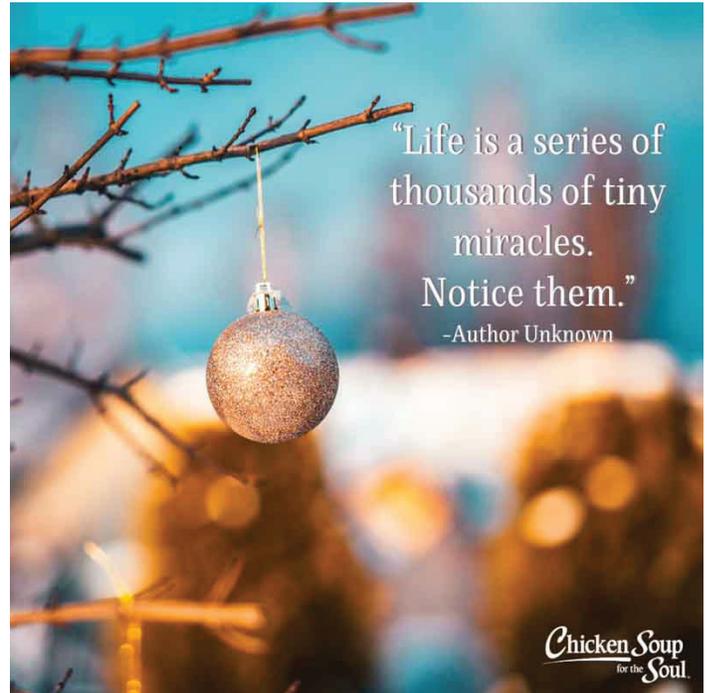


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## Church Services

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church: Worship in the church at 8:30 a.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/215332349572015/>)

Groton Christian & Missinary Alliance Church: Worship in the church at 10:30 a.m.: (<https://www.facebook.com/GrotonCMA/>)

St. John's Lutheran Church: Worship in the church at 9 a.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnsgroton/>)

Emmanuel Lutheran Church - Worship inside at 9 a.m.

(<https://www.facebook.com/Emmanuel-Lutheran-Church-GrotonSD-ELCA-636505039852208/>)

United Methodist Church: Worship online only at 11 a.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/grotonsdumc>)

Buffalo Lake Lutheran Church, rural Eden, 10:30 a.m. Worship inside or stay in vehicle and listen on the FM.

Heaven Bound Ministries of Pierpont has worship on Saturdays at 5:30 p.m. in the basement.

Heaven Bound Ministries of Pierpont / Buffalo Lake Lutheran Church, rural Eden - will have a podcast posted. <https://anchor.fm/paul-irvin-kosel>



## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*The angel answered,  
“The Holy Spirit will come  
on you, and the power of the  
Most High will overshadow you.  
So the holy one to be born will  
be called the Son of God.*

- LUKE 1:35



*“Angel” by Thomas Derrick (1930)*

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## BIBLE

## TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. The main Christmas story is paraphrased from what two New Testament books? *Mark/John, Acts/Romans, Matthew/Luke, Jude/Revelation*

2. From Luke 2:34, who prophesied to Mary that this Christ child is set for the fall and rising again of many? *Melchior, Simeon, Cyrenius, Felix*

3. What bright phenomenon led the wise men (Magi) to the young Jesus and Savior? *Whirlwind, Star, Rainbow, Rainfall of sparkling gold*

4. Where was the young child when the Magi came to visit Him to present gifts? *Manger, Under the stars, House, Temple*

5. By what method did the shepherds learn of Christ's birth? *New star, Angel appearance, Walking stranger, Donkey speaking*

6. How many times does the word "Christmas" appear in the Bible (KJV)? *Zero, 1, 2, 7*

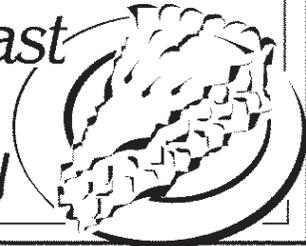
ANSWERS: 1) Matthew/Luke; 2) Simeon; 3) Star; 4) House; 5) Angel appearance; 6) Zero

*Comments? More Trivia? Gift ideas? Visit [www.TriviaGuy.com](http://www.TriviaGuy.com)*

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## Comfort foods

Made fast  
and  
healthy



by Healthy Exchanges

### Holiday Pink Lady

Here's a special "refreshment" that we're certain will delight Santa and his elves this holiday season, but won't take up much of Mrs. Claus' time.

- 2 (8-ounce) cans crushed pineapple, packed in fruit juice, undrained  
Sugar substitute to equal 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups reduced-calorie cranberry juice cocktail
- 4 cups diet ginger ale  
Ice

1. In a blender container, combine undrained pineapple and sugar substitute. Cover and process on BLEND for 30 seconds or until mixture is smooth.

2. In a large pitcher, combine blended pineapple and cranberry juice cocktail. Add diet ginger ale. Mix well to combine. Pour into tall glasses filled with ice. Makes 8 (3/4 cup) servings.

• Each serving equals: 32 calories, 0g fat, 0g protein, 8g carb., 20mg sodium, 0g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 1/2 Fruit.

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Character Profile:  
*Dale Arden*



**AN AIRPLANE IS TORN ASUNDER BY A FREAK METEOR SHOWER!**

THAT FATEFUL FLIGHT BRINGS RAVEN-HAIRED BEAUTY DALE ARDEN INTO THE ARMS OF WORLD-RENOWNED ATHLETE FLASH GORDON.

SINCE THEN THEIR LIVES HAVE BEEN BOUND TOGETHER... FACING ADVENTURES UNDREAMED OF IN THE HOPES OF SAVING A WORLD ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION!



By JIM KEEFE

12-13

ITS EGG SHATTERED, THE CREATURE CHARGES THE PAIR RESPONSIBLE!

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WE'VE STUMBLED INTO THE MIDDLE OF A NESTING GROUND.

WORSE --- NOW THAT WE'VE BROKEN AN EGG --- WE'RE SEEN AS A THREAT.

THOM!

WHA..?!

IT CAN'T BE... THE MONSTER'S CLIMBING UP AFTER US!

TO BE CONT'D

## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



**H**OW MANY CLUBS DOES A BEGINNING GOLFER NEED?

AS A YOUNGSTER, I PLAYED SOME PRETTY GOOD FUN ROUNDS WITH ONLY A HANDFUL.



AN IDEAL SET IS:  
3-WOOD,  
3-5-7-9 IRONS  
AND PUTTER.

GO NO FURTHER THAN THAT INITIALLY AND YOU CAN UPGRADE MORE ECONOMICALLY AS YOU GROW IN EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS.

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## Learn Right Way to Use a Cane

**DEAR DR. ROACH:** I have Parkinson's disease, and balance is an issue. I have been using a cane on the right side, my weak leg side. I have seen videos that say a cane should be used on a person's uninjured side. I tilt to the right and catch my balance without cane support in most cases. Which side do you suggest I use for better and faster movement? — J.C.A.

**ANSWER:** A cane is normally used on the "good" side, the side opposite of the one that needs support. However, I refer every patient with a cane to a physical or occupational therapist, since the cane should be the proper type, the proper height and used in the correct hand. Also, people need to be instructed on how to use it properly. Up to 70% of people with canes don't use them properly, and as such won't get the help they could be getting. Almost half of people will abandon them. A skilled therapist can help you get the most benefit from the cane.

I have read that canes with built-in laser lights can be particularly helpful for people with Parkinson's. This might be something to look into as well. These are valuable for people with "freezing" of gait.

\*\*\*

**DEAR DR. ROACH:** You put my life into disarray as I read your column on the risk of recurrence with respect to breast cancer! I promptly grabbed my retired pathologist husband,

and he was floored also. He accessed respected medical sites online, and we cannot find any stating that "women with estrogen receptor positive, progesterone receptor positive and HER2 negative tumors are more likely to experience recurrence." What research are you looking at?

I was told by my breast surgeon, oncologist and radiologist that I am in the best possible position with breast cancer. If this is an actual error, you'll have a whole nation of readers and breast cancer survivors in an anxious state and the phones of providers ringing off the hook! Please tell me that this was a misprint. — T.W.

**ANSWER:** It is not a misprint.

The issue is that risk factors for late recurrences are different from overall prognostic findings. Because fortunately late recurrences are relatively rare, they don't have a major effect on overall prognosis, which is where I think you and your husband may be looking. Specifically, triple-negative tumors (ER negative, PR negative, HER-2 negative) have a worse overall prognosis, but survivors have a low risk of recurrence if they get through the first five years.

I am putting some of the original research onto my page at facebook.com/keithroachmd1.

I must note that there are more sophisticated genetic markers that can help predict recurrence. My column lacks space to go into those, but your oncologist can speak to you about them.

I am sorry your life is in disarray. I don't mean to increase your anxiety. Perhaps it would help if I noted that according to one of the studies I am posting, recurrence rate in the 20 years after diagnosis is only 1.4% per year for ER+ women with no lymph nodes positive for cancer.

*Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).*

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1. What duo released "Playboy"?
2. Who released "Easier Said Than Done" in 1963?
3. In which Stevie Nicks music video is she seen holding a baby dressed in white?
4. "Great Gig in the Sky" appeared on what album?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "Don't want your love anymore, Don't want your kisses, that's for sure, I die each time I hear this sound, Here he comes ..."

### Answers

1. Pop and country duo Gene and Debbe, in 1968. Songwriter Gene Thomas also created music for numerous singers.
2. The Essex, a group of five Marines stationed at Camp LeJeune. The song went to the top of the Billboard chart, even though it was released as the b-side to their first single.
3. "Rooms on Fire," 1989. Nicks is the only woman to have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame twice, once as an individual singer and once as a member of the band Fleetwood Mac.
4. Pink Floyd's "The Dark Side of the Moon," in 1973. The song began as an organ instrumental.
5. "Cathy's Clown," by The Everly Brothers, in 1960. The song is odd in that it has no verses and starts with a chorus.

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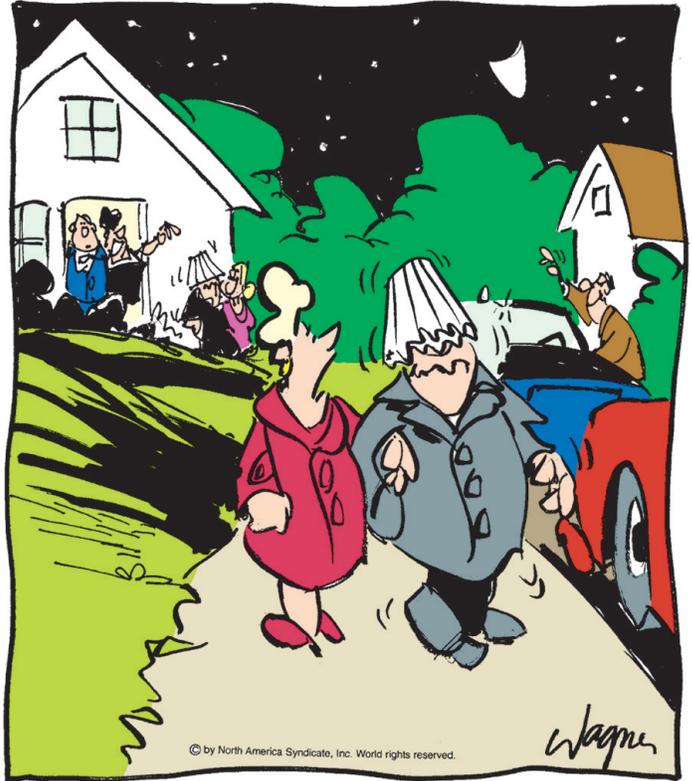
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Just Like Cats & Dogs by Dave T. Phipps



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## GRIN and BEAR IT <sup>by</sup> Wayne



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Wayne

"Wait a minute! You're not my husband!"

### HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTIHOFF



HENRY BOLTIHOFF

Find at least six differences in details between panels.



HENRY BOLTIHOFF

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Differences: 1. Santa's boots are black. 2. Building is shorter. 3. Brick pattern is different. 4. Car wheel is black. 5. Boy's coat has pocket. 6. Santa's beard is longer.

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- Candles will burn more evenly if you refrigerate them for a few hours before lighting.

- “I have drafty windows. I took a plastic shower curtain and cut it to fit the windows. Then I secured it with tape. It’s worked well to keep out the drafts, and I just remove it once a week and clean the windows with vinegar to discourage any mold from growing. It will work until next spring, anyway.”  
— *P.S. in Michigan*

- There is a reason that most refrigerators have more than one crisper drawer. Some items need to be stored separately. For example, keep apples and carrots in different compartments. The apples give off a gas that can give the carrots a bitter taste.

- A great tip from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: During the winter, outdoor cats sometimes sleep under the hoods of cars. They can be injured

or even killed by the starting of the motor. Before you start your car in the morning (or any time of day, really) give your hood a nice loud rap to give the cat a chance to escape.

- “To keep melting snow, mud and leaves out of your house and off of your floors, line a wide, shallow box bottom with plastic wrap or a kitchen-size garbage bag. Place the lined box near the front door to hold dirty shoes.” — *R.I. in Ohio*

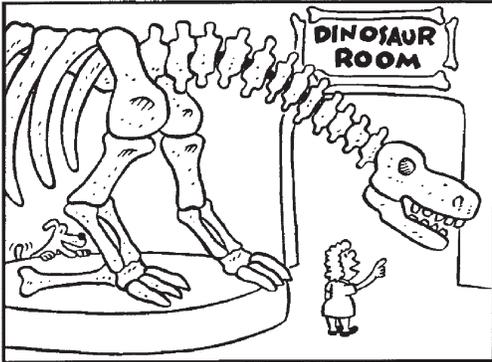
- Mix some salt with a little bit of water and rub the mixture over your hands for a few minutes to get rid of the smell of garlic or onions from cooking. Rinse under cold water.” — *J.J. in Nevada*

*Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.*

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**A BONEYARD BAFFLER!** Sally loves to count the number of bones in the dinosaur room. See it you can dig up the same number as she did.

Answer: Not counting the teeth, Sally found 38 bones.

**A SEATTLE SPRITZER!**

What word, in an Oxford English Dictionary, do people in Seattle always pronounce incorrectly?

Answer: That word would be .... "incorrectly."

## Junior Whirl

by Charles Barry Townsend



Illustrated by David Coulson

**YELLOW JACKET JOUSTING!**

Can you identify the "stinging" words asked for in the following questions? (all of the words end in "sting.")

1. What sting has excessive pride?
2. What sting cures hunger?
3. What sting writes for someone else?
4. What sting is found in bakeries?
5. What sting is found in theaters?
6. What sting is found in schools?
7. What sting makes you laugh?
8. What sting leaves you hungry?
9. What sting do farmers love?
10. What sting changes bread?
11. What sting cleans your room?
12. What sting ruins old boats?



**CHAIN REACTION!** Take the seven letters printed below our diagram and place them in the circles so that eight four-letter words can be read, top to bottom, along the connecting lines. All the words will begin with the letter in the top circle.

Answers: Top to bottom, left to right: dust, dusk, dunk, dune, dank, Dane, dare, dam.

Answers: 1. Boasting. 2. Feasting. 3. Ghosting. 4. Frosting. 5. Casting. 6. Testing. 7. Jesting. 8. Fasting. 9. Harvesting. 10. Toasting. 11. Dusting. 12. Rusting.

## TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Doctrine
- 4 Commotions
- 8 Mid-May honorees
- 12 Cattle call
- 13 "Arrivederci"
- 14 "So be it"
- 15 Wordplay specialists
- 17 Hindu royal
- 18 Locate
- 19 Piece of cheesecake?
- 20 Subsequently
- 22 Reedy
- 24 Concoct
- 25 Good news for bargain hunters
- 29 Bard's "always"

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
		18						19				
20	21					22	23					
24					25					26	27	28
29				30						31		
32			33						34			
			35						36			
37	38	39					40					
41					42	43					44	45
46					47					48		
49					50					51		

- 30 Unrefined
- 47 Between jobs
- 7 "Mayday!"
- 27 Chills and fever
- 31 Id counterpart
- 48 Carnival city
- 8 Leatherneck
- 28 Deteriorates
- 32 Ruins
- 49 Remain
- 9 Mideast nation
- 30 Staff
- 34 Touch
- 50 Ball-bearing items
- 10 Options list
- 33 In poor taste
- 35 Cincinnati team
- 51 Agent
- 11 Use scissors
- 34 " — She Sweet?"
- 36 Gets up
- 16 Gush forth
- 19 Snapshots
- 36 Strategic tricks
- 37 — Valley (California ski resort)
- 20 Sleeping, perhaps
- 37 Turfs
- 40 Family member
- 21 Release
- 38 Resign
- 41 Cather's "One of —"
- 22 Cafeteria stack
- 39 — Major
- 42 Expensive seafood
- 23 Greet the villain
- 40 Competent
- 46 Platter
- 25 Motivate
- 42 Illuminated
- 43 Rhyming tribute
- 44 Tear
- 45 Tofu base

### DOWN

- 1 Mischievous tyke
- 2 Old French coin
- 3 2001 movie, " —, Inc."
- 4 Thespian
- 5 Regimen
- 6 Scull tool

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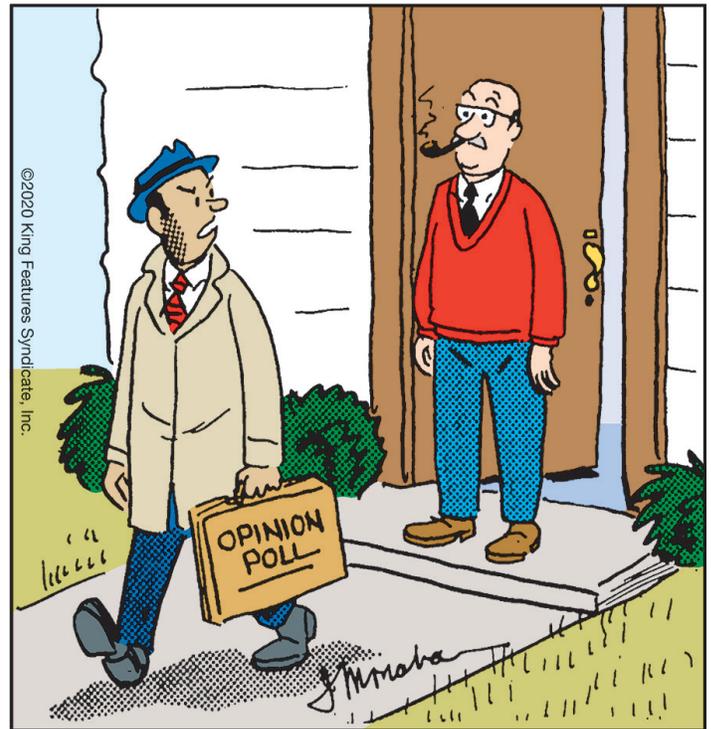
## — King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 27 mins.

I	S	M		A	D	O	S		M	O	M	S		
M	O	O		C	I	A	O		A	M	E	N		
P	U	N	S	T	E	R	S		R	A	N	I		
		S	P	O	T			P	I	N	U	P		
A	F	T	E	R			T	H	I	N				
B	R	E	W			P	R	I	C	E	W	A	R	
E	E	R			C	R	A	S	S		E	G	O	
D	E	S	T	R	O	Y	S		A	B	U	T		
				R	E	D	S			R	I	S	E	S
S	Q	U	A	W				A	U	N	T			
O	U	R	S			L	O	B	S	T	E	R	S	
D	I	S	H			I	D	L	E		R	I	O	
S	T	A	Y			T	E	E	S		S	P	Y	

## LAFF - A - DAY



"If there's one thing I can't stand it's opinionated people!"

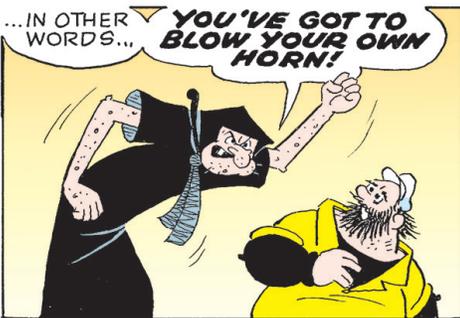
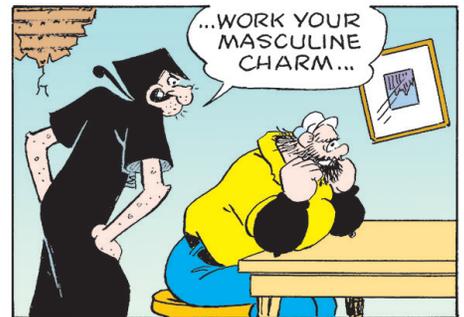
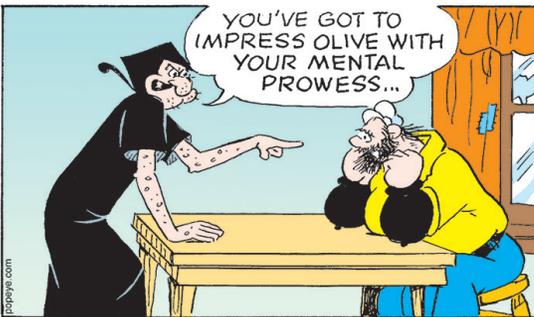
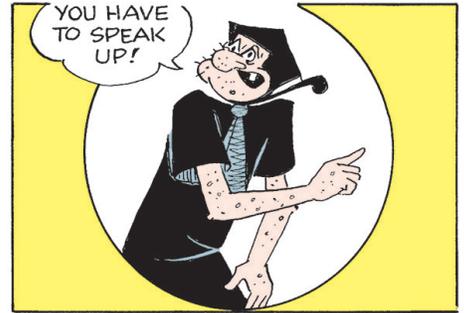
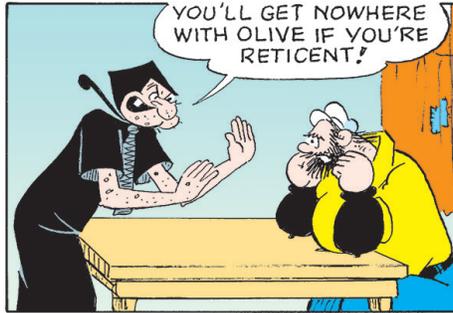
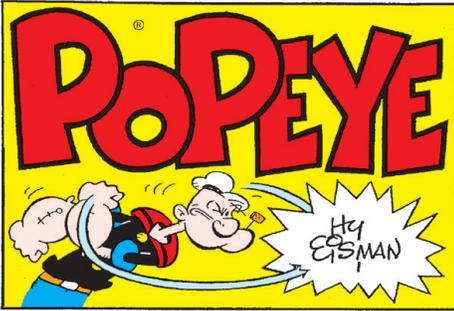
## Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



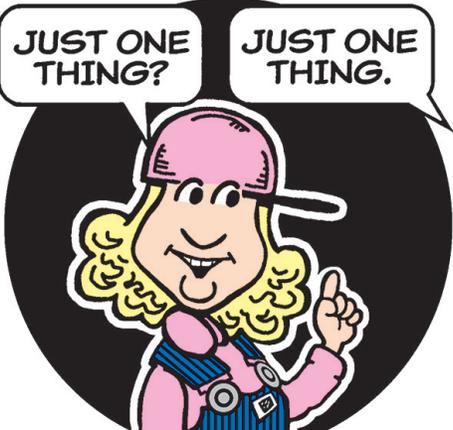
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## R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



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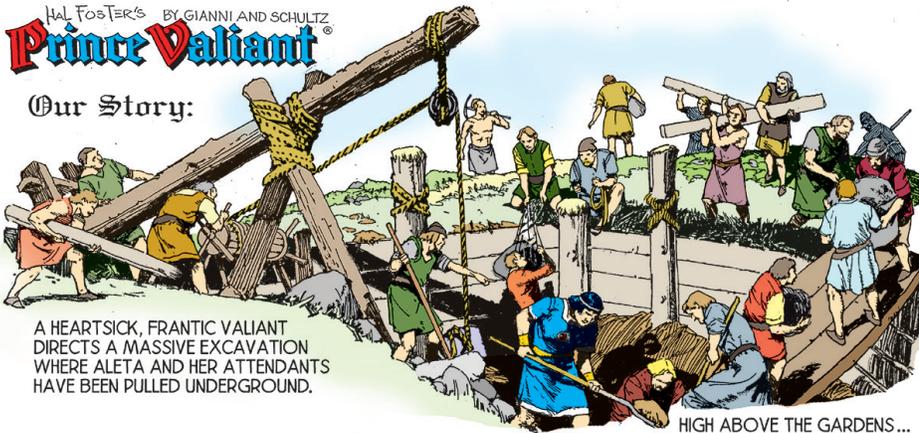
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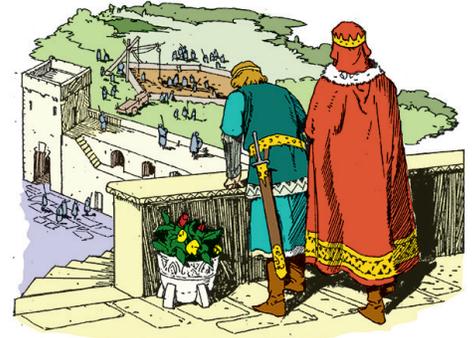
Hal Foster's BY GIANNI AND SCHULTZ  
**Prince Valiant**

Our Story:



A HEARTSICK, FRANTIC VALIANT DIRECTS A MASSIVE EXCAVATION WHERE ALETA AND HER ATTENDANTS HAVE BEEN PULLED UNDERGROUND.

HIGH ABOVE THE GARDENS...



... KING ARTHUR AND ARN WATCH, "MISFORTUNE AND CHAOS SEEM TO FOLLOW YOUR FATHER, ARN. I FEAR I HAVE SOUGHT TO PUNISH A MAN PUNISHED FAR WORSE BY FATE ITSELF."



"SO AN OLD WITCH PROPHEZIZED," REPLIES ARN. "BUT THIS IS AN ASSAULT ON CAMELOT AS WELL AS ON MY MOTHER, AND I MUST MEET IT."

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"IT SHALL BE MET!" ARTHUR RESPONDS, "BUT YOU, MY REGENT, MUST STAY PUT. ALETA MAY BE YOUR MOTHER, BUT CAMELOT IS NOW YOUR MISTRESS."

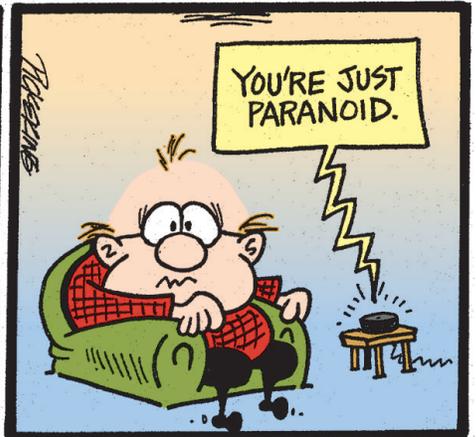
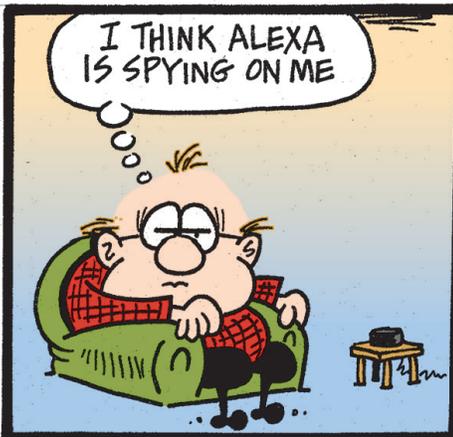
AND, SO, ARTHUR RETURNS TO HIS RETIREMENT AND THE LEADEN CHAINS OF CIVIC OBLIGATION SETTLE OVER ARN.



NEXT:  
Good scents

## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### Make Getting Fit Your Yearlong Goal

Where do you want your fitness level to be a year from now? To get to that point, we need to take the first step. For most of us, that's going to mean exercising at home. Here are some resources:

Sit and Be Fit ([www.sitandbefit.org](http://www.sitandbefit.org)) can be found on your PBS station (if it's not, call the station and ask for it) and on the internet on YouTube. All Sit and Be Fit exercises are done sitting in a chair.

SilverSneakers ([silversneakers.com](http://silversneakers.com)), sometimes covered by Medicare plans, holds classes in gyms across the country, but at this point few people are going to gyms. Do a location search and find a facility near you. Ask whether they have video or online classes and see whether your Medicare plan covers it.

Look for "Growing Stronger," the free 126-page strength-training book for seniors, on the website [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov). Follow the suggested timeline, starting with reading the book and setting goals. Leave a message for your doctor and ask if it's OK for you to start this or any program, especially if you have heart, bone or blood pressure conditions.

Remember what being physically fit can do for us: reduce our risk of falls, maintain independence, build strength and keep bones strong. That's a goal worth striving for.

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1. What Atlanta Falcons player had his house set on fire by Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes of hip-hop group TLC in 1994?

2. Who became the first Swedish golfer to win a major championship with her victory at the 1988 U.S. Women's Open?

3. An anthropomorphic citrus fruit named Otto is the official mascot of what university's athletic teams?

4. The College Punter of the Year Award is named in honor of what Pro Football Hall of Famer?

5. Following his retirement from the Boston Celtics in 1963, Bob Cousy returned to the NBA in 1969 as a coach (and occasional player) for what NBA team?

6. What two-time Norris Trophy winner (1992, '97) had his No. 2 jersey retired by the New York Rangers?

7. What motorsports facility occupies the former site of Florida's World



by Ryan A. Berenz

War II-era Hendricks Army Airfield?

## Answers

1. Andre Rison.
2. Liselotte Neumann.
3. Syracuse University.
4. Ray Guy.
5. The Cincinnati Royals.
6. Brian Leetch.
7. Sebring International Raceway.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





## Can I Safely Take My Pet to the Vet?

**DEAR PAW'S CORNER:** My state has stopped its reopening plan and stepped back to phase 2, which limits business hours, puts a curfew back in place, and essentially puts us into lockdown again. My dog "Custer" is supposed to visit the vet every six months due to a chronic condition, but we haven't gone all year because I don't know if it's safe or if lockdown rules apply. Should I just hold off on Custer's visits until next year? — *Taylor C., Brockton, Massachusetts*

**DEAR TAYLOR:** Give the veterinarian a call today, because he or she will have the best, most up-to-date guidance on opening and operating as this pandemic continues. The situation with business openings and lockdowns is very fluid right now, and rules are different from state to state and even

between cities.

When the first lockdown rules began to ease, back in June, the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to veterinary offices was to prioritize emergency and urgent visits first, followed by routine visits. Some states explicitly designated veterinary practice as an essential service, allowing them to remain open even during strict lockdown phases.

Custer's veterinarian will be able to tell you when the next routine appointment is available. Scheduling may be tight, not because there are many urgent cases ahead of you, but because the practice is limited to a certain number of visitors in the building at one time.

Keeping up with Custer's visits is very important. I am almost certain that the vet will want to see Custer soon, and will probably make his visit a priority because of his ongoing health issue.

*Send your tips, questions or comments to [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).*

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## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- Snakes can help predict earthquakes. They can sense a coming earthquake from 75 miles away, up to five days before it happens.
- Pure cocoa can help prevent tooth decay.
- According to Roger Highfield, author of “The Physics of Christmas: From the Aerodynamics of Reindeer to the Thermodynamics of Turkey,” Rudolph’s red nose is probably the result of a parasitic infection of his respiratory system.
- The original game of Clue, patented in 1947 by a British man who invented it to pass time during World War II air-raid blackouts, included a lead pipe token made of real lead (it was eventually replaced by steel, then pewter). The original version also included slightly more exotic weapons like a hypodermic syringe and an Irish walking stick.
- There are no muscles in your fingers. Their function is controlled by the muscles in your palms and arms.
- No one ever called “The Lion King” a documentary, but one hyena researcher was so incensed by the film’s inaccuracies that he sued Disney for defamation on behalf of hyenas everywhere.
- There’s a town called “Big Ugly” in West Virginia.
- The Eiffel Tower was originally supposed to be erected in Barcelona, but the project was rejected because citizens considered it an eyesore.
- It’s illegal in New Zealand to name your child Sex Fruit, Fat Boy, 4Real, Cinderella Beauty Blossom, or Fish and Chips.
- Your tonsils can grow back if there was tissue left behind during the removal process.
- If you could use your nose in space, you’d discover it smells like a mixture of hot metal, diesel fumes and barbecue, thanks to compounds called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons that emanate from dying stars.

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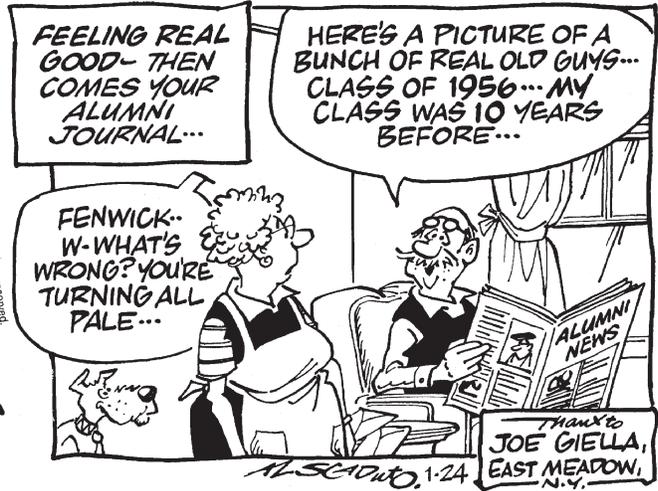
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## THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

HOMESCHOOL  
HI-JINX-



## BY AL SCADUTO



### Star of Bethlehem



*Ornithogalum umbellatum* forms carpets of low-growing foliage topped with star-shaped white flowers during April and May. It's great for keeping a sunny bank of soil from eroding away, an accent in a sunny garden, or covering exposed

roots under trees or shrubs. It can be invasive, and will need thinning out from time to time.

It attracts bees and other pollinators with its nectar- and pollen-rich flowers.

- Brenda Weaver

Sources: [www.easytogrowbulbs.com](http://www.easytogrowbulbs.com),  
[www.gardenersworld.com](http://www.gardenersworld.com),  
[www.missouribotanicalgarden.org](http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org)

## VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

### “Unbanked” Veterans

They call them “the unbanked,” people who don’t use banks for any reason. At this point there are 250,000 veterans without bank accounts. Without one, they can receive their benefits only through a prepaid debit card or a paper check.

Last year, the Department of Veterans Affairs established the Veterans Benefits Banking Program, and 25,000 veterans so far have signed up, mostly because of the convenience, safety and money-saving aspects.

Having a bank account can save you a trip to the convenience store to buy a money order ... as well as the fee to pay for it. Just sit at home and write a check at your leisure. Pop it in the mail and off it goes.

Once a bank knows you for a little while, you’ll be in a better position to apply for a loan or a credit card.

If you sign up for automatic deposit at one of the VBBP financial institutions, your benefits won’t have to get to you in the mail. You won’t have to pay check-cashing fees either. And paying a bill by check is proof that you paid it.

Go online to the VA site [veteransbenefitsbanking.org/](http://veteransbenefitsbanking.org/) and click on Find A Bank/Credit Union. Scroll down and see what looks good and fits your needs. Maybe you have a special affinity to a certain bank or credit union because of where you served. You’ll find Kirtland Federal, Fort Hood National, Andrews Federal and dozens more. (A small plug here: I’ve done business with USAA for many years, as did my father, and they’ve always treated me well, through loans, credit card accounts, auto insurance and more.)

Click around the site for more information. Once you have a bank account (be sure to tell them about VBBP when you sign up), you’ll want direct deposit of your benefits. To arrange that, call 800-827-1000 Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST.

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## Four wrestlers place at Cossack Avalanche

Two Groton Area wrestlers placed first and two placed second at the Sioux Valley Cossack Avalanche Tournament held Saturday in Volga. Dragr Monson at 120 pounds and Christian Ehresmann at 126 pounds both placed first while Cole Bisbee at 160 pounds and Adrian Knutson at 285 pounds both placed second.

### **120: Dragr Monson (5-0) placed 1st and scored 22.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 5-0 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 5-0 won by fall over Parker Graveman (Spearfish) 2-1 (Fall 0:56)

1st Place Match - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 5-0 won by fall over Dylan Sloan (Yankton) 7-5 (Fall 0:47)

### **126: Christian Ehresmann (5-0) placed 1st and scored 21.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 5-0 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 5-0 won by fall over Carter Dahl (Sioux Falls Roosevelt) 1-2 (Fall 3:14)

1st Place Match - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 5-0 won by major decision over Aiden Kracht (Spearfish) 2-1 (MD 12-1)

### **138: Korbin Kucker (4-2) scored 4.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 4-2 won by fall over Christopher Hoang (Sioux Falls Roosevelt) 0-2 (Fall 1:33)

Semifinal - Evan Nelson (Yankton) 5-9 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 4-2 (Fall 5:23)

Cons. Semi - Zach Powell (Tri-Valley) 7-7 won by fall over Korbin Kucker (Groton Area) 4-2 (Fall 0:47)

### **160: Cole Bisbee (3-2) placed 2nd and scored 16.0 team points.**

Quarterfinal - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-2 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-2 won by fall over Dylan Irion (Spearfish) 7-7 (Fall 3:38)

1st Place Match - Seth Heidenreich (Sioux Valley) 15-4 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-2 (Fall 1:32)

### **285: Adrian Knutson (3-2) placed 2nd and scored 4.0 team points.**

Round 1 - Adrian Knutson (Groton Area) 3-2 won by fall over Chase Dyson (Sioux Falls Roosevelt) 0-2 (Fall 0:13)

Round 3 - Collin Graves (Viborg-Hurley) 9-3 won by fall over Adrian Knutson (Groton Area) 3-2 (Fall 6:00)

## Junior high teams drop close games to Moberidge-Pollock

The Groton Area seventh and eighth grade teams hosted Moberidge-Pollock on Saturday and both teams lost in a close battle. Moberidge-Pollock won the seventh grade game, 26-22. The lead changed hands five times and the game was tied twice before Moberidge-Pollock pulled ahead in the third quarter. Groton Area led, 8-7, after the first quarter, it was tied at 14 at half time and Moberidge-Pollock led, 20-18, after the third quarter.

Ryliee Dunker led Groton Area with eight points while Jerica Locke and Mia Crank each had six and Cali Tollifson added two points. Groton Area was two of nine from the line. Moberidge-Pollock was three of five from the line. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter.

Groton Area led for most of the game in the eighth grade contest, leading by as much as six at 21-15. But then a drought set up and Groton Area would not score for the rest of the game while Moberidge-Pollock kept pecking away at the lead until it was tied at 21 at the end of regulation. The game went into overtime and Moberidge-Pollock scored the lone goal to post a 23-21 win.

Laila Roberts led Groton Area with eight points while Faith Traphagen had six, Brooklyn Hansen, Kennedy Hansen and Emma Kutter each had two points and Elizabeth Fliehs had one.

Groton Area was three of 15 from the line and Moberidge-Pollock was one of seven.

The eighth grade was also broadcast on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the eighth grade parents.

This was the season finale for Groton Area's junior high program.

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CONGRESSMAN  
**DUSTY JOHNSON**  
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Dear Santa,

2020 was a hard year for all of us, and as I'm sure you know, the world continues to battle a global pandemic. It's not been all bad though, and what can only be called a Christmas Miracle, our healthcare workers are beginning to receive a lifesaving vaccine. Americans have buckled down, and we've done our best to make the Nice List – I hope you'll keep my Christmas list in mind as you're making the rounds this year.

All I want for Christmas is...

All of our healthcare workers, senior citizens, and those most vulnerable to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.  
Relief for hurting small businesses, schools, and families.

Passage of the PRICE Act for our cattle producers.

To stop surprise medical billing for Americans. Hopefully this happens in an end of year spending bill!

Good weather for our farmers and ranchers.

A functional Congress.

Peace and comfort to those that have lost loved ones in 2020.

Now Santa, I know these are hefty requests, but if anyone can make the impossible happen during the holiday season, it's you.

Thanks,  
Dusty Johnson

PS. Merry Christmas!

**John Thune**  
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



## American Ingenuity at its Finest

There is no way around it – this has been a tough year. Painful but necessary social distance, economic hardship, and – of course – unimaginable loss of American lives. It has also been a year of unmistakable American spirit. This spirit of ingenuity and perseverance is highly evident in the impressive push for a COVID-19 vaccine. The first coronavirus vaccine was recently authorized for use in the United States by the Food and Drug Administration, and distribution efforts began immediately. This means that a safe COVID vaccine was developed, tested, manufactured, and authorized five times faster than any vaccine in history.

Essentially, our government bet on American ingenuity, and it paid off. The effort to get this vaccine authorized and distributed is a remarkable example of what can be done when we work together toward a single, life-saving goal.

All of the experts, scientists, soldiers, trial volunteers, and public servants who worked on this effort deserve the highest praise. I am proud of them and all they accomplished for our country. There is no doubt that their efforts will save American lives, and I don't think I am alone in looking forward to the day that our lives settle back into their normal patterns.

Developing a COVID-19 vaccine with impressive speed has produced one unfortunate side-effect: skepticism. Was this process fast? Yes. But was it rushed? No. This was an around-the-clock effort, and methods to speed and streamline the process have not jeopardized safety. This vaccine has gone through the same important steps and review process as any other. To ensure the ability to start distribution as soon as a vaccine was authorized, we started manufacturing them before we even knew if they would be viable.

The start of vaccinations for our health care workers marks the beginning of what will hopefully be a decisive victory in our COVID battle. We owe that to the hard work and persistence of medical researchers. But we owe it also to the vaccine trial volunteers, who enabled researchers to complete the process of developing a safe and effective vaccine. It's no exaggeration to say that the bravery of vaccine volunteers could end up saving hundreds of thousands or even millions of lives. A lot of courageous people stepped forward when we needed them, and we would not have a COVID vaccine today without their willingness to help. I doubt we'll ever know most of the volunteers' names, but they are heroes of this battle just the same.

When it's my turn in line, I will get the COVID vaccine. I will get it for my own health and for the health of my family, friends, and the many great South Dakotans with whom I work. As I said, this year has been tough. But times of challenge also present times of incredible achievement – these vaccines certainly represent that.

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## Merry "Little" Christmas

Each family celebrates holidays differently. This year, I think it's safe to say we all share a similar different. Each of us has had to evaluate what our holiday gatherings will look like as we battle this deadly pandemic. Some have concluded that a Merry "Little" Christmas is what works best for their family. While that might be discouraging, just remember that the first Christmas was pretty simple, too.

Christmas is a time of hope and joy. But this year there's an extra element of grief involved as we mourn the lives lost to this awful pandemic. At the time I'm writing this, we've lost 1,300 people to COVID-19 in South Dakota. Jean and I pray for those experiencing Christmas without their loved ones this year.

Christmas is sometimes called the season of giving. There is real joy in giving. We remember the gift God gave to the world through his son Jesus Christ, by sharing gifts with those we love and finding ways to give back to our communities.

Particularly, this year I've been thinking about Charles Dickens and his Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. With the vaccine rolling out to more and more Americans each day, it's only a matter of time until everyone who wants a vaccine has received one. By this time next year, we all hope to be back to normal again. Until we've reached that point, let's use the gift the Good Lord gave us to fight this virus: common sense.

Wear your darn mask. I know I am a broken record saying this again, but it needs to be said. We are getting better about wearing our masks when it makes sense, but there's still improvement that can be made. If you're out in public and cannot social distance, just wear your mask. It will help protect you and those around you. It's also important to wash our hands and use hand sanitizer. That's good advice for combatting COVID-19, but also other more common ailments like the cold and flu.

COVID-19 disproportionately impacts those of us who have lived longer. We need to keep that in mind as we celebrate this holiday season. I said this around Thanksgiving and it's worth saying again: if you are worried about getting sick, stay home. If you are worried that you are sick and might infect someone else, stay home. If you have a "cold" you might actually have COVID-19. Stay home. If you're worried about your kids getting your parents or grandparents sick, stay home. We live in the 21st century and, although it's admittedly not the same, there are methods for us to be together virtually this Christmas.

That's a decision each of us will have to make on our own. Only we know what's best for our families. But while Christmas 2020 might be different, we must remember that we're almost there and that the end is in sight. With vaccines on the way, we must remain hopeful, yet continue our diligence.

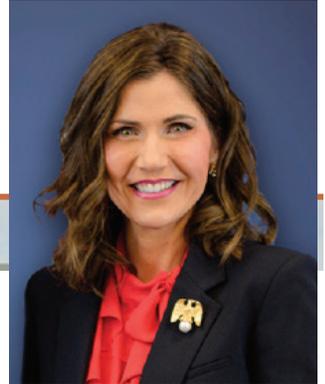
I'll leave you with the words of an old familiar carol that I loved to hear Bing sing: "Have yourself a merry little Christmas. Let your heart be light. Next year all our troubles will be out of sight...Someday soon we all will be together, if the fates allow. Until then, we'll have to muddle through somehow. So have yourself a merry little Christmas now."

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SOUTH DAKOTA GOVERNOR  
**KRISTI NOEM**



## The Christmas Tree's Promise

It's the most wonderful time of the year. As I write this, it's the last day of Hanukkah, Christmas is right around the corner, and the New Year comes shortly thereafter. I know my family is excited to celebrate Christmas and spend some time together.

Across South Dakota and around the world, families are celebrating beautiful traditions to ring in the holiday season. As we celebrate these traditions, it's important for us to take a step back and remember why we practice them in the first place.

Christmas trees are one of my favorite holiday celebrations. Every year in millions of homes across the country and around the world, we decorate evergreen trees to celebrate Christmas. It's easy to take for granted that this is just something that we do, but there's a purpose for this tradition.

Christmas trees are a symbol of rebirth and renewal. Every winter, the cold comes, the snow falls, and the sun shows its face less and less. But these beautiful Christmas trees stand tall, beautiful, and green, promising us that spring is not far off. The weather will warm; the green will return to our landscape; our future is bright.

Just like Christmas itself, these trees remind us that life and beauty are still present even during the coldest and darkest times. I'm reminded of A Charlie Brown Christmas, when Charlie Brown famously asks, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" His best friend Linus reminds him of Jesus' birth. And then the kids decorate a tiny little Christmas tree, and they manage to make it so beautiful.

Linus' reminder to Charlie Brown is perhaps the most beautiful symbol of rebirth and renewal for our world. Christmas reminds us that Jesus came to a world that was cold and dark. A little baby was born to save us all, and his birth brought the promise of everything that he would do for us.

That's an important reminder in every season of life. But it rings especially true this year. We've faced new, unique challenges this year in South Dakota and around the world, and COVID-19 has been the toughest. People have lost their livelihoods. Many folks, especially in the vulnerable population, have had to drastically change their day-to-day lives. And – most heartbreaking of all – so many families have lost loved-ones.

But even during difficult times like this – especially during difficult times – we must remember that we will get through this together. No matter how cold and dark the season, we can look at the green branches of the Christmas tree and remember that spring is on its way.

I hope that you and yours have a truly Merry Christmas. If you're celebrating another holiday, then happy holidays to you as well. Let's remember the Christmas tree's promise of rebirth and renewal. I'm so excited for what the future has in store for all of us.

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## Tell Santa I Tried to Be Nice

It's that time of the year when the conversation around the dinner table in the Parsonage has to do with naughty or nice.

I must admit it's not my favorite conversation because what is naughty, and what is nice? That all depends on who you're talking to. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage has a different definition of these words than I do.

According to my wife, nice has to do with broccoli, and naughty has to do with Apple fritter. At least I can't.

I'm afraid I have to disagree with this because as far as I'm concerned, nice has to do with Apple fritter and naughty has to do with broccoli. I'm not sure that you can get any naughtier than broccoli.

But this time of the year, the definition of naughty and nice is determined by some overweight guy living in the North Pole abusing reindeer. If you think I'm going to listen to his definition, you don't know me.

I don't want Santa to determine if I'm naughty or nice because I don't trust that guy.

Why would I want to trust a guy who only works one day out of the year and the rest of the time live somewhere in the North Pole? He's almost, but not quite, as bad as politicians. But at least Santa works one day out of the year.

"So," my wife began, "do you think you've been nice this year?"

As a husband for almost half a century, I know a trick question when presented to me. I can't tell you how many times I have been tricked with one of these questions.

"Well," I stuttered, "how do you think I fared during the year?"

I was open to put it back on her shoulders and let her go away with it. My wife is an expert in many things and, in particular, in interrogation. Me, I'm an expert in failing interrogations.

Throughout life, I have learned that it is not what I think that really matters but what other people think particularly about me. It's not if I think I was nice this past year, but did my wife think I was nice.

Looking very thoughtfully as she usually does when interrogating me, she said, "Well, there was that incident at the beginning of the year about a lizard on my pillow."

It was all I could do to hold back a chuckle. I remember that incident very well in a motel over in St. Augustine. I still can see that lizard staring at my wife.

"You have to admit," I explained, "that lizard was rather a nice little critter."

"If that's your definition of nice," she said most adamantly, "then you have failed the test."

I wouldn't say this out loud so that she could hear me, but that was one test I enjoyed failing.

After pausing for a moment or two, she said, "Then there's the incident about the bug on my leg while I was driving."

Although I tried to withhold any outward expression of laughter, it was beyond my control.

"So, you think it was nice for that bug to be on my leg, causing me to bump into the car in front of me?" I had almost forgotten that, but nobody was hurt in the incident.

"What does nice have to do with that kind of bug on my leg?"

Then, much to my surprise, she broke out laughing as well.

To some people, what is nice is not nice to other people. What is naughty is not necessarily naughty in someone else's estimation.

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All these things she brought to my attention was not something I worked at. It was something that came without any influence on my part. My part was laughing at the incident and enjoying it for weeks to come.

As the room quieted down, I finally raised my question.

"So," I began, "do you think you've been nice this year?"

The tables were turned now, and I wanted to press her with some of my interrogations.

I'm not a very good interrogator, particularly when it comes to issues concerning my wife. But I thought since she brought up the subject, I would carry it through and see where it took us.

She stared at me for quite some time and then said, "I think I have been overly nice because I have given you so much material to write about." Then she glared at me with one of "those glares."

First, I didn't quite know how to take it. I was afraid that her NICE was turning into her NAUGHTY, and I would not be able to handle that.

Following a few silent moments, she then burst out laughing. I was relieved, to say the least.

We enjoyed a few moments of shared laughter, which greatly lightened up our day. As I was thinking about it, there was another nice aspect of our relationship.

That nice aspect is, my wife is not a writer, or I would be in trouble.

Later that day, I thought of the Bible verse. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Our relationship is not based on nice or naughty but rather on the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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**#300 in a series**

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

Milestone: 300 posts. Who saw that coming when this thing was starting out? How do I feel about that? Mostly tired, discouraged, and worried. This far into this thing, and it's worse than ever. We haven't learned a thing in all this time.

Tonight all of the numbers are off our records; it is a weekend, so I'm not getting too excited about that. There were 175,100 new cases reported today, and we're at 17,679,000, which is 1.0% more than yesterday's total. It's looking like we'll hit 18 million about Monday. Hospitalizations are, for the first time in almost two weeks, not at a record level at 113,955.

And deaths total 316,212. This is 0.8% more than yesterday. There were 2487 deaths reported today.

As the Midwest and Mountain West slow somewhat (not that things are great there), we are seeing some very bad news on the West Coast, which we discussed last night, and in the South, particularly Georgia, Arkansas, South Carolina, and Tennessee, all setting one or another record this week. Arizona's starting to look rough again too. And those previous hot spots are still seeing extremely high death rates. More than a third of Americans live in areas served by hospitals with ICU beds in critical supply, and 10 percent live in areas where ICUs have less than five percent availability; some are full.

I have just one piece of news tonight, then an extended rant. I'm sorry; this is about to get long. I'll make it up to you over the next few days.

The news is that, as expected, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices met today and recommended, 11-0 (with three recusals due to conflicts of interest) to endorse the Moderna vaccine for adults 18 and older. This goes to Robert Redfield, director of the CDC for sign-off. That is the last hurdle, and then vaccine will ship, likely tomorrow. This committee also focused a fair amount of discussion on allergic reactions to the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine; we're now up to six cases in the US in addition to the two in Britain, as well as some milder allergic reactions. We'll discuss allergies at more length tomorrow; this thing tonight is well past long enough.

I could have guessed it was coming, but it still caught me by surprise: The anti-science folks are out in full force, declaring that these new vaccines have scary ingredients in them—not insane theories like little computer chips or nanobots, not that any of them know what the hell a nanobot is anyhow, but ordinary scary ingredients like aluminum and formaldehyde and mercury. Claims that we don't know what's in these vaccines. Also hearing that you just don't know what mRNA might do inside a person. (I always feel as though we need a clap of thunder and the lights to suddenly dim when I hear these pronouncements.) Further, folks are assuring me that this stuff is all true because an "MD" told them it was. And finishing up with a flourish, there is some talk of being "guinea pigs." Sigh.

Let's take this from the top:

As usual, we'll address the source first. First of all, we have to acknowledge the possibility that the person I was dealing with might just have embellished the story a bit, and attributing your garbage ideas to a real live doctor is one way to gain instant credibility with the unwary; so it is entirely possible she made that part up.

On the other hand, this would not be the first time I've dealt with a genuine doctor-said-it moment. Now I'm going to tread lightly here because I know and respect more than a few individuals with an MD behind their names. Also, I have no wish to be insulting to physicians as a class; but I've picked up on some other misinformation being spread around by doctors—misinformation about how this disease progresses, about how it is transmitted (even after we knew better—everyone was sort of wrong at the start), about risks, and now about vaccines. For example, one acquaintance's family physician assured her that, since her husband had been diagnosed with Covid-19, she could be sure the rest of the family had also been infected and was, therefore, now immune and free to romp through life without a care during this pandemic. The was well after we knew for sure this is simply not true. Also, I have recently with my own eyes seen a physician argue that wearing masks is useless in stemming this pandemic despite all of the solid evidence that is an incorrect statement. Like that. This is a problem because we all, pretty

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reasonably, tend to trust physicians on the subject of health.

Thing is, while infectious diseases are certainly taught in medical school along with 12 zillion other topics, most doctors are not infectious disease specialists, so there's a bunch they're not going to know about infectious diseases, especially a shiny brand new one that everyone's still learning about, and even fewer doctors are vaccinologists. Furthermore, most doctors are sort of busy these days, so it is entirely possible they haven't all had time to rummage around to find an actual ingredients list for these vaccines. It is frustrating to see them opining on these matters without first making sure they have their facts right, but it happens. Not most of the time and not most doctors, but now and then and some of them. That's really not OK.

As for the content of these claims, it's way off the mark too. It is simply not true that "we don't know what is in these vaccines." Ingredients get listed for vaccines in much the same way they get listed for pancake mix. Here, for example, is the ingredients list for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine lifted right off the pages of a letter Pfizer sent the FDA:

Active Ingredient:

nucleosidemodified messenger RNA (modRNA) encoding the viral spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2

Lipids:

(4-hydroxybutyl)azanediylbis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis [ALC-3015]

(2-hexyldecanoate),2[(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide [ALC-0159]

1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3- phosphocholine [DPSC]

Cholesterol

Phosphate-buffered Saline

potassium chloride

monobasic potassium phosphate

sodium chloride

dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate

Sugar:

Sucrose

Diluent

0.9% Sodium Chloride

Looks pretty scary, right? I mean, you knew it wasn't going to say things like "wheat flour" and "sugar," right, but still. Before you get all freaked-out, let's have a look:

First, the active ingredient. Now we've talked about RNA before, many times. (If you want a quick refresher, check out my Update #46 posted April 9 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3496698997013148>.) This is the business end of the vaccine, a piece of viral mRNA that codes for that spike (or S) protein. Once it's inside your cells, they'll use it to make viral spike protein which will then stimulate your immune system, eliciting a response with memory that will swamp any future virus you encounter so that it cannot enter your cells and make you sick. This stuff is the point of the vaccine. Now, on its own, this S protein is harmless; it has no capability to infect or damage your cells because we don't have the rest of the virus along with it, but you still react to it; it is, as they say in the business, immunogenic. That's what we want.

Now one of the problems with putting mRNA into people for a purpose like immunization is that loose RNA gets degraded pretty fast. Your cells don't like loose RNA floating around, especially the foreign variety, so it tends to break it down before it has the desired effect. This is why this vaccine RNA is "nucleosidemodified;" they substituted in "modified" building blocks to make it more stable. It's still going to get degraded, but this way it will hang around long enough to enable protein synthesis adequate to elicit a hearty response before it disappears into the sunset.

Now those next four ingredients have really daunting names—all those letters and numbers and unpronounceable syllables. They're fats. That's what lipids are: fats. And fats are great big complex molecules with great big complex names. But they're just fats. So what are they doing in our vaccine? Well, these particular fats are assembled in what's called nanoparticles, which simply means really, really tiny particles; and their purpose is to form a greasy layer of bubbles around the mRNA. These tiny slippery bubbles of

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fat protect the RNA from being broken down too soon and help it slip inside your cells so the protein-making can commence.

The first one of these, the ALC-3015, is the primary lipid because it is ionizable, that is, it can be positively charged, which makes it stick very nicely to the RNA, which has a negative charge (and opposites really do attract). This is also a component which can sometimes cause allergic reactions; I'm guessing it's getting a lot of attention nowadays. The other three lipids are just "helpers" for the ALC-3015; they help the nanoparticles hold their shape and prevent them from clumping up.

The phosphate-buffered saline is no stranger to medical uses; you find all sorts of drugs suspended in it because it keeps the pH (acid level) of the vaccine close to the pH of your own tissues. This keeps it from being overly irritating, injuring cells, or being degraded when injected. You have some sense of this if you've ever gotten vinegar (which is a dilute acid) on a cut; the wrong pH certainly is irritating to tissues.

And that brings us to sucrose, the same stuff you sprinkle on your morning Cheerios. Table sugar. Its purpose in this vaccine is as a cryoprotectant, that is, it protects the nanoparticles so that freezing doesn't disrupt them; it also helps keep them from sticking together.

The saline diluent is what the pharmacist adds to the vial after it is thawed and in preparation for doses being injected. It is what's often called "normal" saline; simply a solution of sodium chloride (table salt) in distilled water in the same concentration as we find sodium chloride in your blood and tissues—that's what's "normal" about it.

Now the reason I hit you with the full chemical names of these constituents is that I want you to go now and look back over that list. What you're looking for is the words, aluminum, mercury or thiomersal, and formaldehyde because these, too, are chemical names (just easier ones, ones you're familiar with); if any of these was present, it would appear in this list of chemical names. Go ahead, go back and look now. I'll wait here for you.

So you looked and you're back, right? Not there, are they? You know why? Because they're not in this vaccine. The "MD" was wrong.

Now I want to be clear that none of these substances is harmful in the amounts used in vaccine. They are, in fact, useful in some vaccines. Aluminum is a common constituent of adjuvants, substances used to make a vaccine more immunogenic, that is, work better. We talked about adjuvants earlier (see my Update #166 posted August 7 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3846639405352437> if you're interested in more details; we have some adjuvanted vaccines in the pipeline, so it will likely be relevant later.) This, however, is a nonadjuvanted vaccine, so there's no aluminum. Mercury (in the form of thimerosal) and formaldehyde are preservatives. This vaccine contains no preservatives at all, not with mercury and not with formaldehyde.

We really have to stop freaking out every time we find out something contains "chemicals." News flash: We're all built out of chemicals. Everything you touch is made out of them too—all of your food, all of your clothing, all of your furniture, everything. The whole damned world is built out of them. Chemicals are not bad or good; they're just ingredients. In fact, the ingredients in that crispy, organically-grown apple you crunched down this morning includes stuff like asparagine, D-catechin, farnesene, P-coumaric acid, avicularin, quercetin, rutin, ursolic acid, and protocatechuic acid. They were quite delicious too, I'm guessing. That apple was pure chemicals, from first bite to last. It's fine, really.

Now, I don't want to be dismissive: There are chemicals which can be harmful, many of them. But chemicals are not, in themselves, scary. And many chemicals which can be harmful are dose dependent for their harm. Just as a little sunlight is not dangerous, whereas a lot can set off devastating mutations in skin cells, and a glass of wine leaves you perfectly functional, whereas a couple of bottles is pretty disabling, so a toxin usually needs to be present in some minimum dose before it does its damage. Take, for example, formaldehyde; you spend a lot of time breathing formaldehyde fumes and you're going to have a problem. But it so happens your body actually uses formaldehyde in tiny quantities—for metabolism and in making some essential compounds. In fact, you make the stuff just so you'll have it on hand when you need it. The typical infant has some 1500 times as much formaldehyde circulating in his bloodstream at any moment than is present in a vaccine dose. Hard to make the case this is dangerous under the circumstances. On the other hand, you are perfectly right to protect that kid from large doses. Just don't

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expose him to unnecessary risks of infection over a misunderstanding of how these things work.

The form the substance takes can matter too. Mercury is a good example. We all know mercury is toxic, even in small quantities; but that is true only for some forms: Methylmercury, for example, is dangerous and builds up in the body with repeated exposure. But the mercury found in thimerosal, the vaccine preservative, is in the form of ethylmercury and is excreted by the gut, so it doesn't build up. What's more, it has been eliminated from childhood and most adult vaccines anyhow, so any exposure these days is going to be minimal.

And finally, a word about being a "guinea pig." Nope. You know who the guinea pigs were? The folks who stepped up for the clinical trials. Now, by the time anything got injected into anybody, we were pretty darned sure we didn't have a toxic or dangerous substance, but fact is, without the usual preliminary animal trials, there was always a chance for something unexpected to turn up. And yet those folks rolled up their sleeves for science and humanity anyway. It is an insult to the courage they demonstrated to go around calling yourself a guinea pig like you're doing something particularly brave. You are, instead, the beneficiary of the real guinea pigs. We owe them.

Now it's true these vaccines haven't had the longer clinical trials which are usual for a new vaccine. A good share of the reason for that is this virus is spreading so fast to so many people in such a short time that we had enough infected trial participants to make a call about efficacy quite quickly, much faster than usual. We've talked about the fact that some clinical trials can extend to hundreds of thousands of people and span five or more years in order to reach that critical mass of infections; if anything can be said to be "lucky" in our current situation, it is that we had plenty of chances for our "guinea pigs" to be exposed and get sick. That means we had efficacy results long before there was a long track record on safety; this is why the FDA made the vaccine companies wait two additional months to apply for emergency use authorization (EUA)—they wanted more time for things to turn up if they were going to. But this is also why only EUA, not regular licensing has been done: It's going to take more data before licensing is considered. There is some risk of something turning up; it diminishes every day that nothing does turn up, but is a real thing. Honestly, that risk never goes to zero, even with long-licensed vaccines. We've had a few allergic responses with this first vaccine, but we have those with other vaccines and most other drugs too. The risk is never zero. Everything possible has been done to minimize the risks consistent with getting this vaccine out into the world where it can stop the carnage this virus is wreaking on the populace. The advisory committee decided the potential benefit outweighs the potential risk, not that there is zero risk. To repeat, there is never zero risk. The status quo certainly doesn't give us zero risk either: Witness 315,000+ dead and counting.

It was about the beginning of this month that Franklin County, Kansas, deputies began receiving early-morning calls about a woman walking along the highway between two towns almost nine miles apart. When they went out there to check out the situation, they discovered the woman was walking to work—six miles. Now, it's not bitter in Kansas this time of year, but it's plenty cold for a six-mile morning stroll, not to mention the six-mile hike home at night. It turns out she didn't have any other way to get to work, and she has two small children to support; so she's doing what needs doing. That didn't seem like a sustainable situation to the deputies. So they didn't waste much time getting a group together to talk about a longer-term solution.

They came up with a pretty nice one: Putting together a coalition of generous deputies, caring citizens, community-spirited businesses, and the department's "No Shave November" funds, they did, indeed, solve the problem, and on Tuesday, after what must have been two weeks of feverish activity, the deputies presented her with a little Christmas miracle: a van, registration for it, the first year's insurance, two new car seats, a grocery gift card, some toys for the kids, and \$200. Just like that. See a need, meet a need.

The sheriff pointed out how this willingness to tackle a situation and help out exemplifies their commitment to serve the community. No kidding. He also told NBC15 News, "I am very proud of the men and women of the Sheriff's Office. This is not just something they did, this shows who they are," adding, "On behalf of the entire staff of the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, I want to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas." Same back at you, Sheriff!

Take care. We'll talk again.

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## December 19th 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: +564 (94,336 total) Positivity Rate: 10.3%

Total Tests: 5480 (713,178 total)

Hospitalized: +37 (5385 total). 365 currently hospitalized -22)

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

Sanford Aberdeen: 11 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 1 (0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +28 (1329 total)

Females: 7 Males: 14

50s=3, 60s=5, 70s+6, 80+=7

Counties: Brown-1, Campbell-2, Codington-2, Corson-1, Dewey-2, Douglas-1, Edmunds-1, Gregory-1, Meade-1, Minnehaha-5, Perkins-3.

Recovered: +820 (84,490 total)

Active Cases: -277 (8,496)

Percent Recovered: 89.6%

Beadle (33) +9 positive, +10 recovered (113 active cases)

Brookings (24) +11 positive, +29 recovered (227 active cases)

Brown (50): +17 positive, +32 recovered (309 active cases)

Clark (2): +3 positive, +1 recovered (27 active cases)

Clay (11): +12 positive, +13 recovered (117 active cases)

Codington (66): +25 positive, +35 recovered (443 active cases)

Davison (52): +8 positive, +18 recovered (148 active cases)

Day (17): +5 positive, +10 recovered (68 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +3 positive, +2 recovered (45 active cases)

Faulk (10): +0 positive, +3 recovered (18 active cases)

Grant (21): +3 positive, +13 recovered (88 active cases)

Hanson (3): +0 positive, +1 recovered (20 active cases)

Hughes (25): +9 positive, +15 recovered (170 active cases)

Lawrence (27): +9 positive, +19 recovered (228 active cases)

Lincoln (58): +49 positive, +58 recovered (604 active cases)

Marshall (4): +8 positive, +3 recovered (34 active cases)

McCook (21): +4 positive, +1 recovered (43 active cases)

McPherson (1): +3 positive, +3 recovery (16 active case)

Minnehaha (244): +141 positive, +195 recovered (2134 active cases)

Pennington (123): +75 positive, +110 recovered (1100 active cases)

Potter (2): +1 positive, +6 recovered (8 active cases)

Roberts (26): +11 positive, +11 recovered (124 active cases)

Spink (21): +9 positive, +13 recovered (82 active cases)

Walworth (14): +5 positive, +9 recovered (64 active cases)

### NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 19:

- 6.3% rolling 14-day positivity
- 241 new positives
- 5,152 susceptible test encounters
- 154 currently hospitalized (+10)
- 2,885 active cases (-176)
- 1,231 total deaths (+6)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	394	365	750	8	Substantial	7.89%
Beadle	2456	2310	5016	33	Substantial	9.56%
Bennett	347	318	1070	8	Substantial	4.46%
Bon Homme	1442	1369	1842	22	Substantial	22.50%
Brookings	2804	2553	9610	24	Substantial	11.67%
Brown	4195	3836	10820	50	Substantial	17.62%
Brule	622	585	1660	6	Substantial	26.00%
Buffalo	405	384	841	10	Substantial	26.19%
Butte	831	750	2774	16	Substantial	20.54%
Campbell	109	103	202	3	Minimal	6.67%
Charles Mix	1060	952	3492	10	Substantial	27.42%
Clark	300	271	827	2	Substantial	6.25%
Clay	1558	1430	4382	11	Substantial	17.42%
Codington	3262	2827	8094	66	Substantial	21.28%
Corson	437	408	878	7	Substantial	22.64%
Custer	651	585	2328	8	Substantial	21.66%
Davison	2631	2431	5584	52	Substantial	13.88%
Day	502	417	1487	17	Substantial	17.95%
Deuel	391	332	961	6	Substantial	18.60%
Dewey	1221	1035	3447	10	Substantial	30.23%
Douglas	361	310	808	7	Substantial	18.09%
Edmunds	318	269	865	4	Substantial	16.81%
Fall River	423	373	2230	10	Substantial	17.76%
Faulk	307	279	582	10	Substantial	23.08%
Grant	802	692	1871	21	Substantial	22.16%
Gregory	472	423	1053	25	Substantial	12.50%
Haakon	218	166	459	5	Substantial	21.43%
Hamlin	574	498	1464	32	Substantial	9.26%
Hand	310	293	691	2	Moderate	11.54%
Hanson	300	277	580	3	Substantial	16.28%
Harding	88	76	150	0	Moderate	21.43%
Hughes	1920	1725	5436	25	Substantial	12.33%
Hutchinson	674	595	1977	14	Substantial	23.60%

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Hyde	130	126	354	0	Minimal	12.50%
Jackson	256	211	849	8	Substantial	44.29%
Jerauld	257	228	480	15	Moderate	23.81%
Jones	63	63	180	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	500	454	1375	13	Substantial	12.66%
Lake	969	887	2697	13	Substantial	18.24%
Lawrence	2406	2162	7427	27	Substantial	17.95%
Lincoln	6381	5719	16780	58	Substantial	22.18%
Lyman	508	471	1668	9	Substantial	10.84%
Marshall	248	210	968	4	Substantial	24.68%
McCook	650	586	1375	21	Substantial	24.29%
McPherson	173	156	490	1	Moderate	3.97%
Meade	2111	1870	6506	21	Substantial	21.25%
Mellette	213	193	640	2	Substantial	21.43%
Miner	218	194	487	6	Substantial	4.35%
Minnehaha	23900	21522	65658	244	Substantial	19.39%
Moody	512	438	1550	14	Substantial	33.73%
Oglala Lakota	1857	1652	6128	33	Substantial	15.11%
Pennington	10454	9231	32798	123	Substantial	23.58%
Perkins	254	210	639	9	Substantial	15.56%
Potter	292	282	700	2	Substantial	13.33%
Roberts	908	758	3668	26	Substantial	25.94%
Sanborn	300	283	591	3	Substantial	12.12%
Spink	683	580	1814	21	Substantial	18.48%
Stanley	259	239	748	2	Moderate	12.20%
Sully	103	92	239	3	Moderate	0.00%
Todd	1123	1024	3732	17	Substantial	17.28%
Tripp	606	547	1299	10	Substantial	15.49%
Turner	923	800	2309	47	Substantial	17.59%
Union	1494	1308	5188	28	Substantial	18.62%
Walworth	592	514	1590	14	Substantial	26.80%
Yankton	2327	2018	8039	22	Substantial	22.83%
Ziebach	281	225	691	7	Substantial	33.33%
Unassigned	0	0	1958	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	3476	0
10-19 years	10402	0
20-29 years	17337	3
30-39 years	15646	12
40-49 years	13467	22
50-59 years	13388	69
60-69 years	10650	173
70-79 years	5598	284
80+ years	4372	787

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	49309	655
Male	45027	695

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## Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

13

New Probable Cases

4

Active Cases

309

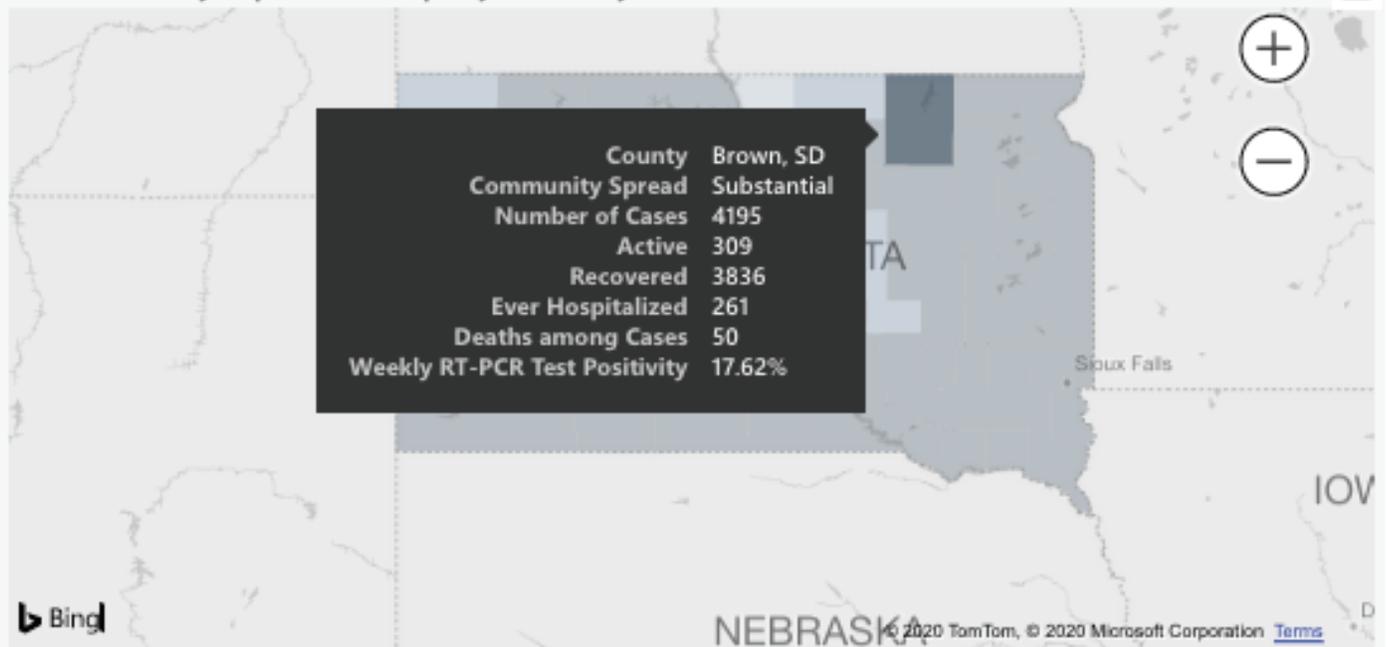
Recovered Cases

3,836

Currently Hospitalized

365

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases

3,994

Total Probable Cases

201

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

14.9%

Total Persons Tested

15,015

Total Tests

33,471

Ever Hospitalized

261

Deaths Among Cases

50

% Progress (October Goal: 44233 Tests)

327%

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

216%

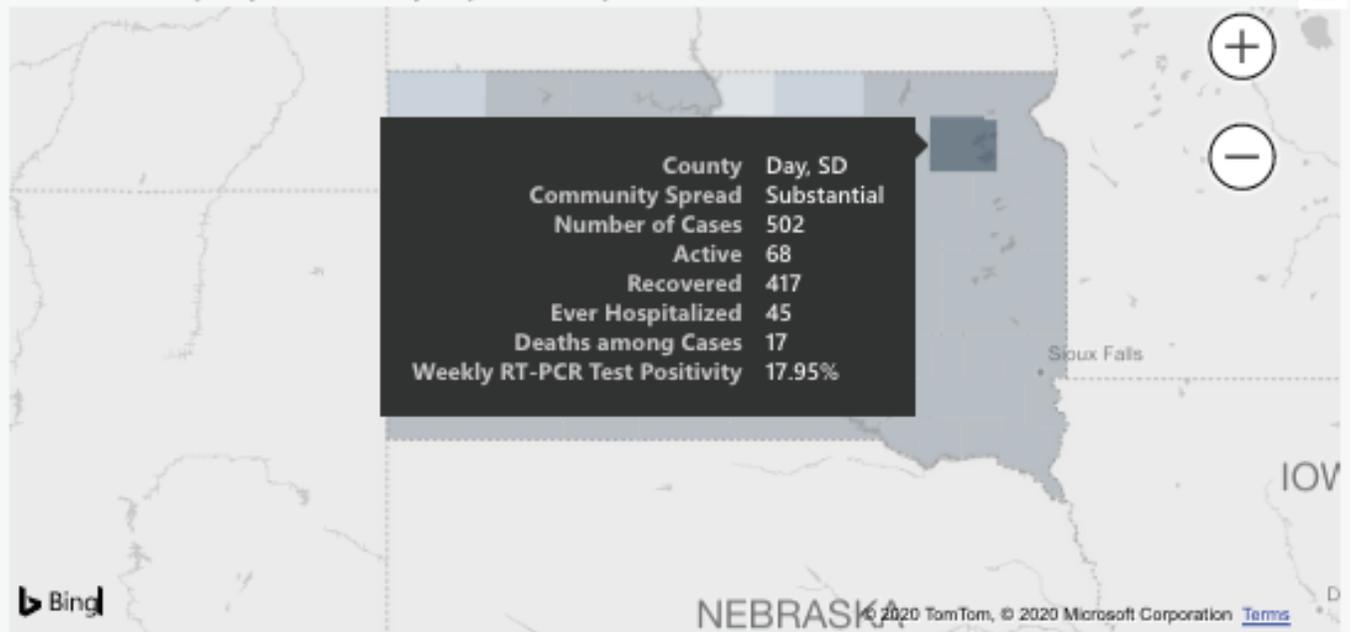
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## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



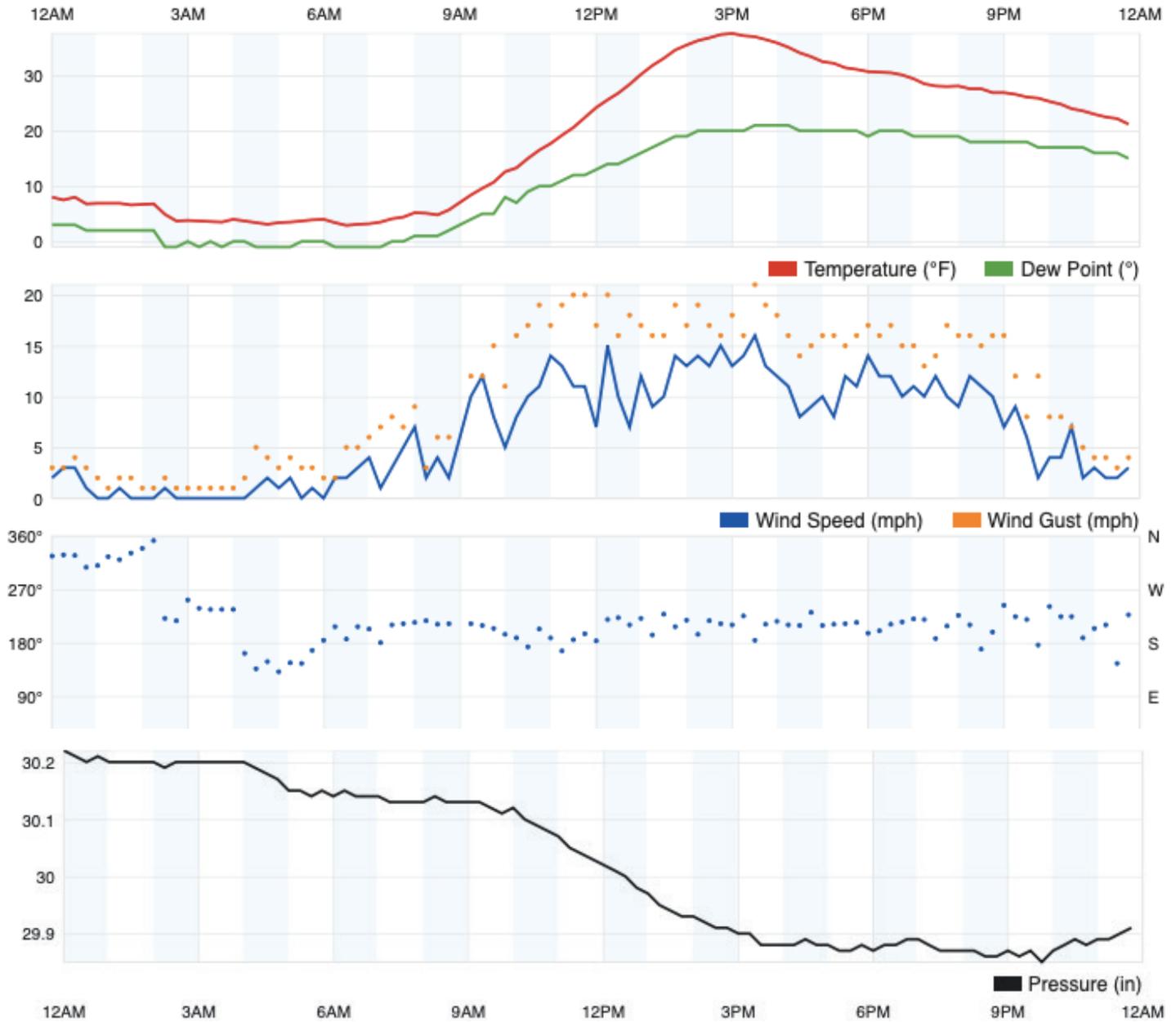
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny then  
Slight Chance  
Rain

High: 43 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear  
then Mostly  
Clear and  
Blustery

Low: 28 °F

Monday



Sunny and  
Breezy then  
Sunny

High: 39 °F

Monday  
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 22 °F

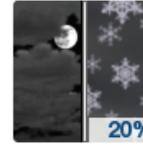
Tuesday



Partly Sunny

High: 46 °F

Tuesday  
Night



Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance Snow  
and Blustery

Low: 17 °F

Wednesday



Blustery.  
Slight Chance  
Snow then  
Partly Sunny

High: 24 °F



Warm with Increasing Winds  
Highs: Near 40 east to Low  
50s west

Late Afternoon and Evening:  
Light Rain (may mix with snow  
along the Coteau this evening)



A clipper system will move through the Dakotas today. Winds will increase out of the west this afternoon with gusts around 50 mph possible west of the Missouri River. Light rain is possible this afternoon, mainly along the northern tier of SD. Rain may mix with a few flakes of snow this evening in northeast SD.

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## Dry as of Late

A look at precipitation amounts  
as of Dec 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020

<b>Location</b>	<b><u>Past 55 Days</u> <i>(since Oct 26<sup>th</sup>)</i></b>	<b>Year to date 2020</b>	<b>Year to date 2019</b>	<b>2019-2020 Difference</b>	<b>2020 Difference from Normal</b>
<b>Mobridge</b>	<u>Trace</u>	13.14"	28.93"	-15.79"	-2.84"
<b>Timber Lake</b>	<u>Trace</u>	15.70"	29.67"	-13.97"	-2.37"
<b>Pierre</b>	<u>0.03"</u>	13.92"	30.11"	-16.19"	-5.59"
<b>Kennebec</b>	<u>0.07"</u>	16.61"	35.09"	-18.48"	-2.62"
<b>Aberdeen</b>	<u>0.14"</u>	14.84"	29.59"	-14.75"	-6.46"
<b>Sisseton</b>	<u>0.37"</u>	13.15"	34.09"	-20.94"	-10.48"
<b>Wheaton</b>	<u>0.69"</u>	18.19"	30.62"	-12.43"	-5.82"
<b>Watertown</b>	<u>0.99"</u>	19.02"	32.60"	-13.58"	-1.46"

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

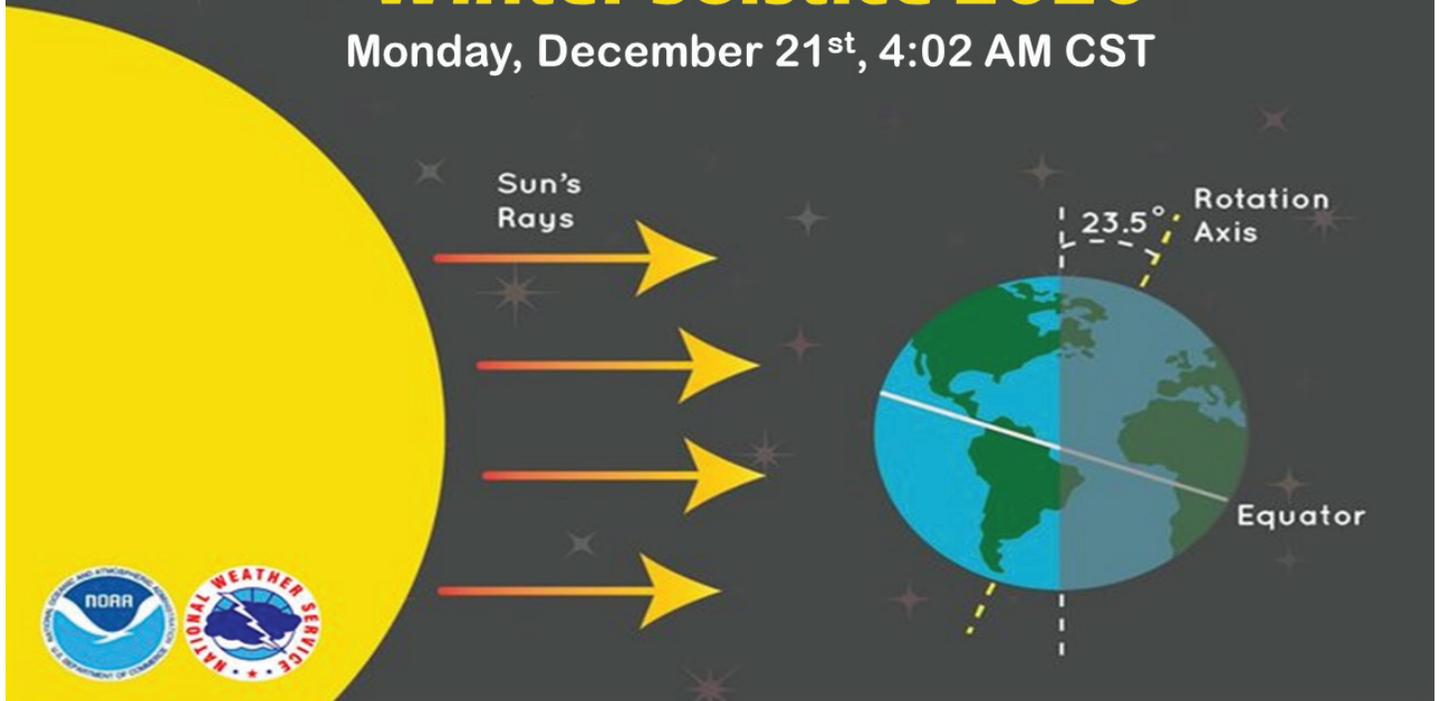
\*Climate normals based on 1980-2010 data

As you know, it's been dry as of late... but how dry exactly? Here's the breakdown, as well as a comparison to 2019, through today Dec 19th. Also, Timber Lake may tie their record for most consecutive days without at least 0.01" of precip tomorrow (56 ending Dec 13th, 1999). Also currently at 55 consecutive days, Mobridge ranks 5th place (68 days ending Dec 28th, 2006).

Records go back to 1911 at both sites.

## Winter Solstice 2020

Monday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 4:02 AM CST



**Monday is the Winter Solstice! This is the shortest day of the year and the beginning of astronomical Winter for those of us in the Northern Hemisphere.**

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## Today in Weather History

December 20, 1991: Light freezing drizzle and freezing rain developed over northern South Dakota from Timber Lake to Webster. Numerous car accidents were attributed to slippery conditions. The Aberdeen Police Department reported 24 accidents in Aberdeen, but only one resulted in an injury. Numerous businesses closed and schools were canceled.

December 20, 2008: Arctic air combined with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills to the central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota from the late afternoon of the 20th until the afternoon of the 21st. Wind chills of 35 below to 45 below zero were common across the area.

1836: A famous "sudden freeze" occurred in central Illinois. A cold front with 70 mph winds swept through around Noon, dropping the temperature from 40 degrees to near zero in a matter of minutes. Many settlers froze to death. Folklore told of chickens frozen in their tracks and men frozen to saddles. Ice in streams reportedly froze to six inches in a few hours.

1929: An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas on December 20 - 21st, 1929. The storm produced 26 inches of snow near Hillsboro, Texas, and 24 inches in 24 hours in Clifton.

1977: A "Once in a Lifetime" wind and dust storm struck the south end of the San Joaquin Valley in California. Winds reached 88 mph at Arvin before the anemometer broke, and gusts were estimated at 192 mph at Arvin by a U.S. Geological Survey. Meadows Field in Bakersfield recorded sustained 46 mph winds with a gust of 63 mph. The strong winds generated a wall of dust resembling a tidal wave that was 5,000 feet high over Arvin. Blowing sand stripped painted surfaces to bare metal and trapped people in vehicles for several hours. 70% of homes received structural damage in Arvin, Edison, and East Bakersfield. 120,000 Kern County customers lost power. Agriculture was impacted as 25 million tons of soil was loosened from grazing lands. Five people died, and damages totaled \$34 million.

These strong winds also spread a large fire through the Honda Canyon on Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California. This fire, which started from a power pole on Tranquillon Ridge being blown over, claimed the lives of Base Commander Colonel Joseph Turner, Fire Chief Billy Bell, and Assistant Fire Chief Eugene Cooper. Additionally, severe burns were experienced by Heavy Equipment Operator Clarence McCauley. He later died due to complications from the burns.

1984: Lili, a rare December hurricane, was officially declared a tropical system in the central Atlantic as a distinct eye type feature was apparent on satellite imagery. The hurricane peaked at sustained 80 mph winds and a pressure of 980 millibars or 28.94 inches of mercury, a very respectable Category 1 Hurricane in December.

2006: Severe Cyclone Bondo, the equivalent of a Category 4, approaches the Madagascar coast with sustained winds of 138 mph.

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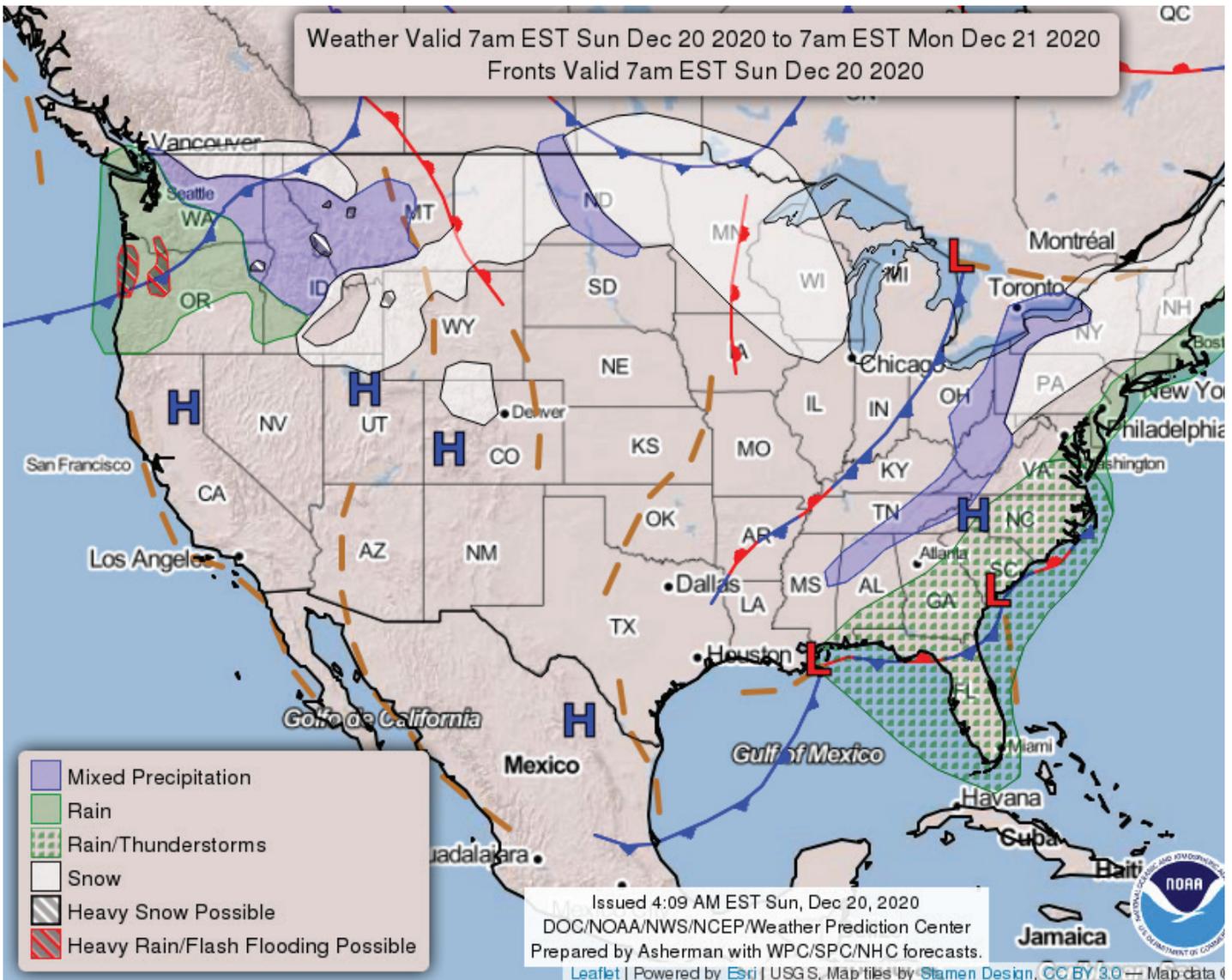
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 38 °F at 2:59 PM**  
**Low Temp: 3 °F at 6:20 AM**  
**Wind: 21 mph at 11:17 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 60° in 1893**  
**Record Low: -29° in 1916**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 4°F**  
**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.31**  
**Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.51**  
**Precip Year to Date: 16.52**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:53 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11 a.m.**



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## THE JOY THAT COMES FROM CHRISTMAS

A young run-away girl collapsed on the streets of a large city at the beginning of the Christmas season. She was rushed to a hospital, placed in intensive care, and finally made it to a room where she made slow progress in regaining her health.

One evening a group of carolers stopped by her room and sang the beautiful songs that describe the birth of Jesus. After they sang, a young lady approached her bed and asked if she knew the Baby that they had been singing about.

Quietly, barely above a whisper, she said, "I heard about Him when I went to Sunday school. But don't remember too much about Him."

The young lady reminded her of the story and the meaning of the birth of Jesus and the plan of salvation. When she heard the story, she accepted the Lord as her Savior.

Finally, it was time for her to leave and a nurse said, "Well, now that you're better, it's time for you to leave."

Happily, she said, "Yes, but I'm not leaving alone. I'm taking Jesus with me. Do you know Jesus?"

"Oh, yes," replied the nurse, in a grumpy voice.

"Well, then," she asked, "why aren't you filled with joy like I am? If you truly know Jesus, you'll be happy all the time."

David said, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation!"

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we surrender our joy to the stress and strains of life. Come now and return the joy we once had when we accepted Christ as our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-06-12-17-33

(three, six, twelve, seventeen, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$42,000

Lotto America

01-09-15-28-35, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 4

(one, nine, fifteen, twenty-eight, thirty-five; Star Ball: five; ASB: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.15 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$330 million

Powerball

27-32-34-43-52, Powerball: 13, Power Play: 2

(twenty-seven, thirty-two, thirty-four, forty-three, fifty-two; Powerball: thirteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$304 million

### Saturday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 81, Sturgis Brown 32

Centerville 58, Iroquois 46

Chamberlain 63, Tiospa Zina Tribal 53

Colome 44, Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 25

Dell Rapids 67, Tea Area 65

Ipswich 57, Webster 26

Langford 45, Hitchcock-Tulare 31

Lemmon 42, Mott-Regent, N.D. 39

Lower Brule 71, North Central Co-Op 27

Lyman 70, Bennett County 39

McCook Central/Montrose 45, Bon Homme 44

Mitchell 50, Rapid City Stevens 49

Northwestern 65, Miller 55

O Gorman 82, Sioux Falls Christian 71

Pierre 79, Spearfish 51

Potter County 60, Warner 50

Rapid City Central 71, Huron 59

St. Thomas More 67, Scottsbluff, Neb. 51

Stuart, Neb. 40, Burke 39

Wessington Springs 70, Mitchell Christian 52

White River 68, Custer 60

Winner 65, Sully Buttes 40

Rotary Classic Mobridge-Pollock=

McIntosh 58, South Border, N.D. 46

Mobridge-Pollock 58, Herreid 38

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Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 62, Timber Lake 57  
Stateline Shootout=  
Upton, Wyo. 71, Belle Fourche 53  
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=  
Aberdeen Central 57, Sturgis Brown 27  
Arlington 41, Milbank 40  
Baltic 60, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 48  
Bennett County 60, Lyman 55  
Burke 61, Stuart, Neb. 32  
Castlewood 50, Hamlin 48  
Centerville 73, Iroquois 50  
Colome 58, Cody-Kilgore, Neb. 48  
Dell Rapids St. Mary 50, Dell Rapids 43  
Deubrook 53, DeSmet 42  
Flandreau 57, Colman-Egan 52  
Garretson 70, Madison 57  
Hill City 61, Hot Springs 11  
Hitchcock-Tulare 52, Langford 31  
Lower Brule 54, North Central Co-Op 38  
Mitchell 70, Rapid City Stevens 52  
Mitchell Christian 47, Wessington Springs 42  
New Underwood 50, Faith 34  
Parkston 55, Lennox 43  
Pierre 57, Spearfish 32  
Rapid City Central 65, Huron 54  
Sioux Falls Christian 59, Clark/Willow Lake 39  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 61, Sioux Falls Lincoln 23  
Sioux Valley 57, Elkton-Lake Benton 20  
St. Thomas More 66, Scottsbluff, Neb. 39  
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 50, Bon Homme 43  
Wall 61, Harding County 45  
Warner 63, Potter County 31  
White River 63, Custer 30  
Rotary Classic Mobridge-Pollock=  
Herreid 60, Mobridge-Pollock 43  
South Border, N.D. 45, McIntosh 14  
Timber Lake 56, Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 19  
Stateline Shootout=  
Belle Fourche 70, Upton, Wyo. 27

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

## Selland sparks South Dakota St women past No. 20 Mizzou St

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (AP) — Myah Selland scored 19 points with 10 rebounds, six assists and four steals and South Dakota State defeated its third ranked team this season, upending No. 20 Missouri State 60-52 on Saturday.

The Jackrabbits (5-2) beat Iowa State and Gonzaga and jumped into the Top 25 before losing their last two games to Kansas State and Northern Iowa.

Paiton Burckhard added 13 points for South Dakota State, which took the lead by scoring nine-straight

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points in the first quarter and turning that into a 14-2 run. The lead was 31-22 at the half and was 13 midway through the third quarter.

The Bears (4-2), who have Power Five wins over No. 14 Maryland and Missouri but lost to Wake Forest, closed within 46-40 entering the fourth quarter. A basket by Jasmine Franklin cut it two four but the Bears scored the next nine points, a 3-pointer by Burckhard making it 55-32 with 6 1/2 minutes to play.

Missouri State was only 5-of-19 shooting in the fourth quarter and finished at 32% for the game.

Brice Calip scored 13 points for Missouri State.

The Bears won the only other meeting between the teams in 1974.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/Womenscollegebasketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## South Dakota reports 21 new deaths from coronavirus

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials reported 21 more deaths from COVID-19 on Saturday and an additional 564 new infections.

Saturday's numbers bring the state's death toll from COVID-19 to 1,350.

The death count is the 38th highest in the country overall and the seventh highest per capita at 150 deaths per 100,000 people, according to researchers at John Hopkins.

The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 dropped to 365 on Saturday, a decrease of 22 from a day earlier.

There were 1,062 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 16th in the country for new cases per capita, according to figures compiled by The COVID Tracking Project. One in every 215 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

As of Saturday's report, nearly 6,200 people had been vaccinated in South Dakota, up from 3,500 on Friday.

A total of 8,496 people have active infections in South Dakota.

## Protest leader's lawyers want more info from authorities

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Lawyers for the leader of a July 3 protest before President Donald Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore want training and other materials used by law enforcement and the National Guard who used force to disperse protesters.

The Rapid City Journal reports defense lawyer Bruce Ellison said during a hearing Friday that his legal team needs to know if the deployments were legal, how the riot lines mobilized so quickly, and what law enforcement and the Guard were told to expect.

Pennington County prosecutor Kelsey Weber argued the materials were either tactical in nature, or too burdensome and irrelevant to the case.

Evidence shown in court earlier included a video that showed Tilsen taking a shield from a National Guard soldier.

Tilsen is charged with second-degree robbery and grand theft in the alternative, meaning Tilsen could only be convicted of one — not both — of those charges in relation to the shield. He's also charged with two counts of simple assault against law enforcement.

Tilsen faces up to 16 years in prison.

Former South Dakota U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson has been one of Tilsen's defense lawyers.

## 'Hurting for hope,' South Dakota rural churches mark Advent

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

CANTON, S.D. (AP) — The Nativity stable at Canton Lutheran Church will be silent this year, breaking from a community tradition of gathering for a live Christmas performance. Instead, churches in this rural

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corner of South Dakota are grappling with how to approach an Advent filled with quiet mourning after the coronavirus tore through the region.

Church announcements are marked not with parties and performances, but with deaths. South Dakota and North Dakota, states largely spared from the worst of the pandemic during the spring and summer, have seen a frightening pace of death since October. The states' per capita death over the fall was almost double that of even the next worst-off state.

Even as congregations mourn, they are finding new significance in Advent, when Christians mark the long, dark nights leading up to Christmas as they prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

"Advent is the season when we look forward, and long and wait for that new life to come upon us," the Rev. Tim Thies said. "We're a people hurting for hope."

The church's annual Nativity performance often draws a crowd of thousands to Canton, a city of about 3,500 people nestled against the Big Sioux River dividing South Dakota from Iowa. People come to see the camels, the angels who ascend on a hydraulic lift — and of course, the infant Jesus, played by one of the church's newest arrivals.

Not this year.

The church canceled the live show, fearing that a large gathering would add to the virus' toll.

"There's just a void and you can't fill it," Thies said.

Community grieving also has been halted, even as the impact of the deaths from the virus has rippled, said Cheryl Johnson, a member of Canton Lutheran. Memorial services for some people were postponed; others had small graveside gatherings.

"These were pillars of the community," said Johnson. "There should have been hundreds of people at those services."

One man who died operated a construction company that built many of the homes people live in; another operated a manufacturing business that was a big employer. Many from the older generation were faithful donors to the churches that run charities in town.

Canton Lutheran's congregation has lost 12 members over the last few months, from COVID-19 and other causes, Thies said.

The virus has been a crucible on the neighborly harmony that is the pride of many towns. Impassioned debates over politics and mask requirements, the unrelenting discomfort of isolation, the pain of losing loved ones and the pressures on medical workers have all compounded into discord.

Churches saw needs arising, even as they waded through divisions.

The Grand Valley Lutheran Church, a 126-year-old congregation of mostly farming families a few miles south of Canton, shut down services during the early days of the pandemic. But the Rev. Lance Lindgren — who later died of the virus — was adamant that the church continue to provide some form of worship, so hymns from the church organ streamed over Facebook.

The church did everything it could to meet spiritual needs, while still attempting to keep people safe. It purchased an FM transmitter so worshippers could listen from their cars, and Lindgren held drive-through communion. As the weather grew colder, Eric Scott, the congregational president, measured off the church's fellowship hall to separate chairs by 6 feet (1.8 meters).

"At those times, people were really looking for something, and going back to their faith, going back to God," Scott said.

Then Canton was hit by a wave of cases. The 77-year-old pastor died on Nov. 3.

"With the passing of pastor Lance, the first question was: What do we do now?" Scott said.

Grand Valley was not the only area church reeling from loss. The pages of the local newspaper, The Sioux Valley News, filled with obituaries. The nursing home began marking deaths with small, white crosses on its front lawn.

Churches asked members to gather outside the nursing home, laying hands on its brick walls to offer prayers for residents and staff.

"It was a powerful moment where we were coming together in faith," said Clay Lundberg, the pastor

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of the United Methodist Church in Canton.

Still, pastors struggled with how to comfort their congregations.

"We're called to be the hands and feet of Christ, but how do you do that when you can't touch somebody? How do you do that when you can't give them a hug?" said Thies, the pastor at Canton Lutheran.

He and other pastors said they've been going back to the basics of ministering to their congregations: making phone calls, writing letters, and trying to make their presence felt.

"We don't want people to slip through the cracks and be lost in these terrible pandemic days," he said.

Church members who usually organize the live Nativity performance thought the congregation needed a message of hope, so they recruited the shop class from the high school to assemble a stable, even if it remained empty of people.

"(It's) a reminder to the people — that this is the true meaning of Christmas," said Dorothy Trumm, a 76-year-old church member.

At Grand Valley, the congregation decided to forego some of its midweek Advent services, but felt that continuing Sunday services and delving into the grief was what Lindgren would have wanted.

"I look at this pandemic as an opportunity," Scott said. "We're in waiting, and it's waiting for something good."

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

## Belgians, Dutch, Austrians halt UK flights, fearing variant

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The Netherlands, Belgium and Austria on Sunday banned flights from the U.K. and Germany considered limiting such flights to make sure that a new strain of coronavirus sweeping across southern England does not establish a strong foothold on the continent.

The Netherlands banned flights from the U.K. for at least the rest of the year while Belgium issued a flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight and also halted train links to Britain, including the Eurostar. German officials were considering "serious options" regarding incoming flights from the U.K., but have not yet taken action.

Austria said it would also halt flights from the U.K. but there were no immediate details on the timing of the ban, the Austrian news agency APA reported. The Czech Republic, meanwhile, imposed stricter quarantine measures from people arriving from the U.K.

The five EU governments say their response comes in reaction to tougher measures imposed Saturday in London and surrounding areas by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. He immediately put those regions into a new Tier 4 level of restrictions, saying that a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70% more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

"There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," Johnson said, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said Sunday he was issuing the flight ban for 24 hours starting at midnight "out of precaution."

"There are a great many questions about this new mutation and if it is not already on the mainland," he said. He hoped to have more clarity by Tuesday.

The World Health Organization tweeted late Saturday that, "We're in close contact with U.K. officials on the new #COVID19 virus variant." It promised to update governments and the public as more is learned about this variant.

The new strain of coronavirus was identified in southeastern England in September and has been circulating in the area since, a WHO official told the BBC on Sunday.

"What we understand is that it does have increased transmissibility, in terms of its ability to spread,"

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said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19.

Studies are under way to better understand how fast it spreads and whether "it's related to the variant itself, or a combination of factors with behavior," she said.

She said the strain had also been identified in Denmark, the Netherlands and Australia, where there was one case that did not spread further.

"The longer this virus spreads, the more opportunities it has to change," she said. "So we really need to do everything we can right now to prevent spread, and minimizing that spread will reduce the chances of it changing."

Susan Hopkins of Public Health England said that while the variant has been circulating since September, it wasn't until this week that officials felt they had enough evidence to declare that it has higher transmissibility than other circulating viruses.

The strain has spread to other parts of the U.K. but in smaller amounts than in London and surrounding areas, she told the BBC.

Germany has not yet spelled out a ban but is considering limiting or halting flights from the U.K. as well, the dpa news agency reported Sunday. A high-ranking German official told dpa that restrictions on flights from Britain are a "serious option."

The Czech Republic announced that all people arriving in the country who spent at least 24 hours on British territory during the last two weeks have to isolate as of this Sunday.

Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the 27-nation EU, was in contact with its neighbors and was following all developments about the new variant closely, dpa reported.

Europe has been walloped this fall by soaring new infections and deaths due to a resurgence of the virus, and many nations have reimposed a series of restrictions to reign in their outbreaks.

Britain has seen over 67,000 deaths in the pandemic, the second-highest confirmed toll in Europe after Italy.

Johnson on Saturday closed all non-essential shops, hairdressers, gyms and pools and told Britons to reorganize their holiday plans. No mixing of households is now allowed indoors in Tier 4 areas, including London, and only essential travel is permitted into and out of such areas. In the rest of England, people will be allowed to meet in Christmas bubbles for just one day instead of the five that were planned.

Raf Casert in Brussels, Sylvia Hui in London and Karel Janicek in Prague contributed reporting.

## Deal on Fed removes obstacle to agreement on virus aid bill

By ANDREW TAYLOR and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top congressional lawmakers struck a late-night agreement on the last major obstacle to a COVID-19 economic relief package costing nearly \$1 trillion, clearing the way for votes as early as Sunday.

The breakthrough involved a fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers and was resolved by the Senate's top Democrat and a senior conservative Republican.

Congressional aides confirmed the agreement late Saturday, which clears the way for an expected deal Sunday on the aid bill. The measure is finally nearing passage amid a frightening spike in cases and deaths and accumulating evidence that the economy is struggling through the pandemic.

"We're getting very close, very close," Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., as he left the Capitol late Saturday. Schumer spent much of the day going back and forth with GOP Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania. Toomey had been pressing a provision to close down Fed lending facilities. Democrats and the White House said it was too broadly worded and would have tied the hands of the incoming Biden administration.

The compromise, aides said, preserved Toomey's goal but retained the Fed's existing powers to restart similar facilities in the future.

The COVID-19 legislation has been held up after months of dysfunction, posturing and bad faith. But talks turned serious last week as lawmakers on both sides finally faced the deadline of acting before

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leaving Washington for Christmas.

The relief bill, lawmakers and aides say, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans. It would provide a fresh round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction.

The measure is being added to a \$1.4 trillion spending bill and lots of other unfinished work, including previously stalled legislation to extend tax breaks, authorize water projects, and address the problem of surprise sky-high medical bills for out-of-network procedures.

It would be virtually impossible for lawmakers to read and fully understand the measure before a House vote expected Sunday night.

Schumer said he hoped both the House and Senate would vote on the measure Sunday. That would take more cooperation than the Senate can usually muster, but a government shutdown deadline loomed at midnight Sunday and all sides were eager to leave for the holiday.

Toomey defended his provision in a Senate speech, saying the emergency powers were designed to stabilize capital markets at the height of the pandemic this spring and were expiring at the end of the month anyway. The language he had sought would block the Biden administration from restarting them.

Toomey has a stubborn streak and Democrats held firm as well, but both sides saw the need for a compromise.

The Fed's emergency programs provided loans to small and mid-size businesses and bought state and local government bonds. Those bond purchases made it easier for those governments to borrow, at a time when their finances were under pressure from job losses and health costs stemming from the pandemic.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said last month that those programs, along with two that purchased corporate bonds, would close at the end of the year, prompting an initial objection by the Fed. Under the Dodd-Frank financial overhaul law passed after the Great Recession, the Fed can only set up emergency programs with the support of the treasury secretary.

Democrats also said that Toomey was trying to limit the Fed's ability to boost the economy, just as Biden prepared to take office.

"This is about existing authorities that the Fed has had for a very long time, to be able to use in an emergency," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. "It's about a lending authority for helping small businesses, state government, local government in the middle of a crisis."

Toomey disputed that, saying his proposal "is emphatically not a broad overhaul of the Federal Reserve's emergency lending authority." His office issued a statement early Sunday calling the compromise with Schumer "an unqualified victory for taxpayers" that met Toomey's aim of shutting down the emergency facility.

A Senate vote would follow, possibly on Monday. One more short-term funding bill would be needed to avoid the looming deadline — or a partial shutdown of nonessential agencies would start on Monday.

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

It would be 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 governmentwide appropriations bill would fund agencies through next September. That measure was likely to provide a last \$1.4 billion installment for President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall as a condition of winning his signature.

## EU-UK trade talks floundering over fish as cutoff day nears

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Deep into a crucial weekend of negotiations, a breakthrough on fishing rights re-

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mained elusive for the European Union and Britain, leaving both without a trade agreement that would dull the edge of a chaotic, costly economic break on New Year's Day.

With hundreds of thousands of jobs at stake throughout the economy, the tiny sector of fisheries continued to drive a wedge between the 27-nation bloc and the U.K., highlighting the animosity that drove them to a Brexit divorce over the past four years. Britain left the bloc in January but a 11-month economic transition period ends on Dec. 31.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office said Sunday that the EU is "continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence. We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in control of our own laws or waters."

The almost mythical sense of Britain's rights to rule its waves was an essential part of what drove Brexiters to victory in the 2016 referendum. Johnson is seeking to make sure that as much as possible of the shared British waters are now returned to U.K. vessels only.

The EU has always maintained that those waters have been shared for decades, if not centuries, and insists if too many fishing rights are taken away, it will punish Britain by imposing hefty import fees to the mainland market, which is essential to the U.K. seafood industry.

The stalemate has left the overall talks inconclusive with businesses on both sides clamoring for a deal that would save tens of billions in costs. Johnson, though, could not be budged.

"We need to get any deal right and based on terms which respect what the British people voted for," his office said.

The EU parliament needs to approve any deal before the end of the year and had set a Sunday night deadline so it could have a cursory vetting of the deal and approve it before New Year's Day. Negotiators, however, seemed little impressed by yet another deadline when so many had already been missed during the four-year departure process.

One official from an EU coastal nation said the EU was refusing to yield more than a quarter of the fishing quotas the bloc stands to lose now that Britain is regaining full control of its waters due to Brexit. Britain is also steadfast that a 3-year transition period would be long enough for EU fishermen to adapt to the new rules, while the EU wants at least six years.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were still ongoing.

A failure to reach a post-Brexit deal would lead to more chaos on Britain's borders with the EU at the start of 2021, when new tariffs would add to other impediments to trade enacted by both sides. The talks have bogged down on two main issues over the past days — the EU's access to U.K. fishing waters and assurances of fair competition between businesses.

A trade deal would ensure there are no tariffs and quotas on trade in goods between the two sides, but there would still be technical costs, partly associated with customs checks and non-tariff barriers on services.

While both sides would suffer economically from a failure to secure a trade deal, most economists think the British economy would take a greater hit, at least in the near-term, as it is relatively more reliant on trade with the EU than vice versa.

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Jill Lawless contributed from London.

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## As end approaches, Trump gets doses of flattery, finality

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration is ending how it began, with over-the-top declarations of praise for the chief executive.

But now the flattery is mixed with a sense of finality as key people in the president's orbit are beginning to turn the page and acknowledge his defeat. Trump himself keeps to the Oval Office, still fighting

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the Election Day results and offering scant acknowledgement of the death and suffering Americans are bearing in the darkest hours of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a week when the Electoral College made official President-elect Joe Biden's victory, Trump remained out of sight, staying late in the Oval Office and working the phones and television remote in his private dining area just steps from the Resolute Desk.

While he made not one public appearance, some of those who have been his most influential allies and loyal defenders gave up the fight, letting the president down as gently as possible.

Attorney General William Barr offered his resignation last Monday after weeks of tension with Trump brought about an early exit from his post. Long seen as one of Trump's most supportive Cabinet members, Barr in recent weeks and months had drawn Trump's wrath for not supporting the president's baseless claims of election fraud or for not publicly pursuing an investigation into Biden's son Hunter.

But when Barr stepped aside, he did so with flowery language reminiscent of the compliments that were tossed as verbal bouquets at Trump during early Cabinet meetings.

"Your record is all the more historic because you accomplished it in the face of relentless, implacable resistance," Barr wrote in his resignation letter. Trump promptly tweeted it out, adding his own words of praise for the attorney general.

In the six weeks since his defeat by Biden, Trump has been increasingly disengaged from his job. The virus has killed more than 300,000 Americans and is now claiming more than 3,000 lives a day, but the president has offered barely a word about the deaths or the development of the vaccine that could bring an end to the pandemic.

At the same time, he has relentlessly tweeted conspiracy theories and false claims about the election, incorrectly insisting it was stolen from him while taking steps to undermine the Biden administration before it begins. Most Republicans went along, refusing to push Trump to stop or work with the president-elect.

Many in the GOP took their cues from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who refused to stand up to Trump, instead making the calculation that an outraged Republican base — and an angry president — could help produce victories in a pair of January runoff races in Georgia that will dictate control of the Senate. But this past week, even McConnell, R-Ky., bent to reality, declaring that the Electoral College "had spoken" and that Biden was the victor.

McConnell's acknowledgement that Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris had won came only after a long public recap of Trump's accomplishments on the Senate floor. McConnell spoke about Trump for nine minutes, declaring that "many of us hoped that the presidential election would yield a different result." He discussed Biden for one minute.

Some more of Trump's fiercest allies also appeared to give credence, albeit briefly, to the electoral result. White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said in a cable television appearance that Trump was in strong position for a possible 2024 campaign — a roundabout acknowledgement that he won't be president come next year.

Others close to Trump also marked the looming end. His daughter and adviser Ivanka Trump began tweeting photos of moments throughout the term. His son Eric Trump and his family posed for photos just outside the Oval Office. West Wing staffers put up photos on Instagram of White House Christmas parties, and most of those pictured weren't wearing masks.

Vice President Mike Pence continued his role as Trump's biggest hype man, even as the cheerleading came with a whiff of nostalgia. Pence in a ceremony Friday marked the first anniversary of the U.S. Space Force, which he framed as a major part of Trump's legacy.

But with Trump largely in hiding, it fell to Pence to make a public show of meeting with those distributing the vaccine. And on Friday, he was the one who rolled up his sleeves and took a public shot in the arm as part of a campaign to convince Americans the vaccine is safe.

Trump has been happy to bask in praise throughout his presidency. His Cabinet meetings at times resembled "Dear Leader" sessions in authoritarian nations where officials gush compliments for the man in charge.

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The tone was set at the president's first Cabinet meeting, in June 2017, when the only subject for debate appeared to whether Trump was a great president or the greatest. With the media invited to watch, Trump extolled the achievements of his young administration, asserting that he had accomplished more than any president in his first six months — with "few exceptions," like President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Pence that day declared his job was "the greatest privilege of my life." Attorney General Jeff Sessions said he was "thrilled," Energy Secretary Rick Perry gave his "hats off" to Trump and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross offered thanks "for the opportunity" to work for the president.

Perhaps the strongest words came from chief of staff Reince Priebus: "On behalf of the entire senior staff around you, Mr. President, we thank you for the opportunity and the blessing that you've given us to serve your agenda."

On Wednesday, Trump convened his 25th and perhaps final Cabinet meeting. Much had changed.

Several top officials were not there, including Barr, whose resignation was pending; acting Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who had tested positive for COVID-19; and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was quarantining because he had been exposed to someone with the virus.

Whether there was effusive praise of Trump remains unknown.

The president did not let the media in.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>

## 2nd COVID-19 vaccine authorized in US preparing to ship out

OLIVE BRANCH, Miss. (AP) — Workers on Sunday began packaging shipments of the second COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the U.S., a desperately needed boost to efforts to bring the coronavirus pandemic under control.

Employees at a factory in the Memphis area were boxing up the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health. The much-needed shots are expected to be given starting Monday, just three days after the Food and Drug Administration authorized their emergency rollout.

Later Sunday, an expert committee will debate who should be next in line for early doses of the Moderna vaccine and a similar one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech. Pfizer's shots were first shipped out a week ago and started being used the next day, kicking off the nation's biggest vaccination drive.

Public health experts say the shots — and others in the pipeline — are the only way to stop a virus that has been spreading wildly. Nationwide, more than 219,000 people per day on average test positive for the virus, which has killed more than 314,000 in the U.S. and nearly 1.7 million worldwide.

The Pfizer and Moderna shots shipped so far and going out over the next few weeks are nearly all going to health care workers and residents of long-term care homes, based on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

That panel meets Sunday to debate who should get the doses available after those early shots are given.

There won't be enough shots for the general population until spring, so doses will be rationed at least for the next several months.

The panel members are leaning toward putting "essential workers" next in line, because people like bus drivers, grocery store clerks and others are the ones getting infected most often. But other experts say people 65 and older should be next, along with people with certain medical conditions, because those are the Americans who are dying at the highest rates.

The expert panel's advice is almost always endorsed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. No matter what the CDC says, there will be differences from state to state, because their health departments have different ideas about who should be closer to the front of the line.

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. Both vaccines appeared safe and strongly protective in large, still unfinished studies.

## **Nepal president dissolves Parliament; elections next spring**

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Nepal's president dissolved Parliament on Sunday after the prime minister recommended the move amid an escalating feud within his Communist Party that is likely to push the Himalayan nation into a political crisis.

Parliamentary elections will be held on April 30 and May 10, according to a statement from President Bidya Devi Bhandari's office.

Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli decided to dissolve Parliament at a Cabinet meeting Sunday and immediately presented his recommendation.

Oli became prime minister after his Nepal Communist Party won elections three years ago. Oli's party and the party of former Maoist rebels had merged to form a strong communist party to win the election.

There has, however, been a power tussle with the leader of the former Maoists rebels, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is also the co-chair of the party. Oli has refused to succeed him as the prime minister or lead the party, causing problems within the party.

The opposition has repeatedly accused Oli's government of corruption and his administration has faced criticism over its handling of the coronavirus. The number of virus cases in Nepal has reached 243,184, including 1,777 deaths.

Oli also has been accused of moving closer to China and drifting away from Nepal's traditional partner India since taking over power. This has caused problems between Oli and New Delhi.

## **The Latest: Germany ponders limiting UK flights due to virus**

The Associated Press undefined

BERLIN — Germany is considering limiting flights from Britain to make sure that a new, allegedly highly contagious strain of coronavirus that is sweeping across southern England does not spill over to Germany, the dpa news agency reported Sunday.

A high-ranking German government official told dpa that restrictions on flights from Britain are a "serious option."

Belgium and the Netherlands started banning flights from the U.K. in reaction to tougher measures imposed in London and surrounding areas on Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Johnson said a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70% more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

The German government, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, is in close contact with its European neighbors on developing situation, dpa reported.

### **THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:**

- Dutch ban U.K. flights, fearing the new coronavirus variant hitting London and south England—
- General sorry for 'miscommunication' over vaccine shipments
- UK nixes Christmas gatherings, shuts London shops over virus
- Another US coronavirus record; vaccine shipments reduced
- A surge of 'new poor' linked to closed restaurants and hotels are struggling amid Italy's outbreak
- California hospitals are battling to find beds to house ICU patients amid fears that the exploding coronavirus infection rate will exhaust resources and health care workers.

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

### **HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:**

BRUSSELS — Belgium has joined the Netherlands in banning flights from the U.K. and also banned rail

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connections in an attempt to make sure that a new strain of coronavirus that is sweeping across southern England does not spill over on its territory.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo on Sunday said he was issuing the order for 24 hours starting at midnight "out of precaution."

"There are a great many questions about this new mutation and if it is not already on the mainland," he said. He hoped to have more clarity as of Tuesday.

The Netherlands is banning flights from the U.K. for at least the rest of the year.

Both Belgium and the Netherlands were reacting to tougher measures imposed in London and surrounding areas on Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

**AMSTERDAM** — The Netherlands is banning flights from the U.K. for at least the rest of the year in an attempt to make sure that a new strain of coronavirus that is sweeping across southern England does not reach its shores.

The ban came into effect Sunday morning and the government said it was reacting to tougher measures imposed in London and surrounding areas on Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The Netherlands said it will assess "with other European Union nations the possibilities to contain the import of the virus from the United Kingdom."

Johnson said a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70% more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

"There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," the prime minister stressed, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

The Dutch government is already strongly advising its citizens not to travel unless absolutely necessary.

**JERUSALEM** — Israel on Sunday began its coronavirus inoculation drive, aiming to vaccinate some 60,000 people a day in a bid to stamp out the illness that is once again surging among its population.

The country will first immunize health workers, followed by the elderly, high-risk Israelis and those over 60 years old. Israel says it has secured sufficient doses for much of the country's 9 million people from both Pfizer and Moderna, whose vaccine U.S. authorities approved this week for emergency use.

With public opinion polls showing many Israelis are reluctant to receive shots right away, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would set a "personal example" and insisted on being the first Israeli vaccinated. He received the shot Saturday night.

Netanyahu called it an "exciting moment" that would put Israel on the path to returning to its normal routines. The country's health minister also received a vaccine shot.

**SEOUL**, South Korea — South Korea has recorded more than 1,000 new coronavirus cases for the fifth consecutive day, putting pressure on authorities to enforce the toughest distancing rules that would further hurt the economy.

The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency says it's found 1,097 additional cases over the past 24-hour period, the highest daily tally since the pandemic began. That puts the national caseload at 49,665, including 674 deaths.

About 70% of the new cases come from the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, which has been at the center of a viral resurgence.

The pace of the spread has already met government conditions for raising social distancing rules to their highest level. But officials have been reluctant to move forward with the measure out of worries for the economy. The new steps would be banning gatherings of more than 10 people and shutting hundreds of thousands of non-essential businesses.

**SYDNEY** — The outbreak in Sydney's northern beach suburbs has grown to 70 cases with an additional 30 in the last 24 hours, and authorities say they may never be able to trace the source.

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While the numbers are rising, New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said Sunday there hasn't been evidence of massive seeding outside the northern beaches community. A new list of cases, however, shows the virus had spread to greater Sydney and other parts of the state.

The government has imposed a lockdown in the area until Wednesday. Residents will only be permitted to leave their homes for five basic reasons, including medical care, exercise, grocery shop, work or for compassionate care reasons.

State Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant said that contact tracers are yet to locate patient zero, but an extensive investigation is underway.

**HOUSTON** — Texas on Saturday surpassed 25,000 deaths from the coronavirus pandemic, the second-highest total in the country.

State health officials reported 272 new deaths due to COVID-19, bringing Texas' death toll to 25,226.

Cases of COVID-19 and virus-related hospitalizations continue to rise in the state. On Saturday, the state reported 9,796 people hospitalized with the virus, an increase of nearly 23% over the last month.

Officials reported 12,914 new cases on Saturday. That comes two days after the state set its one-day record of new cases — 16,864 — on Thursday.

The increase in cases and hospitalizations comes as state health officials announced Friday that Texas will receive 620,000 more doses of COVID-19 vaccines over the next week. More than 224,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine have already been delivered in Texas.

**SANTA FE, N.M.** — New Mexico on Saturday reported 1,442 additional known COVID-19 cases and 27 additional deaths.

The statewide totals increased to 128,930 cases and 2,155 as seven-day rolling averages for daily new cases dropped and daily deaths rose over the last two weeks.

According to data from Johns Hopkins University and The COVID Tracking Project, the rolling average of daily new cases dropped from 1,869 on Dec. 4 to 1,542.1 on Friday while the rolling average of deaths rose from 28.9 to 34.1.

A pandemic-high 48 daily deaths were reported Thursday as Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said daily deaths could grow even higher over the holidays.

**ANCHORAGE, Alaska** -- The 2021 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race will be about 140 miles (225 kilometers) shorter than normal as a result of complications stemming from the coronavirus pandemic.

Race officials announced Friday that teams will no longer embark on a 1,000-mile journey to Nome but instead will take a roughly 860-mile (1,380 kilometer) loop that starts and ends in Willow.

Every musher must also test negative for the coronavirus before the race begins. They will also be tested again during the race. Facial coverings and social distancing will be mandated at checkpoints.

The race is scheduled to begin on March 6.

**ATLANTA** — U.S. health officials closely tracking possible side effects of the first authorized COVID-19 vaccine say they have seen six cases of severe allergic reaction out of more than a quarter million shots given.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said more than 272,000 shots of the Pfizer vaccine were given nationwide as of Saturday morning. The half-dozen cases of allergic reaction were reported as of Friday night, and included one person with a history of vaccination reactions.

Health officials are keeping close watch for such side effects.

U.S. vaccine recipients are supposed to hang around after their injections in case signs of an allergy appear. The CDC says all cases occurred within the recommended observation window and were promptly treated.

The numbers were discussed at a meeting of a committee that advises the CDC on vaccines. The group

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on Saturday endorsed Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, which was granted emergency authorization on Friday.

**BIRMINGHAM, Ala.** — The United States added a record of nearly a quarter million coronavirus cases in the past day.

Health experts says the record could increase as cases surge in parts of the country and health care systems struggle to keep up.

Along with 249,709 new cases, there were an additional 2,814 reported deaths nationwide in the past 24 hours. That pushed the confirmed U.S. death toll past 313,000, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

California led the case surge with 48,221 more infections. Almost 17,000 people are hospitalized in California and health officials are scrambling to find enough beds for patients. Texas, Florida, New York and Tennessee all registered more than 10,400 new cases.

The seven-day rolling average for new cases in the U.S. rose in the past two weeks from 183,787 to 219,324 on Friday, an increase of nearly 20%.

Health officials are concerned about future cases brought on by travel over Christmas and New Year's.

**PHOENIX** — Arizona residents are being told to "shrink their circles" of personal contacts to help the state's health care system handle coronavirus cases.

Arizona reported a record 4,104 COVID-19 related hospitalizations. It also added more than 5,500 coronavirus cases on Friday.

State and local governments need to do more to reduce the coronavirus' spread, because one of Banner Health's hospitals is using a refrigerated truck trailer to augment its now full morgue, says Dr. Marjorie Bessel, the hospital chain's chief clinical officer.

Only 8% of all beds and intensive care unit beds were available, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

**WASHINGTON** — With coronavirus numbers setting new daily records, the nation's capital is temporarily suspending all indoor dining in restaurants over the holidays.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser issued an executive order Friday night banning indoor dining for three weeks, starting Wednesday at 10 p.m. and extending through Jan. 15.

The District of Columbia will remain in phase two of its reopening plan, and the government described the move as a "holiday pause."

The order also extends Washington's public health emergency through March 31 and orders all museums to close. The entire Smithsonian network of museums, which includes the National Zoo, already shut down voluntarily in late November.

**WASHINGTON** — An Army general in charge of COVID-19 vaccines apologized Saturday for "miscommunication" with states on the number of early doses delivered.

Gen. Gustavo Perna's remarks came a day after a second vaccine was added in the fight against the coronavirus. Governors in more than a dozen states says the federal government has told them next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be less than originally projected.

"I want to take personal responsibility for the miscommunication," he said. "I know that's not done much these days. But I am responsible. ... This is a herculean effort and we are not perfect."

Perna says the government now is on track to get approximately 20 million doses to states by the first week of January, a combination of the newly approved Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. He says 2.9 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses have been delivered so far.

The coronavirus has killed more than 313,000 people in the U.S., the highest death toll in the world.

**Official: Large car bomb kills 9 in Afghan capital**

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By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A car bomb blast that rocked Afghanistan's capital Sunday morning killed at least nine people, according to the Afghan Interior Ministry.

Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi told reporters at the site of the attack that the attack wounded around 20 others, including a member of parliament, Khan Mohammad Wardak. Andarabi said the lawmaker was in "good condition."

The interior minister added that the casualty toll could rise further.

The attack happened while the lawmaker's convey was passing through an intersection in Kabul's Khoshal Khan neighborhood. The blast set afire surrounding civilian vehicles, as well as damaging nearby buildings and shops.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement condemning the attack, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the Taliban should stop violence against civilians and accept a ceasefire, to facilitate the current peace process.

Ghani's statement did not directly lay blame on the Taliban for the car bombing or offer evidence that the group was responsible for it.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital of Kabul in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students.

IS also claimed responsibility for Saturday's rocket attacks at the major U.S. base in Afghanistan. There were no casualties in that assault, according to NATO and provincial officials.

A NATO official confirmed the attack and said initial reports indicated that the airfield was not damaged.

In another report from the southern Helmand province, the Afghan Defense Ministry in a statement confirmed that a suicide car bomber tried to attack an army checkpoint, but was identified and shot by soldiers.

Two soldiers were slightly wounded in the attempted assault in Nawa district, the ministry said.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack in Helmand.

Violence in Afghanistan has spiked even as the Taliban and Afghan government negotiators hold talks in Qatar, trying to hammer out a peace deal that could put an end to decades of war. At the same time, the Taliban have waged bitter battles against IS fighters, particularly in eastern Afghanistan, while continuing their insurgency against government forces.

Earlier this week, U.S. Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, held an unannounced meeting with Taliban leaders in Doha to discuss military aspects of last February's U.S.-Taliban agreement.

The agreement, signed in Qatar where the Taliban maintain a political office, was intended to set the stage for direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

After talks with the Taliban, Milley flew to Kabul to consult with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. He said he emphasized to both parties the need to rapidly reduce levels of violence across the country.

## Israel begins virus inoculation drive as infections surge

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel on Sunday began its coronavirus inoculation drive, aiming to vaccinate some 60,000 people a day in a bid to stamp out the illness that is once again surging among its population.

The country will first immunize health workers, followed by the elderly, high-risk Israelis and those over 60 years old. Israel says it has secured sufficient doses for much of the country's 9 million people from both Pfizer and Moderna, whose vaccine U.S. authorities approved this week for emergency use.

"It's great news that we have the vaccine so we can get on with our lives and get out from this crisis," said Moshe Yehezkel, a Tel Aviv resident.

"I will get vaccinated," he added.

Israel's 81-year-old President Reuven Rivlin was among those vaccinated Sunday. In a tweet, he called on Israelis to go get the shot.

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With public opinion polls showing many Israelis are reluctant to take vaccines right away, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would set a "personal example" and insisted on being the first Israeli vaccinated. He received the shot Saturday night.

Netanyahu expressed confidence in the vaccine before rolling up the right sleeve of his black, short-sleeve shirt and receiving the injection. He called it an "exciting moment" that would put Israel on the path to returning to its normal routines. The country's health minister also received the vaccine Saturday.

Israel has an agreement with Pfizer to secure 8 million doses of the U.S. pharmaceutical company's vaccine — enough to cover nearly half of Israel's population since each person requires two doses. Israel reached a separate agreement with Moderna earlier this month to purchase 6 million doses of its vaccine — enough for another 3 million Israelis.

Israeli media reported that the inoculation drive got off to a bumpy start, with the country's HMOs flooded with phone calls for appointments to get vaccinated and many Israelis complaining they weren't able to get through.

With daily infection numbers trending upward and currently notching just under 3,000 a day, Israeli leaders are again debating whether to impose a third national lockdown since the pandemic began. Many restrictions remain in place from the country's second lockdown in the fall, with most hotels still shuttered and restaurants open only for delivery and take out. Unemployment remains in the double digits.

Israel has had mixed results in its fight against the virus. Netanyahu was lauded in the spring for sealing borders and locking down the country swiftly, a move that battered the economy but drove down infection rates.

But a hasty and erratic reopening sent confirmed cases soaring in late summer, leading to what at the time was one of the world's worst outbreaks.

Israel has reported more than 368,000 confirmed cases and more than 3,000 virus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

## **Dutch ban UK flights, fearing the new coronavirus variant**

THE HAGUE (AP) — The Netherlands is banning flights from the U.K. for at least the rest of the year in an attempt to make sure that a new strain of coronavirus that is sweeping across southern England does not reach its shores.

The ban came into effect Sunday morning and the government said it was reacting to tougher measures imposed in London and surrounding areas on Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The Netherlands said it will assess "with other European Union nations the possibilities to contain the import of the virus from the United Kingdom."

Johnson said a fast-moving new variant of the virus that is 70% more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread of new infections in London and southern England.

"There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," the prime minister stressed, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

The Dutch government is already strongly advising its citizens not to travel unless absolutely necessary.

There was no immediate word on what the Dutch government intended to do about the ferries that travel between the U.K. and the Netherlands.

Britain has alerted the World Health Organization that the new variant identified this week appears to be accelerating the spread of COVID-19, saying it accounted for some 60% of the capital's cases.

Viruses mutate regularly, and scientists have found thousands different of mutations among samples of the virus causing COVID-19. But many of these changes have no effect on how easily the virus spreads or how severe symptoms are.

Britain has seen over 67,000 deaths in the pandemic, the second-highest confirmed toll in Europe after Italy. The Netherlands has recorded over 10,500 virus-related deaths.

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standingtheOutbreak

## **Pandemic exposes the vulnerability of Italy's 'new poor'**

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic did not produce Elena Simone's first budgetary rough patch. The 49-year-old single mother found herself out of the job market when the 2008 global financial crisis hit Italy and never fully got back in, but she created a patchwork of small jobs that provided for herself and the youngest of her three children.

That all changed with Italy's first COVID-19 lockdown in the spring.

With schools closed, so went Simone's cafeteria job. Her housecleaning gigs dried up, too. While others returned to work when the lockdown ended, Simone stayed frozen out.

"There was a period when I was only eating carrots," she recalled from her kitchen decorated with colorful plush characters shaped like vegetables.

For the first time in her life, Simone needed help putting food on the table. At a friend's urging, she enrolled for access to the food stores operated by Roman Catholic charity Caritas. Her eligibility covers her through January, and she hopes to be off the charity rolls by then "to make room for people who need it even more."

The charity serving more than 5 million people in the Milan archdiocese, Caritas Ambrosiana, says the pandemic is revealing for the first time the depths of economic insecurity in Italy's northern Lombardy region, which generates 20% of the country's gross domestic product.

Simone, who has two adult children and a 10-year-old son at home, is typical of Italy's new poor. These are people who managed to get by after the 2008 financial crisis, staying off the radar of Italy's welfare system by relying on informal, gray-market jobs and the help of friends and family.

But between Italy's near-total spring lockdown, the introduction of a partial lockdown when the virus surged again in the fall and the continued toll the pandemic is taking on Italy's economy, the slim threads that allowed people to weave together employment have snapped.

Nowhere in Italy is this more evident than in Lombardy, where COVID-19 first exploded in Europe. Italian agriculture lobby Coldiretti estimates that the virus has created 300,000 newly poor people, based on surveys of the dozens of charity groups operating in the region.

Caritas Ambrosiana provided help to 9,000 people during the spring lockdown, 20% of whom reported that their financial situation had "drastically" worsened over the 10-week closure. In October, nearly 700 families requested food aid for the first time.

Nationally, one-third of all people seeking help from Caritas during the pandemic are first-time recipients, and in a reversal of usual trends, most are Italians and not foreign residents.

More than 40 organizations provide food on a daily basis in Milan, Italy's financial capital. One of the largest, Pane Quotidiano, serves some 3,500 meals a day. Many of those in need once worked in restaurants and hotels, which have been particularly penalized by the coronavirus restrictions, or as domestic help.

"It is even more widespread than we knew, especially for a rich city like Milan," Caritas Ambrosiana spokesman Francesco Chiavarini said. "These precarious jobs were lost. And we don't know when or if they will be restored."

Researchers at Milan's Bocconi University said in a working paper for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that blue-collar workers without college degrees paid the heaviest price for Italy's virus restrictions. Half reported a drop in their salaries, compared with just 20% of the top earners, and many did not have the luxury of working remotely.

"What we are seeing is a substantial increase in inequality," Bocconi University researcher Vincenzo Galasso said.

Those without solid job contracts are the most exposed in the pandemic that has already killed over 68,000 people in Italy, the highest death toll in Europe.

Simone discovered too late that her cafeteria contract described her as an occasional worker, meaning

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she had no basis to request government support to replace lost income. Her cleaning jobs were off the books altogether, and she has recovered only two of the dozen she held before the pandemic.

Even when workers qualify for Italy's public-private short-term layoff scheme, the money has arrived late and is generally inadequate to cover a family's basic expenses, Chiavarini said. Basic coverage is 400 euros (\$490) a month, yet monthly rents in a city like Milan start around 600 euros (\$735).

Food security is emerging as a key issue as the pandemic enters winter.

Progetto Arca, which runs shelters and provides other social services in Milan, started operating a food truck last month after seeing that homeless people who had filled their stomachs with restaurant and bar handouts were going hungry during the partial fall lockdown when many establishments had closed.

And isn't just the homeless coming by the food truck. On a recent night, a well-dressed man in a quilted jacket and dress trousers waited off to the side until the line had dissipated. He identified himself as a lawyer but declined further comment and asked not to be photographed as he took away two hot meals and two bags of food for the next day, one for his companion waiting at home.

So far, government moratoriums on evictions and the firing of contracted workers have helped keep a cap on what charity workers see as an emerging poverty crisis.

"When these are lifted, we will see the real price that we need to pay for this pandemic," Chiavarini said. "We celebrate Milan as the capital of innovation, but beneath these skyscrapers of which we are so proud, there is a hidden world where people are living in conditions of real precariousness."

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## CFP semifinal moved from Rose Bowl to AT&T Stadium in Texas

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

The College Football Playoff semifinal scheduled to be played at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena on Jan. 1 is relocating to the Dallas Cowboys' stadium in Texas, a move prompted by California's ban on spectators at sporting events during the pandemic.

College Football Playoff executive director Bill Hancock said Saturday night that conference commissioners who make up the CFP management committee and the Tournament of Roses mutually agreed to relocate the game because of the "growing number of COVID-19 cases in Southern California."

"The game in Dallas will still be played in the mid-afternoon window on New Year's Day," Hancock said in a statement. "We are pleased that parents and loved ones will now be able to see their students play in the game."

The decision, announced about 13 1/2 hours before the playoff field was scheduled to be set Sunday, is just the latest twist during a college football season played through myriad COVID-19 disruptions.

The Rose Bowl, known as the Granddaddy of all college football's postseason games, has been played every year since 1916.

Coaches and school officials with playoff contenders have complained about the Rose Bowl being unable to accommodate players' family members because of California's COVID-19 restrictions, put in a place as the state tries to fight a public health crisis that is straining its hospitals.

Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly even suggested that if the Fighting Irish were selected to play in the Rose Bowl, the school would boycott if players could not have family attend.

None of the teams in contention to be selected for the playoff are from the western United States.

The Rose Bowl asked the state for an exception to the restriction, but was denied twice, including earlier this week. The restrictions have been in place since March and UCLA has played its home football games at the Rose Bowl since November, including its regular-season finale Saturday night.

"We know that the decision was not an easy one to make," said David Eads, Tournament of Roses CEO and Executive Director. "While we remain confident that a game could have been played at the Rose Bowl Stadium, as evident in the other collegiate and professional games taking place in the region, the

projection of COVID-19 cases in the region has continued on an upward trend.”

The other College Football Playoff semifinal on Jan. 1 will be held in New Orleans at the Sugar Bowl, with current plans to allow 3,000 fans at the Superdome. The championship game is scheduled for Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Hancock said it had not yet been determined if the semifinal at AT&T Stadium in Arlington would still be called the Rose Bowl. The name is part of licensing agreement and is co-owned by the Pasadena Tournament of Roses and the City of Pasadena.

If not, it would be the first time in more than 100 years no Rose Bowl game was played after a college football season. The first Rose Bowl was played Jan. 1, 1902.

The last time the Rose Bowl game was played outside Pasadena, California, was 1942. The game between Oregon State and Duke was played in Durham, North Carolina, because the West Coast was deemed unsafe after the attacks on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

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## Trump downplays Russia in first comments on hacking campaign

By JILL COLVIN and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contradicting his secretary of state and other top officials, President Donald Trump suggested without evidence that China — not Russia — may be behind the cyber espionage operation against the United States and tried to minimize its impact.

In his first comments on the breach, Trump scoffed at the focus on the Kremlin and downplayed the intrusions, which the nation’s cybersecurity agency has warned posed a “grave” risk to government and private networks.

“The Cyber Hack is far greater in the Fake News Media than in actuality. I have been fully briefed and everything is well under control,” Trump tweeted Saturday. He also claimed the media are “petrified” of “discussing the possibility that it may be China (it may!).”

There is no evidence to suggest that is the case. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said late Friday that Russia was “pretty clearly” behind the operation against the United States.

“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,” Pompeo said in the interview with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

Officials at the White House had been prepared to put out a statement Friday afternoon that accused Russia of being “the main actor” in the hack, but were told at the last minute to stand down, according to one U.S. official familiar with the conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.

It is not clear whether Pompeo got that message before his interview, but officials are now scrambling to figure out how to square the disparate accounts. The White House did not immediately respond to questions about the statement or the basis of Trump’s claims. The State Department also did not respond to questions about Pompeo’s remarks.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has refused to blame Russia for well-documented hostilities, including its interference in the 2016 election to help him get elected. He blamed his predecessor, Barack Obama, for Russia’s annexation of Crimea, has endorsed allowing Russia to return to the G-7 group of nations and has never taken the country to task for allegedly putting bounties on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Pompeo in the interview said the government was still “unpacking” the cyberespionage operation and some of it would likely remain classified.

“But suffice it to say there was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially

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embed code inside of U.S. government systems and it now appears systems of private companies and companies and governments across the world as well," he said.

Though Pompeo was the first Trump administration official to publicly blame Russia for the intrusion, cybersecurity experts and other U.S. officials have been clear over the past week that the operation appears to be the work of Russia. There has been no credible suggestion that any other country — including China — is responsible.

Democrats in Congress who have received classified briefings have also affirmed publicly that Russia, which in 2014 hacked the State Department and interfered through hacking in the 2016 presidential election, was behind it.

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 government and industry leaders.

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

While Trump downplayed the impact of the hacks, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has said it compromised federal agencies as well as "critical infrastructure." Homeland Security, the agency's parent department, defines such infrastructure as any "vital" assets to the U.S. or its economy, a broad category that could include power plants and financial institutions.

One U.S. official, speaking Thursday on condition of anonymity to discuss a matter that is under investigation, described the hack as severe and extremely damaging.

"This is looking like it's the worst hacking case in the history of America," the official said. "They got into everything."

Trump had been silent on the hacks before Saturday.

Deputy White House press secretary Brian Morgenstern on Friday declined to discuss the matter, but told reporters that national security adviser Robert O'Brien had 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.

"Rest assured we have the best and brightest working hard on it each and every single day," he said.

The Democratic leaders of four House committees given classified briefings by the administration on the hack have complained 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.

If the hackers are indeed from Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency, as experts believe, their resistance may be tenacious.

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The only way to be sure a network is clean is "to burn it down to the ground and rebuild it," said Bruce Schneier, a prominent security expert and Harvard fellow.

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 its U.S. government clients are rich with generals and spymasters.

Associated Press writers Frank Bajak in Boston, Eric Tucker in Washington and Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

## Concern among Muslims over halal status of COVID-19 vaccine

By VICTORIA MILKO AP Science Writer

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — In October, Indonesian diplomats and Muslim clerics stepped off a plane in China. While the diplomats were there to finalize deals to ensure millions of doses reached Indonesian citizens, the clerics had a much different concern: Whether the COVID-19 vaccine was permissible for use under Islamic law.

As companies race to develop a COVID-19 vaccine and countries scramble to secure doses, questions about the use of pork products — banned by some religious groups — has raised concerns about the possibility of disrupted immunization campaigns.

Pork-derived gelatin has been widely used as a stabilizer to ensure vaccines remain safe and effective during storage and transport. Some companies have worked for years to develop pork-free vaccines: Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis has produced a pork-free meningitis vaccine, while Saudi- and Malaysia-based AJ Pharma is currently working on one of their own.

But demand, existing supply chains, cost and the shorter shelf life of vaccines not containing porcine gelatin means the ingredient is likely to continue to be used in a majority of vaccines for years, said Dr. Salman Waqar, general secretary of the British Islamic Medical Association.

Spokespeople for Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca have said that pork products are not part of their COVID-19 vaccines. But limited supply and preexisting deals worth millions of dollars with other companies means that some countries with large Muslim populations, such as Indonesia, will receive vaccines that have not yet been certified to be gelatin-free.

This presents a dilemma for religious communities, including Orthodox Jews and Muslims, where the consumption of pork products is deemed religiously unclean, and how the ban is applied to medicine, he said.

"There's a difference of opinion amongst Islamic scholars as to whether you take something like pork gelatin and make it undergo a rigorous chemical transformation," Waqar said. "Is that still considered to be religiously impure for you to take?"

The majority consensus from past debates over pork gelatin use in vaccines is that it is permissible under Islamic law, as "greater harm" would occur if the vaccines weren't used, said Dr. Harunor Rashid, an associate professor at the University of Sydney.

There's a similar assessment by a broad consensus of religious leaders in the Orthodox Jewish community as well.

"According to the Jewish law, the prohibition on eating pork or using pork is only forbidden when it's a natural way of eating it," said Rabbi David Stav, chairman of Tzohar, a rabbinical organization in Israel.

If "it's injected into the body, not (eaten) through the mouth," then there is "no prohibition and no problem, especially when we are concerned about sicknesses," he said.

Yet there have been dissenting opinions on the issue — some with serious health consequences for Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, some 225 million.

In 2018, the Indonesian Ulema Council, the Muslim clerical body that issues certifications that a product is halal, or permissible under Islamic law, decreed that the measles and rubella vaccines were "haram,"

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or unlawful, because of the gelatin. Religious and community leaders began to urge parents to not allow their children to be vaccinated.

"Measles cases subsequently spiked, giving Indonesia the third-highest rate of measles in the world," said Rachel Howard, director of the health care market research group Research Partnership.

A decree was later issued by the Muslim clerical body saying it was permissible to receive the vaccine, but cultural taboos still led to continued low vaccination rates, Howard said.

"Our studies have found that some Muslims in Indonesia feel uncomfortable with accepting vaccinations containing these ingredients," even when the Muslim authority issues guidelines saying they are permitted, she said.

Governments have taken steps to address the issue. In Malaysia, where the halal status of vaccines has been identified as the biggest issue among Muslim parents, stricter laws have been enacted so that parents must vaccinate their children or face fines and jail time. In Pakistan, where there has been waning vaccine confidence for religious and political reasons, parents have been jailed for refusing to vaccinate their children against polio.

But with rising vaccine hesitancy and misinformation spreading around the globe, including in religious communities, Rashid said community engagement is "absolutely necessary."

"It could be disastrous," if there is not strong community engagement from governments and health care workers, he said.

In Indonesia, the government has already said it will include the Muslim clerical body in the COVID-19 vaccine procurement and certification process.

"Public communication regarding the halal status, price, quality and distribution must be well-prepared," Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in October.

While they were in China in the fall, the Indonesian clerics inspected China's Sinovac Biotech facilities, and clinical trials involving some 1,620 volunteers are also underway in Indonesia for the company's vaccine. The government has announced several COVID-19 vaccine procurement deals with the company totaling millions of doses.

Sinovac Biotech, as well as Chinese companies Sinopharm and CanSino Biologics — which all have COVID-19 vaccines in late-stage clinical trials and deals selling millions of doses around the world — did not respond to Associated Press requests for ingredient information.

In China, none of the COVID-19 vaccines has been granted final market approval, but more than 1 million health care workers and others who have been deemed at high risk of infection have received vaccines under emergency use permission. The companies have yet to disclose how effective the vaccines are or possible side effects.

Pakistan is late-stage clinical trials of the CanSino Biologics vaccine. Bangladesh previously had an agreement with Sinovac Biotech to conduct clinical trials in the country, but the trials have been delayed due to a funding dispute. Both countries have some of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

While health care workers on the ground in Indonesia are still largely engaged in efforts to contain the virus as numbers continue to surge, Waqar said government efforts to reassure Indonesians will be key to a successful immunization campaign as COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use.

But, he said, companies producing the vaccines must also be part of such community outreach.

"The more they are transparent, the more they are open and honest about their product, the more likely it is that there are communities that have confidence in the product and will be able to have informed discussions about what it is they want to do," he said.

"Because, ultimately, it is the choice of individuals."

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Associated Press writers Edna Tarigan in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

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## **Bills beat Broncos 48-19 for first AFC East crown since 1995**

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

DENVER (AP) — Donning gray caps that declared them AFC East champions for the first time since 1995, the Buffalo Bills acted like this was old hat.

"We're going to enjoy it on the flight back home, but we know the job ain't done yet," defensive end Jerry Hughes said after the Bills' 48-19 dismantling of the Denver Broncos officially ended New England's 11-year reign atop the division.

"We still have a lot more to accomplish," added Hughes, who contributed to the Bills' biggest blowout of 2020 with a 21-yard fumble return for a touchdown just 17 seconds after Josh Allen's second TD run.

Sporting blue T-shirts that read "Won but not done," the Bills (11-3) acted like the Patriots did all those years when they dominated the division and AFC East titles were mere stepping stones.

"It's great that we're able to do it the first time in 25 years," Allen said. "To be the team and to be the quarterback on the team that does it, obviously feels really good. At the same time, that's not our end goal. We set out to do this in order to get the chance to do what we really want to do, and that's to win a Super Bowl championship."

No disrespect to those celebrating, of course.

"I know our fans and Bills Mafia is probably going crazy right now," Allen added. "But there's still a lot on the table."

Buffalo coach Sean McDermott said he received a congratulatory email from Marv Levy, the last Bills coach to win the AFC East.

But he, too, was looking beyond winning a division title.

"We have more work to do," McDermott said.

Allen, who wasn't even born the last time the Bills won the division in 1995, ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more against the team that bypassed him in the 2018 NFL draft despite his starring at windy Wyoming, just 2½ hours north of Denver.

Asked if the snub by Broncos general manager John Elway, who chose linebacker Bradley Chubb instead, made this milestone moment any more meaningful, Allen responded, "I'm where I'm supposed to be."

While the Bills have turned things around in Allen's three seasons, the Broncos (5-9) continue to founder. This loss secured their fourth consecutive losing season, something that hadn't happened in Denver since the franchise's futile early days in the 1960s and early '70s.

They also became the first team ever to go five years without making the playoffs following a Super Bowl title.

Allen threw for 359 yards, hitting Stefon Diggs 11 times for 147 yards before he suffered a foot injury in the fourth quarter, and Cole Beasley eight times for 112 yards.

Allen also tied Jack Kemp's record of 25 career touchdown runs with his second TD scamper, a 1-yard keeper to the right that was set up by Andre Roberts' 55-yard return of Taylor Russilino's short second-half kickoff.

After Allen's 1-yard TD run to start the second half, cornerback Tre'Davious White strip-sacked Drew Lock on Denver's first offensive play. Defensive end Jerry Hughes scooped up the ball at the 21 and weaved his way through several Broncos to make it 35-13.

Allen dismantled Denver's makeshift secondary that had lost five cornerbacks in two weeks, picking on De'Vante Bausby all afternoon while completing 28 of 40 passes. Rookie cornerback Michael Ojemudia held his own but was ejected in the third quarter for slapping Bills rookie receiver Gabriel Davis.

Allen threw touchdown passes to Dawson Knox and Jake Kumerow, who became the 13th Bills player to catch a TD pass, tying an NFL record held by seven other teams.

Lock hit tight end Noah Fant with a 6-yard touchdown toss with 5 seconds left in the first half, but Russilino missed the extra point. He also missed the 51-yard field goal attempt way to the right on Denver's opening drive.

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"I thought offensively we had a pretty good first half there," Broncos coach Vic Fangio said. "If we make the field goal and extra point for 17 points, you're looking at a tight game."

## COVID KICKER

The Broncos turned to Russolino, whose vagabond career included stops in the XFL, the Canadian Football League and even the Chinese arena league after Brandon McManus went on the COVID-19 reserve list.

In addition to his short second-half kickoff to the Buffalo 4 that Roberts returned to Broncos territory, Russolino missed a 51-yard field goal and two extra points on a windy day that didn't adversely affect Bills kicker Tyler Bass, who made both field goal attempts and all six extra points.

"All four of those were disappointing," Fangio said, "because he had a really good day in practice the other day when he was practicing and I was encouraged by him. There was some wind out there, but it didn't bother their kicker. Yeah, I thought he was going to kick better than he did."

## INJURIES

Bills: Along with Diggs, PR Andre Roberts injured his lower back in the third quarter, and OL Daryl Williams left with a groin injury. A person with direct knowledge of the injury told The Associated Press that Diggs' foot was fine. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because McDermott provided no injury updates after the game, when he said he was "just praying that everyone turns out to be healthy."

Broncos OLB Bradley Chubb (ankle) and RB Royce Freeman (hip) were hurt in the second half.

## UP NEXT:

Bills: visit the New England Patriots for a Monday night game on Dec. 28.

Broncos: visit the Los Angeles Chargers, who they rallied from a 21-point deficit to beat on Nov. 1 with a touchdown as time ran out.

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AP Sports Writer John Wawrow contributed.

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## AP sources: Trump floats Sidney Powell as special counsel

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JILL COLVIN and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump floated naming lawyer Sidney Powell, who was booted from his campaign's legal team after pushing unfounded conspiracy theories, as a special counsel investigating allegations of voter fraud as he grasps for straws to stay in power.

During a Friday meeting at the White House, Trump went as far as discussing getting Powell security clearance, according to two people familiar with the meeting, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private conversation.

That Trump is even entertaining the idea of installing Powell underscores the increasingly desperate steps he has been weighing as he tries to reverse the results of the Nov. 3. election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Trump has been entertaining conspiracy theories and outlandish schemes to try to remain in office, egged on by allies like former national security adviser Michael Flynn and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the president's personal attorney.

It is unclear whether Trump intends to try to move forward with the effort to install Powell. Under federal law, the U.S. attorney general, not the president, is responsible for appointing special counsels. And numerous Republicans, from outgoing Attorney General William Barr to governors and state election officials, have said over and over again that there is no evidence of the kind of mass voter fraud that Trump has been baselessly alleging in the weeks since he lost. The Friday meeting was first reported by The New York Times.

In addition to losing the popular vote by more than 7 million votes, Trump lost the Electoral College decisively to Biden, 306 electoral votes to 232.

Trump's campaign and his allies have now filed roughly 50 lawsuits alleging widespread voting fraud

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and almost all have been dismissed or dropped. Trump has lost before judges of both political parties, including some he appointed, and some of the strongest rebukes have come from conservative Republicans. The Supreme Court has also refused to take up two cases — decisions that Trump has scorned.

With no further tenable legal recourse, Trump has been fuming and peppering allies for options as he refuses to accept his loss.

That includes Giuliani, who during the Friday meeting pushed Trump to seize voting machines in his hunt for evidence of fraud. The Department of Homeland Security made clear, however, that it had no authority to do so. It is also unclear what that would accomplish.

Barr told The Associated Press in an interview earlier this month that the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security have looked into claims that voting machines “were programmed essentially to skew the election results ... and so far, we haven’t seen anything to substantiate that.” Paper ballots are also retained under federal law and have been used to verify results, including in Georgia, which performed two audits of the vote tally using paper-ballot backups.

Flynn, whom Trump recently pardoned for lying to the FBI, went even further, suggesting Trump could impose martial law and use the military to re-run the election. Trump’s chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and White House counsel Pat Cipollone, voiced their objections, the people familiar with the meeting said.

Powell was initially part of the president’s campaign legal team, but was booted after a bizarre news conference with Giuliani in which she made a series of outlandish claims of election fraud, including an assertion that election software was created in Venezuela “at the direction of Hugo Chavez” — the Venezuelan president who died in 2013.

In interviews and appearances, Powell continued to make misleading statements about the voting process, unfurled unsupported and complex conspiracy theories involving communist regimes and vowed to “blow up” Georgia with a “biblical” court filing.

Trump’s team soon announced it had cut ties with Powell. “She is not a member of the Trump Legal Team. She is also not a lawyer for the President in his personal capacity,” Giuliani and another Trump lawyer, Jenna Ellis, said in a statement.

Dominion Voting Systems, a particular target of Powell’s, has also demanded she retract the “wild” and “knowingly baseless” claims she has made about the voting machine company and threatened a defamation lawsuit.

Since parting ways with the campaign, Powell has continued to file litigation on Trump’s behalf, teaming up with conservative attorney L. Lin Wood in Georgia.

Powell and the White House did not respond to requests for comment Saturday.

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Lemire reported from New York. Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo contributed to this report.

## Fight over Fed powers stalls \$900 billion aid plan

By ANDREW TAYLOR and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An arcane battle over emergency Federal Reserve powers foiled efforts on Saturday to lock down an agreement on an almost \$1 trillion COVID-19 economic relief package. The deadlock was just the latest stumble in a partisan, months-long fight over pandemic relief and the lack of progress is backing lawmakers once again up against a government shutdown deadline Sunday night.

Lawmakers on both sides said a provision by Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., that would curb emergency Federal Reserve powers was the sticking point. Republicans are insisting on the Toomey plan, while Democrats are adamantly against it. After some posturing earlier Saturday, efforts intensified at forging a compromise, and Toomey met twice with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to try to iron it out.

“I think that we should be able to get a deal done,” Toomey said after the first meeting

“I think they agreed to go back and write down what they were saying, so everybody can read it and exchange paper,” said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The latest pratfall likely upends hopes for a House vote Sunday and quick Senate action on an agreement that’s virtually ready save for Toomey’s provision.

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"That has to be resolved. And then everything will fall into place," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. "It's a very significant difference."

A new deadline of midnight Sunday for a government shutdown served as a backstop for the tortuous negotiations, which were being conducted in secret largely among the top four leaders in Congress.

"We need to conclude our talks, draft legislation, and land this plane," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Toomey defended his controversial provision in a floor speech, saying the emergency powers were designed to stabilize capital markets at the height of the COVID panic this spring and are expiring at the end of the month anyway. The language would block the Biden administration from restarting them.

Even Toomey said this week that his provision "could be seen as redundant," but neither he nor his Democratic adversaries were backing down from the fight, though compromise language was being shuttled back and forth.

At issue are Fed emergency programs, launched amid the pandemic this spring, that provided loans to small and mid-size businesses and bought state and local government bonds. Those bond purchases have made it easier for those governments to borrow, at a time when their finances are under pressure from job losses and health costs stemming from the pandemic.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said last month that those programs, along with two that purchased corporate bonds, would close at the end of the year, prompting an initial objection by the Fed. Under the Dodd-Frank financial reform law passed after the Great Recession, the Fed can only set up emergency programs with the support of the treasury secretary.

But in Mnuchin's letter closing the programs, he said the Fed could request that future treasury secretaries renew them. Fed Chair Jerome Powell echoed that view Wednesday at a news conference. Yet Toomey's language would bar the Fed from doing so.

That prompted a rare statement Saturday from former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, who oversaw a dramatic expansion of the Fed's emergency lending during the Great Recession, which most economists credit with helping end the financial crisis.

It is "vital that the Federal Reserve's ability to respond promptly to damaging disruptions in credit markets not be circumscribed," Bernanke said. "The relief act should ensure, at least, that the Federal Reserve's emergency lending authorities, as they stood before the passage of the CARES Act (in March), remain fully intact and available to respond to future crises."

Democrats in Congress also say that Toomey is trying to limit the Fed's ability to boost the economy, just as Biden takes office.

"This is about existing authorities that the Fed has had for a very long time, to be able to use in an emergency," said Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. "It's about a lending authority for helping small businesses, state government, local government in the middle of a crisis."

Toomey disputed that charge, saying his proposal "is emphatically not a broad overhaul of the Federal Reserve's emergency lending authority."

The massive package would wrap much of Capitol Hill's unfinished 2020 business into a take-it-or-leave-it measure that promises to be a foot thick or more. House lawmakers will probably have only a few hours to study it before voting as early as Sunday night. A Senate vote would follow, possibly on Monday. One more short-term funding bill will be needed to avoid the looming deadline — or a partial shutdown of non-essential agencies would start on Monday.

An agreement in principle Saturday would be a precursor to more hours of translating compromises into detailed legislation. Lawmakers are eager to exit Washington and close out a tumultuous year.

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 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

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otherwise expire right after Christmas. It includes \$600 direct payments to individuals; vaccine distribution funds and money for renters, schools, the Postal Service and people needing food aid.

It would be 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 new relief aid would be added to a \$1.4 trillion governmentwide appropriations bill that would fund 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.

## The Latest: Texas virus death toll rises above 25,000

The Associated Press undefined

HOUSTON — Texas on Saturday surpassed 25,000 deaths from the coronavirus pandemic, the second-highest total in the country.

State health officials reported 272 new deaths due to COVID-19, bringing Texas' death toll to 25,226.

Cases of COVID-19 and virus-related hospitalizations continue to rise in the state. On Saturday, the state reported 9,796 people hospitalized with the virus, an increase of nearly 23% over the last month.

Officials reported 12,914 new cases on Saturday. That comes two days after the state set its one-day record of new cases — 16,864 — on Thursday.

The increase in cases and hospitalizations comes as state health officials announced Friday that Texas will receive 620,000 more doses of COVID-19 vaccines over the next week. More than 224,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine have already been delivered in Texas.

### THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

The United States reached a record of nearly a quarter million coronavirus cases reported in 24 hours. An additional 2,814 people died nationwide, pushing the death toll to more than 313,000. Some areas of California are "just right at that cusp of getting overrun," says Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert.

The Army general in charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines out across the U.S. apologized for "miscommunication" with states over the number of doses to be delivered in the early stages.

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

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

SANTA FE, N.M. — New Mexico on Saturday reported 1,442 additional known COVID-19 cases and 27 additional deaths.

The statewide totals increased to 128,930 cases and 2,155 as seven-day rolling averages for daily new cases dropped and daily deaths rose over the last two weeks.

According to data from Johns Hopkins University and The COVID Tracking Project, the rolling average of daily new cases dropped from 1,869 on Dec. 4 to 1,542.1 on Friday while the rolling average of deaths rose from 28.9 to 34.1.

A pandemic-high 48 daily deaths were reported Thursday as Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said daily deaths could grow even higher over the year-end holidays.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- The 2021 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race will be about 140 miles shorter than normal as a result of complications stemming from the coronavirus pandemic.

Race officials announced Friday that teams will no longer embark on a 1,000-mile journey to Nome but instead will take a roughly 860-mile loop that starts and ends in Willow.

Every musher must also test negative for the coronavirus before the race begins. They will also be

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tested again during the race.

Facial coverings and social distancing will be mandated at checkpoints.

The race is scheduled to begin on March 6.

ATLANTA — U.S. health officials closely tracking possible side effects of the first authorized COVID-19 vaccine say they have seen six cases of severe allergic reaction out of more than a quarter million shots given.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said more than 272,000 shots of the Pfizer vaccine were given nationwide as of Saturday morning. The half-dozen cases of allergic reaction were reported as of Friday night, and included one person with a history of vaccination reactions.

Health officials are keeping close watch for such side effects.

U.S. vaccine recipients are supposed to hang around after their injections in case signs of an allergy appear. The CDC says all cases occurred within the recommended observation window and were promptly treated.

The numbers were discussed at a meeting of a committee that advises the CDC on vaccines. The group on Saturday endorsed Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, which was granted emergency authorization on Friday.

Less severe side effects have also been rare. Among the first 215,000 people to get vaccinated in the U.S., fewer than 1.5% of them had problems that left them unable to perform their normal activities or required medical care.

Many vaccines can cause temporary discomfort, such as a sore arm or certain flu-like symptoms. COVID-19 vaccines tend to cause more of those reactions than a flu shot, and some hospitals are staggering the times their employees get vaccinated to avoid staffing problems.

MONROE, La. -- Louisiana's newest member of Congress was admitted to a hospital for monitoring on Saturday, one day after announcing that he had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Republican Rep.-elect Luke Letlow was admitted as a precaution, spokesman Andrew Bautsch told The News-Star. Bautsch also is fighting the disease, the newspaper said.

Letlow, who is from the northeast Louisiana town of Start, was elected earlier this month to the 5th District seat representing northeast and central Louisiana. He is scheduled to be sworn in next month.

He had announced Friday that he had been infected by the coronavirus and was quarantining at home.

Letlow was the third high-profile Louisiana politician in two days to say he had been infected. Democratic U.S. Rep. Cedric Richmond, who is leaving to become a member of President-elect Joe Biden's White House staff, and Republican Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser both said Thursday that they had tested positive for the virus.

Two Republicans in Louisiana's congressional delegation — U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy and U.S. Rep. Mike Johnson — have publicly said they've recovered from the disease.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The United States added a record of nearly a quarter million coronavirus cases in the past day.

Health experts says the record could increase as cases surge in various parts of the country and health care systems struggle to keep up.

Along with 249,709 new cases, there were an additional 2,814 reported deaths nationwide in the past 24 hours. That pushed the confirmed U.S. death toll past 313,000, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University.

California led the case surge with 48,221 more infections. Almost 17,000 people are hospitalized in California and health officials are scrambling to find enough beds for patients. Texas, Florida, New York and Tennessee all registered more than 10,400 new cases.

The seven-day rolling average for new cases in the U.S. rose in the past two weeks from 183,787 to 219,324 on Friday, an increase of nearly 20%.

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Health officials are concerned about future cases brought on by travel and gatherings during the holidays and New Year's.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — State health officials say 2,711 COVID-19 vaccinations have been administered so far in Tennessee, the worst state in the country for new cases per capita.

The Tennessee Department of Health on Friday unveiled its online vaccination dashboard, which will be updated on Tuesdays and Fridays. Tennessee frontline hospital health care workers on Thursday began receiving the Pfizer vaccine.

There were 1,640 new cases per 100,000 people in Tennessee in the past two weeks, which ranks first in the nation, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins. The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths rose from 50 on Dec. 4 to 74 on Friday.

Republican Gov. Bill Lee has declined to require a mask order. Only a dozen other states lack a state-wide mask requirement.

PHOENIX — Arizona residents are being told to “shrink their circles” of personal contacts and gatherings to help the state's health care system handle coronavirus cases.

Arizona reported a record 4,104 COVID-19 related hospitalizations. It also added more than 5,500 coronavirus cases on Friday.

State and local governments need to do more to reduce the coronavirus' spread, because one of Banner Health's hospitals is using a refrigerated truck trailer to augment its now full morgue, says Dr. Marjorie Bessel, the hospital chain's chief clinical officer.

Only 8% of all beds and intensive care unit beds were available, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

The Department of Health Services reported 118 more deaths, increasing the statewide totals to 448,231 confirmed cases and 7,937 confirmed deaths.

WASHINGTON — With coronavirus numbers setting new daily records, the nation's capital is temporarily suspending all indoor dining in restaurants over the holidays.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser issued an executive order Friday night banning indoor dining for three weeks, starting Wednesday at 10 p.m. and extending through Jan. 15.

The District of Columbia will remain in phase two of its reopening plan, and the government described the move as a “holiday pause.”

The order also extends Washington's public health emergency through March 31 and orders all museums to close. The entire Smithsonian network of museums, which includes the National Zoo, already shut down voluntarily in late November.

WASHINGTON — An Army general in charge of COVID-19 vaccines apologized Saturday for “miscommunication” with states on the number of early doses delivered.

Gen. Gustavo Perna's remarks came a day after a second vaccine was added in the fight against the coronavirus. Governors in more than a dozen states says the federal government has told them next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be less than originally projected.

“I want to take personal responsibility for the miscommunication,” he said. “I know that's not done much these days. But I am responsible. ... This is a herculean effort and we are not perfect.”

Perna says the government now is on track to get approximately 20 million doses to states by the first week of January, a combination of the newly approved Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. He says 2.9 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses have been delivered so far.

The coronavirus has killed more than 313,000 people in the U.S., the highest death toll in the world.

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says Christmas gatherings can't go ahead and non-

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essential shops must close in London and much of southern England.

Johnson announced the capital and other areas in southern England currently under Tier 3 will move to a stricter Tier 4 that requires non-essential shops, hairdressers and indoor leisure venues to close after the end of business hours Saturday.

Johnson says a planned five-day easing of socializing rules allowing up to three households to meet in "Christmas bubbles" will be canceled for Tier 4 areas. No mixing of households will be allowed except under limited conditions outside in public places.

For the rest of England, people can meet in Christmas bubbles for just one day instead of Dec. 23-27.

U.K. officials reported another 28,507 confirmed cases on Friday and 489 deaths within 28 days of testing positive for the virus.

The U.K. has reported 1.9 million coronavirus cases. It has Europe's second-highest confirmed COVID-19 death toll at 66,600 and sixth-highest overall.

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — An Associated Press analysis shows states spent more than \$7 billion this spring buying personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, gowns and ventilators.

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.

The data was obtained from states through open-records requests. State governments were scrambling for supplies at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Some states paid as much as \$11 for individual N95 masks, which previously cost around 50 cents before the pandemic.

Supplies often went to the highest bidder, even if they'd 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.

BERLIN — Switzerland has approved the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer and German pharmaceutical company BioNTech.

The country's health agency says the vaccine had been approved for the small Alpine country after a careful examination by expert teams. The agency did not say when vaccinations in Switzerland would begin.

The approval comes shortly after Britain, Canada, the United States and other countries allowed the use of the vaccine in their respective countries.

The director of Swissmedic said "Thanks to the rolling process and our flexible teams we could quickly decide and fully accommodate the three most important requirements security, efficacy and quality."

Raimund Bruhin added that, "The safety of the patients is a required condition especially regarding the approval of vaccines."

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan lawmakers and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer have agreed to a \$465 million pandemic spending plan, including relief payments to businesses and workers struggling to stay afloat because of the coronavirus and government restrictions to curb its spread.

The legislation received overwhelming Senate support late Friday and is expected to win House passage on Monday before legislators adjourn for the year. Nearly half of the funding would be used to continue, through March, a maximum 26 weeks of unemployment benefits in a year instead of 20 weeks.

The bill would provide \$45 million in assistance to employees who have been laid off or seen their hours cut due to restrictions under a state health department order that has prohibited indoor restaurant dining and closed entertainment venues. A worker could get up to \$1,650.

Small businesses affected by the recent orders would receive \$55 million in grants — up to \$20,000 if they had to close, \$15,000 if they partially closed. Certain concert and other live-entertainment sites could qualify for \$40,000 as part of a separate \$3.5 million grant program.

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BOSTON -- Massachusetts expects to receive 20% fewer doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine this year after the federal government reduced its allotment, state officials say.

The state joins more than a dozen others that have been told their vaccine shipments will be smaller than planned in coming weeks. Instead of receiving 180,000, Massachusetts now expects to get 145,000.

Republican Gov. Charlie Baker said he hasn't received an explanation for the cutback.

"We're certainly frustrated," Baker said at a COVID-19 briefing on Friday. "We're working to get clarity on what this means, what happened and how that bump will be dealt with along the way."

Baker said he expects to get more answers during a call with federal officials next week. Despite the reduced allotment, Baker said he expects the state to have "more than enough" doses in the first months of 2021.

NEWARK — New Jersey will start to vaccinate its nursing homes a week later than other states because the state missed a deadline by a day with Operation Warp Speed, the state's top health official said Friday.

Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli said the "sheer volume" of information required for over 650 facilities led the state to miss a Dec. 7 deadline. That means New Jersey won't begin vaccinations at its long-term care centers until Dec. 28, she said.

New Jersey's COVID-19 outbreak has ravaged nursing homes, with 7,430 deaths, including residents and staff. That's about 46% of the overall death toll in the state.

## AP Exclusive: MLB payrolls drop nearly \$2.5B in pandemic

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Major League Baseball payrolls plunged to \$1.75 billion during the pandemic-shortened season from \$4.22 billion, and the World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers led with \$98.6 million — the smallest for the top spender in 20 years.

Base wages for 40-man rosters tumbled to \$1.54 billion, according to information sent from Major League Baseball to teams on Friday night and obtained by The Associated Press. That was down from \$3.99 billion in 2019.

Prorated portions of signing bonuses totaled \$120.6 million, down slightly from \$122.8 million. Earned bonuses fell to \$25 million from \$26.9 million.

Buyouts of unexercised 2021 options came to \$58.2 million, more than double the \$26.9 million for buyouts of unexercised 2020 options, a sign of expense-cutting amid the revenue loss.

Los Angeles won its first title since 1988 as it topped spending for the first time since 2017, when the Dodgers led for the fourth year in a row. The total had not been that low of the top spender since the New York Yankees in 2000 at \$95.3 million.

The Yankees, at \$83.6 million, were No. 2 for the second straight season. The New York Mets were third at \$83.4 million in their final season of ownership by the Wilpon and Katz families, up from 12th and their highest since they were second in 2009. The Mets were purchased last month by hedge fund manager Steven Cohen, who is boosting payroll higher for next year.

Houston was fourth at \$81.4 million, up from eighth, followed by the Chicago Cubs at \$80.6 million, down from third.

San Diego was sixth at \$76.3 million, followed by Washington (\$76.2 million), Texas (\$75.2 million) and the Los Angeles Angels (\$69.9 million),

Boston, two years removed from a World Series title, dropped from first to 13th at \$63.3 million after trading stars Mookie Betts and David Price to the Dodgers.

AL champion Tampa Bay was 28th at \$29.4 million, ahead of only Pittsburgh (\$24.1 million) and Baltimore (\$23.5 million).

Base salaries were reduced by 60/162 due the shortened schedule as part of an agreement between MLB and the players' association following the interruption of spring training by the novel coronavirus. The season's start was delayed from March 26 to July 23, and each team's schedule cut from 162 games to 60.

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If full salaries had been paid and a complete schedule played with the usual average of callups from the minors, payrolls likely would have increased by 4% from 2019.

While the luxury tax was suspended, three teams projected to finish over the \$208 million tax threshold, based on full payrolls by average annual value and including benefits and a COVID credit of at least \$1.5 million per club: the Yankees (\$239.8 million), Houston (\$224.3 million) and the Chicago Cubs (\$216.3 million).

New York and Chicago, both over for the second straight year, would have paid at 30% of the amount above \$208 million up until \$228 million, and the Yankees would have paid 42% in the amount over \$228 million. Houston would have paid at a 20% amount on its overage.

The Yankees avoided what would have been a full tax bill of \$10,965,773 according to AP's calculation, the Astros \$3,263,801 and the Cubs \$2,480,775. If they had paid on a prorated 60/162 share, the Yankees would have owed \$4,061,397, the Astros \$1,208,815 and the Cubs \$918,805.

Still, each of those teams will have the compensation rate of a luxury tax-paying club if it signs a free agent who turned down a qualifying offer from another team: Each would forfeit its second- and fifth-highest picks in the 2021 amateur draft and lose \$1 million of international amateur signing bonus pool allotment.

Philadelphia was just under the tax threshold at \$207.3 million and the Dodgers at \$204.6 million.

Boston dropped to \$184.9 million after paying a Red Sox record \$13.4 million luxury tax in 2019, when the team failed to make the playoffs.

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

## Pentagon plan on cyber split draws strong Hill criticism

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon is proposing to end an arrangement in which a single military officer leads two of the nation's main cybersecurity organizations, a move that a leading Democrat said Saturday makes him "profoundly concerned" amid a large-scale hacking campaign on U.S. government computer systems.

Rep. Adam Smith, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a letter to acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller that he objects to the way the Pentagon is going about splitting off U.S. Cyber Command from the National Security Agency.

Both organizations currently are headed by Army Gen. Paul Nakasone, an arrangement known as "dual-hatting."

"Any action to sever the dual-hat relationship could have grave impacts on our national security, especially during a time that the country is wrestling with what may be the most damaging cyberattack in our country's history," Smith wrote.

Smith was referring to revelations that elite hackers gained access to U.S. government computer systems and likely purloined a trove of delicate secrets over a monthlong period before being detected. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that Russia was "pretty clearly" behind the hack, which is ongoing. On Saturday, President Donald Trump suggested without evidence that China — not Russia — may be behind the hack and tried to minimize its impact.

A U.S. official confirmed Saturday that the Pentagon has a plan for separating the National Security Agency and Cyber Command. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an internal matter not publicly announced.

In his letter to Miller, Smith said the Pentagon has not met conditions set by the 2017 defense bill for severing the NSA from Cyber Command. Those conditions include certification by the secretary of defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that ending the "dual-hat" arrangement will not hurt national security.

Smith sent a similar letter to Gen. Mark A. Milley, the Joint Chiefs chairman.

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A spokesman for Milley, Col. Dave Butler, said Milley has “not officially reviewed or endorsed the proposal” for splitting the two organizations.

The notion of splitting NSA from Cyber Command goes back to the Obama administration, which proposed to elevate the status of Cyber Command by making it a unified military command, taking it from under the purview of U.S. Strategic Command. The move reflected growing concern about cyber security.

That move was approved by President Donald Trump in 2017, and it was foreseen that at some point Cyber Command would split away from the NSA, although such a move had strong opponents in Congress.

It’s not clear who the Trump administration might install as head of the NSA if it were split from Cyber Command before President-elect Joe Biden takes office Jan. 20.

Smith questioned the legality and timing of the Pentagon’s proposal to split the organizations.

“I am deeply concerned about measures to terminate the dual-hat structure and request that you immediately consult with the House Armed Services Committee regarding any potential efforts to take such action,” Smith wrote in his letter to Milley, which Smith made public on Saturday.

“Further, given that no assessment has been completed and no certification has been issued, I remind you that any action to terminate the dual-hat relationship with NSA and Cyber Command is not only inadvisable, but is contrary to law.”

## Trump downplays Russia in first comments on hacking campaign

By JILL COLVIN and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contradicting his secretary of state and other top officials, President Donald Trump on Saturday suggested without evidence that China — not Russia — may be behind the cyber espionage operation against the United States and tried to minimize its impact.

In his first comments on the breach, Trump scoffed at the focus on the Kremlin and downplayed the intrusions, which the nation’s cybersecurity agency has warned posed a “grave” risk to government and private networks.

“The Cyber Hack is far greater in the Fake News Media than in actuality. I have been fully briefed and everything is well under control,” Trump tweeted. He also claimed the media are “petrified” of “discussing the possibility that it may be China (it may!).”

There is no evidence to suggest that is the case. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said late Friday that Russia was “pretty clearly” behind the operation against the United States.

“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,” Pompeo said in the interview with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

Officials at the White House had been prepared to put out a statement Friday afternoon that accused Russia of being “the main actor” in the hack, but were told at the last minute to stand down, according to one U.S. official familiar with the conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.

It is not clear whether Pompeo got that message before his interview, but officials are now scrambling to figure out how to square the disparate accounts. The White House did not immediately respond to questions about the statement or the basis of Trump’s claims. The State Department also did not respond to questions about Pompeo’s remarks.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has refused to blame Russia for well-documented hostilities, including its interference in the 2016 election to help him get elected. He blamed his predecessor, Barack Obama, for Russia’s annexation of Crimea, has endorsed allowing Russia to return to the G-7 group of nations and has never taken the country to task for allegedly putting bounties on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Pompeo in the interview said the government was still “unpacking” the cyberespionage operation and some of it would likely remain classified.

“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

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companies and governments across the world as well," he said.

Though Pompeo was the first Trump administration official to publicly blame Russia for the intrusion, cybersecurity experts and other U.S. officials have been clear over the past week that the operation appears to be the work of Russia. There has been no credible suggestion that any other country — including China — is responsible.

Democrats in Congress who have received classified briefings have also affirmed publicly that Russia, which in 2014 hacked the State Department and interfered through hacking in the 2016 presidential election, was behind it.

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 government and industry leaders.

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

While Trump downplayed the impact of the hacks, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has said it compromised federal agencies as well as "critical infrastructure." Homeland Security, the agency's parent department, defines such infrastructure as any "vital" assets to the U.S. or its economy, a broad category that could include power plants and financial institutions.

One U.S. official, speaking Thursday on condition of anonymity to discuss a matter that is under investigation, described the hack as severe and extremely damaging.

"This is looking like it's the worst hacking case in the history of America," the official said. "They got into everything."

Trump had been silent on the hacks before Saturday.

Deputy White House press secretary Brian Morgenstern on Friday declined to discuss the matter, but told reporters that national security adviser Robert O'Brien had 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.

"Rest assured we have the best and brightest working hard on it each and every single day," he said.

The Democratic leaders of four House committees given classified briefings by the administration on the hack have complained 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.

If the hackers are indeed from Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency, as experts believe, their resistance may be tenacious.

The only way to be sure a network is clean is "to burn it down to the ground and rebuild it," said Bruce Schneier, a prominent security expert and Harvard fellow.

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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 its U.S. government clients are rich with generals and spymasters.

Associated Press writers Frank Bajak in Boston, Eric Tucker in Washington and Bobby Caina Calvan in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

## One family's virus nightmare reflects deepening US crisis

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

First, Theresa Pirozzi's 85-year-old dad got sick and was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. Days later, her mom was so weak she could barely walk. Now, instead of getting ready for Christmas, Pirozzi is anxiously awaiting updates from the hospital where both of her parents are in intensive care with the coronavirus.

"I'm not putting up decorations in here. It's just not right, right now," Pirozzi said from her parents' home in Oak Park, California. "I'm physically ill from worry."

The couple are emblematic of the crisis deepening at an alarming rate in California, where hospitals are being stretched to their limits as the virus explodes across the state. Nearly 17,000 people were hospitalized with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infections as of Friday and a state model that uses current data to forecast future trends shows the number could reach an unfathomable 75,000 by mid-January.

With California's more than 48,000 new cases leading the way, the United States as a whole added a record 249,709 new cases of COVID-19 in one day, Johns Hopkins University reported Saturday. The death toll now stands at more than 315,000.

Texas, Florida, New York and Tennessee all recorded more than 10,400 new cases each. Over the past two weeks, the seven-day rolling average for new cases in the U.S. jumped to 219,324 daily from 183,787, an increase of almost 20%.

Cases were on the rise before Thanksgiving, and holiday gatherings sent them even higher. Health officials now fear the increase will only be compounded through Christmas and New Year's. In many places, health officials say, people tired of wearing face masks and staying away from others are simply disregarding suggested precautions.

While federal regulators have approved two vaccines to combat the illness and doses already have been given to thousands of people, mainly health care workers, widespread vaccinations for the general public aren't expected before spring.

Several states have said the federal government told them that next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be smaller than originally projected. The Army general in charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines out across the U.S. apologized Saturday for "miscommunication" with states over the number of doses to be delivered in the early stages of distribution.

Of the more than 272,000 shots of the Pfizer vaccine that had been given as of Saturday morning, U.S. health officials said they had seen six cases of severe allergic reaction. One of the half-dozen people had a history of vaccination reactions, they said.

In a potential complication, England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, said Saturday the U.K. had informed the World Health Organization that officials believe a new variant of the coronavirus can spread more rapidly. Britain's health secretary said this week that the new variant was believed to be linked to the rapid surge of COVID-19 cases in south and southeastern England.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed stricter restrictions on the region Saturday, meaning millions must cancel Christmas get-togethers and most shops have to close in London before the holiday. New but less stringent restrictions were imposed on the U.S. capital, with indoor dining in restaurants banned starting next week through mid-January.

In California, hospitals across the state are buckling under a surge of patients and morgue space is run-

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ning low. Hospitals are running out of intensive care unit beds and patients are being cared for at several overflow locations. In some places, the sick are being triaged in tents and ambulances are backing up outside emergency rooms because there is nowhere to put patients.

When Pirozzi's father, Jerry, arrived at the Los Robles Regional Medical Center in Thousands Oaks, it was so packed with patients that he had to spend two days in the emergency room before an intensive care bed opened up, Pirozzi said. She kept calling the hospital, but ER nurses told her they had no rooms, she said.

"I'm sure that was very difficult for him, being confused, not being able to breathe, being alone," Pirozzi said. "They're doing the best they can, but they are just completely stressed and overworked."

Her mother, Shirley, was taken to the same hospital four days later and was moved into a separate room, she said. Pirozzi said her family hasn't told Jerry that his wife of more than 57 years is also hospitalized; she fears that would only make him worse.

"I want him to be a little stronger so it doesn't roll him backwards," she said. "Because I know all he cares about is his bride."

Pirozzi said both of her parents have been having panic attacks. Since family members can't visit, she has been delivering written notes in a plastic bag that she asks nurses to read to them.

She pleaded with the public to take the virus seriously.

"I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy, having them both go down within five or seven days of each other," she said. "Do whatever you can to protect yourself because you don't want to have this happen to you."

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press writer Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama, contributed to this report.

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

## **Biden introduces his climate team, says 'no time to waste'**

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Just as the United States has needed a unified, national response to COVID-19, it needs one for dealing with climate change, President-elect Joe Biden said Saturday as he rolled out key members of his environmental team.

"We literally have no time to waste," Biden told reporters as introduced his choices.

The approach is a shift from Donald Trump's presidency, which has been marked by efforts to boost oil and gas production while rolling back government efforts intended to safeguard the environment. The incoming Biden team will try to undo or block many of the current administration's initiatives. There also will be an emphasis on looking out for the low-income, working class and minority communities hit hardest by fossil fuel pollution and climate change.

In his remarks, Biden stressed the diversity of an emerging team that he described as "brilliant, qualified, tested and they are barrier-busting."

"Already there are more people of color in our Cabinet than any Cabinet ever, more women than ever," said the former vice president, who has promised to assemble a group of department leaders who reflect the diversity of America.

The nominees Biden introduced Saturday had compelling personal stories that they cited as guiding them if confirmed by the Senate.

New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland would be the first Native American to lead the Interior Department, which has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for generations. She said her life has not been easy. She struggled with homelessness and relied on food stamps at one point.

"This moment is profound when we consider the fact that a former secretary of the Interior once pro-

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claimed his goal, was to quote, 'civilize or exterminate' us," Haaland said. "I'm a living testament to the failure of that horrific ideology."

Haaland was referring to Alexander H.H. Stuart, who said that in 1851.

Former two-term Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm is in line to be energy secretary. She described arriving in the U.S. at age 4 and brought from Canada by a family "seeking opportunity." She said her father found work as a bank teller and retired as head of the bank.

"It's because of my family's journey and my experience in fighting for hardworking Michigan families that I have become obsessed, obsessed with gaining good-paying jobs in America in a global economy," Granholm said.

North Carolina official Michael Regan would be the first African American man to run the Environmental Protection Agency. Regan, the state environmental head since 2017, has made a name for himself by pursuing cleanups of industrial toxins and helping the low-income and minority communities significantly affected by pollution.

Regan said he grew up in North Carolina hunting and fishing with his father and grandfather and that he has great respect for the outdoors and the country's natural resources, but he also had a respiratory condition that required him to use an inhaler.

"Since the start of my career, my goals have been the same," Regan said. "To safeguard our natural resources, to improve the quality of our air and water, to protect our families and our communities, and to help them see the opportunities of a cleaner, healthier world."

Biden's nominee to oversee the Council on Environmental Quality is Brenda Mallory. The office oversees environmental reviews for virtually all major infrastructure projects and advises the president on major environmental issues. If confirmed, she would be the first African American to hold the position since it was created more than half a century ago.

Two other members of the team introduced Saturday do not need Senate confirmation. They are Gina McCarthy, to serve as national climate adviser, and Ali Zaidi, to serve as her deputy. McCarthy was EPA administrator from 2013 to 2017 during President Barack Obama's second term.

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Associated Press staff writers Ellen Knickmeyer, Jill Colvin and Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

## Seaweed industry stays afloat, seeks growth during pandemic

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

SACO, Maine (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic has been a struggle for much of American seafood, but at least one sector of the industry has found a way to grow during the crisis — the seaweed business.

Seaweed harvesting and farming, based largely along the rocky and chilly coast of Maine, has grown for several years as interest in foods and nutritional products made with the gooey marine algae have risen in popularity. Like many pieces of the seafood industry, seaweed is highly dependent on the restaurant sector, which made the pandemic a potentially major setback.

But that hasn't been the case, according to state records and members of the industry. Representatives for Atlantic Sea Farms, a Saco company that works with two dozen seaweed farmers and accounts for most of the seaweed aquaculture in the state, said it nearly doubled its harvest this year to 450,000 pounds.

Other growers said they continued harvesting seaweed through the pandemic, though finding workers and buyers was more complicated than a typical year. The industry was able to pivot to selling more of its products via retail locations than restaurants, and that meant it avoided the trouble that befell other seafood industries, such as the hard-hit oyster business, said Tollef Olson, president of the Maine Seaweed Council.

"Almost all the products we put out have been stabilized," Olson said. "Some of the wholesale business definitely dropped off, but we're seeing more shelf space, and more online platforms."

The statewide harvest of farm-raised seaweed in Maine grew from about 50,000 pounds in 2018 to about 275,000 pounds last year, state records show. Atlantic Sea Farms alone thinks its farmers will harvest more than 800,000 pounds in 2021.

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The seaweed is processed into products such as seaweed sauerkraut and frozen kelp cubes for smoothies. The state's seaweed industry also includes a wild harvest of rockweed, which is used for livestock feed and fertilizers.

The pandemic hit Maine right around the same time as the seaweed aquaculture business's spring harvesting season, said Bri Warner, chief executive officer of Atlantic Sea Farms. Members of the industry have had to hustle to get seaweed products in new stores due to restaurant closures, and have had some success, she said.

"Four ounces of a kelp in smoothie cubes is not the same as kelp on every salad in Sweetgreen that's going out the door. We're being very creative about how we sell," Warner said. "We feel very good about being able to weather the storm."

The seaweed business's ability to grow during the pandemic is an outlier within the U.S. seafood business. Consumer demand for seafood at restaurants dropped by more than 70% during the early months of the pandemic, and that sent troubling economic ripples through the business, according to one study published in the scientific journal *Fish and Fisheries* in November.

The seaweed industry has been limited by restrictions on the amount of people who can work on farms, said Sarah Redmond, one of the owners of Springtide Seaweed, a Gouldsboro grower. Growers often grow the seaweed underwater on ropes in bays, and the work is labor intensive.

However, the growth in people cooking at home, and looking to experiment with new ingredients, during the pandemic might have helped the seaweed trade, Redmond said.

"We've actually seen an increase in demand for our seaweed products," she said. "There's still a demand for healthy food and healthy ingredients."

## **VIRUS TODAY: General apologizes; AP finds states spend \$7B**

The Associated Press undefined

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

### THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— The Army general in charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines distributed across the United States apologized after many governors said they had been shorted on anticipated shipments. Gen. Gustave Perna said he made mistakes by citing numbers of doses that he believed would be ready for delivery. Perna said the government now is on track to get approximately 20 million doses to states by the first week of January.

— The Associated Press tallied more than \$7 billion in purchases by states in the spring for personal protective equipment and high-demand medical devices such as ventilators and infrared thermometers. It's the most comprehensive accounting to date of how much states were buying, what they were spending and whom they were paying during a chaotic time when inadequate national stockpiles left them scrambling.

— The pandemic might be helping a little-known corner of the seafood market: seaweed. Atlantic Sea Farms in Maine says it nearly doubled its harvest this year to 450,000 pounds (204 kilograms). The seaweed is processed into products such as seaweed sauerkraut and frozen kelp cubes for smoothies.

**THE NUMBERS:** The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. rose over the past two weeks from 2,001 on Dec. 4 to 2,576 on Friday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

**DEATH TOLL:** The U.S. death toll stands at more than 315,000 people, up from about 300,000 when the week began.

**QUOTABLE:** "I want to take personal responsibility for the miscommunication. I know that's not done much these days. But I am responsible. ... This is a Herculean effort and we are not perfect." — Gen. Gustave Perna, in charge of distributing coronavirus vaccines, in response to criticism about smaller allocations so far to states.

**ICYMI:** A publisher's arrest has led to changes in access to courts in a North Carolina county. Reporters must seek permission, but up to five will be allowed to watch proceedings in Alamance County. Court staff had cited the virus for keeping journalists out. Tom Boney Jr. of The Alamance News was handcuffed when he objected on Dec. 8.

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ON THE HORIZON: Negotiators in Congress appear close to nailing down an almost \$1 trillion COVID-19 relief package. House members stood by for a vote that will come no earlier than Sunday. The proposed package includes \$600 payments to individuals.

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

## AP: Tight supplies for virus gear cost US states billions

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 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, or PPE, 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 personal protective equipment 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 protective equipment 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 protective equipment 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

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sold personal protective equipment, including a Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer, an American tribal organization and consultants with international connections. Idaho officials bought 50,000 N95 masks from a women's clothing store in Los Angeles, and Ohio purchased 3 million gowns from an in-state marketing and printing company. In both cases, the businesses used their connections with Chinese manufacturers.

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 protective equipment 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.

States paid an average cost during the spring of about 14 cents per glove, a fourfold increase over pre-pandemic prices. But the AP's analysis found that more than half the states at times paid much more than that to certain vendors: up to 50 cents per glove.

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.

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 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 protective equipment field.

The largest supplier of personal protective equipment 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.

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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 protective equipment 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 personal protective equipment 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.

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 personal protective equipment sales to 32 states by Fastenal, and \$50 million in protective equipment 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 personal protective equipment 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 protective gear 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 personal protective equipment 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 protective equipment.

"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.

## General sorry for 'miscommunication' over vaccine shipments

By ED WHITE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

The Army general in charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines across the United States apologized on Saturday for "miscommunication" with states over the number of doses to be delivered in the early stages of distribution.

"I failed. I'm adjusting. I am fixing and we will move forward from there," Gen. Gustave Perna told reporters in a telephone briefing.

Perna's remarks came a day after a second vaccine was added in the fight against COVID-19, which has killed more than 312,000 people in the U.S. Governors in more than a dozen states have said the federal government has told them that next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be less than originally projected.

Perna acknowledged the criticism and accepted blame.

"I want to take personal responsibility for the miscommunication," he said. "I know that's not done much these days. But I am responsible. ... This is a Herculean effort and we are not perfect."

The general said he made mistakes by citing numbers of doses that he believed would be ready.

"I am the one who approved forecast sheets. I'm the one who approved allocations," Perna said. "There is no problem with the process. There is no problem with the Pfizer vaccine. There is no problem with the Moderna vaccine."

There's a distinction between manufactured vaccine and doses that are ready to be released. The finished product must undergo "rigorous quality control and sterility tests," which can take up to a month, the Department of Health and Human Services said.

The Food and Drug Administration then must receive a certificate of analysis 48 hours before the manufacturer ships a batch, the government said.

Perna said the government now is on track to get approximately 20 million doses to states by the first week of January, a combination of the newly approved Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Perna said 2.9 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses have been delivered to states so far.

In Michigan, where the Pfizer vaccine is produced, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Friday accused the White House of "slow-walking the process." Michigan is due 60,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in its second allotment, down from an anticipated 84,825.

"We have Michigan hospitals and nursing homes ready to administer this vaccine," she said.

## UK nixes Christmas gatherings, shuts London shops over virus

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Millions of people must cancel their Christmas get-togethers and most shops have to close in London and much of southern England, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Saturday as he imposed a new, stricter level of coronavirus restrictions on the region to curb rapidly spreading infections.

Johnson said Saturday that the capital and large areas in southern England already placed under the highest level of the U.K. government's three-tiered coronavirus alert system will move into a new Tier 4 that requires all non-essential shops, hairdressers and indoor leisure venues to close after the end of business hours Saturday.

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With just days to go until Christmas, Johnson also announced that a planned easing of socializing rules that would have allowed up to three households to meet in "Christmas bubbles" from Dec. 23 to Dec. 27 will be canceled for Tier 4 areas and sharply curtailed in the rest of England.

"It is with a very heavy heart that I must tell you we cannot proceed with Christmas as planned," Johnson said.

He said he concluded there was "no alternative open to me" and people must sacrifice this Christmas to have a better chance of protecting the lives of loved ones.

No mixing of households will be allowed in Tier 4 except under very limited conditions outside in public places. Travel in and out of Tier 4 areas won't be allowed unless essential. In the rest of England, people will be allowed to meet in Christmas bubbles for just one day instead of five, as the government originally planned.

The changes upend the plans of millions of people who were looking forward to gathering with family and friends next week and force scores to revise their travel plans at the last minute. Before Saturday, government officials maintained they would allow small, private gatherings to go ahead.

While restaurants, pubs, bars and theaters in much of England are already closed and prepared for a bleak Christmas, all shops in Tier 4 areas that don't sell food or medicine received only hours' notice that they must shutter after Saturday until officials review the situation on Dec. 30.

The British Retail Consortium said it was "hugely regrettable news," especially coming just two weeks after a month-long lockdown in England ended and at the height of the year's peak retail period.

"Retailers have invested hundreds of millions of pounds making stores COVID--secure for customers and staff," said Helen Dickinson, the trade body's chief executive. "For businesses, the government's stop-start approach is deeply unhelpful."

In announcing the more restrictive category, Johnson said that a fast-moving new variant of the coronavirus that is more than 70% more transmissible than existing strains appears to be driving the rapid spread in London and southern England.

While London fared relatively well in controlling the virus throughout the fall, the city now has the highest infection rates in England. Officials said the new mutation accounted for some 60% of the capital's cases.

"There's no evidence to suggest it is more lethal or causes more severe illness," the prime minister stressed, or that vaccines will be less effective against it.

England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, said the U.K. has alerted the World Health Organization that the new variant identified this week appears to be accelerating the spread of COVID-19. The government's scientific advisers came to that conclusion based on preliminary modelling figures, and they are continuing to analyze the available data, he said.

Viruses mutate regularly, and scientists have found thousands different of mutations among samples of the virus causing COVID-19. But many of these changes have no effect on how easily the virus spreads or how severe symptoms are.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, told reporters after receiving notification from England this week that the U.N. health agency had "no evidence this variant behaves differently" and that it was similar to a variant initially reported among mink in Europe. She said scientists would study the virus strain to see if there might be any difference in how it prompts an immune response in people.

In Wales, authorities said they decided to move up a lockdown planned for after Christmas and people must stay at home from 12:01 a.m. Sunday. The move will largely scrap Christmas gatherings in line with the rules for southern England.

The Scottish government said Saturday that residents would be subject to Tier 4 restrictions starting on Dec. 26, and a travel ban between Scotland and the rest of the U.K. will be in force throughout the holiday period. Northern Ireland already said a fresh lockdown would start once Christmas is over.

U.K. officials reported another 27,052 confirmed cases on Saturday and 534 further deaths of people who had tested positive within the previous 28 days. The U.K. has Europe's second-highest COVID-19 death toll behind Italy, standing at 67,075.

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

## **Holiday traffic clogs Balkan borders despite virus warnings**

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Balkan citizens leaving Western Europe to go home for the holidays created huge traffic jams at border crossings Saturday despite coronavirus restrictions that seek to discourage travel over Christmas and New Year's.

Huge lines of cars formed on the borders between Slovenia and Croatia as well as Hungary and Serbia as thousands of people waited for hours Saturday and earlier on Friday to cross.

Many people from countries like Turkey, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia work and live in Western Europe. They traditionally travel home by car for holidays, both in the winter and in the summer.

Some European Union nations with big migrant worker communities have imposed obligatory coronavirus tests and isolation upon their return, hoping to dissuade people from holiday travel to countries with high infection rates.

Countries throughout the Balkans have reported thousands of new virus infections daily and hospitals across the region are full. Visits by relatives from abroad usually trigger more contacts and family gatherings, potentially further spreading the virus.

Apart from regular Christmas traffic, the current border rush appeared to be fueled by Serbia's decision to demand mandatory negative coronavirus tests for foreigners coming in starting on Monday. Serbian citizens without negative tests will have to isolate for 10 days upon arrival.

Croatian state HRT television reported Saturday from the country's border with Slovenia that Croatians and others heading home for Christmas were honking their horns after some had to spend the night in their cars.

Croatia, a member of the EU, is also demanding mandatory negative virus tests for its citizens coming in from abroad, which has slowed down the usual border checks. The HRT report said lines of cars have formed on Croatia's borders with Bosnia and Serbia.

Naser Malili, who was driving from Switzerland to Kosovo, said he was forced to spend 10 hours on the Croatian border with children in the car and no facilities.

"I have been traveling this road for 30 years and I have never seen anything like this before," he said. "Everyone is with families. It is not normal."

Serbia's RTS television said travelers waited for at least four hours to enter Hungary overnight Friday into Saturday. It said some 16,000 people have entered Serbia in the past 24 hours.

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

## **'Do as I say': Anger as some politicians ignore virus rules**

By JULIET WILLIAMS Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Denver's mayor flies to Mississippi to spend Thanksgiving with his family — after urging others to stay home. He later says he was thinking with "my heart and not my head." A Pennsylvania mayor bans indoor dining, then eats at a restaurant in Maryland. The governor of Rhode Island is photographed at an indoor wine event as her state faces the nation's second-highest virus rate.

While people weigh whether it's safe to go to work or the grocery store, the mayor of Austin, Texas, heads to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, on a private jet after hosting a wedding for 20. California's governor dines at a swanky French restaurant with lobbyists, none wearing masks, a day after San Francisco's mayor was there for a birthday party. Both had recently imposed tough rules on restaurants, shops and activities to slow the spread of the virus.

To the public's chagrin, some of America's political leaders have been caught preaching one thing on

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the coronavirus and practicing another.

Sure, politicians have long been called out for hypocrisy. But during a pandemic that's forced millions into seclusion and left many without paychecks, such actions can feel like a personal insult — reinforcing the idea "that some people just don't have to follow the rules while the rest of us do," says Rita Kirk, a professor of communications at Southern Methodist University.

And that, in turn, hints at even deeper questions.

In a monarchy, a king or queen is special, born to the role, cast as above the rest. In a dictatorship, the ruler often takes more spoils than the ruled. But in a democratic society, where leaders are drawn from among the very people who must abide by their decisions, what happens when those in charge act in ways that suggest they're above those who are not?

It's easy to see politicians flouting their own rules as a moral failing. They're entrusted to work toward society's best interests and serve as an example in a crisis. But pandemic-era hypocrisy has only deepened the polarization in a time already marked by division, emboldening those who doubt the seriousness of the virus and dividing people's responses based on political affiliations.

To Erica Bohn, 49, who hasn't hugged her adult children since March, it feels like a slap in the face.

"The disconnect is really confusing to me. These are intelligent, well-educated, well-informed people that should know better," said Bohn, a financial consultant from Champaign, Illinois. "It's no wonder people are confused or don't believe what politicians say."

One might question whether it's even reasonable to believe politicians have moral authority or should live up to standards many people haven't been able to follow as the pandemic drags on. The response depends on elected leaders' own messaging.

"People hate hypocrisy," says Daniel Effron, an associate professor of organizational behavior at London Business School. "They'll condemn the same moral failing much more harshly from someone who's been preaching a different standard."

The response to leaders' hypocritical behavior is highly dependent on political affiliation, experts say. People tend to rationalize a transgression from someone they agree with or respect but pounce on political opponents for the same actions.

There's a wider effect, too. Politicians undermining official virus messaging could make it harder to get Americans to follow precautions, especially those who may believe COVID-19 isn't that dangerous in a country whose president has been accused of downplaying the virus that's killed over 300,000 people.

"They're probably less likely to follow COVID safety guidelines," says Jeff Stone, a psychology professor at Arizona State University.

Some of those with the strongest virus messaging are among the "do as I say, not as I do" crowd. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo planned to host an extended family Thanksgiving until public backlash made him think twice. The California Assembly moved its legislative work to an NBA arena to ensure social distancing, but then a group of lawmakers headed to a restaurant together.

The backlash is not uniquely American. People were outraged when the chief architect of England's lockdown rules drove from London to his father's seaside home after he and his wife were suspected to have the virus, violating the country's travel rules. He's since lost his job and is now being investigated by police.

But hypocrisy is perceived differently in cultures that are more individualistic, like the United States, versus those that tend toward being collective. In China, for example, societal norms often tend to skew in favor of promoting social harmony.

In an individualistic culture, if someone says one thing but does another, "the way they explain that is that the person's trying to fool us ... trying to appear more virtuous than they really are," Effron says. In a collectivist culture, people may forgive the inconsistency if there are explanations for it.

"It's not that people in Asia are OK with hypocrisy," he says. "It's that saying one thing and doing another does not always count as hypocrisy, it's about trying to do what's right in different situations."

In a critical time when COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths are surging in the U.S., leaders have a big responsibility in "selling this message to the public," says San Jose State University political

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science professor Melinda Jackson.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has fielded weeks of questions about whether he's a credible coronavirus messenger after dining out with a group. The Democrat has called it a lapse in judgment but has ignored questions about whether Californians can still trust him. A growing effort to gather enough signatures for a recall vote shows that many have had enough.

For Bohn, the Illinois woman who's hunkered down, it seems like politicians have forgotten who pays their salary — and who they're supposed to serve.

"The lack of self-awareness in American politics is just something else," she says. "They lose all sense of what it is to serve a constituency."

## President in the pews: DC churches offer Biden options

By WILL WEISSERT and ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — His motorcade thunders around Delaware, snarling traffic. Everywhere he goes, a security team envelops him and a pack of journalists trails behind.

Yet President-elect Joe Biden enters his church, St. Joseph on the Brandywine, with startlingly little interruption.

Wearing a dark suit and medical mask, Biden slipped into a polished wooden pew near the back of the sanctuary for a recent Saturday evening Catholic Mass. He was one of only about 40 worshippers with attendance limited by the coronavirus pandemic. His row was empty except for a Secret Service agent sitting on the aisle and others stationed around the sanctuary. They had flak jackets under their dress clothes.

This is one of the last places where Biden can at least try to blend in, a luxury that probably will fade away completely when he takes office next month. Once he arrives in Washington, the trappings of the presidency — and the eagerness of the city's residents to be near power — could make a casual church visit nearly impossible.

A Biden transition team official refused to say which church Biden might attend in the nation's capital or whether he might return to Delaware for services, at least to start. Washington's COVID-19 measures restrict large indoor services, and many churches have moved services online.

Biden says Americans should be allowed to attend church during the pandemic "safely," and his transition team has underscored the importance of heeding local restrictions. Still, if he does become a regular Washington churchgoer, Biden will have plenty of choices.

Four Catholic churches sit within 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of the White House. As vice president, Biden attended Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Washington's tony Georgetown neighborhood, where the nation's only other Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, frequently went to Mass before his inauguration.

Previous presidents have made a wide variety of choices — or none. Not far from the White House is New York Avenue Presbyterian, which maintains the pew where Abraham Lincoln once worshipped. Even closer is St. John's Episcopal Church, walkable across Lafayette Square from the White House for the presidents who have made a historic practice of worshipping there at least once.

St. John's was thrust into the headlines this summer when police forcibly dispersed protesters so President Donald Trump could pose with a Bible outside its butter-yellow front doors. But its status as the "Church of Presidents" dates to James Madison, and it's accustomed to the special scrutiny that comes with hosting commanders in chief.

The Rev. Luis Leon, rector at St. John's from 1994 to 2018, said congregants were very good about high-powered visits: "They treated the president's experience of worship as they would treat their own experience of worship."

The VIP presence nonetheless had its own specific effects on churchgoers' behavior. Leon joked that, on days when the reserved "President's pew" was occupied, the church "would get tilted" because so many congregants wanted to sit on the same side of the sanctuary as the chief executive, hoping to shake his hand during the Episcopalian exchange of the peace.

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While Trump often consulted with spiritual leaders in the Oval Office, he never adopted a home church in Washington. He preferred private prayer, including with the Rev. Jentezen Franklin, a Georgia-based megachurch pastor who recalled at least 10 visits with Trump on faith matters.

Franklin said the outgoing president "always was so receptive" of spiritual encounters.

"When we first started meeting with him, we asked him, could we pray with him? And he was very open to that, very thankful," Franklin said.

Former President Barack Obama and his family attended the historically Black Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in the early days of his administration. But a competition emerged among the city's houses of worship to attract the first family, and the Obamas ultimately never settled on a full-time church home in the capital.

Joshua DuBois, who was Obama's faith adviser during his first term, recalled the search for a church as "a beautiful challenge."

"On the one hand, President Obama wanted to worship as often as he could with local congregations, and to worship God and be in community with others in his new home," DuBois said. But "we were acutely aware of the disruption of a presidential visit and wanted to be mindful, to limit that disruption as much as possible."

President George W. Bush often opted to worship at Camp David during his years in Washington.

The Clintons were the last first family to regularly attend church in the city. They became members of Foundry United Methodist Church, just north of the White House on 16th Street, where then-teenage Chelsea was active in the youth group.

The Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, then-Foundry's pastor, said he would help minimize crowding by asking the congregation to remain seated at the end of the service for the Clintons to exit.

"Anytime he seemed to be a little sleepy I thought to myself, 'Well, at least today I can serve the people of the United States by giving their president a bit of a rest with my sermon,'" Wogaman said.

For now, Biden's churchgoing remains low-key.

He attends Mass nearly every week at St. Joseph's — a yellow church built in 1841 on land donated by manufacturing magnate Charles I. DuPont — less than five minutes by motorcade from his lakeside home in Wilmington. Biden sometimes goes on Saturday evening but most often on Sunday mornings, attending with his wife, Jill, or his adult grandchildren, though more frequently coming solo.

Biden attended Mass on Friday to mark the anniversary of the deaths of his first wife and daughter, who were killed in a 1972 car crash and are buried at the church cemetery. His son Beau, a former Delaware attorney general who died of brain cancer in 2015, is also buried there. Biden occasionally attends Mass at other churches, such as St. Joseph's in downtown Wilmington, or St. Edmund near his vacation house in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

On this Saturday evening at St. Joseph's, the Rev. Glenn Evers didn't acknowledge the incoming president in the congregation's midst, instead cautioning anyone worried about "an opportunity to catch" the virus to stay away from the traditionally crowded Christmas Eve afternoon Mass. Most pews were roped off to ensure social distancing, but parishioners nearby could hear Biden softly reciting the Lord's Prayer.

When Evers asked them to turn and greet their neighbors, they tried not to gawk at the president-elect, who offered warm but quick smiles in return.

Biden's traveling press pool waited just outside the church grounds, and bomb-sniffing dogs checked the area long before anyone arrived. Biden entered the church a few minutes late and was the first to exit at the end of the service, keeping disruption to a minimum.

He did that so effectively that the only sign he had ever even been there was a Secret Service agent, who lingered to hold the door open for others who filed out a few minutes behind the president-elect.

"We've inconvenienced you enough," the agent said. "It's the least I can do."

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Schor reported from Washington.

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## 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, but it hit a sensitive nerve among Italian officials because it noted that Italy went into the crisis with an out-of-date pandemic plan.

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 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,

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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 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>.

## **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 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.

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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 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

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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.

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.

## 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

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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 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 longtime 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.

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"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>.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Dec. 20, the 355th day of 2020. There are 11 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 20, 1989, the United States launched Operation Just Cause, sending troops into Panama to topple the government of Gen. Manuel Noriega.

On this date:

In 1790, the first successful cotton mill in the United States began operating at Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was completed as ownership of the territory was formally transferred from France to the United States.

In 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union as all 169 delegates to a special convention in Charleston voted in favor of separation.

In 1864, Confederate forces evacuated Savannah, Georgia, as Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman nearly completed his "March to the Sea."

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was released from prison after serving nine months for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch.

In 1963, the Berlin Wall was opened for the first time to West Berliners, who were allowed one-day visits to relatives in the Eastern sector for the holidays.

In 1978, former White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman was released from prison after serving 18 months for his role in the Watergate cover-up.

In 1987, more than 4,300 people were killed when the Dona Paz (DOHN'-yuh pahz), a Philippine passenger ship, collided with the tanker Vector off Mindoro island.

In 1995, an American Airlines Boeing 757 en route to Cali, Colombia, slammed into a mountain, killing all but four of the 163 people aboard. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, NATO began its peacekeeping mission, taking over from the United Nations.

In 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that homosexual couples were entitled to the same benefits and protections as wedded heterosexual couples.

In 2005, a federal judge ruled that "intelligent design" could not be mentioned in biology classes in a Pennsylvania public school district, delivering a stinging attack on the Dover Area School Board.

In 2017, Cardinal Bernard Law, the disgraced former archbishop of Boston, died in Rome at the age of 86; his failure to stop child molesters in the priesthood had triggered a crisis in American Catholicism.

Ten years ago: In the biggest anti-terrorist sweep in Britain in nearly two years, police arrested a dozen men accused of plotting a large-scale terror attack on targets inside the United Kingdom. Former Mexican presidential candidate Diego Fernandez de Cevallos was freed more than seven months after his kidnapping by suspected leftist rebels. "Barney Miller" actor Steve Landesberg, 74, died in Los Angeles.

Five years ago: A strong showing by a pair of upstart parties in Spain's general election upended the country's traditional two-party system, with the ruling center-right Popular Party winning the most votes but falling far short of a parliamentary majority. Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach of the Philippines was crowned Miss Universe at the pageant in Las Vegas (in a bizarre finale, first-time host Steve Harvey mistakenly identified first-runner up Ariadna Gutierrez Arevalo of Colombia as the winner before correcting himself and apologizing for the error). Tony Award-winning actress Patricia Elliott, 77, died in New York.

One year ago: President Donald Trump signed a Defense Authorization Act that included Space Force, the first new military service in more than 70 years. Police in Iowa said they had charged a woman with

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attempted murder after she told police that she intentionally ran over a 14-year-old girl because she believed the teenager was Mexican; she was also accused of driving over a curb to hit a 12-year-old Black boy. (Both children survived; the suspect, Nicole Poole, was ruled incompetent for trial.)

Today's Birthdays: Original Mouseketeer Tommy Cole (TV: "The Mickey Mouse Club") is 79. Rhythm and blues singer-musician Walter "Wolfman" Washington is 77. Rock musician-music producer Bobby Colomby is 76. Rock musician Peter Criss is 75. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue is 74. Psychic/illusionist Uri Geller is 74. Producer Dick Wolf ("Law & Order") is 74. Rock musician Alan Parsons is 72. Actor Jenny Agutter is 68. Actor Michael Badalucco is 66. Actor Blanche Baker is 64. Rock singer Billy Bragg is 63. Rock singer-musician Mike Watt (The Secondmen, Minutemen, FIREHOSE) is 63. Actor Joel Gretsch is 57. Country singer Kris Tyler is 56. Rock singer Chris Robinson is 54. Actor Nicole deBoer is 50. Movie director Todd Phillips is 50. Singer David Cook ("American Idol") is 38. Actor Jonah Hill is 37. Actor Bob Morley is 36. Singer JoJo is 30. Actor Colin Woodell is 29.