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Saturday, Dec. 19

Wrestling at Sioux Valley, 10 a.m.
Junior High Girls Basketball hosting Mobridge-Pollock (7th at 1 p.m., 8th to follow)

JH Girls

Mobridge-Pollock at Groton Area
Sat., Dec. 19, 2020

1 p.m.: 7th Grade Sponsored by Bob & Vicki Walter
2 p.m.: 8th Grade Sponsored by 8th grade parents



OPEN: 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
Douglas Doeden
Saturday, Dec. 19, 10:00 a.m.
Groton Area School Arena



GDILIVE.COM
GDIRADIO Locally 89.3FM



**ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN
PRESCHOOL**
Christmas Program
Monday, Dec. 21, 2020
9:30 a.m.

The service of
Martha Farnen
Monday, Dec. 21, 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Church



GDILIVE.COM
GDIRADIO Locally 89.3FM



**ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN
PRESCHOOL**
Christmas Program
Monday, Dec. 21, 2020
3:00 p.m.



Girls

Redfield at Groton Area
Monday, Dec. 21, 7:30 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



Deacon Jeff leaving local parish

Deacon Jeffrey James Schulte will be leaving the St. Elizabeth Seton & St. Joseph Parish Family this weekend. Father Tom Hartman said on the parish Facebook Page, "We hate to lose Deacon Jeff but it's time to say goodbye. Deacon Jeff will leave after this weekend to go home for Christmas. From there back to St Louis to finish his last semester. God willing he will be ordained a priest in May. Thanks Deacon Jeffrey James Schulte for serving our parish families!"

This yard sign is posted in front of the rectory this morning.

Junior high girls teams beat Redfield

Groton Area's junior high girls' basketball teams hosted Redfield on Friday and both teams won their games.

The seventh graders won, 43-3. Jerica Locke led the Tigers with 12 points followed by Rylee Dunker with eight, Mia Crank had six, Carly Gilbert five, Jaedyn Penning and Olivia Steigelmeier with four each and Talli Wright and Cali Tollifson each had two points

The eighth graders won, 44-2. Laila Roberts led Groton Area with 20 points followed by Elizabeth Fliehs with seven, Emma Kutter had five, Faith Traphagen and Kennedy Hansen each had four and Ashley Johnson and Brooklyn Hansen each added two points.

Both games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The seventh grade game was sponsored by Locke Electric and the eighth grade game was sponsored by Ed and Connie Stauch.

The girls finish the season today by hosting Mobridge-Pollock starting at 1 p.m. The games will also be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, with the seventh grade sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter and the eighth grade game by the eighth grade parents.

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#299 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The news is pretty uniformly bad. We're at record or near-record numbers in all categories.

We've broken 17 and a half million with 17,503,900 cases in the US, which is 1.6% higher than yesterday's number. Considering we hit 17 million just yesterday, this isn't great. There were 279,400 new cases reported today, a new record of the type I wish we'd just stop setting, some 25,000 more than the previous record set just a few days ago on December 12.

Our average daily new case number is and has been for some time over 200,000, which means we're set to just go on adding a million cases every five days—four if we're really unlucky (and stupid). This is more than three times the number we were seeing over the summer peak in July. Most of what's going on now is still due to Thanksgiving-related cases, and we're going to see even worse in a few weeks if we don't wise up before Christmas next week. I have never dreaded the winter holidays until this year, and this year, I really, really dread them. I read a story today about a family that decided no one could tell them what to do, and so they had a big, convivial Thanksgiving dinner for 22 of their nearest and dearest. Today, 18 of those folks are sick. I hope it was a really great party, although I'm not sure how great it would have to be to justify the aftermath. Please understand this virus does not care about your freedom.

Predictions are that 85 million of us will travel between December 23 and January 3, mostly by car. That's only two-thirds of the number who traveled for Christmas last year—and around 85 million too many. There are real concerns among public health authorities that people will also relax their precautions, either because they're tired of it all or because they figure the vaccines will come riding in on their white horse to save us. There are also a lot of folks who know someone who got sick, but not that sick, and so they've decided this is no big deal. I wish they were right; but they're not. They're not close.

We set (another) record for hospitalizations today—12 days and counting now. There are 114,195 people hospitalized in the US due to Covid-19. Los Angeles County has been on fire for weeks. Yesterday, 65% of their hospitals were on diversion, which means they're redirecting incoming ambulances to other institutions because they're full-up. Bedside providers are starting to show a lot of PTSD-like symptoms as the waves continue to break over them. They're surrounded by death in numbers they've never dealt with in their careers; they're isolated from family to protect them; they're working double shifts and extra shifts and day after day without a break; they're holding iPads and cell phones up so families can say good-bye to dying patients; they're watching their coworkers get sick and die. The human psyche is not designed to handle that level of strain for months and months, and we're seeing the results in good people stretched too far. In addition to the damage done the system by this pandemic, I've thought a lot about the damage done to the people working in it. We'll be reaping the harvest of this pandemic for years to come, long after the money dries up and folks have moved on.

There have now been 313,725 lives lost to this pandemic in our country. Today 3220 people's deaths were reported, the third-worst day yet. This is a 1.0% increase from yesterday's total. There's going to be a whole lot more dying before we've put anywhere near enough vaccine into people to make a difference on a societal level. Dr. Carlos del Rio, executive associate dean of Emory University's School of Medicine, told CNN, "We're just simply saying, 'Well, we're getting vaccine.' But the vaccine is coming way too late for thousands of people who will die before we get the vaccine distributed widely. . . . Transmissions are actively happening, and I think before the end of the year, we may be getting close to 4,000 deaths a day."

I have a bit more detail on the FDA's Vaccines and Biological Products Advisory Committee meeting from yesterday. The vote was 20 in favor and one abstention to recommend approval of the emergency use authorization (EUA) for this vaccine candidate. The abstention was from a person concerned that the EUA was going to be too broad; he would have preferred it was limited only to people at high risk under an expanded access protocol.

(Weird little side note: There was discussion of facial swelling seen in vaccine recipients who have previously received dermal fillers, those injections that plump up aging cheeks or lips to give a more youthful appearance. It was noted that this has been seen in one of these cases with flu vaccine; I do not know

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the mechanism of action for that at all. In all cases, the swelling was localized and resolved with treatment. There will be a note about this in the prescribing information.

And there was apparently a hint in the data that this vaccine does, indeed, prevent asymptomatic infection. I get the idea this was not definitive, but it is definitely welcome. And today, the FDA did issue the EUA for the vaccine. I expect the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will follow shortly with the final piece of the puzzle so vaccine can ship; the group meets tomorrow to consider this step. This approval will approximately double the number of available doses, which is a significant thing.

One and possibly up to three more, in addition to the initial two, allergic reactions to the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine have occurred in the US. Only one was serious, the one we talked about yesterday. This was a point of discussion in yesterday's advisory committee meeting. The current recommendation is that you stay around the vaccination site for 15 minutes after receiving your vaccine, 30 minutes if you have a history of severe allergic reactions; this is so that, if you would have a reaction, it can be treated immediately. There is also a requirement that all vaccination sites have treatment for severe allergic reactions immediately available on site. The Moderna vaccine is similar in many ways, but does not have exactly the same composition, as the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine; so it is unclear whether we should be concerned about this vaccine too. Until scientists work out which components are triggering these reactions, that will remain an open question, and precautions will be taken. There were zero cases of anaphylaxis in clinical trial participants; but it is not unusual to see rare adverse effects show up once we start putting vaccine into huge numbers of people. I do not want to make light of this potential complication, but I will say, unless something a whole lot more dire turns up, this will not deter me from receiving the vaccine when it becomes available to me.

There have also been a small number of cases of a condition called Bell's palsy among those who received vaccine in clinical trials—four in the Pfizer/BioNTech trials and three in the Moderna trials. Bell's palsy is a sudden weakness in facial muscles which causes half of the face appear to droop; when patients smile, one side of the mouth typically does not curve upward, and the eye on that side may resist closing. It is temporary in most people, improving within a few weeks, and recovery typically occurs within six months. There is no clear causal link to the vaccine, but the combined data from the two trials is concerning. The rate of development of this condition is somewhat higher in vaccine recipients than would be expected in the general population. The current plan is to continue to follow vaccinated people to develop a better understanding of just what's operating here. In the meantime, we should all keep in mind the extreme rarity of this condition in recipients.

There was discussion of what to do with clinical trial participants who received placebo injections—whether to essentially unblind the trial and notify them, then permit them access to vaccination on a priority basis or to wait until their number comes up in the general course of things and inform them whether they've already received vaccine as they prepare to be vaccinated in the ordinary course of events. Moderna has proposed to notify immediately after the EUA and offer leftover vaccine from the trials; this supply will outdate soon, so cannot be distributed, which means doing so would not interfere with the supply available to the general public. Pfizer/BioNTech, on the other hand, wants to wait until recipients become eligible for vaccination with the rest of the public; they have already begun informing participants who are health care workers and are now eligible. We've discussed the pros and cons of each approach, and I don't know what I think about what's the right thing to do. Despite wading through a live blog of the entire several-hour meeting, I was unable to discover whether the Committee weighed in on this question; it appears they did not. I will note that two to three cases of severe disease are showing up in placebo recipients each week, so this is a very relevant question.

A thing we do not talk about enough is the outbreaks in prisons. This is a population at very high risk due to the impossibility of social distancing and the serious shortage of masks and such for precautions. Prisoners generally share space with others, eat in large groups, and spend most of their time indoors, all of which increase risk. And, of course, they cannot remove themselves from these dangerous situations. All of that shows in the fact that one in five prisoners have been infected; this is more than four times the rate of infection in the general population. In some states, half of prisoners have been infected. Those

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in this population who are at high risk for severe disease are sitting ducks for this virus. New cases are at all-time highs. More than 1700 have died. There are lots of plans to vaccinate at-risk populations like essential workers and those living in communal settings; but many states, even those which initially had decided to prioritize prisoners for vaccination, are backing away from those plans under pressure from the public. I'm sure you can imagine the argument for doing this: Why should people who've done bad things get in line ahead of their victims? I could point out that most of them did not commit crimes that carry the death penalty, but I will instead say that prisons serve as a focus of infection in the community. Workers come and go from the prisons, and there's been many a prison outbreak which spilled over into the surrounding community, killing innocent folks who haven't done any crimes at all. Once again, public health is not a matter of fairness; we might wish to consider treating or vaccinating people we regard as undeserving, not for them, but for us. There is no segment of society that it makes sense to write off on the argument that they "deserve" this disease because what they get, deserved or not, ends up spilling over to those of us we're quite sure do not deserve it. We have to be practical here. And I'll add one more consideration to this discussion: Jails are also seeing large numbers of infections, and jails frequently hold people who have not been found guilty of anything. So we're subjecting folks to unprecedented risks who are, in the eyes of the law and often in real life too, innocent. So there's that too.

Ssanjhi is an ancient Indian art form that uses custom-made scissors to cut intricate patterns and images out of paper, then uses the cut-out images as stencils to decorate all sorts of objects, textiles, and homes. It apparently takes years to acquire the skills, and these skills are often passed down from generation to generation in a family. The pieces are generally nature-inspired and range from very small to huge. These are cut without the use of patterns or practice runs. I've seen examples, and they are beautiful works of art; this is a form of human expression worth preserving.

A company called Direct Create was formed in 2015 to bypass retailers and enable these artisans to sell direct to customers, bringing the price down and increasing sales and income for the artists. Many of these artists have been selling in-person in markets and exhibitions; the company has also enabled collaboration to custom-design products for clients, another way to secure a more stable income for them.

You can imagine what happened to the livelihood of these artists when the pandemic hit and these in-person sales opportunities disappeared. There was no way to reach customers. This gave a big boost to Direct Create because they provide an online platform for sales, and they now have more than 2500 artisans registered and selling their work. There are also some cool intercultural fusion projects happening: One artisan created a storytelling-box depicting a Romanian folk tale for a German teacher using ancient Indian techniques. That seems really cool to me.

Direct Create does not make a profit from sales; it charges a percentage to cover handling online payment, packaging, and shipping (and, I presume, a living for the creators, which seems fair to me). According to the AP, "It's been a lifeline for papercutting artisan, [Ram] Soni, who initially had to lay off all his workers and even considered giving up his art."

Several artisans report they've been able to restart their businesses and rehire their workers so all of them can earn a living in these difficult times. Soni told the AP, "We get to earn money, but we also earn respect." We all probably need that. New problems beget new solutions if we look out for them.

Take care. I'll be back tomorrow.

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December 18th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota: Community Spread:

Substantial: Faulk upgraded from Moderate to Substantial

Moderate: Harding, McPherson (downgraded from Substantial), Hand (downgraded from Substantial), Jerauld, Sully, Stanley (downgraded from Substantial).

Minimal: Campbell, Hyde (downgraded from Moderate), Jones (downgraded from Moderate).

Positive: +575 (93,772 total) Positivity Rate: 11.3%

Total Tests: 5108 (707,698 total)

Hospitalized: +31 (5348 total). 387 currently hospitalized -19)

Avera St. Luke's: 15 (-3) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 3 (-1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 1 (0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 12 (+2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 1 (+1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +28 (1329 total)

Females: 13 Males: 15

40s=1, 50s=2, 60s=3, 70s+6, 80+=16

Counties: Bennett-2, Bon Homme-1, Brown-2, Day-2, Grant-1, Hamlin-2, Lawrence-1, Lincoln-1, Mellette-1,

Minnehaha-2, Pennington-4, Perkins-2, Spink-1, Union-1, Walworth-1, Yankton-3.

Recovered: +530 (83,670 total)

Active Cases: +17 (8,773)

Percent Recovered: 89.2%

Beadle (33) +6 positive, +3 recovered (114 active cases)

Brookings (24) +9 positive, +5 recovered (245 active cases)

Brown (49): +19 positive, +37 recovered (325 active cases)

Clark (2): +0 positive, +1 recovered (25 active cases)

Clay (11): +11 positive, +7 recovered (118 active cases)

Codington (64): +9 positive, +15 recovered (451 active cases)

Davison (52): +6 positive, +6 recovered (158 active cases)

Day (17): +3 positive, +4 recovered (73 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +2 positive, +6 recovered (45 active cases)

Faulk (10): +1 positive, +1 recovered (21 active cases)

Grant (21): +8 positive, +7 recovered (98 active cases)

Hanson (3): +2 positive, +4 recovered (21 active cases)

Hughes (25): +8 positive, +5 recovered (176 active cases)

Lawrence (27): +19 positive, +16 recovered (238 active cases)

Lincoln (58): +67 positive, +43 recovered (613 active cases)

Marshall (4): +3 positive, +2 recovered (29 active cases)

McCook (21): +2 positive, +1 recovered (40 active cases)

McPherson (1): +1 positive, +0 recovery (16 active case)

Minnehaha (239): +141 positive, +138 recovered (2193 active cases)

Pennington (123): +84 positive, +77 recovered (1134 active cases)

Potter (2): +0 positive, +1 recovered (16 active cases)

Roberts (26): +10 positive, +5 recovered (124 active cases)

Spink (21): +8 positive, +3 recovered (86 active cases)

Walworth (14): +3 positive, +2 recovered (68 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 18:

- 6.5% rolling 14-day positivity
- 509 new positives
- 7,543 susceptible test encounters
- 144 currently hospitalized (-4)
- 3,061 active cases (+77)
- 1,225 total deaths (+21)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	393	361	748	8	Substantial	7.89%
Beadle	2447	2300	4975	33	Substantial	9.56%
Bennett	346	317	1069	8	Substantial	4.46%
Bon Homme	1439	1365	1832	22	Substantial	22.50%
Brookings	2793	2524	9572	24	Substantial	11.67%
Brown	4178	3804	10793	49	Substantial	17.62%
Brule	622	583	1652	6	Substantial	26.00%
Buffalo	405	382	840	10	Substantial	26.19%
Butte	828	744	2770	16	Substantial	20.54%
Campbell	109	105	202	1	Minimal	6.67%
Charles Mix	1056	939	3479	10	Substantial	27.42%
Clark	297	270	827	2	Substantial	6.25%
Clay	1546	1417	4376	11	Substantial	17.42%
Codington	3237	2792	8044	64	Substantial	21.28%
Corson	437	407	876	6	Substantial	22.64%
Custer	644	578	2321	8	Substantial	21.66%
Davison	2623	2413	5571	52	Substantial	13.88%
Day	497	407	1484	17	Substantial	17.95%
Deuel	385	323	961	6	Substantial	18.60%
Dewey	1214	1008	3434	8	Substantial	30.23%
Douglas	353	308	800	6	Substantial	18.09%
Edmunds	315	267	867	3	Substantial	16.81%
Fall River	418	369	2225	10	Substantial	17.76%
Faulk	307	276	580	10	Substantial	23.08%
Grant	799	679	1866	21	Substantial	22.16%
Gregory	471	423	1053	24	Substantial	12.50%
Haakon	216	162	456	5	Substantial	21.43%
Hamlin	570	495	1459	32	Substantial	9.26%
Hand	309	290	691	2	Moderate	11.54%
Hanson	300	276	577	3	Substantial	16.28%
Harding	87	76	148	0	Moderate	21.43%
Hughes	1911	1710	5403	25	Substantial	12.33%
Hutchinson	673	588	1963	14	Substantial	23.60%

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Hutchinson	673	588	1963	14	Substantial	23.60%
Hyde	130	125	353	0	Minimal	12.50%
Jackson	255	209	849	8	Substantial	44.29%
Jerauld	256	225	482	15	Moderate	23.81%
Jones	63	63	179	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	497	451	1372	13	Substantial	12.66%
Lake	965	882	2688	13	Substantial	18.24%
Lawrence	2397	2143	7394	27	Substantial	17.95%
Lincoln	6332	5661	16710	58	Substantial	22.18%
Lyman	507	469	1665	9	Substantial	10.84%
Marshall	240	207	965	4	Substantial	24.68%
McCook	646	585	1371	21	Substantial	24.29%
McPherson	170	153	488	1	Moderate	3.97%
Meade	2097	1847	6497	20	Substantial	21.25%
Mellette	212	192	642	2	Substantial	21.43%
Miner	216	192	486	6	Substantial	4.35%
Minnehaha	23759	21327	65367	239	Substantial	19.39%
Moody	507	435	1545	14	Substantial	33.73%
Oglala Lakota	1849	1644	6122	33	Substantial	15.11%
Pennington	10379	9121	32684	123	Substantial	23.58%
Perkins	251	211	634	6	Substantial	15.56%
Potter	291	276	698	2	Substantial	13.33%
Roberts	897	747	3657	26	Substantial	25.94%
Sanborn	300	281	587	3	Substantial	12.12%
Spink	674	567	1816	21	Substantial	18.48%
Stanley	259	237	745	2	Moderate	12.20%
Sully	102	92	238	3	Moderate	0.00%
Todd	1119	1015	3735	17	Substantial	17.28%
Tripp	599	539	1297	10	Substantial	15.49%
Turner	917	794	2307	47	Substantial	17.59%
Union	1481	1299	5167	28	Substantial	18.62%
Walworth	587	505	1584	14	Substantial	26.80%
Yankton	2313	1995	7912	21	Substantial	22.83%
Ziebach	280	223	682	7	Substantial	33.33%
Unassigned	0	0	1962	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	3449	0
10-19 years	10320	0
20-29 years	17252	3
30-39 years	15555	12
40-49 years	13388	22
50-59 years	13322	66
60-69 years	10572	168
70-79 years	5559	278
80+ years	4355	780

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	49022	648
Male	44750	681

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Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

20

New Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

325

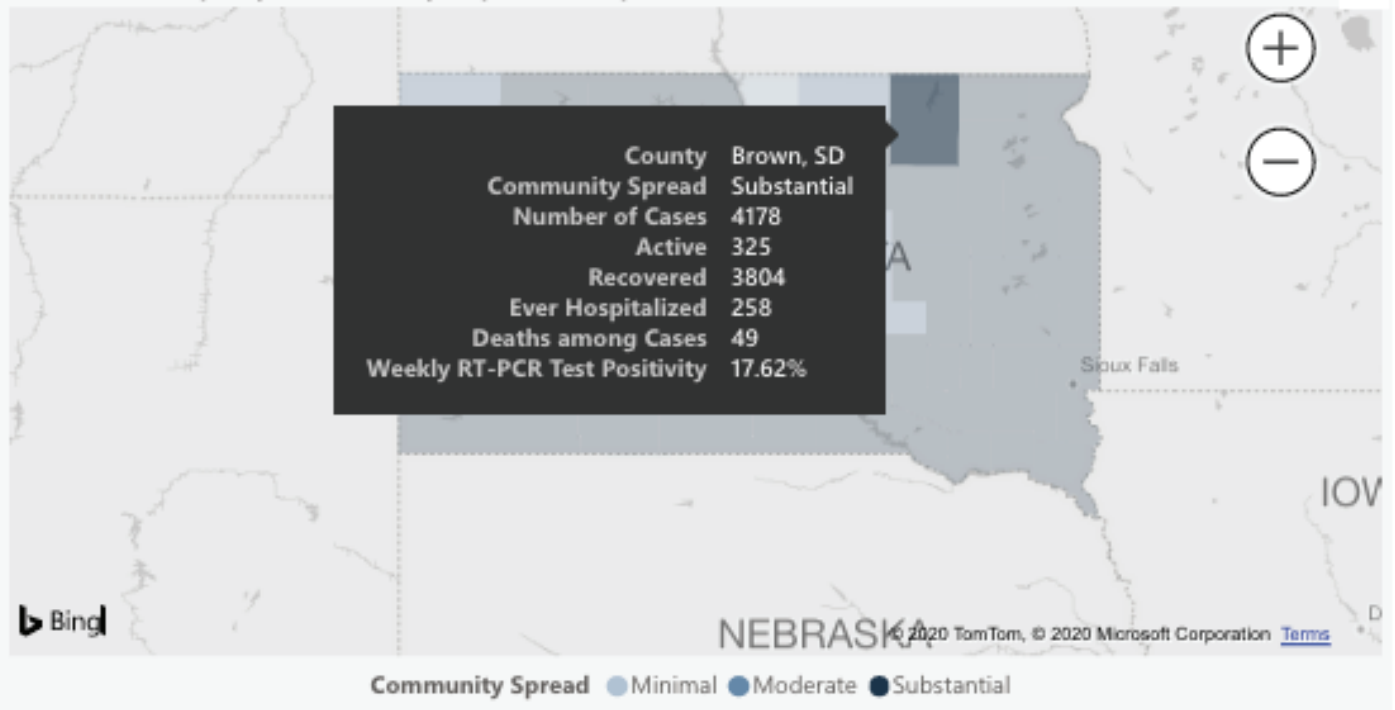
Recovered Cases

3,804

Currently Hospitalized

387

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed Cases

3,981

Total Probable Cases

197

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

23.7%

Total Persons Tested

14,971

Total Tests

33,232

Ever Hospitalized

258

Deaths Among Cases

49

% Progress (October Goal: 44233 Tests)

327%

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

204%

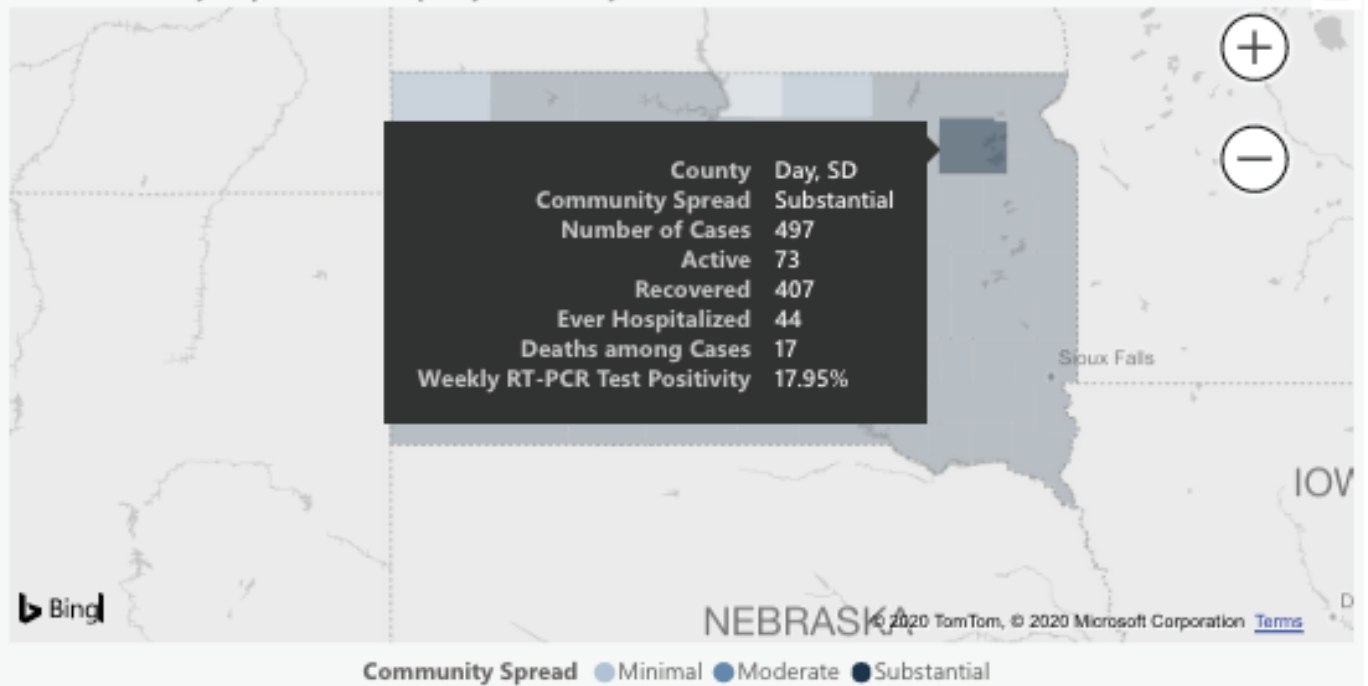
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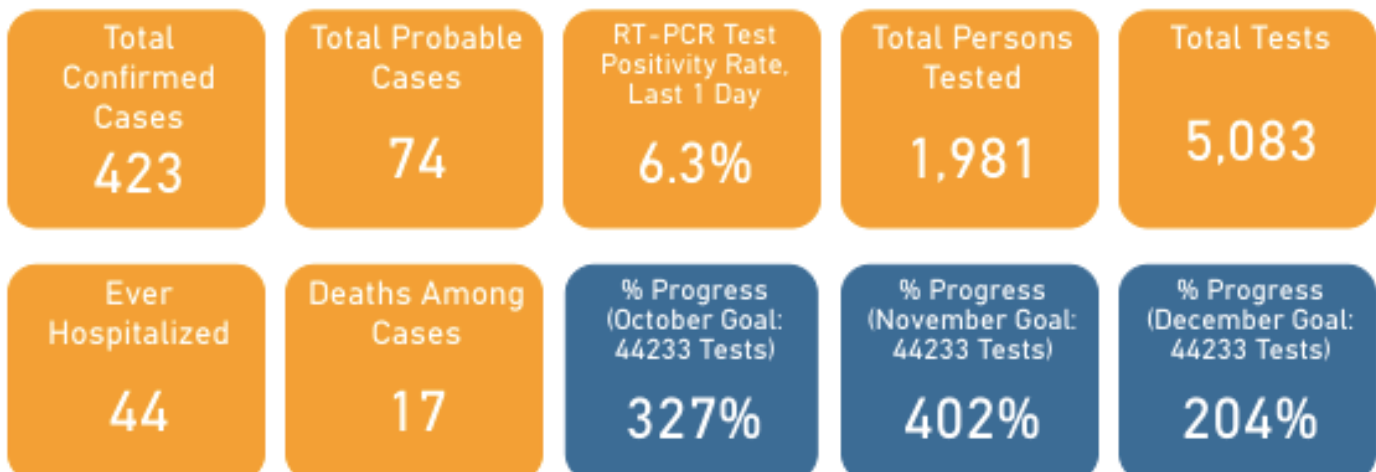
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



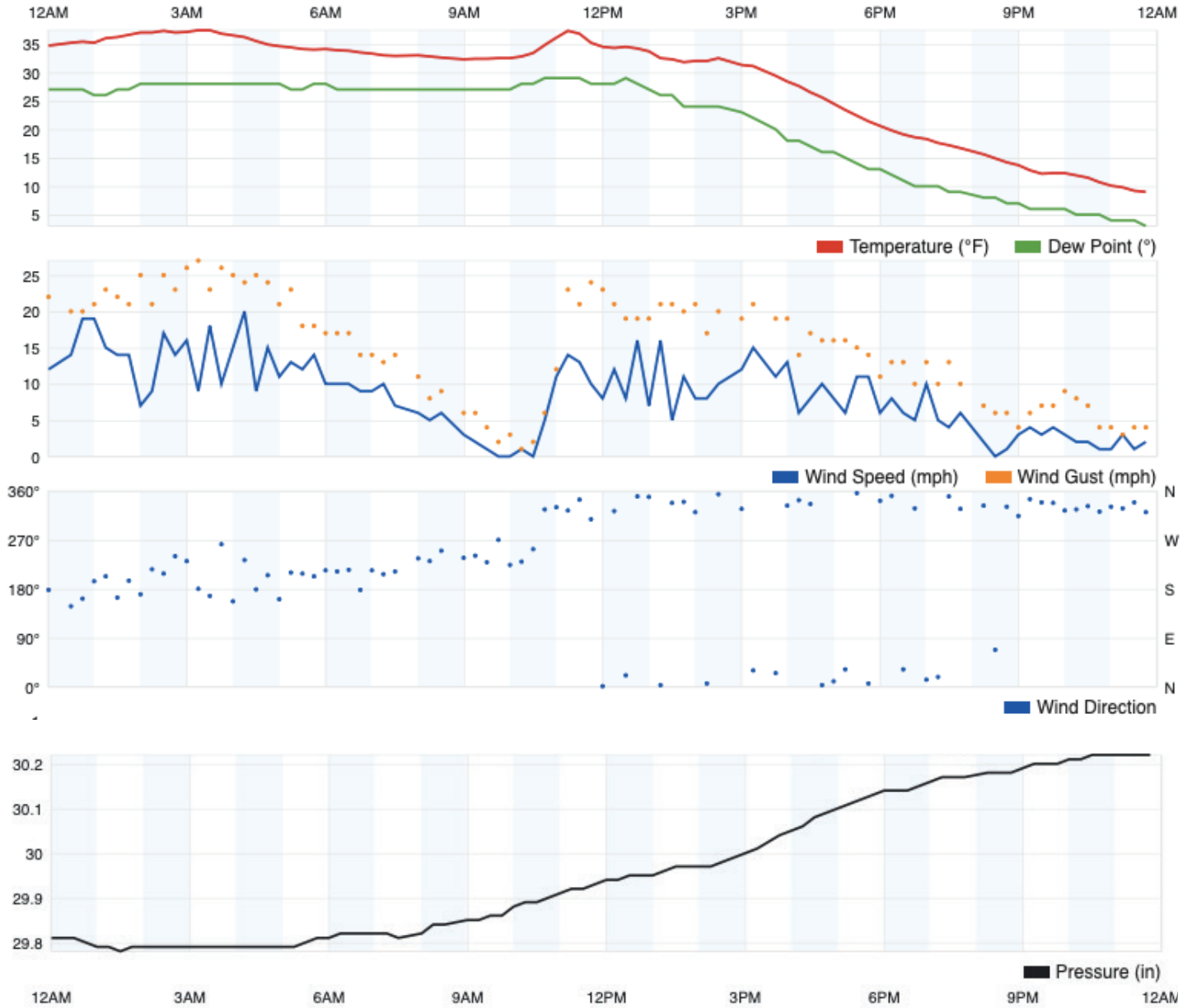
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

Tonight



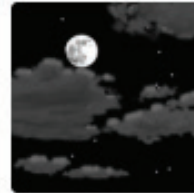
Decreasing
Clouds

Sunday



Increasing
Clouds

Sunday
Night

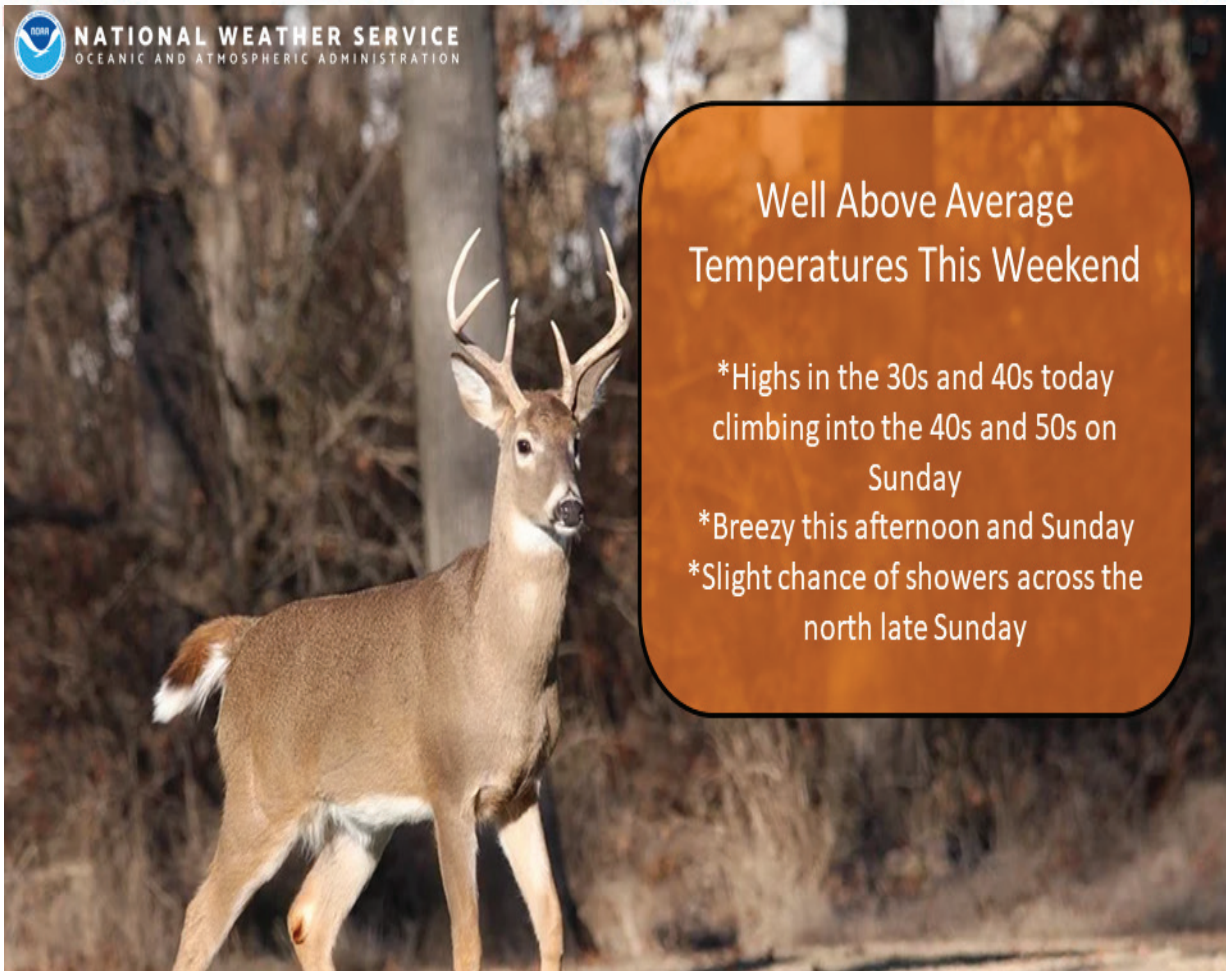


Partly Cloudy

Monday



Sunny



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Well Above Average
Temperatures This Weekend

- *Highs in the 30s and 40s today climbing into the 40s and 50s on Sunday
- *Breezy this afternoon and Sunday
- *Slight chance of showers across the north late Sunday

Breezy conditions are on tap as a couple of systems move through this weekend. Today will be sunny and dry with highs in the 30s and 40s. Temperatures will top out in the 50s across south central SD on Sunday though a few showers aren't out of the question across the north Sunday afternoon.

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Today in Weather History

December 19, 1968: Snow and near-blizzard conditions existed across west-central Minnesota, with 5 to 7 inches of new snow reported. Heavier snowfall amounts were reported further to the southeast in Minnesota. Six inches of snow was reported in Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County.

December 19, 1990: Snow began to fall over the northwest part of Minnesota by early afternoon on the 19th, and fell heavily during the night into the early afternoon of the 20th, spreading over the entire northern 2/3 of the state and into some of northeastern South Dakota overnight. By mid-morning, a swath of snow of 6 inches or more was deposited over much of the northern half of the state, or north of a line from Elbow Lake to Garrison to near Two Harbors. In west-central Minnesota, Wheaton received 6 inches, Browns Valley received 4 inches, and Artichoke Lake received 3 inches. In South Dakota, Webster reported 8 inches, Britton reported 7 inches, Sisseton reported 5 inches, and Aberdeen reported 4 inches.

1777: George Washington led his hungry and weary from long marches men to Valley Forge on this day. The winds greeted the 12,000 Continentals as they prepared for the winter.

2009: Snowfall totals from 1 to 2 feet were commonplace in what will go down as one of the biggest snowstorms in history on the East Coast and the first of four snowstorms for the Mid-Atlantic during the winter of 2009-10. The 15 inches of snow measured at Reagan International Airport on Dec. 19th was the third-highest daily snowfall on any calendar day at Washington, DC, since snowfall records began in 1884. The total storm snowfall of 16.4 inches on Dec 18-19 2009 marks the 6th highest two-day snowfall record for Washington, DC putting it just below the second President's Day storm in 2003 and ahead of the Jan 1996 storm. Baltimore Washington Airport saw 20.5 inches of snow and went down as the fifth-highest daily snowfall on any calendar day in Baltimore since snowfall records began in 1893. The total storm snowfall of 21.0 inches on Dec 18-19 2009 marks the 6th highest two-day snowfall record for Baltimore. The daily snowfall records for Dec 19 were smashed for the most snowfall for any calendar day during December at the following stations. Reagan National Airport's new record was 15.0 inches, old record 11.5 in 1932. Baltimore Washington Airport's new record was 20.5 inches, old record 11.5 in 1932. This was the biggest December snowstorm on record and setting a record for the snowiest December for Baltimore, MD. Dulles Airport's new record was 16.0 inches, old record 10.6 in 1982. Richmond International Airport had a total of 6.4 inches. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reported its second greatest daily snowfall total on record with 22.9 inches. It also was the single most significant December snowfall for the city of Philadelphia, PA. Roanoke, Virginia, recorded 17.8 inches setting a record for the greatest 24-hour snowfall in December. Washington, DC, reported 16.4 inches of snowmaking 2009 the snowiest December on record, all in one storm. In New York, Upton on Long Island recorded 26.3 inches, the biggest snowstorm on record.

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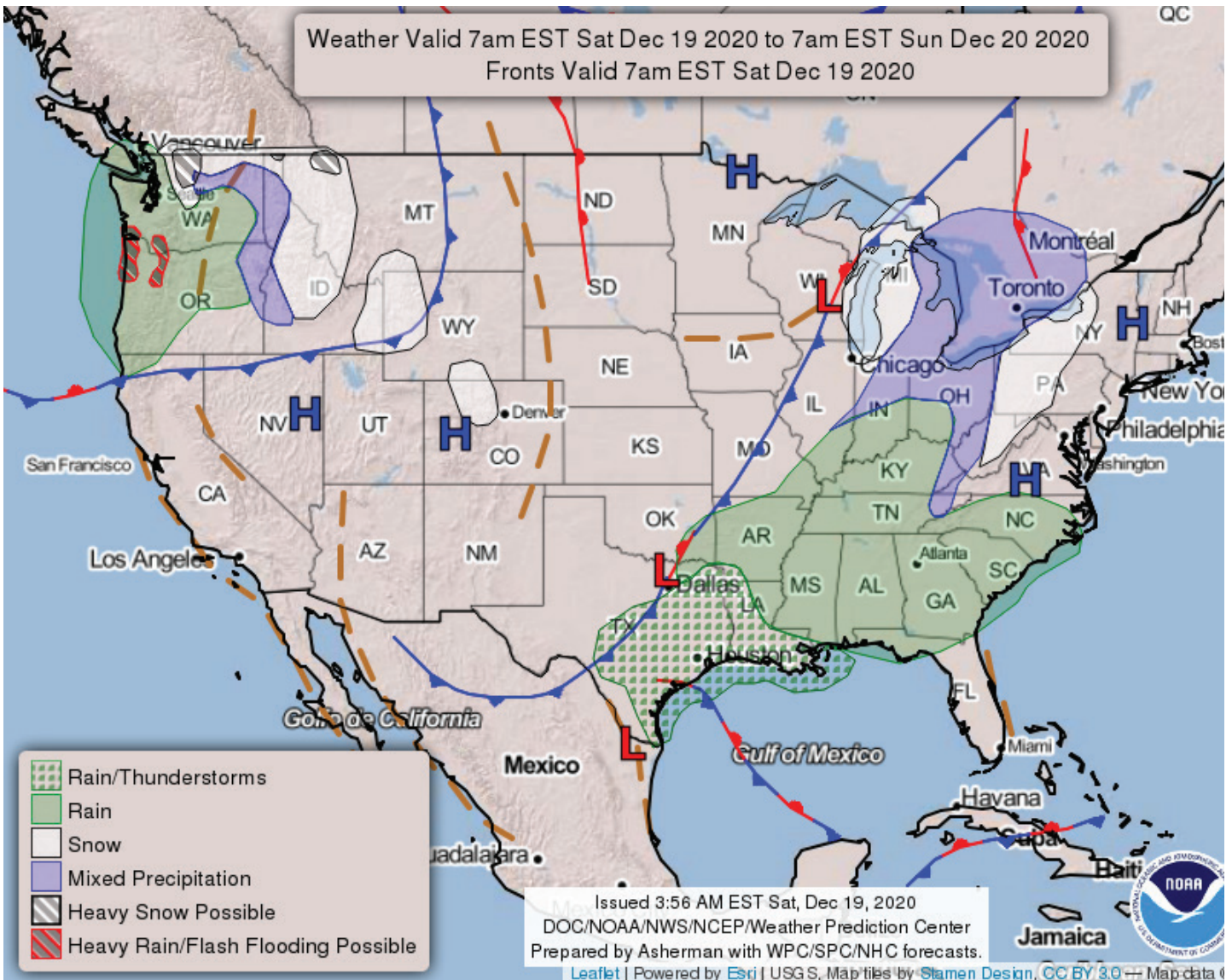
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 38 °F at 3:14 AM
Low Temp: 8 °F at 11:58 PM
Wind: 28 mph at 3:34 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 57° in 1893
Record Low: -29° in 1916
Average High: 24°F
Average Low: 5°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.30
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.50
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 4:53 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10 a.m.



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NO MISTAKE

Walter came home from Sunday school with a question all over his face. "Mom," he asked, "did the shepherds have washing machines where they kept their sheep?"

"Shepherds? Washing machines?" After a moment she said, "No, darling, they did not have washing machines. Why do you ask?"

"Well, Mrs. Mathis was reading the story of the birth of Jesus and she said, 'While shepherds washed their socks that night...' and I didn't understand what was going on."

While we often think of the shepherds in the field that night, the glory that appeared with the angel and the fear that gripped them, we seldom connect the shepherds in that field with the Good Shepherd.

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" twice in John's Gospel. In those statements, he summarized all of the prophetic images of His role as prophet in the Old Testament. This declaration is a claim to His divinity as revealed in the Old Testament and focuses on His love, protection, and guidance of us – His lambs – in the New Testament.

But there is more. Not only is He our Shepherd but He chose to identify Himself as the "good shepherd" – and good is a term that carries with it nobility. It stands in sharp contrast to shepherds who were hired hands who worked and cared only for their own self-interests.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for loving us, for being our Good Shepherd and for laying down Your life for us. May we always follow You, our "Good Shepherd!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

News from the Associated Press

Tourism losses likely to impact South Dakota for years

By MAKENZIE HUBER Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Ashley Dorch thought of her children first when she was laid off Dec. 1

It's only been about two weeks since she was let go as assistant director of catering at the Best Western Plus Ramkota Hotel. But, already, she's applied for 20 jobs.

The single mother has only heard back from two, but wasn't offered a position at either to help support her family — including her 10-, 5- and 4-year-old children. She hasn't heard back from the unemployment office yet either.

That's what the foreseeable future will be like after getting laid off in a pandemic, friends and former co-workers who've also been laid off told her. And it scares her.

"I am the only parent they have in their lives," she said. "When it happened, that was the first thing I thought. Am I able to provide for them in the next month? Am I going to be able to put food on the table, or buy a new jacket if it rips, or new shoes if they grow out of them? Am I going to find a job quick enough to provide for them?"

"It is so close to Christmas, and I'm not going to be able to give my kids the Christmas that I wanted to," she added.

The 29-year-old is just one person impacted by a decimated tourism industry in Sioux Falls this year.

Overall, Minnehaha County has lost 36% of its taxable tourism income this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. South Dakota has lost 12.8% of its total visitor spending, sitting with nearly \$2.97 billion spent this year, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

The loss threatens to leave thousands of people unemployed and shutter businesses — even years after the pandemic is over, local officials and national reports say.

"When people don't travel, they don't stay in your hotels, they don't eat at your restaurants, buy gasoline, shop retail," said Teri Schmidt, executive director of Experience Sioux Falls. "This affects people locally with their jobs, taxes and overall economic benefit of a community."

Dorch was one of over 130 people laid off from the Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls this year — a popular destination for businesses and conventions that all but disappeared in March.

She was able to hang on for months, hoping that the small increase in travelers this summer would carry them over into the new year. But it wasn't enough.

More than 80% of staff members were laid off at the hotel because occupancy dropped between 40% and 60%, said Jan Grunewaldt, chief operating officer for Regency Hotel Management.

"This year, and next year on the books, groups are all gone or mostly gone," Grunewaldt said. "These decisions are heart-wrenching, they keep you awake at night and they're delivered with the utmost empathy and heartbreak. But every single property of ours has had to do it. 50 hotels, lodges and resorts."

In addition to the Ramkota, Regency also manages the ClubHouse Hotel and Suites on Louise Avenue and AeroStay near the airport, with both seeing significant losses this year. Airport traffic alone has dropped 48.2% in 2020.

Overall hotel occupancy in South Dakota is down 21.7%, and Grunewaldt doesn't expect it to get better until mid-2021 at the earliest, and if a vaccine comes along.

The latest U.S. Travel Forecast predicts that leisure and business travel on the national level won't return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. Planners for conventions and conferences are hesitant about planning events until 2022 or 2023, Schmidt said.

Large conventions and events like Pheasant Fest are planned out years in advance. The earliest the event can return to Sioux Falls will be 2024.

Schmidt and her team have to "get back in line to compete" for convention and event schedules, "which can take years," she said.

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"Even if 2021 picks up, people will still be struggling and catching up," Grunewaldt said. "It will be 2022 to 2025 before things really come back."

It's not just hotels, but local businesses — restaurants, gas stations, bars, and more — that rely on the visitor industry.

"I worry, how much more can they take. Can they hang on?" Schmidt said. "They've given their lives to these industries, and now COVID is pounding us into the ground. We have to keep coming back up, and together that's what we're going to do."

More than \$12 million in estimated economic impact was lost in 2020 because of 91 events canceled due to COVID-19, not including events organized by groups other than Experience Sioux Falls, Schmidt said. Already for 2021, Pheasant Fest's cancellation is a \$3.9 million blow to the local economy, based on its 2018 event

As the pandemic continues, Dorch said she's seen friends in the restaurant, bar and visitor industries struggle with unemployment. A few have been evicted or lost their homes because they haven't been able to find work again.

"It's the equivalent of losing a major employer in our community," Grunewaldt said. "The hospitality and tourism industry is one of our top five state economic drivers. It's not just hotels — it's convention centers, the Pentagon, sporting venues, the fairgrounds. All of these are empty shells with debt service and without valuable customers in them."

While Sioux Falls is scrambling to cope with a severe drop in revenue, South Dakota as a whole is fairing better than the city and several other states.

But it's still scraping by, said Katlyn Richter, global media and public relations manager for South Dakota Tourism. An 11-year growth trend halted in March, dropping the state's tax revenue by 13.8%.

"It's a huge impact on South Dakota's entire bottom line," Richter said. Revenue and taxes generated from the tourism industry covers \$840 a year in taxes for South Dakota households.

Behind agriculture, tourism is the second-leading industry for South Dakota, accounting for 5.2% of the state's economy. In 2019, visitor spending generated more than \$84 million in state and local tax revenue in Minnehaha County alone.

South Dakota is fairing better than several other states, including states like Minnesota and Wisconsin where travel spending is down by nearly 50%. Part of that Richter credits to marketing strategies to attract visitors to the "open state" during the pandemic, filled with national and state parks to explore.

One of the most impactful campaigns this year was Kristi Noem's commercial advertisement, Richter said, originally airing on Fox News during the Republican National Convention. After the commercials ran, Richter said the state saw increases in web traffic to its tourism site and hopes it will translate to more visitors in the future.

While national reports estimate people won't be comfortable with pre-pandemic level traveling until 2024, South Dakota hopes to reach that level by 2022.

The state is attractive for hesitant travelers because it's small, rural and features outdoor attractions such as hiking, fishing and hunting, Richter said.

To prepare for those travelers and other business opportunities, the state allocated CARES funding to marketing organizations, such as Experience Sioux Falls, to market their cities and the state — hoping to attract tourism and business conventions when the time is right.

"We have to be assertive, positive, factual, accurate and committed," Schmidt said. "When they're ready, we'll be ready."

As for Dorch, she'd like to return to the Ramkota Hotel when business picks up again, either in 2021 or later. She loved her job and the people she worked with.

But, she's also looking at going to school again — studying nursing or business. As the optimist she is, Dorch believes she can manifest something positive from this.

"I might not be able to provide some things for my kids now, but I try not to think about the negatives," she said. "Once everything is gone and this is all over, I'm going to go back to work and save up and give them a better holiday that they deserve."

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Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 87, Spearfish 50
Brandon Valley 62, Yankton 60
Chamberlain 72, Parkston 41
Custer 64, Lakota Tech 61
Dakota Valley 89, Canton 49
Dell Rapids St. Mary 70, Colman-Egan 38
Elkton-Lake Benton 46, Lake Preston 35
Freeman Academy/Marion 53, Ethan 42
Gordon/Rushville, Neb. 54, Bennett County 47
Hanson 56, Menno 20
Harrisburg 46, Watertown 38
Howard 72, McCook Central/Montrose 38
Jones County 59, Wall 35
Kadoka Area 59, Dupree 44
Lemmon 42, Mott-Regent, N.D. 39
Mitchell 59, Rapid City Central 47
Mobridge-Pollock 46, Sisseton 38
Morrill, Neb. 59, Edgemont 45
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 74, Freeman 18
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 79, Deubrook 78
Potter County 77, Northwestern 42
Rapid City Christian 67, Lyman 58
Rapid City Stevens 66, Huron 52
Redfield 59, Aberdeen Roncalli 58, OT
Scotland 44, Bon Homme 37
Sioux Falls Christian 76, Elk Point-Jefferson 41
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 69, Sioux Falls Lincoln 68
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 54, Brookings 37
Tiospa Zina Tribal 77, White River 76, OT
Tri-Valley 61, Chester 49
Viborg-Hurley 69, Irene-Wakonda 37
Waubay/Summit 57, Waverly-South Shore 52
West Central 53, Winner 49
Wolsey-Wessington 68, Highmore-Harrold 58
Stateline Shootout=
Belle Fourche 44, Sundance, Wyo. 29
Upton, Wyo. 74, Lead-Deadwood 23
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Pierre vs. Douglas, ppd.
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Central 65, Spearfish 25
Bridgewater-Emery 55, Canistota 49
Dakota Valley 56, Canton 52
Deubrook 74, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 21
Dupree 57, Kadoka Area 49

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Edgemont 48, Morrill, Neb. 40
Ethan 68, Freeman Academy/Marion 21
Gordon/Rushville, Neb. 55, Bennett County 23
Hanson 57, Menno 55
Huron 68, Rapid City Stevens 40
Ipswich 61, Langford 21
Lakota Tech 52, Custer 29
Lakota Tech 52, Hill City 29
McCook Central/Montrose 47, Howard 46
Mitchell 48, Rapid City Central 41
Parkston 61, Chamberlain 38
Pierre 48, Sturgis Brown 36
Platte-Geddes 53, Gregory 40
Rapid City Christian 86, Lyman 29
Sioux Falls Christian 48, Elk Point-Jefferson 25
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 55, Brookings 40
Sisseton 59, Mobridge-Pollock 36
Tri-Valley 74, Chester 31
Viborg-Hurley 50, Irene-Wakonda 34
Wall 43, Jones County 38
West Central 53, Winner 43
Stateline Shootout=
Belle Fourche 44, Sundance, Wyo. 29
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Tea Area vs. Dell Rapids, ppd.
White River vs. Tiospa Zina Tribal, ccd.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

07-15-25-51-60, Mega Ball: 5, Megaplier: 3

(seven, fifteen, twenty-five, fifty-one, sixty; Mega Ball: five; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$310 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$304 million

Penn scores 25 to carry Drake over South Dakota 75-57

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Roman Penn had 25 points as Drake won its seventh consecutive game to open the season, beating South Dakota 75-57 on Friday.

Penn shot 10 for 11 from the line.

Tremell Murphy had 15 points and seven rebounds for Drake (7-0). Shanquan Hemphill added 12 points. D.J. Wilkins had 12 points.

Stanley Umude had 14 points for the Coyotes (1-6). A.J. Plitzuweit added 12 points and six rebounds. Xavier Fuller had 11 points.

The Bulldogs improve to 2-0 against the Coyotes this season. Drake defeated South Dakota 69-53 on Nov. 27.

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

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

1 in 5 prisoners in the US has had COVID-19, 1,700 have died

BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL and KATIE PARK of The Marshall Project and ANDREW DEMILLO of The Associated Press undefined

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — One in every five state and federal prisoners in the United States has tested positive for the coronavirus, a rate more than four times as high as the general population. In some states, more than half of prisoners have been infected, according to data collected by The Associated Press and The Marshall Project.

As the pandemic enters its 10th month — and as the first Americans begin to receive a long-awaited COVID-19 vaccine — at least 275,000 prisoners have been infected, more than 1,700 have died and the spread of the virus behind bars shows no sign of slowing. New cases in prisons this week reached their highest level since testing began in the spring, far outstripping previous peaks in April and August.

“That number is a vast undercount,” said Homer Venters, the former chief medical officer at New York’s Rikers Island jail complex.

Venters has conducted more than a dozen court-ordered COVID-19 prison inspections around the country. “I still encounter prisons and jails where, when people get sick, not only are they not tested but they don’t receive care. So they get much sicker than need be,” he said.

Now the rollout of vaccines poses difficult decisions for politicians and policymakers. As the virus spreads largely unchecked behind bars, prisoners can’t social distance and are dependent on the state for their safety and well-being.

This story is a collaboration between The Associated Press and The Marshall Project exploring the state of the prison system in the coronavirus pandemic.

Donte Westmoreland, 26, was recently released from Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas, where he caught the virus while serving time on a marijuana charge. Some 5,100 prisoners have become infected in Kansas prisons, the third-highest COVID-19 rate in the country, behind only South Dakota and Arkansas.

“It was like I was sentenced to death,” Westmoreland said.

Westmoreland lived with more than 100 virus-infected men in an open dorm, where he woke up regularly to find men sick on the floor, unable to get up on their own, he said.

“People are actually dying in front of me off of this virus,” he said. “It’s the scariest sight.” Westmoreland said he sweated it out, shivering in his bunk until, six weeks later, he finally recovered.

Half of the prisoners in Kansas have been infected with COVID-19 — eight times the rate of cases among the state’s overall population. Eleven prisoners have died, including five at the prison where Westmoreland was held. Of the three prison employees who have died in Kansas, two worked at Lansing Correctional Facility.

In Arkansas, where more than 9,700 prisoners have tested positive and 50 have died, four of every seven have had the virus, the second-highest prison infection rate in the U.S.

Among the dead was 29-year-old Derick Coley, who was serving a 20-year sentence at the Cummins Unit maximum security prison. Cece Tate, Coley’s girlfriend, said she last talked with him on April 10 when he said he was sick and showing symptoms of the virus.

“It took forever for me to get information,” she said. The prison finally told her on April 20 that Coley had tested positive for the virus. Less than two weeks later, a prison chaplain called on May 2 to tell her

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Coley had died.

The couple had a daughter who turned 9 in July. "She cried and was like, 'My daddy can't send me a birthday card,'" Tate said. "She was like, 'Momma, my Christmas ain't going to be the same.'"

Nearly every prison system in the country has seen infection rates significantly higher than the communities around them. In facilities run by the federal Bureau of Prisons, one of every five prisoners has had coronavirus. Twenty-four state prison systems have had even higher rates.

Not all states release how many prisoners they've tested, but states that test prisoners broadly and regularly may appear to have higher case rates than states that don't.

Infection rates as of Tuesday were calculated by the AP and The Marshall Project, a nonprofit news organization covering the criminal justice system, based on data collected weekly in prisons since March. Infection and mortality rates may be even higher, since nearly every prison system has significantly fewer prisoners today than when the pandemic began, so rates represent a conservative estimate based on the largest known population.

Yet, as vaccine campaigns get underway, there has been pushback in some states against giving the shots to people in prisons early.

"There's no way it's going to go to prisoners ... before it goes to the people who haven't committed any crime," Colorado Gov. Jared Polis told reporters earlier this month after his state's initial vaccine priority plans put prisoners before the general public.

Like more than a dozen states, Kansas's vaccination plan does not mention prisoners or corrections staff, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, a non-partisan prison data think tank. Seven states put prisoners near the front of the line, along with others living in crowded settings like nursing homes and long-term care facilities. An additional 19 states have placed prisoners in the second phase of their vaccine rollouts.

Racial disparities in the nation's criminal justice system compound the disproportionate toll the pandemic has taken on communities of color. Black Americans are incarcerated at five times the rate of whites. They are also disproportionately likely to be infected and hospitalized with COVID-19, and are more likely than other races to have a family member or close friend who has died of the virus.

The pandemic "increases risk for those who are already at risk," said David J. Harris, managing director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School.

This week, a Council on Criminal Justice task force headed by former attorneys general Alberto Gonzalez and Loretta Lynch released a report calling for scaling back prison populations, improving communication with public health departments and reporting better data.

Prison facilities are often overcrowded and poorly ventilated. Dormitory-style housing, cafeterias and open-bar cell doors make it nearly impossible to quarantine. Prison populations are sicker, on average, than the general population and health care behind bars is notoriously substandard. Nationwide, the mortality rate for COVID-19 among prisoners is 45% higher than the overall rate.

From the earliest days of the pandemic, public health experts called for widespread prison releases as the best way to curb virus spread behind bars. In October, the National Academies of Science, Medicine, and Engineering released a report urging states to empty their prisons of anyone who was medically vulnerable, nearing the end of their sentence or of low risk to public safety.

But releases have been slow and uneven. In the first three months of the pandemic, more than 10,000 federal prisoners applied for compassionate release. Wardens denied or did not respond to almost all those requests, approving only 156 — less than 2%.

A plan to thin the state prison population in New Jersey, first introduced in June, was held up in the Legislature because of inadequate funding to help those who were released. About 2,200 prisoners with less than a year left to serve were ultimately released in November, eight months after the pandemic began.

California used a similar strategy to release 11,000 people since March. But state prisons stopped accepting new prisoners from county jails at several points during the pandemic, which simply shifted the burden to the jails. According to the state corrections agency, more than 8,000 people are now waiting in California's county jails, which are also coronavirus hot spots.

"We call that 'screwing county,'" said John Wetzel, Pennsylvania's secretary of corrections, whose prison

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system has one of the lower COVID-19 case rates in the country, with one in every seven prisoners infected. But that's still more than three times the statewide rate.

Prison walls are porous even during a pandemic, with corrections officers and other employees traveling in and out each day.

"The interchange between communities and prisons and jails has always been there, but in the context of COVID-19 it's never been more clear," said Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein, a professor of social medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill who studies incarceration and health. "We have to stop thinking about them as a place apart."

Wetzel said Pennsylvania's prisons have kept virus rates relatively low by widely distributing masks in mid-March — weeks before even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began recommending them for everyday use in public — and demanding that staff and prisoners use them properly and consistently. But prisoners and advocates say prevention measures on the ground are uneven, regardless of Wetzel's good intentions.

As the country heads into winter with virus infections on the rise, experts caution that unless COVID-19 is brought under control behind bars, the country will not get it under control in the population at large.

"If we are going to end this pandemic — bring down infection rates, bring down death rates, bring down ICU occupancy rates — we have to address infection rates in correctional facilities," said Emily Wang, professor at Yale School of Medicine and co-author of the recent National Academies report.

"Infections and deaths are extraordinarily high. These are wards of the state, and we have to contend with it."

Schwartzapfel reported from Boston and Park from Washington.

This story has been corrected to remove a reference to infection rates for prison employees nationwide that undercounted staff populations in at least one state. The number of staff infected in North Dakota is one in four, not four in five."

South Dakota reports 28 more deaths, 575 new COVID cases

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials reported 28 more deaths from COVID-19 on Friday and an additional 575 new infections.

Friday's numbers bring the state's death toll from COVID-19 to 1,329, and there have been a total of 93,772 cases since the pandemic began.

The numbers show a recent downward trend after surging increases this fall. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in South Dakota decreased over the past two weeks, going from 1,029.43 new cases per day on Dec. 3 to 638.57 new cases per day on Dec. 17.

The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths in South Dakota also decreased over the past two weeks, going from 26.29 deaths per day on Dec. 3 to 17.71 deaths per day on Dec. 17.

The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 dropped to 387 on Friday, a decrease of 19 from a day earlier. The Argus Leader reported that this marks the lowest number of COVID-19 hospitalizations since Oct. 24. Of those in the hospital Friday, 73 were in intensive care and 41 were on ventilators.

A total of 8,773 people have active infections in South Dakota.

As of Friday's report, nearly 3,500 people had been vaccinated in South Dakota.

AP: States spent over \$7B competing for early virus supplies

By DAVID A. LIEB and CAMILLE FASSETT Associated Press

Ray Bellia had a good business before the coronavirus pandemic. He topped \$4 million in annual sales from his New Hampshire store that specialized in protective gear for police.

Then he got a call from a buyer with the state of Massachusetts asking if he had anything that could protect people from COVID-19. As it happened, he did. He went on to sell the state 300,000 disposable

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masks for 97 cents each.

"From that point on, it's been just insanity," Bellia said.

Masks. Gowns. Gloves. Goggles. Sanitizer. Coveralls. Thermometers. Bellia has sold it all, and not just to Massachusetts. From Maine to Hawaii, numerous other states, counties, cities, colleges and schools have lined up to buy from him.

While countless other businesses tanked amid coronavirus shutdowns, Bellia's store — Body Armor Outlet — rapidly evolved into one of the nation's 20 largest suppliers of personal protective equipment to states this past spring, according to a nationwide analysis of state purchasing data by The Associated Press.

The AP tallied more than \$7 billion in purchases by states this spring for personal protective equipment and high-demand medical devices such as ventilators and infrared thermometers.

The data, obtained through open-records requests, is the most comprehensive accounting to date of how much states were buying, what they were spending and whom they were paying during a chaotic spring when inadequate national stockpiles left state governments scrambling for hard-to-get supplies. Much of the buying happened outside normal competitive bidding procedures and, in many states a lack of transparency from governors' administrations made it difficult for the public — and even lawmakers — to see how taxpayer money was being spent.

The spending data covers the period from the emergence of COVID-19 in the U.S. in early 2020 to the start of summer. Some governors described the early PPE marketplace as the Wild West, where supplies often went to the highest bidder, even if they had already been promised to someone else. States set up their own fraud tests, rejecting masks that failed to meet safety specifications or lacked medical labeling.

In some states, normal recordkeeping went by the wayside. Idaho didn't initially itemize how much it paid for each mask and glove ordered from each supplier. That's because the state's buyers were preoccupied with trying to buy large quantities as quickly as possible against hundreds of competitors — all while working from home because of the pandemic, said J.P. Brady, senior buyer for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

"It was chaos, pandemonium," Brady said. "None of us knew what we were doing."

Though states have spent millions more this fall as COVID-19 cases surged again, the initial PPE spending panic has subsided as production increased and supply chains improved.

California spent the most during the pandemic's initial months — at least \$1.5 billion in the AP's data — followed by Texas, Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington. New York also spent several hundred million dollars on PPE and ventilators through November, though it's unclear how much of that occurred in the spring.

New Jersey and New York provided total figures but not specific details about their purchases. New Jersey's health department said it would be too "disruptive" to agency operations to do so, and New York repeatedly postponed a response.

The AP's data shows that millions of dollars flowed from states to businesses that had never before sold PPE, including a Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer, an American tribal organization and consultants with international connections. Traditional safety equipment suppliers also saw a surge in PPE sales, offsetting their losses from other products amid the sudden recession.

But the states' burst of spending wasn't a boon for everyone. Some businesses that tried to supply PPE lost millions of dollars when states canceled orders that failed to meet aggressive delivery deadlines or strict product specifications. Businesses selling PPE faced a treacherous market, with backlogs at foreign manufacturers, shipping delays and multiple intermediaries.

All of that led to a spike in prices paid by the states, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

Before the pandemic, an N95 mask that filters out tiny particles might have cost about 50 cents. This spring, states paid an average of \$3 each, according to the AP's analysis. Some states paid more than \$10 a mask to get them quickly. Average prices for gloves rose fourfold.

In mid-March, Louisiana paid \$57,450 for 5,000 N95 masks — at \$11.49 each — from Grey Wolf Safety Group in Broussard. Grey Wolf owner Sean McClellan said that to fulfill the state's order, he had to buy out whatever his competitors had in stock. Some masks he got were designed for painting, others for

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welding. Some came with special breathing valves, while others did not.

"All the cheap masks that were N95, those were already gone," McClellan said. "So I basically bought up the expensive ones that were left."

Then he marked up the price a bit more and resold them to the state, making a couple of dollars per mask.

"I'm not price-gouging," McClellan said. "I have to make something, and I then have to pay my salesperson something."

Other businesses that charged high prices to states offered similar explanations. Go Green Solutions Inc. in South Grafton, Massachusetts, sold its home state several thousand N95 masks in early April for \$11.25 to \$11.50 each. The price was a product of limited supply and high demand, resulting in only modest profit margins, manager Jim Fisher said.

"Usually, if you found inventory with some of your suppliers, you had to make a purchase right then and there. You couldn't wait," he said, "because within an hour, it would be gone."

States competed with each other, hospital systems, the federal government and even other countries to find and buy medical gear as the virus began spreading.

The pressure to obtain protective supplies led some states to unusual sources. Minnesota bought 2,300 waterproof gowns intended for milking cows from Udder Tech Inc. The special gowns cost about \$46 each when freight was included — about seven times the average price that states were paying for medical gowns this spring. Before the pandemic, some health care systems could buy disposable gowns for about 40 cents each.

"They were looking to acquire anything they could at that point to help protect the health care workers," said Dana Casto, business manager at the Rosemount, Minnesota-based dairy supply company.

While some states paid a premium for small orders from local suppliers, their purchasing agents also scrambled to secure large quantities of protective equipment, much of it manufactured in Asia. That created an opportunity for companies to enter the PPE field.

The largest supplier of PPE to states this spring had never sold a single mask before the pandemic. But from mid-March to early June, Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD sold \$930 million worth of masks and sanitizer to states. Two-thirds of that went to California, where Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom drew criticism for initially keeping secret the details of his "bold and big" deal that paid BYD \$3.30 for each N95.

Like the leaders of some other states, Newsom sidestepped the traditional purchasing process of publicly soliciting competitive bids from vendors, which can take weeks or even months. Some state lawmakers responsible for budgeting complained that Newsom left them out of the loop.

Washington, which was among the first states to record coronavirus cases, bought tens of millions of N95 masks and similar KN95 masks from BYD this spring at prices ranging from \$2.58 to \$4.02 each. That helped rank Washington among the top states in mask purchasing rates per COVID-19 cases among its residents, according to the AP's analysis.

BYD also sold to Connecticut, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Texas this spring and signed an additional \$316 million deal with California in July, after the period covered by the AP's data. By then, the price the company charged to California had fallen to \$2.13 per N95 mask and 20 cents per surgical mask, barely a third of the spring rate.

During the first quarter of 2020, when China was in lockdown, BYD reported a 35% decline in operating income. That's when company Chairman Wang Chuanfu decided to begin making masks and sanitizer. BYD's income rebounded to post a 12% gain through the first three-quarters of the year. Its stock price surged from \$5 a share in January to more than \$20 this fall, although it's unclear how much of that is attributable to new PPE production versus its sales of electric vehicles and other products.

Frank Girardot, senior communications director for BYD North America, compared Chuanfu to an inventor "along the lines of Thomas Edison" who got into the PPE business for altruistic reasons.

"He, in January, decided that this was something that the company had to do in service to the world," Girardot said.

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BYD's largest U.S. investor is Berkshire Hathaway, led by Warren Buffett.

Fastenal Co. and W.W. Grainger, two industrial suppliers, also saw surges in PPE sales. The AP's data includes \$99 million in PPE sales to 32 states by Fastenal, and \$50 million in PPE sales to 40 states by Grainger, which said its profits on those sales were squeezed by increased freight costs and previous contracts with reduced prices.

Many of the companies in the AP's data set are not publicly traded and thus can keep their financial figures private. For example, one of the largest deals is California's \$179 million order of 20 million gowns from BuKo LLC. The New York-based company has a bare-bones website that describes it as "a brand and product development think tank." Few other details are available about the company.

BuKo owner Rashmi Budhram declined to comment when reached by telephone.

Others, however, were more than willing to describe how PPE sales provided a lifeline at the onset of the pandemic.

The leaders at Grand Traverse Economic Development, a commercial investment entity for the Ottawa and Chippewa Native American tribes in Michigan, decided to get into the PPE business when a shutdown affected the tribe's other business ventures. The organization quickly became New Hampshire's top PPE supplier, selling the state nearly \$28 million worth of masks, gowns, coveralls, face shields and sanitizing wipes this spring. It made a profit of around 10% to 15%, business development director Lauren Tucker said.

"This helped us keep our doors open, keep our staff fully employed and engaged, and we grew during the pandemic," she said.

Bellia, president of Body Armor Outlet, also expanded. The AP's data for the spring includes just over \$50 million in PPE sales to states by the Salem, New Hampshire, company. But Bellia said his total PPE sales this year are around \$120 million — a roughly thirtyfold increase over his company's total sales for 2019.

Because of the success, Bellia increased his payroll from eight to 12 employees. And while he continues to sell body armor, he cleared almost all of it out of his warehouse to make room for coronavirus PPE.

"While in a heartbeat I would trade this to go back to the way it was, I think unequivocally it's been a great thing for us," he said.

Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri, and Fassett from Santa Cruz, California. Associated Press data editor Meghan Hoyer contributed to this report.

Fassett 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.

WHO was warned lives were at risk over yanked Italy report

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — An author of a withdrawn World Health Organization report into Italy's coronavirus response warned his bosses in May that people could die and the U.N. agency could suffer "catastrophic" reputational damage if it allowed political concerns to suppress the document, according to emails seen by The Associated Press.

The comprehensive report examined how the Italian government and health system reacted after the country became the epicenter of the European outbreak in late February, with real-time data and case studies of what worked and what didn't. It was aimed at helping other countries prepare as the virus spread globally.

The agency took it down a day after it was posted on its website, prompting the official who coordinated the work to appeal directly to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on May 28 and warn that the report's disappearance was undermining WHO's credibility. He cautioned that any further attempts at censorship would compromise the agency's independence and its relations with donor nations that funded

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the research.

The handling of the report could cause a “scandal of huge proportion — in a delicate moment for the U.N. health agency with the forthcoming COVID-19 investigation,” wrote Francesco Zambon, WHO’s chief field coordinator for Italy and its regions during the pandemic.

In a statement Saturday, WHO said Zambon “expressed his views to many people and they were handled via appropriate channels.”

The report, written by Zambon and a team of WHO public health experts and consultants, was posted May 13 after it had received necessary approvals within the U.N. system, according to internal WHO documents seen by AP. The agency later said it was withdrawn because of “factual inaccuracies” that it has not detailed and denied that it received any pressure from the Italian government to remove it.

In the face of criticism that yanking the report deprived countries of data that could have helped them avoid Italy’s fate, WHO said Monday that it has offered another “mechanism” to assess pandemic responses. But that wasn’t rolled out until two months after the report was pulled.

Concerns over the missing report have grown in recent weeks, fueling criticism of WHO’s leadership of the global response to the pandemic that led the agency to agree to an independent probe of its performance.

The U.N. agency has been loath to publicly criticize countries that are top donors even when their policies could undermine public health.

During the initial stages of the outbreak in January, for example, WHO officials were privately frustrated by the lack of information being shared by China, but publicly lauded the country for its transparency. As the pandemic gained pace in Europe, WHO scientists internally questioned Britain’s policies — such as when it suggested it would pursue “herd immunity” — but publicly emphasized their support.

The missing report has cast a spotlight on preparedness in Italy, where Europe’s deadliest outbreak unfolded. In the hard-hit province of Bergamo, prosecutors have seized on it as part of their investigation into what went wrong.

Paradoxically, the report isn’t even particularly critical of the Italian government and credited officials for their efforts, praising at one point how they counteracted with data “sensational displays of disagreement in talk shows” that stirred anxiety.

The text did note that the Italian Health Ministry hadn’t updated its influenza pandemic preparedness plan since 2006. The 2006 plan was merely “reconfirmed” in 2016-2017 without being updated and was “more theoretical than practical.”

“Unprepared for such a flood of severely ill patients, the initial reaction of the hospitals was improvised, chaotic and creative,” the report said. “It took some time before formal guidance became available.”

Italy’s state-run RAI television investigative “Report” program has published emails showing that a top WHO official, Raniero Guerra, who worked as a liaison with the Italian government during the pandemic, told Zambon to “correct” that Italy’s preparedness plan had been “updated” in 2016, even though the 2016 version was identical to the 2006 one.

Guerra had been in charge of prevention in the Italian Health Ministry from 2014 to 2017, when the plan should have been overhauled. He himself wrote to the then-health minister saying the plan needed to be updated, according to a copy of his 2017 memo seen by AP.

WHO has said the Italian government “at no time” asked it to remove the report, which it now says it does not endorse. “The decision to remove the document from the website was taken by WHO’s Regional Office for Europe due to factual inaccuracies,” WHO said.

Zambon says the only inaccuracy was an out-of-date timeline of the virus in China that he corrected immediately and had new copies without it printed. WHO on Saturday defended retracting the report altogether.

“We are, of course, resolutely focused on saving lives, but published content needs to be accurate and based on proven methods,” WHO said.

Guerra told the Financial Times he didn’t interfere. He added that the 2006 preparedness plan actually didn’t need to be updated because no significant flu strains had been identified since then and that the

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preparedness plan wasn't relevant to the current pandemic because it was only meant to cover influenza.

The deputy health minister, Pierpaolo Sileri, begged to disagree. "That plan was from 2006 and needed to be updated," Sileri told the Corriere della Sera paper. Guerra didn't immediately respond to questions from AP, saying he was traveling.

The emails seen by AP suggest that WHO officials were concerned that the report had upset the Italians, offering rare insight into decision making by the U.N. agency, which is not subject to Freedom of Information requests.

In a May 13 email to Zambon, Guerra noted that Italy had just made a 10 million-euro (\$12.3 million) voluntary donation to the WHO, and that negotiations between WHO and Italy for funding the agency's Venice office were about to begin.

"There are already signs of institutional turmoil from the Italian side and unnecessary resentment against the WHO," Guerra wrote to Zambon on May 14, the day the report was yanked.

A day later, the head of WHO Europe, Dr. Hans Kluge, wrote to Zambon that the "key issue" at stake in the controversy was his relationship with the Italian health minister, Roberto Speranza, who he said had been "very disappointed" by the report.

The Italian government, he said, feels "they are constantly attacked by the press and each word can be misinterpreted. They felt stepped (on) by a friend."

Kluge said he would propose to Speranza including Italian health officials in a review of the report. "We need MoH (Ministry of Health) happy and sign off for Venice," he said, referring to the funding for the office.

The ministry told RAI it doesn't consider the report official.

Meanwhile, Zambon was warning Tedros and Kluge that lives were being put at risk around the world by withholding Italy's "lessons learned."

"A large team of experts worked literally days and nights with one motivation: making sure that what happened in Italy is not repeated in those countries behind in time in the epidemic curve," Zambon wrote Kluge on May 27. "The report contains important messages, extrapolated from facts on what worked (many things) and the blind spots of the system."

A day later, in a message to the WHO chief, Zambon warned of a "risk of catastrophic damage in terms of independence and transparency if a 'censored' version of the above mentioned publication is modified," as well as "compromised" relations with the government of Kuwait, which is one of WHO's biggest donors and had funded the research with an \$80 million grant.

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng in Toronto and writer Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed.

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

Pompeo says Russia 'pretty clearly' behind cyberattack on US

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Russia was "pretty clearly" behind the gravest cyberattack against the United States on record, the first administration official to publicly tie the Kremlin to the widespread intrusion at a time when President Donald Trump has kept silent on the failure to protect government and private-sector computer networks.

It's not clear exactly what the hackers were seeking, but experts say it could include nuclear secrets, blueprints for advanced weaponry, COVID-19 vaccine-related research and information for dossiers on key government and industry leaders.

"We're still unpacking precisely what it is, and I'm sure some of it will remain classified," Pompeo said in an interview late Friday with radio talk show host Mark Levin. "But suffice it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of U.S. government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and companies and governments across the world as

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well. This was a very significant effort, and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity."

Russia has said it had "nothing to do" with the hacking.

Deputy White House press secretary Brian Morgenstern told reporters Friday that national security adviser Robert O'Brien has sometimes been leading multiple daily meetings with the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the intelligence agencies, looking for ways to mitigate the hack.

He would not provide details, "but rest assured we have the best and brightest working hard on it each and every single day."

The Democratic leaders of four House committees given classified briefings by the administration on the hack issued a statement complaining that they "were left with more questions than answers."

"Administration officials were unwilling to share the full scope of the breach and identities of the victims," they said.

Pompeo, in the interview with Levin, said Russia was on the list of "folks that want to undermine our way of life, our republic, our basic democratic principles. ... You see the news of the day with respect to their efforts in the cyberspace. We've seen this for an awfully long time, using asymmetric capabilities to try and put themselves in a place where they can impose costs on the United States."

What makes this hacking campaign so extraordinary is its scale: 18,000 organizations were infected from March to June by malicious code that piggybacked on popular network-management software from an Austin, Texas, company called SolarWinds.

It's going to take months to kick elite hackers out of the U.S. government networks they have been quietly rifling through since as far back as March.

Experts say there simply are not enough skilled threat-hunting teams to duly identify all the government and private-sector systems that may have been hacked. FireEye, the cybersecurity company that discovered the intrusion into U.S. agencies and was among the victims, has already tallied dozens of casualties. It's racing to identify more.

Many federal workers — and others in the private sector — must presume that unclassified networks are teeming with spies. Agencies will be more inclined to conduct sensitive government business on Signal, WhatsApp and other encrypted smartphone apps.

"We should buckle up. This will be a long ride," said Dmitri Alperovitch, co-founder and former chief technical officer of the leading cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. "Cleanup is just phase one."

The only way to be sure a network is clean is "to burn it down to the ground and rebuild it," Schneier said.

Florida became the first state to acknowledge falling victim to a SolarWinds hack. Officials told The Associated Press that hackers apparently infiltrated the state's health care administration agency and others.

SolarWinds' customers include most Fortune 500 companies, and it's U.S. government clients are rich with generals and spymasters.

If the hackers are indeed from Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency, as experts believe, their resistance may be tenacious. When they hacked the White House, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department in 2014 and 2015 "it was a nightmare to get them out," Alperovitch said.

The Pentagon has said it has so far not detected any intrusions from the SolarWinds campaign in any of its networks — classified or unclassified.

Associated Press writers Matthew Lee in Washington and Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

In FBI probe, Texas AG faces aggressive, ethical prosecutor

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has spent years dodging legal and public relations blows that might have knocked others out of politics. The Republican has so far proven too wily for political opponents and prosecutors, winning reelection and rising to national prominence as a conservative

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crusader even while under felony indictment.

But criminal allegations from Paxton's top deputies have set him up to square off against a formidable new opponent: A federal prosecutor with a team of seasoned FBI agents and a track record of getting corrupt public officials sent to prison.

Paxton has not been charged with a crime in the months since eight senior officials in the attorney general's office reported him to the FBI for bribery, abuse of office and other offenses allegedly committed in helping a wealthy donor trying to fend off his own federal investigation. Federal investigators are digging into the attorney general's actions and connections to Nate Paul, an Austin real estate developer who employs a woman with whom Paxton is said to have had an extramarital affair.

Overseeing the effort is San Antonio-based Assistant U.S. Attorney Joe Blackwell, according to a person familiar with the probe who insisted on anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

Paxton has denied any wrongdoing. His unsuccessful recent lawsuit trying to overturn the presidential election has raised questions about whether he's seeking protection from a powerful ally — President Donald Trump.

The U.S. attorney's office in West Texas declined to comment or make Blackwell available for an interview. Federal prosecutors and the FBI generally do not confirm ongoing investigations.

Blackwell, who coordinates public integrity cases across a region stretching more than 500 miles (800 kilometers) to El Paso, is a hard-charging but fair prosecutor, according to former colleagues and opposing lawyers alike. He has a knack for boiling down the complex facts of white-collar investigations, a down-to-earth demeanor and slight Louisiana accent that endears him to juries.

"He's probably the best trial attorney I've ever seen," said Sean O'Connell, a Virginia lawyer who worked with Blackwell as a federal prosecutor in Texas.

Blackwell, 45, earned his law degree from Louisiana State University in 2000. Before joining the U.S. attorney's office, he worked as a military prosecutor and in private practice, former colleagues said.

Blackwell handled a variety of immigration, narcotics, financial crime and other cases in El Paso before moving to San Antonio, where he began prosecuting more complex white-collar cases. His most high-profile case was the 2018 money laundering and fraud trial of former state Sen. Carlos Uresti.

Erica Benites Giese, who was a senior federal prosecutor in San Antonio during the trial, said Blackwell made a "very impassioned" argument that Uresti deserved a prison sentence, and a judge gave the long-time Democratic lawmaker 12 years. But Blackwell is not the type of prosecutor "who just wants heads on his wall," she said.

"No politics plays into his analysis whatsoever," said Benites Giese, who is now in private practice.

Politics has, however, been part of Paxton's defense strategy.

The attorney general has long used political connections and legal maneuvers to stall the prosecution of his state securities fraud case. Five years after Paxton pleaded not guilty it remains unclear where or when he'll face trial.

More recently, Paxton's failed effort to have the U.S. Supreme Court throw out Joe Biden's win in the presidential election prompted speculation that the attorney general is angling for a preemptive pardon in the waning weeks of Trump's administration. Paxton's defense attorney, Philip Hilder, declined to comment.

A broad pardon would foreclose federal prosecution. But it would not necessarily end the investigation into Paxton, according David Crump, a professor at the University of Houston Law Center. He said it's possible the FBI could hand off its findings to state prosecutors.

People who know Blackwell said he's unlikely to be scared away or put off a case if the government decides to bring one. And he's more than capable of legal hardball.

During Uresti's trial, Blackwell successfully got the judge to remove the senator's lawyer, Mikal Watts, for conflict of interest. Watts said he still disagrees with the decision and Uresti's eventual sentence, but that as aggressive as Blackwell might be, he is also ethical.

"He will try the case heads up and let the jury decide," said Watts. "Joe is a guy I would trust my wife with on a weekend away."

Follow Jake Bleiberg: <https://twitter.com/jzbleiberg>.

California hospitals struggling as coronavirus cases explode

By JOHN ANTCAZAK and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California hospitals are battling to find beds to house patients amid fears that the exploding coronavirus infection rate will exhaust resources and health care workers.

As of Friday, nearly 17,000 people were hospitalized with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infections — more than double the previous peak reached in July — and a state model that uses current data to forecast future trends shows the number could reach an unfathomable 75,000 by mid-January.

More than 3,500 confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients were in intensive care units.

Some areas of California are “just right at that cusp of getting overrun,” Dr. Anthony Fauci, the country’s top infectious-disease expert, said during an event organized by the California State University system.

Corona Regional Medical Center southeast of Los Angeles has converted an old emergency room to help handle nearly double the usual number of ICU patients. It’s using space in two disaster tents to triage ER patients because the emergency room is filled with patients who need to be hospitalized.

Ambulances can sit for two hours unless they are bringing in patients with critical, life-or-death emergencies.

“There’s no room at the inn, so to speak,” hospital chief executive Mark Uffer said. “Literally every nook and cranny of the hospital is being used.”

It’s a scene playing out across California. According to state data Friday, all of Southern California and the 12-county San Joaquin Valley to the north had exhausted their regular intensive care unit capacity and some hospitals have begun using “surge” space.

In hard-hit Fresno County in Central California, a new 50-bed alternate care site opened Friday near the community Regional Medical Center. The beds for COVID-19-negative patients will free up space in area hospitals, where just 13 of some 150 ICU beds were available Friday, said Dan Lynch, the county’s emergency medical services director.

Lynch said he expects they will have to use the Fresno Convention Center, which can accommodate up to 250 patients, given current demand.

Fresno and three neighboring counties also have taken the unprecedented step of sending paramedics on emergency calls to evaluate people. They won’t be taken to the emergency room if they could go to an urgent care facility or wait a few days to talk to their doctors, Lynch said.

Some hospitals have canceled non-essential elective surgeries, such as hip replacements, that might require beds which may soon be needed for COVID-19 patients. Others are increasing staff hours or moving patients to free up space.

“I’m not going to sugarcoat this. We are getting crushed,” said Dr. Brad Spellberg, chief medical officer at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center, which has more than 600 beds and is one of the largest hospitals in the county.

Spellberg said every day at his hospital for the last week has begun with no available intensive care beds and a scramble to find room in spaces that don’t usually handle critical patients, like post-surgery recovery areas.

“And it isn’t just COVID patients,” he said. “It’s car accidents and heart attacks and victims of violence. They need a place to go to receive critical care.”

The ever-increasing demand may be straining human resources as well.

“We do still have physical beds available, but we need staff to take care of patients. It doesn’t do a whole lot of good to be sitting in a bed with nobody taking care of you,” Dr. Amy Herold, chief medical officer for Queen of the Valley Medical Center in Napa, told the San Francisco Chronicle. “People are working overtime over and over again and they are exhausted and it is just getting worse.”

John Chapman, president and chief executive at San Antonio Regional Hospital in Upland, said telemetry nurses who monitor vital signs of patients should be overseeing no more than four people, but they could

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wind up taking on five or six because of the crush of cases.

"It definitely increases the risk of something going wrong," he said.

Many emergency rooms already have been using outdoor tents to make more space, said Dr. Marc Futernick, an emergency room physician in Los Angeles who is on the board of the California chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians. One hospital that has maxed out its outdoor overflow tent is expanding into a nearby gym, he said.

Yet coronavirus cases have not reached their peak in this third and most devastating wave, and that means more drastic measures are on the horizon.

Rationing of care "is right around the corner," Futernick said. "There's no feasible way for this to be avoided. The numbers are too big."

As of Friday, the nation's most populous state recorded more than 41,000 new confirmed cases and 300 deaths, both among the highest single-day totals during the pandemic. In the last week, California has reported more than a quarter-million cases and 1,500 deaths.

California has begun receiving new COVID-19 vaccines. But the available doses are too scanty and too late to have any immediate impact on the soaring infection rate.

The latest explosion of cases has been tied to people ignoring social-distancing rules during the Thanksgiving holiday. Health care officials and workers expressed frustration that many people aren't following state-mandated safety rules designed to slow that rate.

"Whatever's coming, I don't think any of us are going to be able to manage it," Uffer said. "You have a dam that's about to break, and you've got to stop putting water into the dam."

If people don't curtail upcoming holiday travels and get-togethers, the state could see a "surge upon a surge," Fauci said.

"I am fearful it will be worse than what we saw in New York," Futernick said. "When New York's hospitals became overwhelmed, health care providers poured in from around the country."

"None of that is happening right now, and there's no way for it to happen because every place is busy," Futernick said. "There's no cavalry coming."

Taxin reported from Orange County. Associated Press writers Adam Beam and Don Thompson contributed from Sacramento, and Janie Har contributed from San Francisco.

'Big win for democracy': Bosnian city of Mostar gets a vote

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Irma Baralija is looking forward to Sunday, when she intends to vote and hopes to win her race as the southern Bosnian city of Mostar holds its first local election in 12 years.

To make that vote possible in her hometown, the 36-year-old Baralija had to sue Bosnia in the European Court of Human Rights for letting a stalemate between two major nationalist political parties prevent her, along about 100,000 other Mostar residents, from voting or running in a municipal election for over a decade.

By winning in court in October 2019, Baralija believes she has "busted the myth (that nationalist parties) have been feeding to us, that an individual cannot move things forward, that we matter only as members of our ethnic groups."

Parties representing only one ethnic group have dominated Bosnian politics since the end of the country's devastating 1992-95 war, which pitted its three main ethnic factions — Serbs, Croats and Muslims — against each other after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

"I hope that my example will inspire citizens of Mostar, when they vote on Sunday, to be brave, to realize that as individuals we can bring positive change," said Baralija, who is running for a city council seat on the ticket of the small, multi-ethnic Our Party.

Divided between Muslim Bosniaks and Catholic Croats, who fought fiercely for control over the city during the 1990s conflict, Mostar has not held a local poll since 2008, when Bosnia's constitutional court declared

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its election rules to be discriminatory and ordered that they be changed.

The dominant nationalist Bosniak and Croat political parties, the SDA and the HDZ respectively, have spent over a decade failing to agree about how to do that. Meanwhile, Mostar was run by a de facto acting mayor, HDZ's Ljubo Beslic, and his office, which included SDA representatives, with no local council to oversee their work or the allocation of nearly 230 million euros from the city's coffers they have spent over the years.

Left without fully functioning institutions, Mostar — one of the impoverished Balkan country's main tourist destinations — has seen its infrastructure crumble, trash repeatedly pile up on its streets and hazardous waste and wastewater treatment sludge dumped in its only landfill, which was supposed to be for non-hazardous waste.

An agreement between the two parties, endorsed by the top European Union and U.S. diplomats in Bosnia, was finally reached in June — eight months after the court in Strasbourg had ruled in favor of Baralija and gave Bosnia six months to amend its election laws so a vote can be held in Mostar.

Mostar is divided in half by the Neretva River. During the war, Croats moved to the western side and Muslims to the east. Since the fighting stopped, the city has had two post offices, two electricity and water suppliers, two phone networks, two public hospitals and more — one crumbling set for each ethnic group.

On Sunday, several small, multi-ethnic parties will be vying for seats in the city council after campaigning on bread-and-butter issues. But the nationalist HDZ and SDA parties hope that, among them, they will secure a two-thirds majority in the council and keep their grip on power.

While acknowledging that the nationalists have armies of faithful voters whom they mobilize by stoking ethnic mistrust, non-nationalist election candidates in Mostar hope the past 12 years has shown that those two parties are too corrupt and incompetent.

"I think that many people finally realized that the abstract, ethnic interests are meaningless while their children are leaving (Mostar) in droves in search of decent jobs and a decent life" elsewhere in Europe, said Amna Popovac, a candidate from the multi-ethnic Platform for Progress party.

The nationalists are now promising to fix the city's many problems as if "Martians and not they were running Mostar, unchecked, for the past 12 years," she added.

Miljan Rupar's name will also be on the ballot. The 35-year-old, who is running as a candidate from the multi-ethnic Social Democrat Party, decided to get involved in politics after realizing that over 38 friends and relatives, including his sister, had left Mostar "for good" in search of a better life abroad.

Rupar wants his city focused on the future, just like the international school where he teaches physics, the United World College branch in Mostar. The school is one of 17 around the globe and run by a movement founded in 1962 with the aim of overcoming Cold War divisions by bringing high-achieving youngsters from all over to live and learn together.

"When I walk into the classroom or attend our bi-weekly assembly and see students and teachers from all over the world, including from various parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who share the same values and goals, it gives me hope," he said.

Political journalist Faruk Kajtaz, however, thinks that hope could prove to be treacherous in the divided city, despite local voters' well-justified grievances. He notes that not just Mostar but all of Bosnia has long been politically and administratively fragmented along ethnic lines.

"Maybe too much is expected from the people of Mostar," he said. "(But) just the fact that citizens of Mostar will finally get a chance to vote for their local legislators is in itself a big win for democracy."

Kemal Softic in Mostar, Bosnia, contributed to this report

EXPLAINER: Iran, despite sanctions, has routes to vaccines

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Although Iran faces crushing U.S. sanctions, there are still ways for Tehran to obtain coronavirus vaccines as the country suffers the Mideast's worst outbreak of the pandemic.

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After earlier downplaying the virus, Iran has since acknowledged the scope of the disaster it faces after 1.1 million reported cases and over 52,000 deaths. Getting vaccines into the arms of its people would be a major step in stemming the crisis.

But while Iran is able to obtain vaccines, challenges remain ranging from sanctions imposed under President Donald Trump to the logistics of making mass vaccinations happen.

HOW COULD IRAN GET THE VACCINE?

Iran has signed up for COVAX, an international program designed to distribute coronavirus vaccines to participating countries around the world. That program is run in part by Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance. Gavi says the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control has already issued a license for Iran to take part. The Treasury declined to comment.

For its part, Iran has alleged U.S. sanctions have affected its ability to purchase medicine and vaccines. President Hassan Rouhani has said Iranians "should curse Trump a hundred times" over the difficulties. U.S. sanctions do have specific carve-outs for medicine and humanitarian aid to Iran. However, international banks and financial institutions hesitate in dealing with Iran transactions for fear of being fined or locked out of the American market.

Those sanctions, however, would not stop Iran from flying a load of cash to Geneva to pay for its participation in COVAX. Gavi declined to offer any information about Iranian payments or orders, though Iran under its rules at a maximum could order vaccines for 50% of its 82 million people.

Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman at Iran's mission to the United Nations, criticized the U.S. for its sanctions and banking restrictions, which he said "cruelly put many obstacles in the way of Iran receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Nonetheless, along with our own indigenous vaccine trials, we fully expect the international community and the relevant international drug companies to fulfill their humanitarian obligation and expedite all our orders," Miryousefi said.

Local efforts to produce a vaccine have not begun in earnest, meaning the Islamic Republic may need to rely on those abroad.

DOES IRAN HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A MASS INOCULATION?

When it comes to childhood vaccinations, Iran has nearly 100% success in inoculations, according to World Health Organization data. People from surrounding countries often come to Iran for medical care as well. Iran's hospitals, doctors and nurses are known as some of the best in the wider Middle East, with a network of clinics from villages to big cities. State-run facilities offer subsidized care, while private hospitals can be incredibly expensive.

However, there are questions about the logistics of a mass vaccination drive. Iran's aging fleet of aircraft likely would need to fly to pick up vaccines made abroad. Many airlines don't fly into Iran due to sanctions. Keeping vaccines ultra cold, like in the case of Pfizer-BioNTech's required minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit), also likely would be a challenge. Mostafa Ghanei, the director of the scientific commission at Iran's National Headquarters for Combating the Coronavirus, reportedly has said that Iran doesn't want the Pfizer vaccine for that reason.

WOULD IRAN ACCEPT AN AMERICAN-MADE VACCINE?

That remains in question. Early in the pandemic, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei floated an unfounded conspiracy theory claiming the virus could be man-made by America. In those March remarks, he suggested that "possibly your medicine is a way to spread the virus more." Those remarks appeared aimed at dismissing any U.S. assistance out of hand from the Trump administration, but Iranian officials also now increasingly criticize President-elect Joe Biden.

Iran is looking at Chinese and Russian vaccine options. However, if it relied on COVAX for the vaccines, the cooperative could choose to issue it American-made vaccines. There's a cost implication as well for Iran if it decides to choose which vaccine it wants from COVAX. It would need to put up \$3.50 a dose in advance to have the ability to refuse the vaccine offered, as opposed to \$1.60 per dose. If Iran chooses to offer a deposit to vaccinate half its population through COVAX, that means a \$143.5 million as opposed to a \$65.6 million initial payment.

Rejecting a COVAX vaccine offer could see Iran receive doses later as well.

WHY IS IRAN UNDER U.S. SANCTIONS?

Since the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover and the 444-day hostage crisis in Tehran, Iran has been subject to a series of changing economic sanctions. Some were lifted under Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for that relief. In 2018, Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from that accord, re-invoking sanctions that had crushed Iran's long-anemic economy.

Trump said he pulled out of the deal over Iran's ballistic missile program, its regional ambitions and other issues — all of which were not part of the 2015 deal. Biden has signaled he could return America to the deal if Iran agrees to again honor its limits. However, a series of escalating incidents over the last year and a half across the Mideast have raised tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

India's virus cases cross 10 million as new infections dip

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's confirmed coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year.

Additional cases in the past 24 hours dropped to 25,152 from a peak of nearly 100,000 in mid-September. The epidemic has infected nearly 1% of India's more than 1.3 billion people, second to the worst-hit United States.

The Health Ministry on Saturday also reported 347 deaths in the past 24 hours, taking total fatalities to 145,136.

Dr. Randeep Guleria, a government health expert, said India is keeping its fingers crossed as the cases tend to increase in winter months.

"If we can sustain our declining trend for the next two to three months, we should be able to start the vaccination program and start moving away from the pandemic," Guleria told The Associated Press.

India is home to some of the world's biggest vaccine-makers and there are five vaccine candidates under different phases of trial in the country.

The Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine-maker, is licensed to produce the Oxford University-AstraZeneca shots. India's Bharat Biotech vaccine also is a front-runner, and the two vaccines are expected to get authorization for emergency use within weeks, said Guleria.

India aims to provide vaccines to 250 million people by July 2021. The government is planning to receive 450 million to 500 million doses, the Health Ministry said.

The first group will include health care and front-line workers. The second group to receive the COVID 19 vaccine will be people over 50 years of age and those under 50 with comorbid conditions, it said.

The pace of new cases has slowed down. It took India 12 days to get from 5 million to 6 million cases, but 22 days to go from 8 million to 9 million, and 29 days to hit 10 million.

India's economy contracted by 7.5% in the July-September quarter following a record slump of 23.9% in the previous three months, pushing the country into a recession for the first time in its history. With millions becoming jobless, the Indian government is continuing to relax harsh lockdown restrictions that were imposed in late March.

A large number of offices, shops, businesses, liquor stores, bars and restaurants have reopened. Restricted domestic and international evacuation flights are being operated along with train services. Schools remain closed.

Portugal's armed forces help nursing homes battle the virus

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

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AMADORA, Portugal (AP) — Tears well up in Diana Correia's eyes as she recalls the October day that 24 of the 55 residents of her nursing home in Portugal tested positive for COVID-19.

The stunning discovery set off a scramble to enact the home's contingency plan and stiffen safety procedures. With some staff sent into isolation, others worked double shifts of up to 16 hours in full protective equipment, leaving them lathered in sweat and bone-weary. Some of the home's residents, suddenly confined to their rooms or their floor, were bewildered and chafed at restrictions, even trying to take the elevator and escape confinement.

"They were hard times," Correia says, trying hard to keep her composure. "Very hard times."

As a resurgence of the pandemic in the fall looked set to overwhelm Portuguese nursing homes like Correia's, and the country's public health service struggled to cope, the government mobilized all the resources it could. That included deploying military units.

The soldiers' mission: fan out across the country to visit hundreds of nursing homes and help shore up their defenses against the pandemic.

Long-term care facilities have proven vulnerable worldwide during the pandemic. The age of their residents, their physical closeness inside what is essentially a large house, and the residents' underlying health problems put them in peril. On top of that, nursing home staff in Portugal commonly work in several different care homes and travel between them on public transport.

Noting that international data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths is "imperfect and limited," a study of 21 countries by the London-based International Long-term Care Policy Network, which includes scientific researchers, found in October that those homes' average share of coronavirus deaths was around 46%.

The European Centre for Disease Control, an EU agency that monitors 31 countries, said the same month that up to 66% of all fatal COVID-19 cases have been among nursing home residents.

By that measure, Portugal hasn't fared badly. Care home deaths through Dec. 14 accounted for 30% of the country's COVID-19 fatalities, the General Directorate for Health told The Associated Press.

On Friday, Portugal's total deaths reached almost 6,000.

At the end of September, fearing a calamity, the Portuguese government sent a distress call to its military. As well as helping with contact tracing, disinfecting buildings and providing beds for hundreds of virus patients at military hospitals, the armed forces were now being asked to buttress nursing home protections.

Dr. Maria Salazar, a physician and a colonel in the Portuguese Air Force, swiftly drew up a nationwide program to train care home staff at their workplace. The program also ensures the staff get the specific medical advice they need in almost daily online Q&A sessions with doctors, nurses and pharmacists.

Within a week, the program was launched, coordinated from the CECOM military operations command center near Lisbon.

About 140 teams of one to three people, taken from the Portuguese Army, Navy and Air Force, have traveled across the country since early October. They have already been to more than half of the targeted 2,770 care homes.

Salazar, a 49-year-old gastroenterologist, says the military presence is reassuring for nursing home staff and residents who were spooked by the virus threat and desperately short of medical know-how.

"Suddenly, all these staff ... felt like they didn't know what they were doing and they were scared to death," Salazar says.

At the root of some muddled decision-making was, simply, fear. "We've identified that very clearly," she says.

In a first phase, troops go in person to the nursing homes and give talks with slideshows that go through the rudimentary rules of cooking, laundry, cleaning and social distancing. It's COVID-19 101.

Correia, the technical director of an AFID charitable association nursing home in Amadora, just north of Lisbon, acknowledges it's nothing her staff haven't heard many times before. The difference is who the instructions are coming from.

"It's a voice from the outside, a military voice with all the weight that carries," she says.

In a recent afternoon session at the AFID home, 10 of Correia's staff listened intently to Sgt. Ari Silva,

from the No. 2 Lancers Regiment, whose barracks are nearby. Wearing military fatigues, a beret and an olive-green face mask, Silva asked his audience how many times they had washed their hands that day. A man sitting at the front said four.

Silva was unimpressed: "Friend, I've done at least double that," he said.

The benefits of the military presence are as much psychological as practical, says 38-year-old Correia. "We feel like someone outside of here feels concern for us," she said. "It's not just us who are concerned."

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Biden transition team criticizes cooperation from Pentagon

By KEVIN FREKING and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's transition team expressed frustration Friday with the level of cooperation they're getting from political appointees at the Department of Defense, saying there has been "an abrupt halt in the already limited cooperation there."

Biden's transition team has been meeting with officials at various agencies to get detailed reviews of the programs and challenges the new administration will inherit, a process that was delayed when the General Services Administration declined to issue an official ascertainment that Biden had won the election. The delay occurred as President Donald Trump, whose appointee ran the GSA, refused to concede.

Yohannes Abraham, executive director of the transition, told reporters that Biden agency review teams at DOD learned Thursday of meetings "being pulled down" and immediately reported it. Abraham called for meetings and requests for information to resume immediately.

"A failure to work together can have consequences well beyond January," Abraham said.

The Pentagon on Friday offered a different assessment. It issued a statement saying there was a "mutually-agreed upon holiday pause," which begins Saturday.

Defense officials said that some meetings had been postponed so that department personnel could concentrate on the issues associated with the possibility of a partial government shutdown Friday evening if Congress was unable to agree on COVID-19 relief legislation. Congress passed a two-day stopgap spending bill Friday night, averting a shutdown. Officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

"Our key focus in the next two weeks is supporting essential requests for information" on Operation Warp Speed and COVID-19 to "guarantee a flawless transition," said acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller.

"Let me be clear: There was no mutually agreed upon holiday break," Abraham countered. "In fact, we think it is important that briefings and other engagements continue during this period as there's no time to spare."

Miller was put in the job a little over five weeks ago, after Trump fired then-Pentagon chief Mark Esper. Miller quickly replaced a number of top policy advisers with Trump loyalists who may be less willing or able to participate effectively in the transition process.

Miller said the department remains committed to a full and transparent transition and is working to re-schedule about 20 interviews with 40 officials until after Jan. 1. He said the department has already done 139 interviews and provided 5,300 pages of nonpublic or classified information.

Abraham made it clear that Biden's transition team was not satisfied with that decision. Biden becomes president the afternoon of Jan. 20.

"There have been many agencies and departments that have facilitated the exchange of info and meetings over the past few weeks," Abraham said. "There have been pockets of recalcitrance, and DOD is one of them."

Baldor reported from Washington.

Asia Today: Sydney beach suburbs in lockdown as cases rise

SYDNEY (AP) — Sydney's northern beaches will enter a lockdown similar to the one imposed during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March as a cluster of cases in the area increased to 41.

From late Saturday afternoon until midnight Wednesday, residents will only be permitted to leave their homes for five basic reasons: medical care, exercise, grocery shop, work or for compassionate care reasons.

An additional 23 cases were recorded in the 24 hours, including 10 already announced, taking the new cases to 41. All but two of those are from the so-called Avalon cluster, named after a community of about 10,000 people on the northern beaches about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from downtown Sydney.

New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian says the restrictions are essential if Sydney has any hope of a semi-normal Christmas.

"We're hoping that will give us sufficient time to get on top of the virus, so that we can then ease up for Christmas and the New Year," she said.

The new cases came as health officials asked hundreds of gym goers on Sydney's northern beaches to get tested and isolate immediately. The gym adds to a lengthy list of venues, including a lawn bowling club, visited by confirmed cases published by authorities on Friday.

Other states acted to prevent the cases jumping borders, with more barriers for New South Wales residents put in place by Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Most of those involved 14-day quarantine periods for people from the northern beaches who travel to those states.

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region:

— Long lines snaked around coronavirus testing sites in the South Korean capital of Seoul, as the country reported another 1,053 cases, the fourth straight day of over 1,000. The viral resurgence has raised questions about the government's handling of the outbreak. Authorities are still deciding whether to increase social distancing to maximum levels, fearing it may further strain the economy. The numbers released by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Saturday brought the national caseload to 48,570, with nearly 7,000 cases added over the past week alone. Fourteen COVID-19 patients died in the past 24 hours to bring the death toll to 659. There are concerns that fatalities will continue to rise because of a shortage of intensive care beds in the hardest-hit Seoul metropolitan area. The KDCA said at least 275 among 13,577 active patients are in serious or critical condition, the most since the emergence of the pandemic. Officials say at least six have died at their homes or long-term care facilities because hospitals ran out of beds. Thousands of people have been lining up at testing centers in front of Seoul City Hall and other public spaces as health authorities expand a massive testing program to detect more virus carriers. Authorities are temporarily providing free tests to anyone in the capital area regardless of whether they have symptoms or clear reasons to suspect infection.

— India's coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year. Additional cases in the past 24 hours dropped to 25,152 from a peak of nearly 100,000 in mid-September. The epidemic has infected nearly 1% of India's more than 1.3 billion people, second to the worst-hit United States. A government health expert says India is keeping its fingers crossed as the cases tend to increase in winter months. India is home to some of the world's biggest vaccine-makers and there are five vaccine candidates under different phases of trial in the country. India aims to provide vaccines to 250 million people by July 2021.

— China says it will soon begin coronavirus inoculations for workers in health care, transport and border control. The vice minister of the National Health Commission says the government is prioritizing those most at risk. Workers in logistics and in markets selling fresh meat and seafood would also be placed higher on the list of those receiving vaccines, along with the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. Vaccines produced by Chinese companies are now pending approval in Turkey, Indonesia and Brazil, as manufacturers continue testing the vaccines in more than a dozen countries including Russia, Egypt and Mexico. The United Arab Emirates last week announced the vaccine was 86% effective in the first public release of such information. Even before final market approval, more than a million people have received vaccine shots in a program critics say has not been transparent about safety, efficacy or scientific merit.

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Congress averts shutdown; fight continues over pandemic aid

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress passed a two-day stopgap spending bill Friday night, averting a partial government shutdown and buying yet more time for frustratingly slow endgame negotiations on an almost \$1 trillion COVID-19 economic relief package.

The virus aid talks remained on track, both sides said, but closing out final disagreements was proving difficult. Weekend sessions were on tap, and House leaders hoped for a vote on Sunday on the massive package, which wraps much of Capitol Hill's unfinished 2020 business into a take-it-or-leave-it behemoth that promises to be a foot thick — or more.

The House passed the temporary funding bill by a 320-60 vote. The Senate approved it by voice vote almost immediately afterward, and President Donald Trump signed it late Friday.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said both sides remain intent on closing the deal, even as Democrats launched a concerted campaign to block an effort by Republicans to rein in emergency Federal Reserve lending powers. The Democrats said the GOP proposal would deprive President-elect Joe Biden of crucial tools to manage the economy.

Negotiations continued into Friday night but an agreement wasn't likely before Saturday, lawmakers and aides said. House lawmakers were told they wouldn't have to report to work on Saturday but that a Sunday session was likely. The Senate will be voting on nominations.

The \$900 billion package comes as the pandemic is delivering its most fearsome surge yet, killing more than 3,000 victims per day and straining the nation's health care system. While vaccines are on the way, most people won't get them for months. Jobless claims are on the rise.

The emerging agreement would deliver more than \$300 billion in aid to businesses and provide the jobless a \$300-per-week bonus federal unemployment benefit and renewal of state benefits that would otherwise expire right after Christmas. It also includes \$600 direct payments to individuals; vaccine distribution funds and money for renters, schools, the Postal Service and people needing food aid.

Democrats on Friday came out swinging at a key obstacle: a provision by conservative Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., that would close down more than \$400 billion in potential Federal Reserve lending powers established under a relief bill in March. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is shutting down the programs at the end of December, but Toomey's language goes further, by barring the Fed from restarting the lending next year, and Democrats say the provision would tie Biden's hands and put the economy at risk.

"As we navigate through an unprecedented economic crisis, it is in the interests of the American people to maintain the Fed's ability to respond quickly and forcefully," said Biden economic adviser Brian Deese. "Undermining that authority could mean less lending to Main Street businesses, higher unemployment and greater economic pain across the nation."

The Fed programs at issue provided loans to small and mid-sized businesses and bought state and local government bonds, making it easier for those governments to borrow, at a time when their finances are under pressure from the pandemic.

The Fed would need the support of the Treasury Department to restart the programs, which Biden's Treasury secretary nominee, Janet Yellen, a former Fed chair, would likely provide. Treasury could also provide funds to backstop those programs without congressional approval and could ease the lending requirements. That could encourage more lending under the programs, which have seen only limited use so far.

Friday opened on an optimistic note after the talks appeared stalled for much of Thursday.

The pending bill is the first significant legislative response to the pandemic since the landmark CARES Act passed virtually unanimously in March, delivering \$1.8 trillion in aid, more generous \$600 per week

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bonus jobless benefits and \$1,200 direct payments to individuals.

The COVID-19 package would be added to a \$1.4 trillion governmentwide appropriations bill that would fund federal agencies through next September. That measure is likely to provide a last \$1.4 billion installment for Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall as a condition of winning his signature.

For Republicans, the most important COVID-19 aid provision was a long-sought second round of "pay-check protection" payments to especially hard-hit businesses and renewal of soon-to-expire state jobless benefits for the long-term unemployed.

Democrats have been denied fiscal relief for states and local governments, a top priority, and they won a supplemental COVID-19 unemployment benefit that was only half the size of what the CARES Act delivered. Democrats also won \$25 billion to help struggling renters with their payments and \$45 billion for airlines and transit systems, but some critics on the left said Democratic negotiators were getting outmaneuvered.

Indeed, McConnell has been in the catbird's seat since Senate Republicans outperformed expectations in November while House Democrats barely held their majority. Preelection Democratic demands for a bill exceeding \$2 trillion were quickly cut by more than half. Still, Biden is pressing for an agreement, fearing a weakening economy will await him on Inauguration Day.

Biden is promising another bill next year, but if Democrats lose Georgia Senate runoff elections next month and fail to win the Senate majority, they may have little leverage.

Most economists, including Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell, strongly support additional economic stimulus as necessary to keep businesses and households afloat through what is widely anticipated to be a tough winter. Many forecast the economy could shrink in the first three months of 2021 without more help. Standard & Poor's said in a report Tuesday that the economy would be 1.5 percentage points smaller in 2021 without more aid.

AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber contributed.

Analysis: For Republicans, profanity is suddenly scandalous

By STEVEN SLOAN AP Political Editor

WASHINGTON (AP) — The definition of a scandal changes quickly in Washington.

Over the course of four years, the nation's capital has careened from crisis to crisis. There was the travel ban, the investigation into Russian interference in an election, the firing of an FBI director, a 35-day government shutdown, dismissals of Cabinet secretaries via tweet, impeachment and a historic pandemic that forced the president to be hospitalized.

And then there was the Glamour interview.

Jen O'Malley Dillon, President-elect Joe Biden's campaign manager and incoming deputy chief of staff, referred to congressional Republicans as "f—ers" in a conversation with the magazine. And Washington was again in a tizzy.

The hand-wringing is a preview of one of the political shifts ahead once Biden takes office. Democrats preparing to take power are furious at any sign of a double standard from Republicans who looked past — or encouraged — President Donald Trump's profane and divisive behavior in office.

And Republicans, eager to portray Democrats as elitists, are suddenly aghast over a lack of decorum.

Although Marco Rubio didn't condemn Trump's comment about African "shithole countries," the Florida Republican senator seemed scandalized by O'Malley Dillon's comment. He tweeted that it shows what Democrats "really think." White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany tweeted the comment "says volumes" about Biden.

Even some Democrats seemed anxious. Axios, a news organization dedicated to chronicling every Beltway twist and turn, used anonymous sources to report "some advisers close" to Biden were "frustrated" about O'Malley Dillon's interview.

She later walked back the comment in a virtual conversation with fellow Democratic operatives.

That such a retreat was deemed necessary almost validates the premise of Biden's presidential campaign: that he would restore normalcy to the nation's politics.

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An indelicate comment that reveals what a White House staffer really thinks — and the ensuing damage control — was the ready definition of a Washington scandal before Trump came to town, and upended that and so many other conventions.

While it's easy to dismiss the O'Malley Dillon episode as another example of Washington's endless capacity for self-obsession, it reveals some difficult truths.

For one, the deference that Republicans showed the White House during the Trump era will be a thing of the past. The same party that cheered Trump for "telling it like it is" is poised to attack those in the incoming administration who deviate from the folkways expected in official Washington.

"They're going to look for any reason not to work with the Biden administration," former North Dakota Democratic Sen. Heidi Heitkamp said of Republicans.

The new standard seems to be applied with particular vigor to women.

Beyond O'Malley Dillon, Neera Tanden is also facing scrutiny of her choice of words. She is nominated to become the first woman of color to lead the powerful Office of Management and Budget, but is facing Republican opposition because — of all things — her Twitter account.

She's labeled Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell "Moscow Mitch" and dismissed Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, as "the worst."

While such language does little to advance constructive debate, it stands as tepid compared to Trump's white-hot Twitter history. He's used the platform to accuse MSNBC host Mika Brzezinski of "bleeding badly from a face-lift," disparage the appearance of Texas GOP Sen. Ted Cruz's wife and brand journalists the "enemy of the people."

Yet Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn has said Tanden's past comments were "combative and insulting" and created a "problematic path" for her nomination.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., said her rhetoric was "filled with hate & guided by the woke left."

Such skirmishes cause needless distractions, especially when those in power face far weightier matters such as the pandemic, joblessness and systemic racism.

But they prompt a bigger question about whether Republicans, who will be a powerful force in the new Congress, will seek to impose a different set of rules on the Biden administration than they did for Trump.

Beyond the GOP's newfound appreciation for civility, the party that abandoned its obsession with deficits during the Trump era is suddenly watching every nickel and dime. That has real implications at a moment when the coronavirus is surging and the typically restrained Federal Reserve is all but begging Congress to go big in its economic response.

Of course, Biden does face the prospect of genuine scandals when he takes office next month.

His son Hunter is being investigated by federal prosecutors for tax and financial issues. The probe threatens to dominate President-elect Biden's search for an attorney general, who would be in the precarious position of overseeing an investigation into the son of his boss.

Biden will be judged primarily by his policies, how he handles the pandemic and the economic collapse that it wrought, chief among them.

But he will also be assessed for his tone, a test of whether Americans want a return to a pre-Trump era of political sniping or whether they have come to accept Trump's trampling on the traditions of how a president should talk and act.

Biden centered his campaign around the idea that he was out to restore the "soul" of a deeply divided nation. That means the words that emanate from the president-elect and those around him matter.

But it is an open question if it provides an opening to those who looked past the excesses of the Trump era to suddenly demand politeness without at least some self-awareness.

As Biden himself might say: Come on, man.

Editor's Note: Steven Sloan has covered politics for the AP since 2018. Follow him at <http://twitter.com/stevensloan>

California town says no to tough virus rules, then yes

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By JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

The little California town of Solvang would normally be jammed with tourists now, strolling a main street bedecked with 100 brightly decorated Christmas trees or pouring into Danish-themed shops and restaurants, some with rooftop windmills, in search of tasty pastries and bric-a-brac like wooden shoes and puppets.

Instead, "People are calling from all over, saying, 'What the hell is going on?'" City Councilman Mark Infanti said earlier this week after the community of about 5,000 announced it would not enforce the latest stay-at-home order Gov. Gavin Newsom put into effect Dec. 6.

Newsom's order closed many businesses, forbids restaurants from offering anything other than takeout and delivery, and limits retail stores to 20% capacity, a level devastating for Solvang's small storefronts that at peak times before the pandemic overflowed with shoppers.

The unanimous 5-0 vote by Solvang's council on Dec. 7 encouraged businesses to stay open. "As of tonight, they can go about their business as they had done," Councilman Daniel Johnson said following the vote.

That vote was a last hurrah for Johnson and two other councilors — one of them the mayor — whose terms ended one week later. Their replacements took office this week and quickly denounced the resolution and implored the business community to follow the rules.

"I think for a few dollars to make for a couple or three weeks is not worth anyone's life," new Mayor Charlie Uhrig said. Infanti and the other new council member, Claudia Orona, agreed with him.

The two holdovers have since said it was never the old council's intent to have people breaking the law. Instead it was to pressure Santa Barbara County officials to push the state to put less densely populated areas into separate categories without as many restrictions as urban centers like Los Angeles.

"The original bottom line was to join Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties asking the governor to remove the tri-county region from Southern California," Councilman Robert Clarke told The Associated Press in an email.

"And, we were not going to encourage businesses to break any rules, we were just not going to actively pursue enforcement," he added.

Solvang — Danish for "sunny field" — is 130 northwest of Los Angeles. It was settled in 1911 by Danes who moved from the upper Midwest seeking a better climate.

Its unusual look and feel made it a tourist destination. In recent years, it has attracted 1.5 million visitors, many from Asia.

But this month, normally its busiest of the year because of the huge Danish-styled Christmas celebration Solvang puts on, hotel occupancy has plunged to around 20 percent, City Manager Xenia Bradford said. Business at restaurants is off 50%, said Tracy Beard, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce.

Still, no one seems to be breaking the tough new rules, both say, and even if they were the city wouldn't have the authority to go after most of them. The Santa Barbara County Health Department, for example, licenses the restaurants and could impose fines or pull the licenses of lawbreakers.

"All of us in the food and beverage industry know that we're held accountable by the (county) Health Department and (state) Alcoholic Beverage Control," said Lisa Mesa, who with her husband, Alfred, owns the popular Good Life wine and beer cellar, which has canceled all its tastings.

"While I as a business owner certainly appreciate the gesture by the previous City Council, it's not enforceable, and I knew that," she added.

What's more, she said, everyone in town knows the coronavirus is a serious threat even if it hasn't hit Solvang as hard as other places.

"We're not a bunch of rebels running around out here eating outside and, you know, flipping the bird to the rest of the state," she said.

Hacked networks will need to be burned 'down to the ground'

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

It's going to take months to kick elite hackers widely believed to be Russian out of the U.S. govern-

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ment networks they have been quietly rifling through since as far back as March in Washington's worst cyberespionage failure on record.

Experts say there simply are not enough skilled threat-hunting teams to duly identify all the government and private-sector systems that may have been hacked. FireEye, the cybersecurity company that discovered the intrusion into U.S. agencies and was among the victims, has already tallied dozens of casualties. It's racing to identify more.

"We have a serious problem. We don't know what networks they are in, how deep they are, what access they have, what tools they left," said Bruce Schneier, a prominent security expert and Harvard fellow.

It's not clear exactly what the hackers were seeking, but experts say it could include nuclear secrets, blueprints for advanced weaponry, COVID-19 vaccine-related research and information for dossiers on key government and industry leaders.

Many federal workers — and others in the private sector — must presume that unclassified networks are teeming with spies. Agencies will be more inclined to conduct sensitive government business on Signal, WhatsApp and other encrypted smartphone apps.

"We should buckle up. This will be a long ride," said Dmitri Alperovitch, co-founder and former chief technical officer of the leading cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. "Cleanup is just phase one."

The only way to be sure a network is clean is "to burn it down to the ground and rebuild it," Schneier said.

Imagine a computer network as a mansion you inhabit, and you are certain a serial killer as been there. "You don't know if he's gone. How do you get work done? You kind of just hope for the best," he said.

Deputy White House press secretary Brian Morgenstern told reporters Friday that national security adviser Robert O'Brien has sometimes been leading multiple daily meetings with the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the intelligence community, looking for ways to mitigate the hack.

He would not provide details, "but rest assured we have the best and brightest working hard on it each and every single day."

The Democratic chairs of four House committees given classified briefings on the hack by the Trump administration issued a statement complaining that they "were left with more questions than answers."

"Administration officials were unwilling to share the full scope of the breach and identities of the victims," they said.

Morgenstern said earlier that disclosing such details only helps U.S. adversaries. President Donald Trump has not commented publicly on the matter, but Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on a conservative talk show Friday, "I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity."

What makes this hacking campaign so extraordinary is its scale — 18,000 organizations were infected from March to June by malicious code that piggybacked on popular network-management software from an Austin, Texas, company called SolarWinds.

Only a sliver of those infections were activated to allow hackers inside. FireEye says it has identified dozens of examples, all "high-value targets." Microsoft, which has helped respond, says it has identified more than 40 government agencies, think tanks, government contractors, non-governmental organizations and technology companies infiltrated by the hackers, 75% in the United States.

Florida became the first state to acknowledge falling victim to a SolarWinds hack. Officials told The Associated Press on Friday that hackers apparently infiltrated the state's health care administration agency and others.

SolarWinds' customers include most Fortune 500 companies, and it's U.S. government clients are rich with generals and spymasters.

The difficulty of extracting the suspected Russian hackers' tool kits is exacerbated by the complexity of SolarWinds' platform, which has dozen of different components.

"This is like doing heart surgery, to pull this out of a lot of environments," said Edward Amoroso, CEO of TAG Cyber.

Security teams then have to assume that the patient is still sick with undetected so-called "secondary

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infections” and set up the cyber equivalent of closed-circuit monitoring to make sure the intruders are not still around, sneaking out internal emails and other sensitive data.

That effort will take months, Alperovitch said.

If the hackers are indeed from Russia’s SVR foreign intelligence agency, as experts believe, their resistance may be tenacious. When they hacked the White House, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department in 2014 and 2015 “it was a nightmare to get them out,” Alperovitch said.

“It was the virtual equivalent of hand-to-hand combat” as defenders sought to keep their footholds, “to stay buried deep inside” and move to other parts of the network where “they thought that they could remain for longer periods of time.”

“We’re likely going to face the same in this situation as well,” he added.

FireEye executive Charles Carmakal said the intruders are especially skilled at camouflaging their movements. Their software effectively does what a military spy often does in wartime — hide among the local population, then sneak out at night and strike.

“It’s really hard to catch some of these,” he said.

Rob Knake, the White House cybersecurity director from 2011 to 2015, said the harm to the most critical agencies in the U.S. government — defense and intelligence, chiefly — from the SolarWinds hacking campaign is going to be limited “as long as there is no evidence that the Russians breached classified networks.”

During the 2014-15 hack, “we lost access to unclassified networks but were able to move all operations to classified networks with minimal disruptions,” he said via email.

The Pentagon has said it has so far not detected any intrusions from the SolarWinds campaign in any of its networks — classified or unclassified.

Given the fierce tenor of cyberespionage — the U.S., Russia and China all have formidable offensive hacking teams and have been penetrating each others’ government networks for years — many American officials are wary of putting anything sensitive on government networks.

Fiona Hill, the top Russia expert at the National Security Council during much of the Trump administration, said she always presumed no government system was secure. She “tried from the beginning not to put anything down” in writing that was sensitive.

“But that makes it more difficult to do business.”

Amoroso, of TAG Cyber, recalled the famous pre-election dispute in 2016 over classified emails sent over a private server set up by Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton when she was secretary of state. Clinton was investigated by the FBI in the matter, but no charges were brought.

“I used to make the joke that the reason the Russians didn’t have Hillary Clinton’s email is because she took it off the official State Department network,” Amoroso said.

Associated Press writers Matthew Lee in Washington and Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

Congress averts shutdown; fight continues over pandemic aid

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress passed a two-day stopgap spending bill Friday night, averting a partial government shutdown and buying yet more time for frustratingly slow endgame negotiations on an almost \$1 trillion COVID-19 economic relief package.

The virus aid talks remained on track, both sides said, but closing out final disagreements was proving difficult. Weekend sessions were on tap, and House leaders hoped for a vote on Sunday on the massive package, which wraps much of Capitol Hill’s unfinished 2020 business into a take-it-or-leave-it behemoth that promises to be a foot thick — or more.

The House passed the temporary funding bill by a 320-60 vote. The Senate approved it by voice vote almost immediately afterward, and President Donald Trump signed it late Friday.

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Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said both sides remain intent on closing the deal, even as Democrats launched a concerted campaign to block an effort by Republicans to rein in emergency Federal Reserve lending powers. The Democrats said the GOP proposal would deprive President-elect Joe Biden of crucial tools to manage the economy.

Negotiations continued into Friday night but an agreement wasn't likely before Saturday, lawmakers and aides said. House lawmakers were told they wouldn't have to report to work on Saturday but that a Sunday session was likely. The Senate will be voting on nominations.

The \$900 billion package comes as the pandemic is delivering its most fearsome surge yet, killing more than 3,000 victims per day and straining the nation's health care system. While vaccines are on the way, most people won't get them for months. Jobless claims are on the rise.

The emerging agreement would deliver more than \$300 billion in aid to businesses and provide the jobless a \$300-per-week bonus federal unemployment benefit and renewal of state benefits that would otherwise expire right after Christmas. It also includes \$600 direct payments to individuals; vaccine distribution funds and money for renters, schools, the Postal Service and people needing food aid.

Democrats on Friday came out swinging at a key obstacle: a provision by conservative Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., that would close down more than \$400 billion in potential Federal Reserve lending powers established under a relief bill in March. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is shutting down the programs at the end of December, but Toomey's language goes further, by barring the Fed from restarting the lending next year, and Democrats say the provision would tie Biden's hands and put the economy at risk.

"As we navigate through an unprecedented economic crisis, it is in the interests of the American people to maintain the Fed's ability to respond quickly and forcefully," said Biden economic adviser Brian Deese. "Undermining that authority could mean less lending to Main Street businesses, higher unemployment and greater economic pain across the nation."

The Fed programs at issue provided loans to small and mid-sized businesses and bought state and local government bonds, making it easier for those governments to borrow, at a time when their finances are under pressure from the pandemic.

The Fed would need the support of the Treasury Department to restart the programs, which Biden's Treasury secretary nominee, Janet Yellen, a former Fed chair, would likely provide. Treasury could also provide funds to backstop those programs without congressional approval and could ease the lending requirements. That could encourage more lending under the programs, which have seen only limited use so far.

Friday opened on an optimistic note after the talks appeared stalled for much of Thursday.

The pending bill is the first significant legislative response to the pandemic since the landmark CARES Act passed virtually unanimously in March, delivering \$1.8 trillion in aid, more generous \$600 per week bonus jobless benefits and \$1,200 direct payments to individuals.

The COVID-19 package would be added to a \$1.4 trillion governmentwide appropriations bill that would fund federal agencies through next September. That measure is likely to provide a last \$1.4 billion installment for Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall as a condition of winning his signature.

For Republicans, the most important COVID-19 aid provision was a long-sought second round of "pay-check protection" payments to especially hard-hit businesses and renewal of soon-to-expire state jobless benefits for the long-term unemployed.

Democrats have been denied fiscal relief for states and local governments, a top priority, and they won a supplemental COVID-19 unemployment benefit that was only half the size of what the CARES Act delivered. Democrats also won \$25 billion to help struggling renters with their payments and \$45 billion for airlines and transit systems, but some critics on the left said Democratic negotiators were getting outmaneuvered.

Indeed, McConnell has been in the catbird's seat since Senate Republicans outperformed expectations in November while House Democrats barely held their majority. Preelection Democratic demands for a bill exceeding \$2 trillion were quickly cut by more than half. Still, Biden is pressing for an agreement, fearing a weakening economy will await him on Inauguration Day.

Biden is promising another bill next year, but if Democrats lose Georgia Senate runoff elections next month and fail to win the Senate majority, they may have little leverage.

Most economists, including Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell, strongly support additional economic stimulus as necessary to keep businesses and households afloat through what is widely anticipated to be a tough winter. Many forecast the economy could shrink in the first three months of 2021 without more help. Standard & Poor's said in a report Tuesday that the economy would be 1.5 percentage points smaller in 2021 without more aid.

AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber contributed.

US clears Moderna vaccine for COVID-19, 2nd shot in arsenal

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. added a second COVID-19 vaccine to its arsenal Friday, boosting efforts to beat back an outbreak so dire that the nation is regularly recording more than 3,000 deaths a day.

Much-needed doses are set to arrive Monday after the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health.

The move marks the world's first authorization for Moderna's shots. The vaccine is very similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health care workers and nursing home residents as the biggest vaccination drive in U.S. history starts to ramp up.

The two work "better than we almost dared to hope," NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins told The Associated Press. "Science is working here, science has done something amazing."

Early results of large, still unfinished studies show both vaccines appear safe and strongly protective although Moderna's is easier to handle since it doesn't need to be stored at ultra-frozen temperatures.

A second vaccine represents a ray of hope amid despair as the virus continues to spread unabated even before holiday gatherings that are certain to further fuel the outbreak.

The scourge has claimed more than 312,000 U.S. lives and killed 1.7 million people worldwide. New cases in the U.S. are running at over 216,000 per day on average. Deaths per day have hit all-time highs, eclipsing 3,600 on Wednesday.

California has emerged as one of the most lethal hot spots, with hospitals running out of intensive care beds and ambulances lining up outside emergency rooms in scenes reminiscent of the calamity around New York City last spring. California on Friday reported over 41,000 new cases and 300 more deaths.

When New York's hospitals were in crisis, health care workers from across the country came to help out. This time, "there's no cavalry coming" because so many hospitals are swamped, said Dr. Marc Futernick, an emergency room physician in Los Angeles.

The nation is scrambling to expand vaccinations as rapidly as Moderna and Pfizer can churn out doses. Moderna's is for people 18 and older, Pfizer's starts at age 16.

It's just the beginning of "what we hope will be a big push to get this terrible virus behind us, although it will take many more months to get to all Americans," Collins said.

Moderna expects to have between 100 million and 125 million doses available globally in the first three months of 2021, with 85-100 million of those available in the U.S.

Even with additional candidates in the pipeline, there won't be enough for the general population until spring, and shots will be rationed in the meantime. And while health workers are enthusiastically embracing vaccination, authorities worry the public may need more reassurance to ensure more people get in line when it's their turn.

"Frankly if we don't succeed in getting 80% or so of Americans immunized against COVID-19 by the middle of this 2021 year, we have the risk that this epidemic could go on and on and on," Collins said.

He is especially concerned that accurate information about the shots' value reaches communities of color, which have been hard-hit by COVID-19 yet also are wary after years of health care disparities and research abuses.

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To try to help instill confidence, Vice President Mike Pence received the Pfizer-BioNTech shot on live TV Friday, along with Surgeon General Jerome Adams.

FDA's decision could help pave the way for other countries that are considering the Moderna vaccine, the first-ever regulatory clearance for the small Cambridge, Massachusetts, company. European regulators could authorize its use as soon as Jan. 6. Britain, Canada and a few other countries already have cleared the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, with a European Union decision due Monday.

"What we want to always remember is one size does not fit all. We want to have options," said Dr. Paul Duprex of the University of Pittsburgh.

Moderna has about 5.9 million doses ready for shipment set to begin over the weekend, according to Operation Warp Speed, the government's vaccine development program. Injections of health workers and nursing home residents continue next week, before other essential workers and vulnerable groups are allowed to get in line.

Both Moderna's and Pfizer-BioNTech's shots are so-called mRNA vaccines, made with a groundbreaking new technology. They don't contain any coronavirus – meaning they cannot cause infection. Instead, they use a piece of genetic code that trains the immune system to recognize the spike protein on the surface of the virus, ready to attack if the real thing comes along.

Their development less than a year after the coronavirus first emerged set a speed record, but Collins stressed that shouldn't worry people. The speed was due to billions in company and government investments paired with years of earlier scientific research, not any cut corners.

"The rigor of the analysis of these vaccines is unprecedented," Collins said. "We're not done with this but hope is on the way, and the hope comes from this scientific brain trust that has pulled out all the stops."

Experts are hoping the two vaccines together will "break the back of the pandemic" when combined with masks and other precautions, said Dr. Arnold Monto of the University of Michigan, who chaired an advisory committee that publicly debated the shots' evidence ahead of FDA's decisions.

The FDA's main messages:

--Both the new Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer-BioNTech shot require two doses several weeks apart. The second dose must be from the same company as the first.

--In a study of 30,000 volunteers, the Moderna vaccine was more than 94% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 in people 18 and older. It also strongly protected older adults, who are most vulnerable.

--The inoculated can't throw away their masks as it's not yet clear either vaccine prevents silent, symptomless virus spread. But there was a hint that Moderna's shot might provide some protection against asymptomatic infection.

--The Moderna study uncovered no major safety problems. Like with the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, expect sore arms, fever, fatigue and muscle aches, which are signs the immune system is revving up.

--Both vaccines carry "a remote chance" of causing a severe allergic reaction. Moderna's study turned up none of these, though a handful were reported in Britain as the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccinations got underway and the FDA is looking into five in the U.S., including a severe reaction in Alaska. The vaccines' ingredients aren't identical. Still, after any COVID-19 vaccination, people should stick around for 15 minutes – or 30 minutes if they have a history of severe allergies – so if they do have a reaction, it can be treated immediately.

--Both vaccines remain experimental, and the government is closely monitoring safety in case rare problems crop up.

--Additional studies are needed to tell if the vaccine should be used by pregnant women and children. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should discuss whether to get the vaccine with their doctor.

Associated Press reporter Amy Taxin contributed to this report from Orange County, California.

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.

VIRUS TODAY: 2nd vaccine approved; Pence receives shot on TV

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— The U.S. added a second COVID-19 vaccine to its arsenal, boosting efforts to beat back an outbreak so dire that the nation is regularly recording more than 3,000 deaths a day. The Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health. The move marks the world's first authorization for Moderna's shots.

— One in every five state and federal prisoners in the United States has tested positive for the coronavirus, a rate more than four times as high as the general population. In some states, more than half of prisoners have been infected, according to data collected by The Associated Press and The Marshall Project.

— U.S. health officials are seeing an astonishing lack of demand for COVID-19 medicines that may help keep infected people out of the hospital, drugs they rushed out to states over the past few weeks as deaths set new records.

THE NUMBERS: The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. rose over the past two weeks from 1,834 on Dec. 3 to 2,633 on Thursday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

DEATH TOLL: The U.S. death toll stands at almost 312,000 people, up from about 300,000 when the week began.

QUOTABLE: "I think we know this isn't going to be perfect. We don't have vaccine for everyone right away, so we're going to have to make difficult decisions." — Claire Hannan, executive director of an organization that represents managers of state vaccination programs.

ICYMI: Vice President Mike Pence became the highest-ranking U.S. official to receive the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine on Friday in a live-television event aimed at reassuring Americans the shot is safe. He celebrated the milestone as "a medical miracle" that could eventually contain the pandemic.

ON THE HORIZON: Doses of the Moderna vaccine are set to arrive Monday. The vaccine is similar to one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech that's now being dispensed to millions of health care workers and nursing home residents.

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

Pence, top congressional leaders get vaccines; Trump absent

By ZEKE MILLER, JILL COLVIN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence and the leaders of the House and Senate received their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on Friday as they tried to reassure the American public that the shot is safe. Pence, in a live-television event, celebrated the milestone as "a medical miracle" that could eventually put an end to a raging pandemic that has killed more than 310,000 people nationwide.

Conspicuously absent: President Donald Trump, who has remained largely out of sight five days into the largest vaccination campaign in the nation's history.

"I didn't feel a thing. Well done," Pence told the technicians from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Friday morning as he became the highest-ranking U.S. official to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, the first authorized in the U.S.

Later, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, tweeted photos of themselves receiving the vaccine from the Capitol physician, who urged all members of Congress to join them.

The public displays come as top U.S. health officials are trying to persuade regular Americans who may be skeptical of the vaccinations to get them to pave the way for the end of the pandemic.

A recent survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that only about half of Americans want to get the vaccine as soon as possible. Another quarter of the public isn't sure,

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while the remaining quarter say they aren't interested. Some simply oppose vaccines in general. Others are concerned that the injections have been rushed and want to see how the rollout goes.

Trump, who was hospitalized with COVID-19 in October, has been largely absent from the effort to sell the American public on what aides hope will be a key part of his legacy. He has held no public events to trumpet the rollout. He hasn't said when he will be inoculated. And he has tweeted fewer than a handful of times about the vaccines despite sending a flurry of tweets about other topics.

He did weigh in with a congratulatory tweet Friday night after the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of a second vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health.

Trump's relative silence comes as he continues to rage about his defeat in the Nov. 3 election and embraces increasingly extreme efforts to overturn the people's will. He's pushed aside the plans of aides who wanted him to be the public face of the vaccination campaign, eschewing visits to labs and production facilities to thank workers, or hosting efforts to build public confidence in the shot, according to people familiar with the conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to speak candidly.

Instead, Pence has been the one in the spotlight highlighting the safety and efficacy of the vaccines, touring a production facility this week before headlining Friday's event.

Pence didn't flinch during the quick prick, nor did his wife, Karen. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, who is Black, also received a shot during the televised White House event and stressed the importance of communities of color seeing people like him being vaccinated to build trust.

"Today, Karen and I wanted to step forward and take this vaccine to assure the American people that while we cut red tape, we cut no corners," Pence said. "Hope is on the way."

Trump's lack of visibility has been surprising, especially for a president rarely shy to take credit, said Lawrence Gostin, a professor at Georgetown Law who focuses on public health.

"The president's relatively low profile on the COVID response since the election is curious and counter to Mr. Trump's own interests," he said. Gostin, who has criticized Trump's handling of the pandemic in the past, said that he "deserves a great deal of credit" for Operation Warp Speed and placing a bet on two vaccines that use groundbreaking mRNA technology.

"Having exhibited leadership in the vaccines' development, he should take great pride in publicly demonstrating his trust in COVID vaccines," he said.

Trump did appear at a White House "summit" ahead of the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the Pfizer vaccine last week. But many Trump aides are puzzled by his low profile now that the vaccine is actually being injected. They see it as a missed opportunity for the president, who leaves office on Jan. 20, to claim credit for helping oversee the speedy development and deployment of the vaccine that is expected to finally contain the virus.

Trump himself has fretted about credit going to his successor, Biden, who will preside over the bulk of the nationwide injection campaign next year.

"Don't let Joe Biden take credit for the vaccines," Trump has told reporters. "Don't let him take credit for the vaccines because the vaccines were me, and I pushed people harder than they've ever been pushed before."

In fact, FDA scientists were the ones who came up with the idea for Operation Warp Speed, the White House-backed effort through which millions of doses of coronavirus vaccines and treatments are being manufactured even as they are still being evaluated. And much of the groundwork for the shots was laid over the past decade, including through research on messenger RNA, or mRNA, used in the vaccines developed by both Pfizer and Moderna.

Trump's low-key approach could have an impact on public health. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the country's top infectious-disease expert, told NBC News this week that 75% to 85% of the nation needs to be vaccinated to achieve "herd immunity," making the public education campaign about the vaccine's safety all the more pressing.

Trump has said he would be open to taking a vaccine. White House deputy press secretary Brian Morgenstern told reporters that, because Trump already had COVID-19, his doctors have been trying to de-

termine when he should take it.

"When the time is right, I'm sure he will remain willing to take it," he said.

According to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is not yet enough information to determine whether those who have had COVID-19, like Trump, should get the vaccine.

But White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany offered an alternate explanation. She told reporters this week that Trump, who has previously spread misinformation about other vaccines, "wants to send a parallel message which is, you know, our long-term care facility residents and our front-line workers are paramount in importance."

Gostin disagreed. "It will be enormously damaging to public trust in the vaccine if President Trump isn't visibly enthusiastic, including getting his shot on national television," he argued. "It simply isn't good enough to have Vice President Pence as a proxy."

Some lawmakers have said they are reluctant to be among the first to be vaccinated so they're not seen as jumping the line. But others enthusiastically made appointments.

"Millions of Americans are waiting for shots, many of whom are workers on the front lines of this pandemic," tweeted Democratic Rep. Don Beyer of Virginia, who was among those to receive one. "I am not more important than they are, but national leaders must lead by example."

Admissions changes aim to remedy segregation in NYC schools

By JIM MUSTIAN and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City is changing its admission system for hundreds of middle and high schools, officials said Friday in announcing one of the most significant steps the nation's largest school system has taken in years to address racial segregation.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said the city is suspending academic merit-based screening for its selective middle schools for at least a year, partly because the coronavirus pandemic has scrambled test, attendance and grading data that the schools have used to grant admission to top-performing elementary school kids.

It wouldn't be fair for schools to rely on two-year-old data about children so young, Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza said. Instead, a lottery would be used when schools have more applicants than available seats.

Carranza called the changes "a common-sense approach" to tackling two issues: the challenges arising from the pandemic and longstanding patterns of racial concentration that leave many schools less diverse than the student population as a whole.

"These changes will help ensure that our classrooms reflect the great diversity that is New York City, and it's also a true representation of the values that we hold dear as a city — that equity, inclusivity and excellence for all children is at the cornerstone of what we do," he said at a virtual news conference with de Blasio.

New York City's school system has more than 1.1 million students. About 41% are Hispanic, 26% Black, 16% Asian and 15% white. Despite various administrations' professions of commitment to diversity and changes over the years to the system for assigning students to schools, many coveted schools fill up with white, wealthier students.

"It's time to start using every tool at our disposal to address inequality," said de Blasio, a Democrat. "The status quo in New York City public schools cannot continue."

The system also will eliminate geographic priorities for high school admissions starting next year, beginning with neighborhood residency priorities.

For now, high schools can continue to screen students academically for admission, though the city is inviting them to eliminate or reconsider those criteria. At the moment, however, no changes are planned for a handful of elite high schools that choose students based solely on a test or, in one case, performing arts auditions and portfolios.

Calls to change the city's school admission system have been growing in recent years. Middle school academic screens were already scrapped in a Brooklyn area where de Blasio lived before becoming mayor.

But there are also advocates for preserving at least some components of the selective admissions system. Some families and officials have argued the city should instead focus more effort on helping students from underrepresented groups prepare for the process and on expanding the ranks of top schools.

"Equity and excellence can and must be pursued simultaneously; there should be no trade-off between the two," state Sen. John Liu said in a statement. A former city comptroller and councilman, he now chairs the Senate's committee on the city's education system.

Liu, a Democrat, agreed that the pandemic had made the usual middle school screening process unworkable this year. He urged the city to have "full public discourse about the issues" as it weighs what to do in future.

Visit by COVID-infected official closes Washington Monument

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

The Trump administration abruptly closed the Washington Monument over exposure concerns from a recent visit by Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who tested positive this week for the coronavirus.

Interior spokesman Nicholas Goodwin said Friday "a couple" of employees have quarantined since Bernhardt's visit, "resulting in a temporary workforce reduction at the monument and its temporary closure." The park service posted a brief notice of the closure on its website sometime Thursday.

An official with an independent advocacy group for national parks and park workers on Friday criticized Bernhardt, saying the interior secretary had failed to protect health and safety overall during the pandemic.

Bernhardt had been slow to allow closing of national parks to limit infection among park employees, visitors and local residents, said Kristen Brengel, a vice president of the National Parks Conservation Association. National park employees also have expressed concern at he and other Interior officials continuing to visit national parks and other federal sites during the pandemic, Brengel said.

"It really is putting your own interest over the health and safety of park staff, is what it comes down to," she said.

Goodwin said in an email that "the health and safety of the public and our employees is our top priority."

"Interior has an incredible team of more than 60 public health professionals on staff that have been leading the Department's pandemic response efforts with the Secretary and other members of leadership over the past year," he said.

Goodwin said the Washington Monument, normally one of the capital's most visited sites, would reopen Monday, with tickets going on sale Sunday.

The closure comes after the Interior Department disclosed Wednesday, after an inquiry from The Washington Post, that Bernhardt had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Bernhardt was quarantining and was currently without symptoms, Goodwin said in an email that day. Interior officials did not respond to questions Thursday and Friday about the secretary's current condition. Nor have they said how Bernhardt may have been exposed.

The National Park Service has been requiring members of the public to wear face masks and take other COVID-19 precautions at the monument since at least Oct. 1. Goodwin said no park worker at the monument has tested positive for COVID-19 since then.

Bernhardt had been wearing a mask and otherwise following recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention throughout his visit, Goodwin said.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, the capitol's representative in Congress, wrote to the National Park Service head earlier this month, saying she was concerned the monument was not being operated safely and asking that it be shut down.

Norton cited reports that "visitors are not uniformly following mask and social-distancing guidelines while on federal property, including inside the Washington Monument's elevator."

"These behaviors put NPS employees and the public at significant risk," she said.

In the letter, Norton said she had learned of four infections and one hospitalization among park service workers on the National Mall, which includes the Washington Monument. Goodwin did not immediately

respond to questions about coronavirus infections among park service employees and other Interior staffers on Friday.

D.C. is in an intensified phase of official precautions for the pandemic, including limits on public gatherings and recommendations for nonessential workers to stay home.

Bernhardt is one of numerous Trump administration staffers and officials to test positive for the coronavirus. That includes President Donald Trump, who was hospitalized in October after contracting COVID-19.

Bernhardt's and the park service's social media feed have shown him keeping up a busy schedule of visits to national parks and other sites under his agency during the pandemic. Posts show Bernhardt wearing a mask during those visits more frequently now than in the first months of the pandemic.

In the photos, uniformed National Park Service employees often are the people standing nearest him, often without masks.

Biden may time confirmation votes to protect House majority

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's decision to tap several House Democrats for administrative positions is putting Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a politically tough spot, having chiseled away at the party's already slimming majority and leaving her potentially without enough votes to pass his legislative agenda.

Democrats already were heading into the new Congress with a razor-thin margin over Republicans. But Biden's overture to a third lawmaker, Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M., as the history-making first Native American interior secretary, set off a fresh round of pained conversations on what to do. Pelosi will start the Biden era with a narrow majority, 222-211, with a few races still undecided.

But Pelosi's leadership team has a plan.

"We need to manage something like this," Rep. James Clyburn of South Carolina, the Democratic whip and a top Biden ally, said in an interview with The Associated Press this week.

According to Clyburn, an emerging strategy is to stagger the confirmations: Biden would hold off on formally submitting the nominations all at once so the House numbers don't immediately drop.

Under the plan, timing would unfold over the first several months of the new Congress, ample time for the House to pass the 100-days agenda, a typically important but symbolic, legislative sprint that takes on new importance aligned with Biden's presidency.

Biden's first pick from the House, Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., would join the administration quickly once the president-elect is inaugurated Jan. 20, Clyburn said. Richmond is poised to become a senior adviser, a position that doesn't require confirmation by the Senate.

Biden would then wait to submit the other two nominees, Haaland and Rep. Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio, who was tapped as housing secretary, until after the March special election in Louisiana to fill Richmond's seat.

The lawmakers can remain in the House, voting as members, until they are Senate confirmed. Their nominations could be sent one after the other, in the months that follow.

"Just manage it," Clyburn said.

The three House seats are in Democratic strongholds and expected to be off-limits to Republicans. But special elections can throw curveballs, and the staggered timing would also give the campaigns ample running room to shore up the candidates and races.

Democrats are already deep into political soul-searching after a dismal November outcome for House Democrats. Biden's victory had short coattails as they lost seats and saw their majority shrink.

Moderate lawmakers and strategists blamed progressives for pushing the party's message too far leftward; progressives complained it was centrists who ran timid campaigns without a bold message to attract voters.

Pelosi is a master vote counter on the House floor, but even her skills will be tested in the new Congress, starting with her own election for another term as speaker. If even a few Democratic lawmakers object or peel off, passing bills in the new Congress could be difficult.

In an extreme scenario, Republicans could even try to wrest control of the gavel and the majority. If the

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numbers dipped so low — with illnesses or other absences, which are likely during the COVID-19 crisis — Republicans could try to force a floor vote on the issue.

Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., said Friday that the departures of the three lawmakers would combine with existing divisions among Democrats to make governing “very hard” for Pelosi.

“On any given vote when your margin is as narrow as this, a few people can be mad about something totally unrelated to the vote and just take it out on you,” Cole said.

The danger zone was close enough that House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer warned Biden last month off taking any more Democrats from his ranks.

“I thought it would be difficult if, in fact, members of the Congress were selected,” Hoyer told reporters this week. “The margin was very close.”

A similar scenario has played out in the Senate, where Biden has refrained from naming senators to administrative positions because of the narrow GOP hold.

The Senate breakdown will be 51-48 when the new Congress is sworn in Jan. 3, with the majority not yet decided until two Jan. 5 runoff elections in Georgia. One of the runoffs involves a sitting Republican senator.

In some ways, the closely split House could provide an opportunity for Biden to reach across the aisle and try to cut bipartisan deals with a centrist agenda that could attract some Republicans.

But so far, House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy has signaled movement in the opposite direction. He wants to use floor procedures as political weaponry to gum up the bills with Republican priorities and force vulnerable Democrats into tough votes.

Republicans used the strategy with some success in the current session of Congress, producing campaign ads against Democrats seeking reelection. McCarthy, his own shot at seizing the majority for Republicans in 2022 now within reach, warned shortly after the November election there would be more floor battles to come.

McCarthy said while Republicans won't have the majority in the new year, they will “run the floor.”

To block those efforts, Democrats are considering rules changes proposed by Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla., that would raise the threshold on those votes to a two-thirds majority to make it more difficult for Republicans to change the bills.

Yet the first legislation of the new Congress may not be too difficult for Pelosi to pass, even with a slimmer majority.

The agenda is likely to be rooted in H.R. 1 through H.R.9 - the first nine bills of the last Congress — popular Democratic measures on voting rights, lowering prescription drug prices, raising the minimum wage and requiring background checks for gun purchases that most Democrats have already voted for.

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Myon Burrell enjoys 1st days of freedom after prison release

By ROBIN MCDOWELL and MARGIE MASON Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — For nearly two decades, Myon Burrell had nothing but time.

Locked up for life at 16 for a high-profile murder he swore he had nothing to do with, he was stuck in a tiny cell without even a window to watch the seasons change. The years dragged on slowly, and he saw the bodies of once-robust men age and decay.

Still, he couldn't help wishing that the outside world would slow down. In the Stillwater prison visiting room and in family photographs, his own son seemed to grow overnight from toddler to teen to man.

Then, on Tuesday afternoon, everything changed. In the wake of an investigation by The Associated Press and APM Reports that raised grave doubts about his conviction, the Minnesota Board of Pardons said Burrell could go home.

With no opportunity for real goodbyes, men in his unit rattled their bars or reached out their hands, wishing him well as he passed. Within hours, he walked out the prison's front door into the frigid air, relatives and supporters swarming around him and chanting “Myon's free! Myon's free!”

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"It was so surreal. ... Every step that I took, it was just like bricks, just bricks and bricks and bricks, just being removed from my shoulders," said Burrell, now 34, in his first interview from home. "Everything just being lifted off me. I was like, finally."

His release came after years of legal wrangling. Tens of thousands of dollars had been spent to hire a series of lawyers to clear Burrell's name for the 2002 killing of Tyesha Edwards, a sixth-grader hit by a stray bullet while studying inside her family's south Minneapolis home.

Burrell's break finally came this year, when the AP uncovered new evidence and serious flaws in the police investigation. Among them: a failure to collect a corner store's surveillance video, which Burrell said could have cleared him, and heavy reliance on six jailhouse informants who benefited generously from testifying. One said his time was cut from 16 years to three.

The pressure that followed from the NAACP, the ACLU, and community organizers led to the creation of an independent panel of legal experts, which confirmed many of the AP's findings and said police appeared to have suffered from "tunnel vision" while pursuing Burrell. It recommended that he be freed immediately.

But Burrell never dreamed that within a week of that report's release he'd be in his living room, meeting nieces and nephews for the first time. Friends and family filed in for hours. They hugged and gave him presents ranging from Air Jordan 4 Retro basketball shoes to a telescope — he had been longing to see the stars and the moon in the dark, open sky.

Burrell now has a job lined up, along with a wife and supportive family ready to help with his transition to freedom. He's struggling to process the sudden switch to life on the outside, but finding joy in the smallest of things like opening the refrigerator even when he's not hungry and the simple luxury of having a bathroom door.

He's savored a real egg roll, he told friends, not the improvised version made in prison with tortillas, summer sausage, and Thai noodles.

But Burrell said he would not forget those he left behind in prison. Many, he said, were like him — Black kids swept up in an era of harsh policing and sentencing.

With no idea how to navigate the criminal justice system, he said, many were easily convinced by defense attorneys to sign plea deals even when they weren't guilty. Some teens from his neighborhood signed away 20, 30, or even 40 years of their lives when told they otherwise risked never seeing the outside of a cell again.

When announcing Burrell's commutation, Gov. Tim Walz pointed to scientific studies and the U.S. Supreme Court, which have both stressed that teenage brains work differently than those of adults and that most young offenders should not be given extreme prison sentences. Walz said the shameful state of juvenile criminal justice in Minnesota "needs to be reformed."

"We can't shackle our children in 2020 and expect them to understand and live in a society with respect to decency," he said during the pardons board hearing. "We need to make compassion and redemption part of our criminal justice system."

Burrell's sentence was commuted to 20 years, but he was not pardoned. He is serving the rest of his time, about two years, under supervised release requiring him to wear an ankle bracelet.

He intends to keep fighting for full exoneration in court.

Burrell said his conversion to Islam helped him cope, and he went on to become a religious leader while behind bars. He said he prayed every day for Tyesha and her family and will continue to do so, knowing that whatever he suffered, nothing can compare to losing a child.

Several members of the little girl's family, however, said they were upset to see Burrell free, and that the media fanfare felt like a slap in the face. Tyesha's brother, Jimmie Edwards III, said he doesn't believe Burrell is innocent, in part because he never tried to reach out to the family after her death.

"If I was convicted of doing something I didn't do, the first thing I would do was contact the family," he said by telephone. "I would try to make amends with the family (and) I would do everything in my power to let them know that I was innocent."

He was also angry that Sen. Amy Klobuchar had not contacted them about Burrell's commutation.

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Tyesha's death and the swift arrest of Burrell and two co-defendants have been touted repeatedly by Klobuchar — the city's top prosecutor at the time of the crime — as an example of finding justice for victims of gangs and gun violence. The girl's grieving parents appeared in campaign ads during Klobuchar's successful run for the U.S. Senate in 2006. And Burrell was mentioned, again, on the Democratic debate stage during her presidential bid last year.

But there was no hard evidence — no gun, DNA, or fingerprints — tying Burrell to the shooting. And the AP found that officers relied heavily on a single eyewitness, who offered conflicting accounts. Another man has said repeatedly over the years that he, not Burrell, was in fact the shooter.

After the AP's story, Klobuchar called for a review of the case and pushed for the creation of a conviction integrity unit — which recently got federal funding. She said protecting the innocent is just as important as punishing the guilty.

As for Burrell, he can't help thinking about how much of his life is already gone, but said he realized something while lying in bed his first night home: His time in prison wasn't wasted. It shaped who he is today and prepared him for what comes next. Time, he vows, he will use to help others.

"I want to be an example," he said. "I want to go from being a poster child of this monster to being a poster child of being a righteous, productive member of society."

Associated Press reporter Mohamed Ibrahim contributed to this report.

France's Macron blames his COVID-19 on negligence, bad luck

By ANGELA CHARLTON and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday blamed his COVID-19 on a combination of negligence and bad luck, urging his compatriots to stay safe as critics called out slip-ups in his behavior to prevent infection, from a close-quarters handshake to repeated big-group meals over the past week.

In what looked like a self-shot video from the presidential retreat in Versailles where he was isolating, Macron said he was experiencing symptoms that included headaches, fatigue and a dry cough. He promised to give daily updates and be "totally transparent" about the evolution of his illness.

"I am doing well," the 42-year-old French leader said, speaking softly with a bottle of gel on the desk behind him and dressed casually in a turtleneck top. "Normally, there is no reason for it to evolve in a bad way."

Macron said his infection "shows that the virus really can touch everyone, because I am very protected and am very careful."

"Despite everything I caught this virus — perhaps, doubtless, a moment of negligence, a moment of bad luck, too," he said.

A fellow European leader who spent time with Macron at an EU summit last week, Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovic, tested positive for the virus Friday. Ten other leaders at the EU summit have since tested negative; others either aren't getting tested or haven't released results.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who tested positive for the coronavirus and spent three days at Walter Reed Medical Center in early October, spoke with Macron on Thursday and wished him a speedy recovery, the White House said Friday. Several White House aides and members of Trump's campaign staff tested positive after he did.

In France, Macron's diagnosis brought criticism that he had set a bad example as the country sees a new uptick in cases and doctors warn families to take precautions this holiday season — especially at the dinner table.

Macron usually wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, and has insisted that his virus strategy is driven by science. But he has been captured on camera in recent days violating France's virus-control guidelines.

He shook hands and half-embraced the head of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Angel Gurría, at a meeting Monday. Both were masked, but Macron's office acknowledged Friday

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the move was a "mistake."

In his video message Friday, the president suggested that his behavior had helped limit the spread of the virus.

"Had I not respected the rules, the barrier measures, I would have caught it much faster and, most of all, I would have transmitted it in the preceding hours to many more people," Macron said.

He urged people to "hold firm" and look after each other during the festive season, warning: "The virus is picking up, even stronger."

Last week, Macron spent two days in intense negotiations at the EU summit in Brussels with the leaders of the other 26 member countries. Video excerpts released by the EU showed the leaders spread out in a circle in a huge meeting room — Macron, and most of the other leaders, were not masked.

Macron also hosted or took part in multiple large-group meals in the days before testing positive Thursday, including with members of his centrist party and rival politicians, while French people are currently advised to avoid gatherings larger than six people. His office has been contacting those present for the meals, but told some people sitting far from the president that they were not considered at risk.

Macron office isn't providing details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles, tucked in a grove tightly guarded by police.

Macron's positive test comes as French health authorities are again seeing a rise in infections and are warning of more as French families prepare to get together for Christmas and New Year festivities. France reported another 18,254 new infections Thursday and its death toll is just under 60,000.

France's Pasteur Institute released a study Friday suggesting that meal times at home and in public are a major source of contamination. Pasteur epidemiologist Arnaud Fontanet said on France-Inter radio Friday that during the holidays, "we can see each other, simply not be too numerous, and at critical moments at meals, not too many people at the same table."

Macron took a test "as soon as the first symptoms appeared" on Thursday morning and will self-isolate for seven days, in line with national health authorities' recommendations, the presidency said. Macron plans to continue working, and went ahead with a planned speech by videoconference Thursday.

The French health minister suggested that Macron might have been infected at the EU summit in Brussels last week, but Macron had multiple meetings in Paris as well.

France had Europe's first virus case in January, but Macron's government came under criticism for not having enough masks or tests and not confining the population quickly enough. A strict two-month lockdown brought infections down, and France sent children back to school and their parents back to work.

But infections surged again this fall so he declared a new, softer lockdown in October aimed at relieving pressure on hospitals. The measures were relaxed slightly this week, though restaurants, tourist sites, gyms and some other facilities remain closed.

Leicester reported from Le Pecq, France. Karel Janicek in Prague, Catherine Gaschka in Paris and Raf Casert in Brussels contributed.

Watchdog: Floyd protests overwhelmed NYPD, sparking conflict

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Police Department was caught off guard by the size of the spring protests after the killing of George Floyd and resorted to aggressive disorder control methods that stoked tensions and stifled free speech, the city's inspector general said in a report released Friday.

The Department of Investigation report followed a six-month probe that focused on the NYPD's institutional planning and response to the May and June protests after Floyd's killing by police in Minneapolis, rather than on the actions of individual officers.

It criticized tactics that included trapping demonstrators with a technique called kettling, making mass arrests, using pepper spray and batons, and detaining protesters for hours. Too few officers were deployed early in the demonstrations, the report said.

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The report also found that Mayor Bill de Blasio's decision to impose a nightly curfew after two days of looting exacerbated conflicts between demonstrators and police officers, who were given mixed messages on how it was to be enforced.

De Blasio's executive order said the curfew applied to everyone, with exceptions for essential workers. In subsequent public statements, he said the curfew wouldn't apply to "peaceful protesters."

The Department of Investigation recommended the NYPD create a unit to lead protest planning and response, adopt policies and training that reinforce respect for First Amendment rights, and improve messaging during demonstrations, such as repeating dispersal orders and staging officers in riot gear out of the view of protesters.

It also recommended that the department no longer use for protests a rapid-response unit that deals in terrorism and other emergencies.

"The problems went beyond poor judgment or misconduct by some individual officers," Department of Investigation Commissioner Margaret Garnett said at a news conference. "Our investigation found that the NYPD as an institution made a number of key errors or omissions that likely escalated tensions and the potential for violence and certainly contributed to the public perception that the department was suppressing rather than facilitating lawful first amendment assembly and expression."

Police Commissioner Dermot Shea, who told investigators he objected to the curfew, said in a statement that he intends to incorporate all 20 of the report's recommendations into the department's policies. And de Blasio, in a video response, said the report "makes very clear, we've got to do something different and we got to do something better."

The springtime protests in New York City often featured peaceful daytime rallies and marches that devolved into chaos after dark, as they did in some other cities. Some demonstrators firebombed police cars, vandalized buildings and attacked officers with thrown objects.

Police officers, in turn, at times used what appeared to be arbitrary force, using batons and bicycles wielded like shields to force protesters out of particular areas or break up demonstrations.

Asked at his daily news briefing Friday whether top police officials would be disciplined, de Blasio demurred, saying: "We're definitely going to look at actions of individual commanders down to the precinct level, but I think it's fair to say that what's being pointed out here is not so much time for retribution, honestly, but time for change."

Pat Lynch, the head of the city's largest police union, said city leaders deserve blame for sending officers out with "no plan, no strategy and no support to deal with unrest that was fundamentally different from any of the thousands of demonstrations that police officers successfully protect every single year."

"No amount of new training or strategizing will help while politicians continue to undermine police officers and embolden those who create chaos on our streets," said Lynch, the president of the Police Benevolent Association.

Two other reports in recent months have also criticized the NYPD's handling of the protests.

The civil rights organization Human Rights Watch last month issued a report citing evidence that police planned an aggressive crackdown on protesters on June 4 in the Bronx. The state Attorney General's Office issued a preliminary report in July that cited a "clear breakdown of trust between police and the public."

In October, the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society sued the city on behalf of protesters who say they were assaulted and abused by police.

"This report confirms that the shocking violence the NYPD employed during the George Floyd protests was directly traceable to the leadership failures of Mayor de Blasio, Police Commissioner Shea and other police leaders who created a de facto policy permitting and encouraging individual officers to target protesters for brutal treatment and unlawful arrests," the NYCLU and Legal Aid Society said in a joint statement.

The Department of Investigation also found that many officers lacked sufficient training on policing protests, and that the department didn't assess the context or proportion of a potential threat in shaping its protest response.

"Those two weeks in late May and early June were a very painful period in an already deeply challeng-

ing year for New York City," Garnett said. "Our goal was to bring transparency and accountability to the events of that period."

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/mikesisak

US experts debate: Who should be next in line for vaccine?

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Deciding that health care workers and nursing home residents should be first in line for the initial, limited supplies of COVID-19 shots wasn't that hard a call. Now U.S. health officials have to determine who should be next.

How high a priority, for example, should senior citizens, teachers, transit workers and supermarket employees get in the next few months as more vaccine becomes available?

A federal panel of vaccination experts takes up that question at an emergency meeting this weekend. Its guidance is not binding, and no matter what it decides, there will be differences from state to state.

The panel members are leaning toward putting "essential workers" next up because people like bus drivers, grocery store clerks and others who perform vital jobs that can't be done from home are the ones getting infected most often. That is also where concerns about racial inequities in the crisis are most apparent. Many essential workers are Black and Hispanic.

But other experts say people 65 and older should be next, along with people with certain medical conditions. Those are the ones who are dying at the highest rates, they say.

The panel is scheduled to vote on the proposal Sunday.

"I think we know this isn't going to be perfect. We don't have vaccine for everyone right away, so we're going to have to make difficult decisions," said Claire Hannan, executive director of an organization that represents managers of state vaccination programs.

If essential workers are indeed next up, states already have different ideas about who among them should be closer to the front of the line.

In Nevada, for example, teachers and child care staff will be ahead of public transportation workers, according to the state's current plan. Then come agriculture and food workers, and then retail and utility employees.

In South Dakota, teachers could get access before those working in food and transportation. In Arkansas, the essential workers list includes teachers, prison guards, police officers, meatpacking plant workers and mayors.

The advice of the expert panel — the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices — is almost always endorsed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's what happened earlier this month, when the group said top priority should be given to health care workers and residents of long-term care homes for the 20 million initial vaccinations this month.

But it's not clear things will go the same way in the next phase. CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield has said he believes priority should be given to people 70 and older who live with children or grandchildren.

The advisory panel's chairman, Dr. Jose Romero, told The Associated Press he was aware of Redfield's comments but had not spoken directly with him about it.

Redfield declined to say if he would prioritize senior citizens over essential workers even if the panel recommended the reverse. "I look forward to listening to the advisory group's discussion, and to receiving its recommendation for consideration," he said in an email to the AP.

Most states followed the panel's recommendation that health care workers and nursing home residents get the very first doses. But there have been a few exceptions.

Utah said long-term care residents should be in line behind health care workers, instead of sharing the front with them. Massachusetts included prisoners and homeless people in the first tier. Nevada, New Hampshire and Wyoming did the same for police officers.

State-to-state variations are likely to increase in the next-priority groups, said the Kaiser Family Founda-

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tion's Jennifer Kates, who has been analyzing state vaccination plans.

"I think we're going to see states falling out in different ways," with some putting older people ahead of essential workers, Kates said.

Things could get messy. For example, some experts said that if one state prioritizes certain essential workers and a neighboring state decides to give primacy to seniors, people might try crossing state lines in hopes of getting vaccinated.

"That's one of the issues of not having a fully national plan of immunization," said Romero, who also is the head of the Arkansas state health department.

The proposal before the advisory committee relies on a broad definition of essential workers set in August by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It counts hundreds of different jobs as part of the critical infrastructure workforce, including first responders, teachers, communications technicians, weather forecasters, sewage treatment plant employees and people who work in animal shelters.

According to estimates presented to the advisory committee, as many as 87 million people not working in health care can be counted as essential employees.

The nation has more than 53 million senior citizens. The CDC also counts more than 100 million Americans as having underlying medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe COVID-related illness, though there is overlap between the two groups.

Trade associations and worker groups have been sending emails and other communications to the committee, arguing that they should be given priority.

Julie Russell, representing the Coronado Unified School District in California, urged that teachers and other school workers be prioritized. "We ask that you recognize the importance of the safety of our staff and how many young lives each of us touch," she said at a meeting last weekend of the panel.

Dr. Charles Lee of the American College of Correctional Physicians pushed for those who work in jails and prisons, plus inmates.

Romero said the committee is likely to discuss ways to help states narrow down which essential workers should go first. For example, people who are considered essential but can work from home might be placed further down the list than those who can't stay 6 feet away from others while on the job.

What about the staff of the Atlanta-based CDC? In a memo to employees that was obtained by the AP, Redfield said the agency will not get a direct allotment of vaccine. However, Georgia's plan allows for certain public health and lab workers to be in the state's highest priority group. Some CDC staff also work at hospitals and clinics, and may be prioritized with staff at those places.

Of course, when more vaccine comes out, "the issue of priority becomes less important," said Dr. Eric Toner, a Johns Hopkins University scientist who has written about possible vaccination prioritization frameworks.

"The bottom line is we just need to get as many people vaccinated as quickly as we can," he said.

AP writers Candice Choi and Jason Dearen in New York City and Jonathan Poet in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

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College students recruited as teachers to keep schools open

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and CASEY SMITH Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — As the coronavirus sidelines huge numbers of educators, school districts around the country are aggressively recruiting substitute teachers, offering bonuses and waiving certification requirements in order to keep classrooms open.

Coming to the rescue in many cases are college students who are themselves learning online or home for extended winter breaks.

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In Indiana, the 4,400-student Greenfield-Central school district about 20 miles (32 kilometers) east of Indianapolis made a plea for help as its substitute pool shrank. "I said, 'If you've got a student who's in college, maybe they'd like to work even a two-month thing for us - which would be a stopgap, no doubt - but it will help us a whole, whole bunch,'" said Scott Kern, the Greenfield-Central Community School Corporation director of human resources.

Over a dozen college students answered the call including his own daughter, 19-year-old Grace Kern, who is studying medical imaging technology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She has been working in elementary school classrooms, helping students as teachers offer instruction remotely via a screen inside the room.

"My dad told me that a bunch of teachers are out and they're struggling to get substitutes in. And I was like, 'Well, all my classes are online, except for one, so I have the time to do it.' And I would hate for the schools and the students to struggle," she said.

The teaching force already was stretched in many places before the pandemic hit as fewer students entered the profession, and retirees who often fill in as substitutes have been staying home in large numbers because of concerns about their health. As contact tracing forces teachers into quarantine, staffing shortages have become so severe that many schools have had no choice but to switch to distance learning.

In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont, a Democrat, appealed late last month to college students who were coming home for their winter break to help in hospitals, virus testing sites - and in schools. In cases where teachers are leading instruction remotely because they have to be in quarantine, for example, Lamont said college students could be paid to come into the classrooms and help provide supervision.

"Look you could binge watch Netflix for three weeks but we have some other ways that you could really be of assistance, helping your entire community get through this pandemic," Lamont said at a news briefing.

Isabel Orozco, a freshman at Wellesley College, is working as a substitute teacher in the Cheshire, Connecticut district, where she graduated high school in June. She said she's considering taking all of her spring semester classes online, so she can continue working in the public schools.

"Anything I can do to help, I feel good about," she said.

College students have been tapped in growing numbers this year by Kelly Education, which contracts with districts to provide substitutes. Company president Nicola Soares said the pandemic has laid bare problems with shortages that have been worsening for years.

"So when I think about the pandemic and everything that we have seen for the past 10 months it has absolutely exacerbated the issue around teacher shortages and also substitute teacher shortages," Soares said, adding that she doesn't expect much relief next school year. "We have seen a lot of folks leave the profession. The openings are going to increase, so it is domino effect."

In South Carolina, Lisa Usry, of Charleston, encountered this firsthand. One of her first jobs of the year was filling in for a teacher in his mid-60s who quit abruptly.

"He worked a couple weeks and said, 'I'm out of here' and walked out the door," she recalled.

In Nebraska, more districts are applying for exemptions to a requirement that substitutes have a teaching certificate. The exemption, once only used by a few large districts, allows administrators to hire subs who have 60 college credits and have completed a teaching course and another that addresses bias and discrimination.

Because the state's substitute requirements had been so high, it had relied heavily on retirees in years past, said Jenni Benson, president of the Nebraska State Education Association. But it has been a harder sell this year, with the association finding that only 33% of the 500 retired teachers it surveyed in August planned to sub this year, while the others said no or were unsure.

Seventy-four-year-old Pat Shepard, a retired Spanish teacher from of Lincoln, Nebraska, was among those who went ahead and kept working, more even than past years as her district offered bonuses for subs that committed to a certain number of jobs each month. Some of her substitute teacher friends, though, decided to take the year off.

"One she has a father who is 89 with a heart condition and a brand new grandbaby so she is not willing. I've had some others who are cancer survivors and things like that. And they are just not willing to take

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that risk," she said. "I'm a little bit more concerned now after Thanksgiving because our our cases here are just getting more and more everyday in the city."

In Iowa, more substitute jobs are going unfilled, even after the state lowered its requirements. In the past districts could manage by dividing an absent teacher's students among the other teachers in the building. But that won't work in a pandemic, said Coy Marquardt, associate executive director at the Iowa State Education Association.

To get by, some administrators and counselors are being called into action to serve as substitutes, although even that isn't enough.

"That is one of the reasons why some of the districts went and are still in virtual or remote because they just didn't have the staffing," he said.

Hollingsworth reported from Mission, Kansas. Pat Eaton-Robb contributed from Hartford, Connecticut.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By BEATRICE DUPUY, ARIJETA LAJKA and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

Here's a look at false and misleading claims circulating as the United States rolled out the newly authorized Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to some health care workers and others. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Alabama nurse did not die as a result of receiving COVID-19 vaccine

CLAIM: A 42-year-old nurse in Alabama died after she received the COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday.

THE FACTS: No health care workers died after Alabama began administering COVID-19 vaccines to them on Tuesday. Yet posts online began falsely claiming that a nurse had died after receiving the vaccine. The posts circulated on Facebook and Twitter, with some users suggesting it was their aunt who had died or they had received the information from a close friend. Social media users shared screenshots of text messages that said, "omg just found out my aunt dead," and also said that the woman's family did not want her name revealed. Some online posts suggested a nurse who died of COVID-19 had instead died after receiving the vaccine. The posts were shared by accounts that had previously shared anti-vaccine misinformation. "And so it starts... A 42 y/o nurse in Alabama found dead 8-10 hours after the vaccine," one post on Facebook said. After being contacted by the AP, Alabama Department of Public Health officials checked with the hospitals that administered the COVID-19 vaccine to confirm that the information being shared online was false. The department released a statement on social media to combat the misinformation. "The posts are untrue," the department said. "No persons who received a COVID-19 vaccine in Alabama have died." The posts online claimed that the nurse had died from a severe allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. Those with a history of allergic reactions are being told to not get the vaccine after two health care workers in England suffered reactions. Those two people have since recovered. Pfizer, whose vaccine was granted emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 11, has reported no serious adverse effects from its clinical trials. The AP reported Tuesday that Alabama received nearly 41,000 doses of the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine in its initial round of shipments, which were delivered to 15 hospitals that could store that vaccine at the necessary temperature. More than 4,254 people have died from the virus in the state, and more than 305,640 have tested positive for COVID-19, according to researchers from Johns Hopkins.

—Beatrice Dupuy

BBC footage shows COVID-19 vaccination with retractable needle

CLAIM: Video shows health care worker faking giving the COVID-19 vaccine in England with a "disappearing needle."

THE FACTS: The video does not show a staged shot. As video footage of COVID-19 vaccinations floods news channels and social platforms, some social media users are misrepresenting those videos to create

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a false narrative that health care workers are not actually being inoculated. The posts are being shared by people who oppose vaccines in order to spread doubt about the vaccine and the pandemic. Social media users are amplifying these false claims by sharing a nine-second BBC clip from Wednesday that shows a health care worker administering a vaccine into the arm of a patient. The needle retracts after the vaccine is injected. One Twitter video that falsely suggests the medical worker is faking the inoculation has been viewed more than 420,000 times. "Disappearing needles!! There soo desperate, come on!!" one tweet said. Another said, "So far I have yet to see a real vaccine given to a patient. All fakes. May I present to you, the disappearing needle...Remember those collapsible toy knives we used to play with as kids?" In reality, the videos show a health care worker using a safety syringe, which is retractable to prevent needlestick injuries that can spread diseases like hepatitis. Safety syringes have no impact on the amount of vaccine someone gets and are no different from receiving the vaccine through a traditional needle, said Dr. Craig Spencer, director of Global Health in Emergency Medicine at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center. Spencer received the COVID-19 vaccine Wednesday. "What you saw in those videos are retractable needles," he said. BBC debunked the claims earlier Thursday. A BBC spokesperson told the AP that the footage was genuine and showed a health care worker using a safety syringe. "Most importantly, people need to be learning about vaccinations from trusted health sources like the CDC, not your aunt's Facebook page or a viral tweet," Spencer said.

—Beatrice Dupuy

Video of vaccination in Toronto does not show 'fake' needle

CLAIM: Video shows COVID-19 vaccination in Toronto involved a "fake" needle.

THE FACTS: Social media users shared a video of a health care worker in Toronto receiving a real shot of the COVID-19 vaccine, with false claims that the needle was "fake" because fluid leaked out while she was being injected. On Dec. 14, Tamara Dus, director of health services at University Health Network, administered Canada's first vaccinations at the Michener Institute of Education in Toronto. Canadian news networks posted a video that shows Dus giving the vaccine to Cecile Lasco, a personal support worker at the Rekai Centres, a long-term care home. In the video, while Lasco is being injected with the vaccine, liquid drips on her arm. Social media users then posted the clip with false claims. "Isn't that the fakest looking needle you've ever seen? Why is there so much fluid leaking from the needle? Why isn't the skin irritated or red at the injection site?" an Instagram user who shared the clip wrote. The post had over 45,000 views. "This was on CTV this morning. THAT IS THE FAKEST LOOKING NEEDLE INJECTION I'VE EVER SEEN!! First of all... fluid should not be leaking from the needle!! Second of all.. look at when she takes it out. Skin is intact, not red or irritated. Is this a joke," wrote another Instagram user who shared the video. Gillian Howard, a spokeswoman at University Health Network, told The Associated Press, "It is not uncommon after receiving a vaccine, that some of the vaccine will come back through the puncture made by the needle." Howard added, "We have also looked at the syringes to ensure that there is a tight lock of the needle to the syringe." Sarah Kirchofer, nurse practitioner and interim director of occupational health at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, reviewed the video and told the AP in a call that this type of leakage can happen when the syringe isn't sufficiently tightened to the needle. "It's something that we see a lot," Kirchofer said. "It's definitely not an indication that there was a fake needle." Kirchofer also administered Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine this week. "In my experience so far in our vaccine clinic, things have gone extremely well," she said. Howard said that UHN has been in touch with Pfizer and Lasco, the health worker who received the shot, about the incident. "Because this was aired live and people are not aware that this sometimes happens with vaccination, we appreciate the interest," she said. "However, the idea that this is fake is without merit and irresponsible in the extreme."

—Arijeta Lajka

CLAIM: A video clip shows that a nurse on a German television show faked giving the COVID-19 vaccine without a needle.

THE FACTS: Posts are falsely claiming a video shared online shows a nurse who suspiciously "forgot the

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needle” when administering the vaccine in Germany. In fact, COVID-19 vaccines have yet to be approved in Germany, and the video shows a vaccination rehearsal — not a faked injection. The clip, which is being shared on Twitter by a QAnon conspiracy and pro-Trump account, has been viewed more than 80,000 times. Some users are falsely claiming the video is evidence that the vaccine and pandemic are part of an elaborate hoax. In the video, a health care worker wearing a yellow hazmat suit and white gloves practices administering an injection to a patient’s arm, and then applies gauze while another worker in blue gloves puts on a bandage. “Well, the television team of the ‘Current Camera’ stupidly forgot the needle for the propaganda video,” the caption being shared with the video said. The 8-second video was taken from a segment that originally aired on WELT, a German TV news channel, about the security of vaccination centers in Germany against vaccine opposition groups. AP reached out to WELT, and the news outlet confirmed that the footage shows a logistical test run before vaccinations are administered in Darmstadt, which is near the German city of Frankfurt. The event took place on Dec. 5 to prepare for vaccination centers opening in the city, according to a city news release. City officials said that they wanted the rehearsal to look as realistic as possible. The European Medicines Agency has yet to approve the vaccine for Europe. The group is now set to discuss the Pfizer vaccine on Dec. 21 after German officials demanded that the agency move up the date.

—Beatrice Dupuy

COVID-19 vaccine does not contain live virus

CLAIM: The vaccine contains the virus. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said this.

THE FACTS: A clip of Johnson mistaking the word “virus” for “vaccine” is being misrepresented online to falsely claim that the vaccine contains the live virus. During a press conference on Dec. 2, Johnson announced that the British government had accepted the vaccine created by Pfizer and BioNTech for distribution. As he was discussing the logistical challenges of distributing the vaccine, including the temperature required to store the vaccine, Johnson misspoke. “The virus has got to be stored at -70 degrees,” he said while talking about the vaccine. Posts online sharing the clip claimed that Johnson “slipped up and told the truth” that the government wanted to inject its citizens with the virus and encouraged British citizens to reject the vaccine. “It’s time to wakey wakey people! The vaxxine is the virus! Boris Johnson tells you straight up! When are you going to believe your eyes & ears? Retweet!!!!” said one tweet that included the video of Johnson’s gaffe. All the vaccines that were developed in the U.S. do not contain the live virus and will not cause anyone to test positive for the virus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The vaccines work by helping the immune system identify the virus in order to fight it. The Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine as well as the Moderna vaccine rely on messenger RNA, or mRNA. Each vaccine works by using mRNA to carry a genetic code that works as an instruction card to tell the body to make the “spike protein” that is in the coronavirus. Once the protein is made in the body, the cells get rid of the instructions and the immune system builds an immune response to it. The vaccines do not use the live virus. The Pfizer vaccine began rolling out in the U.S. on Monday, starting with health care workers.

—Beatrice Dupuy

Report spreads debunked claims about Dominion machines in Michigan county

CLAIM: A report released this week in Michigan shows Dominion Voting Systems machines in Antrim County, Michigan, were “intentionally designed with inherent errors to create systemic fraud and influence election results.”

THE FACTS: There is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. There’s also no evidence the election technology firm Dominion Voting Systems switched or deleted votes, used algorithms to unevenly weigh vote tallies, colluded with Democrats, or used foreign servers — despite repeated efforts by the president and his supporters to claim it did. Even so, a deluge of false claims around Dominion is circling back to Antrim County, Michigan, this week after starting there on election night, when confusion around a clerk’s error drove social media users to falsely blame the election management system used to tabulate the data. The renewed attention to Dominion and Antrim County this week stems from a report released

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on Monday as part of a lawsuit seeking to challenge the county's election results. The 23-page report — signed by a former Republican congressional candidate with a history of spreading misinformation about Michigan's election — claims Dominion "is intentionally and purposefully designed with inherent errors to create systemic fraud and influence election results." The report claims the results of the election in Antrim County should not be certifiable because a forensic analysis of voting machines found a "machine error built into the voting software designed to create error." However, a hand tally of all presidential election votes in Antrim County completed on Thursday matched the results found by voting machines, showing that the machines did not err there. A joint statement released Monday by the Michigan Department of State and the Michigan attorney general's office strongly disputed the report, saying its analysis is "critically flawed, filled with dramatic conclusions without any evidence to support them." Antrim County officials concurred in a Tuesday press release, saying, "An analysis which should have been data and fact based is instead riddled with false and unsupported claims, baseless attacks, and incorrect use of technical terms." Officials have thoroughly explained the human mistake that caused the small, Republican-leaning county to temporarily report unofficial results that reflected a landslide win for Joe Biden. "It was prompted by the clerk not updating media drives in some of the machines in Antrim County, an accidental human error," the Michigan Department of State said in a release. "Reporting errors are common, and always caught and corrected in the county canvass, if not before, as was the case in Antrim County." County Clerk Sheryl Guy told the AP, "There was no malice, no fraud here, just human error." The mistake was corrected. Several social media users, including Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani and the president himself, have cited the report's mention of the county having a "68% error rate," which it claims is based on a review of tabulation logs from three days after Election Day. The report's authors didn't explain all the errors they saw, or what they mean by "error rate." County officials told the AP they didn't understand the number, since they have not had a chance to look through the data. The report released Monday also included a slew of other debunked claims about Dominion, which Dominion CEO John Poulos addressed at length on Tuesday in prepared statements to a Republican-led Michigan Senate committee investigating the election. "The disinformation campaign being waged against Dominion defies facts or logic," Poulos said. "To date, no one has produced credible evidence of vote fraud or vote switching on Dominion systems because these things simply have not occurred."

—Ali Swenson

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WHO: Vaccine program gets access to nearly 2 billion doses

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization program to help get COVID-19 vaccines to all countries in need has access to nearly 2 billion doses of "promising" vaccine candidates, officials said Friday.

None of the agreements include the vaccines by Moderna, which took one step closer to approval in the U.S. on Thursday, or Pfizer-BioNTech, which is already in use in the U.S., Canada and Britain and nearing approval in the European Union.

The initiative WHO is co-leading, known as COVAX, also has yet to receive firm pledges and a timeline from rich countries to share the vaccines they have already secured for themselves.

Of the approximately 12 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines the pharmaceutical industry is expected to produce next year, about 9 billion shots have already been reserved by rich countries. Canada is leading the pack, with around 10 doses reserved per Canadian, according to the science analytics company Airfinity.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agreements mean that some 190 countries and economies taking part in the COVAX initiative will have access to vaccines "during the first half of next year."

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"This is fantastic news and a milestone in global health," Tedros, an Ethiopian who goes by his first name, said at a media briefing also attended by COVAX and pharmaceutical industry leaders.

WHO and its partners in COVAX, the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, were "working non-stop to start vaccination early next year," he said, stressing that vaccines would not replace but complement techniques already proven to help stem the spread of the virus.

The U.N.-backed COVAX program needs \$6.8 billion more to secure vaccine contracts and ensure delivery of allocated doses. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said it is in world's best interests to ensure broad immunization because "nature always strikes back."

"If we don't eradicate the disease, a virus can mutate," Guterres said. "And vaccines that at a certain moment are effective can no longer be effective if things change."

COVAX's vaccine dose arrangements include pharmaceutical makers British-Swedish AstraZeneca, U.S.-based Johnson & Johnson and the Serum Institute of India, though talks with others are ongoing.

"We are certainly in discussions with Pfizer and Moderna. We're hoping to be able to reach agreements with them. But we were not ready this morning," said Dr. Richard Hatchett, the head of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

Hatchett acknowledged that U.S. regulatory proceedings, the need to maintain the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines at sub-zero temperatures and cost issues were "all issues that are being talked about" with the two companies.

Dr. Seth Berkley, the head of the Gavi alliance, alluded to recent media reports — which includes one by The Associated Press — that pointed to growing concerns that funding and support were lacking for COVAX and that less-developed nations could be left behind.

"We still need more doses and yes, we still need more money," Berkley said, "but we have a clear pathway to securing the initial 2 billion doses."

Developing countries also need to show they have a plan in place to roll out the vaccines. The U.N.'s children's agency UNICEF, which would ship COVAX doses in the developing world, called a meeting this week with more than 300 vaccine procurement officials to go over what may be needed.

UNICEF has checklist running dozens of pages to prepare countries, said Benjamin Schreiber, a UNICEF immunization expert who is coordinating the COVAX rollout.

"We can't send vaccines to countries if they're not ready," he said.

Associated Press writer Lori Hinnant in Paris and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed.

With Trump silent, reprisals for hacks may fall to Biden

By ERIC TUCKER, FRANK BAJAK and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All fingers are pointing to Russia as the source of the worst-ever hack of U.S. government agencies. But President Donald Trump, long wary of blaming Moscow for cyberattacks, has been silent.

The lack of any statement seeking to hold Russia responsible casts doubt on the likelihood of a swift response and suggests any retaliation — whether through sanctions, criminal charges or cyber actions — will be left in the hands of President-elect Joe Biden's administration.

"I would imagine that the incoming administration wants a menu of what the options are and then is going to choose," said Sarah Mendelson, a Carnegie Mellon University public policy professor and former U.S. ambassador to the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council. "Is there a graduated assault? Is there an all-out assault? How much out of the gate do you want to do?"

To be sure, it's not uncommon for administrations to refrain from leveling public accusations of blame for hacks until they've accumulated enough evidence. Here, U.S. officials say they only recently became aware of devastating breaches at multiple government agencies in which foreign intelligence agents rooted around undetected for as much as nine months.

But Trump's response, or lack thereof, is being closely watched because of his preoccupation with a

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fruitless effort to overturn the results of last month's election and because of his reluctance to consistently acknowledge that Russian hackers interfered in the 2016 presidential election in his favor.

Exactly what action Biden might take is unclear, or how his response might be shaped by criticism that the Obama administration did not act aggressively enough to thwart interference in 2016. He offered clues in a statement Thursday, saying his administration would be proactive in preventing cyberattacks and impose costs on any adversaries behind them.

U.S. government statements so far have not mentioned Russia. Asked about Russian involvement in a radio interview Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo acknowledged that Russia consistently tries to penetrate American servers, but quickly pivoted to threats from China and North Korea. Speaking to reporters Friday, Trump economic adviser Larry Kudlow did not commit to blaming the Kremlin, saying, "People are saying Russia. I don't know that. It could be other countries."

Democratic Sens. Dick Durbin and Richard Blumenthal, who were briefed Tuesday on the hacking campaign in a classified Armed Services Committee session, were unequivocal in blaming Russia.

There are other signs within the administration of a clear-eyed recognition of the severity of the attack, which happened after elite cyber spies injected malicious code into the software of a company that provides network services. For instance, the civilian cybersecurity agency warned in an advisory Thursday that the hack posed a "grave risk" to government and private networks.

A response could start with a public declaration that Russia is believed responsible, already a widely shared assessment in the U.S. government and cybersecurity community. Such statements often aren't immediate.

It took weeks after the incidents became public for the Obama administration to blame North Korea in the Sony Pictures Entertainment hack in 2014 and for then-national intelligence director James Clapper to confirm China as the "leading suspect" in hacks of the Office of Personnel Management.

Public naming-and-shaming is always part of the playbook. Trump's former homeland security adviser Thomas Bossert wrote this week in a New York Times opinion piece that "the United States, and ideally its allies, must publicly and formally attribute responsibility for these hacks." Republican Sen. Mitt Romney said in a SiriusXM interview that it was "extraordinary" the White House has not spoken out.

Another possibility is a federal indictment, assuming investigators can accumulate enough evidence to implicate individual hackers. Such cases are labor-intensive and often take years, and though they may carry slim chances of courtroom prosecution, the Justice Department regards them as having powerful deterrent effects.

Sanctions, a time-honored punishment, can have even more bite and will almost certainly be weighed by Biden. President Barack Obama sanctioned Russian intelligence services after the 2016 election interference and expelled Russian diplomats. The Trump administration and Western allies similarly expelled diplomats over Moscow's alleged poisoning of an ex-intelligence officer in Britain.

Exposing Kremlin corruption, including how Russian President Vladimir Putin accrues and hides his wealth, may amount to even more formidable retaliation.

"This isn't just a tit-for-tat or hacking back into their systems," Mendelson said. "It's, 'We're going to go for what you really care about, and what you really care about is the funds that are stashed, and revealing the larger network and how it's connected to the Kremlin.'"

The U.S. can also retaliate in cyberspace, a path made easier by a Trump administration authorization that has already resulted in some operations.

Former national security adviser John Bolton told reporters at a 2018 briefing that offensive cyber operations against foreign rivals would now be part of the U.S. arsenal and that the U.S. response would no longer be primarily defensive.

"We can totally melt down their home networks," said Jason Healey, a Columbia University cyberconflict scholar. "And any time we see their operators popping up they know that we are going to go after them, wherever they are."

U.S. Cyber Command has also taken more proactive measures, engaging in what officials describe as "hunt forward" operations designed to detect cyber threats in other countries before they reach their

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intended target.

Military cyber fighters, for instance, partnered with Estonia in the weeks before the U.S. presidential election in a joint operation aimed at identifying and defending against threats from Russia.

While the U.S. is also prolific in its offensive cyberintelligence-gathering — tapping allied foreign leaders' phones and inserting spyware into commercial routers, for instance — such efforts are measured compared with the infection of 18,000 government and private-sector organizations in the SolarWinds hack, Healey said.

The better response — since espionage itself is not a crime — is to triple down on defensive cybersecurity, Healey said.

David Simon, a cybersecurity expert and former Defense Department special counsel, said there must be consequences for those responsible for attacks — and the Trump administration “has fallen far short in holding the Kremlin accountable.”

“Until it’s clear the U.S. will impose meaningful costs on adversaries,” he said in an email, “a material change in the Kremlin’s behavior is not likely to be seen.”

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 19, the 354th day of 2020. There are 12 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Dec. 19, 1998, President Bill Clinton was impeached by the Republican-controlled House for perjury and obstruction of justice (he was subsequently acquitted by the Senate).

On this date:

In 1777, during the American Revolutionary War, Gen. George Washington led his army of about 11,000 men to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to camp for the winter.

In 1843, “A Christmas Carol,” by Charles Dickens, was first published in England.

In 1915, legendary French chanteuse Edith Piaf was born in Paris. German psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer, who discovered the pathological condition of dementia, died in Breslau (now Wroclaw), Poland, at age 51.

In 1946, war broke out in Indochina as troops under Ho Chi Minh launched widespread attacks against the French.

In 1960, fire broke out on the hangar deck of the nearly completed aircraft carrier USS Constellation at the New York Naval Shipyard; 50 civilian workers were killed.

In 1972, Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific, winding up the Apollo program of manned lunar landings.

In 1974, Nelson A. Rockefeller was sworn in as the 41st vice president of the United States in the U.S. Senate chamber by Chief Justice Warren Burger with President Gerald R. Ford looking on.

In 1975, John Paul Stevens was sworn in as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 2001, the fires that had burned beneath the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York City for the previous three months were declared extinguished except for a few scattered hot spots.

In 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Iraq in “material breach” of a U.N. disarmament resolution.

In 2003, design plans were unveiled for the signature skyscraper — a 1,776-foot glass tower — at the site of the World Trade Center in New York City.

In 2008, citing imminent danger to the national economy, President George W. Bush ordered an emergency bailout of the U.S. auto industry.

Ten years ago: The body of an American tourist, Kristine Luken, 44, was found near a road outside Jerusalem. (A Palestinian man was later sentenced by an Israeli court to life in prison for stabbing Luken.) Belarus’ President Alexander Lukashenko won re-election. In a game that came to be known as the “Miracle at the New Meadowlands,” Philadelphia’s DeSean Jackson returned a punt 65 yards for a touchdown as time expired in the Eagles’ 38-31 comeback win over the New York Giants.

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Five years ago: Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton debated in Manchester, New Hampshire, where they engaged in a pointed but polite discussion of national security, Americans' heightened terrorism fears and the economy. Conductor Kurt Masur, 88, died in Greenwich, Connecticut. Spain's Mireia Lalaguna Royo was named the winner of the Miss World 2015 competition in a Chinese island resort, an event dogged by controversy over China's refusal to allow Canada's entrant to attend.

One year ago: Congress headed home for the holidays without a plan or timeline in place for President Donald Trump's impeachment trial in the Senate; Republicans resisted Democratic demands for new witness testimony. The evangelical Christian magazine Christianity Today said in an editorial that President Donald Trump should be removed from office; the editorial urged believers not to "continue to brush off Mr. Trump's immoral words and behavior in the cause of political expediency." The House gave Trump an overwhelming bipartisan victory on trade, approving a bill putting in place the terms of the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. Karl Fontenot, who spent 35 years in prison in a murder case featured in the book and TV series "The Innocent Man," was released from an Oklahoma prison; a federal judge had written that newly discovered evidence provided "solid proof" of his "probable innocence."

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elaine Joyce is 77. Actor Tim Reid is 76. Paleontologist Richard E. Leakey is 76. Musician John McEuen is 75. Singer Janie Fricke is 73. Jazz musician Lenny White is 71. Actor Mike Lookinland is 60. Actor Scott Cohen is 59. Actor Jennifer Beals is 57. Actor Robert MacNaughton is 54. Magician Criss Angel is 53. Rock musician Klaus Eichstadt (Ugly Kid Joe) is 53. Actor Ken Marino is 52. Actor Elvis Nolasco is 52. Actor Derek Webster is 52. Actor Kristy Swanson is 51. Model Tyson Beckford is 50. Actor Amy Locane is 49. Pro Football Hall of Famer Warren Sapp is 48. Actor Rosa Blasi is 48. Actor Alyssa Milano is 48. Actor Tara Summers is 41. Actor Jake Gyllenhaal (JIH'-lihn-hahl) is 40. Actor Marla Sokoloff is 40. Rapper Lady Sovereign is 35. Journalist Ronan Farrow is 33. Actor Nik Dodani is 27.