urging states to be more aggressive in fighting the virus.

In recent days, Birx has herself become more pointed in her criticism of Trump.

Asked during an appearance on NBC’s “Meet the Press” on Sunday about officials in the Trump administration repeatedly flouting public health experts’ pleas for Americans to avoid large gatherings and commit to wearing face masks, Birx voiced concern about leaders “parroting myths.”

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

Madhani reported from Chicago.

## Hunter Biden tax probe examining Chinese business dealings

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is investigating the finances of President-elect Joe Biden’s son, including scrutinizing some of his Chinese business dealings and other transactions, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The revelations put a renewed spotlight on questions about Hunter Biden’s financial history, which dogged his father’s successful White House campaign and were a frequent target of President Donald Trump and his allies. They also come at a politically delicate time for the president-elect, who is weighing his choice to lead an agency that is actively investigating his son.

The tax investigation was launched in 2018, the year before the elder Biden announced his candidacy for president. Hunter Biden confirmed the existence of the investigation on Wednesday, saying he learned about it for the first time the previous day.

“I take this matter very seriously but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors,” he said in a statement.

It is unclear which entities or business dealings might be tied up in the probe, though the person with knowledge of the matter said at least some of focus was on his past work in China. Federal investigators served a round of subpoenas on Tuesday, including one for Hunter Biden, according to another person familiar with the investigation.

Investigators did not reach out until recently because of Justice Department practice against taking overt investigative actions in the run-up to an election, one of the people said. The people familiar with the investigation insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing probe.

Hunter Biden has a history of international affairs and business dealings in a number of countries. Trump and his allies have accused him of profiting off his political connections and have raised unsubstantiated charges of corruption related to his work in Ukraine at the time his father was vice president and leading the Obama administration’s dealings with the Eastern European nation.

Late Wednesday, Trump tweeted a quote from New York Post columnist Miranda Devine claiming, “10% of voters would have changed their vote if they knew about Hunter Biden.”

Biden is actively assembling his Cabinet but has yet to name a nominee to lead the Justice Department.

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That person could ultimately have oversight of the investigation into the new president's son if it is still ongoing when Biden is sworn in on Jan. 20.

The transition team said in a statement, "President-elect Biden is deeply proud of his son, who has fought through difficult challenges, including the vicious personal attacks of recent months, only to emerge stronger."

The revelations could also add weight to Trump's broad accusations that Biden was weak on China. Trump took a tough line on China during the campaign as he tried to deflect blame for the coronavirus. Biden has rejected the characterization that he was weak and said that, unlike Trump, he would rebuild global coalitions to check China's power.

A New Yorker profile on Hunter Biden last year detailed some of his business work in China, including how he accompanied his father on a 2013 trip to Beijing, where he met with a business associate. He also acknowledged having received a diamond from a Chinese energy tycoon interested in liquified natural gas projects.

He downplayed the idea that the gift could have been intended to affect his father's policy. He told the magazine he gave the diamond to an associate.

"What would they be bribing me for? My dad wasn't in office," he said.

Hunter Biden has been caught up in controversies before. While his father was vice president, Hunter joined the Naval Reserve and was discharged after testing positive for cocaine in his system, later revealing a yearslong struggle with addiction.

He also joined the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma in 2014, sparking concerns about the perceptions of a conflict of interest given the elder Biden was deeply involved in U.S. policy toward Ukraine. An investigation by the Republican-led Senate did not identify any policies that were directly affected by Hunter Biden's work.

In the weeks before the election, Trump supporters used the existence of a laptop they said was connected to Hunter Biden — and the emergence of someone who maintains he had business discussions with him — to raise questions about Joe Biden's knowledge of his son's activities in Ukraine and China. The president-elect has said he did not discuss his son's international business dealings with him and has denied having ever taken money from a foreign country.

The laptop surfaced publicly in October when The New York Post reported on emails that it said had come from Hunter Biden's laptop and that it said it received from Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer.

A third person familiar with the matter said the tax investigation does not have anything to do with the laptop.

In a CNN interview last week, President-elect Biden addressed the business dealings of his brothers and his son Hunter, pledging that they would avoid any perceived conflicts of interest during his time in office.

"My son, my family will not be involved in any business, any enterprise that is in conflict with or appears to be in conflict, where there's appropriate distance from the presidency and government," Biden said.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Associated Press writer Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

## Can I stop wearing a mask after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

By The Associated Press undefined

Can I stop wearing a mask after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

No. For a couple reasons, masks and social distancing will still be recommended for some time after people are vaccinated.

To start, the first coronavirus vaccines require two shots; Pfizer's second dose comes three weeks after the first and Moderna's comes after four weeks. And the effect of vaccinations generally aren't immediate.

People are expected to get some level of protection within a couple of weeks after the first shot. But full protection may not happen until a couple weeks after the second shot.



It's also not yet known whether the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines protect people from infection entirely, or just from symptoms. That means vaccinated people might still be able to get infected and pass the virus on, although it would likely be at a much lower rate, said Deborah Fuller, a vaccine expert at the University of Washington.

And even once vaccine supplies start ramping up, getting hundreds of millions shots into people's arms is expected to take months.

Fuller also noted vaccine testing is just starting in children, who won't be able to get shots until study data indicates they're safe and effective for them as well.

Moncef Slaoui, head of the U.S. vaccine development effort, has estimated the country could reach herd immunity as early as May, based on the effectiveness of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. That's assuming there are no problems meeting manufacturers' supply estimates, and enough people step forward to be vaccinated.

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

Read previous Viral Questions:

Should I wipe down groceries during the pandemic?

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

What does COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness mean?

## Minneapolis approves cuts to police budget, not staffing

By AMY FORLITI and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved a budget early Thursday that will shift about \$8 million from the police department toward violence prevention and other programs — but will keep the mayor's targeted staffing levels for sworn officers intact, averting a possible veto.

Mayor Jacob Frey, who had threatened to veto the entire budget if the council went ahead with its plan to cap police staffing, said the vote was a defining moment for the city, which has experienced soaring crime rates amid calls to defund the police since the May 25 death of George Floyd.

"We all share a deep and abiding reverence for the role our local government plays in service of the people of our city," Frey said. "And today, there are good reasons to be optimistic about the future in Minneapolis."

The City Council had initially approved a proposal to cut the city's authorized police force to 750 officers, down from the current 888, beginning in 2022. But they changed course late Wednesday after the mayor called the move "irresponsible." The council voted 7-6 on Wednesday to keep the cap at 888.

"Tonight the City Council passed a budget that represents a compromise, and also a big step forward into a more compassionate and effective public safety future," said City Council member Steve Fletcher, co-author of the proposal to lower the cap on staffing. He said the City Council has more work to do and "we cannot afford to remain stuck in the past any longer."

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

The plan cuts nearly \$8 million from Frey's \$179 million policing budget and redirects it to mental health teams, violence prevention programs and other initiatives.

More than 300 Minneapolis residents signed up to speak about the proposal Wednesday, with some pleading for City Council members to deliver the reforms they promised after Floyd's death, and others warning it would be irresponsible to cut officers.

Some in favor of the plan called police officers cowards, gang members, white supremacists or terrorists. They spoke about violence that African Americans and other minorities have experienced at the hands of police. Those against the plan said the City Council was acting irresponsibly and has bungled its

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attempts to bring change. They cited increasing violence, saying they don't feel safe.

"The place I grew up this summer burned," said Will Roberts, who grew up in the Longfellow neighborhood. "And it burned because of police misconduct."

Loraine Teel, of south Minneapolis, said she supported the mayor's position, telling council members: "You cannot achieve reform without a plan that includes the cooperation of those being reformed ... You have failed miserably."

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.

"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 includes 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 its current authorized cap of 888. 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.

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.

## Beirut silos at heart of debate about remembering port blast

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Ghassan Hasrouty spent most of his life working at the silos in Beirut's port, unloading grain shipments to feed the country even as fighting raged around him during the 1975-90 civil war.

Decades later, he perished under the same silos, their towering cement structure gutted by the force of the Aug. 4 explosion at the port, when 2,750 tons of improperly stored ammonium nitrates ignited in what became one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history.

In a horrific instant, a burst of power ravaged Beirut. More than 200 people died and the horror and devastation scarred the survivors.

Hasrouty's son, Elie, wants justice for his father and thinks the silos should stay as a "mark of shame" and reminder of the corruption and negligence of politicians that many Lebanese blame for the tragedy.

A government-commissioned study in the wake of the disaster says the 50-year-old silos could collapse at any moment and should be demolished, sparking an emotional debate among the city's residents over how to preserve the memory of the tragedy.

In Lebanon, where a culture of impunity has long prevailed and where those behind violent attacks, bombings and assassinations have rarely been brought to justice, the debate is steeped in suspicion.

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Sara Jaafar believes the government wants to obliterate the silos and move on as if nothing happened. "It is a reminder of what they did," said Jaafar, an architect whose apartment overlooking the silos was destroyed in the explosion.

"I never want to lose the anger that I have," she said.

Just days after the catastrophic blast, as public outrage mounted, Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab stepped down, saying the country's endemic corruption was "bigger than the state."

The massive, 48-meter-high silos absorbed much of the explosion's impact, effectively shielding the western part of the city from the blast that damaged or completely destroyed thousands of buildings.

The investigation into how such a large amount of dangerous chemicals was poorly stored for years under the nose of the port authority and the wider political leadership has dragged on. Rights groups and families are concerned it's a tactic to protect senior officials, none of whom have so far been detained or charged with any wrongdoing.

More than four months later, rotting wheat is dripping from the shredded but still-standing silos, which stored up to 85% of Lebanon's grain. Pigeons and rodents have found home among the wreckage.

Emmanuel Durand, a French civil engineer who volunteered for the government-commissioned team of experts, spent several weeks using a laser scanner to gather digital data for an analysis of the silos' structure after the explosion.

Though they may look structurally sound from afar, the silos are tilted and their foundation is broken, which has caused vertical cracks in two of them. They could collapse at any moment, Durand said, although it is impossible to calculate when.

"Silos are very strong as long as they have integrity, just like an egg," Durand said. "Now if the shell of the egg is slightly broken, it becomes very weak and you will have no difficulty in crushing the egg."

The army has plans to demolish the silos with equipment that crushes concrete and rebar, Durand said. Kuwait, which financed the building of the silos in the 1970s, has offered to donate to rebuild them.

Then came a proposal by Fadi Abboud, a former tourism minister and member of the largest Christian party, the Free Patriotic Movement, to turn the port and silos into a "tourist attraction," a site that would rival the Roman ruins in Baalbek.

Families of the victims protested, called it a heartless commercialization of the site where so many died.

"In their dreams!" vowed Gilbert Karaan, whose 27-year-old fiancée, firefighter-medic Sahar Fares, died battling the fire that broke out just before the explosion. "They will not profit off the martyrs."

Jonathan Dagher, a journalist with the independent online media platform Megaphone, said Abboud's words were in line with comments by Gebran Bassil, the party's leader, who said the explosion could be turned into a "big opportunity" to secure international support for Lebanon's cash-strapped government.

"These words are not an accident" and belittle the tragedy of what happened, Dagher said.

There are concerns the port blast could be treated in the same way as Lebanon's 15-year civil war.

The war is not taught in schoolbooks. There is no memorial for the 17,000 missing from the war. A general amnesty allowed warlords and militia leaders to dominate the country's postwar politics. After the war, downtown Beirut was quickly rebuilt, a high-end corporate hub emerging from the ruins and devastation.

Jaafar, the architect, said pushback against demolishing the silos stems from fear that a similar scenario, based on a "concept of amnesia" — if you don't see it, it didn't happen — is being engineered for the Aug. 4 blast.

Lebanese architect Carlos Moubarak says the gutted silos should remain in place, their sheer size forever an echo of the massive explosion.

"There is something very, very powerful about the silos," he said. "They are now part of the people's collective memory".

Moubarak has designed a memorial park at the site, with the silos as a focal point, a remembrance ring at the crater, a museum and green space. The aim, he said, is to honor the victims and survivors while also capturing the spirit of solidarity among the Lebanese in the wake of the explosion. He is now trying to figure out ways to fund it.

Elie Hasrouty's father and grandfather had both worked at the silos since they were built.

His father, Ghassan, 59, called home 40 minutes before the explosion to tell his wife that a new shipment of grains would keep him there late and asked her to send his favorite pillow and bedsheets for the unplanned overnight at work.

His remains were found at the bottom of the silos, 14 days later.

The silos should stay on as "a witness to corruption, so we can learn," Hasrouty said. "Something must change."

## 'Under the rug:' Sexual misconduct shakes FBI's senior ranks

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An assistant FBI director retired after he was accused of drunkenly groping a female subordinate in a stairwell. Another senior FBI official left after he was found to have sexually harassed eight employees. Yet another high-ranking FBI agent retired after he was accused of blackmailing a young employee into sexual encounters.

An Associated Press investigation has identified at least six sexual misconduct allegations involving senior FBI officials over the past five years, including two new claims brought this week by women who say they were sexually assaulted by ranking agents.

Each of the accused FBI officials appears to have avoided discipline, the AP found, and several were quietly transferred or retired, keeping their full pensions and benefits even when probes substantiated the sexual misconduct claims against them.

Beyond that, federal law enforcement officials are afforded anonymity even after the disciplinary process runs its course, allowing them to land on their feet in the private sector or even remain in law enforcement.

"They're sweeping it under the rug," said a former FBI analyst who alleges in a new federal lawsuit that a supervisory special agent licked her face and groped her at a colleague's farewell party in 2017. She ended up leaving the FBI and has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"As the premier law enforcement organization that the FBI holds itself out to be, it's very disheartening when they allow people they know are criminals to retire and pursue careers in law enforcement-related fields," said the woman, who asked to be identified in this story only by her first name, Becky.

The AP's count does not include the growing number of high-level FBI supervisors who have failed to report romantic relationships with subordinates in recent years — a pattern that has alarmed investigators with the Office of Inspector General and raised questions about bureau policy.

The recurring sexual misconduct has drawn the attention of Congress and advocacy groups, which have called for whistleblower protections for rank-and-file FBI employees and for an outside entity to review the bureau's disciplinary cases.

"They need a #MeToo moment," said U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier, a California Democrat who has been critical of the treatment of women in the male-dominated FBI.

"It's repugnant, and it underscores the fact that the FBI and many of our institutions are still good ol'-boy networks," Speier said. "It doesn't surprise me that, in terms of sexual assault and sexual harassment, they are still in the Dark Ages."

In a statement, the FBI said it "maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual harassment" and that claims against supervisors have resulted in them being removed from their positions while cases are investigated and adjudicated.

It added that severe cases can result in criminal charges and that the FBI's internal disciplinary process assesses, among other factors, "the credibility of the allegations, the severity of the conduct, and the rank and position of the individuals involved."

The AP review of court records, Office of Inspector General reports and interviews with federal law enforcement officials identified at least six allegations against senior officials, including an assistant director and special agents in charge of entire field offices, that ranged from unwanted touching and sexual advances to coercion.

None appears to have been disciplined, but another sexual misconduct allegation identified in the AP



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review of a rank-and-file agent resulted in him losing his security clearance.

The FBI, with more than 35,000 employees, keeps a notoriously tight lid on such allegations. The last time the Office of Inspector General did an extensive probe of sexual misconduct within the FBI, it tallied 343 "offenses" from fiscal years 2009 to 2012, including three instances of "videotaping undressed women without consent."

The latest claims come months after a 17th woman joined a federal lawsuit alleging systemic sexual harassment at the FBI's training academy in Quantico, Virginia. That class-action case claims male FBI instructors made "sexually charged" comments about women needing to "take their birth control to control their moods," inviting women trainees over to their homes and openly disparaging them.

In one of the new lawsuits filed Wednesday, a former FBI employee identified only as "Jane Doe" alleged a special agent in charge in 2016 retired without discipline and opened a law firm even after he "imprisoned, tortured, harassed, blackmailed, stalked and manipulated" her into having several "non-consensual sexual encounters," including one in which he forced himself on her in a car. The AP is withholding the name and location of the accused special agent to protect the woman's identity.

"It is the policy and practice of the FBI and its OIG to allow senior executives accused of sexual assault to quietly retire with full benefits without prosecution," the woman's attorney, David J. Shaffer, alleges in the lawsuit.

One such case involved Roger C. Stanton, who before his abrupt retirement served as assistant director of the Insider Threat Office, a division at Washington headquarters tasked with rooting out leakers and safeguarding national security information.

According to an Inspector General's report concluded this year and obtained by AP through a public records request, Stanton was accused of drunkenly driving a female subordinate home following an after-work happy hour. The woman told investigators that once inside a stairwell of her apartment building, Stanton wrapped his arm around her waist and "moved his hand down onto her bottom" before she was able to get away and hustle up the stairs.

After Stanton left, he called the woman 15 times on her FBI phone and sent her what investigators described as "garbled text" complaining that he could not find his vehicle. The heavily redacted report does not say when the incident happened.

Stanton disputed the woman's account and told investigators he "did not intend to do anything" and only placed his arm around her because of the "narrowness" of the stairs. But Stanton acknowledged he was "very embarrassed by this event" and "assistant directors should not be putting themselves in these situations."

Stanton retired in late 2018 after the investigation determined he sexually harassed the woman and sought an improper relationship. He did not respond to requests for comment from AP.

Earlier this year, the Inspector General found that the special agent in charge of the Albany, New York, office, James N. Hendricks, sexually harassed eight subordinates at the FBI.

Hendricks also was not named in the OIG report despite its findings. He was first identified in September by the Albany Times Union. One current and one former colleague of Hendricks confirmed his role in the case to AP.

Hendricks now writes a law enforcement blog in which he touts his FBI accolades but makes no mention of the misconduct allegations. He did not respond to requests for comment.

Becky, the former analyst, told AP she once believed FBI's "organizational values and mission aligned with how I was raised." But she was disabused of that notion after reporting to management that Charles Dick, a supervisory special agent at the FBI Training Academy at the time, sexually assaulted her at a farewell party.

Becky told AP her assailant had threatened her at least two times before. "Once while we were waiting for the director he said, 'I'm going to touch your ass. You know it's going to happen.'"

"His boorish behavior was well known," she added. "He was getting away with everything."

In a federal lawsuit filed Wednesday, Becky accused the former agent of wrapping his arm around her

chest while posing for a photograph and "reaching under her and simulating" penetration of her "with his fingers through her jeans."

Dick denied the charges and was acquitted in state court in Virginia by a judge who ruled it "wholly incredible" that Becky would "stand there and take it and not say anything," according to a transcript of the proceeding. Dick retired from the FBI months before the Inspector General followed up on Becky's internal complaint, Becky alleged in her lawsuit, adding she faced retaliation for coming forward.

"It's much easier to suffer in isolation than it is to go public," she told AP. "But if I don't report it, I'm complicit in the cultural and institutionalized cover-up of this sort of behavior."

AP reporter Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

## **Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine faces last hurdle before US decision**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine faces one final hurdle as it races to become the first shot greenlighted in the U.S.: a panel of experts who will scrutinize the company's data for any red flags.

Thursday's meeting of the Food and Drug Administration's vaccine advisory panel is likely the last step before a U.S. decision to begin shipping millions of doses of the shot, which has shown strong protection against the coronavirus.

The FDA panel functions like a science court that will pick apart the data and debate — in public and live-streamed — whether the shot is safe and effective enough to be cleared for emergency use. The non-government experts specialize in vaccine development, infectious diseases and medical statistics. The FDA is expected to follow the committee's advice, although it is not required to do so.

The FDA's decision comes as the coronavirus continues surging across much of the world, claiming more than 1.5 million lives, including more than 289,000 in the U.S.

Hanging over the meeting is a warning from U.K. officials that people with a history of serious allergic reactions shouldn't get the vaccine. Government officials there are investigating two reports of reactions that occurred when the country began mass vaccinations.

Still, a positive recommendation and speedy U.S. approval seem nearly certain after FDA scientists issued an overwhelmingly positive initial review of the vaccine earlier this week.

FDA said results from Pfizer's large, ongoing study showed the shot, which was co-developed with Germany's BioNTech, was more than 90% effective across people of different ages, races and underlying health conditions, including diabetes and obesity. No major safety issues were uncovered and common vaccine-related side effects like fever, fatigue and injection site pain were tolerable.

"The data presented in the briefing report were consistent with what we heard before and are really exciting," said Dr. William Moss, head of Johns Hopkins University's International Vaccine Access Center. "Nothing that I see would delay an emergency use authorization."

The meeting also gives regulators an opportunity to try to boost public confidence in the breakneck development process that has produced the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and a string of other upcoming shots in less than a year. The FDA has also faced weeks of verbal abuse from President Donald Trump for not rushing out a vaccine before Election Day.

"There have been a lot of questions about why it takes us so long or 'are we being rigorous enough?'" said FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn in an interview. "I'm hoping that people will see with our transparency that we have taken a very rigorous stance on this."

Hahn said the agency has already teed up the process to authorize the vaccine by filling out all the legal paperwork in advance, regardless of the ultimate decision.

On Thursday's agenda:

### **RARE ADVERSE REACTIONS**

The FDA uncovered no major safety issues in its review of Pfizer's 44,000-person study, including no allergic reactions of the type reported in the U.K. But such studies can't detect rare problems that might

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only affect a tiny slice of the general population.

FDA reviewers noted four cases of Bell's palsy that all occurred among people getting the vaccine. They concluded the cases were likely unrelated to the vaccine because they occurred at rates that would be expected without any medical intervention. But the agency did say cases of the nerve disorder should be tracked, given that other vaccines can cause the problem.

"I think we have to be upfront, without scaring people, that we don't know yet about any potential, rare, long-term adverse events," Moss said.

## EFFICACY QUESTIONS

The FDA found the vaccine highly effective across various demographic groups.

But it's unclear how well the vaccine works in people with HIV and other immune-system disorders.

The study excluded pregnant women, but experts will tease apart the data for any hints in case women get vaccinated before realizing they're pregnant.

A study of children as young as 12 is underway.

## IMPACT OF EMERGENCY AUTHORIZATION

Answering some of these questions will require keeping Pfizer's study going for many more months.

When the FDA panel met in October, experts warned against allowing trial participants who received placebos to switch and get the real vaccine immediately after it receives the FDA's emergency OK. Doing that could make it impossible to get answers to long-term questions, including how long the protection lasts.

Pfizer and BioNTech say they want to allow such participants to get the vaccine either upon request or, at the latest, after six months of follow-up.

The FDA still hasn't made clear if it will accept that approach.

"FDA is adamant that they want these trials completed," said Norman Baylor, former director of FDA's vaccine office, adding that its expert panel members "know that too."

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AP writer David Koenig contributed to this story from Dallas.

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## India's pandemic recovery plan could cost air quality goals

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — India is facing two public health emergencies simultaneously: critically polluted air and the pandemic. And Surinder Singh, a bus driver in the capital New Delhi, is trapped between them both.

In previous years, the government encouraged more people to use buses that run on cleaner fuels, like the one he drives, as an emergency air quality measure. But this year there are limits on passengers to maintain social distance. The air stings Singh's eyes and he worries about contracting the virus every time a person gets on board.

Still reeling from India's harsh lockdown that dried up his \$9 daily income for two months, the 47-year-old father of two says he has no choice but to work. Masked and armed with a bottle of hand sanitizer, he starts his journey near a private hospital that is overwhelmed by virus patients. He travels through roads packed with traffic to the city's largest and most frenetic railway station.

"I drive the bus in constant fear," he said.

Millions of others are equally desperate in India's historic recession. The economy contracted by 23.9% in the April-June quarter — its worst performance in at least 24 years — and by 7.5% in the next quarter.

The virus, meanwhile continues to spread with over 9.7 million cases, and more than 140,000 deaths. And India's underfunded hospitals, already strained by the virus, are also filling up with patients in respiratory distress from air pollution.

The pandemic has made emergency measures, such as boosting public transit, harder to implement.

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And long-term targets, including weaning power plants from dirty fossil fuels, are taking a back seat. India plans to increase coal production to reduce imports, and its recovery plan remains heavily reliant on energy sources that produce carbon emissions.

"This pandemic will define the pathway of how we move in the future (to control air pollution)," said Sunil Dahiya, an analyst at the advocacy group Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

India's environment ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

The dual threat is particularly pronounced in the Indian capital New Delhi, where the annual spike in winter pollution levels has come amid a surge in new COVID-19 cases. The city is among the most polluted in India, where an estimated 1.67 million people die annually from bad air. Dr. Akshay Budhraj, a pulmonologist at a private hospital here, said it was flooded with patients with respiratory distress who thought they had COVID-19. "Patients are very, very anxious," he said.

The Delhi pollution gets worse in the fall and winter when the burning of crop debris in neighboring states coincides with cooler temperatures that trap smoke close to the city. Over 76,000 farm fires were spotted by satellites in Punjab state -- the most since 2016 — and Delhi's air quality levels in October were worse than previous years, government data shows.

Although the city of 29 million people and 10 million cars is enveloped in smog, authorities have fewer options than before the pandemic. Last year, authorities had restricted some of the capital's private vehicles and increased public transportation. But this year, standing passengers aren't allowed in Delhi's buses, and metro coaches are only allowing about 50 people, compared to a maximum of 300 in the past. Anumita Roychowdhury, a director at the advocacy group Centre for Science and Environment, estimated that public transit is operating at a third of capacity overall.

The pandemic also has hindered efforts to clean emissions at coal-fired power plants, which account for 65% of India's electricity. The government had asked plants to install technology that would remove sulfur dioxide from their emissions by 2022. But after initial delays from problems in getting loans, the pandemic snapped supply chains and made it impossible to import the required equipment, said Ashok Kumar Khurana, who heads the Association of Power Producers.

India's power ministry has sought a deadline extension from the environment ministry while the government has undertaken measures aimed at boosting coal production. In June, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the auction of 40 new coal leases to private miners. Modi described this shift from India's state-controlled coal industry as "freeing the coal sector from decades of lockdown."

Last year, the government asked the state-run Coal India to increase the annual production from the current 661 million tons (600 million metric tons) to over a billion tons by 2024. To make the transition to domestic coal easier, it has also waived regulations that mandated a federal environment ministry review if a power plant wanted to change the type of coal being used.

Much of India's coal reserves have a high ash content that burns inefficiently and results in increased emissions and air pollution, said Roychowdhury. India is the third-highest emitter of carbon dioxide, behind China and the United States.

These are efforts to save "an industry that is already circling the drain," said Kanika Chawla, an energy policy expert at the New Delhi-based think tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water. Before the pandemic, India's power plants were running below capacity because the growth in power production capacity had outpaced demand.

With demand dipping further, Chawla said that the government had an opportunity to pivot away from fossil fuels and accelerate a "just" transition to cleaner fuels. "We were clearly at a crossroad," she said.

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Follow Aniruddha Ghosal on Twitter: @aniruddhg1

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## US antitrust siege of tech widens with lawsuits vs Facebook

By MARCY GORDON and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The giant tech companies whose services are woven into the fabric of social life are now the targets of a widening assault by government competition enforcers. Regulators filed landmark antitrust lawsuits Wednesday against Facebook, the second major government offensive this year against once seemingly untouchable tech behemoths.

The Federal Trade Commission and 48 states and districts sued the social network giant, accusing it of abusing its market power to squash smaller competitors and seeking remedies that could include a forced spinoff of Facebook's prized Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services. The company's conduct has crimped consumers' choices and harmed their data privacy, the regulators charged.

Once lionized as innovators and job creators — and largely left alone by Washington for nearly two decades — Big Tech companies have seen their political fortunes plummet. Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have come under scrutiny from Congress, federal regulators, state attorneys general and European authorities. Their once-considerable political support in Congress has eroded.

Lawmakers of both major parties are championing stronger oversight of the industry, arguing that its massive market power is out of control, crushing smaller competitors and endangering consumer privacy.

There's little likelihood the pressure will ease up. President-elect Joe Biden has said the breakup of Big Tech giants should be seriously considered.

Lawmakers and consumer advocates have accused Facebook of anticompetitive behavior, most starkly in buying up aspiring smaller rivals like Instagram and WhatsApp and by copying features introduced by competitors. Critics say such tactics squash competition and could limit viable alternatives for consumers looking, for instance, for comparable services that do less tracking for targeted advertising. Businesses, including mom and pop shops, might have to pay more for ads if they have fewer choices to reach consumers online.

The new lawsuits were announced by the FTC and New York Attorney General Letitia James, culminating separate investigations over the past year and a half.

The FTC said Facebook has engaged in a "a systematic strategy" to eliminate its competition, including by purchasing smaller up-and-coming rivals like Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014.

At a news conference, James said "it's really critically important that we block this predatory acquisition of companies and that we restore confidence to the market."

"For nearly a decade Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," said James, a Democrat. "They reduced choices for consumers. They stifled innovation, and they degraded privacy protections for millions of Americans."

Facebook called the government's claims "revisionist history" that punishes successful businesses and noted that the FTC cleared the Instagram and WhatsApp acquisitions years ago. "The government now wants a do-over, sending a chilling warning to American business that no sale is ever final," Facebook general counsel Jennifer Newstead said in a statement.

Antitrust skeptics point to newer social media services such as TikTok and Snapchat as rivals that could "overtake" older platforms like Facebook.

Facebook is the world's biggest social network with 2.7 billion users and a company with a market value of nearly \$800 billion. CEO Mark Zuckerberg is the world's fifth-richest individual and the most public face of Big Tech swagger.

James alleged that Facebook had a practice of opening its site to third-party app developers, then abruptly cutting off developers that it saw as a threat. The lawsuit — which includes 46 states, Guam and the District of Columbia — accuses Facebook of anti-competitive conduct and using its market dominance to harvest consumer data and reap a fortune in advertising revenues.

Online ads make up the bulk of the company's revenue, which reached over \$70 billion last year.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who was on the executive committee of attorneys general

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conducting the investigation, said the litigation could alter the communications landscape much the way the breakup of AT&T's local phone service monopoly did in the early 1980s.

"Our hope is to restructure the social networking marketplace in the United States, and right now there's one player," Stein told reporters.

Antitrust expert Rebecca Allensworth, a law professor at Vanderbilt University, said it is "hard to win any antitrust lawsuit and this one is not any different." But as far as antitrust cases go, she added, the government has a strong one.

"These lawsuits mark an important turning point in the battle to rein in Big Tech monopolies and to reinvigorate antitrust enforcement," said Alex Harman, competition policy advocate for Public Citizen, a nonprofit consumer advocacy group.

The Justice Department sued Google in October for abusing its dominance in online search and advertising — the government's most significant attempt to buttress competition since its historic case against Microsoft two decades ago.

That suit, announced just two weeks before Election Day, brought accusations of political motivation from some quarters. It was filed by a cabinet agency headed by an attorney general seen as a close ally of President Donald Trump, who has often publicly criticized Google.

The FTC, by contrast, is an independent regulatory agency whose five commissioners currently include three Republicans and two Democrats. Two of the three Republicans, Noah Phillips and Christine Wilson, voted against the agency's action against Facebook. And the coalition of 48 states and districts that sued Facebook is bipartisan.

Instagram and WhatsApp are among some 70 companies that Facebook has acquired over the past 15 years. But they are the ones most frequently held up by Facebook critics as properties that should be split off.

Facebook paid a mere \$1 billion for Instagram — considered one of the cleverest deals ever in the industry — bolstering the social network's business a month before its stock went public. At the time, the photo-sharing app had about 30 million users and wasn't producing any revenue. A few years later, Facebook acquired WhatsApp, an encrypted messaging service, for \$19 billion.

Zuckerberg vowed both companies would be run independently, but over the years the services have become increasingly integrated. Users are now able to link accounts and share content across the platforms. Instagram now has more than 1 billion users worldwide. Such integration could make it more difficult to break off the companies.

Sisak reported from New York. AP journalists Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, and Gary D. Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

## Tensions rise over masks as virus grips smaller US cities

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and RYAN FOLEY Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — Arguments over mask requirements and other restrictions have turned ugly in recent days as the deadly coronavirus surge across the U.S. engulfs small and medium-size cities that once seemed safely removed from the outbreak.

In Boise, Idaho, public health officials about to vote on a four-county mask mandate abruptly ended a meeting Tuesday evening because of fears for their safety amid anti-mask protests outside the building and at some of their homes.

One health board member tearfully announced she had to rush home to be with her child because of the protesters, who were seen on video banging on buckets, blaring air horns and sirens, and blasting a sound clip of gunfire from the violence-drenched movie "Scarface" outside her front door.

"I am sad. I am tired. I fear that, in my choosing to hold public office, my family has too often paid the price," said the board member, Ada County Commissioner Diana Lachiondo. "I increasingly don't recognize this place. There is an ugliness and cruelty in our national rhetoric that is reaching a fevered pitch here at home, and that should worry us all."

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Boise police said three arrest warrants were issued in connection with the demonstrations at board members' homes.

In South Dakota, the mayor of Rapid City said City Council members were harassed and threatened over a proposed citywide mask mandate that failed this week even as intensive care units across the state filled with COVID-19 patients.

The tensions are flaring amid an epic surge in U.S. deaths, hospitalizations and infections over the past several weeks.

The U.S. topped 3,000 deaths Wednesday in what is a single-day record, according to the COVID Tracking Project. That's surpassed the level seen during last spring's peak in and around New York City. New cases per day have rocketed to more than 200,000 on average, and the number of patients in the hospital with COVID-19 stood at almost 105,000 on Tuesday, another all-time high.

The grim figures led the usually stoic health director of the nation's most populated county to become emotional. Barbara Ferrer described "a devastating increase in deaths" in Los Angeles County, with the total hitting 8,075 on Wednesday.

"Over 8,000 people who were beloved members of their families are not coming back," Ferrer said, fighting back tears.

Meanwhile, protesters in Montana's Gallatin County have gathered for two consecutive weeks outside the Bozeman home of county health officer Matt Kelley to decry regulations, including a statewide mask mandate. They have carried signs reading, "We refuse to be your experiment" and "Oxygen is essential."

Last week, around 80 people lined Bozeman's Main Street to support Kelley and other health officials.

In Montana's Flathead County, where officials recorded 17 coronavirus-related deaths over 18 days and resistance to masks runs strong, the interim public health officer is resigning when her contract is up at year's end, citing a lack of support from local authorities for measures to control the scourge.

In Helena, Republicans who control both chambers of the Montana Legislature denied a request by Democratic lawmakers to require masks be worn inside the Capitol during the legislative session next month.

In Missouri, Greene County officials recorded 51 COVID-19 deaths in the first eight days of December as hospitals overflow and hundreds of health care workers are quarantined. The area's two major hospitals asked the city of Springfield, the county seat, to renew the city's mask mandate before it expires in January. The county itself does not have a mask mandate, nor does the state.

As the deaths pile up, Springfield Mortuary Services owner Brian Simmons is overseeing the embalming and cremation of COVID-19 victims as his own 48-year-old daughter battles the virus. She spent the past week hospitalized on a ventilator in one of the city's overwhelmed hospitals.

"You are just helpless," he said. "There is nothing you can do about it. We haven't seen her since she's gone in."

South Dakota has suffered through the country's worst rate of COVID-19 deaths per capita over the last week, but Gov. Kristi Noem has been ardent in her opposition to mask mandates or other aggressive efforts to slow infections.

That hands-off approach drew vocal support at Rapid City Council meetings, even as doctors warned that the only large hospital in the western half of the state is facing a crisis and patients are being flown out of the state. The meetings drew hours of testimony from people who said the dangers of the virus are overblown and that mask requirements violate their liberties.

Dr. Stephen Neabore, who works in the biggest hospital system in the region, said he has been frustrated as he tries to persuade people to wear masks. After working in New York City and studying medicine in England, he said, he sees a distinct skepticism toward government around him.

"I still see people out here that will tell me that they don't believe it's any worse than a common cold," he said.

The City Council in Palmer, Alaska, rejected a mask mandate Friday for the community of 7,300 residents about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Anchorage.

Opponents questioned the effectiveness of masks, wondered why a mandate more common in larger

communities was even being considered, and threatened to take their business online or to the neighboring city of Wasilla, which doesn't have a mask order.

Many implored the City Council not to follow the steps of "liberal" Anchorage in forcing residents to require face coverings.

"We are not Anchorage and should not be treated as if we are," Rhonda Hayhurst said in an email to the council. "I moved out here to get away from tyranny as being imposed by the Anchorage administration."

Coronavirus deaths also have been rising rapidly in rural parts of Iowa, where many people disdain masks. Among the hardest hit is O'Brien County, population 13,800, where 42 deaths have been blamed on the virus.

Ty Rushing, who covers the region as managing editor of the Northwest Iowa Review, said obituaries in his newspaper have been piling up.

"It's sad to say, but I think people are just numb to it or they are sticking their head in the sand about it," Rushing said.

In Iowa's Harrison County, 47 deaths have been attributed to the virus out of population of about 14,000. Most of the deaths have resulted from outbreaks at nursing homes in small towns like Dunlap.

Dunlap City Clerk Meredith Van Houten said almost everyone in the town of about 950 people has a connection to those who have died. She said one was her old neighbor.

"It's a horrible time right now," Van Houten said.

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Associated Press journalists from around the globe contributed to this report.

## **Hunter Biden tax probe examining Chinese business dealings**

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is investigating the finances of President-elect Joe Biden's son, including scrutinizing some of his Chinese business dealings and other transactions, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The revelations put a renewed spotlight on questions about Hunter Biden's financial history, which dogged his father's successful White House campaign and were a frequent target of President Donald Trump and his allies. They also come at a politically delicate time for the president-elect, who is weighing his choice to lead an agency that is actively investigating his son.

The tax investigation was launched in 2018, the year before the elder Biden announced his candidacy for president. Hunter Biden confirmed the existence of the investigation on Wednesday, saying he learned about it for the first time the previous day.

"I take this matter very seriously but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors," he said in a statement.

It isn't clear which entities or business dealings might be tied up in the probe, though the person with knowledge of the matter said at least some of focus was on his past work in China. Federal investigators served a round of subpoenas on Tuesday, including one for Hunter Biden, according to another person familiar with the investigation.

Investigators did not reach out until recently because of Justice Department practice against taking overt investigative actions in the run-up to an election, one of the people said. The people familiar with the investigation insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing probe.

Hunter Biden has a history of international affairs and business dealings in a number of countries. Trump and his allies have accused him of profiting off his political connections, and have also raised unsubstantiated charges of corruption related to his work in Ukraine at the time his father was vice president and leading the Obama administration's dealings with the Eastern European nation.

Late Wednesday, Trump tweeted a quote from New York Post columnist Miranda Devine claiming, "10% of voters would have changed their vote if they knew about Hunter Biden."



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Biden is actively assembling his Cabinet, but is yet to name a nominee to lead the Justice Department. That person could ultimately have oversight of the investigation into the new president's son if it is still ongoing when Biden is sworn in on Jan. 20.

The transition team said in a statement, "President-elect Biden is deeply proud of his son, who has fought through difficult challenges, including the vicious personal attacks of recent months, only to emerge stronger."

The revelations could also add weight to Trump's broad accusations that Biden was weak on China. Trump took a tough line on China during the campaign as he tried to deflect blame for the coronavirus. Biden has rejected the characterization that he was weak and said that, unlike Trump, he would rebuild global coalitions to check China's power.

A New Yorker profile on Hunter Biden last year detailed some of his business work in China, including how he accompanied his father on a 2013 trip to Beijing, where he met with a business associate. He also acknowledged having received a diamond from a Chinese energy tycoon interested in liquified natural gas projects.

He downplayed the idea that the gift could have been intended to affect his father's policy. He told the magazine he gave the diamond to an associate.

"What would they be bribing me for? My dad wasn't in office," he said.

Hunter Biden has been caught up in controversies before. While his father was vice president, Hunter joined the Naval Reserve and was discharged after testing positive for cocaine in his system, later revealing a yearslong struggle with addiction.

He also joined the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma in 2014, sparking concerns about the perceptions of a conflict of interest given the elder Biden was deeply involved in U.S. policy toward Ukraine. An investigation by the Republican-led Senate did not identify any policies that were directly affected by Hunter Biden's work.

In the weeks before the election, Trump supporters used the existence of a laptop they said was connected to Hunter Biden — and the emergence of someone who maintains he had business discussions with him — to raise questions about Joe Biden's knowledge of his son's activities in Ukraine and China. The president-elect has said he did not discuss his son's international business dealings with him and has denied having ever taken money from a foreign country.

The laptop surfaced publicly in October when The New York Post reported on emails that it said had come from Hunter Biden's laptop and that it said it received from Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer.

A third person familiar with the matter said the tax investigation does not have anything to do with the laptop.

In a CNN interview last week, President-elect Biden addressed the business dealings of his son Hunter and his brothers, pledging that they would avoid any perceived conflicts of interest during his time in office.

"My son, my family will not be involved in any business, any enterprise that is in conflict with or appears to be in conflict, where there's appropriate distance from the presidency and government," Biden said.

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Lemire reported from Wilmington, Del. Associated Press writer Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

## UN chief warns 'vaccine nationalism' is moving at full speed

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Wednesday that "vaccine nationalism" is moving "at full speed," leaving poor people around the globe watching preparations for inoculations against the coronavirus in some rich nations and wondering if and when they will be vaccinated.

The U.N. chief reiterated his call for vaccines to be treated as "a global public good," available to everyone, everywhere on the planet, especially in Africa. And he appealed for \$4.2 billion in the next two months for the World Health Organization's COVAX program, an ambitious project to buy and deliver

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coronavirus vaccines for the world's poorest people.

After a virtual U.N. meeting with the African Union, Guterres said at news conference that financing COVAX is the only way to guarantee vaccines will be available in Africa and other developing areas.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a high-level U.N. General Assembly meeting last week on COVID-19 that "the light at the end of the tunnel is growing steadily brighter" to end the pandemic. But, he added, vaccines "must be shared equally as global public goods, not as private commodities that widen inequalities and become yet another reason some people are left behind."

Tedros said WHO's cash-strapped ACT-Accelerator program to quickly develop and distribute vaccines fairly, which includes the COVAX project, "is in danger of becoming no more than a noble gesture" without major new funding. COVAX will require an additional \$23.9 billion for 2021, he said, stressing that the \$28 billion total is less than one-half of 1 percent of the \$11 trillion in stimulus packages announced so far by the Group of 20, the world's richest countries..

The United Kingdom and Russia have already started vaccinating people against the coronavirus. In the United States, the Pfizer vaccine could get a green light for emergency use in the coming days and the Moderna vaccine in the coming weeks. Canada announced approval of the Pfizer vaccine Wednesday,

Guterres said Africa's 54 nations have registered more than 2.2 million cases of coronavirus infections and over 53,000 deaths from COVID-19.

"There is real hope that vaccines — in combination with other public health measures — will help to overcome the pandemic," he said.

But to end it, he added, vaccines must be available to all and "most African countries lack the financing to adequately respond to the crisis, due in part to declining demand and prices of their commodity exports."

The director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, John Nkengasong, said in late November that vaccinations against the coronavirus on the continent might not start until the second quarter of next year. "I have seen how Africa is neglected when drugs are available" in the past, he told reporters.

Guterres said Wednesday when asked about Nkengasong's assessment: "It is my hope that we'll be able to do it before the second quarter, but it is true that what we're seeing today is an enormous effort by several countries in order to ensure vaccines for their own populations."

"It's true we are seeing vaccination nationalism moving at full speed," the U.N. chief said.

"If Africa is not properly supported, we will not be able to fight the pandemic," he said. "There are several vaccines in the pipeline for COVAX, and it is perfectly possible to deliver if the financing is guaranteed."

## SpaceX launches Starship on highest test flight, crash-lands

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — SpaceX launched its shiny, bullet-shaped, straight-out-of-science fiction Starship several miles into the air from a remote corner of Texas on Wednesday, but the 6 1/2-minute test flight ended in an explosive fireball at touchdown.

It was the highest and most elaborate flight yet for the rocketship that Elon Musk says could carry people to Mars in as little as six years. Despite the catastrophic finale, he was thrilled.

"Mars, here we come!!" he tweeted.

This latest prototype — the first one equipped with a nose cone, body flaps and three engines — was shooting for an altitude of up to eight miles (12.5 kilometers). That's almost 100 times higher than previous hops and skimming the stratosphere.

Starship seemed to hit the mark or at least come close. There was no immediate word from SpaceX on how high it went.

The full-scale, stainless steel model — 160 feet (50 meters) tall and 30 feet (9 meters) in diameter — soared out over the Gulf of Mexico. After about five minutes, it flipped sideways as planned and descended in a free-fall back to the southeastern tip of Texas near the Mexican border. The Raptor engines reignited for braking and the rocket tilted back upright. When it touched down, however, the rocketship became

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engulfed in flames and ruptured, parts scattering.

The entire flight — as dramatic and flashy as it gets, even by SpaceX standards — lasted six minutes and 42 seconds. SpaceX broadcast the sunset demo live on its website; repeated delays over the past week and a last-second engine abort Tuesday heightened the excitement among space fans.

Musk called it a “successful ascent” and said the body flaps precisely guided the rocket to the landing point. The fuel tank pressure was low, however, when the engines reignited for touchdown, which caused Starship to come down too fast.

“But we got all the data we needed!” he tweeted.

Musk had kept expectations low, cautioning earlier this week there was “probably” 1-in-3 chance of complete success.

Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, who founded the Blue Origin rocket company, offered swift congratulations.

“Anybody who knows how hard this stuff is is impressed by today’s Starship test.”

Two lower, shorter SpaceX test flights earlier this year from Boca Chica, Texas — a quiet coastal village before SpaceX moved in — used more rudimentary versions of Starship. Essentially cylindrical cans and single Raptor engines, these early vehicles reached altitudes of 490 feet (150 meters). An even earlier model, the short and squat Starhopper, made a tiny tethered hop in 2019, followed by two increasingly higher climbs.

Wednesday’s test followed SpaceX’s latest space station supply run for NASA by three days, and the private company’s second astronaut flight by less than a month from Florida’s Kennedy Space Center.

Starship is actually the upper stage of Musk’s envisioned moon- and Mars-ships. It will launch atop a mega booster still in development known as the Super Heavy. The entire vehicle will tower 394 feet (120 meters) — 31 feet (9.4 meters) taller than NASA’s Saturn V rocket that hurled men to the moon a half-century ago.

SpaceX intends to use Starship to put massive satellites into orbit around Earth, besides delivering people and cargo to the moon and Mars. Earlier this year, SpaceX was one of three prime contractors chosen by NASA to develop lunar landers capable of getting astronauts on the moon by 2024.

Right before Wednesday’s launch, NASA announced the 18 U.S. astronauts who will train for the Artemis moon-landing program.

While accepting an award in Berlin last week, Musk said he’s “highly confident” of a human flight to Mars in six years — “if we get lucky, maybe four years.” But Musk is the first to admit his timelines can be overly optimistic.

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## UK-EU to resume Brexit trade talks but say large gaps remain

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In the end, not even dinner of scallops and steamed turbot could bring the leaders of the European Union and Britain any closer together than months of talks by negotiators seeking to cobble together a trade deal in the wake of their Brexit divorce.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave the two sides four more days, until Sunday, to end four years of diplomatic heartburn and salvage the unlikeliest of trade deals after the U.K. voted to leave the EU in 2016. Otherwise, they face a tumultuous no-deal split at the end of the month, threatening hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in losses.

Even after two lengthy phone calls and a three-hour dinner in less than a week, there was still far too much which was unpalatable.

“We understand each other’s positions. They remain far apart,” von der Leyen said.

Johnson flew to Brussels in hopes of injecting new momentum into talks that are stuck on issues includ-

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ing fishing rights and competition rules.

But there was no breakthrough at the three-hour meeting, which Downing St. described as “frank.” Von der Leyen said it was “lively and interesting.” But a whiff of progress anywhere? None.

Britain left the EU on Jan. 31 but remains in its economic structures until the end of the year. That means a serious economic rupture on Jan. 1 that could be chaotic if there is no trade agreement.

The two leaders had hoped to inject political momentum into trade talks that have become hopelessly deadlocked on fishing and other key aspects of the future relationship. But Britain and the EU gave ominously opposing views of the main sticking points — and each insisted the other must move to reach agreement.

Johnson told lawmakers in the House of Commons that the bloc’s demands that the U.K. continue to adhere to its standards or face retaliation were not “terms that any prime minister of this country should accept.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel 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 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.

When Johnson was crossing over the English Channel to Brussels, down below the impact of Brexit was already visible with extra long tailbacks in France’s Calais where truckers were trying to meet the demands of U.K. companies which want to lay in extra stock ahead of potential disruption on Jan. 1.

“For about the last three weeks we’ve seen an increase in the flow of traffic toward Great Britain due to stockpiling. The platforms, whether it’s the port and the (Euro)tunnel, don’t have capacity to absorb this increase in traffic,” said Sebastien Rivera, Secretary General of France’s National Federation of Road Transport.

“Right now, it takes (truckers) easily three or four more hours to cross the English Channel. So it is easily 240 or 300 euros of financial costs to the company, that’s for nothing more than the additional time it takes,” Rivera told the Associated Press.

Failure to secure a trade deal would cause much greater disruption, bringing 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.

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 trying to bind Britain to the bloc’s rules indefinitely.

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Associated Press writer Raf Casert reported this story in Brussels and AP writer Jill Lawless reported from London. AP writers Geir Moulson in Berlin and Jeff Schaeffer in Calais, France, contributed to this report.

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## US govt, states sue Facebook for 'predatory' conduct

By MARCY GORDON and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government and 48 states and districts sued Facebook Wednesday, accusing it of abusing its market power in social networking to crush smaller competitors and seeking remedies that could include a forced spinoff of the social network's Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services.

The landmark antitrust lawsuits, announced by the Federal Trade Commission and New York Attorney General Letitia James, mark the second major government offensive this year against seemingly untouchable tech behemoths. The Justice Department sued Google in October for abusing its dominance in online search and advertising — the government's most significant attempt to buttress competition since its historic case against Microsoft two decades ago. Amazon and Apple also have been under investigation in Congress and by federal authorities for alleged anticompetitive conduct.

James noted at a press conference that "it's really critically important that we block this predatory acquisition of companies and that we restore confidence to the market."

The FTC said Facebook has engaged in a "a systematic strategy" to eliminate its competition, including by purchasing smaller up-and-coming rivals like Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014. James echoed that in her press conference, saying Facebook "used its monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users."

The FTC fined Facebook \$5 billion in 2019 for privacy violations and instituted new oversight and restrictions on its business. The fine was the largest the agency has ever levied on a tech company, although it had no visible impact on Facebook's business.

Facebook called the government actions "revisionist history" that punishes successful businesses and noted that the FTC cleared the Instagram and WhatsApp acquisitions years ago. "The government now wants a do-over, sending a chilling warning to American business that no sale is ever final," Facebook general counsel Jennifer Newstead said in a statement that echoed the company's response to a recent congressional antitrust probe.

Facebook is the world's biggest social network with 2.7 billion users and a company with a market value of nearly \$800 billion whose CEO Mark Zuckerberg is the world's fifth-richest individual and the most public face of Big Tech swagger.

James alleged Facebook had a practice of opening its site to third-party app developers, then abruptly cutting off developers that it saw as a threat. The lawsuit — which includes 46 states, Guam and the District of Columbia — accuses Facebook of anti-competitive conduct and using its market dominance to harvest consumer data and reap a fortune in advertising revenues.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who was on the executive committee of attorneys general conducting the investigation, said the litigation has the potential to alter the communications landscape the way the breakup of AT&T's local phone service monopoly in the early 1980s did.

"Our hope is to restructure the social networking marketplace in the United States, and right now there's one player," Stein told reporters. James said the coalition worked collaboratively with the FTC but noted the attorneys general conducted their investigation separately.

Antitrust expert Rebecca Allensworth, a law professor at Vanderbilt University, said it is "hard to win any antitrust lawsuit and this one is not any different." But as far as antitrust cases go, she added, the government has a strong one.

The Justice Department's suit against Google, announced just two weeks before Election Day, brought accusations of political motivation from some quarters. It was filed by a cabinet agency headed by an attorney general seen as a close ally of President Donald Trump, who has often publicly criticized Google.

The FTC, by contrast, is an independent regulatory agency whose five commissioners currently include three Republicans and two Democrats.

President-elect Joe Biden has said the breakup of Big Tech giants should be seriously considered. He

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has singled out Facebook's Zuckerberg for scorn, calling him "a real problem."

Instagram and WhatsApp are among some 70 companies that Facebook has acquired over the past 15 years. But they are the ones most frequently held up by Facebook critics as properties that should be split off.

Facebook paid \$1 billion for Instagram, bolstering the social network's business a month before its stock went public. At the time, the photo-sharing app had about 30 million users and wasn't producing any revenue. A few years later, Facebook acquired WhatsApp, an encrypted messaging service, for \$19 billion.

Zuckerberg vowed both companies would be run independently, but over the years the services have become increasingly integrated. Users are now able to link accounts and share content across the platforms. Instagram now has more than 1 billion users worldwide. Such integration could make it more difficult to break off the companies.

NetChoice, a Washington trade association that includes Facebook as a member, quickly panned the lawsuits. The case for antitrust enforcement against Facebook "has never been weaker," NetChoice vice president Carl Szabo said in a statement, pointing to newer social services such as TikTok and Snapchat as rivals that could "overtake" older platforms.

"These lawsuits mark an important turning point in the battle to rein in Big Tech monopolies and to reinvigorate antitrust enforcement," said Alex Harman, competition policy advocate for Public Citizen, a nonprofit consumer advocacy group.

Sisak reported from New York. AP journalists Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, and Gary D. Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

## Lawmakers act to avert shutdown, buying time for COVID talks

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Still spinning their wheels on COVID-19 relief, lawmakers grabbed a one-week government funding extension on Wednesday that buys time for more talks — though there is considerable disagreement over who is supposed to be taking the lead from there.

Amid the uncertainty, the House easily passed a one-week government-wide funding bill that sets a new Dec. 18 deadline for Congress to wrap up both the COVID-19 relief measure and a \$1.4 trillion catchall spending bill that is also overdue. The 343-67 vote sent the one-week bill to the Senate, where it's expected to easily pass before a deadline of midnight Friday to avert a partial government shutdown.

The measure would give lawmakers more time to sort through the hot mess they have created for themselves after months of futile negotiations and posturing and recent rounds of flip-flopping.

Top GOP leaders said the right people to handle endgame negotiations are the top four leaders of Congress and the Trump administration, focused on a proposal by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to eliminate a Democratic demand for a \$160 billion or so aid package for state and local governments.

Top Democrats, meanwhile, are placing their bets on a bipartisan group of senators who are trying to iron out a \$908 billion package. The bipartisan group is getting no encouragement from McConnell, but members are claiming progress on perhaps the most contentious item, a demand by the Kentucky Republican to award businesses and other organizations protections against COVID-related lawsuits.

"We're trying to get a bipartisan compromise along the lines of the Gang of Eight framework," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "We need Leader McConnell to stop sabotaging the talks and work with this gang of eight, which is the most hopeful and the only bipartisan group together."

Senate Minority Whip John Thune, R-S.D., however, said the only way to resolve the negotiations is for McConnell, Pelosi and the White House to take charge.

"The bipartisan group provided a good foundation kind of a place to start from. And hopefully, the negotiations are real negotiations on what can ultimately pass the House, the Senate, and get signed," Thune said. "We need to get under way."

The Trump administration is back in the middle of the negotiations, offering a \$916 billion package on

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Tuesday that would send a \$600 direct payment to most Americans but eliminate a \$300-per-week employment benefit favored by the bipartisan group of Senate negotiators.

The offer arrived Tuesday came with the endorsement of the top House Republican and apparent backing from McConnell, who had previously favored a \$519 billion GOP plan that has already failed twice. But Democrats immediately blasted the plan over the administration's refusal to back the partial restoration, to \$300 per week, of bonus pandemic jobless benefits that lapsed in August.

"I think everybody is encouraged that there is a real framework here that everybody agrees on and there's a few issues that are still the sticking points," Treasury Secretary Steven Muchin told reporters Wednesday. "The two biggest issues are the money for state and local governments and liability protections. If we can't resolve those, we can move forward on everything else. I don't want to tell a bunch of small businesses that they can't get (paycheck protection) loans."

President-elect Joe Biden is pressing for as much pandemic relief as possible, though he's not directly involved in the talks. McConnell says Congress will not adjourn without providing the long-overdue COVID-19 relief. The pressure to deliver is intense — all sides say failure isn't an option.

The bipartisan negotiating 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 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 plan assembled by McConnell but far smaller than a wish list assembled by House Democrats.

Details leaked Wednesday on less controversial elements of their plan, including a four-month extension of jobless benefits set to expire at the end of the month, \$300 billion for "paycheck protection" subsidies for struggling businesses, funding for vaccines and testing, and a host of smaller items like aid to transit systems, the Postal Service and health care providers.

Negotiations continue on a hotly contested liability shield from COVID-related lawsuits brought against businesses, universities and others that have reopened during the pandemic. The liability issue is regarded as a key to an eventual agreement that would pair the business relief with a \$160 billion state and local aid package sought by Democrats.

"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.

But there's clear momentum for another round of payments going out to taxpayers despite reservations among rank-and-file Republicans concerned about corraling costs.

A potential COVID agreement would catch a ride on a separate \$1.4 trillion government-wide spending bill that has its own set of problems, including fights over protections for the sage grouse, the Census, and accounting maneuvers being employed by lawmakers to squeeze \$12 billion more into the legislation.

"We're still looking for a way forward," McConnell said Wednesday morning.

Pelosi said she's encouraged about the reports she's hearing from the bipartisan talks.

"I think that we're close," Pelosi said. "That's what they tell me."

## First woman, next man on moon will come from these NASA 18

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA has named the 18 astronauts — half of them women — who will train for its Artemis moon-landing program.

The first woman and next man on the moon will come from this elite group.

Vice President Mike Pence introduced the astronauts Wednesday at the close of his final meeting as chairman of the National Space Council. The announcement was made at Florida's Kennedy Space Center, beneath one of only three remaining Saturn V moon rockets from the 1960s and 1970s Apollo program.

Pence noted that the last of the 12 men to walk on the moon, the late Apollo 17 commander Gene Cernan, wanted nothing more than to remove "last" from his title. Cernan's final lunar footsteps were on Dec. 14, 1972.

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"He spent the rest of his natural life advocating for America to go back to the moon, and we are going to honor Gene Cernan's memory," Pence told the small crowd, seated several feet apart from one another.

Five of the astronauts — the only ones in attendance — walked onto the stage, waving and wearing masks.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine stressed there would be more astronauts joining the group. NASA has 47 active astronauts.

The space agency is aiming for a moon landing by 2024, although the chances of that happening are growing increasingly dim. The upcoming change in administration also adds uncertainty.

Half of the NASA astronauts have spaceflight experience. Two are at the International Space Station right now: Kate Rubins and Victor Glover.

The two astronauts who performed the world's first all-female spacewalk last year made the cut: Christina Koch and Jessica Meir.

It's a fairly young group, with most in their 30s or 40s. The oldest is 55, the youngest 32. Only two — Joe Acaba and Stephanie Wilson — flew on NASA's old space shuttles.

"The history is awesome, but we're here to look toward the future," Acaba told reporters after the announcement.

The other experienced members on the list include Kjell Lindgren, Anne McClain and Scott Tingle, all former space station residents.

"We are dreamers, but even more so, we're doers," McClain said.

She wants children from all backgrounds to take note of the diverse lunar team: "The doors are open, come on after us."

Among those yet to rocket into space: Kayla Barron, Raja Chari, Matthew Dominick, Woody Hoburg, Jonny Kim, Nicole Mann, Jasmin Moghbeli, Frank Rubio and Jessica Watkins.

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AP science writer Christina Larson contributed from Washington.

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

## Despite Trump's venting and threats, Biden's win is sealed

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's plenty of noise but no cause for confusion as President Donald Trump vents about how the election turned out and vows to subvert it even still.

This truth is self-evident: Joe Biden is on track to become president Jan. 20. The machinery of government and democracy is moving inexorably toward that end despite Trump's attempts to undermine the voters' will.

Trump on Wednesday demanded an "OVERTURN" of the outcome in a collection of tweets arguing he could only have lost the election if it were "FIXED." He attempted to support his case by saying odds-makers on election night heavily favored his reelection, "the so-called 'bookies,'" as if a gambler's bet mattered. It doesn't.

Americans who don't wish to get caught up in the nitty gritty of Trump's attempts to undermine the election can take their cue from one of the many judges who have dismissed the complaints of his team or his allies that the voting or counting was corrupt.

"This ship has sailed," said U.S. District Judge Linda Parker in throwing out a lawsuit challenging Biden's win in Michigan this week.

Not only has the ship sailed but it has reached safe harbor and dropped anchor.

Biden's victory was essentially locked in Tuesday by the so-called safe harbor deadline set by federal law for states to finish their certifications and resolve legal disputes. It's an insurance policy to guard against Congress trying to manipulate the electoral votes that will be cast next week and sent to the



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Capitol for counting on Jan. 6.

These steps — the deadline, the convening of the Electoral College in state capitals, Congress' count in early January — are rituals that are routinely ignored by the public at large. They became less ignorable when Trump began exploring any and all avenues to stay in power.

But the election is over and has been for weeks. Here's why:

—Biden won a decisive majority of electoral votes in states that certified their results.

—The Democrat is set to finish with even more electoral votes, 306, a total Trump called a landslide when he won the same in 2016.

—No systemic fraud or even consequential error has been established in an election that state monitors and courts have repeatedly found was run fairly. More than that, the election played out with striking efficiency given that it was held in the middle of a deadly pandemic.

—Trump's attempts to browbeat Republican officials in Georgia and Michigan into upending Biden's victory in those states came to nothing.

—Trump's legal arguments in favor of overturning the result have been shredded by judges across the country, including by some he appointed and hoped would therefore side with him.

Trump reshaped much of the federal bench with his own nominees during his term and placed three justices on the Supreme Court. None of that has helped him reverse his defeat by Biden.

Altogether, Trump's campaign or his allies have seen more than 35 of their court cases fail. Trump has won one, concerning deadlines for proof of identification for certain absentee ballots and mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania, and it did not change the outcome.

This week the Supreme Court turned aside a bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of Biden's victory. Trump now says his campaign will join a case in the Supreme Court led by the Texas attorney general, who bases the case on false and unsupported allegations that have been discredited in other courts.

—Even as Trump cries foul over Biden naming his Cabinet and other senior personnel, the Trump administration is working with the incoming Biden administration on the transition. Republican lawmakers are adjusting to the transfer of power while still declining for the most part to acknowledge Biden's victory out loud.

## Extraordinary walk off highlights racism in European soccer

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

Players have taken a knee, unfurled slogans and demanded tougher action only to find European soccer remains infested with racism.

But on Tuesday, at the end of a year of striking gestures against racial injustice and discrimination worldwide, elite players of the Champions League took the extraordinary step of refusing to continue playing in Paris after a match official was accused of using a racist slur.

In a show of solidarity, the players from Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir left the field and didn't return until Wednesday night, when play resumed with a new referee team.

Before the match restarted Wednesday, the players took a knee in unison as the Champions League anthem played, while some — including PSG star Neymar — raised a fist. PSG won the game 5-1, with Neymar scoring three of his team's goals.

"The walk off by both Basaksehir and PSG together lays down a marker in Europe," Piara Powar, executive director of the Football Against Racism in Europe anti-discrimination 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 Tuesday night's game when referee Sebastian Coltescu of Romania was accused of using a racial term to identify Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo, who is Black.

An enraged Webo demanded an explanation for the slur, repeating at least six times: "Why you say Negro?"

"You are racist," Basaksehir coach Okan Buruk declared to Coltescu. "Why when you mention a Black

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guy, you have to say 'This Black guy?'" added Basaksehir substitute Demba Ba, who is Black.

The exchanges were broadcast live around the world from soccer's biggest club competition at PSG's Parc des Princes. While racism at soccer games has typically come from the stands, the match Tuesday was played without fans because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lack of a crowd made the comments clear to hear.

Dismissing any attempts to excuse Coltescu's language, French Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu said Wednesday that "pointing at someone by their (skin) color is unacceptable and inexcusable" and praised the players.

"It's unprecedented and sends a strong signal also to soccer institutions," she said.

Powar, of the anti-discrimination FARE network, said there was no question the comment was racist.

"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," said Powar, whose group helps UEFA, the Champions League competition organizer, prosecute discriminatory acts like Tuesday's incident.

"There is no ambiguity. This incident shows the need for much better training of match officials. Unintentional racism is still racism," Powar said.

Sports teams in the United States have also made their voices heard during a year of national reckoning against racial injustice in America. A Milwaukee Bucks boycott of their NBA playoff game this summer against the Orlando Magic to protest the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man in their home state, cascaded into a wave of similar protests across the American sports scene.

The NBA postponed that game and two others in the playoff series, while three WNBA, five Major League Soccer and three Major League Baseball games were called off as athletes acted in solidarity with the Bucks' players.

Meanwhile, the persistent racism infesting European soccer was on show again Wednesday in England, where a lower-league match was played with limited fans.

In the fourth division, Exeter City reported a suspected discriminatory comment by a fan toward a visiting player from Northampton Town. The referee spoke to the players and managers, and the game continued.

Earlier this year in Portugal, Porto striker Moussa Marega tried to walk off the field in February 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."

Players might now feel more emboldened to leave the field after seeing the largely positive reaction to what happened Tuesday in Paris.

"What they've done was very good from both sides to support those who were in the incident," said Japhet Tanganga, a defender with Premier League club Tottenham, who is Black.

But the dismissive response from Jorge Jesus, the coach of Portuguese club Benfica, reinforced why activists face ongoing challenges trying to change attitudes.

"This is very fashionable today, this racism thing," he said. "Anything that can be said about a Black man is always a sign of racism. The same thing can be said about a white man, but then it's no longer a sign of racism. There is this wave being implanted in the world."

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/Soccer> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

**AP-NORC poll: Only half in US want shots as vaccine nears**

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By LAURAN NEERGAARD and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As states frantically prepare to begin months of vaccinations that could end the pandemic, a new poll finds only about half of Americans are ready to roll up their sleeves when their turn comes.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows about a quarter of U.S. adults aren't sure if they want to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. Roughly another quarter say they won't.

Many on the fence have safety concerns and want to watch how the initial rollout fares — skepticism that could hinder the campaign against the scourge that has killed nearly 290,000 Americans. Experts estimate at least 70% of the U.S. population needs to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, or the point at which enough people are protected that the virus can be held in check.

"Trepidation is a good word. I have a little bit of trepidation towards it," said Kevin Buck, a 53-year-old former Marine from Eureka, California.

Buck said he and his family will probably get vaccinated eventually, if initial shots go well.

"It seems like a little rushed, but I know there was absolutely a reason to rush it," he said of the vaccine, which was developed with remarkable speed, less than a year after the virus was identified. "I think a lot of people are not sure what to believe, and I'm one of them."

Amid a frightening surge in COVID-19 that promises a bleak winter across the country, the challenge for health authorities is to figure out what it will take to make people trust the shots that Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious-disease expert, calls the light at the end of the tunnel.

"If Dr. Fauci says it's good, I will do it," said Mary Lang, 71, of Fremont, California. She added: "Hopefully if enough of us get the vaccine, we can make this virus go away."

Early data suggests the two U.S. frontrunners -- one vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech and another by Moderna and the National Institutes of Health -- offer strong protection. The Food and Drug Administration is poring over study results to be sure the shots are safe before deciding in the coming days whether to allow mass vaccinations, as Britain began doing with Pfizer's shots on Tuesday.

Despite the hopeful news, feelings haven't changed much from an AP-NORC poll in May, before it was clear a vaccine would pan out.

In the survey of 1,117 American adults conducted Dec. 3-7, about 3 in 10 said they are very or extremely confident that the first available vaccines will have been properly tested for safety and effectiveness. About an equal number said they are not confident. The rest fell somewhere in the middle.

Experts have stressed that no corners were cut during development of the vaccine, attributing the speedy work to billions in government funding and more than a decade of behind-the-scenes research.

Among those who don't want to get vaccinated, about 3 in 10 said they aren't concerned about getting seriously ill from the coronavirus, and around a quarter said the outbreak isn't as serious as some people say.

About 7 in 10 of those who said they won't get vaccinated are concerned about side effects. Pfizer and Moderna say testing has uncovered no serious ones so far. As with many vaccines, recipients may experience fever, fatigue or sore arms from the injection, signs the immune system is revving up.

But other risks might not crop up until vaccines are more widely used. British health authorities are examining two possible allergic reactions on the first day the country began mass vaccinations with the Pfizer shot.

Among Americans who won't get vaccinated, the poll found 43% are concerned the vaccine itself could infect them — something that's scientifically impossible, since the shots don't contain any virus.

Protecting their family, their community and their own health are chief drivers for people who want the vaccine. Roughly three-quarters said life won't go back to normal until enough of the country is vaccinated.

"Even if it helps a little bit, I'd take it," said Ralph Martinez, 67, who manages a grocery store in Dallas. "I honestly think they wouldn't put something out there that would hurt us."

Over the summer, about a third of Martinez's employees were out with COVID-19. He wears a mask daily but worries about the constant public contact and is concerned that his 87-year-old mother is similarly exposed running her business.

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COVID-19 has killed or hospitalized Black, Hispanic and Native Americans at far higher rates than white Americans. Yet 53% of white Americans said they will get vaccinated, compared with 24% of Black Americans and 34% of Hispanics like Martinez.

Because of insufficient sample size, the survey could not analyze results among Native Americans or other racial and ethnic groups that make up a smaller proportion of the U.S. population.

Horace Carpenter of Davenport, Florida, knows that as a Black man at age 86, he is vulnerable. "I'd like to see it come out first," he said of the vaccine. But he said he, too, plans to follow Fauci's advice.

Given the nation's long history of racial health care disparities and research abuses against Black people, Carpenter isn't surprised that minority communities are more hesitant about the new vaccines.

"There is such racial inequality in our society," he said. "There's bound to be some hiccups."

Health experts say it is not surprising that people have doubts because it will take time for the vaccines' study results to become widely known.

"Sometimes you have to ask people more than once," said John Grabenstein of the Immunization Action Coalition, a retired Army colonel who directed the Defense Department's immunization program. He said many eventually will decide it's "far, far better to take this vaccine than run the risk of coronavirus infection."

Adding to the challenge are political divisions that have hamstrung public health efforts to curtail the outbreak. The poll found 6 in 10 Democrats said they will get vaccinated compared with 4 in 10 Republicans; about a third of Republicans said they won't.

Only about 1 in 5 Americans are very or extremely confident that vaccines will be safely and quickly distributed, or fairly distributed, though majorities are at least somewhat confident.

Nancy Nolan, 64, teaches English as a second language at a New Jersey community college and has seen the difficulty her students face in getting coronavirus testing and care. "I don't think it'll be fairly distributed," she said. "I hope I'm wrong."

She raised concerns, too, over the speed with which the vaccine was developed: "If I rush, I could have a car accident, I could make a mistake."

Health workers and nursing home residents are set to be first in line for the scarce initial doses. Plans call for other essential workers and people over 65 or at increased risk because of other health problems to follow, before enough vaccine arrives for everyone, probably in the spring.

The poll found majorities of Americans agree with that priority list. And 59% think vaccinating teachers should be a high priority, too. Most also agree with higher priority for hard-hit communities of color and people in crowded living conditions such as homeless shelters and college dorms.

"Once those individuals are cared for, I wouldn't hesitate to get the vaccine if it was available for me," said Richard Martinez, 35, a psychologist in Austin, Texas, who nonetheless understands some of the public skepticism.

"I think it'd be naïve to think that resources wouldn't get someone to the front of the line," he said.

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AP journalists Marion Renault, Federica Narancio and Kathy Young contributed to this report.

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The AP-NORC poll using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Online: AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>.

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## Trump looks past Supreme Court loss to new election lawsuit

By MARK SHERMAN and MARC LEVY Associated Press



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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday asked the Supreme Court to let him join an improbable lawsuit challenging election results in Pennsylvania and other states that he lost, a day after the justices rejected a last-gasp bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

The high court has asked for responses by Thursday. Out of the roughly 50 lawsuits filed around the country contesting the Nov. 3 vote, Trump has lost more than 35 and the others are pending, according to an Associated Press tally.

The suit from the Texas attorney general, Republican Ken Paxton, demands that the 62 total Electoral College votes in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin be invalidated. That's enough, if set aside, to swing the election to Trump. Paxton's suit repeats a litany of false, disproven and unsupported allegations about mail-in ballots and voting in the four battlegrounds.

Repeating many of those claims, Trump lawyer John Eastman wrote, "The fact that nearly half of the country believes the election was stolen should come as no surprise." Biden won by more than 7 million votes and has a 306-232 electoral vote edge.

"We will be INTERVENING in the Texas (plus many other states) case," Trump said hours before the high court filing. "This is the big one. Our Country needs a victory!"

Legal experts dismissed Paxton's filing as the latest and perhaps longest legal shot since Election Day, and officials in the four states sharply criticized Paxton. "I feel sorry for Texans that their tax dollars are being wasted on such a genuinely embarrassing lawsuit," Wisconsin's attorney general, Josh Kaul, said.

Seventeen states Trump won last month joined Texas in urging the court to take on the lawsuit less than a week before presidential electors gather in state capitals to formally choose Biden as the next president.

They are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and West Virginia.

The Supreme Court, without comment Tuesday, refused to call into question the certification process in Pennsylvania. Gov. Tom Wolf, D-Pa., already has certified Biden's victory and the state's 20 electors are to meet on Dec. 14 to cast their votes for the former vice president.

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.

Shortly before tweeting about joining Paxton's case, Trump distanced himself from the Pennsylvania challenge, saying it wasn't his. "The case everyone has been waiting for is the State's case with Texas and numerous others joining," he said.

The court's decision not to intervene in Pennsylvania came in a suit led by Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Pa., and GOP congressional candidate and Trump favorite Sean Parnell, who lost to Rep. Conor Lamb, D-Pa.

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

In court filings, lawyers for Pennsylvania and Wolf, said the suit's claims were "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.

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

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

In their underlying suit, 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.

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 the 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.

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Associated Press writer Nomaan Merchant in Houston contributed to this report.

## Michigan's top court spikes election lawsuit by Trump allies

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The Michigan Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected an unprecedented request to take control of ballots and ballot boxes from the Nov. 3 election and appoint someone to investigate claims of vote-counting fraud in Detroit.

The court said it is "not persuaded that it can or should grant the requested relief." The order was 4-3, with a Republican-nominated justice, Elizabeth Clement, joining three Democrats in throwing out the lawsuit.

The case was filed days after the Board of State Canvassers certified Joe Biden's 154,000-vote Michigan victory over President Donald Trump. It was another lawsuit aimed at changing the outcome of the election.

There is no evidence of widespread election fraud anywhere in the U.S., experts say.

"I consider it imprudent to hear this matter, a conclusion only amplified by my view that it is irresponsible to continue holding out the possibility of a judicial solution to a political dispute that needs to be resolved with finality," Clement said.

Three dissenting conservative justices said they were in favor of at least hearing arguments.

"The case before the court is no small matter. Election disputes pose a unique test of a representative democracy's ability to reflect the will of the people when it matters most," Justice David Viviano said. "But it is a test our country has survived, one way or another, since its inception. ... By closing the courthouse door on these petitioners, the court today denies them any ability to have their claims fully considered by the judiciary."

The lawsuit by Trump allies took aim at a number of issues, including the mailing of absentee ballot applications by the Democratic secretary of state months ago.

"The time to challenge this scheme may have been before the applications were mailed out — or at least before the absentee ballots were cast — rather than waiting to see the election outcome and then challenging it if unpalatable," Clement said.

Chief Justice Bridget McCormack and justices Megan Cavanagh and Richard Bernstein joined Clement in dismissing the case but didn't offer separate remarks.

Follow Ed White at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>

## VIRUS TODAY: Vaccine poll results, vocal anti-mask sentiment

By The Associated Press undefined

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

### THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— A new poll captures the mood of Americans about their willingness to get the COVID-19 vaccine, and the results show many people are skeptical. About one-fourth of U.S. adults say they won't get the shots, and another quarter are unsure.

— Even as the death toll soars, mask resistance remains high - and very vocal - in communities around the nation. Protesters are not shy about showing up at the homes of county officials as they consider mask mandates and virus-related business restrictions.

— The ongoing negotiations in Congress over a relief package have advanced the idea of \$600 in direct payments to many Americans.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging 206,000 new confirmed infections each day over the past week. Deaths are averaging more than 2,200 a day, and a record 104,000 people were hospitalized as of Tuesday.

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QUOTABLE: "I still see people out here that will tell me that they don't believe it's any worse than a common cold." — Dr. Stephen Neabore, a physician in South Dakota.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: The 2020 tax season is just around the corner, and filing your taxes is complicated because of the craziness of this pandemic year.

ON THE HORIZON: A Food and Drug Administration advisory panel meets Thursday to discuss whether to authorize the Pfizer vaccine for emergency use.

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

## UN: Ethiopia's conflict has 'appalling' impact on civilians

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's situation is "spiraling out of control with appalling impact on civilians" and urgently needs outside monitoring, the United Nations human rights chief warned Wednesday. But Ethiopia is rejecting calls for independent investigations into the deadly fighting in its Tigray region, saying it "doesn't need a baby-sitter."

And the U.N. secretary-general announced a new agreement with Ethiopia on badly needed humanitarian aid, a day after Ethiopia said its forces had shot at U.N. staffers doing their first assessment in Tigray. Antonio Guterres said joint assessments will occur "to make sure that there is full access to the whole of the (Tigray) territory and full capacity to start humanitarian operations."

But it isn't the "unfettered," neutral access the U.N. has sought for weeks.

There are growing 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 assistance only if it feels "it failed to investigate." To assume it can't conduct such probes "is belittling the government," he said.

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

Most communications and transport links remain severed, hiding the extent of atrocities committed since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Nov. 4 announced that fighting had begun with the Tigray People's Liberation Front. The TPLF dominated Ethiopia's government 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.

U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet called the situation "exceedingly worrying and volatile" with fighting reported in areas surrounding the Tigray capital, Mekele, and the towns of Sheraro and Axum, "in spite of government claims to the contrary."

"We have corroborated information of gross human rights violations and abuses including indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, looting, abductions and sexual violence against women and girls," Bachelet told reporters. "There are reports of forced recruitment of Tigrayan youth to fight against their own communities."

However, she said, "we have been unable to access the worst affected areas."

One concern has been the reported involvement of troops from neighboring Eritrea, a bitter enemy of the TPLF. But the U.N. secretary-general said he had "confronted" Ethiopia's prime minister on that question and Abiy "guaranteed to me that they have not entered Tigrayan territory."

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

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But "this is the moment to have a serious discussion with Ethiopian authorities on ... full respect for human rights, reconciliation and unimpeded humanitarian access," U.N. secretary-general Guterres said. "And I have to say that in my last discussion with the prime minister, there was a full acceptance ... of the need to move into this direction."

Over the weekend, a week after the U.N. and Ethiopia signed an initial deal to allow humanitarian access, government forces shot at and detained U.N. staffers who allegedly broke through checkpoints while trying to reach areas where "they were not supposed to go."

Crucially, the initial deal allowed aid only in areas under federal government control.

The incident is "really costly" because it further delays help for Tigray residents who have waited for five weeks, U.N. humanitarian spokesman Saviano Abreu told The Associated Press.

He said the six-member U.N. team, detained in Humera and released two days later, was carrying out security assessments along roads that had been agreed upon with Ethiopia's government. Such assessments are crucial before aid can be sent in.

Pressure on Abiy is growing. "When humanitarian aid is systematically blocked and denied to civilians in a war zone who desperately need it, then it starts to look less like 'logistical problems' and more like weaponizing hunger," Simon Adams with the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect tweeted.

And the top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Tibor Nagy, tweeted that "we strongly urge all parties to safeguard humanitarian workers in and around Ethiopia's Tigray region. We continue to urge immediate and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Tigray."

Needs are critical. 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 Ayder Referral Hospital has run out of supplies, including fuel for generators.

"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.

Overall, Mardini said, people in Tigray "have had no phone, no internet, no electricity and no fuel. Cash is running out. This of course adds to the tension."

In neighboring Sudan, nearly 50,000 Ethiopian refugees now take shelter. Some resist being moved to a camp away from the border, in the hope that missing family members, separated by the fighting, can be found.

"How can we go?" asked one refugee, Haile Gebremikeal. "If we can stay here for one or two months, if they give us a chance, we can look for our family or our family can look for us. There are no telephones, no internet. We don't have anything."

Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Fay Abuelgasim in Village 8, Sudan, and Nadine Achoui-Lesage in Geneva contributed.

## Biden hails historic Pentagon pick, but some Dems in a bind

By WILL WEISSERT, ROBERT BURNS, JONATHAN LEMIRE and LISA MASCARO Associated Press  
WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden on Wednesday introduced his choice for secretary of defense, calling retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin the right man for a potentially volatile moment in global security while hailing the prospect of the first African American to lead the Pentagon.

But the nomination is putting some congressional Democrats in a political bind. In the past, they've opposed naming recently retired military officers to a post typically occupied by civilians, yet they don't want to defy their party's incoming president nor be seen as blocking history.

"He is the right person for this job at the right moment," Biden said at a Delaware event with Austin, adding, "He's loved by the men and women of the armed forces, feared by our adversaries, known and



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respected by our allies.”

The choice has both won applause and provoked consternation on Capitol Hill.

Three years ago, Congress waived a law prohibiting the appointment as defense secretary of military officers who have been retired fewer than seven years. That allowed confirmation of President Donald Trump’s choice for the post, retired U.S. Marine Gen. Jim Mattis.

That came, however, over the objections of some Democrats, who may now have to reverse themselves to back Austin, who served 41 years in the Army and retired in 2016. Biden said his pick understands the need to keep a clear distance between military and civilian rule, but he added, “Just as they did for Jim Mattis, I am asking Congress to grant a waiver.”

“There’s a good reason for this law that I fully understand and respect,” said the president-elect, whose son Beau, the former Delaware attorney general who died of brain cancer in 2015, served as an attorney on Austin’s military staff in Iraq. “I would not be asking for this exception if I did not believe this moment doesn’t call for it.”

Austin said he comes to “this new role as a civilian leader, with military experience to be sure, but also with a deep appreciation and reverence for the prevailing wisdom of civilian control of our military.”

“I recognize that being a member of the president’s Cabinet requires a different perspective and unique responsibility from a career in uniform,” Austin said. “And I intend to keep this at the forefront of my mind.”

Austin’s nomination as the first Black leader of the Pentagon could have even more resonance at a time of extraordinary racial tension in the country. Before announcing that he’d settled on Austin, Biden was facing pressure from activists over a lack of diversity in some of the key posts of the Cabinet he was building.

Before Mattis, the last time Congress approved a waiver was in 1950, for retired Gen. George Marshall. The waiver would have to be approved by both congressional chambers, giving the House a rare say over a nomination that otherwise would require only Senate confirmation.

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

The Senate could prove more precarious, though. Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York struck a cautious tone Wednesday when asked about a waiver for Austin, saying, “I’m gonna have to study that.”

“Bottom line is that Austin’s a very good nominee and we’ll figure out where to go from there,” Schumer said.

Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said at the time of the Mattis confirmation, “Waiving the law should happen no more than once in a generation. ... Therefore, I will not support a waiver for future nominees.”

Now Reed is suggesting he’d be open to the possibility for Austin. “I feel, in all fairness, you have to give the opportunity to the nominee to explain himself or herself,” he said Tuesday.

Similarly, Illinois Sen Dick Durbin opposed the waiver for Mattis but now says of Biden’s nominee, “I was so impressed with his performance that I would consider a waiver for Austin, once I get to know him.”

Civilian control of the military has long been rooted in Americans’ wariness of large standing armies with the power to overthrow the government they are intended to serve. That is why the president is the civilian commander in chief, and it is 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 rule again.

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.

Connecticut Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal said despite the historic racial angle of Austin’s 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.”

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"That principle is essential to our democracy. ... I think (it) has to be applied, unfortunately, in this instance," Blumenthal said Tuesday.

Sen. Tim Kaine, a Virginia Democrat, was noncommittal, saying in a statement he'd "closely evaluate the implications for waiving the National Security Act requirement twice in just four years." Hawaii Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz, went further Tuesday, saying, "This is becoming a trend, and I don't like it. It is difficult to imagine voting for a Mattis."

With the Senate almost evenly divided politically — with the outcome of two Georgia special elections pending next month — Biden can lose only a limited number of Democrats, which is unusual for an incoming president from the same party.

That means he'll need some Republican support to get Austin confirmed, though, that will be forthcoming, at least in some quarters. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the current chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said, "I always support waivers."

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.

Still, opposition to another waiver has also come from outside Congress. Kori Schake, director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute think tank, tweeted that she had reluctantly supported a waiver for Mattis because she believed Trump posed "a threat to Constitutional governance domestically and the liberal order internationally. Thankfully, Biden is neither, so the circumstances don't support a waiver."

Weissert, Burns and Mascaro reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Matthew Daly and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

## **EXPLAINER: Allergic reactions to vaccines rare, short-lived**

By The Associated Press undefined

Vaccines can sometimes cause allergic reactions, but they are usually rare and short-lived.

British regulators are looking into reports of allergic reactions in two people who received the new Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday, the first day of a vaccination program. In the meantime, they're telling people to skip the vaccine if they've had a history of serious allergic reactions.

A look at allergic reactions to vaccines:

**HOW OFTEN DO THEY HAPPEN?**

Allergic reactions can occur with numerous vaccines and experts say they are not unexpected.

In the Pfizer-BioNTech study of 42,000 people, the rate was about the same in those who got the coronavirus vaccine versus those who got a dummy shot. U.S. Food and Drug Administration reviewers who examined the study's safety data found that 137 — or 0.63% — of vaccine recipients reported symptoms suggestive of an allergic reaction, compared to 111 — or 0.51% — in the placebo group.

A 2015 study in the U.S. examining the rate of anaphylaxis — a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction — found that it occurred about once per every million vaccine doses. The study evaluated children and adults who got vaccines against numerous diseases, including polio, measles and meningitis.

"For the general population this does not mean that they would need to be anxious about receiving the vaccination," said Stephen Evans, a vaccines expert at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

He noted that even common foods can provoke severe allergic reactions.

**WHY DO THESE REACTIONS HAPPEN?**

Scientists say people can be sensitive to components in the shot, like gelatin or egg protein, or to the vaccine itself. People with egg allergies are sometimes advised not to get the flu shot, since that vaccine is mostly grown in chicken eggs.

Common symptoms of an allergic reaction include a rash, skin irritation, coughing or trouble breathing. The exact ingredients used in Pfizer's new COVID-19 vaccine are proprietary and are not publicly dis-

closed. The vaccine uses a new technology, and is coated in lipid nanoparticles, which have been used in drugs.

Some people react to almost any drug or vaccine, said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's school of public health. The key is whether reactions to the vaccine are more common or more severe \_\_\_ and that doesn't appear to be the case so far, he said.

#### WHAT ARE OTHER SIDE EFFECTS?

Typical side effects for many vaccines include things like a sore arm from the shot, fever and muscle aches. In the Pfizer study, participants also reported fatigue, headache and chills.

More serious side effects are reported to regulators or health officials for further investigation. But it can often take time to determine if the vaccine caused the side effect or if the person just coincidentally received the shot before becoming ill.

As for the COVID-19 vaccine, "It's just so high-profile that every little thing that happens all the time is going to get magnified," said Jha.

"We should talk about it, we should be honest with people, but we should put it into context and help people understand," he said. "There is a small proportion of people who have an allergic reaction to almost any medicine."

## UK probes whether COVID-19 vaccine caused allergic reactions

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's medical regulator warned Wednesday that people with a history of serious allergic reactions shouldn't get the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer and BioNTech, and investigators looked into whether two reactions on the first day of the U.K.'s vaccination program were linked to the shot.

The advice was issued on a "precautionary basis," and the people who had the reactions had recovered, said professor Stephen Powis, medical director for National Health Service in England.

Pfizer and BioNTech said they were working with investigators "to better understand each case and its causes."

Also on Wednesday, Canada's health regulator approved the vaccine, with Dr. Supriya Sharma, chief medical adviser at Health Canada, calling it "a momentous occasion."

Canada is set to receive up to 249,000 doses this month and Canadian officials expect to start administering them next week as soon after they are shipped from Belgium on Friday.

Britain's Medical and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency has said people should not receive the shot if they have had a significant allergic reaction to a vaccine, medicine or food, such as those who have been told to carry an adrenaline shot — such as an EpiPen or other similar devices — or others who have had potentially fatal allergic reactions. The medical regulator also said vaccinations should be carried out only in facilities that have resuscitation equipment.

Such advice isn't uncommon; several vaccines already on the market carry warnings about allergic reactions, and doctors know to watch for them when people who've had reactions to drugs or vaccines in the past are given new products.

The two people who reported reactions were NHS staff members who had a history of significant allergies and carried adrenaline shots. Both had serious reactions but recovered after treatment, the NHS said.

Stephen Evans, a professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said the regulator had done the right thing, but the general public shouldn't be worried about getting the vaccine.

"For the general population, this does not mean that they would need to be anxious about receiving the vaccination. One has to remember that even things like Marmite can cause unexpected severe allergic reactions," he said, referring to the food spread that is made from brewer's yeast.

Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the school of public health at Brown University, said he would advise patients who have had severe allergic reactions to other medicines or foods to delay vaccination if they can while the two cases in the U.K. are investigated. He would extend that advice to people who carry EpiPens.

"The cautionary approach is to say to people who have had severe reactions to other things, 'just hold,'"

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Jha said, adding: "There is going to be a deep dive into these two people who got an allergic reaction" to the vaccine.

He added that because the vaccine is so high-profile, "every little thing that happens all the time is going to get magnified. We should talk about it, we should be honest with people, but we should put it into context and help people understand ... there is a small proportion of people who have an allergic reaction to almost any medicine."

The comments came a day after Britain rolled out its mass vaccination program amid efforts to control a pandemic that has killed more than 62,000 people across the country. The MHRA gave an emergency authorization to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine last week, making Britain the first country to approve its widespread use.

Even in nonemergency situations, health authorities must closely monitor new vaccines and medications because studies in tens of thousands of people can't detect a rare risk that would affect 1 in 1 million. Authorities have not said how many people have received the shot in Britain so far, but they plan to give 800,000 doses in the first phase, which will target people over 80, nursing home staff and some NHS workers.

Late-stage trials of the vaccine found "no serious safety concerns," Pfizer and BioNTech said. More than 42,000 people have received two doses of the shot during those trials.

Detailed data from the vaccine's trials showed potential allergic reactions in 0.63% of those who received the vaccine, compared with 0.51% of those who received the placebo. Reviewers from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration called this a "slight numerical imbalance."

Documents published by the two companies showed that people with a history of severe allergic reactions were excluded from the trials, and doctors were advised to look out for such reactions in trial participants who weren't previously known to have severe allergies.

As part of its emergency authorization for the vaccine, the MHRA required health care workers to report any adverse reactions to help regulators gather more information about safety and effectiveness.

The agency is monitoring the vaccine rollout closely and "will now investigate these cases in more detail to understand if the allergic reactions were linked to the vaccine or were incidental," Powis said. "The fact that we know so soon about these two allergic reactions and that the regulator has acted on this to issue precautionary advice shows that this monitoring system is working well."

Dr. June Raine, head of the medical regulatory agency, informed a parliamentary committee about the reactions during previously scheduled testimony on the pandemic.

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

Margaret Keenan, the first person to get the vaccine in the U.K., was discharged Wednesday from University Hospital Coventry, where she had been undergoing a heart checkup when she was given the shot.

"I feel great and I'm so pleased to be able to go home and to spend some quality time with my family," the 90-year-old former shop clerk said in a statement released by the NHS.

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Associated Press writers Frank Jordans in Berlin, Lauran Neergaard in Alexandria, Virginia, Rob Gillies in Toronto and David Koenig in Dallas contributed.

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

## **Boeing 737 Max back in air 2 years after grounded by crashes**

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Commercial flights with Boeing 737 Max jetliners resumed Wednesday for the first time since they were grounded worldwide nearly two years ago following two deadly accidents.



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Brazil's Gol Airlines became the first in the world to return the planes to its active fleet, using a 737 Max 8 on a flight from Sao Paulo to Porto Alegre, according to flightradar24.com.

The company own announcement didn't specify the route of the flight.

Gol is set to start regular service on Dec. 18, according to aviation data firm Cirium, with several daily flights between Sao Paulo and other major Brazilian cities.

Customers will be able to exchange their tickets if they don't want to fly on a 737 Max, a Gol spokesperson told The Associated Press in an email.

Several passengers at Sao Paulo's Guarulhos airport were surprised to learn they had traveled on a 737 Max aircraft, though it was marked on their ticket. Others were aware.

"I was a bit apprehensive but my husband is a pilot, so I asked him. He said it was fine," said Lucelyn Jockyman, who texted her mother before takeoff. "If anything happens, look after my dogs please!" she joked.

Gol, the country's largest airline with 36 million passengers annually, owns seven 737 Max aircraft, according to Cirium. It is the only Brazilian company with the model in its fleet.

The Boeing plane was grounded globally in March 2019, shortly after a 737 Max crashed in Ethiopia. A prior crash in Indonesia involving the model occurred in October 2018. In all, 346 people died.

Boeing said it upgraded the plane's safety systems and software before winning approval to fly again.

Brazil's aviation regulator lifted its restrictions on the 737 Max in November, clearing the way for the plane to resume flights in Latin America's biggest country.

Similar restrictions have been lifted in the U.S. and Europe, where commercial airline flights with the plane are expected to resume soon, likely starting with American Airlines on Dec. 29.

"The MAX is one of the most efficient aircraft in aviation history and the only one to undergo a complete recertification process," Gol's chief executive officer, Paulo Kakinoff, said in a statement earlier this week.

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AP journalist David Koening contributed to this report from Dallas.

## Weeks after election, YouTube cracks down on misinformation

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

More than a month after the U.S. presidential election, YouTube says it will start removing newly uploaded material that claims widespread voter fraud or errors changed the outcome.

The Google-owned video service said Wednesday that this is in line with how it has dealt with past elections. That's because Tuesday was the "safe harbor" deadline for the election and YouTube said enough states have certified their results to determine Joe Biden as the winner.

But this election was different from past elections and YouTube has been widely criticized for not doing more to prevent misinformation from spreading on its platform. Unlike Twitter and Facebook, which put measures in place — with some success — YouTube had until Wednesday stood by its decision to allow baseless claims about election fraud to stay up.

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

That hasn't stopped President Donald Trump and his supporters from claiming that is the case. Conservative news sites and YouTube accounts have been instrumental in spreading these claims, like a 90-second cellphone video that showed a man closing the doors of a white van and then rolling a wagon with a large box into a Detroit election center. It was intended to show fraud, but was quickly discredited by news organizations and public officials — the man was a photojournalist hauling camera equipment, not illegal ballots.

Still, the damage was done, reinforcing voters' belief that the election was marred by fraud and irregularities.

YouTube said it is trying to strike a balance between "allowing for a broad range of political speech and making sure our platform isn't abused to incite real-world harm or broadly spread harmful misinformation."

## AP's song of the year: Keedron Bryant's 'I Just Wanna Live'

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The top 10 songs of the year by Associated Press Music Editor Mesfin Fekadu (a playlist of the songs can be found here ):

1. Keedron Bryant, "I Just Wanna Live": During times of turmoil and unrest, people respond differently. Some protest. Some cry. And some sing. Following the gruesome death of George Floyd, Johnnetta Bryant turned to God and asked for a pray — and the lyrics to "I Just Wanna Live" were born. She asked her son, then 12-year-old Keedron Bryant, to sing the song and the rest is for the history books. Keedron Bryant's powerful performance about being a young Black man in today's world went viral, with everyone from Barack Obama to LeBron James praising the future superstar and his family for their strength and positive message. The song not only helped Keedron Bryant land a record deal, it helped heal the world at a time when music is a language that unites us all.

2. Chloe x Halle, "Do It": To the window, to the walls, 'till the sweat drops down my... Chloe x Halle took us to the clubs — aka the living room — during a pandemic year when we desperately needed an epic dance tune to help us get through the day.

3. Mickey Guyton, "Black Like Me": Digging deep to write personal lyrics about her upbringing — and being that rare Black singer on the country music scene — Mickey Guyton birthed a beautiful, touching song that is bound to become a country music classic.

4. Kelly Rowland, "Coffee": A smooth, sexy number from a R&B goddess.

5. Charlie Wilson featuring Smokey Robinson, "All of My Love": Uncle Charlie plus Uncle Smokey equals musical bliss. The soul icons joined forces for one of the year's best collaborations that will surely put a smile on your face.

6. Roddy Ricch, "The Box": Insert fire emoji here.

7. Dua Lipa, "Don't Start Now": With this addictive pop gem and updated dance moves, Dua Lipa is well on her way to world domination.

8. Gabby Barrett featuring Charlie Puth, "I Hope": Breakthrough country singer Gabby Barrett already had a hit with the original version of "I Hope," but then Charlie Puth slide into her DMs and asked to add his vocals to the song and update the beat. The result is an undeniable pop smash.

9. Pop Smoke featuring DaBaby and Lil Baby, "For the Night": Late rapper Pop Smoke clearly had a knack for hip-hop melodies, which explains why most of his songs have exploded on TikTok. "For the Night" is a monster hit that also featured other acts leading the new class of rap.

10. BLACKPINK featuring Selena Gomez, "Ice Cream": K-pop all-stars BLACKPINK came out swinging with this trap-pop bop that was as sweet and irresistible as ice cream.

## 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 unstoppable, 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.

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

The fears of a hypothetical Poxit 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 Poxit 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.

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On the eve of the EU summit, Warsaw city hall ordered EU flags, along with national and city flags, to be displayed in many places. Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski said the aim was to pressure the government to compromise, and show the rest of Europe that the Polish government's position "is not the position of the whole of Poland."

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.

## Black bikers see racism in Myrtle Beach, SC, traffic plan

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Motorcycle clubs roar into Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, each May for separate week-long rallies, one mostly white, the other mostly Black. Each brings millions of dollars, spent by hundreds of thousands of bikers, and some inevitably let loose, with binge drinking, public nudity and noise competitions that rattle the beachfront high-rises.

At 60, Metris Batts says she parties a little more responsibly than many others, but she still rides to be seen at the Black event, cruising atop her silver-gray Honda VTX in brightly colored cowboy boots and rhinestone-studded jeans.

There's a thrill to riding fast, Batts says, so it's infuriating to be stuck for hours in a 23-mile (37-kilometer) one-way detour. Police put up the barricades along Ocean Boulevard during the peak nights of Black Bike Week, officially known as the Atlantic Beach Bikefest. White bikers rolling in days earlier for Harley Week each May are treated differently, Black bikers say.

"If you get in a cattle chute, you can't get out," Batts said. "We ride for freedom."

Civil rights lawyers have now accused the city in federal court of racial discrimination by creating an experience so unpleasant that Black visitors will eventually go away. In opening arguments last week to five Black and four white jurors, an NAACP lawyer said Myrtle Beach during Bikefest is "like a city under martial law," The Sun News of Myrtle Beach reported.

City attorneys have countered that "different traffic control strategies" apply to each festival, and that the police response to Bikefest was imposed to prevent violence following a spate of shootings and robberies six years ago.

Three people were killed and seven injured that weekend in 2014. Then-Gov. Nikki Haley called for getting rid of the Black event altogether, calling it a "pollution of South Carolina."

Bikefest originated along historically segregated beaches, where white bikers had congregated as early as 1940 for the annual Harley Week. Around 1980, a local Black motorcycle club called the Carolina Knight Riders started holding a family-and-friends gathering at Atlantic Beach, a hamlet just north of Myrtle Beach known as the "Black Pearl" for its reputation as a haven for African American beachgoers.

The Atlantic Beach event soon sprawled into nearby towns, including Myrtle Beach, where most of the 35,000 residents are white. Organizers say it's the single largest yearly influx of Black visitors to the area, and like Harley Week, it has grown far beyond any one group's ability to control it.

Myrtle Beach, always struggling to promote South Carolina's Grand Strand as a family-friendly upscale destination, tried to push bikers out with helmet requirements and noise ordinances, only to be taken to court by white and Black bikers alike. The city also lost to the NAACP when a federal judge said its early-2000s Bikefest traffic plan was racially motivated; that one forced riders into one-way traffic for 5 miles (8 kilometers).

Encountering unfriendly shopkeepers and officers has become part of the Bikefest experience, said bikers interviewed by The Associated Press. The NAACP has sued accusing restaurants and a hotel of discriminating against African American tourists during the event, just as it has challenged authorities in other tourist destinations where Black visitors say they've suffered abusive policing.



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"If my motorcycle ran out of gas in Myrtle Beach, I would push it until I got out of the city limits," said Lewis Clark, a biker in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, who helped organize the event in prior years.

Myrtle Beach city and Chamber of Commerce officials refused to talk about the trial.

Jason Eastman, a sociologist at Coastal Carolina University, likens both Black Bike Week and Harley Week to events like Carnival and spring break, when visitors think social norms can be upturned. What separates them is how residents have responded, Eastman said.

About a decade ago, he dug through 8,500 online reader comments about the bike weeks on articles by The Sun News.

He found that while the behavior of bikers at the events are similar, commenters frame "the mostly white Harley riders as successful in their educations and careers," while stereotyping Black bikers as "unemployed, uneducated, immature, underclass criminals."

Bikefest old-timers often disavow the "Black Bike Week" moniker, trying to steer the event back to Atlantic Beach, where it all started, supporting hole-in-the-wall joints and hanging out in the local Hooters parking lot or at the Carolina Knight Riders clubhouse.

"That's where the real partying is," Batts said. "That's where the real networking is. That's where the real relationships are."

This year's Bikefest — which would have been in its 40th year — was canceled because of COVID-19. The Knight Riders are already planning an event next May to make up for what they missed. "We're calling it the 40 Plus One," said Aaron Cox, the club's business manager.

Michelle Liu 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.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 10, the 345th day of 2020. There are 21 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 10, 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. received his Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, saying he accepted it "with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind."

On this date:

In 1861, the Confederacy admitted Kentucky as it recognized a pro-Southern shadow state government that was acting without the authority of the pro-Union government in Frankfort.

In 1869, women were granted the right to vote in the Wyoming Territory.

In 1898, a treaty was signed in Paris officially ending the Spanish-American War.

In 1946, newspaperman Damon Runyon, known for his short stories featuring colorful Broadway denizens, died at a New York hospital at age 66.

In 1950, Ralph J. Bunche was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the first Black American to receive the award.

In 1967, singer Otis Redding, 26, and six others were killed when their plane crashed into Wisconsin's Lake Monona; trumpeter Ben Cauley, a member of the group the Bar-Kays, was the only survivor.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev concluded three days of summit talks in Washington. Violinist Jascha Heifetz died in Los Angeles at age 86.

In 1994, Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin received the Nobel Peace Prize, pledging to pursue their mission of healing the anguished Middle East.

In 1996, South African President Nelson Mandela signed the country's new constitution into law during a ceremony in Sharpeville.

In 2007, suspended NFL star Michael Vick was sentenced by a federal judge in Richmond, Virginia, to

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23 months in prison for bankrolling a dogfighting operation and killing dogs that underperformed (Vick served 19 months at Leavenworth). Former Vice President Al Gore accepted the Nobel Peace Prize with a call for humanity to rise up against a looming climate crisis and stop waging war on the environment.

In 2009, President Barack Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize with a humble acknowledgment of his scant accomplishments and a robust defense of the U.S. at war. James Cameron's 3-D film epic "Avatar" had its world premiere in London.

In 2013, South Africa held a memorial service for Nelson Mandela, during which U.S. President Barack Obama energized tens of thousands of spectators and nearly 100 visiting heads of state with a plea for the world to emulate "the last great liberator of the 20th century." (The ceremony was marred by the presence of a sign-language interpreter who deaf advocates said was an impostor waving his arms around meaninglessly.) General Motors named product chief Mary Barra its new CEO, making her the first woman to run a U.S. car company.

Ten years ago: The Norwegian Nobel Committee honored Chinese literary critic Liu Xiaobo (lee-OO' show-BOH'), imprisoned for urging political reform, by presenting his \$1.4 million Nobel Peace Prize diploma and medal to an empty chair. A federal jury in Salt Lake City convicted street preacher Brian David Mitchell of kidnapping and raping Elizabeth Smart. (Mitchell was later sentenced to life in prison.)

Five years ago: The Senate Judiciary Committee rebuked Donald Trump by endorsing a nonbinding amendment, 16-4, that said barring individuals from entering the United States based on religion would be un-American (the Republican presidential front-runner had called for blocking Muslims from entering the country in the aftermath of attacks in the United States and abroad.)

One year ago: House Democrats announced two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, declaring that he "betrayed the nation" with his actions toward Ukraine and an obstruction of Congress' investigation; Trump responded with a tweet of "WITCH HUNT!" At an evening rally in Pennsylvania, Trump mocked the impeachment effort and predicted it would lead to his reelection in 2020. House Democrats and the White House announced agreement on a modified North American trade pact to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement. A man and a woman burst into a kosher market in Jersey City, N.J., with assault weapons, killing three people in the store after earlier killing a police officer at a nearby cemetery; they then died in an hours-long exchange of gunfire with police. (Authorities said the pair acted out of hatred for Jews and law enforcement.) A Pennsylvania appeals court rejected Bill Cosby's bid to overturn his sexual assault conviction.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Tommy Kirk is 79. Actor Fionnula Flanagan is 79. Pop singer Chad Stuart (Chad and Jeremy) is 79. Rhythm-and-blues singer Ralph Tavares is 79. Actor-singer Gloria Loring is 74. Pop-funk musician Walter "Clyde" Orange (The Commodores) is 74. Country singer Johnny Rodriguez is 69. Actor Susan Dey is 68. Former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is 64. Jazz musician Paul Hardcastle is 63. Actor John York (TV: "General Hospital") is 62. Actor-director Kenneth Branagh (BRAH'-nah) is 60. Actor Nia Peeples is 59. TV chef Bobby Flay is 56. Rock singer-musician J Mascis is 55. Rock musician Scot Alexander (Dishwalla) is 49. Actor-comedian Arden Myrin is 47. Rock musician Meg White (The White Stripes) is 46. Actor Emmanuelle Chriqui is 45. Rapper Kuniva (D12) is 45. Actor Gavin Houston is 43. Actor Alano Miller is 41. Violinist Sarah Chang is 40. Actor Patrick John Flueger is 37. Country singer Meghan Linsey is 35. Actor Raven-Symone is 35. Actor/singer Teyana Taylor is 30. Actor Kiki Layne is 29.