

Groton Daily Independent

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Attention...There's been a slight schedule change to today's basketball games at Sioux Valley. Both the boys C team and girls JV teams will play at 1 o'clock. The boys C team will play in an auxiliary gym and the girls JV team will play in the main gym. Boys JV will begin approximately at 2 PM with the varsity girls to follow at approximately 3:15 and the boys varsity to follow. This will get everyone on the road back to Groton an hour earlier.

Double Header

Groton Area at Sioux Valley
Tuesday, Dec. 29, 1:00 p.m.
GDILIVE.COM



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

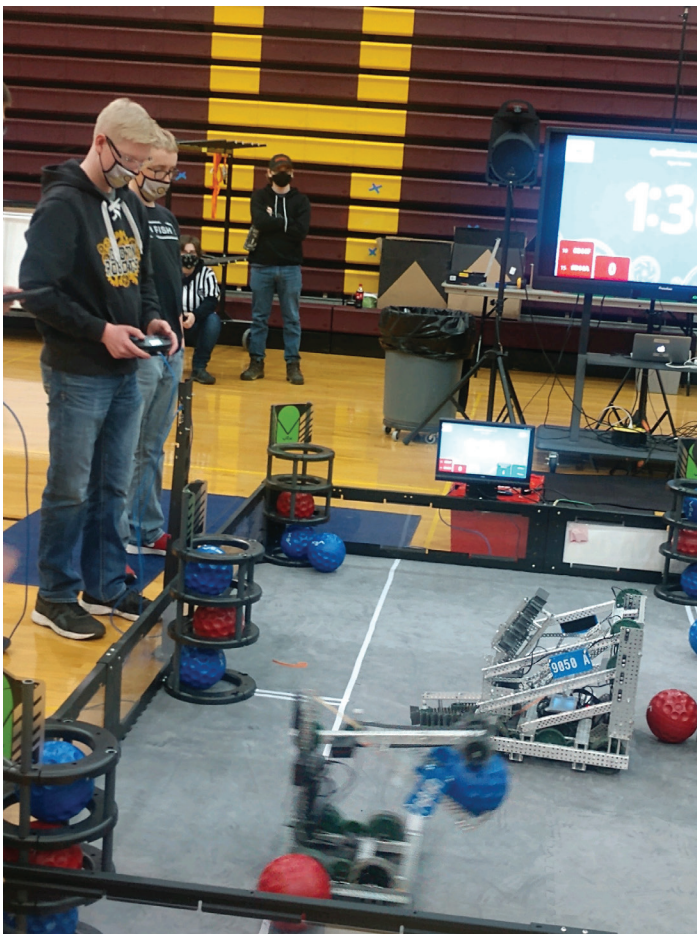
Groton Area Robotics 2020 Summary

Our 2020-2021 Groton Robotics season has not been without a few bumps, which is something we've all become accustomed to this past year. The first tournament on our schedule was right here in Groton. We unfortunately had to cancel due to members and coaching staff being close-contacts or testing positive themselves.

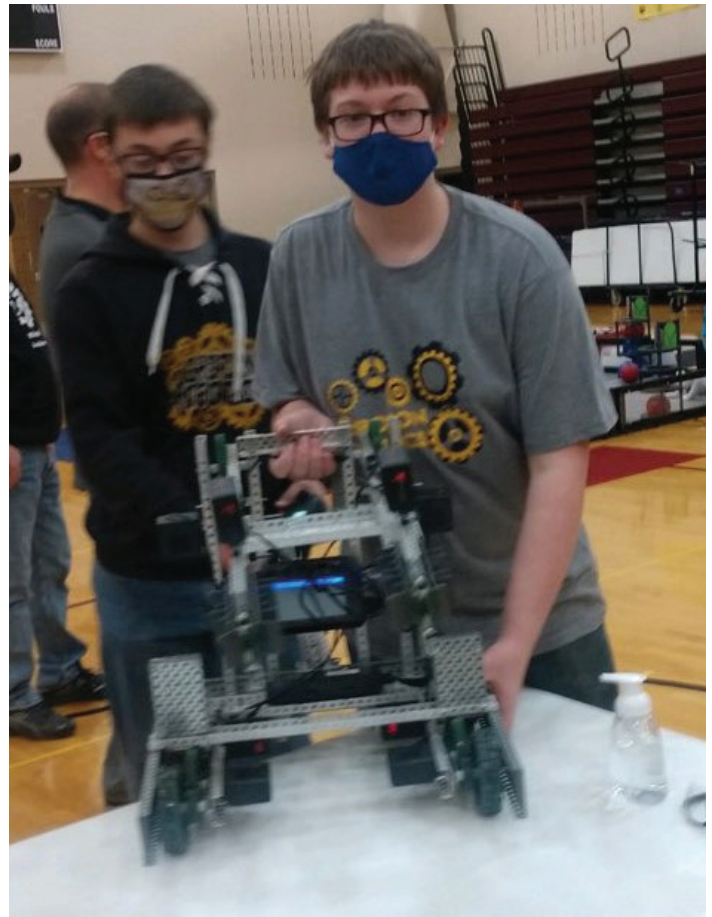
The next tournament went on as scheduled in Mitchell, on November 7th. It ended up being the infamous "first tournament" for all of the young robotists from around the state, in which robots tend to leave the match in more pieces than they started out in. We sent four teams to Mitchell. All did well, although none of our teams made it to the championship match. Galaxy won their first match in the finals, but lost in the quarter finals. GAT Wrenches, G-Force, and the Gear Heads all lost in the first round of the finals.

The November 21st tournament at Douglas in Box Elder was also cancelled due to COVID related issues at their school.

The robotists finally got their robots out on the field again in Harrisburg on Saturday, December 12. We sent four teams again as part of twenty-one total teams from around the state. Going into the finals, G-Force moved up into the 2nd seed because of a formed alliance with a higher ranked Box Elder team. Gear Heads and Galaxy formed an alliance together and were in the 4th seed going into the finals. Geek Squad was selected for an alliance and was in the 10th seed for the tournament. Geek Squad won their first match in the round of 16 and lost in the quarter finals to the number 1 seed. Gear Heads and Galaxy lost their first match in the quarter finals. G-Force won their quarter final match. They had difficulty due



Travis Townsend and Garret Schultz running their robot on the G-Force team. (Photo by Neil Warrington)



Jackson Dinger and Axel Warrington getting ready to compete on the Galaxy Team. (Photo by Neil Warrington)

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to problems with an intake malfunction. They had 7 minutes to make repairs going into the championship match! Unfortunately they lost, but win or lose, it's always great to see Groton in the final match. Congratulations, G-Force!!

Teams attending this tournament were: Galaxy (Jack Dinger, Axel Warrington, and James Brooks), G-Force (Travis Townsend, Garret Schultz, Jace Kroll), Gear Heads (Ethan Clark, River Pardick, Isaac Higgins),

Geek Squad (Charlie Frost, Blake Lord, Brody Lord, and Ashton Brooks). Not all members were able to attend. GAT Wrenches was represented in Mitchell by Tannor McGannon and Dylan McGannon, with Charlie Frost assisting from the Geek Squad.

Great job to all the teams! Upcoming tournaments: January 9th in Canton, February 6th Groton will be hosting, and February 27th, the State Tournament will be in Harrisburg.

- Article submitted Neil Warrington and Shane Clark



Axel Warrington and James Brooks competing in a match. (Photo by Neil Warrington)



Ethan Clark and River Pardnick making some adjustments to their robot. (Photo by Neil Warrington)



Charlie Frost waiting to compete in a match. (Photo by Neil Warrington)

What do their robots do?

VEX Robotics Competition 2020 'Change Up' is played on a 12'x12' square field configured as seen below. Two (2) Alliances - one (1) "red" and one (1) "blue" - composed of two (2) Teams each, compete in Matches consisting of a fifteen second (0:15) Autonomous Period, followed by a one minute and forty-five second (1:45) Driver Controlled Period. The object of the game is to attain a higher score than the opposing Alliance by Scoring Balls and Connecting Rows.

There are thirty-two (32) Balls on a VRC Change Up Field. Sixteen (16) Red and sixteen (16) Blue. There are also nine (9) Goals placed around the field.

Balls are to be Scored in Goals. Each scored Ball is worth 1 point for the corresponding Alliance color. The highest scored Ball in a Goal will be owned by the corresponding Alliance color.

If an Alliance owns three goals in any direction (vertical, horizontal or diagonal), they will receive a 6 point bonus for a Connected Row. But be careful, Balls can be descored by the opposing Alliance at any time during the Driver-Control period!

The alliance that scores more points in the Autonomous period is awarded with (6) bonus points, added to the final score at the end of the match. Each Alliance also has the opportunity to earn an additional Win Point by completing their Home Row during the Autonomous Period. This Bonus can be earned by both Alliances, regardless of who wins the Autonomous Bonus. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: <https://www.vexrobotics.com/v5/competition/vrc>



COLLEGES PART 3: Students cross hurdles while learning during a pandemic

By: Bart Pfankuch

As part of its in-depth look at the state of higher education in the state, South Dakota News Watch made contact with students who experienced learning during a pandemic close up. Here are three of their stories.

Making frugal financial choices

Sydney Becker, 19, is a graduate of Lincoln High School in Sioux Falls who has placed practicality and financial stability high on her list of priorities in obtaining a college degree.

Becker graduated a semester ahead of her high school senior class and used the spring months of 2019 to work and save up for her freshman year.

She toured the University of South Dakota campus in Vermillion and “instantly fell in love,” but decided to create options by also touring the university center community college campus in Sioux Falls. She was impressed with the smaller footprint of the USD satellite campus and what she learned would be fewer students in each class compared with the main campus.

Enrolling at the center would also allow her to live at home and keep earning money while working at the St. Francis House homeless shelter in Sioux Falls.

Nearly two years later, the savings have been significant. Instead of paying about \$26,000 a year to attend USD full-time and live on campus, Becker pays about \$9,000 a year for the same credit load at the university center. She receives about \$5,000 a year in federal student aid and is able to pay the remaining \$1,900 per semester in cash.

“That had a big impact on me,” Becker said. “Thinking about \$26,000 a year times four — I don’t want to get out of college and worry about all that debt.”

Becker also learned from her older brother, who attended in person at St. Cloud University in Minnesota and has graduated with a radiology degree but also a hefty monthly student-loan payment.

Becker, who is studying business administration and sociology, has taken a mix of in-person and online courses at the university center and has had success in both formats.

She has made valuable connections with instructors both in person and online, and said the value of online courses rises as professors and students gain more experience in using the technology to teach remotely in an effective way.

“It just really depends on the teacher,” she said. “Some in-class teachers do the bare minimum, while some online teachers go above and beyond because they know it is an online course.”



Student Sydney Becker of Sioux Falls switched up her plans to attend the University of South Dakota in Vermillion and is instead taking accounting classes at the USD satellite campus near her home. Photo: Submitted

When the pandemic hit, Becker enrolled solely in online courses for safety reasons.

"I don't want to put my parents at risk, who are at higher risk in the pandemic, and to possibly affect the people I work for and with," she said.

Online discussion groups allow her to engage with her peers if she has questions about lesson plans or assignments. Online courses also allow more flexibility as to when assignments are due, often allowing her to turn them in on weekends — which is useful to Becker, who continues to hold down a job during her studies.

After seeing the financial rewards of staying in Sioux Falls, and becoming more comfortable with online learning, she now intends to complete her degree at the satellite campus and buy a house during her junior year.

Becker, who described herself as a highly determined student who kept mostly to herself in high school, said she has not longed for the social aspects of living and taking classes on a busy campus with thousands of students her own age. Online learning has allowed her to focus on her coursework and avoid distractions that might arise on a big campus, she said.

Smaller class sizes at the university center have allowed her to establish relationships with professors even though she is learning online. One example, she said, is that her sociology professor encouraged her to sign up for a student honors program once she qualified, and to see the \$65 registration fee as money well spent to add that honor to her resume.

"I am very happy with the decisions I made," Becker said. "I love the teachers here [in Sioux Falls]. They're so nice and they actually know you by your name, and they'll email you directly if something comes up that you need to know."

Surviving COVID-19 and an unusual semester

Andrew Ward saw his fall semester at the School of Mines in Rapid City upended for a time when he battled a COVID-19 infection. Ward, 20, a Wisconsin native, had a fever and cough for a few days and then quarantined for two weeks after that to avoid spreading the virus.

Ward said he was not put off by the shift in how teaching in the mechanical engineering program was delivered at Mines during the pandemic. Most of his classes this fall were presented in a hybrid fashion, with a mix of a few in-person meetings in classrooms and lessons delivered by videos or through the Zoom online format.

Ward, who moved to South Dakota and enrolled at Mines because family members had attended in the past, said the video components in his courses allowed him to rewatch lessons to strengthen his understanding.

"I think it definitely gives you a good impression of what online classes can be," he said.

He said he felt professors were generally committed to using the online format as best they could.

"I think the hybrid classes are still a lot of work for the professors to make all the videos and hold the Zoom classes," he said. "They might not be in person, but some classes that don't require labs don't really need to be in person."

However, Ward said he and other students were pleased to hear that the Board of Regents had frozen tuition for



School of Mines student Andrew Ward overcame a COVID-19 infection and a shift to some online classes during his fall semester, but is happy with how things are going on the path to an engineering degree. Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

Dakota News Watch

the 2020-21 academic year, not just to avoid paying more but because he felt the overall value of his education was slightly diminished amid the pandemic.

"Some of us were really relieved because we didn't see the logic in raising tuition if we were going all online," Ward said. "I could actually see a point to reduced tuition if most classes go online."

Seeing the good in a bad situation

Augustana University junior Jenifer Fjelstad has looked at the pandemic and its impacts on the fall semester at the Sioux Falls private college as a challenge but also an opportunity to deepen her appreciation for campus life before COVID-19.

Fjelstad, a journalism and French double major from Groton, S.D., said she was surprised at how well the university community adapted to COVID-19 and the new normal it necessitated. She said that after a month or so, wearing masks stopped bothering her, and watching some classes over the Zoom platform also took on a level of normalcy.

Fjelstad said she was also impressed to see how students banded together to keep one another safe.

Attending some classes via computer was somewhat less satisfying, Fjelstad said in an email to News Watch.

"On Zoom, it's easy, almost too tempting, to be on your phone, zone out, or be multitasking," Fjelstad wrote. "Being in person invites students to pay more attention and remember the material more."

Too great a shift toward online learning in the future could reduce the value of higher education, Fjelstad said. But she added that the pandemic has set the stage for an effective hybrid style of learning that includes both online interaction and technology but also in-class experiential learning.

"I think the new way of learning has opened a door to more inclusive learning in the hybrid-flex model, but this time has also shown that face-to-face classes are still as important as ever," Fjelstad wrote.

If anything, enduring the challenges of a pandemic-infused semester has made Fjelstad even more appreciative of the intangible benefits of college life and learning.

"I feel that when I am seeing my professors, connecting with my classmates, using workout facilities, studying in academic buildings, and participating in clubs and events, that's when I'm actually getting the most of my education," she wrote. "Once bits of that start getting taken out, the value starts to decline."

Fjelstad said she is eager to return to the full on-campus experience without the threat of the coronavirus as soon as vaccinations become widespread and effective.

"I think everyone's social lives suffered from the pandemic," Fjelstad wrote. "Students are conscious of limiting their 'bubble,' which means we aren't having as many spontaneous, large-group, or acquaintance connections. Being back on campus this fall reminded me just how much value socializing adds to college."



Augustana University student Jenifer Fjelstad said the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic gave her a new appreciation for the value of living and learning on campus. Photo: Submitted

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#309 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

There were 183,900 new cases reported today. We are now up to 19,345,000 cases in the US, a 1.0% increase from yesterday. Hospitalizations are up from yesterday at 118,720. And we're up to 335,032 deaths from this virus in the US, 0.6% more than yesterday. There were 1835 deaths reported today. I will issue the usual caveat that no numbers between Christmas Eve and January 4 or so are terribly informative and leave things at that.

I am deeply concerned about California, which has shown a 72% increase in new cases this month, well ahead of the US's disastrous-enough 38.9% increase in new cases; this amounts to over 300,000 cases in just the seven-day period ending December 22 as records were set around Los Angeles, San Diego, and Fresno. California is the only state with more than two million cases: The first million took 10 months to reach; the second million took just six weeks. This is serious. Test positivity has grown from just over seven percent to 12.4 per cent in the past three weeks. Hospitals are being overwhelmed, and ICU bed capacity is seriously strained: There are only around 1000 ICU beds available in a state with a population of almost 40 million, and Los Angeles County, home to a quarter of those folks, had just 30 ICU beds available yesterday. The state is running well behind the pack for per capita cases (34th place among states) and deaths (42nd place) for the entire run of the pandemic, but the past couple of weeks have been simply awful: Over the past seven days, it is second among states in per capita new case reporting. There has recently been a decline in the rate of new case growth in the state, so we can hope things may be turning around there. We can send good wishes to our fellow citizens in this stricken state; better for them is better for all of us.

Florida is getting close to its summer peaks too. While they're better off than California, things are deteriorating in several metropolitan areas in the state. With the elderly population in the state, things could worsen fast; and the entire South is also showing signs of trouble, Tennessee and Alabama in particular.

This is not great news: Yesterday was the busiest day for airports in this country since the middle of March, back when we didn't fully understand we had a problem. There have been only a few days, mostly over Thanksgiving and Christmas, since the pandemic began when the number of air travelers has exceeded a million; yesterday was one of those with 1.3 million travelers passing through TSA screening checkpoints. I guess a lot of folks didn't get the memo about a pandemic being on and all. The total for the Christmas travel season was 3.8 million people; this is much less than the 9.5 million last year, but is way, way too many for the current situation. We haven't nailed down yet just where in the trip the exposures are occurring—in flight, at the airport, or at the destination—but travel is shaping up to be a critical factor in spread.

In a piece of good news, Novavax is starting US phase 3 clinical trials for its vaccine candidate; phase 3 trials have been fully enrolled and underway in Europe for about a month now with a phase 2b trial fully enrolled in South Africa as well. Preliminary data from these ongoing trials should be available in the next three months. Now they're ready to go with phase 3 in the US and Mexico. This latest trial will enroll up to 30,000 participants, two-thirds of whom will receive the vaccine candidate and one-third of whom will receive placebo. This candidate contains a full-length prefusion (unaffected by fusion with the host cell membrane) protein antigen derived from the spike (S) protein of the coronavirus and is an adjuvanted vaccine using a proprietary saponin-based adjuvant known as Matrix-M. We should note that this adjuvant does not contain aluminum, a boogeyman set up by the antivaxx forces in our population. (If you need a refresher on adjuvants, which are going to be coming up more and more frequently in coming weeks as new vaccines go into clinical trials, see my Update #166 posted August 7 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3846639405352437>.) This vaccine candidate is administered in two doses 21 days apart. The trials are focusing on over-65 participants in their enrollments, aiming for 25 percent in this age group, and are also focusing on racial and ethnic groups disproportionately affected by this disease. Once again, the fact that this virus continues to rage through our population is a good thing for vaccine trials because the required number of cases shouldn't take long to achieve. Sad when bad news is good news, but that's where we are.

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There have been cases of psychosis linked to Covid-19 infection, including in folks who experienced only mild illness from the virus. They're turning up across the US and around the world, and the association is pretty difficult to dismiss. The number appears to be small, but the manifestations are quite severe. These are people with no prior medical or family history of psychiatric symptoms of any kind, which is worrisome. It remains to be seen how amenable these cases are to treatment. When someone tells you all about how this virus doesn't kill a high percentage of cases, so it's no big deal, keep things like these folks and the long-haulers in mind—as well as the amputees, the kidney dialysis patients, and the neurologic and stroke rehab patients. Dying isn't the only bad thing that can happen to Covid-19 patients.

In Los Cruces, New Mexico, the coronavirus has hit particularly hard, and a familiar scene has been families gathered outside a window of a hospital, as close to a loved one as they were permitted to get during what might become the last moments of that loved one's life. One night in November, a woman wearing a mask and bearing a couple of pizza boxes walked up from behind two such families, tapped someone on the shoulder, handed each family a warm pizza, and disappeared. The New York Times' Manny Fernandez wrote about this kindness and later discovered the woman with the pizzas, Holly Montoya, had a mother also in the hospital with Covid-19. She told the reporter, "I knew how they felt." I'll just bet she did. She also said, "I feel kind of silly because it was such a little thing."

Her mother died just four days later, and the mother of a family to whom she delivered a pizza died a week after that. But for one beautiful moment before the losses became permanent, these people who've never met shared an important moment. Fernandez wrote, "We are a divided country, in the grip of a deadly pandemic. But our unspoken connections outnumber our spoken divisions. We stand suffering at our individual walls, until strangers approach from behind, bearing love and pizza."

Nothing illustrates our common humanity like food because none of us, whatever our politics, can get by without it. Maybe a starting place for putting ourselves back together, for overcoming our divisions and our hostility, is to provide food for one another and to eat it together. We have to try something.

Be well. We'll talk again.

Winter Weather Advisory

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 6 AM THIS MORNING TO 3 AM CST WEDNESDAY...

- * WHAT...Snow expected. Total snow accumulations of 2 to 4 inches.
- * WHERE...Portions of northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.
- * WHEN...From 6 AM this morning to 3 AM CST Wednesday.
- * IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling.

In Minnesota, the latest road conditions can be obtained at 511mn.org, or by calling 5 1 1. In South Dakota, the latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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December 28 COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota: Community Spread for week of Dec. 28:

Moderate: Brule, Clark, Corson, Jackson and Lyman downgraded from Substantial to Moderate.

Minimal: Buffalo, Jerauld, Mellette, Sanborn and Ziebach downgraded from Moderate to Minimal; Jones upgraded from None to Minimal.

Positive: +267 (97,657 total) Positivity Rate: 22.8%

Total Tests: 1162 (747,610 total)

Hospitalized: +22 (5583 total). 288 currently hospitalized (+14)

Avera St. Luke's: 9 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 3 (0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 3 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 1 (+1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +0 (1446 total)

Recovered: +439 (89,688 total)

Active Cases: -172 (6523)

Percent Recovered: 91.8%

Beadle (34) +5 positive, +3 recovered (77 active cases)

Brookings (29) +7 positive, +16 recovered (204 active cases)

Brown (57): +24 positive, +15 recovered (245 active cases)

Clark (2): +1 positive, +1 recovered (19 active cases)

Clay (11): +5 positive, +14 recovered (92 active cases)

Codington (68): +15 positive, +13 recovered (277 active cases)

Davison (52): +3 positive, +5 recovered (104 active cases)

Day (20): +0 positive, +1 recovered (42 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +2 positive, +1 recovered (54 active cases)

Faulk (11): +0 positive, +1 recovered (9 active cases)

Grant (28): +1 positive, +4 recovered (40 active cases)

Hanson (3): +0 positive, +1 recovered (14 active cases)

Hughes (25): +1 positive, +12 recovered (129 active cases)

Lawrence (28): +12 positive, +8 recovered (143 active cases)

Lincoln (63): +23 positive, +34 recovered (497 active cases)

Marshall (4): +2 positive, +3 recovered (26 active cases)

McCook (21): +2 positive, +3 recovered (41 active cases)

McPherson (1): +0 positive, +0 recovery (12 active case)

Minnehaha (259): +58 positive, +123 recovered (1610 active cases)

Pennington (128): +41 positive, +69 recovered (897 active cases)

Potter (2): +1 positive, +0 recovered (10 active cases)

Roberts (31): +7 positive, +0 recovered (101 active cases)

Spink (24): +1 positive, +7 recovered (48 active cases)

Walworth (14): +5 positive, +3 recovered (43 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 28:

- 4.9% rolling 14-day positivity
- 94 new positives
- 1,958 susceptible test encounters
- 108 currently hospitalized (+2)
- 1,878 active cases (-145)
- 1,270 total deaths (+4)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	410	378	768	8	Substantial	25.00%
Beadle	2486	2375	5126	34	Substantial	7.95%
Bennett	351	337	1082	8	Moderate	3.45%
Bon Homme	1471	1407	1867	23	Substantial	25.40%
Brookings	2908	2674	9947	29	Substantial	6.39%
Brown	4341	4039	11003	57	Substantial	20.86%
Brule	627	602	1682	6	Moderate	6.25%
Buffalo	410	393	853	10	Minimal	14.29%
Butte	859	788	2827	18	Substantial	15.38%
Campbell	112	105	207	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1090	1006	3532	11	Substantial	14.55%
Clark	310	289	848	2	Moderate	6.38%
Clay	1607	1504	4488	11	Substantial	11.88%
Codington	3392	3047	8339	68	Substantial	15.29%
Corson	448	421	887	10	Moderate	13.04%
Custer	669	619	2381	9	Substantial	18.60%
Davison	2686	2530	5669	52	Substantial	14.34%
Day	523	461	1524	20	Substantial	23.44%
Deuel	404	370	989	6	Substantial	12.50%
Dewey	1257	1134	3484	12	Substantial	34.09%
Douglas	378	336	819	7	Substantial	32.00%
Edmunds	352	294	873	4	Substantial	20.45%
Fall River	443	403	2271	12	Substantial	17.65%
Faulk	310	290	591	11	Moderate	0.00%
Grant	815	747	1918	28	Substantial	4.11%
Gregory	482	436	1080	26	Substantial	9.09%
Haakon	229	185	466	7	Substantial	29.17%
Hamlin	599	525	1498	32	Substantial	15.49%
Hand	312	296	698	2	Moderate	0.00%
Hanson	308	291	600	3	Moderate	17.39%
Harding	89	82	153	1	Minimal	14.29%
Hughes	1978	1824	5533	25	Substantial	3.05%
Hutchinson	694	631	2029	16	Substantial	17.54%

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Hyde	131	129	363	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	262	232	852	8	Moderate	18.18%
Jerauld	258	233	492	15	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	65	63	181	0	Minimal	14.29%
Kingsbury	536	473	1408	13	Substantial	31.25%
Lake	1008	939	2750	16	Substantial	19.28%
Lawrence	2505	2334	7519	28	Substantial	20.68%
Lincoln	6676	6116	17275	63	Substantial	15.60%
Lyman	512	489	1702	9	Moderate	6.45%
Marshall	259	229	990	4	Substantial	20.59%
McCook	672	610	1399	21	Substantial	22.03%
McPherson	178	165	498	1	Moderate	2.86%
Meade	2186	2014	6650	24	Substantial	15.24%
Mellette	214	205	647	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	223	199	497	6	Moderate	31.25%
Minnehaha	24663	22794	67360	259	Substantial	12.16%
Moody	527	477	1578	14	Substantial	15.15%
Oglala Lakota	1906	1744	6170	34	Substantial	17.71%
Pennington	10950	9925	33519	128	Substantial	21.66%
Perkins	281	233	662	11	Substantial	32.43%
Potter	299	287	711	2	Moderate	9.30%
Roberts	958	831	3717	31	Substantial	24.54%
Sanborn	303	295	610	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	696	624	1854	24	Substantial	5.52%
Stanley	266	249	762	2	Substantial	0.00%
Sully	108	97	244	3	Minimal	28.57%
Todd	1139	1070	3766	19	Substantial	20.90%
Tripp	620	584	1315	11	Substantial	16.67%
Turner	950	841	2369	47	Substantial	14.93%
Union	1581	1405	5359	30	Substantial	17.10%
Walworth	612	555	1609	14	Substantial	16.67%
Yankton	2475	2181	8164	24	Substantial	24.28%
Ziebach	288	247	692	7	Moderate	9.09%
Unassigned	0	0	1896	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	3615	0
10-19 years	10736	0
20-29 years	17785	4
30-39 years	16131	12
40-49 years	13941	24
50-59 years	13834	74
60-69 years	11048	182
70-79 years	5801	309
80+ years	4499	841

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	50881	699
Male	46509	747

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Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

15

New Probable Cases

9

Active Cases

245

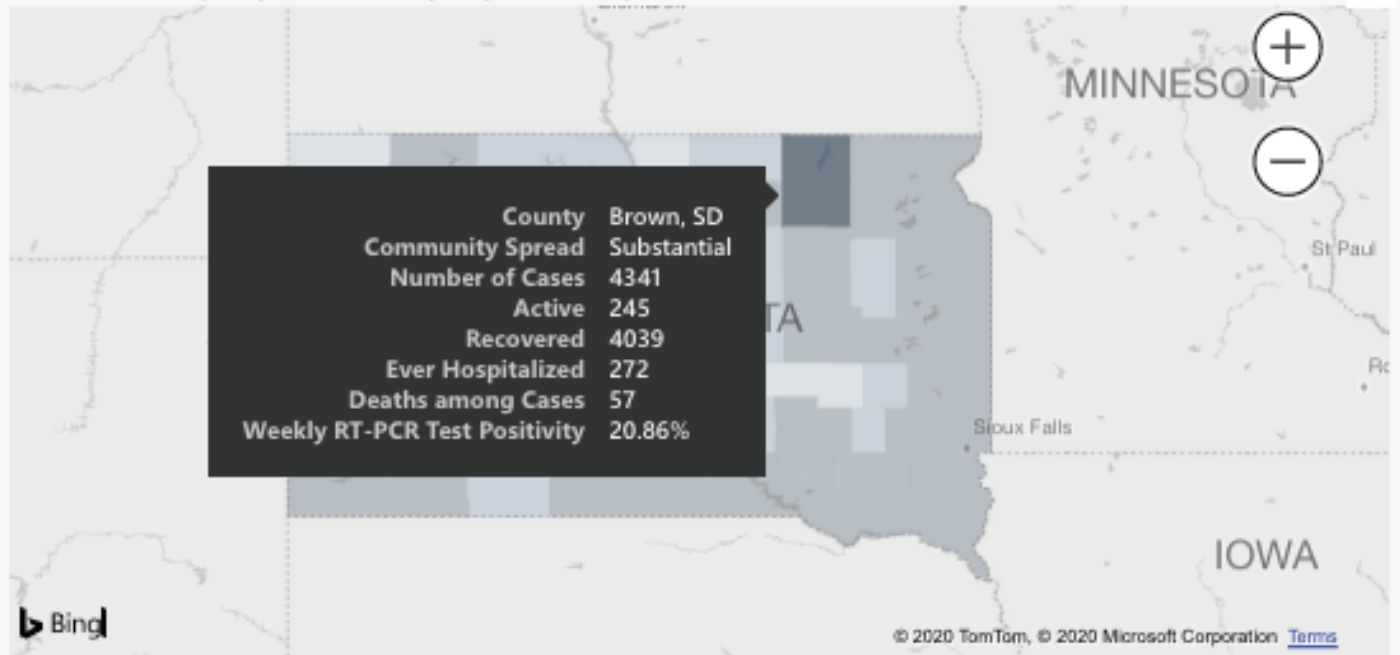
Recovered Cases

4,039

Currently Hospitalized

288

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

4,093

Total Probable Cases

248

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

40.6%

Total Persons Tested

15,344

Total Tests

35,304

Ever Hospitalized

272

Deaths Among Cases

57

% Progress (October Goal: 44233 Tests)

327%

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

294%

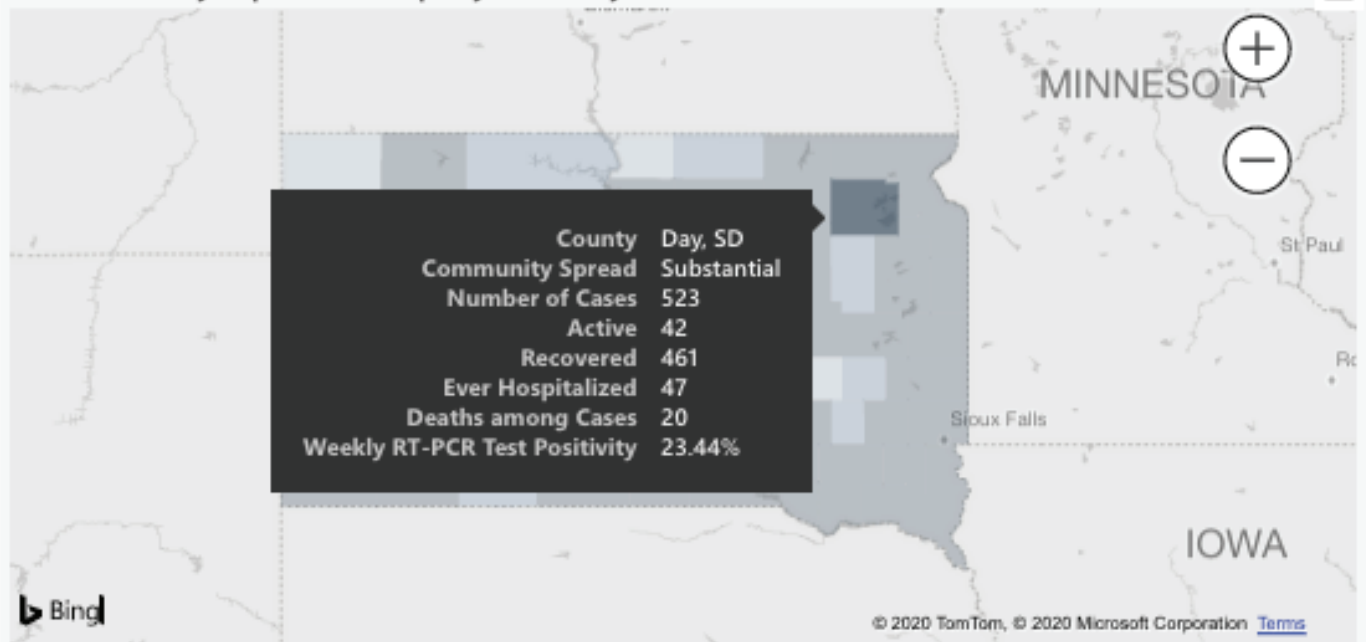
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



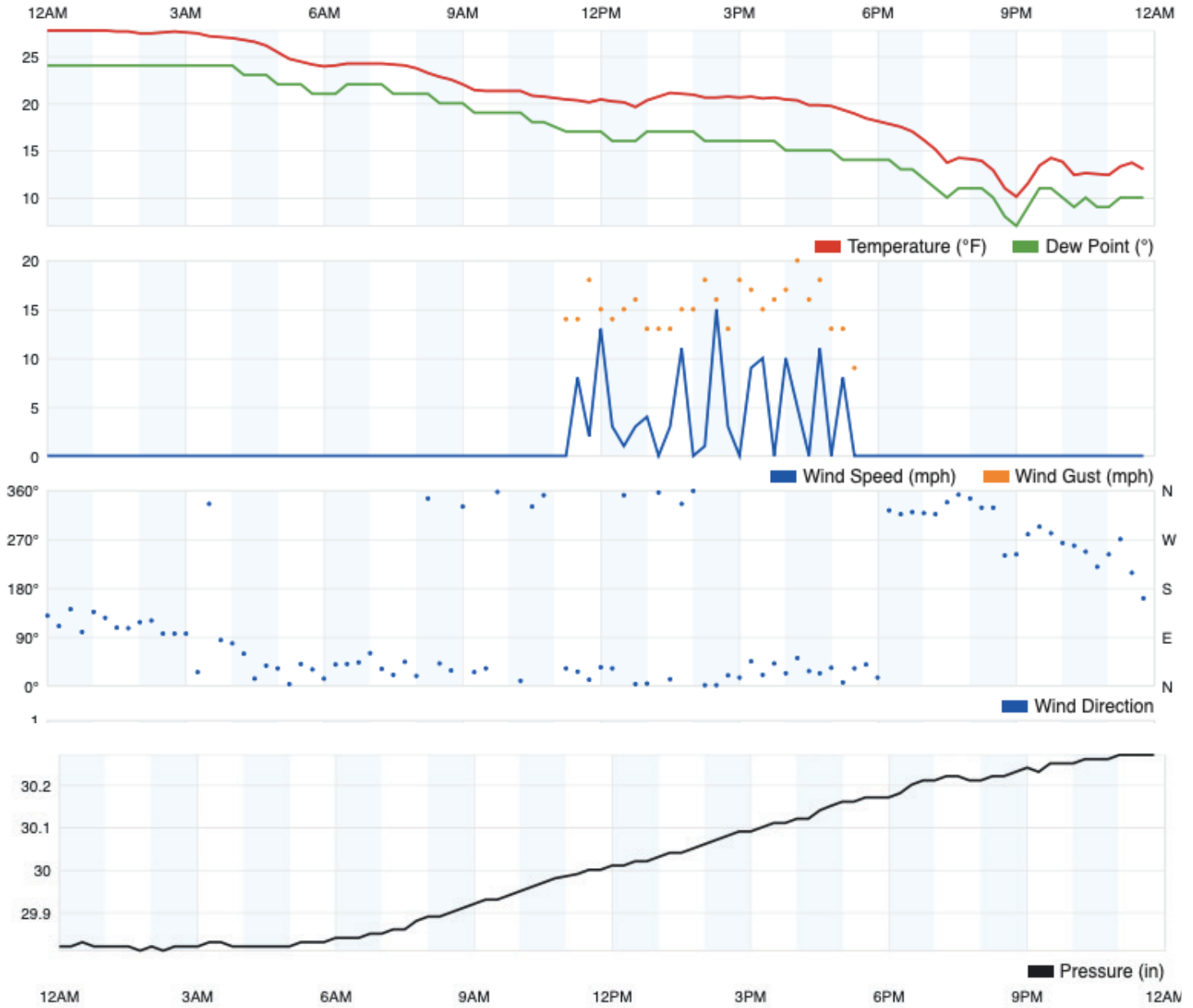
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Winter Weather Advisory

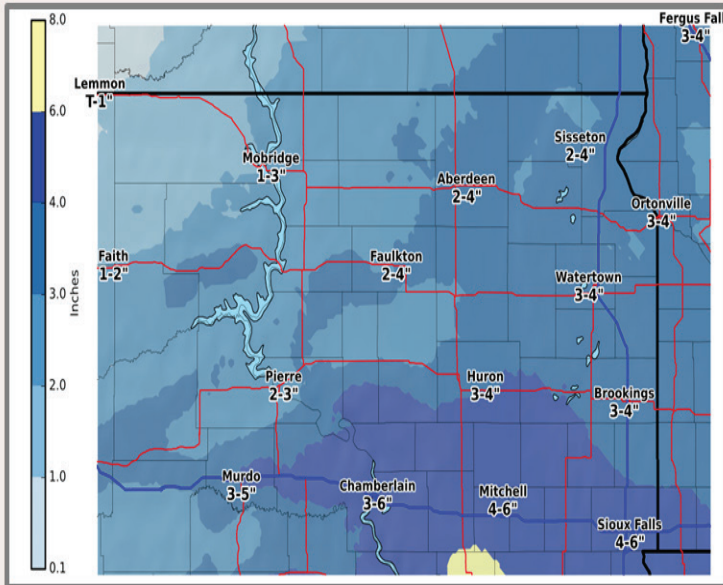
Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
100%	50%			
Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 26 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 21 °F	Low: 4 °F	High: 25 °F

Snow Tuesday – Tuesday Night

Updated: 12/28/2020 2:39 PM Central



Expected Snowfall



What to Expect

A winter storm will track across the region on Tuesday into Tuesday night. Snowfall amounts of 2-4 inches can be expected, with isolated higher amounts possible.

Southerly winds of 10 to 20 mph with higher gusts.

Travel impacts will be possible.

A winter storm will move across the region on Tuesday into Tuesday night. Snowfall amounts of 2-4 inches can be expected, with isolated higher amounts possible. Lower amounts of 1-3 inches are anticipated in north-central South Dakota. The snow will gradually end from west to east Tuesday night.

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Today in Weather History

December 29, 2005: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across parts of north-central and most of north-east South Dakota from the morning of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Big Stone and Traverse counties in west-central Minnesota had 7 to 8 inches of snow the evening of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Light rain and freezing rain fell before the snow, creating some slick roads which resulted in some accidents. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, Big Stone City, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Waubay, Browns Valley, and Wheaton; 9 inches northeast of Isabel and Hecla; 10 inches at Wilmot and Clear Lake; 12 inches at Milbank; and 14 inches at Summit.

December 29, 1876: The Pacific Express train was crossing the Ashtabula River in Ohio when the bridge collapsed. The bridge collapsed at 7:28 PM, during a snowstorm that left two feet of snow and produced 40 mph winds. The only railcar not to fall into the icy river below was the first locomotive.

1830 - A very heavy snowstorm ushered in the "winter of the deep snow." The storm produced 30 inches of snow at Peoria IL and 36 inches at Kansas City MO. Cold and snow continued until the middle of February causing great suffering among pioneers. (David Ludlum)

1894 - A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Fort Scott, KS, was buried under 26 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 - One hundred cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures. Kansas City, MO, experienced its warmest December day of record with a morning low of 60 degrees and an afternoon high of 71 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - A storm off the Middle Atlantic Coast produced heavy snow in the Appalachians and the north-eastern U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in southeastern Massachusetts. Cape Cod received thirteen inches of snow, and snow drifts three feet deep were reported around Chatham MA. Strong winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in southwestern New England. In the western U.S., a Pacific coast storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, with 24 inches reported at Mammoth Mountain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A cold front brought rain and snow to the northwestern U.S. The rainfall total of 2.70 inches at Astoria OR was a record for the date. High winds along the eastern slopes of the Northern Rockies gusted to 81 mph at Livingston MT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Snow and ice prevailed from the southwestern U.S. to the Great Lakes Region. Flagstaff, AZ, received nine inches of snow in just six hours. Bitter cold weather continued over Maine. Portland ME reported a record twenty-two straight days with highs 32 degrees or colder. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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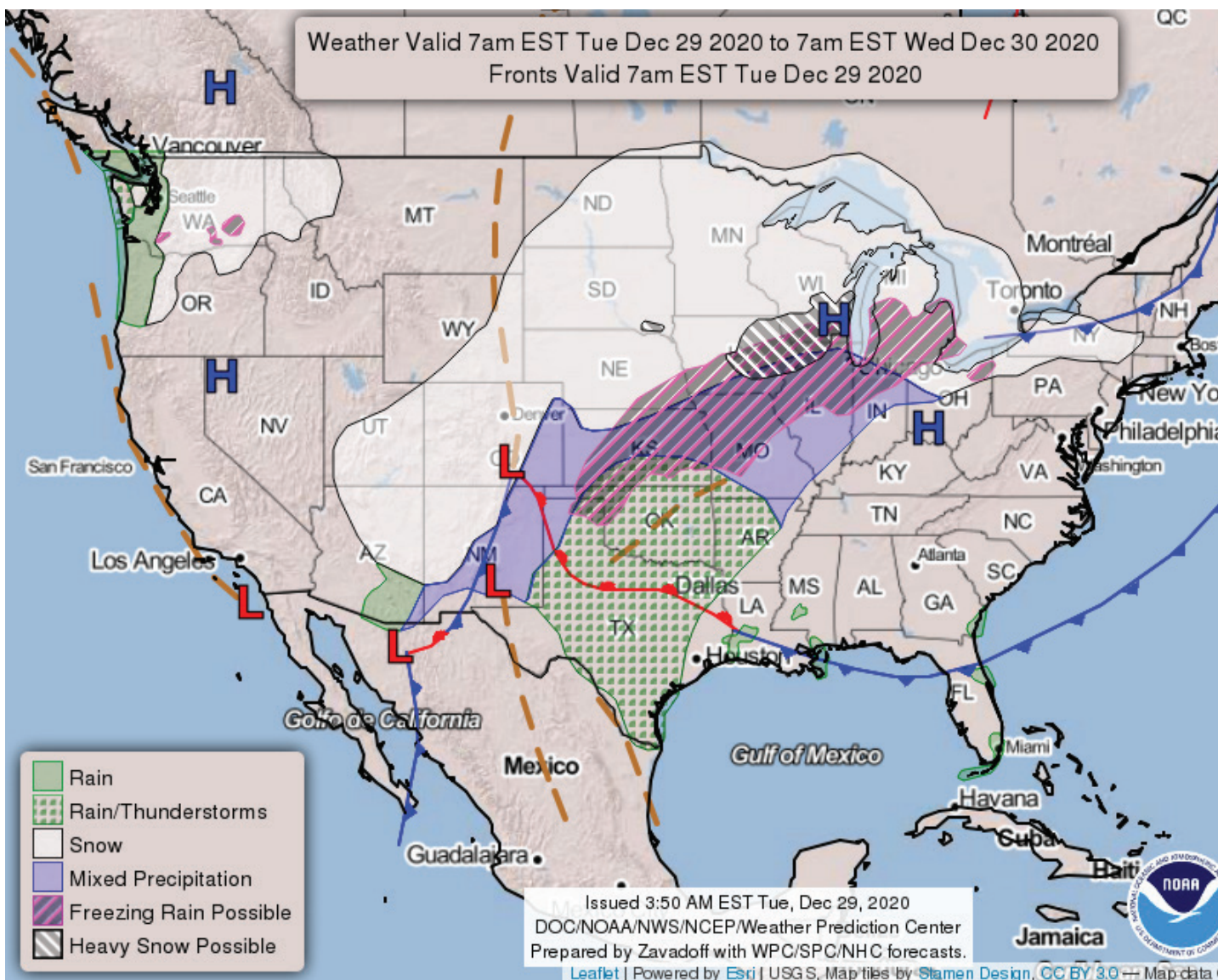
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 23.9 °F
Low Temp: 7.0 °F
Wind: 12 mph
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 59° in 1999
Record Low: -35 in 1917
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 3°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.46
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.66
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 4:59 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.



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WHY FATHERS MATTER

We rarely think of Joseph when we speak of Mary and her son, Jesus. But Joseph was a very special individual as well.

In describing him, Matthew says that he was a "just" or "righteous" man. And, because of that, he was a "decent," "fair" and "righteous" man. When he was faced with an incredibly difficult decision, an angel appeared and advised him to "go ahead with your marriage to Mary."

Initially, Scripture informs us, "that not wanting to disgrace her, he planned to send her away." He was well aware of the fact that stoning was the legal prescription for what people would think of Mary's being pregnant without being married. If he took Mary to be his wife, he could be humiliated or ridiculed by those around him. But he chose to obey the command of the angel to marry her. As a "righteous" man he was also a "merciful" man, a man willing to listen to, hear from, and obey God. Joseph was a man of great character.

But there is more. Not only was he righteous, merciful, and obedient to the voice of God, but he was a man who was sensitive and discrete. Joseph was open to the voice of God and responded immediately when God spoke to him and protected the reputation and honor of Mary – thereby revealing he was a man of integrity.

Prayer: Lord, we pray for fathers everywhere who will strive to be like the earthly father of Your Son. We ask that You raise up men of integrity to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

News from the Associated Press

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Dell Rapids St. Mary 70, Chester 35

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Dell Rapids St. Mary 53, Chester 37

Parker 61, Redfield 56

Sioux Falls Washington 69, Yankton 27

Wilmot/Waubay/Summit Co-op 61, Sisseton 58

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

Prosecutors waiting on debris testing in AG crash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A team of prosecutors is waiting for testing results on a piece of debris that may indicate where the South Dakota attorney general's car was when he struck and killed a man over three months ago, a prosecutor said Monday.

A decision on whether to charge Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg in the Sept. 12 crash has been delayed for months, prompting criticism from Gov. Kristi Noem. The Department of Public Safety, which oversaw the investigation, has reported it handed over all its findings to prosecutors, led by Hyde County deputy state's attorney Emily Sovell.

But Crystal Johnson, the Minnehaha County state's attorney who is assisting Sovell, said in an email to The Associated Press that she did not have a time frame for the results of additional testing on an "(unusual) item of debris that was in the middle of the accident scene." She said it could give information on where Ravnsborg's car was when it struck 55-year-old Joseph Boever, a Hyde County resident.

Sovell did not immediately reply to a request for comment and has not spoken publicly about the case.

Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price, who led the crash investigation, has said Ravnsborg was distracted before he drove onto the shoulder of a darkened stretch of highway, but has not provided details on what the distraction was. Boever was walking on the side of the road and displaying some type of light when Ravnsborg's 2011 Ford Taurus hit him, according to Price.

The attorney general has said he's confident that he did not commit a crime in the crash on a rural highway as he was returning home from a Republican fundraiser. In a 911 call immediately following, Ravnsborg expressed confusion, saying he had hit "something" that was "in the middle of the road." He later told a dispatcher that it could have been a deer.

Ravnsborg has said he only realized he hit a man when he returned to the accident scene the next day and found Boever's body. The attorney general has stayed on the job, but his office was not involved in the crash investigation.

South Dakota hits 2-month low in virus cases, testing slows

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota on Monday reported the lowest number of daily new coronavirus cases in two months, tallying 267 people who had tested positive, though testing also slowed after the Christmas holiday.

The Department of Health reported the results of 1,162 tests, a large drop from the average of 4,309 daily tests over the previous seven days. Health officials indicated that 14.3% of the RT-PCR tests performed came back positive, which is an indicator that more people may have infections than tests are indicating.

South Dakota has seen a significant drop in coronavirus cases after infections peaked in November. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has decreased by 47%, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. The Department of Health's count of people with active infections dipped below 7,000 for the first time since October.

No new deaths from the virus were reported, but after the November spike, the state's rate of deaths per capita has risen to the fifth-highest in the nation, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. Over the course of the pandemic, 1,446 people have died after contracting COVID-19, representing roughly one out of every 610 people.

Man killed in rollover crash in western South Dakota

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a 63-year-old man died in a rollover crash in western South Dakota.

The Rapid City Journal reports the crash happened early Sunday morning east of Keystone on state Highway 40. Authorities say the man's vehicle went off the road, hit a ditch and rolled.

The driver was pronounced dead at the scene. He was the vehicle's only occupant.

South Dakota's Highway Patrol is investigating the crash.

Belarus starts COVID-19 vaccinations with Russian shots

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Belarus on Tuesday announced the start of mass coronavirus vaccinations with the Russian-developed Sputnik V shot, becoming the second country after Russia to roll out a vaccine that is still undergoing late-stage studies to ensure its safety and effectiveness.

The first batch of Sputnik V arrived in the former Soviet republic on Tuesday, according to a joint statement by the Belarusian Health Ministry, the Russian Health Ministry and the Russian Direct Investment Fund that bankrolled development of the jab.

The health ministry posted pictures of people getting the shots on social media.

"A new stage starts in Belarus today with mass vaccinations against COVID-19. Medical staff, teachers, and those who come into contact a lot of people due to their jobs will be the first to get vaccinated. Vaccination will be entirely voluntary," Health Minister of Belarus Dmitry Pinevich was quoted in the statement as saying.

Belarus conducted its own trial of Sputnik V among 100 volunteers and gave the shot regulatory approval on Dec. 21. The Russian-made vaccine was also approved on an emergency basis in Argentina, where vaccinations are expected to start Tuesday as well.

Russia has been widely criticized for giving the domestically developed Sputnik V regulatory approval in August after the vaccine only had been tested on a few dozen people. An advanced study among tens of thousand started shortly after the vaccine received the Russian government's go-ahead.

Despite warnings to wait for the results of the study, Russian authorities started offering it to people in high-risk groups — such as medical workers and teachers — within weeks of approval. This month, mass vaccinations with Sputnik V started in Russia, even though it is still undergoing the late-stage trial.

Belarus has reported nearly 190,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and about 1,400 deaths since the start of the pandemic, but many in the Eastern European nation of 9.4 million people suspect that authorities are manipulating statistics to hide the true scope of the country's outbreak.

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has faced months of demands by protesters to step down after an August election they say was fraudulent, has cavalierly dismissed the coronavirus. He shrugged off the fears and national lockdowns the new virus had caused as "psychosis" and advised citizens to avoid catching it by driving tractors in the field, drinking vodka and visiting saunas.

His attitude has angered many Belarusians, adding to the public dismay over his authoritarian style and helping to fuel months of post-election protests.

Opposition figures say Lukashenko's government has allowed COVID-19 to run rampant in jails where it

has detained thousands of protesters.

Follow all the developments in Belarus at <https://apnews.com/Belarus>.

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

Fate of Trump's \$2,000 checks now rests with GOP-led Senate

By LISA MASCARO and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's push for \$2,000 COVID-19 relief checks now rests with the Senate after the House voted overwhelmingly to meet the president's demand to increase the \$600 stipends, but Republicans have shown little interest in boosting spending.

The outcome is highly uncertain heading into Tuesday's session. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has declined to publicly address how he plans to handle the issue. But Democrats, sharing a rare priority with Trump, have seized on the opportunity to force Republicans into a difficult vote of either backing or defying the outgoing president.

After bipartisan approval by the House, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer warned, "There is no good reason for Senate Republicans to stand in the way."

"There's strong support for these \$2,000 emergency checks from every corner of the country," Schumer said in a statement late Monday. He called on McConnell to make sure the Senate helps "meet the needs of American workers and families who are crying out for help."

The House tally was a stunning turn of events. Just days ago Republicans blocked Trump's sudden demands for bigger checks during a brief Christmas Eve session as he defiantly refused to sign the broader COVID-19 aid and year-end funding bill into law.

As Trump spent days fuming from his private club in Florida, where he is spending the holidays, dozens of Republicans calculated it was better to link with Democrats to increase the pandemic stipend rather than buck the outgoing president and constituents counting on the money. Democrats led passage, 275-134, but 44 Republicans joined almost all Democrats in approval.

Senators were set to return to session Tuesday amid similar, stark GOP divisions between those who align with Trump's populist instincts and others who adhere to what had been more traditional conservative views against government spending. Congress had settled on smaller \$600 payments in a compromise over the big year-end relief bill Trump reluctantly signed into law.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared, "Republicans have a choice: Vote for this legislation or vote to deny the American people the bigger paychecks they need."

The showdown could end up as more symbol than substance if Trump's effort fizzles out in the Senate.

The legislative action during the rare holiday week session may do little to change the \$2 trillion-plus COVID-19 relief and federal spending package Trump signed into law Sunday, one of the biggest bills of its kind providing relief for millions of Americans.

That package — \$900 billion in COVID-19 aid and \$1.4 trillion to fund government agencies — will deliver long-sought cash to businesses and individuals and avert a federal government shutdown that otherwise would have started Tuesday, in the midst of the public health crisis.

But the outcome will define Trump's GOP, putting a spotlight on the Georgia runoff election Jan. 5 where two Republican senators are in the fights of their political lives against Democrats in a pair of races that will determine which party controls the Senate next year.

Together with votes Monday and Tuesday to override Trump's veto of a sweeping defense bill, it's potentially one last confrontation between the president and the Republican Party he leads as he imposes fresh demands and disputes the results of the presidential election. The new Congress is set to be sworn in Sunday.

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Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee, acknowledged the division and said Congress had already approved ample funds during the COVID-19 crisis. "Nothing in this bill helps anybody get back to work," he said.

Aside from the direct \$600 checks to most Americans, the COVID-19 portion of the bill revives a weekly pandemic jobless benefit boost — this time \$300, through March 14 — as well as a popular Paycheck Protection Program of grants to businesses to keep workers on payrolls. It extends eviction protections, adding a new rental assistance fund.

The COVID-19 package draws and expands on an earlier effort from Washington. It offers billions of dollars for vaccine purchases and distribution, for virus contact tracing, public health departments, schools, universities, farmers, food pantry programs and other institutions and groups facing hardship in the pandemic.

Americans earning up to \$75,000 will qualify for the direct \$600 payments, which are phased out at higher income levels, and there's an additional \$600 payment per dependent child.

Meantime the government funding portion of the bill keeps federal agencies nationwide running without dramatic changes until Sept. 30.

President-elect Joe Biden told reporters at an event in Wilmington, Delaware, that he supported the \$2,000 checks.

Trump's sudden decision to sign the bill came as he faced escalating criticism from lawmakers on all sides over his eleventh-hour demands. The bipartisan bill negotiated by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had already passed the House and Senate by wide margins. Lawmakers had thought they had Trump's blessing after months of negotiations with his administration.

The president's defiant refusal to act, publicized with a heated video he tweeted just before the Christmas holiday, sparked chaos, a lapse in unemployment benefits for millions and the threat of a government shutdown in the pandemic. It was another crisis of his own making, resolved when he ultimately signed the bill into law.

In his statement about the signing, Trump repeated his frustrations with the COVID-19 relief bill for providing only \$600 checks to most Americans and complained about what he considered unnecessary spending, particularly on foreign aid — much of it proposed by his own budget.

While the president insisted he would send Congress "a redlined version" with spending items he wants removed, those are merely suggestions to Congress. Democrats said they would resist such cuts.

For now, the administration can only begin work sending out the \$600 payments.

Most House Republicans simply shrugged off Trump's push, 130 of them voting to reject the higher checks that would pile \$467 billion in additional costs. Another 20 House Republicans — including Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, a Trump confidant — skipped the vote, despite pandemic procedures that allow lawmakers to vote by proxy to avoid travel to the Capitol. McCarthy was recovering at home from elbow surgery, his office said.

A day after the signing, Trump was back at the golf course in Florida, the state where he is expected to move after Biden is sworn in on Jan. 20.

Colvin reported from West Palm Beach, Florida. Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Brexit ends Britons' right to live and work in EU

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — So far, the large majority of British and EU citizens have not felt the realities of Brexit. Though the U.K. left the European Union on Jan. 31, it follows the bloc's rules until the end of this year as part of a transition period to the new economic relationship.

That's all set to change.

On Jan. 1, Britain embarks on its new, more distant relationship with the EU after nearly five decades of closer economic, cultural and social integration.

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The change for Britain's economy and people is the most dramatic since World War II, certainly more so than when the country joined what was then the European Economic Community in 1973.

"It's a far bigger shock to our economic system and it's going to happen instantaneously," said Anand Menon, director of The U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank and a professor of European politics and foreign affairs at King's College London.

"All of a sudden you wake up in a new world at the start of January."

Here are some of the changes to movement that people will start to feel almost overnight.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

Even though the coronavirus pandemic has led to a collapse in the numbers of people traveling between Britain and the EU, the end of freedom of movement from Jan. 1 will represent the most tangible Brexit consequence so far.

Under the divorce deal agreed by the two sides on Dec. 24, the roughly 1 million British citizens who are legal residents in the EU will have broadly the same rights as they have now. The same applies to more than 3 million EU citizens living in the U.K.

But British citizens will no longer have the automatic right to live and work in the EU, and vice versa. People who want to cross the border to settle will have to follow immigration rules and face other red tape such as ensuring their qualifications are recognized.

The exception is people moving between the U.K. and Ireland, which have a separate common travel area.

For many in the EU, the freedom to be able to travel, study and live anywhere in the 27-nation bloc is among the most appealing aspects of European integration.

Yet some in Britain and other parts of Western Europe became more skeptical about freedom of movement after several former communist nations in Eastern Europe joined the EU in 2004 and many of their citizens moved to the U.K. and other wealthier countries to work. Concerns over immigration were a major factor in Britain's 2016 Brexit vote. On Jan. 1, the consequences of that decision will become apparent for British and European citizens alike.

WHAT ARE THE NEW TRAVEL RULES?

Although travelling for holidays will remain visa-free, British nationals will only be allowed to spend 90 days out of every 180 in the EU, while the U.K. will allow European citizens to stay for up to six consecutive months.

For retired British citizens who have been used to spending more than three months at their second homes on Spain's sun-soaked Costa del Sol, the change may come as a shock. British travellers in Europe will also have to have at least six months left on their passports and buy their own travel insurance. Britons will no longer be issued the European Health Insurance Card, which guarantees access to medical care across the bloc, but the U.K. says it is setting up a replacement system so that U.K. visitors to the bloc and EU citizens visiting Britain still have medical coverage.

WHAT ABOUT PETS?

For British citizens accustomed to taking their dog, cat or ferret on vacation in Europe each summer, the situation will get more complicated as Britain will no longer be part of the EU's pet passport scheme — although the agreement avoids the onerous months-long procedures that some had feared. U.K. pet owners will have to have their animal microchipped and vaccinated against rabies at least 21 days before travel, and will need to get an Animal Health Certificate from a veterinarian no more than 10 days before departure.

WILL DRIVING BE A HASSLE?

The deal means British drivers won't need an international driving permit once they cross the Channel. British motorists can travel in the EU on their U.K. licenses and insurance, as long as they carry proof that

they are insured in the form of a "green card."

WHAT ABOUT WORKING?

The end of freedom of movement will have a major impact on hiring at all ends of the labor market.

A newly graduated British citizen on holiday in the Greek islands, for example, won't be able to walk up to a beach bar and seek part-time work without having the necessary visa. The same applies for European citizens arriving in the U.K. They won't be able to turn up at a sandwich shop like Pret a Manger and look for work without the necessary documentation.

Larger businesses will also find it far more difficult and costly to hire people from the other side. The deal does include provisions to allow contractors and business travelers to make short-term work trips without visas.

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

Nashville bomber left hints of trouble, but motive elusive

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — In the days before he detonated a bomb in downtown Nashville on Christmas, Anthony Quinn Warner changed his life in ways that suggest he never intended to survive the blast that killed him and wounded three other people.

Warner, 63, gave away his car, telling the recipient that he had cancer. A month before the bombing, he signed a document that transferred his longtime home in a Nashville suburb to a California woman for nothing in return. The computer consultant told an employer that he was retiring.

But he didn't leave behind a clear digital footprint or any other obvious clues to explain why he set off the explosion in his parked recreational vehicle or played a message warning people to flee before it damaged dozens of buildings and knocked out cellphone service in the area.

While investigators tried to piece together a possible motive for the attack, a neighbor recalled a recent conversation with Warner that seemed ominous only in hindsight.

Rick Laude told The Associated Press on Monday that he saw Warner standing at his mailbox less than a week before Christmas and pulled over in his car to talk. After asking how Warner's elderly mother was doing, Laude said he casually asked him, "Is Santa going to bring you anything good for Christmas?"

Warner smiled and said, "Oh, yeah, Nashville and the world is never going to forget me," Laude recalled.

Laude said he didn't think much of the remark and thought Warner only meant that "something good" was going to happen for him financially. He was speechless when he learned that authorities had identified Warner as the bomber.

"Nothing about this guy raised any red flags," Laude said.

As investigators continued to search for a motive, body camera video released late Monday by Nashville police offered more insight to the moments leading up to the explosion and its aftermath.

The recording from Officer Michael Sipos' camera captures officers walking past the RV parked across the street as the recorded warning blares and then helping people evacuate after the thunderous blast off camera. Car alarms and sirens wail as a police dispatch voice calls for all available personnel and people stumble through downtown streets littered with glass.

David Rausch, the director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, said authorities hope to establish a motive but sometimes simply cannot.

"The best way to find motive is to talk to the individual. We will not be able to do that in this case," Rausch said Monday in an interview on NBC's "Today" show.

Investigators are analyzing Warner's belongings collected during the investigation, including a computer and a portable storage drive, and continue to interview witnesses as they try to identify a potential motive, a law enforcement official said. A review of his financial transactions also uncovered purchases of potential bomb-making components, the official said.

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Warner had recently given away a vehicle and told the person he gave it to that he had been diagnosed with cancer, though it is unclear whether he indeed had cancer, the official said. Investigators used some items collected from the vehicle, including a hat and gloves, to match Warner's DNA, and DNA was taken from one of his family members, the official said.

The official could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Warner also apparently gave away his home in Antioch, Tennessee, to a Los Angeles woman a month before the bombing. A property record dated Nov. 25 indicates Warner transferred the home to the woman in exchange for no money. The woman's signature is not on that document.

Warner had worked as a computer consultant for Nashville real estate agent Steve Fridrich, who told the AP in a text message that Warner had said he was retiring earlier this month.

Officials said Warner had not been on their radar before Christmas. A law enforcement report released Monday showed that Warner's only arrest was for a 1978 marijuana-related charge.

"It does appear that the intent was more destruction than death, but again that's all still speculation at this point as we continue in our investigation with all our partners," Rausch said.

Officials have not provided insight into why Warner selected the particular location for the bombing, which damaged an AT&T building and wreaked havoc on cellphone service and police and hospital communications in several Southern states. By Monday, the company said the majority of services had been restored for residents and businesses.

Forensic analysts were reviewing evidence from the blast site to try to identify the components of the explosives as well as information from the U.S. Bomb Data Center for intelligence and investigative leads, according to a law enforcement official who said investigators were examining Warner's digital footprint and financial history.

The official, who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, said federal agents were examining a number of potential leads and pursuing several theories, including the possibility that the AT&T building was targeted.

The bombing took place on a holiday morning well before downtown streets were bustling with activity. Police were responding to a report of shots fired Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes. Then, for reasons that may never be known, the audio switched to a recording of Petula Clark's 1964 hit "Downtown" shortly before the blast.

Balsamo reported from Washington. Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press journalists Scott Stroud and Mark Humphrey in Nashville; Eric Tucker in Washington; Denise Lavoie in Richmond, Virginia; and Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

Child labor in palm oil industry tied to Girl Scout cookies

By ROBIN McDOWELL and MARGIE MASON Associated Press

They are two young girls from two very different worlds, linked by a global industry that exploits an army of children.

Olivia Chaffin, a Girl Scout in rural Tennessee, was a top cookie seller in her troop when she first heard rainforests were being destroyed to make way for ever-expanding palm oil plantations. On one of those plantations a continent away, 10-year-old Ima helped harvest the fruit that makes its way into a dizzying array of products sold by leading Western food and cosmetics brands.

Ima is among the estimated tens of thousands of children working alongside their parents in Indonesia and Malaysia, which supply 85% of the world's most consumed vegetable oil. An Associated Press investigation found most earn little or no pay and are routinely exposed to toxic chemicals and other dangerous conditions. Some never go to school or learn to read and write. Others are smuggled across borders and left vulnerable to trafficking or sexual abuse. Many live in limbo with no citizenship and fear being swept up in police raids and thrown into detention.

The AP used U.S. Customs records and the most recently published data from producers, traders and

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buyers to trace the fruits of their labor from the processing mills where palm kernels were crushed to the supply chains of many popular kids' cereals, candies and ice creams sold by Nestle, Unilever, Kellogg's, PepsiCo and many other leading food companies, including Ferrero – one of the two makers of Girl Scout cookies.

Olivia, who earned a badge for selling more than 600 boxes of cookies, had spotted palm oil as an ingredient on the back of one of her packages but was relieved to see a green tree logo next to the words "certified sustainable." She assumed that meant her Thin Mints and Tagalongs weren't harming rainforests, orangutans or those harvesting the orange-red palm fruit.

But later, the whip-smart 11-year-old saw the word "mixed" in all caps on the label and turned to the internet, quickly learning that it meant exactly what she feared: Sustainable palm oil had been blended with oil from unsustainable sources. To her, that meant the cookies she was peddling were tainted.

Thousands of miles away in Indonesia, Ima led her class in math and dreamed of becoming a doctor. Then one day her father made her quit school because he needed help meeting the high company targets on the palm oil plantation where she was born. Instead of attending fourth grade, she squatted in the unrelenting heat, snatching up the loose kernels littering the ground and knowing if she missed even one, her family's pay would be cut.

She sometimes worked 12 hours a day, wearing only flip flops and no gloves, crying when the fruit's razor-sharp spikes bloodied her hands or when scorpions stung her fingers. The loads she carried, sometimes so heavy she would lose her footing, went to one of the very mills feeding into the supply chain of Olivia's cookies.

"I am dreaming one day I can go back to school," she told the AP, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Child labor has long been a dark stain on the \$65 billion global palm oil industry. Though often denied or minimized as kids simply helping their families on weekends or after school, it has been identified as a problem by rights groups, the United Nations and the U.S. government.

With little or no access to daycare, some young children follow their parents to the fields, where they come into contact with fertilizers and some pesticides that are banned in other countries. As they grow older, they push wheelbarrows heaped with fruit two or three times their weight. Some weed and prune the trees barefoot, while teen boys may harvest bunches large enough to crush them, slicing the fruit from lofty branches with sickle blades attached to long poles.

In some cases, an entire family may earn less in a day than a \$5 box of Girl Scout Do-si-dos.

"For 100 years, families have been stuck in a cycle of poverty and they know nothing else than work on a palm oil plantation," said Kartika Manurung, who has published reports detailing labor issues on Indonesian plantations. "When I ... ask the kids what they want to be when they grow up, some of the girls say, 'I want to be the wife of a palm oil worker.'"

The AP's investigation into child labor is part of a broader in-depth look at the industry that also exposed rape, forced labor, trafficking and slavery. Reporters crisscrossed Malaysia and Indonesia, speaking to more than 130 current and former workers – some two dozen of them child laborers – at nearly 25 companies. Their locations are not being disclosed and only partial names or nicknames are being used due to fears of retribution.

The AP found children working on plantations and corroborated accounts of abuse, whenever possible, by reviewing police reports and legal documents. Reporters also interviewed more than 100 activists, teachers, union leaders, government officials, researchers, lawyers and clergy, including some who helped victims of trafficking or sexual assault.

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Indonesian government officials said they do not know how many children work in the country's massive palm oil industry, either full or part time. But the U.N.'s International Labor Organization has estimated 1.5 million children between 10 and 17 years old labor in its agricultural sector. Palm oil is one of the largest

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crops, employing some 16 million people.

In much smaller neighboring Malaysia, a newly released government report estimated more than 33,000 children work in the industry there, many under hazardous conditions – with nearly half of them between the ages of 5 and 11. The study was conducted in 2018 after the country was slammed by the U.S. government over the use of child labor, and it did not directly address the large number of migrant children without documents hidden on many plantations in its eastern states, some of whom have never seen the inside of a classroom.

Many producers, Western buyers and banks belong to the 4,000-member Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, a global association that provides a green stamp of approval to those committed to supplying, sourcing, financing or using palm oil that's been certified as ethically sourced.

The RSPO has a system in place to address grievances, including labor abuse allegations. But of the nearly 100 complaints listed on its case tracker for the two Southeast Asian countries in the last decade, only a handful have mentioned children.

"It is an issue, and we know it's an issue," said Dan Strechay, the RSPO's global outreach and engagement director, adding that the association has started working with UNICEF and others to educate members about what constitutes child labor.

Strechay said many parents in Indonesia and Malaysia believe it's the "cultural norm" for their kids to work alongside family members, even if it means pulling them out of school. "And that's not OK," he said.

Palm oil is contained in roughly half the products on supermarket shelves and in almost three out of every four cosmetic brands, though that can be hard to discern since it appears on labels under more than 200 different names.

And in a world where more and more consumers are demanding to know the provenance of the raw materials in the products they purchase, many companies are quick to issue assurances that they are committed to "sustainable" sourcing. But supply chains often are murky – especially in the palm oil industry – and developing countries that produce commodities in large volumes cheaply often do so by disregarding the environment and minimizing labor costs.

Most people take words like "organic," "fair trade" and "sustainable" at face value. But not Olivia. She became increasingly worried about palm oil, rifling through the kitchen cupboards in her family's century-old farmhouse in Jonesborough, Tennessee, to inspect the ingredients printed on cans and wrappers. Then she began digging through her shampoos and lotions, trying to make sense of the scientific-sounding names she saw there.

Now 14, Olivia has fired letters off to the head of Girl Scouts of the USA, demanding answers about how the palm oil is sourced for the organization's cookies. She's started an online petition to get it removed. And she and some other members of Troop 543 have stopped selling them.

The Girl Scouts did not respond to questions from the AP, directing reporters to the two bakers that make the cookies. Those companies and their parent corporations also had no comment on the findings.

"I thought Girl Scouts was supposed to be about making the world a better place," Olivia said. "But this isn't at all making the world better."

Many kids are introduced to palm oil soon after they're born – it's a primary fat in infant formula. And as they grow, it's present in many of their favorite foods: It's in their Pop-Tarts and Cap'n Crunch cereal, Oreo cookies, KitKat candy bars, Magnum ice cream, doughnuts and even bubble gum.

"Let them enjoy it," said Abang, a skinny 14-year-old who dropped out of the fifth grade to help his father on an Indonesian plantation and has never tasted ice cream. He has accepted his own fate, but still dreams of a better future for his little brother.

"Let me work, just me, helping my father," Abang said. "I want my brother to go back to school. ... I don't want him in the same difficult situation like me."

Though many consumers aren't familiar with it, palm oil became ubiquitous nearly two decades ago after warnings about health risks associated with trans fats. Almost overnight, food manufacturers began

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shifting to the highly versatile and cheap oil.

Indonesia is the world's largest palm oil producer and, with a population of 270 million, there is no shortage of strong backs. Many laborers migrate from the poorest corners of the country to take jobs that others shun, often bringing their wives and children as helpers in order to meet impossibly high daily quotas.

Others have been living on the same plantations for generations, creating a built-in workforce – when one harvester retires or dies, another in the family takes his place to hold onto company-subsidized housing, which often is a dilapidated shack with no running water and sometimes only limited electricity.

It's a cycle that 15-year-old Jo was trying to break. Even though he had to help his family in the fields each day, heaving palm fruits high over his head and lobbing them onto trucks, his parents let him keep \$6 a month to cover school fees so he could attend morning classes.

"I am determined to finish high school to find a job outside the plantation," said Jo, who toiled alongside his mother, father and grandfather. "My parents are very poor. Why should I follow my parents?"

But for many migrant children in neighboring Malaysia – which relies almost entirely on foreign workers to fill constant labor shortages – the hurdles to a brighter life seem insurmountable.

Male harvesters technically are not allowed to bring their families to plantations on Borneo island, which is shared by both countries. So children often follow behind, sometimes traveling alone on illicit smugglers' routes known as "jalan tikus," or rat roads. The perilous border crossings to the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak can take place at night, either on foot across winding jungle paths or in packed speed boats racing without lights, sometimes colliding or capsizing in the dark.

An official estimate says 80,000 children of illegal migrants, mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines, are living in Sabah alone, but some rights groups say the true number could be nearly double that. Without birth certificates and with no path to citizenship, they are essentially stateless – denied access to even the most basic rights, and at high risk of exploitation.

Migrant workers without documents are often treated "inhumanely" in Malaysia, said Soes Hindharno, an official from Indonesia's Manpower Ministry. He said he had not received any complaints about child labor occurring in his own country, but an official from the ministry that oversees women and children's issues acknowledged it was an area of growing concern in Indonesia.

Malaysia's Ministry of Plantation Industries and Commodities did not respond to repeated requests for comment, but Nageeb Wahab, head of the Malaysian Palm Oil Association, a government-supported umbrella group, called allegations of child labor very serious and urged complaints to be reported to authorities.

Children of migrant parents grow up living in fear they will be separated from their families. They try to remain invisible to avoid attracting the ever-watchful eyes of police, with some keeping backpacks with supplies ready in case they need to flee their houses and sleep in the jungle to avoid raids.

Many never leave their guarded plantations, some so remote that workers must climb hills to search for a phone signal. And for those who dare to go out, trouble can come quickly.

Alex was 12 when he began working 10 hours a day on a small plantation with his father, hoisting fruits so heavy his aching muscles kept him awake at night. One day, he decided to sneak off to visit his favorite aunt in a nearby village. With no passport, Alex said authorities quickly found him and carted him off to a crowded immigration detention center where he was held for a month.

"There were hundreds of other people there, some my age, and also younger children, mostly with their mothers," he said. "I was very afraid and kept thinking about how worried my mother and father must be. It made it hard to even eat or drink."

But the biggest obstacles faced by Alex and other child workers in the two countries are lack of access to adequate, affordable education and medical care.

Some companies in Indonesia provide rudimentary elementary schooling on plantations, but children who want to continue their studies may find they have to travel too far on poor roads or that they can't afford it. In Malaysia, the problem is even bigger: Without legal documents, tens of thousands of kids are not allowed to go to government schools at all.

It's such an extensive problem that Indonesia has set up learning centers to help some of its children on plantations in the neighboring country, even sending in its own teachers. But with such heavy workloads

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on plantations, one instructor said he had to beg parents to let their sons and daughters come for even just a half-day of classes. And many children, especially those living in remote, hard-to-reach areas, still have no access to any type of education.

"Why aren't companies playing a role in setting up schools in collaboration with the government?" asked Glorene Das, executive director of Tenaganita, a Malaysian nonprofit group concentrating on migrant issues for more than two decades. "Why are they encouraging the children to work instead?"

Medical care also is woeful, with experts saying poor nutrition and daily exposure to toxic chemicals are undermining child laborers' health and development. Many Indonesian plantations have their own basic clinics, but access may be available only to full-time workers. Travel to a private doctor or hospital can take hours, and most families cannot afford outside care. Migrant children without documents in Malaysia have no right to health care and often are too scared to seek medical help in villages or cities – even in life-threatening emergencies.

Many young palm oil workers also have little understanding about reproductive health. Girls working on remote plantations are vulnerable to sexual abuse, and teen pregnancies and marriages are common.

Ana was just 13 when she first arrived in Malaysia, quickly learning, as she put it, that "anything can happen to the female workers there." She said she was raped and forced to marry her attacker, but eventually managed to break free after years of abuse and return home to start a new life. Now a mother with kids of her own, she abruptly left Indonesia last year again to look for work in Malaysia.

Many children do not have the option to ever leave. They are born on plantations, work there and sometimes die there. Overgrown headstones and crosses marking graves in crude cemeteries are found on some plantations near the towering palm trees.

Others, like 48-year-old Anna's husband, are buried in community graveyards along the Indonesian and Malaysian border. A month after the palm oil harvester's death, Anna lovingly tended his plot at the Christian site in Sabah, crammed with the bodies of hundreds of other migrants.

She said her son, whose own newborn baby was buried in the adjacent grave, had inherited his father's job. He is the family's main breadwinner now.

The cycle continues.

Olivia is not the first Girl Scout to raise questions about the way palm oil makes its way into the beloved American cookies.

More than a decade ago, two girls in a Michigan troop stopped selling S'mores and other seasonal favorites because they worried palm oil's expansion in Indonesia and Malaysia was destroying rainforests and killing endangered animals like orangutans.

After they campaigned for several years, the Girl Scouts of the USA became an affiliate member of the RSPO and agreed to start using sustainable palm oil, adding the green tree logo to its roughly 200 million boxes of cookies, which bring in nearly \$800 million annually.

The RSPO was created with the best of intentions and it attempts to factor in the interests of a wide array of groups, including environmental organizations, industry leaders and banks. Its mission was not to flip a switch overnight, but to encourage the mammoth palm oil industry to evolve after years of breakneck growth and little outside oversight.

Still, for many food and cosmetic companies facing increased pressure from conscientious consumers, the association's stamp of approval has become the go-to answer when questions are raised about their commitments to sustainability.

Monitoring the millions of workers hidden beneath palms covering an area equal to roughly the size of New Zealand, however, is next to impossible.

Some women and children on remote, sprawling plantations told the AP and labor rights groups that they are ordered to hide or stay home when sustainability auditors visit. They said only the optimal, easiest-to-reach parts of a plantation are typically showcased, with poor living and working conditions in distant areas hidden from outside eyes.

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"The RSPO promises sustainable palm oil. But it doesn't mean that that palm oil is free of child labor or other abuses," said Robin Averbeck of the Rainforest Action Network, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that has found pervasive problems on plantations, including those certified as sustainable. "It has simply become a tool for greenwashing."

When contacted by the AP, companies reaffirmed their support of human rights for all workers, with some noting they rely on their suppliers to meet industry standards and abide by local laws. If evidence of wrongdoing is found, some said they would immediately cut ties with producers.

"We aim to prevent and address the issue of child labor wherever it occurs in our supply chain," said Nestle, maker of KitKat candy bars. Unilever – the world's biggest ice-cream maker, including Magnum – noted that its suppliers "must not, under any circumstance, employ individuals under the age of 15 or under the local legal minimum age for work or mandatory schooling." There was no response from Mondelez, which owns Oreo cookies, or Cap'n Crunch parent company PepsiCo.

Consumers have their own challenges in trying to buy responsibly. Those, like Olivia, who want to make sense of where their palm oil really comes from often find themselves confused, since the dense terms used to explain what makes palm oil sustainable can sometimes raise even more questions.

Take Girls Scout cookies, for instance, which are made by two different U.S. bakers

Boxes from both are stamped with green palm logos. The maker of Olivia's cookies, Little Brownie Bakers in Kentucky, has the word "mixed" beside the tree, meaning as little as 1 percent of the palm oil might be certified sustainable. ABC Bakers in Virginia says "credits," which means money is going toward promoting sustainable production.

The bakers' parent companies – Italian confectionary brand Ferrero and Canadian-based Weston Foods – would not comment on the issue of child labor, but both said they were committed to sourcing only certified sustainable palm oil.

Weston Foods, which owns ABC Bakers, would not provide any information about its palm oil suppliers, citing proprietary reasons, so the AP could not determine if its supply chain was tainted.

Palm oil, the highest-yielding vegetable oil, is an important part of the two Southeast Asian countries' economies and the governments bristle at any form of criticism, saying the industry plays an important role in alleviating poverty.

They have banned products touted as "palm oil-free" from supermarket shelves and created slogans calling the crop "God's gift." And when students at an international school in Malaysia were criticized last year for staging a play questioning the industry's effect on the environment, school administrators responded with an apology.

Back in Indonesia, Ima could give a very different classroom presentation about palm oil, but she has no chance. She continues to toil full time on the plantation alongside her family, even though her mother had promised she eventually could resume her studies.

"Sometimes my friends ask me, 'Why did you drop out? Why are you not at school?'" Ima said, her resentment readily apparent. "Because I have to help my father. If you want to replace me and help my father, then I will go to school. How about that?"

After learning about Ima, Olivia is even more determined to fight on. She sent letters to her customers explaining her reasons for no longer selling Girl Scout cookies, and many responded by donating money to her Southern Appalachian troop to show support.

Now, Olivia is asking Girl Scouts across the country to band with her, saying, "The cookies deceive a lot of people. They think it's sustainable, but it isn't.

"I'm not just some little girl who can't do anything about this," she says. "Children can make change in the world. And we're going to."

Biden warns of Trump officials' 'roadblocks' to transition

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is warning of massive damage done to the national

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security apparatus by the Trump administration and “roadblocks” in communication between agency officials and his transition team that could undermine Americans’ security.

During remarks Monday in Wilmington, Delaware, Biden said his team has faced “obstruction” from the “political leadership” at the Defense Department and the Office of Management and Budget as they’ve sought to gather necessary information to continue the transition of power.

“Right now we just aren’t getting all the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security areas. It’s nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility,” Biden said.

He warned that his team needs “full visibility” into the budget process at the Defense Department “in order to avoid any window of confusion or catch-up that our adversaries may try to exploit.” He also said they need “a clear picture of our force posture around the world and of our operations to deter our enemies.”

Biden’s remarks came after he was briefed by members of his national security and defense teams and advisers, including his nominees for secretary of State, Defense and Homeland Security, as well as his incoming national security adviser. The president-elect said his team found that agencies “critical to our security have incurred enormous damage” during President Donald Trump’s time in office.

“Many of them have been hollowed out in personnel, capacity and in morale,” he said. “All of it makes it harder for our government to protect the American people, to defend our vital interests in a world where threats are constantly evolving and our adversaries are constantly adapting.”

Trump has still refused to concede an election he lost by more than 7 million votes, and his administration did not authorize official cooperation with the Biden transition team until Nov. 23, weeks after the election. Biden and his aides warned at the time that the delay was hampering their ability to craft their own vaccine rollout plan, but have since said cooperation on that and other issues related to COVID-19 has improved.

Last week, however, Biden himself said that the Defense Department “won’t even brief us on many things” and suggested because of this, he didn’t have a complete understanding of the full scope of the recent cyberhack that breached numerous government systems.

On Monday, Biden said his team still gathering information about the extent of the cyberhack, but described the need to “modernize” America’s defense to deter future such attacks, “rather than continuing to over-invest in legacy systems designed to address the threats of the past.”

Pentagon officials pushed back on Biden’s characterization of the disconnect between the Defense Department and the Biden team. Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said in a statement that the department has conducted 164 interviews with over 400 officials, and provided over 5,000 pages of documents, which is “far more than initially requested by Biden’s transition team.”

Miller also said that his team is continuing to schedule meetings for the remaining weeks of the transition and “answer any and all requests for information in our purview.”

Biden also spoke in length about the need to rebuild global alliances, which he said were necessary to combat climate change, address the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future epidemics, and confront the growing threat posed by China.

“Right now, there’s an enormous vacuum. We’re going to have to regain the trust and confidence of a world that has begun to find ways to work around us or without us,” he said.

Trump has implemented an “America First” foreign policy that saw the U.S. retreat from longstanding global alliances and treaties. The Trump Administration cut funding from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, withdrew from the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Accords.

The shift away from international diplomacy also precipitated an exodus of staff from key agencies, like the State Department. Trump himself has had a contentious relationship with the intelligence community, criticizing its findings that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to boost his candidacy. And still other national security agencies have faced staff cuts and unstable leadership throughout Trump’s time in office as the president frequently fired his department heads with little notice, often leaving departments with acting secretaries or vacant positions in their top ranks.

The situation has left what experts say is a major morale crisis throughout the federal government, and

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Biden said Monday that "rebuilding the full set of our instruments of foreign policy and national security is the key challenge" he and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris face when they take office on January 20.

House votes to override Trump's veto of defense bill

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled House voted overwhelmingly to override President Donald Trump's veto of a defense policy bill, setting the stage for what would be the first veto override of his presidency.

House members voted 322-87 on Monday to override the veto, well above the two-thirds needed to override. The Senate, which is expected to vote on the override this week, also needs to approve it by a two-thirds majority.

Trump rejected the defense bill last week, saying it failed to limit social media companies he claims were biased against him during his failed reelection campaign. Trump also opposes language that allows for the renaming of military bases that honor Confederate leaders.

The defense bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, affirms 3% pay raises for U.S. troops and authorizes more than \$740 billion in military programs and construction.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said after the vote that the House had done its part to ensure the NDAA becomes law "despite the president's dangerous sabotage efforts."

Trump's "reckless veto would have denied our service members hazard-duty pay," removed key protections for global peace and security and "undermined our nation's values and work to combat racism, by blocking overwhelmingly bipartisan action to rename military bases," Pelosi said.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called the bill "absolutely vital to our national security and our troops," adding, "Our men and women who volunteer to wear the uniform shouldn't be denied what they need — ever."

Trump has succeeded throughout his four-year term in enforcing party discipline in Congress, with few Republicans willing to publicly oppose him. The bipartisan vote on the widely popular defense bill showed the limits of Trump's influence in the final weeks before he leaves office, and came minutes after 130 House Republicans voted against a Trump-supported plan to increase COVID-19 relief checks to \$2,000. The House approved the larger payments, but the plan faces an uncertain future in the Republican-controlled Senate, another sign of Trump's fading hold over Congress.

Trump has offered a series of rationales for rejecting the defense bill. He urged lawmakers to impose limits on Twitter and other social media companies he claimed are biased against him, as well as to strip out language that allows for the renaming of military bases such as Fort Benning and Fort Hood that honor Confederate leaders. Trump also claimed without evidence that the biggest winner from the defense bill would be China.

In his veto message, Trump also said the bill restricts his ability to conduct foreign policy, "particularly my efforts to bring our troops home." Trump was referring to provisions in the bill that impose conditions on his plan to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan and Germany. The measures require the Pentagon to submit reports certifying that the proposed withdrawals would not jeopardize U.S. national security.

The veto override was supported by 212 Democrats, 109 Republicans and an independent. Twenty Democrats opposed the override, along with 66 Republicans and an independent.

House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy of California missed the vote, but Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a member of Republican leadership, supported the override, as did Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the House Armed Services panel. Thornberry is retiring this year and the bill is named in his honor.

The Senate approved the bill 84-13 earlier this month, well above the margin needed to override a presidential veto. Trump has vetoed eight other bills, but those were all sustained because supporters did not gain the two-thirds vote needed in each chamber for the bills to become law without Trump's signature.

Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Trump's

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declaration that China gained from the defense bill was false. He also noted the shifting explanations Trump had given for the veto.

"From Confederate base names to social media liability provisions ... to imaginary and easily refutable charges about China, it's hard to keep track of President Trump's unprincipled, irrational excuses for vetoing this bipartisan bill," Reed said.

Reed called the Dec. 23 veto "Trump's parting gift to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and a lump of coal for our troops. Donald Trump is showing more devotion to Confederate base names than to the men and women who defend our nation."

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said Trump's veto "made it clear that he does not care about the needs of our military personnel and their families."

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

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in a rare break with Trump, had urged passage of the defense bill despite Trump's veto threat. McConnell said it was important for Congress to continue its nearly six-decade-long streak of passing the defense policy bill.

Bills earn 1st sweep of Patriots since '99 with 38-9 win

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — The Buffalo Bills put a cherry atop the changing of the guard in the AFC East.

A week after unseating the Patriots as division champions, Buffalo became the first AFC East team in two decades to sweep New England in a season series with a 38-9 victory Monday night.

Josh Allen passed for four touchdowns to help the Bills stay in the mix for the No. 2 seed in the AFC playoffs.

The Bills (12-3) last swept the Patriots in 1999. The last division opponents to sweep the Patriots were the Jets and Dolphins in 2000. The Patriots' 19 straight seasons without losing both games to a divisional opponent was an NFL record. New England (6-9) will finish with its first losing record since coach Bill Belichick's first season in 2000.

Allen was 27 of 36 for 320 yards. He now has 34 touchdown passes, surpassing Jim Kelly to set a franchise single-season record. With his eighth 300-yard game, he also surpassed Drew Bledsoe's single-season team record of seven.

"We've got one game left. And all that, it's cool, the records, this and that," Allen said. "But the plan is to get to 13-3 and give ourselves a chance in the playoffs. It doesn't mean much if we can't get it done."

Stefon Diggs had nine catches for 145 yards and three touchdowns, setting a Bills single-season record for receiving yards.

"I'm new to this team so I'm basking in (the) ambience of everybody," Diggs said. "I've got a young quarterback who's balling."

The Patriots struggled to move the ball for most of the night with running back Damien Harris out for the second straight game with an ankle injury. Cam Newton had a touchdown run but was just 5 of 10 for 34 yards passing before being pulled in the third quarter for backup Jarrett Stidham.

Newton's 34 yards passing are the fewest by a Patriots starting quarterback since 1993.

He said the season has been frustrating because the work he has put in hasn't translated into wins.

"I've sacrificed so much this year, and it hurts when you have an outing that you have tonight," he said.

Belichick said he hasn't made any decisions about who will start the Patriots' finale Sunday against the New York Jets.

"It was the opportunity to give him a chance to play," Belichick said of inserting Stidham. "Cam did a good job for us. I mean, that wasn't the problem. We were just not very competitive in the beginning."

The Bills had no trouble moving the ball against a depleted Patriots defense that was missing linebacker

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Ja'Whaun Bentley and defensive tackle Lawrence Guy due to shoulder injuries.

Their absences were most glaring in the passing game. New England struggled to put pressure on Allen, allowing him time to find open receivers. The Patriots allowed a season-worst 474 yards overall.

"They outplayed us across the board, outplayed us and out-coached us," Belichick said.

The Patriots closed to 10-9 on Newton's 9-yard TD run in the second quarter, but Nick Folk missed the extra point and the Bills pulled away from there.

Buffalo used its passing game to march down the field on the ensuing drive. Allen completed 5 of 7 throws for 59 yards and a 4-yard TD to Lee Smith.

After a quick three-and-out by New England, the Bills went right back to work.

Allen misfired on his first pass of the drive, and then connected with Diggs for 17 yards to get the ball to midfield. Diggs got free again on the next play, slipping behind J.C. Jackson on a slant and sprinting the final 32 yards for the touchdown to make it 24-9.

The Allen-Diggs connection worked again on the opening drive of the second half. Allen found Diggs three times during an eight-play, 75-yard drive that ended with an 18-yard TD play by the star receiver.

INJURIES

Bills: S Jordan Poyer was helped off field late in second quarter to be evaluated for a head injury.

Patriots: DE Tashawn Bower left in the first quarter with a neck injury. ... LB Josh Uche exited in second quarter with a foot injury. ... LB Terez Hall left in the third quarter with an ankle injury. ... S Devin McCourty exited in the third quarter with a shoulder injury. ... C David Andrews left in the third quarter with a calf injury. ... RG Shaq Mason exited in the third quarter with a foot injury. ... LB Anfernee Jennings left in the fourth quarter with an undisclosed injury.

MILESTONE

Diggs became the third player in the 51-year history of the AFC East to top 110 receptions and 1,400 yards receiving in a season. The other two are Wes Welker (New England, 2011) and Marvin Harrison (Indianapolis, 1999).

MOVING ON UP

With his TD run in the second quarter, his 12th of 2020, Newton tied Steve Grogan for the franchise single-season record for rushing TDs by a quarterback. It also marked Newton's 70th career rushing TD, extending his NFL record.

UP NEXT

Bills: Host the Dolphins on Sunday.

Patriots: Host the Jets on Sunday.

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

House approves Trump's \$2K checks, sending to GOP-led Senate

By LISA MASCARO and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted overwhelmingly Monday to increase COVID-19 relief checks to \$2,000, meeting President Donald Trump's demand for bigger payments and sending the bill to the GOP-controlled Senate, where the outcome is highly uncertain.

Democrats led passage, 275-134, their majority favoring additional assistance, but dozens of Republicans suddenly joined in approval. While Democrats favored bigger checks, Congress had settled on smaller \$600 payments in a compromise over the big year-end relief bill Trump reluctantly signed into law. The president's GOP allies opposed more spending and Trump's push puts them in a difficult spot.

The vote was a stunning turn of events from just days ago, when House Republicans blocked Trump's demands during a Christmas Eve session. After Trump spent days fuming from his private club in Florida, where he is spending the holidays, dozens of Republicans preferred to link with Democrats rather than buck the outgoing president. Senators were set to return to session Tuesday, forced to consider the measure amid similar, stark GOP divisions.

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared, "Republicans have a choice: Vote for this legislation or vote to deny the American people the bigger paychecks they need."

The showdown could end up as more symbol than substance. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has declined to say publicly how the Senate will handle the bill when Democrats there try to push it forward for a vote on Tuesday.

After the robust House vote, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer warned, "There is no good reason for Senate Republicans to stand in the way."

"There's strong support for these \$2,000 emergency checks from every corner of the country," Schumer said in a statement. "Leader McConnell ought to make sure Senate Republicans do not stand in the way of helping to meet the needs of American workers and families who are crying out for help."

The legislative action during the rare holiday week session may do little to change the \$2 trillion-plus COVID-19 relief and federal spending package that Trump signed into law Sunday, one of the biggest bills of its kind providing relief for millions of Americans.

That package — \$900 billion in COVID-19 aid and \$1.4 trillion to fund government agencies — will deliver long-sought cash to businesses and individuals and avert a federal government shutdown that otherwise would have started Tuesday, in the midst of the public health crisis.

But the outcome will define Trump's GOP, putting a spotlight on the Georgia runoff election Jan. 5 where two Republican senators are in the fights of their political lives against Democrats in a pair of races that will determine which party controls the Senate next year.

Together with votes Monday and Tuesday to override Trump's veto of a sweeping defense bill, it's potentially one last confrontation between the president and the Republican Party he leads as he imposes fresh demands and disputes the results of the presidential election. The new Congress is set to be sworn in Sunday.

Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, the ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee, acknowledged the division and said Congress had already approved ample funds during the COVID-19 crisis. "Nothing in this bill helps anybody get back to work," he said.

Aside from the direct \$600 checks to most Americans, the COVID-19 portion of the bill revives a weekly pandemic jobless benefit boost — this time \$300, through March 14 — as well as a popular Paycheck Protection Program of grants to businesses to keep workers on payrolls. It extends eviction protections, adding a new rental assistance fund.

The COVID-19 package draws and expands on an earlier effort from Washington. It offers billions of dollars for vaccine purchases and distribution, for virus contact tracing, public health departments, schools, universities, farmers, food pantry programs and other institutions and groups facing hardship in the pandemic.

Americans earning up to \$75,000 will qualify for the direct \$600 payments, which are phased out at higher income levels, and there's an additional \$600 payment per dependent child.

Meantime the government funding portion of the bill keeps federal agencies nationwide running without dramatic changes until Sept. 30.

Democrats are promising more aid to come once President-elect Joe Biden takes office, but Republicans are signaling a wait-and-see approach.

Biden told reporters at an event in Wilmington, Delaware, that he supported the \$2,000 checks.

Trump's sudden decision to sign the bill came as he faced escalating criticism from lawmakers on all sides over his eleventh-hour demands. The bipartisan bill negotiated by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had already passed the House and Senate by wide margins. Lawmakers had thought they had Trump's blessing after months of negotiations with his administration.

The president's defiant refusal to act, publicized with a heated video he tweeted just before the Christmas holiday, sparked chaos, a lapse in unemployment benefits for millions and the threat of a government shutdown in the pandemic. It was another crisis of his own making, resolved when he ultimately signed the bill into law.

In his statement about the signing, Trump repeated his frustrations with the COVID-19 relief bill for providing only \$600 checks to most Americans and complained about what he considered unnecessary

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spending, particularly on foreign aid — much of it proposed by his own budget.

While the president insisted he would send Congress “a redlined version” with spending items he wants removed, those are merely suggestions to Congress. Democrats said they would resist such cuts.

For now, the administration can only begin work sending out the \$600 payments.

A day after the signing, Trump was back at the golf course in Florida, the state where he is expected to move after Biden is sworn in on Jan. 20.

Most House Republicans simply shrugged off Trump’s push, 130 of them voting to reject the higher checks that would pile \$467 billion in additional costs. Another 20 House Republicans — including Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, a Trump confidant — skipped the vote, despite pandemic procedures that allow lawmakers to vote by proxy to avoid travel to the Capitol. McCarthy was recovering at home from elbow surgery, his office said.

Republican Rep. Mo Brooks of Alabama, a conservative who supported Trump’s extraordinary and futile challenge of the election results, counted himself Monday among the opponents of a more generous relief package and Trump’s call for higher payments.

“It’s money we don’t have, we have to borrow to get and we can’t afford to pay back,” he said on “Fox and Friends.”

But Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York said she was open to the idea of \$2,000 checks. “Many Americans are in dire need of relief,” she said on the show.

Colvin reported from West Palm Beach, Florida. Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas is the ranking Republican on the Ways and Means Committee, not the chairman.

Ohio police officer fired in fatal shooting of Black man

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Report for America/Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A white Ohio police officer was fired Monday after bodycam footage showed him fatally shooting 47-year-old Andre Hill — a Black man who was holding a cellphone — and failing to administer first aid for several minutes.

Columbus police officer Adam Coy was fired hours after a hearing was held to determine his employment, Columbus Public Safety Director Ned Pettus Jr. said in a statement.

“The actions of Adam Coy do not live up to the oath of a Columbus Police officer, or the standards we, and the community, demand of our officers,” the statement read. “The shooting of Andre Hill is a tragedy for all who loved him in addition to the community and our Division of Police.”

Coy remains under criminal investigation for last week’s shooting.

The decision came after Pettus concluded a hearing to determine whether the actions taken by Coy in the moments before and after the fatal shooting of Hill on Tuesday were justified. The public safety director upheld the recommendation of Police Chief Thomas Quinlan, who made a video statement Christmas Eve, saying he had seen enough to recommend Coy be terminated.

Quinlan expedited the investigation and bypassed procedure to file two departmental charges alleging critical misconduct against Coy in the death of Hill.

“This is what accountability looks like. The evidence provided solid rationale for termination,” Quinlan said after Coy’s termination Monday afternoon. “Mr. Coy will now have to answer to the state investigators for the death of Andre Hill.”

Members of the local Fraternal Order of Police attended the hearing on behalf of Coy, who was not in attendance, according to a statement from Pettus’ office.

“Officer Coy was given the opportunity today to come and participate,” Brian Steel, vice president of the police union, told reporters Monday. “He elected not to participate. I do not know why ... I would have

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liked to have him here, but it's his decision."

Coy and another officer responded to a neighbor's nonemergency call after 1 a.m. Tuesday about a car in front of his house in the city's northwest side that had been running, then shut off, then turned back on, according to a copy of the call released Wednesday.

Mayor Andrew Ginther said it remains unclear if that car had anything to do with Hill.

Police bodycam footage showed Hill emerging from a garage and holding up a cellphone in his left hand seconds before he was fatally shot by Coy. There is no audio because the officer hadn't activated the body camera; an automatic "look back" feature captured the shooting without audio.

Hill lay on the garage floor for several minutes without any officer on the scene coming to his aid.

An investigation is also being conducted into the other officers who responded to the call that ended in Hill being shot, who Quinlan said also appear to have either failed to activate their body cameras or to render Hill aid. He said any others who violated department protocols will be held accountable.

Officers must activate their body cameras as soon as they are dispatched to a major incident such as a shooting, robbery or burglary, under departmental policy. Although Coy was dispatched on a nonemergency call, the call became an enforcement action when the officer interacted with Hill because that was separate from the original call, said police department spokesperson Sgt. James Fuqua.

In addition to an internal police investigation, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost was appointed a special prosecutor in the death of Hill on Thursday.

There is also an investigation under the state's criminal investigations unit, under Yost, with assistance from the U.S. attorney's office and the FBI's Civil Rights Division.

Coy, a 17-year member of the force, was relieved of duty, ordered to turn in his gun and badge, and stripped of police powers last week.

The killing of Hill at the hands of Columbus police follows the fatal shooting of Casey Goodson Jr. on Dec. 4 by a white Franklin County Sheriff's deputy. The two back-to-back shootings have resulted in an outpour of criticism from advocates and the Black community in Columbus for wider and more comprehensive police reform.

"The termination of Adam Coy from Columbus Division of Police does not bring Andre Hill back to those who love him," Ginther said in a statement Monday.

Hill's family issued a statement through attorney Ben Crump's law firm, calling the decision to fire Coy "correct" but urging law enforcement to do more.

"We need to redefine a relationship between police and communities of color in which it doesn't turn deadly for a Black person with a cell phone to encounter a law enforcement officer," the statement said.

Farnoush Amiri is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

FAA outlines new rules for drones and their operators

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal officials say they will allow operators to fly small drones over people and at night, potentially giving a boost to commercial use of the machines.

Most drones will need to be equipped so they can be identified remotely by law enforcement officials.

The final rules announced Monday by the Federal Aviation Administration "get us closer to the day when we will more routinely see drone operations such as the delivery of packages," said FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson.

Drones are the fastest-growing segment in all of transportation, with more than 1.7 million under registration, according to the Transportation Department.

However, the widespread commercial use of the machines has developed far more slowly than many advocates expected. Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos once predicted that his company would use drones to deliver goods to customers' doorsteps within five years, but that prediction is already off by two years.

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There have been several tests and limited uses. United Parcel Service said last year that it received approval to operate a nationwide fleet of drones and has already made hundreds of deliveries on a hospital campus in North Carolina.

Also last year, Google sister company Wing Aviation won FAA approval for commercial drone flights in a corner of Virginia.

And this past August, Amazon got similar FAA approval to deliver packages by drones. The company is still testing the service and hasn't said when shoppers will see deliveries.

For drone supporters impatient with the pace of adoption, regulatory hurdles are a leading complaint. Currently, operators who want to fly a drone over people or at night need a waiver from the FAA.

The new rules will require that drones used at night include flashing lights that can be seen up to three miles away. Operators will need special training. Small drones flying over people cannot have rotating parts capable of cutting skin.

The rules covering flights over people and at night will take effect in about two months. They finalize proposed rules issued last year.

All drones that must be registered with the FAA will be required to have equipment that broadcasts their identification, location and control station or be operated at FAA-recognized areas. So-called remote ID was a requirement imposed by Congress at the urging of national security and law enforcement agencies.

Drone manufacturers will have 18 months to begin making drones with remote ID, and operators will have one year after that to start using drones with remote ID.

Bomber to neighbor: The world is 'never going to forget me'

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, DENISE LAVOIE and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — It seemed like a friendly chat between neighbors. Only after a bomb exploded in downtown Nashville on Christmas morning could Rick Laude grasp the sinister meaning behind his neighbor's smiling remark that the city and the rest of the world would never forget him.

Laude told The Associated Press on Monday that he was speechless when he learned that authorities identified his 63-year-old neighbor, Anthony Quinn Warner, as the man suspected of detonating a bomb that killed himself, injured three other people and damaged dozens of buildings.

Laude said he saw Warner standing at his mailbox less than a week before Christmas and pulled over in his car to talk. After asking how Warner's elderly mother was doing, Laude said he casually asked, "Is Santa going to bring you anything good for Christmas?"

Warner smiled and said, "Oh, yeah, Nashville and the world is never going to forget me," Laude recalled.

Laude said he didn't think much of the remark and thought Warner only meant that "something good" was going to happen for him financially.

"Nothing about this guy raised any red flags," Laude said. "He was just quiet."

Laude said Warner sometimes did not respond when he and other neighbors waved to him, but said he did not take it personally. "I knew that he was just a recluse," he said.

Warner left behind clues that suggest he planned the bombing and intended to kill himself, but a clear motive remained elusive.

"We hope to get an answer. Sometimes, it's just not possible," David Rausch, the director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, said Monday in an interview on NBC's "Today" show. "The best way to find motive is to talk to the individual. We will not be able to do that in this case."

As investigators continued to search for a motive, body camera video released late Monday by Nashville police offered more insight to the moments leading up to the explosion and its aftermath.

The recording from Officer Michael Sipos' camera captures officers walking past the RV parked across the street as the recorded warning blares and then helping people evacuate after the thunderous blast off camera. Car alarms and sirens wailed as a voice on the dispatcher calls for all available personnel and a roll call and people stumble through the downtown area littered with glass.

Investigators are analyzing Warner's belongings collected during the investigation, including a computer

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and a portable storage drive, and continue to interview witnesses as they try to identify a motive for the explosion, a law enforcement official said. A review of his financial transactions also uncovered purchases of potential bomb-making components, the official said.

Warner had recently given away a vehicle and told the person he gave it to that he had been diagnosed with cancer, though it is unclear whether he indeed had cancer, the official said. Investigators used some items collected from the vehicle, including a hat and gloves, to match Warner's DNA and DNA was taken from one of his family members, the official said.

The official could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Warner also apparently gave away his home in Antioch, a Nashville suburb, to a Los Angeles woman a month before the bombing. A property record dated Nov. 25 indicates Warner transferred the home to the woman in exchange for no money after living there for decades. The woman's signature is not on that document.

Warner had worked as a computer consultant for Nashville real estate agent Steve Fridrich, who told the AP in a text message that Warner had said he was retiring earlier this month.

Officials said Warner had not been on their radar before Christmas. A law enforcement report released Monday showed that Warner's only arrest was for a 1978 marijuana-related charge.

"It does appear that the intent was more destruction than death, but again that's all still speculation at this point as we continue in our investigation with all our partners," Rausch added.

Furthermore, officials have not provided insight into why Warner selected the particular location for the bombing, which damaged an AT&T building and wreaked havoc on cellphone service and police and hospital communications in several Southern states. By Monday, the company said the majority of services had been restored for residents and businesses.

Forensic analysts were reviewing evidence from the blast site to try to identify the components of the explosives as well as information from the U.S. Bomb Data Center for intelligence and investigative leads, according to a law enforcement official who said investigators were examining Warner's digital footprint and financial history.

The official, who was not authorized to discuss an ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, said federal agents were examining a number of potential leads and pursuing several theories, including the possibility that the AT&T building was targeted.

Doug Korneski, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Memphis field office, said Sunday that officials were looking at any and all motives and were interviewing acquaintances of Warner's to try to determine what may have motivated him.

The bombing took place early on a holiday morning well before downtown streets were bustling with activity. Police were responding to a report of shots fired when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes. Then, for reasons that may never be known, the audio switched to a recording of Petula Clark's 1964 hit "Downtown" shortly before the blast.

In addition to the DNA found at the blast site, investigators from the Tennessee Highway Patrol were able to link the vehicle identification number recovered from the wreckage to an RV registered to Warner, officials said.

"We're still following leads, but right now there is no indication that any other persons were involved," Korneski said. "We've reviewed hours of security video surrounding the recreation vehicle. We saw no other people involved."

President-elect Joe Biden on Monday called the bombing "a reminder of the destructive power an individual or a small group can muster and the need for continued vigilance across the board."

President Donald Trump hasn't publicly commented on the explosion but has spoken to Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and offered resources and support, according to the governor's office.

Balsamo reported from Washington, and Lavoie from Richmond, Virginia. Associated Press journalists Scott Stroud and Mark Humphrey in Nashville, Michael Kunzelman in College Park, Maryland, Eric Tucker in Washington and Alexandra Jaffe in Wilmington, Delaware, contributed to this report.

China sentences lawyer who reported on outbreak to 4 years

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese court on Monday sentenced a former lawyer who reported on the early stage of the coronavirus outbreak to four years in prison on charges of “picking fights and provoking trouble,” one of her lawyers said.

The Pudong New Area People’s Court in the financial hub of Shanghai gave the sentence to Zhang Zhan following accusations she spread false information, gave interviews to foreign media, disrupted public order and “maliciously manipulated” the outbreak.

Lawyer Zhang Keke confirmed the sentence but said it was “inconvenient” to provide details — usually an indication that the court has issued a partial gag order. He said the court did not ask Zhang whether she would appeal, nor did she indicate whether she would.

Zhang, 37, traveled to Wuhan in February and posted on various social media platforms about the outbreak that is believed to have emerged in the central Chinese city late last year.

She was arrested in May amid tough nationwide measures aimed at curbing the outbreak and heavy censorship to deflect criticism of the government’s initial response. Zhang reportedly went on a prolonged hunger strike while in detention, prompting authorities to forcibly feed her, and is said to be in poor health.

China has been accused of covering up the initial outbreak and delaying the release of crucial information, allowing the virus to spread and contributing to the pandemic that has sickened more than 80 million people worldwide and killed almost 1.8 million. Beijing vigorously denies the accusations, saying it took swift action that bought time for the rest of the world to prepare.

China’s ruling Communist Party tightly controls the media and seeks to block dissemination of information it hasn’t approved for release. In the early days of the outbreak, authorities reprimanded several Wuhan doctors for “rumor-mongering” after they alerted friends on social media. The best known of the doctors, Li Wenliang, later succumbed to COVID-19.

House votes to override Trump’s veto of defense bill

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled House voted overwhelmingly Monday to override President Donald Trump’s veto of a defense policy bill, setting the stage for what would be the first veto override of his presidency.

House members voted 322-87 to override the veto, well above the two-thirds needed to override. The Senate, which is expected to vote on the override this week, also needs to approve it by a two-thirds majority.

Trump rejected the defense bill last week, saying it failed to limit social media companies he claims were biased against him during his failed reelection campaign. Trump also opposes language that allows for the renaming of military bases that honor Confederate leaders.

The defense bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, affirms 3% pay raises for U.S. troops and authorizes more than \$740 billion in military programs and construction.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said after the vote that the House had done its part to ensure the NDAA becomes law “despite the president’s dangerous sabotage efforts.”

Trump’s “reckless veto would have denied our service members hazard-duty pay,” removed key protections for global peace and security and “undermined our nation’s values and work to combat racism, by blocking overwhelmingly bipartisan action to rename military bases,” Pelosi said.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called the bill “absolutely vital to our national security and our troops,” adding, “Our men and women who volunteer to wear the uniform shouldn’t be denied what they need — ever.”

Trump has succeeded throughout his four-year term in enforcing party discipline in Congress, with few Republicans willing to publicly oppose him. The bipartisan vote on the widely popular defense bill showed the limits of Trump’s influence in the final weeks before he leaves office, and came minutes after 130 House

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Republicans voted against a Trump-supported plan to increase COVID-19 relief checks to \$2,000. The House approved the larger payments, but the plan faces an uncertain future in the Republican-controlled Senate, another sign of Trump's fading hold over Congress.

Trump has offered a series of rationales for rejecting the defense bill. He urged lawmakers to impose limits on Twitter and other social media companies he claimed are biased against him, as well as to strip out language that allows for the renaming of military bases such as Fort Benning and Fort Hood that honor Confederate leaders. Trump also claimed without evidence that the biggest winner from the defense bill would be China.

In his veto message, Trump also said the bill restricts his ability to conduct foreign policy, "particularly my efforts to bring our troops home." Trump was referring to provisions in the bill that impose conditions on his plan to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan and Germany. The measures require the Pentagon to submit reports certifying that the proposed withdrawals would not jeopardize U.S. national security.

The veto override was supported by 212 Democrats, 109 Republicans and an independent. Twenty Democrats opposed the override, along with 66 Republicans and an independent.

House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy of California missed the vote, but Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a member of Republican leadership, supported the override, as did Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the House Armed Services panel. Thornberry is retiring this year and the bill is named in his honor.

The Senate approved the bill 84-13 earlier this month, well above the margin needed to override a presidential veto. Trump has vetoed eight other bills, but those were all sustained because supporters did not gain the two-thirds vote needed in each chamber for the bills to become law without Trump's signature.

Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Trump's declaration that China gained from the defense bill was false. He also noted the shifting explanations Trump had given for the veto.

"From Confederate base names to social media liability provisions ... to imaginary and easily refutable charges about China, it's hard to keep track of President Trump's unprincipled, irrational excuses for vetoing this bipartisan bill," Reed said.

Reed called the Dec. 23 veto "Trump's parting gift to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and a lump of coal for our troops. Donald Trump is showing more devotion to Confederate base names than to the men and women who defend our nation."

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said Trump's veto "made it clear that he does not care about the needs of our military personnel and their families."

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

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in a rare break with Trump, had urged passage of the defense bill despite Trump's veto threat. McConnell said it was important for Congress to continue its nearly six-decade-long streak of passing the defense policy bill.

Each year, 1,000 Pakistani girls forcibly converted to Islam

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Neha loved the hymns that filled her church with music. But she lost the chance to sing them last year when, at the age of 14, she was forcibly converted from Christianity to Islam and married to a 45-year-old man with children twice her age.

She tells her story in a voice so low it occasionally fades away. She all but disappears as she wraps a blue scarf tightly around her face and head. Neha's husband is in jail now facing charges of rape for the underage marriage, but she is in hiding, afraid after security guards confiscated a pistol from his brother in court.

"He brought the gun to shoot me," said Neha, whose last name The Associated Press is not using for

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her safety.

Neha is one of nearly 1,000 girls from religious minorities who are forced to convert to Islam in Pakistan each year, largely to pave the way for marriages that are under the legal age and non-consensual. Human rights activists say the practice has accelerated during lockdowns against the coronavirus, when girls are out of school and more visible, bride traffickers are more active on the Internet and families are more in debt.

The U.S. State Department this month declared Pakistan "a country of particular concern" for violations of religious freedoms — a designation the Pakistani government rejects. The declaration was based in part on an appraisal by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom that underage girls in the minority Hindu, Christian, and Sikh communities were "kidnapped for forced conversion to Islam... forcibly married and subjected to rape."

While most of the converted girls are impoverished Hindus from southern Sindh province, two new cases involving Christians, including Neha's, have roiled the country in recent months.

The girls generally are kidnapped by complicit acquaintances and relatives or men looking for brides. Sometimes they are taken by powerful landlords as payment for outstanding debts by their farmhand parents, and police often look the other way. Once converted, the girls are quickly married off, often to older men or to their abductors, according to the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Forced conversions thrive unchecked on a money-making web that involves Islamic clerics who solemnize the marriages, magistrates who legalize the unions and corrupt local police who aid the culprits by refusing to investigate or sabotaging investigations, say child protection activists.

One activist, Jibran Nasir, called the network a "mafia" that preys on non-Muslim girls because they are the most vulnerable and the easiest targets "for older men with pedophilia urges."

The goal is to secure virginal brides rather than to seek new converts to Islam. Minorities make up just 3.6 percent of Pakistan's 220 million people and often are the target of discrimination. Those who report forced conversions, for example, can be targeted with charges of blasphemy.

In the feudal Kashmore region of southern Sindh province, 13-year-old Sonia Kumari was kidnapped, and a day later police told her parents she had converted from Hinduism to Islam. Her mother pleaded for her return in a video widely viewed on the internet: "For the sake of God, the Quran, whatever you believe, please return my daughter, she was forcibly taken from our home."

But a Hindu activist, who didn't want to be identified for fear of repercussions from powerful landlords, said she received a letter that the family was forced to write. The letter claimed the 13-year-old had willingly converted and wed a 36-year-old who was already married with two children.

The parents have given up.

Arzoo Raja was 13 when she disappeared from her home in central Karachi. The Christian girl's parents reported her missing and pleaded with police to find her. Two days later, officers reported back that she had been converted to Islam and was married to their 40-year-old Muslim neighbor.

In Sindh province, the age of consent for marriage is 18 years old. Arzoo's marriage certificate said she was 19.

The cleric who performed Arzoo's marriage, Qasi Ahmed Mufti Jaan Raheemi, was later implicated in at least three other underage marriages. Despite facing an outstanding arrest warrant for solemnizing Arzoo's marriage, he continued his practice in his ramshackle office above a wholesale rice market in downtown Karachi.

When an Associated Press reporter arrived at his office, Raheemi fled down a side stair, according to a fellow cleric, Mullah Kaifat Ullah, one of a half-dozen clerics who also performs marriages in the complex. He said another cleric is already in jail for marrying children.

While Ullah said he only marries girls 18 and above, he argued that "under Islamic law a girl's wedding at the age of 14 or 15 is fine."

Arzoo's mother, Rita Raja, said police ignored the family's appeals until one day she was videotaped outside the court sobbing and pleading for her daughter to be returned. The video went viral, creating a social media storm in Pakistan and prompting the authorities to step in.

"For 10 days, the parents were languishing between the police station and government authorities and

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different political parties," Nasir, the activist, said. "They were not being given any time... until it went viral. That is the real unfortunate thing over here."

Authorities have stepped in and arrested Arzoo's husband, but her mother said her daughter still refuses to come home. Raja said she is afraid of her husband's family.

The girl who loved hymns, Neha, said she was tricked into the marriage by a favorite aunt, who told Neha to accompany her to the hospital to see her sick son. Her aunt, Sandas Baloch, had converted to Islam years before and lived with her husband in the same apartment building as Neha's family.

"All Mama asked when we left was 'when will you be back?'" remembered Neha.

Instead of going to the hospital, she was taken to the home of her aunt's in-laws and told she would marry her aunt's 45-year-old brother-in-law.

"I told her I can't, I am too young and I don't want to. He is old," Neha said. "She slapped me and locked me up in a room."

Neha told of being taken before two men, one who was to be her husband and the other who recorded her marriage. They said she was 19. She said she was too frightened to speak because her aunt threatened to harm her two-year-old brother if she refused to marry.

She learned of her conversion only when she was told to sign the marriage certificate with her new name — Fatima.

For a week she was locked in one room. Her new husband came to her on the first night. Tears stained her blue scarf as she remembered it:

"I screamed and cried all night. I have images in my mind I can't scratch out," said Neha. "I hate him."

His elder daughter brought her food each day, and Neha begged for help to escape. Although the woman was frightened of her father, she relented a week after the marriage, bringing the underage bride a burqa — the all-covering garment worn by some Muslim women — and 500 rupees (about \$3). Neha fled.

But when she arrived home, Neha found her family had turned against her.

"I went home and I cried to my Mama about my aunt, what she said and the threats. But she didn't want me anymore," said Neha.

Her parents feared what her new husband might do to them, Neha said. Further, the prospects of marriage for a girl in conservative Pakistan who has been raped or married before are slim, and human rights activists say they often are seen as a burden.

Neha's family, including her aunt, all refused to talk to the AP. Her husband's lawyer, Mohammad Saleem, insisted that she married and converted voluntarily.

Neha found protection at a Christian church in Karachi, living on the compound with the pastor's family, who say the girl still wakes screaming in the night. She hopes to go back to school one day but is still distraught.

"At the beginning my nightmares were every night, but now it is just sometimes when I remember and inside I am shaking," she said. "Before I wanted to be a lawyer, but now I don't know what I will do. Even my mama doesn't want me now."

Mormon church sued for alleged role in Boy Scouts sex abuse

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was hit with several lawsuits Monday for allegedly covering up decades of sexual abuse among Boy Scout troops in Arizona, marking the latest litigation before the state's end-of-year deadline for adult victims to sue.

The church "must be held accountable in order to bring healing and closure to Mormon victims of childhood sexual abuse," Hurley McKenna & Mertz, a law firm that focuses on church sex abuse, said in a statement.

In the seven lawsuits each representing seven different male victims, attorneys say church officials never notified authorities about abuse allegations. Public records show members of church-sponsored Boy Scout troops who were abused would tell church bishops about what they had experienced. The lawsuits allege bishops would then tell the victims to keep quiet so the church could conduct its own investigation. In the meantime, troop leaders and volunteers accused of sex abuse would be allowed to continue in their roles

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or be assigned to another troop, the suits said.

Church spokesman Sam Penrod said in a statement that the faith has zero tolerance for abuse of any kind and that the serious allegations require thorough investigation. He called it inaccurate to say the faith had access to files that had names of banned Scout leaders and said the church hasn't seen the records that allegedly back the accusations.

"The claim that the church has had access to the BSA ineligible volunteer files for many decades is simply false," Penrod said. "The church learned about the details of those files at the same time as the general public. These claims will be carefully evaluated and appropriately addressed."

All seven victims are asking for a jury to award an unspecified sum for medical expenses, pain and suffering. They are also seeking punitive damages for the "outrageous conduct" of church officials.

The church sponsored at least seven troops in Arizona in metro Phoenix and Tucson, according to attorneys. The suits were all filed earlier this month — six in Maricopa County Superior Court and one in Pima County Superior Court. The allegations of sexual abuse touch all troops between 1972 and 2009.

The church was the largest sponsor of Boy Scouts of America troops and its greatest ally until the Utah-based faith ended the partnership on Jan. 1, 2020, and pulled out more than 400,000 young people. The faith moved them into its own global youth program that focuses on religion and spiritual development, while weaving in camping and other outdoor activities in parts of the world where that's feasible.

The split between the Boy Scouts and the faith known widely as the Mormon church ended a nearly century-old relationship between two organizations that were brought together by shared values that diverged in recent years. Amid declining membership, the Boy Scouts of America opened its arms to openly gay youth members and adult volunteers as well as girls and transgender boys, while the church believes that same-sex intimacy is a sin.

In its first step toward creating a compensation fund for men who were molested as youngsters years ago by scoutmasters or other leaders, the Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy protection in February. Around 90,000 sexual abuse claims have been filed against the Boy Scouts. It's the latest major American institution to seek bankruptcy protection amid mounting legal pressures over allegations of sexual abuse. Roman Catholic dioceses across the country and some universities have paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years.

These suits come as a window to pursue litigation for some victims of childhood sexual abuse in Arizona is about to close. The state joined several others last year in extending the rights of now-adult victims to sue their alleged assailants and any churches, youth groups or other institutions that turned a blind eye at the time of the abuse.

Lawmakers gave victims until their 30th birthday to sue — a decade longer than before. Victims who missed the cutoff have a one-time opportunity to file suit before the end of the year. Arizona has no deadline for criminal charges in child sexual abuse cases.

Andrew Van Arsdale, a lawyer with Abused in Scouting, says the legal network is filing 261 sex abuse lawsuits in Arizona on Monday against various local Scout councils.

Associated Press writers Brady McCombs in Salt Lake City and David Crary in New York contributed to this report.

Lawyer: Soldier charged in Rockford shooting may have PTSD

By MICHAEL TARM and SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — An attorney for a U.S. Army special forces sergeant arrested in what authorities called an apparently random shooting at an Illinois bowling alley that left three people dead told an initial hearing Monday that her client may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Duke Webb, 37, faces three counts of murder and three counts of first-degree attempted murder for injuring three others in the shooting at Don Carter Lanes, in Rockford, on Saturday evening.

According to Army service information, Webb had four deployments to Afghanistan, the most recent

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once ending in July.

His lawyer, Elizabeth Bucko, also told the hearing in a Winnebago County courtroom that Webb appeared to have issues with memory loss. She added that he will undergo mental health evaluations, the Rockford Register Star reported.

The judge denied bond for Webb, meaning he will remain jailed. His arraignment was set for Feb. 16.

Webb was taken into custody shortly after the shooting and without officers firing a shot, Rockford Police Chief Dan O'Shea said Sunday. The suspect has no known ties to the victims and authorities "believe this was a completely random act," O'Shea said.

At a news conference Monday afternoon, Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley said that Webb was in the Rockford area visiting family. But Hanley declined to comment on possible motives for the shooting.

Bucko, the defense attorney, told The Associated Press later Monday that Webb had no prior criminal record in Illinois or anywhere else, something she said was confirmed by a pretrial service report to the court. She added that Webb "has been successful in the service for 12 years."

Webb joined the Army in 2008 and was on leave Saturday, the Army has said.

A criminal complaint released Monday says Webb admitted to the shootings shortly after officers arrived on the scene, even showing officers where he'd placed two guns he had brought with him — a Glock .40 caliber and a Glock .389 caliber.

Hanley added Monday that the firearms did not appear to be military-issued.

The complaint describes horrific scenes as the gunman opened fire just before 7 p.m. Saturday, first targeting a group of teenagers on the first floor of the two-story building.

A bullet ripped through the shoulder of a 14-year-girl, and a 14-year-old boy was hit in the face. Both survived. Thomas Furseth, 65, was on the first floor and began running toward the stairs to the second-floor bar when the gunman fatally shot him in the torso, according to the complaint. He managed to get to the second floor before collapsing.

The gunman then went up the stairs himself and opened fire in a bar area filled with up to 25 people. Dennis Steinhoff, 73, was fatally shot in the torso. Jerome Woodfork, 69, also was fatally shot and a witness later described seeing Woodfork falling from a second-floor balcony. His body was found below the balcony in a parking lot.

Tyrone Lewis, 62, survived, but was listed in critical condition. He was shot while in the bar area in the thigh, back, neck, groin and buttocks.

According to the Army, Webb's first deployment to Afghanistan was from August to December 2009. His other deployments were from October 2013 to April 2014, from October 2014 to April 2015, and from January to July of this year.

Webb was twice awarded the Bronze Star. Among the other awards he has compiled was the Army Good Conduct Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Medal and the Combat Action Badge, according to the service information.

The Army has said Webb is a special forces assistant operations and intelligence sergeant assigned to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. O'Shea did not explain why he was in Illinois.

The 14-year-old boy shot in the face was airlifted to a hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, in stable condition, and a 16-year-old girl who was shot in the shoulder was treated at a hospital and released.

Maj. Gen. John Brennan, commander of 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), said in a statement Sunday night that Webb's alleged actions were "shocking" and "completely out of character" with Webb's 12 years of honorable service.

Rockford is a city of about 170,000 residents about 80 miles (130 kilometers) northwest of Chicago.

The bowling alley was closed when the shooting happened, in accordance with restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, O'Shea said. But a bar upstairs was open. The chief said the upstairs venue has double doors that open to the outside, ensuring the bar is in compliance with Illinois' COVID-19 mitigation guidance.

Most of the people at Don Carter Lanes escaped or hid, O'Shea said. The teens who were wounded

were picking up food at the carryout section of the bowling alley, he said.

Associated Press National Security Writer Robert Burns in Washington, D.C., and AP researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York also contributed to this report.

From Zoom to Quibi, the tech winners and losers of 2020

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MAE ANDERSON AP Technology Writers

We streamed, we Zoomed, we ordered groceries and houseplants online, we created virtual villages while navigating laptop shortages to work and learn from home. In many ways, 2020's pandemic-induced isolation threw our dependence on technology into overdrive, snipping away at our real-life connections while bringing digital relationships to the fore.

But for every life-changing Zoom, there was at least one soon-forgotten Quibi. Here's a look at the year's tech winners and losers.

LOSERS:

— Virtual Reality

As the world adjusted to a new stuck-at-home reality, the pandemic could have been virtual reality's chance to offer an escape. With the use of special headsets and accouterments like gloves, the technology lets people interact with a 360 degree view of a three-dimensional environment, seemingly a good fit for people stuck indoors.

But people turned to easier-to-use software and games that they already had. Few rushed to spend hundreds of dollars on a clunky new headset or tried to learn the ropes of virtual reality meeting software. And no VR games broke into the mainstream. So virtual reality, on the verge of success for decades, missed its moment, again.

— Social media election labels

It was the year of labels on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and even TikTok. Ahead of the Nov. 3 U.S. presidential vote, the companies promised to clamp down on election misinformation, including baseless charges of fraud and candidates' premature declarations of victory. And the most visible part of this was the bevy of labels applied to tweets, posts, photos and videos.

"Some or all of the content shared in this Tweet is disputed and might be misleading about an election or other civic process," read one typical label applied to a tweet by President Donald Trump.

But many experts said that while the labels made it appear that the companies were taking action, "at the end of the day it proved to be pretty ineffective," as Jennifer Grygiel a professor at Syracuse University and social media expert, put it.

— Quibi

Less than a year ago, Quibi launched a splashy Super Bowl ad that posed the question "What's a Quibi?" People may still be scratching their heads.

Quibi, short for "quick bites," raised \$1.75 billion from investors including major Hollywood players Disney, NBCUniversal and Viacom.

But the service struggled to reach viewers, as short videos abound on the internet and the coronavirus pandemic kept many people at home. It announced it was shutting down in October, just months after its April launch.

— Uber and Lyft

Fresh off of their initial public offerings the year before and still struggling to show they can be profitable, the ride-hailing services were clobbered by the pandemic in 2020, as people stopped taking cars and huddled down at home.

In May, Uber laid off 3,700 people, or about 14% of its workforce. Lyft also announced job cuts.

But there are some signs of hope. After significantly reducing costs by restructuring in the second quarter, Lyft said last month it expects to have its first profitable quarter at the end of 2021. And the companies

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scored a major victory in California, where voters passed Proposition 22, granting them an others an exception to a law that sought to classify their drivers as employees, an expense that analysts thought would have pummeled their business in the nation's most populous state.

— U.S. TikTok ban

While India outlawed the popular video sharing app, in the U.S. TikTok appears close to riding out Donald Trump's term without the president succeeding in his efforts to ban it.

Earlier this month, a federal judge blocked a potential ban. It was the latest legal defeat for the administration in its efforts to wrest the app from its Chinese owners. In October, another federal judge postponed a shutdown scheduled for November.

Meanwhile, a government deadline for TikTok's parent, ByteDance to complete a deal that would have Oracle and Walmart invest in TikTok has also passed, with the status of the deal unclear.

While President-elect Joe Biden has said TikTok is a concern, it's not clear what his administration will carry on the Trump administration's attempts at a ban.

WINNERS:

— Nintendo Switch

Even in a year heralding splashy new consoles from Xbox and PlayStation, the Nintendo Switch was the console that could. Launched in 2017, the Switch became a fast seller. That was helped by the launch of the handled Switch Lite in September 2019.

In March, it became hard to find a Switch as people searched for ways to be entertained inside their homes. Boosting its popularity was the release of island-simulation game "Animal Crossing: New Horizons," which debuted March 20 and has now sold a cumulative 26 million units globally, according to Nintendo.

According to the NPD Group, during the first 11 months of 2020, Nintendo Switch sold 6.92 million units in the U.S. It has been the best-selling console in units sold for 24 consecutive months, a record.

— Zoom

All video conferencing software from Microsoft Teams to WebEx thrived during the abrupt shift of tens of millions of people to remote working and schooling during pandemic. But only one became a verb.

Zoom Video Communications was a relatively unheralded company before the pandemic hit, but its ease of use let to wide adoption during the pandemic. There were some growing pains, including lax security that lead to "Zoom bombing" breaches early on. The company revamped its security and remains one of the popular platforms to host remote meetings and classes.

— Ransomware purveyors

The ransomware scourge — in which criminals hold data hostage by scrambling it until victims pay up — reached epic dimensions in 2020, dovetailing terribly with the COVID-19 plague. In Germany, a patient turned away from the emergency room of a hospital whose IT system was paralyzed by an attack died on the way to another hospital.

In the U.S., the number of attacks on healthcare facilities was on track to nearly double from 50 in 2019. Attacks on state and local governments were up about 50% to more than 150. Even grammar schools have been hit — shutting down remote learning for students from Baltimore to Las Vegas.

Cybersecurity firm Emsisoft estimates the cost of U.S. ransomware attacks in the U.S. alone this year at more than \$9 billion between ransoms paid and downtime/recovery.

— PC makers

After beginning the year grappling with exasperating delays in their supply chains, the personal computer industry found itself scrambling to keep up with surging demand for machines that became indispensable during a pandemic that kept millions of workers and students at home.

The outbreak initially stymied production because PC makers weren't able to get the parts they needed from overseas factories that shut down during the early stages of the health crisis.

Those closures contributed to a steep decline in sales during the first three months of the year. But it has been boom times ever since.

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The July-September period was particularly robust, with PC shipments in the U.S. surging 11% from the same time in 2019 — the industry's biggest quarterly sales increase in a decade, according to the research firm Gartner.

— E-commerce

The biggest of the bunch, Amazon, is one of the few companies that has thrived during the coronavirus outbreak. People have turned to it to order groceries, supplies and other items online, helping the company bring in record revenue and profits between April and June. That came even though it had to spend \$4 billion on cleaning supplies and to pay workers overtime and bonuses.

But it's not just Amazon. The pandemic is accelerating the move to online shopping, a trend experts expect to say even after vaccines allow the world to resume normal lives. And thanks in part to shoppers consciously supporting small businesses, Adobe Analytics says online sales at smaller U.S. retailers were up 349% on Thanksgiving and Black Friday. At the more than 1 million businesses that use Shopify to build their websites, sales rose 75% from a year ago to \$2.4 billion on Black Friday, according to Shopify.

JURY'S OUT:

— Big Tech

Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Google did well financially, with each company's stock price and profit up considerably since the start of the year. They gained users, rolled out new products and features and kept on hiring even as other companies and industries faced significant cuts.

But not all is well in the world of Big Tech. Regulators are breathing down each company's neck and that's unlikely to ease up in 2021. Google faces an antitrust lawsuit from the Department of Justice. And Facebook has been hit by one from the Federal Trade Commission along with nearly every U.S. state that seeks to split it off from WhatsApp and Instagram.

More cases could follow. Congressional investigators spent months digging into the actions of Apple and Amazon in addition to Facebook and Google, and called the CEOs of all four companies to testify.

AP Technology Writers Frank Bajak and Michael Liedtke contributed to this story.

More COVID-19 vaccines in the pipeline as US effort ramps up

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

A huge U.S. study of another COVID-19 vaccine candidate got underway Monday as states continue to roll out scarce supplies of the first shots to a nation anxiously awaiting relief from the catastrophic outbreak.

Public health experts say more options in addition to the two vaccines now being dispensed — one made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, the other by Moderna — are critical to amassing enough shots for the country and the world.

The candidate made by Novavax Inc. is the fifth to reach final-stage testing in the United States. Some 30,000 volunteers are needed to prove if the shot — a different kind than its Pfizer and Moderna competitors — really works and is safe.

"If you want to have enough vaccine to vaccinate all the people in the U.S. who you'd like to vaccinate — up to 85% or more of the population — you're going to need more than two companies," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, told The Associated Press on Monday.

The coronavirus is blamed for about 1.8 million deaths worldwide, including more than 330,000 in the U.S. This has been the deadliest month of the outbreak in the U.S. yet, with about 65,000 deaths in December so far, according to the COVID Tracking Project. The nation has repeatedly recorded more than 3,000 dead per day over the past few weeks.

And the U.S. could be facing a terrible winter: Despite warnings to stay home and avoid others over Christmastime, nearly 1.3 million people went through the nation's airports on Sunday, the highest one-day total since the crisis took hold in the U.S. nine months ago.

The Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed expects to have shipped 20 million doses of the

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Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to states by the beginning of January, fewer than originally estimated to the frustration of states and health officials trying to schedule the shots.

There is no real-time tracking of how quickly people are getting the first of the two required doses. As of Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had reports of more than 2.1 million vaccinations out of 11.4 million doses shipped — but the agency knows that count is outdated. It can take days for reports from vaccine providers to trickle in and get added to the site.

“Just because a vaccine arrives doesn’t mean we can put an on-the-spot clinic up and running,” said Jenny Barta, a public health official in Carlton County, Minnesota.

But Tuesday, her agency aims to vaccinate 100 people in a drive-thru clinic for emergency medical workers that Barta hopes could become a model for larger attempts at mass vaccination. Nurses will wheel vaccine to cars lined up in a county-owned snowplow garage. Once the drivers get their shots, they will wait in parking spaces to be sure they don’t have an allergic reaction before heading home.

“Vaccinating one individual at a time is how we’re going to work our way out of this pandemic,” she said.

Yet another worry hanging over the vaccine scramble: Will shots block a new variant of the coronavirus that emerged in Britain and might spread more easily? Fauci said that data from Britain indicates the vaccines still will protect against the virus but that National Institutes of Health researchers will be “looking at it very intensively” to be sure.

A look at the frontrunners in the global vaccine race:

GENETIC CODE VACCINES

The U.S. based its emergency rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and a similar one made by Moderna and the NIH on studies suggesting they are both roughly 95% effective. Europe over the weekend began its first vaccinations with the Pfizer shot, and on Jan. 6 will decide whether to add Moderna’s.

These shots are made with a brand-new technology that injects a piece of genetic code for the spike protein that coats the coronavirus. That messenger RNA, or mRNA, induces the body to produce some harmless spike protein, enough to prime the immune system to react if it later encounters the real virus.

Both vaccines must be kept frozen, the Pfizer shot at ultra-low temperatures that complicate its delivery to poor or rural areas.

Additional companies are working toward their own mRNA candidates, including Germany’s CureVac, which has begun a large study in Europe.

PROTEIN VACCINES

The Novavax candidate is made differently, using what Fauci called a “more tried and true” technology that needs only ordinary refrigeration. The Maryland company grows harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in the laboratory and mixes in an immune-boosting chemical.

Novavax already has enrolled 15,000 people in a late-stage study in Britain and 4,000 in South Africa. The newest and largest study, funded by the U.S. government, will recruit volunteers at more than 115 sites in the U.S. and Mexico and target high-risk older adults along with volunteers from Black and Hispanic communities, which have been hit hard by the virus.

“We’ve got to protect our community and our people,” said the Rev. Peter Johnson, 75, a prominent civil rights activist in Dallas who was among the first volunteers.

Two-thirds of participants will receive vaccine and the rest dummy shots, a twist from earlier vaccine studies that gave half their volunteers a placebo. That should help researchers recruit people who wonder whether it’s better to take part in a study or wait their turn for an existing shot, said Dr. Gregory Glenn, research chief at Novavax.

For many people, that would be a long wait: The Pfizer and Moderna shots are slated first for health care workers and nursing home residents, followed by people 75 and older and essential workers.

“If you wanted to hedge your bets, for most people who aren’t in those very high-risk groups, the shortest route to getting the vaccine would be to sign up for a trial,” said NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins.

TROJAN HORSE VACCINES

The next big vaccine news may come from Johnson & Johnson, which is aiming for a one-dose COVID-19

vaccine.

Made in yet another way, it uses a harmless virus – a cold virus called an adenovirus -- to carry the spike gene into the body. In mid-December, J&J finished enrolling about 45,000 volunteers in a final-stage study in the U.S. and a half-dozen other countries. Fauci expects early results sometime next month.

In Britain, regulators also are considering clearing a similar vaccine made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

Tests of the shots in Britain, South Africa and Brazil suggested they are safe and partially protective — about 70%. But questions remain about how well the vaccine works in people over 55 and how to interpret results from a small number of people given a different set of doses.

A U.S. study of the AstraZeneca shots is still recruiting volunteers; Fauci said researchers hope it will provide a more clear answer.

Companies in China and Russia also are producing adenovirus-based vaccines and began administering them before the results of final testing came in. Argentina is expected to soon use the Russian vaccine.

“KILLED” VACCINES

Spike-focused vaccines aren't the only option. Making vaccines by growing a disease-causing virus and then killing it is a still older approach that gives the body a sneak peek at the germ itself rather than just that single spike protein.

China has three such “inactivated” COVID-19 vaccines in final testing in several countries and has allowed emergency use in some people ahead of results. An Indian company is testing its own inactivated candidate.

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Saudi women's rights activist sentenced to nearly 6 years

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — One of Saudi Arabia's most prominent women's rights activists was sentenced Monday to nearly six years in prison under a vague and broadly worded counterterrorism law. The ruling nearly brings to a close a case that has drawn international criticism and the ire of U.S. lawmakers.

Loujain al-Hathloul has already been in pre-trial detention and has endured several stretches of solitary confinement. Her continued imprisonment was likely to be a point of contention in relations between the kingdom and the incoming presidency of Joe Biden, whose inauguration takes place in January — around two months before what is now expected to be al-Hathloul's release date.

Al-Hathloul could be released in March 2021 based on time already served, according to rights group “Prisoners of Conscience,” which focuses on Saudi political detainees. She has been imprisoned since May 2018, and 34 months of her sentencing will be suspended.

Her family said in a statement she will be barred from leaving the kingdom for five years and required to serve three years of probation after her release.

Biden has vowed to review the U.S.-Saudi relationship and take into greater consideration human rights and democratic principles. He has also vowed to reverse President Donald Trump's policy of giving Saudi Arabia “a blank check to pursue a disastrous set of policies,” including the targeting of female activists.

Jake Sullivan, Biden's incoming national security adviser, called the sentencing of al-Hathloul “unjust and troubling.”

“As we have said, the Biden-Harris administration will stand up against human rights violations wherever they occur,” he said in a tweet.

Al-Hathloul was found guilty and sentenced to five years and eight months by the kingdom's anti-terrorism court on charges of agitating for change, pursuing a foreign agenda, using the internet to harm public order and cooperating with individuals and entities that have committed crimes under anti-terror laws, according to state-linked Saudi news site Sabq. The charges all come under the country's broadly worded counterterrorism law.

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Another Saudi women's rights activist, Maya'a al-Zahrani, was issued the same sentence for a similar list of charges by the Specialized Criminal Court, which tries terrorism cases, according to local media reports Monday.

Both women have 30 days to appeal the verdicts.

A number of other women's rights activists remain imprisoned or continue to face trials on charges related to their activism, such as pushing for the right to drive before the ban was lifted in mid-2018.

"She was charged, tried and convicted using counter-terrorism laws," Loujain's sister, Lina al-Hathloul, said in a statement. "My sister is not a terrorist, she is an activist. To be sentenced for her activism for the very reforms that MBS and the Saudi kingdom so proudly tout is the ultimate hypocrisy," she said, referring to the Saudi crown prince by his initials.

Sabq, which said its reporter was allowed inside the courtroom, reported that the judge said al-Hathloul had confessed without coercion to committing the crimes. The report said the verdict was issued in the presence of the prosecutor, the defendant, a representative from the government's Human Rights Commission and a handful of select local media representatives.

The 31-year-old Saudi activist has long been defiantly outspoken about human rights in Saudi Arabia, even from behind bars. She launched hunger strikes to protest her imprisonment and joined other female activists in telling Saudi judges that she was tortured and sexually assaulted by masked men during interrogations. The women say they were caned, electrocuted and waterboarded. Some say they were forcibly groped and threatened with rape.

Al-Hathloul rejected an offer to rescind her allegations of torture in exchange for early release, according to her family. A court recently dismissed her allegations, citing a lack of evidence.

Among other allegations was that one of the masked interrogators was Saud al-Qahtani, a close confidante and advisor to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the time. Al-Qahtani was later sanctioned by the U.S. for his alleged role in the murder of Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's consulate in Turkey.

In many ways, her case came to symbolize Prince Mohammed's dual strategy of being credited for ushering in sweeping social reforms and simultaneously cracking down on activists who had long pushed for change.

While some activists and their families have been pressured into silence, al-Hathloul's siblings, who reside in the U.S. and Europe, consistently spoke out against the state prosecutor's case and launched campaigns calling for her release.

The prosecutor had called for the maximum sentence of 20 years, citing evidence such as al-Hathloul's tweets in support of women driving and speaking out against male guardianship laws that had led to multiple instances of Saudi women fleeing abusive families for refuge abroad. Al-Hathloul's family said the prosecutor's evidence included her contacts with rights group Amnesty International. She was also charged with speaking to European diplomats about human rights in Saudi Arabia, though that was later dropped by the prosecutor.

The longtime activist was first detained in 2014 under the previous monarch, King Abdullah, and held for more than 70 days after she attempted to livestream herself driving from the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia to protest the kingdom's ban on women driving.

She's also spoken out against guardianship laws that barred women from traveling abroad without the consent of a male relative, such as a father, husband or brother. The kingdom eased guardianship laws last year, allowing women to apply for a passport and travel freely.

Her activism landed her multiple human rights awards and spreads in magazines like Vanity Fair in a photo shoot next to Meghan Markle, who would later become the Duchess of Sussex. She was also a Nobel Peace Prize nominee.

Al-Hathloul's family say in 2018, shortly after attending a U.N.-related meeting in Geneva about the situation of women's rights in Saudi Arabia, she was kidnapped by Emirati security forces in Abu Dhabi, where she'd been residing and pursuing a master's degree. She was then forced on a plane to Saudi Arabia, where she was barred from traveling and later arrested.

Al-Hathloul was among three female activists targeted that year by state-linked media, which circulated her picture online and dubbed her a traitor.

Associated Press writer Deb Riechmann in Washington contributed.

Follow Aya Batrawy on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ayaelb

As South Africa's virus spikes, president bans liquor sales

By ANDREW MELDRUM and MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South African President Cyril Ramaphosa reimposed a ban on alcohol sales and ordered the closure of all bars Monday as part of new restrictions to help the country battle a resurgence of the coronavirus, including a new variant.

Ramaphosa also announced the closure of all beaches and public swimming pools in the country's infection hotspots, which include Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and several coastal areas. In addition, South Africa is extending its nighttime curfew by four hours, requiring all residents must be at home from 9 p.m. until 6 a.m., the president said.

"Reckless behavior due to alcohol intoxication has contributed to increased transmission. Alcohol-related accidents and violence are putting pressure on our hospital emergency units," Ramaphosa said in a nationwide address.

"As we had to in the early days of the lockdown, we now have to flatten the curve to protect the capacity of our healthcare system to enable it to respond effectively to this new wave of infections," he said.

Ramaphosa said the ban on selling alcohol and other new restrictions would take effect at midnight. They include the mandatory wearing of masks in public, and anyone found not wearing a mask in a public place will be subject to a fine or a criminal charge punishable by a possible jail sentence, the president said.

Ramaphosa said the increased restrictions are necessary because of a surge in COVID-19 infections which has pushed South Africa's total confirmed virus cases past 1 million.

"Nearly 27,000 South Africans are known to have died from COVID-19. The number of new coronavirus infections is climbing at an unprecedented rate," he said. "More than 50,000 new cases have been reported since Christmas Eve."

Ramaphosa announced the new measures after a Cabinet meeting and an emergency meeting of the National Coronavirus Command Council. He said the new restrictions would be reviewed in a few weeks and a relaxation would only be considered when the numbers of new cases and hospitalizations decrease.

The country surpassed the 1 million mark in confirmed virus cases on Sunday night, when authorities reported that the country's total cases during the pandemic had reached 1,004,413, including 26,735 deaths.

Like Britain, South Africa is battling a variant of COVID-19 that medical experts think is more infectious than the original. The variant has become dominant in many parts of the country, according to experts.

The South African Medical Association, which represents nurses and other health workers as well as doctors, warned Monday that the health system was on the verge of being overwhelmed by the combination of higher numbers of COVID-19 patients and people needing urgent care from alcohol-related incidents. Many holiday gatherings involve high levels of alcohol consumption, which in turn often lead to increased trauma cases.

"To alleviate the pressure on the system during this time of the year, where we only have skeleton staff working, especially in the public sector, as well as in the private sector, we are asking for stricter restrictions regarding social gatherings," Angelique Coetzee, chairwoman of the medical association told The Associated Press.

"South Africa has got a history of very high alcohol abuse and binge drinking, especially over the weekends. In certain areas that leads to a lot of trauma cases, assaults, motor vehicle accidents and domestic violence," she said.

The medical association has called on the government to impose stricter restrictions on the sale of al-

cohol, especially where large gatherings are concerned.

When South Africa previously had a total ban on liquor sales, trauma cases in hospitals dropped by as much as 60%, according to government statistics. When the ban on alcohol sales was lifted, trauma cases went back up to previous levels.

Amid a resurgence of COVID-19 in early December, South Africa limited sales of alcohol to Monday through Thursday between the hours of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The country also has a nightly 11 p.m.-4 a.m. curfew.

Various alcohol traders had pleaded with the government to avoid a total ban on alcohol sales, citing the economic damage it would cause. South Africa's alcohol industry was among those hardest hit when the country imposed a hard lockdown during April and May that also banned all liquor sales.

South Africa's 7-day rolling average of confirmed daily cases has risen over the past two weeks from 11.18 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 13 to 19.87 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 27.

The 7-day rolling average of daily deaths in the country has risen over the past two weeks from 0.26 deaths per 100,000 people on Dec. 13 to 0.49 deaths per 100,000 people on Dec. 27.

Ramaphosa urged people to avoid gatherings for New Year's Eve. Instead, he asked all South Africans to light candles.

"I will light a candle in Cape Town at exactly midnight on New Year's Eve in memory of those who have lost their lives and in tribute to those who are on the frontline working to save our lives and protect us from harm," he said. "I ask that you join me wherever you are in this very important symbolic gesture."

Trump's hesitation on relief bill will delay aid payments

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The \$900 billion economic relief package that President Donald Trump signed over the weekend will deliver vital aid to millions of struggling households and businesses. Yet his nearly one-week delay in signing the bill means that it will take that much longer for the financial support to arrive.

The package that Trump signed at his private club in Florida on Sunday will extend two unemployment benefit programs providing aid to 14 million people that expired last week. It will also provide small business loans and up to \$600 in cash payments to most individuals. In addition, it extends a moratorium on evictions for one month. The measure does not include aid for states and localities that are being forced to turn to layoffs and service cuts as their tax revenue dries up — a potential long-run drag on the economy.

The legislation extends the two federal jobless aid programs until mid-March and adds a \$300 supplemental weekly payment. But because Trump signed the bill on Sunday, a day after the two programs lapsed, that could cost the unemployed a week of benefits, with payments not restarting until next week.

"The date was really unfortunate," said Michele Evermore, a senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project, a workers' advocacy group. "Now there's some question as to when this gets paid out."

It is possible that the Labor Department will interpret the law to allow payments for the week ending Jan. 2, Evermore said. But if the bill had been signed Saturday, payments clearly could have restarted this week.

And it will likely take two to three weeks for states to update their computer systems to resume the aid programs and pay out the extra \$300, Evermore said, a process that could have started earlier, after Congress first approved the bill about a week ago.

The delay will force those out of work to make hard decisions about paying for food, medicine or rent.

"These are people who have been living in poverty for months," she said. "Any delay is an immense hardship."

Months from now, economists say, the widespread distribution and use of vaccines could potentially unleash a robust economic rebound as the virus is quashed, businesses reopen, hiring picks up and consumers spend freely again. Yet the aid likely won't last long enough to support struggling small businesses and the unemployed until the vaccine has been broadly distributed and a strong rebound has begun.

"Some aid is better than no aid," said Gregory Daco, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. "It's positive. But it's likely going to be insufficient to bridge the gap from today until late spring or early summer, when the health situation fully improves."

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President-elect Joe Biden has said he will seek another relief package soon after his inauguration next month, setting up another political brawl given that some Senate Republicans have said that with vaccines on the way, further government aid may be unnecessary.

The new aid package should boost the broader economy, according to Goldman Sachs. Economists at the investment bank said late Sunday that they are boosting their growth forecast for the first three months of next year to 5% at an annual rate, up from an earlier estimate of 3%.

Much of that upgrade is based on the inclusion of \$600 stimulus checks, Goldman economists said.

Right now, however, the economy is in a renewed slump as a resurgent virus intensifies hardships for businesses. Consumers have cut back on shopping, traveling, dining out and attending sports and entertainment events. Key measures of the economy — retail sales, applications for jobless aid, travel spending — have weakened.

Roughly 14 million Americans faced a cutoff of their federal unemployment benefits if Congress hadn't agreed to the new package after months of stalemate. Perhaps 2 million Americans would have been able to transfer to a state-run extended benefit program, but the rest would have had no income at all. More than 4 million have already used all the unemployment aid available to them, which lasts 26 weeks in most states; they will be able to reapply.

A program that provides unemployment aid for self-employed and contract workers will now pay benefits for 50 weeks, up from 39. A federal program that provides extended benefits, on top of the 26 provided by most states, will also last for another 11 weeks.

Kathy Richardson, 60, hopes to catch up on the car and rental payments that she has fallen behind on, now that she can reapply for unemployment benefits. She started receiving jobless aid in the spring after she was laid off from her executive assistant job at a dental practice but the benefits ran out in November.

"If it hadn't been for family and friends I'd be homeless," she said. "It's been very stressful."

Richardson, who lives in Overland, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis, had a Zoom interview for a new administrative job Monday and was hopeful about her prospects. She has applied for work at Walmart, Target, and Burger King, she said, but was turned down because those companies assume she will quit once she can find a job more consistent with her career.

Her 18-year old son received Christmas presents from her three sisters this year, but not from her.

"I told him, 'Maybe we'll have a special Christmas in July after I've gone back to work,'" Richardson said.

The much larger rescue package the government enacted in March was widely credited with averting a disaster. By injecting money quickly into the pockets of individual Americans, it served to reduce poverty. But as much of that aid expired over the summer, poverty grew. Many people ran through the \$1,200 direct payment checks that had been distributed in April and May. And a supplemental \$600 in jobless benefits expired over the summer.

According to research by Bruce Meyer at the University of Chicago and two colleagues, the U.S. poverty rate jumped from 9.3% in June to 11.7% in November — an increase of nearly 8 million people.

The new relief package restores the Paycheck Protection Program, which offers forgivable loans to many businesses. But many small businesses complain that the program in the past was too restrictive, requiring them to use most of the money on payroll and not enough for other expenses like rent, the cost of personal protective equipment or other supplies.

According to the data firm Womply, about one in five small businesses have closed since early spring. More than half of small businesses have just two months' cash on hand or less, and one in six has two weeks or less of cash, according to a survey by the Census Bureau.

"It's not stimulus — it's a survival plan," Michael Graetz, a Columbia University law professor who studies tax and social policies, said of the new relief package. "Will it allow people to survive for a little longer than they would have otherwise, given what was about to happen at the end of the year? The answer is yes. Not doing it would have been malpractice."

AP Business Writer Paul Wiseman in Washington contributed to this report.

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As COVID-19 ravages US, shootings, killings are also up

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — When Andre Avery drives his commercial truck through Detroit, he keeps his pistol close. Avery, 57, grew up in the Motor City and is aware that homicides and shootings are surging, even though before the pandemic they were dropping in Detroit and elsewhere. His gun is legal, and he carries it with him for protection.

"I remain extremely alert," said Avery, who now lives in nearby Belleville. "I'm not in crowds. If something looks a little suspicious, I'm out of there."

In Detroit, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and even smaller Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Milwaukee, 2020 has been deadly not only because of the pandemic, but because gun violence is spiking.

Authorities and some experts say there is no one clear-cut reason for the spike. They instead point to social and economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 virus, public sentiment toward police following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis police custody and a historic shortage of jobs and resources in poorer communities as contributing factors. It's happening in cities large and small, Democrat and Republican-led.

Two years ago, Detroit had 261 homicides — the fewest in decades. That year there were about 750 nonfatal shootings in the city of more than 672,000.

But with only a few days left in 2020, homicides already have topped 300, while non-fatal shootings are up more than 50% at more than 1,124 through the middle of December.

"I think the pandemic — COVID — has had a significant emotional impact on people across the country," Detroit Police Chief James Craig said. "Individuals are not processing how they manage disputes. Whether domestics, arguments, disputes over drugs, there's this quickness to use an illegally carried firearm."

About 7,000 guns had been seized through mid-December in Detroit, with more than 5,500 arrests for illegal guns. There were 2,797 similar arrests last year.

"I've not seen a spike like this. But when it's happening in other cities — some smaller — what do we all have in common?" Craig said of the slayings and shootings. "That's when you start thinking about COVID."

Washington, D.C., a city of about 700,000, has seen more than 187 homicides this year, eclipsing last year's total by more than 20. Among the most horrible: A 15-month-old baby boy was shot to death during a drive-by shooting.

"We're all sick of the heinous crimes in our city," said Mayor Muriel Bowser.

Crime in parts of the U.S. dropped during the early weeks of the pandemic when stay-at-home orders closed businesses and forced many people to remain indoors.

University of Pennsylvania economics professor David Abrams said crime began to spike in May and June when initial orders in some states were lifted.

Some people "may have been a little stir crazy," Abrams said. "At the end of May, George Floyd's killing led to protests and looting. That led to police reform movements. Any of that could have potentially affected individual behavior and also the police response to that."

Calls for some cities to reduce funding for police departments may have led some officers to take a less aggressive approach to policing, he added.

What the COVID-19 virus did was exacerbate all of the frustration and anger that some in Black and brown communities already were dealing with, according to retired Michigan State University sociology professor Carl Taylor. The virus has killed more than 300,000 people across the country, with minority communities hardest hit.

"The COVID has been absolutely the trigger of an everlasting bomb that's exploding in many parts of our community," he added.

Nowhere is that more true than inside people's homes. "The COVID crisis and the economic shutdown is forcing people into their homes, creating conditions where people are more volatile," said Kim Foxx, the top prosecutor in Cook County, which includes Chicago. And the most jarring statistic that illustrates that volatility is this: The number of domestic-related homicides in the nation's third-largest city are up more than 60% compared with last year.

President Donald Trump claimed spiking crime was somehow related to massive protests over police brutality that swept the nation this year, but the majority of those protests were peaceful. Trump also

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claimed the crime was concentrated in Democratic-run cities, but there have been spikes in Republican-run cities as well. Federal agents and resources were poured into Detroit and a number of other cities this summer to help local authorities collar the rising crime rates.

By early October, more homicides — 363 — were recorded in Philadelphia than the 356 committed in 2019. There were 354 killings in New York through Oct. 11 — 90 more than at the same time last year.

Between Jan. 1 and Nov. 5, 165 homicides were recorded in Milwaukee, the most since 1991. And in Chicago, after three years of falling homicide numbers, the totals skyrocketed to 739 in mid-December compared with 475 at the same point last year.

Even smaller cities like Grand Rapids are suffering. By mid-December there were 35 homicides compared with 16 through all of 2019 and nine the year before. From this January to October, non-fatal shootings topped 200 in the city, which is home to about 200,000 people. Over the same period last year there were 131 non-fatal shootings.

"This year, is it because of COVID? The political polarization we have seen?" asked Sgt. Dan Adams, spokesman for the Grand Rapids Police Department. "This year has been a year like no other. I don't think you can point to any one 'why.'"

It is the same for other mid-sized cities. Last year, there were 18 homicides in Rockford, a city of about 170,000 people in northern Illinois. More than 30 have been killed so far this year, including three Saturday at a bowling alley.

"As we come to the end of this most difficult year and we look ahead at this New Year upon us, we know that this type of violence needs to stop," Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara said.

Associated Press writer Don Babwin contributed to this report from Chicago.

Alabama's Jones, Smith, Harris lead 6 Tide AP All-Americans

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Heisman Trophy finalists Mac Jones and DeVonta Smith have been selected to The Associated Press All-America team, leading a contingent of five Alabama players on the first-team offense.

Crimson Tide running back Najee Harris, tackle Alex Leatherwood and center Landon Dickerson are also first-team selections. No. 1 Alabama is the first team since 1980, when the AP All-America team began featuring two wide receivers and two running backs, to place a quarterback, running back and receiver on the first team.

Cornerback Patrick Surtain II gives the Crimson Tide six first-team selections, the most in the nation. No. 4 Notre Dame, Alabama's College Football Playoff opponent this weekend, has two first-team All-Americans in offensive guard Aaron Banks and linebacker Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah.

Florida's Kyle Trask was selected second-team quarterback and fellow Heisman finalist Trevor Lawrence of Clemson was the third-team quarterback on the AP teams released Monday. Lawrence, the likely first pick in the next NFL draft, made AP All-America for the first time in his career.

No. 2 Clemson, which will face No. 3 Ohio State in the CFP semifinal at the Sugar Bowl on Friday night, had only one other player selected to the All-America teams: Running back Travis Etienne made the first-team as all-purpose player. The senior has been a second-team All-American at running back the last two seasons.

Ohio State guard Wyatt Davis is the only player to repeat as a first-team All-American after making it in 2020. Davis is one of two Buckeyes on the first team along with cornerback Shaun Wade.

The 2020 AP All-America team:

FIRST TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Mac Jones, junior, Alabama.

Running backs — Najee Harris, senior, Alabama; Breece Hall, sophomore, Iowa State.

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Tackles — Brady Christensen, junior, BYU; Alex Leatherwood, senior, Alabama.

Guards — Aaron Banks, senior, Notre Dame; Wyatt Davis, junior, Ohio State.

Center — Landon Dickerson, senior, Alabama.

Tight end — Kyle Pitts, junior, Florida.

Receivers — DeVonta Smith, senior, Alabama; Elijah Moore, junior, Mississippi.

All-purpose player — Travis Etienne, senior, Clemson.

Kicker — Jose Borregales, senior, Miami.

Defense

Ends — Rashad Weaver, senior, Pitt; Tarron Jackson, senior, Coastal Carolina.

Tackles — Daviyon Nixon, junior, Iowa; Darius Stills, senior, West Virginia.

Linebackers — Zaven Collins, junior, Tulsa; Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah, senior, Notre Dame; Joseph Ossai, junior, Texas.

Cornerbacks — Patrick Surtain II, junior, Alabama; Shaun Wade, senior, Ohio State.

Safeties — Talanoa Hufanga, junior, Southern California; Brandon Joseph, redshirt freshman, Northwestern.

Punter — Pressley Harvin III, senior, Georgia Tech.

SECOND TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Kyle Trask, senior, Florida.

Running backs — Jaret Patterson, junior, Buffalo; Javonte Williams, junior, North Carolina.

Tackles — Liam Eichenberg, senior, Notre Dame; Christian Darrisaw, junior, Virginia Tech.

Guards — Cain Madden, junior, Marshall; Kenyon Green, sophomore, Texas A&M.

Center — Tyler Linderbaum, sophomore, Iowa.

Tight end — Hunter Long, junior, Boston College.

Receivers — Jaelon Darden, senior, North Texas; Jonathan Adams Jr., senior, Arkansas State.

All-purpose player — Kadarius Toney, senior, Florida.

Kicker — Cade York, sophomore, LSU.

Defense

Ends — Jaelen Phillips, senior, Miami; Patrick Jones, senior, Pitt.

Tackles — Alim McNeil, junior, North Carolina State; Haskell Garrett, senior, Ohio State.

Linebackers — Mike Rose, junior, Iowa State; Nik Bonitto, sophomore, Oklahoma; Nick Bolton, junior, Missouri.

Cornerbacks — Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson, sophomore, TCU; Ahmad Gardner, sophomore, Cincinnati.

Safeties — Trevon Moehrig, junior, TCU; James Wiggins, senior, Cincinnati.

Punter — Lou Hedley, junior, Miami.

THIRD TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Trevor Lawrence, junior, Clemson.

Running backs — Michael Carter, senior, North Carolina; Mohamed Ibrahim, junior, Minnesota.

Tackles — Darian Kinnard, junior, Kentucky; Samuel Cosmi, junior, Texas.

Guards — Ben Cleveland, senior, Georgia; Tommy Kraemer, senior, Notre Dame.

Center — Creed Humphrey, junior, Oklahoma.

Tight end — Charlie Kolar, junior, Iowa State.

Receivers — Dyami Brown, junior, North Carolina; Ty Fryfogle, senior, Indiana.

All-purpose player — Avery Williams, senior, Boise State.

Kicker — Jake Oldroyd, sophomore, BYU.

Defense

Ends — JaQuan Bailey, senior, Iowa State; Kayvon Thibodeaux, sophomore, Oregon.

Tackles — Christian Barmore, sophomore, Alabama; C.J. Brewer, senior, Coastal Carolina.

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Linebackers — Zion Tupuola-Fetui, junior, Washington; Micah McFadden, junior, Indiana; Dylan Moses, senior, Alabama.

Cornerbacks — Greg Newsome, junior, Northwestern; Eli Ricks, freshman, LSU.

Safeties — Kyle Hamilton, sophomore, Notre Dame; Tykee Smith, sophomore, West Virginia.

Punter — Jake Camarda, junior, Georgia.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/Collegefootball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Lori Loughlin released after prison term in college scam

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

“Full House” actor Lori Loughlin was released from prison Monday after spending two months behind bars for paying half a million dollars in bribes to get her two daughters into college.

Loughlin was released from the federal lockup in Dublin, California, where she had been serving her sentence for her role in the college admissions bribery scheme, the federal Bureau of Prisons said. Her husband, fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli, is serving his five-month sentence at a prison in Lompoc near Santa Barbara, California.

Giannulli is scheduled to be released on April 17, the Bureau of Prisons says. Prosecutors said Giannulli deserved a tougher sentence because he was “the more active participant in the scheme.”

Loughlin and Giannulli were among the highest-profile defendants charged in the scheme, which revealed the lengths to which some wealthy parents will go to get their children into elite universities. Authorities said parents funneled bribes through a fake charity run by an admissions consultant to get their kids into top schools with fake athletic credentials or rigged test scores.

The famous couple admitted in May to paying \$500,000 to get their two daughters into the University of Southern California as crew recruits even though neither girl was a rower. Their guilty plea was a stunning reversal for the couple, whose lawyers had insisted for a year were innocent and accused investigators of fabricating evidence against them.

The only public comments either Loughlin or Giannulli made about the case since their arrest last year came at their sentencing hearings in August. Loughlin, who gained fame for her role as the wholesome Aunt Becky in the sitcom “Full House,” told the judge her actions “helped exacerbate existing inequalities in society” and pledged to do everything in her power to use her experience as a “catalyst to do good.”

Their younger daughter, social media influencer Olivia Jade, made her first public remarks about the scandal this month on the series “Red Table Talk.” Olivia Jade said she doesn’t want or deserve pity.

“We messed up. I just want a second chance to be like, ‘I recognize I messed up.’ And for so long I wasn’t able to talk about this because of the legalities behind it,” she said.

Loughlin and Giannulli were both initially supposed to report to prison on Nov. 19, but prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed Loughlin could start her sentence on Oct. 30. Loughlin also agreed that she would not seek early release on coronavirus-related grounds, prosecutors said.

Of the nearly 60 parents, coaches and others charged in the case, about a dozen are still fighting the allegations. The sentences for the parents who have pleaded so far in the case range from a couple weeks to nine months. Actor Felicity Huffman served nearly two weeks in prison last year for paying an admissions consultant \$15,000 to have a proctor correct her daughter’s SAT answers.

UK warns of ‘bumpy’ post-Brexit transition despite deal

By JILL LAWLESS and RAF CASERT Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — First came the Brexit trade deal. Now comes the red tape and the institutional nitty gritty.

Four days after sealing a free trade agreement with the European Union, the British government warned businesses Monday to get ready for disruptions and “bumpy moments” when the new rules take effect on Thursday night.

Firms are scrambling to digest the details and implications of the 1,240-page deal sealed by the EU and

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the U.K. on Christmas Eve, just a week before the year-end deadline.

Ambassadors from the 27 EU nations, meanwhile, gave their unanimous approval to the deal on Monday. "Green light," said German spokesman Sebastian Fischer, whose country currently holds the EU presidency..

The approval had been expected, since all EU leaders have warmly welcomed the deal, which is designed to put post-Brexit relations between the bloc and former member Britain on reliable footing.

The agreement has not, however, eliminated the mistrust that festered between Britain and its neighbors during months of fractious negotiations

The French presidency said in a statement that France would remain "from the very first day very vigilant" about the implementation of the deal, especially to protect French companies and fisheries "in case the U.K. disregards its commitments."

The agreement needs approval from Britain's Parliament, which is scheduled to vote on it Wednesday, and from the EU's legislature, which is not expected to take up the deal for weeks. The leaders of the European Parliament's political groups said they would not seek full approval until March because of the specific and far-reaching implications of the agreement. The overwhelming expectation is that EU lawmakers will approve the deal.

The U.K. left the EU almost a year ago, but remained within the bloc's economic embrace during a transition period that ends at midnight Brussels time -- 11 p.m. in London -- on Dec. 31.

The agreement, hammered out after more than nine months of tense negotiations, will ensure Britain and the 27-nation bloc can continue to trade in goods without tariffs or quotas. That should help protect the 660 billion pounds (\$894 billion) in annual trade between the two sides, and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that rely on it.

But the end to Britain's membership in the EU's vast single market and customs union will still bring inconvenience and new expense for both individuals and businesses — from the need for tourists to have travel insurance to the millions of new customs declarations that firms will have to fill out.

"I'm sure there will be bumpy moments but we are there in order to try to do everything we can to smooth the path," Michael Gove, the British Cabinet minister in charge of Brexit preparations, told the BBC.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government argues that any short-term disruption from Brexit will be worth it, because the U.K. will now be free to set its own rules and strike new trade deals around the world.

Yet an ominous preview of what could happen if U.K.-EU trade faces heavy restrictions came this month when France briefly closed its border with Britain because of a highly transmissible new variant of the coronavirus sweeping through London and southern England. Thousands of trucks were stuck in traffic jams or parked at a disused airfield near the English Channel port of Dover for days and supermarkets warned that some goods, including fresh produce would soon run short.

Even after France relented and agreed to let in truckers who tested negative for the virus, the backlog of 15,000 drivers who now needed tests took days to clear.

Despite the deal, uncertainty hangs over huge chunks of the relationship between Britain and the EU. The agreement covers trade in goods, but leaves the U.K.'s huge financial services sector in limbo, still uncertain how easily it can do business with the bloc after Jan. 1. The British territory of Gibraltar, which sees thousands of workers cross over daily from Spain, is also in limbo since it was not included in the deal.

"This is not a final done deal in many respects," said Jill Rutter of the U.K. in a Changing Europe think tank, noting that big decisions in many areas are yet to come.

And the deal has angered one sector that the U.K. government vowed to protect: fishing. The economically minor but hugely symbolic issue of fishing rights was a sticking point in negotiations, with maritime EU nations seeking to retain access to U.K. waters, and Britain insisting it must control its seas.

Under the deal, the EU will give up a quarter of the quota it catches in U.K. waters, far less than the 80% Britain initially demanded. The system will be phased in over 5 1/2 years, after which the quotas will be reassessed.

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"I am angry, disappointed and betrayed," said Andrew Locker, chairman of Britain's National Federation of Fishermen's Organizations. "Boris Johnson promised us the rights to all the fish that swim in our exclusive economic zone and we have got a fraction of that."

Casert reported from Brussels. Geir Moulson in Berlin and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed.

Follow all AP stories on the Brexit trade talks at <https://apnews.com/Brexit>

One Good Thing: Highlights of 9 months in tales of kindness

Associated Press undefined

In mid-March, as the coronavirus was ravaging communities and economies around the world, The Associated Press launched its "One Good Thing" series to highlight individuals whose actions offer glimmers of light in dark times.

Nine months later we've hit every continent except Antarctica to publish more than 180 stories of kindness, good deeds and serendipity.

Here is a look back at 10 of our favorite stories of people finding ways to make a difference, no matter how small:

THE TUTU GIRLS: Four young cancer survivors who met, became fast friends and supported each other while in treatment at a hospital in Florida four years ago didn't let the pandemic keep them from their annual reunion. Known as the "tutu girls" for their matching outfits, the 6- and 7-year-olds held their meetup on Zoom. One of the moms got the idea for the dance costumes to raise awareness about childhood cancer, and a tradition was born.

A BIRTHDAY PARADE: A fire truck blared its sirens, police flashed lights on cruisers and dozens of families in a car parade honked horns, raised signs and yelled: "Happy birthday, Jessiah!" None of them knew 6-year-old Jessiah Lee, but they all showed up for the surprise drive-by birthday party in Arlington, Virginia, organized on social media and inspired by similar celebrations that have brought joy to many children and adults during the quarantine.

CLASSROOM ON WHEELS: When Guatemala's schools in closed mid-March, teacher Gerardo Ixcoy invested his savings in a secondhand tricycle that he and his brother converted into a mobile classroom. Each day the 27-year-old set out pedaling among the cornfields of Santa Cruz del Quiché to bring socially distanced lessons to his sixth-graders' homes and yards.

MAKING SWEET MUSIC: Members of the National Orchestra of France filmed themselves playing Ravel's "Bolero" alone at home during lockdown. Then, like building a musical jigsaw puzzle, a sound engineer stitched together their individual clips into a seamless and rousing whole. Posted online, the performance helped the musicians keep in touch with each other and with the audiences they sorely missed.

NEWLYWEDS GIVING BACK: Darshana Kumara Wijenarayana and Pawani Rasanga spent months planning a grand wedding only to see it derailed by the pandemic. Family and friends urged the Sri Lankan couple to postpone the party, but instead they chose to celebrate their love by marrying simply and then spending the day feeding the poor.

CHEERS FOR HEROES: In hard-hit European cities, residents took a moment each night to express gratitude to doctors, nurses and other health care workers. From Athens and Amsterdam to Rome and Madrid, people stood at windows or on balconies singing, cheering and applauding those on the front lines.

TEENAGE SUPPLY PILOT: TJ Kim doesn't even have his driver's license yet, but he's already flying across Virginia delivering medical supplies to small, rural hospitals in need. The 16-year-old turned his weekly flight lessons into relief missions carrying precious pandemic cargo like gloves, masks, gowns and other equipment.

TRUMPETING ON HIGH: Rio de Janeiro firefighter Elielson Silva devised a novel approach to curing the coronavirus blues. Riding a fire truck's retractable ladder as high as 200 feet, he played Brazilian tunes from that lofty perch as residents in isolation watch from their windows and applaud, flush with a restored

sense of community.

TAKE MY LAND: The acreage that Kim Byung-rok bought on a quiet mountain in South Korea a few years ago was meant for farming and fresh air. But after the pandemic hit, he offered a big chunk of it to the local government, figuring it could be put to good use helping others.

TUTORING THE WORLD: A teacher at a public school in Lagos, Nigeria, helped students across the country and abroad learn math remotely during coronavirus lockdowns. Basirat Olamide Ajayi's free online classes became a lifeline for many children who were kept away from classrooms for months.

"One Good Thing" is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Read the collection of stories at <https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing>

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

Aid groups aim to bring health care to migrants on way to US

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — Aurora Leticia Cruz has tried to keep up with her blood pressure medication since fleeing Guatemala more than a year ago, but the limbo she finds herself in — stuck in a sprawling camp at the Texas border after traversing Mexico — has made that hard.

When Cruz felt woozy on a recent day as her blood pressure skyrocketed, it could have ended in tragedy, leaving her 17-year-old granddaughter and two great-grandchildren under 3 alone in the camp in Matamoros. But instead, a nurse practitioner from Oregon and a Cuban doctor, who like Cruz is awaiting U.S. asylum proceedings, were able to pull up her medical record and prescribe the correct dosage.

The health care workers who helped Cruz are with Global Response Management, a nonprofit that is attempting to go beyond mere crisis response and build a system to make it easier to track the health of migrants along their journey from Central America to the U.S. border. Cruz's medical record was created in June by the group, which has been collecting patient information.

"I envision this as a relay race in which we are passing the medical baton to other providers as people work their way north," said Blake Davis, a paramedic from Maine who volunteers for the organization.

The efforts are part of a growing trend in humanitarian aid that has accelerated amid the coronavirus pandemic, which has highlighted the difficulties in getting basic health care to migrants. With public hospitals overwhelmed by virus cases, migrants with heart conditions or problematic pregnancies have nowhere to go. Others have been prescribed ineffective medications because a changing array of doctors are forced to treat them without any medical history.

The Associated Press produced this story with support from the Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit organization dedicated to reporting about responses to social problems.

Led by U.S. military veterans, Global Response Management is staffed by volunteers primarily from the U.S. and paid asylum seekers who were medical professionals in their homelands. The group has treated thousands of migrants over the past year at two clinics in Matamoros, including one inside the camp.

Medics with the group have innovated to bring care to the austere environment, building on what they learned from the organization's work with displaced people in countries such as Bangladesh and Iraq.

They have used telemedicine to consult specialists in the United States and connected a portable device to an iPhone to perform a sonogram. They have also worked with local leaders in the camp to control the spread of the coronavirus by encouraging mask wearing, increasing the number of hand-washing stations and setting up an isolation area. Only one person from the camp has been hospitalized with the virus, even as medical facilities in the area struggled to keep up with infected patients this summer.

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But the group's goal is not just to care for migrants once they reach the border. It wants to offer health care along the routes migrants take.

"Humanitarian aid has to be thought of in a different light," said executive director Helen Perry, an Army Reserve nurse.

It's uncertain how long the camp will even exist since U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to undo the Trump administration policy known as Remain in Mexico, which has forced tens of thousands of asylum seekers to wait across the border while their cases are considered by U.S. courts.

Regardless, there will continue to be people fleeing violence and poverty in Central America, and aid agencies are trying to figure out how to protect them.

Davis, the paramedic from Maine, plans to set up a clinic next year in Tapachula, on Mexico's southern border. He recently flew in a helicopter over the isolated terrain migrants traverse in Guatemala to view the challenge medical teams would face in treating people in transit.

"There is nothing out there for them to get help," Davis said. "We want to be able to fill that void."

The group is working to connect migrants to health care and other resources by asking them what they need via WhatsApp. The idea is to make contact as early as possible with migrants, treat their health problems before they worsen, and create a system where their records can be accessed by doctors along the way.

It is a daunting task that will require finding the migrants, many of whom are trying to avoid detection, and winning their trust. The group's members also must get government officials on board.

And they must tread carefully, so the health data cannot be used against the migrants. As they do in Matamoros, the group will label each record with a number, rather than a name.

Other aid groups are also tackling the challenge.

The International Rescue Committee next month is officially launching InfoDigna, an interactive map in Mexico that connects migrants to shelters, health care providers and other services wherever they are. It will offer live chats to answer migrants' questions about everything from the latest COVID-19 restrictions to the status of immigration court operations.

InfoDigna is part of the group's global digital information service, which informs asylum seekers from Italy to Colombia via smart phones.

"It meets people where they're at," said Edith Tapia, who coordinates the effort in Mexico.

The organizations are stepping into a gap that the World Health Organization has urged governments of host countries to fill, but few have. The issue of how to care for vulnerable people on the move is only likely to grow: A record 80 million people are fleeing poverty, conflict and environmental disasters, according to the WHO.

Maria de Jesus Ruiz Carrasco says she would have lost her foot if Global Response Management hadn't stepped in.

The 31-year-old Cuban woman was rescued by Border Patrol agents who found her along the Rio Grande with a broken leg in October after she crossed from Matamoros.

She underwent two surgeries at a hospital in Brownsville, Texas. But two weeks later, Carrasco was sent back to Matamoros with an oozing wound and 14 pins in her leg. U.S. Customs and Border Protection guidelines recommend asylum seekers with medical problems not be returned to Mexico.

The agency said that because of privacy laws it could not discuss Carrasco's case, but generally if a patient is "cleared for travel" upon release from a medical facility, then the asylum seeker may be returned to Mexico. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

A Mexican official at the border directed Carrasco, who was on crutches and in need of help, to the Global Response Management clinic, where she met Mileydis Tamayo, a nurse from Cuba who is also seeking asylum. Tamayo has been treating Carrasco's wound for 10 weeks.

"If this group wasn't here," Tamayo said later, "many people would be in very bad shape."

A divided nation asks: What's holding our country together?

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By TAMARA LUSH, JOSH BOAK, NICHOLAS RICCARDI and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press
Elections are meant to resolve arguments. This one inflamed them.

Weeks after the votes have been counted and the winners declared, many Americans remain angry, defiant and despairing. Millions now harbor new grievances borne of President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud. Many Democrats are saddened by results that revealed the opposition to be far more powerful than they imagined.

And in both groups there are those grappling with larger, more disquieting realizations: The foundations of the American experiment have been shaken — by partisan rancor, disinformation, a president's assault on democracy and a deadly coronavirus pandemic.

There is a sense of loss.

It burdens even the winners. In North Carolina, a soon-to-be state lawmaker whose victory made history says he is struck by how little feels changed. In Michigan, a suburban woman found her feminism in the Trump era only to see her family torn by the election outcome.

In a Pennsylvania town, the simple things still feel fraught. Plans for a small-town Christmas market spiraled into a bruising fight over public health and politics.

"What is holding our country together?" wonders Charisse Davis, a school board member in the Atlanta suburbs, where the election has not ended. A pair of Senate runoffs on Jan. 5 will decide which party controls the U.S. Senate.

Davis may get her answer soon. A vaccine has brought hope and a chance for a nation to prove it can do big things again. New leadership in Washington may change the tone.

But now, at the end of 2020, many Americans say the experiences of the past four years have made them look at their neighbors — and their country — in a different light.

It's been a tumultuous few months for Ricky Hurtado. The 32-year-old son of Salvadoran immigrant won a seat in the North Carolina state legislature as a Democrat representing a suburban slice of Alamance County.

Hurtado's wife, Yazmin Garcia, earned her U.S. citizenship six days before the election. The couple drove directly from the immigration office where she became a citizen to the nearest early voting site, so she could register on the spot and cast a ballot for her husband.

But Hurtado still can't shake the feeling that, despite all this, little changed. He'd hoped to be part of a Democratic wave that took back his state legislature, hold seats on the state Supreme Court and the U.S. Senate. Instead, Democrats fell short in all those efforts. Trump won North Carolina just as he did in 2016.

"The election certainly makes it feel like Alamance and North Carolina voted for the status quo," Hurtado said. "It feels like we haven't moved in any given direction."

"I won, but as a citizen of North Carolina who's deeply invested in North Carolina, I feel like I lost."

The win made Hurtado the first Latino Democrat ever elected to the state legislature.

After the election, he was flooded with texts and in-person congratulations from well-wishers, including one immigrant mother at an event who told him: "For you to win here, in Alamance County, is so important for my children."

Still, Hurtado is struggling to understand how there was a shift among Latinos toward Trump in the election. The president's strong performance with Cuban Americans in South Florida narrowed the traditional Democratic edge in Miami-Dade County and helped put Florida in Trump's column. In Texas, Trump won tens of thousands of new supporters in predominantly Mexican American communities along the border.

It didn't shock Hurtado. Political opinions are shaped by more than family heritage, race or gender or political party.

"It shows you, your identities are complex," he said.

In the Pennsylvania college town of Slippery Rock, population 3,600, the annual Christmas market was supposed to be the bright spot in a dismal year.

Republican Mayor Jondavid Longo donated his salary — \$88 a month after taxes — to help pay for the

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market that drew 25 vendors and 500 people. He hoped the outdoor event would bring holiday cheer and a much-needed injection of cash to the town's struggling businesses. Perhaps, he figured, a cozy event would also drown out any bitter feelings about the presidential election and the pandemic.

But neither politics nor the pandemic could be escaped.

Things began to devolve on Twitter. Photos surfaced showing few people in masks, leading to criticism that the event might have spread the novel coronavirus.

The mayor said his critics were Democrats and that he believed the market did little in terms of infection. Critics could note that the death toll from the pandemic in rural Butler County has jumped more than four-fold since the Nov. 3 election to roughly 170 people.

"We were outside so I thought things were reasonable," Longo said. "COVID was only an issue for individuals who were trying to stoke the flames of fear and discontent."

Trump won Butler County handily in November, evidence of his campaign to supercharge turnout in rural, conservative places as he cedes ground in the cities and suburbs. It wasn't enough to win Pennsylvania — or other industrial swing states — as President-elect Joe Biden's campaign also managed to motivate even more hard-to-reach voters. But the strategy will have a lasting impact as the physical distance between Democratic areas and Republican areas grows wider.

Longo says the election has changed politics in his town, surfacing resentments from voters on both sides. The lingering tensions now overshadow issues once considered local — such as funding the police and libraries.

"Party politics from the national stage have seeped down into the cracks and crevices of small towns like Slippery Rock," Longo said. "It's really difficult to close the gap and bridge the divide."

In Cobb County, Georgia, Davis popped a bottle of champagne, despite a nagging sense of sadness, then packed the family into the car to head into downtown Atlanta and join thousands dancing in the street.

She decided to just enjoy victory on the Saturday that news organizations called the presidential race for Biden.

"We'll go back to worrying about humanity tomorrow," she said to her family as they climbed in the car. And then tomorrow arrived, and the worry roared back.

Davis, who serves on the school board in suburban Cobb County, was part of a wave of Black women elected to public office in recent years. Women like her led the charge that ushered Biden to an unlikely victory in Georgia.

"We won, but it doesn't really feel like we did," she said.

Trump immediately began sowing doubts about the vote, tossing out specious claims of fraud. Tens of millions of Americans — 36 percent of Republicans in a recent Fox News poll — now believe the claims that the election was rigged and he was the rightful winner.

"I think the election was totally paid for and rigged by the Democrats. I believe there was huge amounts of fraud and representation and illegal processing," said Pamela Allen, a 72-year-old retiree from Holiday, Florida, who has supported Trump since he came down the escalator in Trump Tower in 2015 to announce his candidacy.

Allen, who worked as a poll watcher in Pasco County, said she saw no problems on Election Day.

"Here in Pasco I have to admit it was very well done," she said. But she believes things she's seen on the conservative Trump-favored Newsmax about alleged voter fraud in other states. She is "baffled" as to why Attorney General William Barr didn't arrest anyone, and "amazed" that the Supreme Court didn't rule in Trump's favor. Barr, viewed by Democrats as a staunch Trump loyalist, instead made clear before leaving his job that he had seen no evidence of widespread fraud.

Allen believes that if Biden takes office, he will retire quickly, leaving the presidency to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. She also thinks House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will become vice president. However, Allen hopes Trump will prevail prior to Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

"I would support martial law if that is what he believes he needs to do," she said. "I would support absolutely anything Donald Trump proposes to keep the government going in the direction we were going

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in. As opposed to Biden running the country, absolutely.”

Trump’s efforts to toss out votes came in heavily Black cities, which to Davis represents an ugly history of trying to repress Black voices. She watched a recent debate, when Kelly Loeffler, one of the two Republican senators in runoffs to retain their seats, refused to say Trump lost.

How, Davis worries, can a country recover from that?

“Do we have a democracy or do we not?” she asked.

In her county, formerly a Republican stronghold, the election marked an extraordinary transition: Democrats won victories in most countywide offices, including sheriff, district attorney and a majority on the Board of Commissioners, which is now governed solely by women, most of them Black.

But that blue wave stopped short of flipping the seven-member school board. Davis, one of three Democrats, will remain in the minority. The impact of those results quickly made itself clear to her: Just after the election, the school board split along party and racial lines to vote to disband a committee it had created to review the names of its schools. Some of the schools are named after a Confederate general and a member of a slave-owning family.

“If Democrats say something, then the other side has to be against it,” Davis said. “That’s just where we are. I don’t know how we get past this.”

In suburban Michigan, a coalition of suburban women achieved what it set out to do — help evict Trump from the White House. But Lori Goldman, in Oakland County, Michigan, who runs the group Fems for Dems, can’t shake the sense that the mission now is more critical than it’s ever been.

“We got rid of this blight, this cancer,” said Goldman, 61. “We cut him out. But we know that cancer has spread, it’s spread to soft tissue, other organs. And now we have to save the rest of the body.”

Trump isn’t gone, not really, she said. She is horrified at the number of Americans who believe his unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud.

“That’s a dangerous, dangerous place to be in,” she said. “This country is in a lot of trouble.”

It feels to her that the United States is caught in a period of great transition. The bright, progressive future she longs for seems inevitable. But she thinks a large portion of America would prefer to turn back the clock.

Trump called people like her the “suburban housewives of America,” and tried to appeal to them by spreading fear about Black Lives Matter protesters, crime and low-income housing. Still, Biden won 54% of suburban voters, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate.

Goldman can’t understand why 74 million Americans voted for Trump. She went on national television and said she was ashamed that most of her own relatives were among them. Now some of her siblings don’t want to talk to her anymore.

To her, this is a microcosm of one of the greatest challenges this country has faced: that tribalized politics has pitted people against each other in a way far more profound than ever before. It is no longer Republicans versus Democrats. It has splintered families and friends.

She weeps when she talks about the rift.

Riccardi reported from Denver; Lush from Tampa, Florida; Galofaro from Louisville; and Boak from Baltimore.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 29, the 364th day of 2020. There are two days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Dec. 29, 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as an estimated 300 Sioux Indians were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them.

On this date:

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In 1812, during the War of 1812, the American frigate USS Constitution engaged and severely damaged the British frigate HMS Java off Brazil.

In 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state.

In 1916, James Joyce's first novel, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," was first published in book form in New York after being serialized in London.

In 1939, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," starring Charles Laughton and Maureen O'Hara, was released by RKO Radio Pictures.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany dropped incendiary bombs on London, setting off what came to be known as "The Second Great Fire of London."

In 1972, Eastern Air Lines Flight 401, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, crashed into the Florida Everglades near Miami International Airport, killing 101 of the 176 people aboard.

In 1975, a bomb exploded in the main terminal of New York's LaGuardia Airport, killing 11 people (it's never been determined who was responsible).

In 1989, dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel (VAHTS'-lahv HAH'-vel) assumed the presidency of Czechoslovakia.

In 1992, the United States and Russia announced agreement on a nuclear arms reduction treaty.

In 2006, word reached the United States of the execution of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (because of the time difference, it was the morning of Dec. 30 in Iraq when the hanging took place). In a statement, President George W. Bush called Saddam's execution an important milestone on Iraq's road to democracy.

In 2007, the New England Patriots ended their regular season with a remarkable 16-0 record following a 38-35 comeback victory over the New York Giants. (New England became the first NFL team since the 1972 Dolphins to win every game on the schedule.)

In 2017, Puerto Rico authorities said nearly half of the power customers in the U.S. territory still lacked electricity, more than three months after Hurricane Maria.

Ten years ago: The Obama administration expelled Venezuela's ambassador to the United States, a day after Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said he would not allow diplomat Larry Palmer to become the U.S. ambassador to his country. Suicide bombers succeeded in killing Iraqi police commander Lt. Col. Shamil al-Jabouri, who was renowned in the tense northern city of Mosul for his relentless pursuit of al-Qaida.

Five years ago: Belgian authorities announced they had arrested two men and seized military-type uniforms and Islamic State group propaganda in connection with a suspected plot to unleash holiday season attacks against police and celebrated locations in Brussels. Former "Glee" star Mark Salling was arrested in Los Angeles for investigation of possessing child pornography. (Salling pleaded guilty in December 2017; he took his own life a few weeks later while awaiting sentencing.)

One year ago: A man opened fire at a church near Fort Worth, Texas, killing two people before being shot and killed by a member of the church's volunteer security team. NBA star LeBron James was named the Associated Press male athlete of the decade. British comedy writer and actor Neil Innes, who frequently worked with members of the Monty Python comedy troupe, died at the age of 75.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Rose Lee Maphis is 98. Actor Inga Swenson is 88. Retired ABC newscaster Tom Jarriel is 86. Actor Barbara Steele is 83. Actor Jon Voight is 82. Country singer Ed Bruce is 81. Singer Marianne Faithfull is 74. Retired Hall of Fame Jockey Laffit Pincay Jr. is 74. Actor Ted Danson is 73. Singer-actor Yvonne Elliman is 69. The president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, is 67. Actor Patricia Clarkson is 61. Comedian Paula Poundstone is 61. Rock singer-musician Jim Reid (The Jesus and Mary Chain) is 59. Actor Michael Cudlitz is 56. Rock singer Dexter Holland (The Offspring) is 55. Actor-comedian Mystro Clark is 54. Actor Jason Gould is 54. News anchor Ashleigh Banfield is 53. Movie director Lilly Wachowski is 53. Actor Jennifer Ehle is 51. Actor Patrick Fischler is 51. Rock singer-musician Glen Phillips is 50. Actor Kevin Weisman is 50. Actor Jude Law is 48. Actor Maria Dizzia is 46. Actor Mekhi Phifer (mih-KY' FY'-fuhr) is 46. Actor Shawn Hatosy is 45. Actor Katherine Moennig is 43. Actor Diego Luna is 41. Actor Alison Brie is 38. Country singer Jessica Andrews is 37. Actor Iain de Caestecker is 33. Actor Jane Levy is 31. Singer-actor-dancer Ross Lynch is 25. Rock musician Danny Wagner is 22.