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Conde National League

Dec. 28 Team Standings: Cubs 10, Mets 8, Pirates 6, Giants 6, Braves 5, Tigers 1.

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 225, Lance Frohling 199, Collin Cady 191.

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 568, Collin Cady 532, Jeremy Reyalts 476.

Women's High Games: Mary Larson 177, 171, 164; Tanah Messevou 169; Vickie Kramp 161.

Women's High Series: Mary Larson 512, Tanah Messevou 476, Vickie Kramp 445.

Locke Hired

Kellie Locke was hired Tuesday evening by the Groton City Council as the new assistant finance officer at city hall. Locke will take the place of Peggy Locke, who recently retired from that position.

Yesterday's Scores from Sioux Valley Games:

Boys C Game: Sioux Valley 40, Groton Area 28

Boys JV: Sioux Valley 56, Groton Area 49

Boys Varsity: Sioux Valley 63, Groton Area 44

Girls Varsity: Sioux Valley 53, Groton Area 31

Girls JV: Sioux Valley 53, Groton Area 26



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



COLLEGES PART 4: How one S.D. college used pandemic funds to improve education

By: Bart Pfankuch

While most colleges across the country were stung hard by COVID-19 — logistically and financially — the small private college that serves mostly Native American students on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in southwestern South Dakota got a big boost from the pandemic.

Like the reservation itself, the Oglala Lakota College in Kyle mostly went into a lockdown once COVID-19 hit in March. College President Thomas Shortbull made the decision early on that the risk of COVID-19 to students, faculty and staff was too great to host any in-person teaching or learning in the remote area where the college and its satellite centers are located.

The lockdown paid off in terms of health, as only a few people in the campus community became infected, and with no known outbreaks at the college, those infections were likely due to community spread off campus, Shortbull said.

But the pandemic provided a number of other tangible benefits to the college that serves a mostly income-challenged population of 1,200 students at the main campus and satellite learning centers in nine communities throughout western South Dakota.

Much of the unexpected benefits came from the federal CARES Act, which provided \$6.8 million to the college in the spring and summer. That money allowed the college to purchase laptop computers for 700 students and provide them with hotspot technology to create internet access from their rural homes during remote learning. Some federal money was also used to provide meals to students during the college lockdown, which will continue through the spring semester, Shortbull said.



Thomas Shortbull

“It’s really been a plus-plus for us,” Shortbull said. “Students have gotten more financial aid and it’s created more access, which we would never have been able to do for our students.”

The shift to remote learning has produced its own set of unexpected benefits, Shortbull said. A generation of students not only have new computers and internet access, he said, but they have also been taught to engage in virtual learning and use computer programs that will benefit them in the workplace. He said the laptops can be reused by new students who enroll in the future.

But a significant portion of the federal aid was shifted directly to students to help them pay for college now and in the future, he said. Between now and fall 2021, the college plans to distribute \$3.5 million in federal aid to students in the form of direct scholarships.

Even though Oglala Lakota College has a \$48 million reserve endowment to fall back on, the \$6.8 million in federal aid has allowed the college to provide technology and tuition assistance that it could never have offered before the pandemic.

Plus, the roughly 70 faculty members have also sharpened their online teaching skills, which will make them better teachers. Using Zoom and other online educational platforms has also enabled the college to reduce duplication of in-person classes at its satellite centers. In the fall, that allowed the college to

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hire 20 to 25 fewer adjunct faculty members, which also created an unexpected savings, Shortbull said.

"Overall, this has been a major positive for us," Shortbull said. "I think this is going to have a major impact on the college and our students well into the future."



Representatives of Oglala Lakota College worked a recruitment booth at a past Lakota Nation Invitational event in Rapid City. The college has benefited from federal aid funds distributed during the pandemic. Photo: Submitted

#310 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We could be seeing some delayed reporting from the holiday weekend, so even though today's numbers are scary, it's difficult to know just what they mean. Tomorrow might give us a better indication, although I'm sort of writing off this week in terms of defining any trends. For what it's worth, here's what I have.

There were 216,800 new cases reported today, which is a very high number. We are now over 19-and-a-half million with 19,561,800, which is 1.1% more than yesterday's total. Hospitalizations are again at record levels after a few days of slightly lower numbers with 121,235. It has now been four solid weeks since hospitalizations for Covid-19 were last below 100,000. While hospitalizations have been sky-high for weeks now, the more important picture is how many ICU beds are taken up by these patients; this is the limiting factor in most hospitals. And the news here is not great. The share of ICU patients with Covid-19 has been increasing each week for three months now, according to data published yesterday by the US Department of Health and Human Services. At the end of September, 16 percent of ICU patients had Covid-19; this increased to 22 percent by the end of October and 35 percent at the end of November. And now, at the end of December, we're looking at 40% of ICU patients with Covid-19. This is putting incredible stress on the health care system and even more on the people working in that system.

We did set another record for deaths reported today with 3879; last record was December 11. We are now up to 338,911 deaths in the US, 1.2% more than yesterday. We are moving toward 400,000 much faster than we reached 300,000. One day, we'll talk about this trajectory.

You are likely aware I have a lot of friends in health care; this is the result of a career spent teaching future health care workers. I received this recently from one of them who lives in a part of the country where transmission is rampant: "They are now announcing that there are no ambulances at different times. Very scary. Seems it's taking 8+ hours to offload patients as there is no place for them to go once they arrive at the hospital. There are already nurses quitting or planning to quit. I am now at the point of being infuriated when we drive by a bar or restaurant and people are making merry without masks while my hospital texts me 5x a day offering double time if you'll come in to work. It's an unforgivable slap across the face. I hear the pain and betrayal when I speak with my fellows. It's heartbreaking."

I'm guessing we're going to continue seeing fallout from this pandemic long after this virus has been vanquished. Those nurses quitting are not likely to come back. The ones who've died or been left disabled by the disease won't be back either. And their sense that we have thrown their sacrifices back in their faces isn't likely to fade either: Why should it? Might be a good idea to begin investing in public health because it may be our only bulwark against the next viral pandemic: The health care system itself is likely crippled for a generation, and we're probably going to need it again sooner than that. Investment in public health might alleviate the strains on an already-broken system when the time comes. If you get this, you might wish to raise your voice at the local and state level over the next few months. If we're going to stave off the next disaster, we'll need to get started.

I am once again seeing various home remedies for the prevention or cure of Covid-19 circulating on social media, so I thought I'd give the latest a quick rundown.

It is being recommended to swab the nasal cavity (and sometimes the oral cavity too) with a 10 percent solution of povidone-iodine as an antiseptic. Two things here:

(1) Povidone-iodine is unproven for use in Covid-19, although studies are underway. It may have some efficacy for prophylaxis or in shortening the course of disease or decreasing viral load to reduce transmissibility. We'll have to wait on these studies to discover whether it is actually helpful.

(2) Safety studies have been done, and a 10 percent solution should not be used. Safety has been established for the use of up to 1.25 percent solution in the nose and up to 2.5 percent solution in the oral cavity for up to five months. Risks of higher concentrations may include damage to the ciliated epithelium in the respiratory tract (cells with little hair-like projections that clear particles), damage to mucus-producing cells which also help to clear pathogens, and clinical thyroid disease. Avoid the higher concentrations. In the recommended concentrations, povidone-iodine is unlikely to be damaging, so there's no harm in us-

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ing it if it makes you feel safer.

I am seeing recommendations for combinations of vitamin D3 and vitamin K2. We've discussed vitamin D before; but we'll do this once again. These vitamins show some promise in reducing the severity of Covid-19, but are unproven. These fat-soluble vitamins are potentially toxic if taken in very large doses over time because they accumulate in tissue. Very short-term (up to a week or so) high-dose supplementation is unlikely to be dangerous, however, so it's not a crazy strategy to supplement in the short term when you've been exposed. I would not recommend high-dose supplementation over months just as a prophylactic though. It would not be a problem to take the RDA/AI of these vitamins daily for the long term. RDA for vitamin D3 is 600 IU for most adults, 800 IU for those over age 71; have a look at the label on the bottle of vitamins though because most supplements have many times that dosage, in which case consider taking just one tablet or capsule once or twice a week (whatever works out to the appropriate dosage). The AI for vitamin K2 is 120 mcg for males and 90 mcg for females.

Zinc and vitamin C supplementation is also being recommended, probably because many people believe these have efficacy against the common cold. These may be beneficial, but as with all of the other strategies under discussion here, are also unproven for Covid-19. Vitamin C is harmless, even at high doses, because it is a water-soluble vitamin; excesses will be flushed out of the body in urine, so you might be wasting your money if it doesn't work, but you will not be endangering your health. Zinc, on the other hand, can accumulate to toxic levels. It should not be taken as a nasal spray or inhaled; it can cause a permanent loss of the sense of smell when used this way. Ingestion in zinc lozenges is safe at the recommended dosage; do not exceed that maximum daily dosage.

That new viral variant first spotted in Britain, B.1.1.7, has made its first known appearance in the US in Colorado. The identified individual has no travel history, which tells us the variant has been circulating in the US for some time. Computational biologist Trevor Bedford indicates it looks more and more likely this variant is, indeed, more transmissible than the variants already circulating.

Pfizer and Moderna, makers of the two currently-approved vaccines, and Novavax, maker of a candidate beginning US clinical trials, are all engaged in testing their vaccines against this new variant; but the expectation is that the extant vaccines will be effective against it. A Novavax statement says the company believes their vaccine will elicit an "immune response that covers these sequence variants and will be protective." We are getting the same indications from the other two companies. This is as expected; the spike (S) protein has enough antigenic sites along the way that the current constellation of antibodies produced against it is expected to be sufficient to cover it, even with several mutations in the protein. We won't get worried about this until we have more evidence we should worry; right now, there is no such evidence and not even a hint we should be concerned.

We all got into this disinfecting thing at the beginning of the pandemic, and I was part of that movement as we tried to figure out just how this virus spread. But now, with several months' experience, we have a better idea what's going on; and it is clear we're spending entirely too much time wiping things down—groceries, shopping carts, floors and doorknobs. Survival of virus in droplets deposited on surfaces is low—very low; turns out it is fairly fragile in the environment, so it is inactivated quickly outside its host.

Linsey Marr, engineering professor at Virginia Tech who studies airborne transmission of infections, told NPR most of the disinfecting and cleaning is "overkill" because "all the evidence points toward breathing in the virus from the air as being the most important route of transmission." She suggests, "Instead of paying so much attention to cleaning surfaces, we might be better off paying attention to cleaning the air, given the finite amount of time and resources." She's talking about filtration and ventilation, things we've addressed here more than once, and also recommends ultraviolet radiation as a virus-killing strategy for air.

Now it's still a good idea to keep things clean and to wash your hands often when out in public; but there is no need to go crazy trying to disinfect everything in sight. We've talked about that too and about what I'm going to say next: Stay away from crowds. Wear a mask when you're out in public. Keep to the outdoors and well-ventilated spaces as much as possible. Limit the time you spend indoors with people not of your household. No amount of disinfecting replaces these precautions.

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One of the sectors of the economy we don't think much about is the services that surround major professional sports and their games. While the games have gone on one way or another, the ticket-takers, ushers, and vendors who work the crowds at games are sort of forgotten; with no crowds, there's no need for these folks. Many of them are seasonal and don't have strong unemployment protections.

Turns out some of them don't have as much to worry about as others. For example, the Cleveland Cavaliers NBA team paid workers who were scheduled to work cancelled college conference and NCAA tournament games, as well as a concert, at their arena, paying out \$1.2 million to the workers for those cancelled events. They also paid arena employees who are usually compensated by other organizations like food and beverage companies.

In addition, a couple of big-name players are covering other lost wages for these workers. Kevin Love paid the workers who swap out the arena floor for the lost home games last spring, and this was after he made another \$100,000 donation to arena staff earlier in the pandemic. And Andre Drummond ponied up \$60,000 for arena staff as well as another \$100,000 gift to his hometown in Connecticut for PPE and money for headphones to schools in Cleveland and Detroit to use in online education.

There are good people recognizing needs and meeting them when they do not have to. This gives us a hint of what we need to be doing in this time of widespread need. Not all of us are in a position to donate money, but we all pretty much have something we can offer to our communities. We build the world we want to live in, and we should never forget that. In the end, if we have a world we don't find acceptable, we have only ourselves to blame. Let's start to identify the needs and get to work.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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December 29 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: +501 (98,659 total) Positivity Rate: 13.4%

Total Tests: 3734 (751,344 total)

Hospitalized: +22 (5605 total). 303 currently hospitalized (+15)

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

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

Deaths: +0 (1446 total)

Recovered: +1286 (90,974 total)

Active Cases: -785 (5738)

Percent Recovered: 92.2%

Beadle (34) +2 positive, +15 recovered (64 active cases)

Brookings (29) +18 positive, +37 recovered (185 active cases)

Brown (57): +33 positive, +42 recovered (236 active cases)

Clark (2): +1 positive, +2 recovered (18 active cases)

Clay (11): +6 positive, +19 recovered (79 active cases)

Codington (68): +22 positive, +51 recovered (248 active cases)

Davison (52): +15 positive, +17 recovered (102 active cases)

Day (20): +5 positive, +11 recovered (36 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +4 positive, +7 recovered (51 active cases)

Faulk (11): +3 positive, +2 recovered (10 active cases)

Grant (28): +2 positive, +9 recovered (33 active cases)

Hanson (3): +2 positive, +0 recovered (16 active cases)

Hughes (25): +8 positive, +29 recovered (108 active cases)

Lawrence (28): +27 positive, +56 recovered (114 active cases)

Lincoln (63): +34 positive, +100 recovered (431 active cases)

Marshall (4): +1 positive, +5 recovered (22 active cases)

McCook (21): +1 positive, +7 recovered (35 active cases)

McPherson (1): +0 positive, +4 recovery (8 active case)

Minnehaha (259): +111 positive, +296 recovered (1425 active cases)

Pennington (128): +79 positive, +215 recovered (682 active cases)

Potter (2): +1 positive, +0 recovered (11 active cases)

Roberts (31): +8 positive, +13 recovered (96 active cases)

Spink (24): +3 positive, +8 recovered (43 active cases)

Walworth (14): +1 positive, +6 recovered (38 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 29:

- 4.9% rolling 14-day positivity
- 294 new positives
- 1,402 susceptible test encounters
- 115 currently hospitalized (+7)
- 1,701 active cases (-177)
- 1,276 total deaths (+6)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	410	382	770	8	Substantial	25.00%
Beadle	2488	2391	5149	34	Substantial	7.95%
Bennett	353	340	1082	8	Moderate	3.45%
Bon Homme	1472	1410	1868	23	Substantial	25.40%
Brookings	2926	2711	9964	29	Substantial	6.39%
Brown	4374	4081	11021	57	Substantial	20.86%
Brule	626	607	1686	6	Moderate	6.25%
Buffalo	410	394	853	10	Minimal	14.29%
Butte	868	810	2823	18	Substantial	15.38%
Campbell	113	106	207	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1098	1017	3530	11	Substantial	14.55%
Clark	311	291	848	2	Moderate	6.38%
Clay	1613	1523	4496	11	Substantial	11.88%
Codington	3414	3098	8353	68	Substantial	15.29%
Corson	448	422	887	10	Moderate	13.04%
Custer	671	634	2382	9	Substantial	18.60%
Davison	2701	2547	5689	52	Substantial	14.34%
Day	528	472	1534	20	Substantial	23.44%
Deuel	405	374	989	6	Substantial	12.50%
Dewey	1258	1153	3487	12	Substantial	34.09%
Douglas	378	346	821	7	Substantial	32.00%
Edmunds	356	301	876	4	Substantial	20.45%
Fall River	448	413	2272	12	Substantial	17.65%
Faulk	313	292	594	11	Moderate	0.00%
Grant	817	756	1926	28	Substantial	4.11%
Gregory	482	439	1081	26	Substantial	9.09%
Haakon	232	190	465	7	Substantial	29.17%
Hamlin	601	533	1502	32	Substantial	15.49%
Hand	312	298	698	2	Moderate	0.00%
Hanson	310	291	601	3	Moderate	17.39%
Harding	89	83	153	1	Minimal	14.29%
Hughes	1986	1853	5558	25	Substantial	3.05%
Hutchinson	696	639	2033	16	Substantial	17.54%

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Hyde	131	129	363	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	262	240	852	8	Moderate	18.18%
Jerauld	259	233	494	15	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	65	63	181	0	Minimal	14.29%
Kingsbury	537	483	1411	13	Substantial	31.25%
Lake	1009	948	2755	16	Substantial	19.28%
Lawrence	2532	2390	7512	28	Substantial	20.68%
Lincoln	6710	6216	17314	63	Substantial	15.60%
Lyman	516	491	1703	9	Moderate	6.45%
Marshall	260	234	993	4	Substantial	20.59%
McCook	673	617	1402	21	Substantial	22.03%
McPherson	178	169	500	1	Moderate	2.86%
Meade	2202	2056	6650	24	Substantial	15.24%
Mellette	214	207	653	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	224	199	497	6	Moderate	31.25%
Minnehaha	24774	23090	67479	259	Substantial	12.16%
Moody	530	482	1581	14	Substantial	15.15%
Oglala Lakota	1913	1763	6166	34	Substantial	17.71%
Pennington	11029	10140	33528	128	Substantial	21.66%
Perkins	283	236	662	11	Substantial	32.43%
Potter	300	287	711	2	Moderate	9.30%
Roberts	966	844	3729	31	Substantial	24.54%
Sanborn	303	295	611	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	699	632	1856	24	Substantial	5.52%
Stanley	269	250	764	2	Substantial	0.00%
Sully	110	99	245	3	Minimal	28.57%
Todd	1144	1084	3775	19	Substantial	20.90%
Tripp	620	589	1316	11	Substantial	16.67%
Turner	956	859	2370	47	Substantial	14.93%
Union	1590	1426	5368	30	Substantial	17.10%
Walworth	613	561	1610	14	Substantial	16.67%
Yankton	2491	2213	8169	24	Substantial	24.28%
Ziebach	289	252	693	7	Moderate	9.09%
Unassigned	0	0	1890	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	3655	0
10-19 years	10812	0
20-29 years	17904	4
30-39 years	16252	12
40-49 years	14072	24
50-59 years	13937	74
60-69 years	11136	182
70-79 years	5869	309
80+ years	4521	841

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	51295	699
Male	46863	747

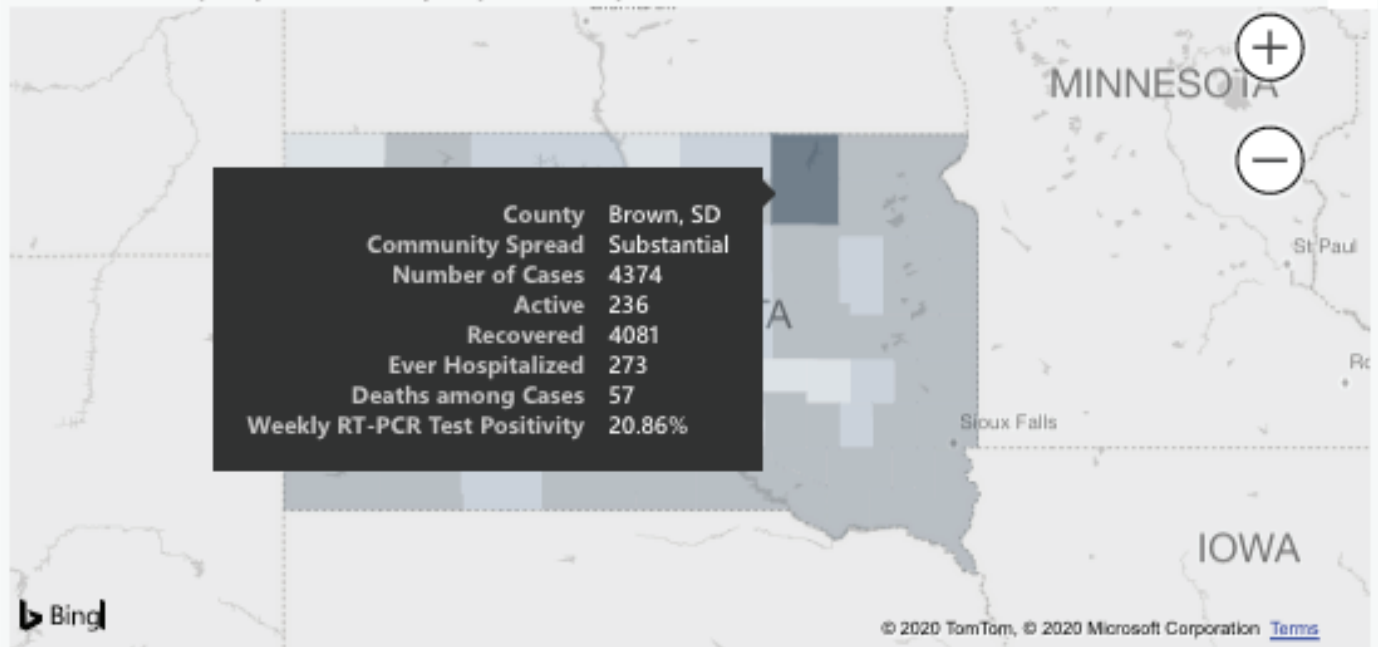
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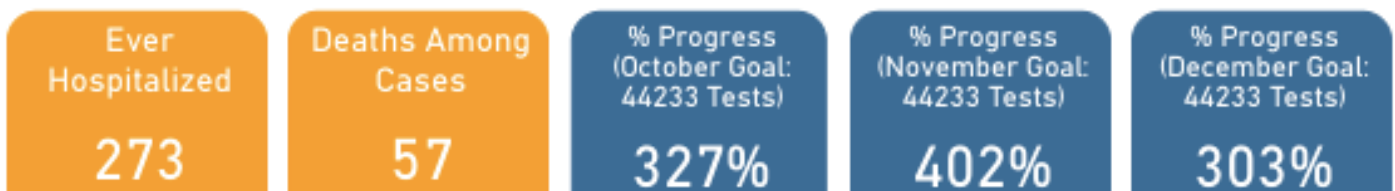
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



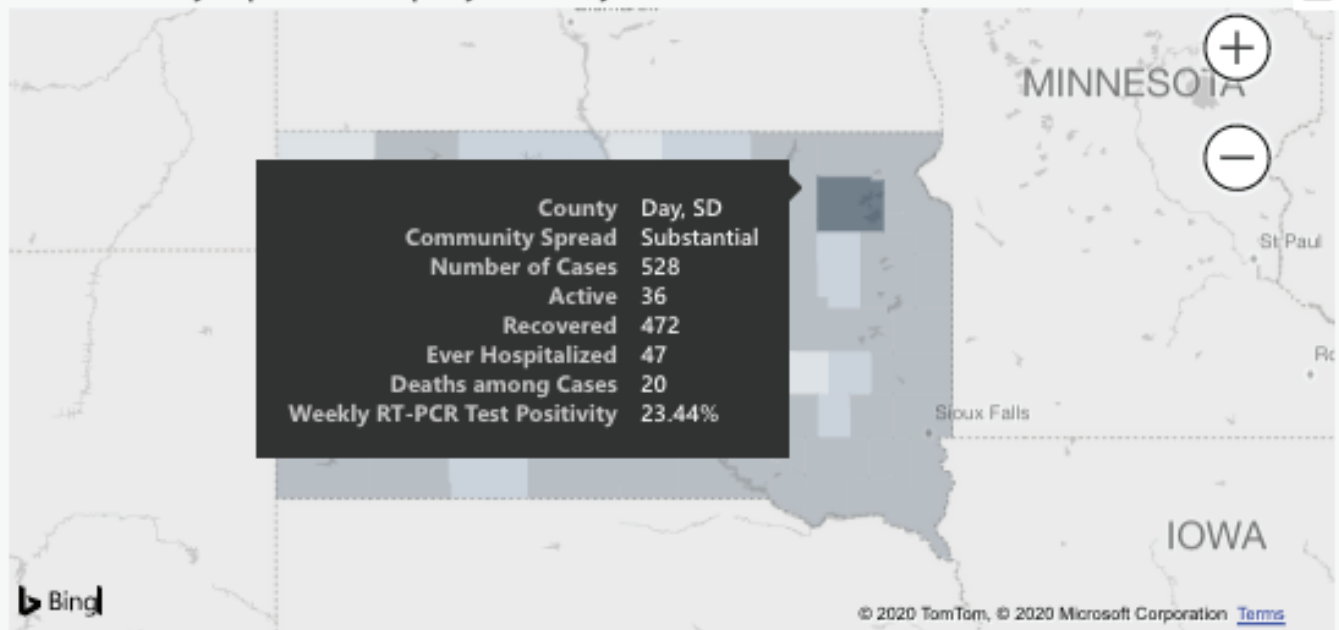
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



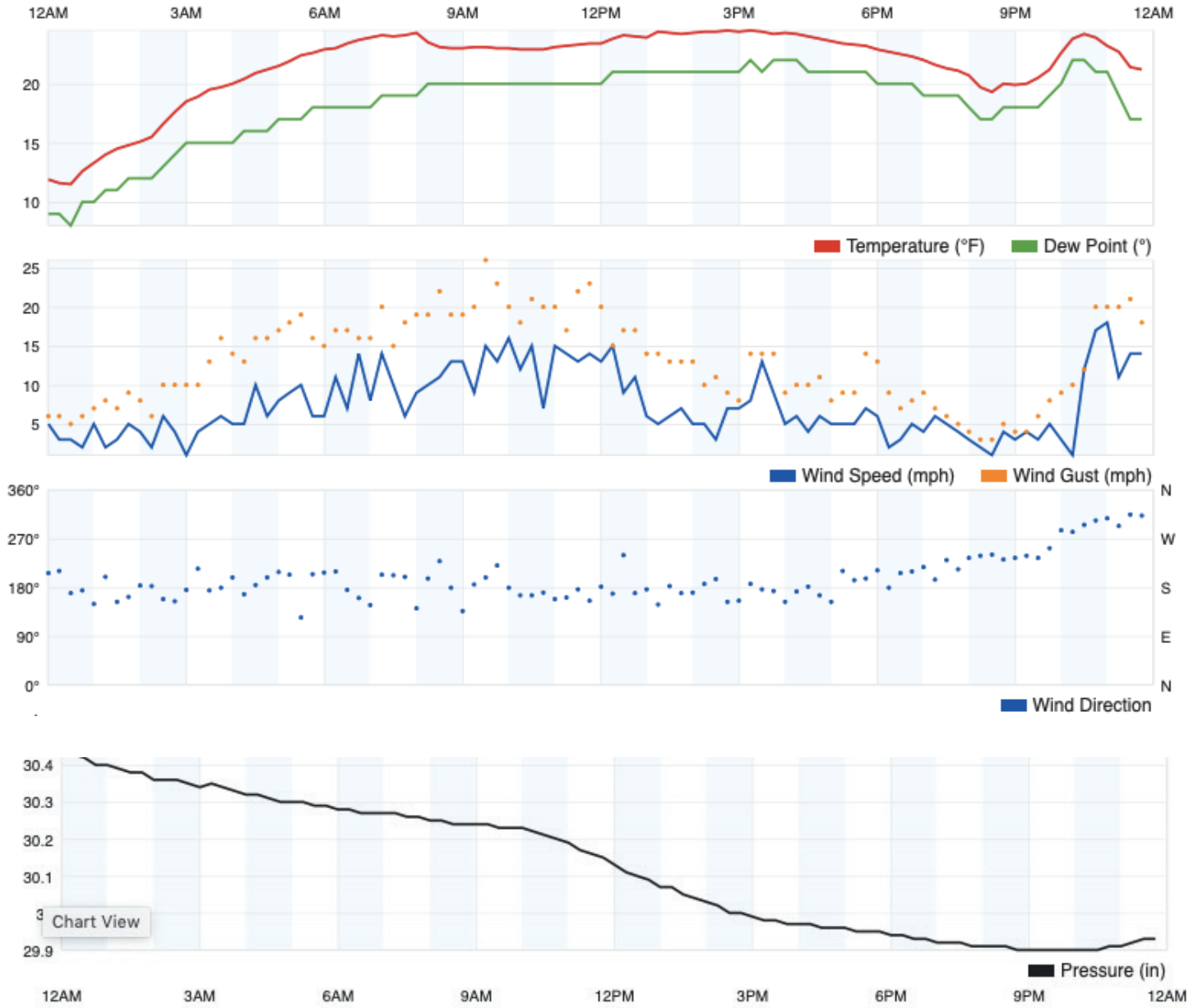
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Chance
Flurries

High: 23 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 6 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 24 °F

Thursday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 8 °F

New
Year's
Day



Mostly Sunny

High: 28 °F

Mostly Dry Over the Next Week (other than a few flurries today)

- Highs today in the upper teens to lower 20s east of the Missouri River Valley
- Highs today in the upper 20s to lower 30s in and west of the Missouri River Valley
- Gusty northwest winds this morning will decrease from west to east through the day today.



Updated: 12/30/2020 4:39 AM Central

After a healthy dose of snow for a large portion of South Dakota and west central Minnesota yesterday, other than a few flurries today, conditions look mostly dry through the next week. Gusty winds northwest winds will diminish from west to east through the day today.

Today in Weather History

December 30, 1985: Winds gusted to 40 to 50 mph over northern South Dakota through the day and into the southern part of the state by late afternoon. The high winds lowered visibilities to near zero at times between Lemmon in Perkins County and Faith in Meade County. The strongest wind gusts were to 63 mph at Mitchell. At 9:33 pm CST, the strong winds blew a semi-tractor trailer off the highway one mile east of Aberdeen.

December 30, 2010: A strong upper-level low-pressure trough and associated surface low-pressure area moved across the region bringing the first of two consecutive blizzards to central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 3 to 6 inches combined with bitter cold north winds of 25 to 40 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions across central and northeast South Dakota from the late morning until the evening hours. Near zero visibilities caused dangerous travel conditions resulting in the closing of Interstates 29 and 90 along with several highways across the region. Several hundred people were stranded in the aftermath of the storm. A group of fishermen had to be rescued in Day County when they became stranded on the ice. The snowfall began across the area anywhere from 7 to 11 am CST and ended between 10 pm and 1 am CST.

1960: A massive accumulation of snow, 68.2 inches to be exact, buries the Japanese city of Tsukayama in 24 hours. Tsukayama is located in the coastal mountains inland from the Sea of Japan along Honshu's west coast and subject to significant sea-effect snowfalls.

2003: The first time in five years, sections of Las Vegas receive an inch or two of snow on cars, roads, sidewalks, and trees, while snow flurries fell on downtown and the Strip.

2014: Steam Devils were seen over Lake Superior near Saginaw, Minnesota. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the Minnesota Public Radio.

2017: Funnels/steam devils were observed on Lake McConaughy, Nebraska in the morning. A boundary moved over the lake's 'warmer' water (compared to the surrounding air). The combination of converging winds and energy added by the lake helped spin these up.

1880 - The temperature at Charlotte, NC, plunged to an all-time record cold reading of 5 degrees below zero, a record which was equalled on the 21st of January in 1985. (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A great cold wave set many records in the northeastern U.S. The mercury plunged to 13 degrees below zero at New York City, and to 15 degrees below zero at Boston. Temperature readings dipped below zero at Boston five nights in a row. Berlin NH hit 44 degrees below zero in the "Great World War I Cold Wave," and Saint Johnsbury VT reached 43 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1933 - The temperature reached 50 degrees below zero at Bloomfield, VT. It was the coldest reading in modern records for New England. The temperature at Pittsburgh NH reached 44 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1955 - Anchorage, AK, reported an all-time record snow depth of 47 inches. (30th-1st) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in Utah, with 28 inches reported in the Mount Holly and Elk Meadows area. Strong winds prevailed ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. Winds gusted to 46 mph at Dodge City KS, and reached 80 mph at Ruidoso NM. Strong northerly winds, ushering arctic cold into the north central U.S., created blizzard conditions in western Minnesota and central and eastern South Dakota. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. A week of subfreezing temperatures in southern California claimed the lives of five people. Redding CA was blanketed with four inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Extreme cold continued across northern Maine. Milo ME was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 38 degrees below zero, and the low of 31 degrees below zero at Caribou ME was a December record for that location. Freezing rain spread across much of Lower Michigan, knocking out electrical power to 1.9 million customers in southeastern Lower Michigan. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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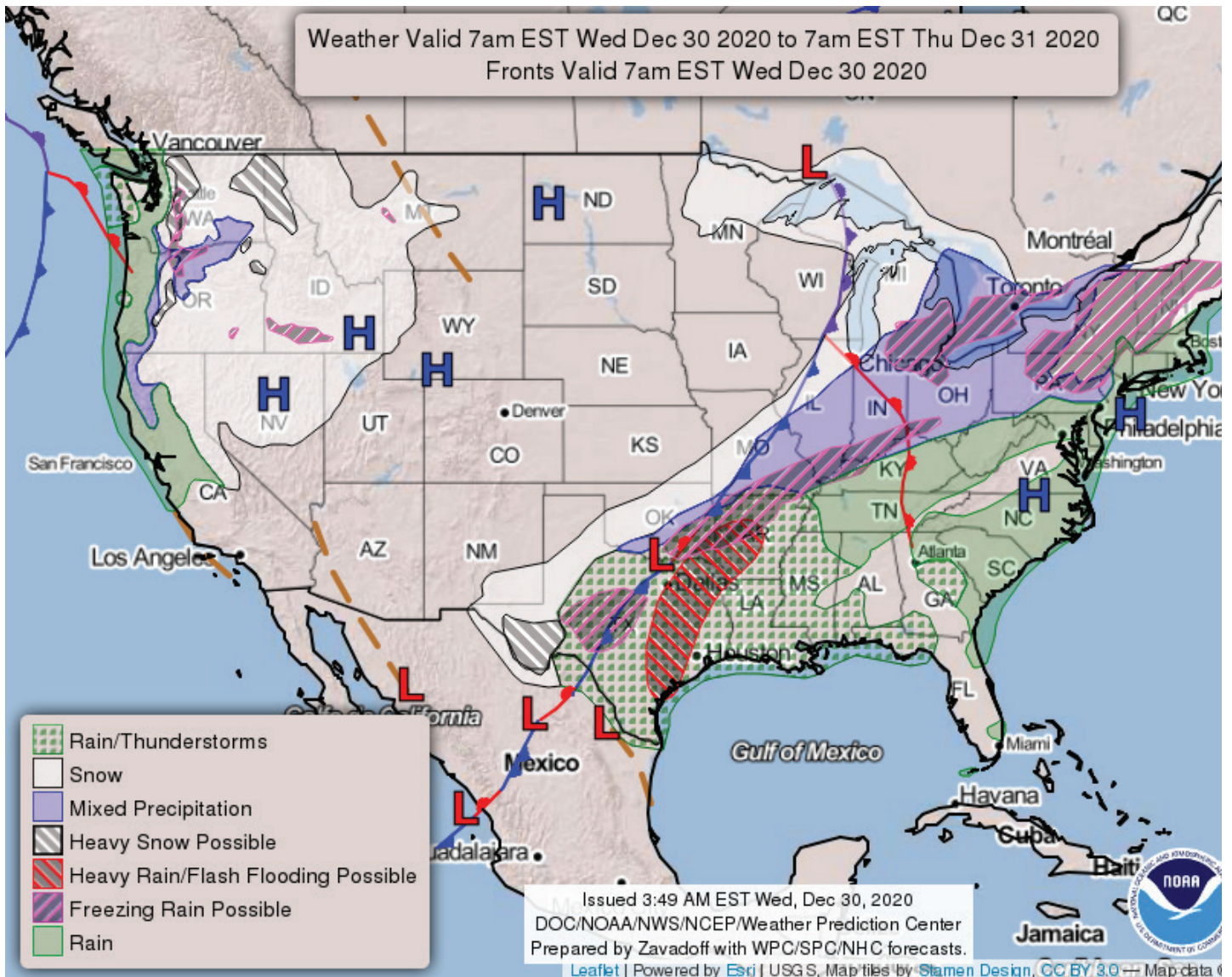
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 2:42 PM
Low Temp: 11 °F at 12:17 AM
Wind: 26 mph at 9:29 AM
Precip: About 5" Snow

Today's Info

Record High: 52° in 1980
Record Low: -34 in 1917
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.48
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.68
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 5:00 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:14 a.m.



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SOME FINAL WORDS

Often what we find depends on what we look for. Here are a few things to look for in the days we will face in the year to come:

Look for God's presence. When fear grips us or failure would defeat us, or if life's challenges seem to be larger than we are, or the nights are longer than usual, remember, we are never alone if Jesus rules and reigns in our lives. He promised that "He will never leave us nor forsake us." When life turns to shambles, He will wrap His loving arms around us and protect us because He is with us.

Look for God's power. The psalmist said that "God is our refuge and strength." Often we look to people for insights and advice when we are faced with difficult problems. But their solutions are never as good as the solutions that come from God. God is the greatest asset any Christian has but we must go to Him and draw from His strength and power.

Look for God's provision. "My God shall supply all your needs." Though we may fail Him, He will not fail us. Though we may fail to claim His promises, it does not mean they are not available. If we look to and trust in Him, He will not let us down.

Prayer: Father, we look to You in faith believing that You will meet our every need if we trust You. Lord, help our unbelief! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: 1 Kings 8:56-58; Psalm 46:1-3; Philippians 4:19

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News from the Associated Press

Man sentence to time served for stealing from tribal college

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Pine Ridge man has been sentenced to time served and ordered to pay restitution after pleading guilty to stealing from the Oglala Lakota College.

The Rapid City Journal reports 33-year-old John Jay Hussman III was sentenced earlier this fall at the federal court in Rapid City after pleading guilty to embezzling from a Native American tribal organization.

It's unclear how many days in jail Hussman served for a crime punishable by up to five years in prison. As part of his plea deal, prosecutors dropped a charge of larceny for allegedly stealing more than \$3,000 from a Pizza Hut in 2017.

Hussman got a \$2,004 check from the college written to Oglala Sioux Tribe Financial Services in December 2018.

Authorities say he endorsed the check in his own name and deposited it in his personal checking account.

Authorities say he paid the money back to the college before sentencing but was ordered to pay \$3,086 in restitution to Pizza Hut even though he wasn't convicted of stealing from them.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

01-31-35-48-62, Mega Ball: 19, Megaplier: 3

(one, thirty-one, thirty-five, forty-eight, sixty-two; Mega Ball: nineteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$376 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$363 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Highmore-Harrold 64, Wessington Springs 63

Lemmon 49, Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 20

Mobridge-Pollock 61, Ellendale, N.D. 50

Sioux Valley 63, Groton Area 44

Chadron Holiday Tournament=

Custer 68, Valentine, Neb. 43

Sioux Falls -Pentagon Tournament=

Mitchell 59, Campbell County, Wyo. 49

Yankton 65, Thunder Basin, Wyo. 50

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 65, Herreid/Selby Area 36

Brandon Valley 63, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 53

Florence/Henry 61, Waubay/Summit 43

Highmore-Harrold 59, Wessington Springs 36

Lemmon 45, Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 37

Milbank 55, Tiospa Zina Tribal 35

Mobridge 58, Ellendale, N.D. 46

Mobridge-Pollock 58, Ellendale, N.D. 46

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Sioux Valley 53, Groton Area 31
White River 70, Kadoka Area 34
Chadron Holiday Tournament=
Valentine, Neb. 38, Custer 33
Huron Holiday Classic=
DeSmet 60, Iroquois 24
James Valley Christian 57, Lyman 35
Jones County 67, Chester 42
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 55, Lower Brule 46
Sioux Falls -Pentagon Tournament=
Mitchell 62, Campbell County, Wyo. 41
Thunder Basin, Wyo. 62, Bridgewater-Emery 50

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

The Latest: Louisiana congressman-elect dies from COVID-19

By The Associated Press undefined

BATON ROUGE, La. — Luke Letlow, who was to have been Louisiana's newest Republican member of the U.S. House, has died from complications related to COVID-19 only days before being sworn into office. He was 41.

Letlow spokesman Andrew Bautsch confirmed the congressman-elect's death Tuesday at Ochsner-LSU Health Shreveport. The spokesman says that "the family appreciates the numerous prayers and support over the past days."

Letlow had won a December runoff election and was set to take office in January. He was admitted to a Monroe hospital on Dec. 19 after testing positive for the coronavirus. He was later transferred to the Shreveport medical center and placed in intensive care.

Letlow is survived by his wife, Julia Barnhill Letlow, and two children.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- 91-year-old Margaret Keenan, gets 2nd shot after 1st Brit to get vaccine
- Alabama cases surge, ICUs 91% full last week
- Belarus, Argentina start vaccinations with Russian shots
- Hospitalizations in England exceed peak in spring
- Follow AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>, <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

SAN FRANCISCO — California's top health official says hospitals in hard-hit Los Angeles County are turning to "crisis care" and bracing for the coronavirus surge to worsen in the new year.

Dr. Mark Ghaly's comment came Tuesday as he extended strict stay-home orders in areas where intensive care units have few beds.

Ghaly says Southern California and the agricultural San Joaquin Valley have virtually no ICU capacity to treat COVID-19 patients. He says some overwhelmed hospitals don't have space to unload ambulances or get oxygen to patients who can't breathe.

The state's "crisis care" guidelines allow for rationing treatment when staff, medicine and supplies are in short supply.

California reported more than 31,000 new coronavirus infections Tuesday and 242 deaths. Nearly 25,000 people in the state have died from COVID-19 during the pandemic.

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DENVER — Colorado Gov. Jared Polis says the state has recorded the first reported U.S. case of the coronavirus variant that has been seen in the United Kingdom.

State health officials said Tuesday that the variant was found in a man in his 20s who is in isolation southeast of Denver and has no travel history.

The Colorado State Laboratory confirmed the virus variant, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was notified.

Scientists in the U.K. believe the new virus variant is more contagious than previously identified strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Health officials have said the vaccines being given now are thought to be effective against the variant.

NEW YORK — Drugmaker Pfizer and partner BioNTech say they will be supplying an additional 100 million doses of their coronavirus vaccine to the European Union next year.

The European Commission is exercising its option to buy those additional doses under the initial contract it signed with the two drugmakers last month.

New York-based Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech said Tuesday the additional supply will give the EU's 27 member states a total of 300 million doses, enough to give 150 million people the two-dose vaccine.

Nearly all the EU member countries started their vaccination campaigns Sunday.

The two companies have said they could provide up to 1.3 billion doses of the vaccine worldwide by the end of 2021, but manufacturing constraints could reduce that amount.

PHOENIX -- Arizona's largest hospital chain says some hospitals have stopped accepting patients brought to them by ambulance runs and transfers as they scramble to address a backlog of sick people amid a surge of COVID-19 cases.

Banner Health says 10 hospitals diverted ambulances and transfers to other medical facilities late Monday and six were still doing so early Tuesday.

Arizona has the second highest coronavirus infection rate in the nation. California has the highest.

State officials announced Tuesday that Arizona will include people aged 75 and older in the second phase of vaccinations against the coronavirus in a move to keep hospitals from getting further overwhelmed.

MOSS BLUFF, La. — A former Louisiana state lawmaker and his wife died from COVID-19 on the same day.

The family's obituary says Vic and Terry Bass Stelly died within hours of each other on Saturday from complications brought on by the coronavirus. A memorial ceremony will be held Thursday at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Lake Charles.

Daughter Toni Stelly Hebert wrote on Facebook that after 60 years together, her parents could not be without each other.

"You don't see marriages like that too often anymore," state Sen. Ronnie Johns, a Republican from Sulphur, told The Advocate. "At first it shocked me that they both died the same day, but as I looked back at how they lived their lives and how they felt about each other, it doesn't surprise me at all."

Vic Stelly served 16 years in the state House and later was a member of Louisiana's higher education policy board. He was 79. Terry Bass Stelly was 80.

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma City fire department says a firefighter, whose nephew became the first department employee to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, died of the virus after being infected while responding to a call.

Fire Chief Richard Kelley, fighting back tears, said Monday that Maj. Andy Davis died Christmas Eve, declining to elaborate on details of when or how Davis was infected.

Deputy Chief Mike Walker said Davis' nephew, firefighter A.J. Davis, was the first fire department employee to receive the vaccine on Saturday.

"We just thought it was the fitting thing to do in light of the passing of Andy," Walker said. "So, we

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reached out to him and he was willing to step up and be the first one.”

Battalion Chief Benny Fulkerson said a second department employee, 45-year-old Robert Saudia, died Monday after suffering from COVID-19, but Saudia’s cause of death has not been determined.

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Beleaguered leaders in the region of South Carolina hardest hit by the coronavirus rebuked residents who plan to party in large crowds for New Year’s Eve with hospitals already reaching the breaking point.

In the Upstate area of the state, COVID-19 infection rates continue to outpace every other part of South Carolina. But some event organizers are still selling tickets to New Year’s Eve celebrations. Greenville officials said Tuesday they had received multiple complaints from residents about the planned festivities, adding that city has denied several requests for special permits to hold large events.

“It’s horribly unfair and irresponsible to the men and women in the health care community, the nurses and doctors who are fighting this on the front lines,” Greenville Mayor Knox White told reporters.

Greenville law enforcement officials say they will be patrolling downtown on New Year’s Eve to ensure people and businesses are complying with state regulations.

WILMINGTON, Del. — President-elect Joe Biden is criticizing the Trump administration for the pace of distributing COVID-19 vaccines, saying it is “falling far behind.”

Biden says “it’s gonna take years, not months, to vaccinate the American people” at the current pace.

He is vowing to ramp up the current speed of vaccinations five to six times to 1 million shots a day, but acknowledges it “will still take months to have the majority of Americans vaccinated.”

The president-elect, who takes office Jan. 20, says he has directed his team to prepare a “much more aggressive effort to get things back on track.”

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — New Mexico officials have fined two Albuquerque churches for violating the state’s public health orders aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 after both venues held large gatherings for Christmas.

The New Mexico Department of Health fined Legacy Church and Calvary Church \$5,000 each on Monday after photos and video showed both churches violated orders limiting occupancy, mandating masks and practicing social distancing.

Tripp Stelnicki, a spokesman for Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, said the leaders and congregation at the two churches violated state regulations.

Legacy Church officials accused the state of trampling on their constitutional rights. Calvary Church’s pastor said they urged people to follow guidelines, blocked every other row to practice social distancing, provided outdoor seating and gave masks to guests who were not wearing one.

PARIS — The French Health Minister says authorities are planning to extend the country’s night curfew in regions where the coronavirus is circulating more, in eastern France near the border with Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

Health Minister Olivier Veran says the extended curfew from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. will start on Jan. 2 “where it’s needed,” he says. Veran ruled out any national or local lockdown in the coming days.

In other regions, the curfew in place since mid-December will be maintained from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. Restaurants and bars will remain closed at least until Jan. 20.

So far, France’s vaccination campaign has been limited to a few dozen people since Sunday, compared with at least 18,000 people in neighboring Germany.

Veran says France has the same number of vaccine doses as Germany in proportion to its population and will get the “same results.” But he acknowledged the approach to vaccinate first people in nursing homes and get written consent from them or their family slowed down the process.

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SIoux FALLS, S.D. — A South Dakota lawmaker says she will participate in the upcoming legislative session remotely until she receives a coronavirus vaccine.

Rep. Linda Duba, a Sioux Falls Democrat, informed legislative leadership she'll stay away from the Capitol building out of concern for her health, the Argus Leader reported. The 64-year-old lawmaker says she wouldn't attend meetings in-person until she receives two doses of a vaccine.

South Dakota's Legislature is set to convene in Pierre on Jan. 12 for a two-month session. Rules and protocols for the session have not been set but may allow lawmakers to participate remotely due to the pandemic.

Duba told legislative leaders in an email she believes proposed rules in the Capitol are not in line with CDC guidelines on indoor gatherings.

CONCORD, N.H. — Up to 400 New Hampshire lawmakers are expected to attend an upcoming legislative session modeled on a drive-in movie theater.

The House released plans Tuesday for what acting Speaker Sherm Packard calls "the most risk-mitigated session of the House yet during this pandemic."

Lawmakers will park in front of a large screen at the University of New Hampshire in Durham and will remain in their cars for the duration of the session on Jan. 6.

Since the pandemic began, the House has met indoors at university arena and outside on an athletic field. House Speaker Dick Hinch, R-Merrimack, died of COVID-19 on Dec. 9, a week after being sworn in during the outdoor gathering.

DES MOINES, Iowa — Coronavirus vaccinations began this week in Iowa's nursing homes.

Officials say although it will take weeks to complete, the vaccination drive gives hope to the isolated residents that they can resume contact with their families.

Three pharmacy companies signed contracts with the government to go into nursing homes and give the vaccines to residents and staff. They began Monday. In Iowa, there are about 31,000 residents and 37,000 staff members in 445 nursing homes and 258 assisted living facilities, said Brent Willett, CEO of the Iowa Health Care Association, a trade group those communities.

It will take several weeks to administer the first dose and it must be followed with a second booster, so the homes won't be reopened to visitors immediately.

Iowa nursing home residents make up about 1.5% of the state's population but about 2.5% of all coronavirus cases and 30% of deaths. Current public health data shows 1,138 deaths in nursing homes out of the state's total 3,812 confirmed deaths.

LONDON — Some people in Britain have received their second and final dose of coronavirus vaccine as the country's immunization program rolls on.

Margaret Keenan, 91, who became the first person in the U.K. to get a vaccine on Dec. 8, had the follow-up injection Tuesday at a hospital in the central England city of Coventry.

Hospital chief executive Andy Hardy says: "We were delighted to welcome Margaret Keenan back to Coventry's University Hospital today to safely receive the second dose of the vaccination after she became the first person in the world to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 (vaccine) following its clinical approval."

The vaccine developed by Pfizer and German firm BioNTech is given in two doses three weeks apart. Its developers say it conferred 95% immunity in clinical trials.

Storm brings heavy snow, closes Nebraska virus testing sites

By The Associated Press undefined

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A strong winter storm made its way across the Upper Midwest Tuesday, creating treacherous travel conditions, spurring warnings urging people to stay off the roads and closing coronavirus testing sites.

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The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings for parts of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Illinois.

Snow was so heavy in western Nebraska Tuesday morning that Interstates 80 and 76 were closed for several hours in both directions after numerous accidents, and the Nebraska Department of Transportation warned people to avoid unnecessary travel.

By 4 p.m. Tuesday, the storm had mostly moved out of Nebraska. The Nebraska State Patrol said troopers responded to more than 150 weather-related incidents, including 129 motorist assists.

Many government buildings and properties closed ahead of the storm, including COVID-19 testing sites in Norfolk, O'Neill, Nebraska City, Beatrice, Bassett and Auburn. Planned testing sites in Nebraska City, Cozad, York and Valentine will not open Wednesday. State officials urged Nebraskans to continue registering for testing, which is expected to resume Thursday.

Police in Omaha reported several accidents blamed on slick roads. Unofficial snowfall amounts by afternoon included about 6.5 inches (16.5 centimeters) in Lincoln and Omaha, 7.5 inches (19 centimeters) near Nebraska City, 7 inches (18 centimeters) in Wayne and 2 inches (5 centimeters) to 5 inches (13 centimeters) in central Nebraska.

Heavy snowfall of up to a foot (30 centimeters), and perhaps more in some spots, was forecast in parts of Iowa, where the state Department of Transportation urged people to delay travel plans. The department's road conditions map showed most highways in the western part of the state covered or partly covered with snow by midday Tuesday.

"Travel conditions are likely to go downhill all day/night," the Iowa department said on Twitter. "If you must travel in the impacted areas, buckle up, slow down and allow plenty of space between vehicles."

Earlier Tuesday, snowfall was heavy, causing visibility problems for motorists and rapidly deteriorating road conditions, Iowa State Patrol spokesman Sgt. Alex Dinkla said. He added that crashes were happening across the state with heavy post-Christmas travel.

"All our troopers are very busy right now covering crashes all over Iowa. Road conditions are very dangerous," he said.

The city of Des Moines had more than 200 employees from public works, parks and recreation, and wastewater reclamation departments on snow removal duty. Public Works Director Jonathan Gano said 100 snow plows, trucks and other equipment were activated to 24-hour operation until the snow stops.

"We're looking at 8 inches followed by some ice so that's going to be a wonderful complication and I think I've seen the forecast for Jan. 1 which has another 4 to 5 inches," he said.

Wisconsin was also bracing for up to 10 inches (25 centimeters) of snow in some areas. The forecast called for 3 to 6 inches of snow in the Milwaukee area.

AccuWeather said parts of southeast Nebraska, northeast Kansas, northern Missouri and southern Iowa could see ice accumulations of up to a quarter of an inch, which could weigh down power lines and branches and cause power outages.

In Topeka, morning snow gave way to freezing rain and then rain as the temperature moved east. In the Kansas City area, light snow on Tuesday morning resulted in several accidents. Among them were several rollover wrecks on the Kansas side of the metropolitan area.

The storm had mostly moved northeast out of Missouri by late Tuesday afternoon.

The Missouri Department of Transportation said roads were mostly or partly covered with snow in the northern third of the state. But the department added late Tuesday afternoon that all roads in the central region of the state had been cleared.

Forecasts showed the storm would move into the Southern Plains later in the week, when parts of Texas and Oklahoma could receive snow or a wintry mix Wednesday and Thursday. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Monday placed several state agencies on standby.

South Dakota lawmaker says she'll stay away from Capitol

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota lawmaker said she will be participating in the upcoming leg-

islative session remotely until she receives a vaccine for COVID-19.

Rep. Linda Duba, a Sioux Falls Democrat, informed legislative leadership she will stay away from the Capitol building during the upcoming legislative session out of concern for her health, the Argus Leader reported. The 64-year-old lawmaker said she would not attend meetings in-person until she receives two doses of a vaccine.

The Legislature is set to convene in Pierre on Jan. 12 for a two-month session. Rules and protocols for the session have not been set, but may allow lawmakers to participate remotely due to the pandemic.

Duba told legislative leaders in an email that she believes proposed rules in the Capitol are not in line with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on indoor gatherings.

"I am 64, have mild asthma, and high blood pressure," she said, adding that if she contracts COVID-19, it could have devastating consequences.

Duba, who works at a school when the Legislature is not in session, may be able to receive the vaccine during the state's fourth phase of vaccine distribution, when school staff will be given priority.

But it is not clear when the state will reach that phase. South Dakota is currently in the first phase of vaccinations, in which medical workers are prioritized.

The Department of Health has said there are about 30,000 medical workers and residents of long-term care facilities who will be prioritized for vaccines. Health officials told the state's health care providers in a call Tuesday that nearly 48,000 doses of vaccine have arrived in the state so far and shipments of roughly 11,000 are expected each week until the middle of January.

The state has reported that 15,830 people have now received their first dose of a vaccine. The vaccines currently available, manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna, require two shots separated by several weeks.

Another Republican lawmaker, Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, of Watertown, confirmed Tuesday he has tested positive for COVID-19. He said experienced only a deep dry cough that lasted two days and is currently isolating in his Black Hills cabin, the Watertown Public Opinion reported.

Schoenbeck, 62, said he plans to go pheasant hunting with his two dogs this weekend but otherwise will take it easy.

Meanwhile, South Dakota has seen a steady decline in virus cases since a surge 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 reported 501 new cases on Wednesday, and the count of people with active infections dropped below 6,000 for the first time since October.

But the number of people hospitalized by the virus increased to 303 people and the positivity rate of RT-PCR tests reported was almost 20%. A positivity rate that high is an indicator that more people could have infections than tests are catching.

Health officials reported no new deaths for a third day. The state has tallied 1,446 deaths from COVID-19, marking the nation's seventh-highest rate per capita.

Arguments filed in suit against legal pot in South Dakota

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — More arguments are being filed in a lawsuit seeking to overturn a citizen-approved constitutional amendment legalizing marijuana in the state.

Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom and South Dakota Highway Patrol Superintendent Rick Miller filed a lawsuit last month challenging the constitutionality of the amendment, which legalized the cultivation, transport, possession and sale of marijuana in the state.

The Rapid City Journal reports plaintiffs are arguing in court filings that the amendment legalizing marijuana violates the South Dakota Constitution in harmful ways, while the defendants say it doesn't and that the lawsuit was filed too late.

South Dakota in November became the first state to legalize recreational and medical pot on the same ballot, after supporters of the two measures joined forces and promoted them as a package deal.

The lawsuit claims the amendment violates the state constitution by not following the "one-subject rule" and because it's not an amendment but a revision that needed to be approved through a constitutional

convention

Lawyers for Thom and Miller say the amendment interferes with other legislative and judicial roles while impacting 22 existing provisions in the constitution. They said the lawsuit is proper.

Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg's office this month asked a judge to dismiss the lawsuit.

Roscoe man dies after vehicle plunges through lake ice

STIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say an Edmunds County man died after his utility terrain vehicle broke through lake ice in northeastern South Dakota.

The Argus Leader reports 81-year-old Eugene Conn, Sr., of Roscoe, died Saturday after his vehicle plunged through the ice on Hosmer Lake, southwest of Hosmer.

Edmunds County Sheriff Todd Holtz said bystanders saw what happened, contacted authorities and tried to rescue Conn.

He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

UK approves use of 2nd COVID-19 vaccine with easier storage

By DANICA KIRKA and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain on Wednesday became the first country to authorize an easy-to-handle COVID-19 vaccine whose developers hope it will become the "vaccine for the world." The approval and a shift in policy that will speed up rollout of the vaccine in the U.K. come as a surge in infections threatens to swamp British hospitals.

The Department of Health said it had accepted a recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency to authorize emergency use of the vaccine developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca.

"The rollout will start on Jan. 4 and will really accelerate into the first few weeks of next year," British Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky News. Britain has bought 100 million doses of the vaccine.

AstraZeneca chief executive Pascal Soriot told BBC Radio 4 the company could start shipping the first doses of the vaccine Wednesday or Thursday "and the vaccination will start next week and we will get to 1 million — and beyond that — a week, very rapidly."

Hundreds of thousands of people in the U.K. have already received a different vaccine, made by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and German firm BioNTech.

Soriot said it was "an important day for millions of people in the U.K. who will get access to this new vaccine. It has been shown to be effective, well-tolerated, simple to administer and is supplied by AstraZeneca at no profit."

Coronavirus vaccines have typically been given in two doses, with an initial shot followed by a booster about three weeks later.

But in a change of approach, the British government said that with the AstraZeneca vaccine it would prioritize giving as many people as possible a single dose, which is believed to give a large measure of protection against the virus. It said people at the highest risk would get priority, and everyone would get a second jab within 12 weeks of the first.

The new strategy comes against a backdrop of soaring infections in the U.K. The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has surpassed the first peak of the outbreak in the spring, with authorities blaming a new, more transmissible variant of the virus, first identified in southeast England, for the spike.

Oxford University's Dr. Andrew Pollard, one of the leaders of the development team, offered hope the newly approved vaccine will help.

"At the moment, there's no evidence that the vaccines won't work against the new variant," Pollard told Radio 4. "But that is something which we have to look at. We can't be complacent about this variant or perhaps future variants."

Partial results from studies in almost 24,000 people in Britain, Brazil and South Africa suggest the shots are safe and about 70% effective for preventing illness from coronavirus infection.

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That's not as good as some other vaccine candidates, but Soriot recently told the Sunday Times newspaper that he was confident the vaccine would prove as effective as its rivals.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is expected to be relied on in many countries because of its low cost, availability and ease of use. It can be kept in refrigerators rather than the ultra-cold storage some other vaccines require. The company has said it will sell it for \$2.50 a dose and plans to make up to 3 billion doses by the end of 2021.

"We have a vaccine for the world," said Pollard.

Researchers claim the vaccine protected against disease in 62% of those given two full doses and in 90% of those initially given a half dose because of a manufacturing error. However, the second group included only 2,741 people — too few to be conclusive.

Questions also remain about how well the vaccine protects older people. Only 12% of study participants were over 55 and they were enrolled later, so there hasn't been enough time to see whether they develop infections at a lower rate than those not given the vaccine.

Researchers also were criticized for lack of information in September, when studies were suspended because a participant suffered a serious illness. AstraZeneca initially declined to provide further details due to patient confidentiality.

Ultimately, the trials resumed after regulators reviewed safety data and decided it was safe to continue. Published partial results show no hospitalizations or severe disease among those who received the vaccine. A separate study testing the AstraZeneca vaccine in the U.S. also is underway.

The vaccine will become the second COVID-19 vaccine in use in Britain. On Dec. 2, regulators gave emergency authorization to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Having another vaccine available means that more people can get protection, said Sarah Gilbert, an Oxford scientist involved in the AstraZeneca project. It takes a different approach than the Pfizer-BioNTech one or another developed in the United States from Moderna Inc.

The ultra-cold storage those other vaccines need is "very impractical" in developing countries, said Dr. Gillies O'Bryan-Tear, chair of policy and communications for Britain's Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine. It means the AstraZeneca one "may reach more parts of the world than the Pfizer one," he said.

Britain's action likely means the World Health Organization will soon clear the AstraZeneca vaccine for use in a global effort to help poor countries, called COVAX. The initiative, led by WHO and the vaccines alliance GAVI, has secured access to at least 100 million doses of the vaccine, with options and other deals to buy more. But none can be distributed until green-lighted by WHO.

The U.N. health agency does not licence or regulate vaccines itself, but typically evaluates vaccines once they have been approved by an agency such as the U.K. regulator or the European Medicines Agency. WHO experts conduct their own evaluation of whether or not the risks of a vaccine outweigh its benefits and then make a recommendation for the shots to be "pre-qualified" so they can be bought by donors for developing countries.

Most coronavirus vaccines to be used in poorer countries likely will be made by the Serum Institute of India, which has been contracted by AstraZeneca to make 1 billion doses. In June, the pharmaceutical company announced that the Serum Institute would produce 400 million doses by the end of 2020 but as of early December, only about 50 million doses had been manufactured after production was halted several times.

In addition to the Serum Institute, AstraZeneca also has deals with vaccine makers in Brazil, South Africa and China to make the Oxford-developed vaccine for use in developing countries.

Corder reported from The Hague, Netherlands. AP medical writer Maria Cheng in Toronto and AP correspondent Jill Lawless in London contributed reporting.

Nashville man's girlfriend warned he was building bombs

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — More than a year before Anthony Warner detonated a bomb in downtown Nashville on Christmas, officers visited his home after his girlfriend told police that he was building bombs in an RV trailer at his residence, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press. But they were unable to make contact with him, or see inside his RV.

Officers were called to Pamela Perry's home in Nashville on Aug. 21, 2019, after getting a report from her attorney that she was making suicidal threats while sitting on her front porch with firearms, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department said Tuesday in an emailed statement. A police report said Raymond Throckmorton, the attorney, told officers that day that he also represented Warner.

When officers arrived at Perry's home, police said she had two unloaded pistols sitting next to her on the porch. She told them those guns belonged to "Tony Warner," police said, and she did not want them in the house any longer. Perry, then 62, was then transported for a psychological evaluation after speaking to mental health professionals on the phone.

Throckmorton told The Tennessean that Perry had fears about her safety, and thought Warner may harm her. The attorney was also at the scene that day, and told officers Warner "frequently talks about the military and bomb making," the police report said. Warner "knows what he is doing and is capable of making a bomb," Throckmorton said to responding officers.

Police then went to Warner's home, located about 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) from Perry's home, but he didn't answer the door when they knocked several times. They saw the RV in the backyard, the report said, but the yard was fenced off and officers couldn't see inside the vehicle.

The report said there also were "several security cameras and wires attached to an alarm sign on the front door" of the home. Officers then notified supervisors and detectives.

"They saw no evidence of a crime and had no authority to enter his home or fenced property," the police statement said.

After officers visited Warner's home last August, the police department's hazardous devices unit was given a copy of the police report. During the week of August 26, 2019, they contacted Throckmorton. Police said officers recalled Throckmorton saying Warner "did not care for the police," and that he wouldn't allow Warner "to permit a visual inspection of the RV."

Throckmorton disputes that he told police they couldn't search the vehicle. "I have no memory of that whatsoever," he told The Tennessean. "I didn't represent him anymore. He wasn't an active client. I'm not a criminal defense attorney."

Throckmorton told the newspaper he represented Warner in a civil case several years ago, and that Warner was no longer his client in August 2019. "Somebody, somewhere dropped the ball," he said.

A day after officers visited Warner's home, the police report and identifying information about Warner were sent to the FBI to check their databases and determine whether Warner had prior military connections, police said.

Later that day, the police department said "the FBI reported back that they checked their holdings and found no records on Warner at all." FBI spokesperson Darrell DeBusk told The Tennessean the agency had conducted a standard agency-to-agency record check.

Six days later, "the FBI reported that Department of Defense checks on Warner were all negative," the police department said.

No other information about Warner came to the department or the FBI's attention after August 2019, police said. "At no time was there any evidence of a crime detected and no additional action was taken," the statement said. "The ATF also had no information on him."

Warner's only arrest was for a 1978 marijuana-related charge.

The bombing happened on Christmas 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. Dozens of buildings were damaged and several people were injured.

Investigators have not uncovered a motive for the Christmas day bombing nor was it revealed why Warner

had selected the particular location, which damaged an AT&T building and wreaked havoc on cellphone, police and hospital communications in several Southern states as the company worked to restore service. The company said on Monday the majority of services had been restored for residents and businesses.

EU officials sign Brexit trade deal as UK lawmakers debate

By JILL LAWLESS and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — On the eve of the U.K.'s seismic economic split from the European Union, British lawmakers were being asked to turn a 1,200-page trade agreement with the bloc into law in a single day on Wednesday.

Just after the EU's top officials formally signed the hard-won agreement in Brussels, Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged legislators in the House of Commons to back a deal that he said heralded "a new relationship between Britain and the EU as sovereign equals."

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 Thursday.

The deal will then enter into force, if Britain's Parliament has approved it. The European Parliament also must sign off on the agreement, but is not expected to do so for several weeks.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel signed the agreement during a brief ceremony in Brussels on Wednesday morning. The documents were then being flown by Royal Air Force plane to London for Johnson to add his signature.

"The agreement that we signed today is the result of months of intense negotiations in which the European Union has displayed an unprecedented level of unity," Michel said. "It is a fair and balanced agreement that fully protects the fundamental interests of the European Union and creates stability and predictability for citizens and companies."

It has been four-and-a-half years since Britain voted by 52% to 48% to leave the bloc that it had joined in 1973. The real repercussions of that decision have yet to be felt, since the U.K.'s economic relationship with the EU remained unchanged during the 11-month post-Brexit transition period.

That will change on New Year's Day. The agreement, hammered out after more than nine months of tense negotiations and sealed on Christmas Eve, will ensure Britain and the 27-nation EU 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.

Brexit supporters, including Johnson, say any short-term pain will be worth it.

Johnson said the Brexit deal would turn Britain from "a half-hearted, sometimes obstructive member of the EU" into "a friendly neighbor — the best friend and ally the EU could have."

He said Britain would now "trade and cooperate with our European neighbors on the closest terms of friendship and goodwill, whilst retaining sovereign control of our laws and our national destiny."

Some lawmakers griped about being given only five hours in Parliament to scrutinize a deal that will mean profound changes for Britain's economy and society. But it is highly likely to get backing from the House of Commons, where Johnson's Conservative Party has a large majority.

The party's powerful euroskeptic wing, which fought for years for the seemingly longshot goal of taking Britain out of the EU, has backed the deal.

The strongly pro-EU Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrats plan to vote against the bill. But the main opposition Labour Party, which had sought a closer relationship with the bloc, said it would vote for the agreement because even a thin deal was better than a chaotic no-deal rupture.

"We have only one day before the end of the transition period, and it's the only deal that we have," said Labour leader Keir Starmer. "It's a basis to build on in the years to come."

Former Prime Minister Theresa May, who resigned in 2019 after three years of Brexit acrimony in Par-

liament, said she would vote for Johnson's agreement. But she said it was worse than the one she had negotiated with the bloc, which lawmakers repeatedly rejected.

She noted that the deal protected trade in goods but did not cover services, which account for 80% of Britain's economy.

"We have a deal in trade, which benefits the EU, but not a deal in services, which would have benefited the U.K.," May said.

Petrequin reported from Brussels.

Follow all AP stories on the Brexit trade talks at <https://apnews.com/Brexit>

Quake aftershocks keep people out of homes in Croatia

By SASA KAVIC Associated Press

PETRINJA, Croatia (AP) — Aftershocks jolted central Croatia on Wednesday, a day after a 6.3-magnitude earthquake killed at least seven people, injured dozens and left several towns and villages in ruins.

The strongest, 4.7-magnitude tremor was recorded near the heavily damaged town of Petrinja, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of the capital, Zagreb. Many people had spent the night in tents, their cars or military barracks.

Neven Pavkovic, a resident, said the aftershocks kept him awake: "It was a rough night, I slept maybe half an hour."

In the hard-hit village of Majske Poljane, where five people died, a little boy could be seen sleeping in a van on the chilly morning.

Sobbing villagers said they received blankets, food and other aid but don't know what they will do next. Rain that fell overnight turned the dust from the rubble into mud, adding to the hardship.

"We can't say 'Good morning,' It is not good," Petrinja mayor Darinko Dumbovic told Croatian radio. "We had the third and fourth tremors this morning, short ones but strong. What hasn't fallen off before is falling now from the ruins of Petrinja."

"Fear has crept into people," he said.

Pope Francis prayed for the victims. At the end of his weekly audience, he said: "I particularly pray for those who died and for their families."

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said the government will declare Saturday a day of national mourning. As the government abolished a travel ban between counties that was imposed during the holidays because of the coronavirus pandemic, Plenkovic appealed for respect for other measures.

"We are still fighting COVID-19, it wouldn't be good to relax now," Plenkovic said at a government session.

Rescuers spent the night searching through the rubble of heavily damaged buildings for possible survivors. Officials said a 12-year-old girl died in Petrinja, a town of some 25,000 people. At least 26 people were hospitalized with injuries.

Tuesday's quake, the strongest in Croatia since the introduction of the modern seismic measurement system, was felt throughout the region, including neighboring Bosnia, Serbia and Slovenia.

The central Croatian region was also struck by a 5.2 earthquake on Monday.

AP writers Dusan Stojanovic and Jovana Gec contributed from Belgrade, Serbia, and Colleen Barry from Milan.

Greek nurse erects ICU at home to treat relatives with virus

By COSTAS KANTOURIS Associated Press

AGIOS ATHANASIOS, Greece (AP) — What does a medical professional do when his wife and in-laws contract the disease at the center of a months-long pandemic?

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Gabriel Tachtatzoglou, a critical care nurse, did not feel good about the treatment options available in Greece's second-largest city when his wife, both her parents and her brother came down with COVID-19 in November. Thessaloniki has been among the areas of Greece with the most confirmed coronavirus cases, and hospital intensive care units were filling up.

Tachtatzoglou, who had to quarantine and could not go to work once his relatives tested positive for the virus, decided to put his ICU experience to use by looking after them himself.

That decision, his family says, probably saved their lives.

"If we had gone to the hospital, I don't know where we would have ended up," Polychoni Stergiou, the nurse's 64-year-old mother-in-law, said. "That didn't happen, thanks to my son-in-law."

Tachtatzoglou set up a makeshift ICU in the downstairs apartment of his family's two-story home in the village of Agios Athanasios, located about 30 kilometers (nearly 20 miles) from the city. He rented, borrowed and modified the monitors, oxygen delivery machines and other equipment his loved ones might need.

He also improvised. Out of a hat stand, he fashioned an IV bag holder. At one point, the repurposed pole supported four bags dispensing antibiotics, fluids to address dehydration and fever-reducing medicine.

"I've been working in the intensive care ward for 20 years, and I didn't want to put my in-laws through the psychological strain of separation. Plus, there was already a lot of pressure on the health service," Tachtatzoglou told the AP in an interview.

In most countries, doctors and nurses are discouraged from treating close relatives and friends on the theory that emotional bonds could cloud their judgment and affect their skills. Tachtatzoglou says he remained in daily contact with doctors at Papageorgiou Hospital, the overwhelmed facility where he works, while caring for his sick family members, and that he would have hospitalized any of the four if they needed to be intubated.

"I looked after them up until the point where it would pose no danger," he said. "At all times, I was ready to move them to the hospital, if needed."

Greece, which has a population of 10.7 million, spent the first phase of the coronavirus pandemic with some of the lowest infection rates in Europe. As cold weather set in, the number of confirmed cases and virus-related deaths began doubling. The country's cumulative death toll in the pandemic went from 393 on Oct. 1 and 635 a month later to 2,517 on Dec. 1. As of Tuesday, it stood at 4,730.

With ICU wards in Thessaloniki pushed to capacity, COVID-19 patients deemed too sick to wait for a bed were taken to hospitals in other parts of Greece, riding in torpedo-shaped treatment capsules. Meanwhile, the situation for Tachtatzoglou's family deteriorated as his wife and in-laws fell ill in alarming succession.

Tachtatzoglou said he agonized constantly over whether to transfer his relatives to hospitals in Thessaloniki, knowing it would mean they would not be able to see each other and might get moved to a hospital farther away.

"We were reduced to tears. There were times when I was desperate, and I was really afraid I would lose them," the nurse said.

They all pulled through, although Tachtatzoglou eventually became infected with the virus himself.

"I took precautions when I treated them, but I didn't have the personal protection gear you find in hospitals," he said. "That's probably how I got sick."

___ One Good Thing at AP: <https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing> ___ Follow Kantouris at: <https://twitter.com/CostasKantouris>

After a year like this, expect a strange New Year's Eve

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — If ever a year's end seemed like cause for celebration, 2020 might be it.

Yet the coronavirus scourge that dominated the year is also looming over New Year's festivities and forcing officials worldwide to tone them down.

From New York's Times Square to Sydney Harbor, big public blowouts are being turned into TV-only shows and digital events. Fireworks displays have been canceled from the Las Vegas Strip to the Arc de

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Triomphe in Paris. Even private parties in some places are restricted.

The occasion stirs mixed feelings for people like Cesar Soltero, who was taking photos, and taking stock, in Times Square this week.

"I'm going to celebrate that I'm alive, but I'm not precisely too happy for this year," said Soltero, 36, an engineer visiting from Orlando, Florida, after forgoing his usual holiday trip to see family in Mexico.

Simona Faidiga and Alessandro Nunziata strolled through Times Square with their Labrador retriever puppy, Maggie, who has given Faidiga a lift after she lost her tour guide job.

The Italian couple moved to Miami for new jobs in March, just as the pandemic froze tourism. He is working as a sales representative, but she is not back at work yet. And they're not ready to declare 2021 will be better, not wanting to jinx it.

"I mean, I don't think it could be worse than 2020," said Nunziata, 27.

Days ahead of the ball drop in Times Square, it clearly wasn't New Year's as usual at the Crossroads of the World. There was room to roam on sidewalks that would normally be all but impassable.

Vendors' carts and window displays at the area's struggling gift shops flaunted few 2021-themed souvenirs as workers set up a stage for a celebration that will unfold this year without the usual throngs of cheering, kissing revelers. Police will block off the area so spectators can't get a glimpse.

"It's almost like a 'Seinfeld' episode," Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said, invoking the 1990s "show about nothing." "This is a ball drop about nothing, where you can't see, so you may as well stay home."

The event's special guests will be first responders and essential workers. But they won't be joining the mayor on stage to lead the countdown. Instead, each guest will watch from a private, well-spaced area.

The night's performances — including disco diva Gloria Gaynor's singing of the apt-for-2020 anthem "I Will Survive" — will be aimed at TV audiences.

New Year's Eve will look different around the world after a year in which the virus killed an estimated 1.8 million people, including more than 330,000 in the U.S.

Germany banned the sale of fireworks, which residents usually set off in on the streets, and a pyrotechnics show at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate is off.

So, too, are the fireworks over the River Thames in locked-down London, where New Year's Eve also marks Britain's final economic split from the European Union. However, Big Ben, which has been largely silent since 2017 while its clock tower is restored, will sound 12 bongs at midnight.

The Netherlands moved the national countdown from an Amsterdam park to a soccer stadium, where spectators won't be allowed in and pyrotechnics will be replaced with "electric fireworks."

In Rome, the fireworks are still on, but customary concerts in public plazas have been scrapped in favor of livestreamed performances and art installations. Pope Francis will skip his typical Dec. 31 visit to the Vatican's life-sized Nativity scene in St. Peter's Square and plans to deliver his New Year's Day blessing indoors, to prevent crowds from gathering.

Rio de Janeiro nixed the fireworks, open-air concerts and rooftop parties that draw crowds of white-clad revelers in the Copacabana neighborhood, where only residents will be allowed in.

New Year's Eve is one of the busiest days of the year at Paulo Roberto Senna's Copacabana beach stand, but the 57-year-old said he was OK with the shutdown: "No money can buy our health!"

Hot dog vendor Fabio Henrique saw it differently.

"They tell us to stay home, but for those who don't have money, where are we going to get the means to live?" asked Henrique, 39.

In Russia, New Year's Eve has been more widely celebrated than Christmas, which is marked on Jan. 7 by the country's Orthodox Christian majority. Public events have been banned or restricted in many regions. But the country's so-called New Year's Eve capital, the city of Kaluga, is luring tourists with a week of festivities, despite pleas from residents to cancel. Officials in Kaluga, 150 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of Moscow, said virus precautions will be taken.

Poland has told residents not to circulate between 7 p.m. on Dec. 31 until 6 a.m. on Jan. 1. Turkey declared a four-day lockdown starting on New Year's Eve, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that security forces will inspect hotels for illicit parties.

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In the U.S., the Christmas morning bombing of the downtown tourist district in Nashville, Tennessee, led the city to cancel its plan to light fireworks and blow up a 2020 sign.

"To say it would have been tone deaf would be an understatement," said Bruce Spyridon, president of the Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa suggested a new way of observing the holiday by lighting candles to honor COVID-19 victims and front-line workers and to hope for a healthy 2021.

Back in New York, yoga and stress-management instructor Allison Richard, 39, wrote up a few New Year's wishes on confetti that will be dropped at midnight in Times Square.

"Freedom," she wrote, and "contentment," "commitment," "connection," "prosperity" and "love."

Associated Press writers around the world contributed to this report.

Bill legalizing abortion passed in pope's native Argentina

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA and DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Argentina's Senate passed a law legalizing abortion in Pope Francis' homeland early Wednesday after a marathon 12-hour session, a victory for the women's movement that has been fighting for the right for decades.

The vote means that abortion will be legalized up to the 14th week of pregnancy, and also will be legal after that time in cases of rape or danger to the mother's life. It will have repercussions across a continent where the procedure is largely illegal.

The measure was passed with 38 votes in favor, 29 against and one abstention, after a session that began late Tuesday.

It was already approved by Argentina's Chamber of Deputies and has the support of President Alberto Fernández, meaning the Senate vote was its final hurdle.

"Safe, legal and free abortion is now the law," Fernández tweeted after the vote, noting that it had been an election pledge.

"Today, we are a better society that expands women's rights and guarantees public health," he added.

Argentina is the largest Latin American country to legalize abortion and the vote was being closely watched. With the exceptions of Uruguay, Cuba, Mexico City, Mexico's Oaxaca state, the Antilles and French Guiana, abortion remains largely illegal across the region.

Outside the Senate, pro- and anti-abortion rights activists gathered, with the bill's supporters wearing the color green that represents their abortion rights movement. Backers waved green flags as Vice President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who presided over the debate, announced the result, shouting "legal abortion in the hospital" as the measure was passed.

Argentina until now has penalized women and those who help them abort. The only exceptions were cases involving rape or a risk to the health of the mother, and activists complain even these exceptions are not respected in some provinces.

Just hours before the Senate session began Tuesday, the pope weighed in, tweeting: "The Son of God was born an outcast, in order to tell us that every outcast is a child of God. He came into the world as each child comes into the world, weak and vulnerable, so that we can learn to accept our weaknesses with tender love."

A previous abortion bill was voted down by Argentine lawmakers in 2018, but this time it was backed by the center-left government. The outcome of the latest vote, however, had still been considered uncertain. That was partly due to the fact that the political parties, including the governing Peronist movement, gave their legislators freedom to vote as they chose. Two of the 72 senators were absent, and 43 of the remaining 70 senators were men.

Argentina's feminist movement has been demanding legal abortion for more than 30 years and activists say the bill's approval could mark a watershed in Latin America, where the Roman Catholic Church's influence has long dominated.

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"Our country is a country of many contradictions," said Ester Albarello, a psychiatrist with a network of health professionals that supports the bill, who was among the demonstrators outside the congressional building. "It is the only one in the world that brought members of its genocidal military dictatorship to justice with all the guarantees. But we still don't have legal abortion. Why? Because the church is together with the state."

Also outside the legislature, a group that calls its members "defenders of the two lives" set up an altar with a crucifix under a blue tent.

Opponents of the bill, separated by a barrier from its backers, watched glumly as the vote unfolded.

"These politicians aren't representing the majority," said opponent Luciana Prat, an Argentine flag covering her shoulders. "In all the polls, people are against this."

Supporters said the bill seeks to eradicate the clandestine abortions that have caused more than 3,000 deaths in the country since 1983, according to figures from authorities.

In addition to allowing abortion within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, the legislation also will establish that even after that period, a pregnancy can be legally terminated if it was the result of rape or if the person's life or integral health was in danger.

It will allow conscientious refusal to participate in an abortion for health professionals and private medical institutions at which all doctors are against the procedure. But they will be required to refer the woman to another medical center. Conscientious objection also could not be claimed if a pregnant woman's life or health was in danger.

AP journalist Yesica Brumec contributed to this report.

China clamps down in hidden hunt for coronavirus origins

By DAKE KANG, MARIA CHENG and SAM MCNEIL Associated Press

MOJIANG, China (AP) — Deep in the lush mountain valleys of southern China lies the entrance to a mine shaft that once harbored bats with the closest known relative of the COVID-19 virus.

The area is of intense scientific interest because it may hold clues to the origins of the coronavirus that has killed more than 1.7 million people worldwide. Yet for scientists and journalists, it has become a black hole of no information because of political sensitivity and secrecy.

A bat research team visiting recently managed to take samples but had them confiscated, two people familiar with the matter said. Specialists in coronaviruses have been ordered not to speak to the press. And a team of Associated Press journalists was tailed by plainclothes police in multiple cars who blocked access to roads and sites in late November.

More than a year since the first known person was infected with the coronavirus, an AP investigation shows the Chinese government is strictly controlling all research into its origins, clamping down on some while actively promoting fringe theories that it could have come from outside China.

The government is handing out hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to scientists researching the virus' origins in southern China and affiliated with the military, the AP has found. But it is monitoring their findings and mandating that the publication of any data or research must be approved by a new task force managed by China's cabinet, under direct orders from President Xi Jinping, according to internal documents obtained by The AP. A rare leak from within the government, the dozens of pages of unpublished documents confirm what many have long suspected: The clampdown comes from the top.

As a result, very little has been made public. Authorities are severely limiting information and impeding cooperation with international scientists.

"What did they find?" asked Gregory Gray, a Duke University epidemiologist who oversees a lab in China studying the transmission of infectious diseases from animals to people. "Maybe their data were not conclusive, or maybe they suppressed the data for some political reason. I don't know...I wish I did."

The AP investigation was based on dozens of interviews with Chinese and foreign scientists and officials, along with public notices, leaked emails, internal data and the documents from China's cabinet and the

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Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It reveals a pattern of government secrecy and top-down control that has been evident throughout the pandemic.

As the AP previously documented, this culture has delayed warnings about the pandemic, blocked the sharing of information with the World Health Organization and hampered early testing. Scientists familiar with China's public health system say the same practices apply to sensitive research.

"They only select people they can trust, those that they can control," said a public health expert who works regularly with the China CDC, declining to be identified out of fear of retribution. "Military teams and others are working hard on this, but whether it gets published all depends on the outcome."

The pandemic has crippled Beijing's reputation on the global stage, and China's leaders are wary of any findings that could suggest they were negligent in its spread. The Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology and the National Health Commission, which are managing research into the coronavirus' origins, did not respond to requests for comment.

"The novel coronavirus has been discovered in many parts of the world," China's foreign ministry said in a fax. "Scientists should carry out international scientific research and cooperation on a global scale."

Some Chinese scientists say little has been shared simply because nothing of significance has been discovered.

"We've been looking, but we haven't found it," said Zhang Yongzhen, a renowned Chinese virologist.

China's leaders are far from alone in politicizing research into the origins of the virus. In April, President Donald Trump shelved a U.S.-funded project to identify dangerous animal diseases in China and Southeast Asia, effectively severing ties between Chinese and American scientists and complicating the search for virus origins. Trump also has accused China of setting off the pandemic through an accident at a Wuhan lab — a theory that some experts say cannot be ruled out but as yet has no evidence behind it.

Research into COVID-19's origins is critical to the prevention of future pandemics. Although a World Health Organization international team plans to visit China in early January to investigate what started the pandemic, its members and agenda had to be approved by China.

Some public health experts warn that China's refusal to grant further access to international scientists has jeopardized the global collaboration that pinpointed the source of the SARS outbreak nearly two decades ago. Jonna Mazet, a founding executive director of the UC Davis One Health Institute, said the lack of collaboration between Chinese and U.S. scientists was "a disappointment" and the inability of American scientists to work in China "devastating."

"There's so much speculation around the origins of this virus," Mazet said. "We need to step back...and let scientists get the real answer without the finger-pointing."

The hidden hunt for the origins of COVID-19 shows how the Chinese government has tried to steer the narrative.

The search started in the Huanan Seafood market in Wuhan, a sprawling, low-slung complex where many of the first human coronavirus cases were detected. Scientists initially suspected the virus came from wild animals sold in the market, such as civet cats implicated in the spread of SARS.

In mid-December last year, Huanan vendor Jiang Dafa started noticing people were falling ill. Among the first was a part-time worker in his 60s who helped clean carcasses at a stall; soon, a friend he played chess with also fell ill. A third, a seafood monger in his 40s, was infected and later died.

Patients began trickling into nearby hospitals, triggering alarms by late December that alerted the China CDC. CDC chief Gao Fu immediately sent a team to investigate.

At first, research appeared to be moving swiftly.

Overnight on Jan. 1, the market suddenly was ordered shut, barring vendors from fetching their belongings, Jiang said. China CDC researchers collected 585 environmental samples from door handles, sewage and the floor of the market, and authorities sprayed the complex down with sanitizer. Later, they would cart out everything inside and incinerate it.

Internal China CDC data obtained by the AP shows that by Jan. 10 and 11, researchers were sequencing dozens of environmental samples from Wuhan. Gary Kobinger, a Canadian microbiologist advising WHO,

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emailed his colleagues to share his concerns that the virus originated at the market.

"This corona(virus) is very close to SARS," he wrote on Jan. 13. "If we put aside an accident...then I would look at the bats in these markets (sold and 'wild')."

By late January, Chinese state media announced that 33 of the environmental samples had tested positive. In a report to WHO, officials said 11 specimens were more than 99% similar to the new coronavirus. They also told the U.N. health agency that rats and mice were common in the market, and that most of the positive samples were clustered in an area where vendors traded in wildlife.

In the meantime, Jiang avoided telling people he worked at Huanan because of the stigma. He criticized the political tussle between China and the U.S.

"It's pointless to blame anyone for this disease," Jiang said.

As the virus continued spreading rapidly into February, Chinese scientists published a burst of research papers on COVID-19. Then a paper by two Chinese scientists proposed without concrete evidence that the virus could have leaked from a Wuhan laboratory near the market. It was later taken down, but it raised the need for image control.

Internal documents show that the state soon began requiring all coronavirus studies in China to be approved by high-level government officials — a policy that critics say paralyzed research efforts.

A notice from a China CDC lab on February 24 put in new approval processes for publication under "important instructions" from Chinese President Xi Jinping. Other notices ordered CDC staff not to share any data, specimens or other information related to the coronavirus with outside institutions or individuals.

Then on March 2, Xi emphasized "coordination" on coronavirus research, state media reported.

The next day, China's cabinet, the State Council, centralized all COVID-19 publication under a special task force. The notice, obtained by the AP and marked "not to be made public," was far more sweeping in scope than the earlier CDC notices, applying to all universities, companies and medical and research institutions.

The order said communication and publication of research had to be orchestrated like "a game of chess" under instructions from Xi, and propaganda and public opinion teams were to "guide publication." It went on to warn that those who publish without permission, "causing serious adverse social impact, shall be held accountable."

"The regulations are very strict, and they don't make any sense," said a former China CDC deputy director, who declined to be named because they were told not to speak to the media. "I think it's political, because people overseas could find things being said there that might contradict what China says, so it's all being controlled."

After the secret orders, the tide of research papers slowed to a trickle. Although China CDC researcher Liu Jun returned to the market nearly 20 times to collect some 2,000 samples over the following months, nothing was released about what they revealed.

On May 25, CDC chief Gao finally broke the silence around the market in an interview with China's Phoenix TV. He said that, unlike the environmental samples, no animal samples from the market had tested positive.

The announcement surprised scientists who didn't even know Chinese officials had taken samples from animals. It also ruled out the market as the likely source of the virus, along with further research that showed many of the first cases had no ties to it.

With the market proving a dead end, scientists turned more attention to hunting for the virus at its likely source: Bats.

Nearly a thousand miles away from the wet market in Wuhan, bats inhabit the maze of underground limestone caves in Yunnan province. With its rich, loamy soil, fog banks and dense plant growth, this area in southern China bordering Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar is one of the most biologically diverse on earth.

At one Yunnan cave visited by the AP, with thick roots hanging over the entrance, bats fluttered out at dusk and flew over the roofs of a nearby small village. White droppings splattered the ground near an altar in the rear of the cave, and Buddhist prayer strings of red and yellow twine hung from the stalactites. Villagers said the cave had been used as a sacred place presided over by a Buddhist monk from Thailand.

Contact like this between bats and people praying, hunting or mining in caves alarms scientists. The

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coronavirus' genetic code is strikingly similar to that of bat coronaviruses, and most scientists suspect COVID-19 jumped into humans either directly from a bat or via an intermediary animal.

Since bats harboring coronaviruses are found in China and throughout Southeast Asia, the wild animal host of COVID-19 could be anywhere in the region, said Linfa Wang at Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore.

"There is a bat somewhere with a 99.9% similar virus to the coronavirus," Wang said. "Bats don't respect these borders.

COVID-19 research is proceeding in countries such as Thailand, where Dr. Supaporn Wacharapluesadee, a coronavirus expert, is leading teams of scientists deep into the countryside to collect samples from bats. During one expedition in August, Supaporn told the AP the virus could be found "anywhere" there were bats.

Chinese scientists quickly started testing potential animal hosts. Records show that Xia Xueshan, an infectious diseases expert, received a 1.4 million RMB (\$214,000) grant to screen animals in Yunnan for COVID-19. State media reported in February that his team collected hundreds of samples from bats, snakes, bamboo rats and other animals, and ran a picture of masked scientists in white lab coats huddled around a large, caged porcupine.

Then the government restrictions kicked in. Data on the samples still has not been made public, and Xia did not respond to requests for an interview. Although Xia has co-authored more than a dozen papers this year, an AP review shows, only two were on COVID-19, and neither focused on its origins.

Today, the caves that scientists once surveyed are under close watch by the authorities. Security agents tailed the AP team in three locations across Yunnan, and stopped journalists from visiting the cave where researchers in 2017 identified the species of bats responsible for SARS. At an entrance to a second location, a massive cave teeming with tourists taking selfies, authorities shut the gate on the AP.

"We just got a call from the county," said a park official, before an armed policeman showed up.

Particularly sensitive is the mine shaft where the closest relative of the COVID-19 virus — called "RaTG13" — was found.

RaTG13 was discovered after an outbreak in 2012, when six men cleaning the bat-filled shaft fell ill with mysterious bouts of pneumonia, killing three. The Wuhan Institute of Virology and the China CDC both studied bat coronaviruses from this shaft. And although most scientists believe the COVID-19 virus had its origins in nature, some say it or a close relative could have been transported to Wuhan and leaked by mistake.

Wuhan Institute of Virology bat expert Shi Zhengli has repeatedly denied this theory, but Chinese authorities haven't yet allowed foreign scientists in to investigate.

Some state-backed scientists say research is proceeding as usual. Famed virologist Zhang, who received a 1.5 million RMB (\$230,000) grant to search for the virus' origins, said partnering scientists are sending him samples from all over, including from bats in Guizhou in southern China and rats in Henan hundreds of miles north.

"Bats, mice, are there any new coronaviruses in them? Do they have this particular coronavirus?" Zhang said. "We've been doing this work for over a decade. It's not like we just started today."

Zhang declined to confirm or comment on reports that his lab was briefly closed after publishing the virus' genetic sequence ahead of authorities. He said he hasn't heard of any special restrictions on publishing papers, and the only review his papers go through is a routine scientific one by his institution.

But scientists without state backing complain that getting approval to sample animals in southern China is now extremely difficult, and that little is known about the findings of government-sponsored teams.

Even as they controlled research within China, Chinese authorities promoted theories that suggested the virus came from elsewhere.

The government gave Bi Yuhai, the Chinese Academy of Sciences scientist tapped to spearhead origins research, a 1.5 million RMB grant (\$230,000), records show. A paper co-authored by Bi suggested an outbreak in a Beijing market in June could have been caused by packages of contaminated frozen fish from Europe.

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China's government-controlled media used the theory to suggest the original outbreak in Wuhan could have started with seafood imported from abroad — a notion international scientists reject. WHO has said it is very unlikely that people can be infected with COVID-19 via packaged food, and that it is "highly speculative" to suggest COVID-19 did not start in China. Bi did not respond to requests for an interview, and China has not provided enough virus samples for a definitive analysis.

The Chinese state press also has widely covered initial studies from Europe suggesting COVID-19 was found in wastewater samples in Italy and Spain last year. But scientists have largely dismissed these studies, and the researchers themselves acknowledged they did not find enough virus fragments to determine conclusively if it was the coronavirus.

And in the last few weeks, Chinese state media has taken out of context research from a German scientist, interpreting it to suggest that the pandemic began in Italy. The scientist, Alexander Kekule, director of the Institute for Biosecurity Research, has said repeatedly that he believes the virus first emerged in China.

Internal documents show the Chinese government also has sponsored studies on the possible role of the Southeast Asian pangolin, a scaly anteater once prized in traditional Chinese medicine, as an intermediary animal host. Within the span of three days in February, Chinese scientists put out four separate papers on coronaviruses related to COVID-19 in trafficked Malayan pangolins from Southeast Asia seized by customs officials in Guangdong.

But many experts now say the theory is unlikely. Wang of the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore said the search for the coronavirus in pangolins did not appear to be "scientifically driven." He said blood samples would be the most conclusive evidence of COVID-19's presence in the rare mammals, and so far, no incriminating matches have been found.

WHO has said more than 500 species of other animals, including cats, ferrets and hamsters, are being studied as possible intermediary hosts for COVID-19.

The Chinese government is also limiting and controlling the search for patient zero through the re-testing of old flu samples.

Chinese hospitals collect thousands of samples from patients with flu-like symptoms every week and store them in freezers. They could easily be tested again for COVID-19, although politics could then determine whether the results are made public, said Ray Yip, the founding director of the U.S. CDC office in China.

"They'd be crazy not to do it," Yip said. "The political leadership will wait for that information to see, does this information make China look stupid or not?...If it makes China look stupid, they won't."

In the U.S., CDC officials long ago tested roughly 11,000 early samples collected under the flu surveillance program since Jan. 1. And in Italy, researchers recently found a boy who had fallen ill in November 2019 and later tested positive for the coronavirus.

But in China, scientists have only published retrospective testing data from two Wuhan flu surveillance hospitals — out of at least 18 in Hubei province alone and well over 500 across the country. The data includes just 520 samples out of the 330,000 collected in China last year.

These enormous gaps in the research aren't due just to a lack of testing but also to a lack of transparency. Internal data obtained by the AP shows that by Feb. 6, the Hubei CDC had tested over 100 samples in Huanggang, a city southeast of Wuhan. But the results have not been made public.

The little information that has dribbled out suggests the virus was circulating well outside Wuhan in 2019 — a finding that could raise awkward questions for Chinese officials about their early handling of the outbreak. Chinese researchers found that a child hundreds of miles from Wuhan had fallen ill with the virus by Jan. 2, suggesting it was spreading widely in December. But earlier samples weren't tested, according to a scientist with direct knowledge of the study.

"There was a very deliberate choice of the time period to study, because going too early could have been too sensitive," said the scientist, who declined to be named out of fear of retribution.

A WHO report written in July but published in November said Chinese authorities had identified 124 cases in December 2019, including five cases outside Wuhan. Among WHO's aims for its upcoming visit to China are reviews of hospital records before December.

Coronavirus expert Peter Daszak, a member of the WHO team, said identifying the pandemic's source should not be used to assign guilt.

"We're all part of this together," he said. "And until we realize that, we're never going to get rid of this problem."

Kang reported from Beijing and Cheng reported from London. Associated Press journalists Han Guan Ng and Emily Wang in Wuhan, China, Haven Daley in Stinson Beach, California, and Tassanee Vejpongsa in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, contributed to this report.

Follow Dake Kang, Sam McNeil and Maria Cheng on Twitter at @dakekang, @stmcneil and @mylcheng. Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

Trump leaves mark on immigration policy, some of it lasting

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Donald Trump was running for reelection, foreign-born U.S. residents were rushing to get their American citizenship before it might be too late.

"I didn't know what would happen if Trump got a second term," said Victoria Abramowska, who became a citizen in Maine this fall, "after all the crazy things he did already."

Her fears weren't unfounded. The Trump administration was more hostile to immigration and immigrants than any administration in decades, making it harder for people to visit, live or work in the United States and seeking to reduce the number illegally entering the country.

Many of the administration's immigration actions can be quickly undone by Joe Biden when he becomes president on Jan. 20. Yet Trump's legacy on immigration won't be easily erased.

People were denied the opportunity to apply for asylum and returned to dangerous conditions at home. Children were traumatized by being separated from their families. Trump's signature border wall went up in environmentally sensitive areas.

"The damage inflicted in the meantime on people of all stripes — legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants, asylum seekers and more — will not be so quickly reversed and in some cases can't be reversed," said Aaron Reichlin-Melnick of the American Immigration Council. "There are people who died because of Trump immigration policies."

Perhaps the most counterintuitive legacy of Trump's immigration crackdown is an apparently unintended one: a surge in foreign residents like Abramowska who rushed to become citizens because they feared the consequences of the crackdown.

Abramowska, a 34-year-old who grew up in Germany but had Polish citizenship, said she worried that Trump could make it harder to become a citizen in the future, complicating her life if she and her U.S.-born husband want to move overseas or just travel. "I didn't know what kind of roadblocks he could put in the way," she said.

Trump set the tone early on immigration, dismissing many Mexican border-crossers as "murderers" and rapists in the June 2015 news conference announcing his candidacy.

Early in his administration, he issued an order that, among other things, banned people from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the country. After a long legal fight, a version of the order was upheld by the Supreme Court in a 5-4 vote.

Trump also quickly imposed a rule denying green cards to immigrants who might need public assistance such as food stamps or Medicaid, which critics said was essentially a wealth test. It also sparked a legal fight and has been placed on hold by a federal court.

He railed about groups of migrants coming to the border and dispatched the military, though there were no signs the Border Patrol needed any help.

The administration sought to halt migrants from crossing the southwest border through measures that included building about 450 miles of wall and forcing people seeking asylum to do so in Mexico or Central America. Once the pandemic started, U.S. Customs and Border Protection began quickly expelling

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nearly everyone under an emergency authorization. The numbers have started to rise to pre-Trump levels, though some of that is likely from people getting caught repeatedly trying to cross the border illegally.

By one count, Trump made more than 400 immigration policy changes, though he spoke less about the issue at the end of his presidency and focused on "law and order" instead amid the protests over the killing by police of George Floyd.

Biden can undo many of the executive actions. He has said, for example, that he wants to restore the cap on refugees that Trump reduced to the lowest on record and plans to halt construction on the border wall. He can offer to settle the suits challenging administration policies.

"The main priority for the first two years is going to be nothing more than just trying to get the system back to where it was in 2016," David Bier, an immigration policy analyst with the Cato Institute, said of the Biden administration.

It may take longer to deal with the less tangible fallout.

The Trump administration imposed a freeze in June on new green cards for high-tech workers, seasonal workers and managers of multinational corporations. Such actions damage the U.S. image abroad, Bier said.

"It has made us less promising as a destination and has diverted people from coming to start businesses here or to start employment," Bier said. "They are going to Canada in record numbers. They are going to Australia in record numbers. They are going other places, or they are making other plans."

To some degree, it's a matter of certainty, Bier said. The administration's many changes to immigration policy make it hard for anyone to plan for the future.

"If you can't plan and count on the U.S. system existing in some form for years to come, then you don't build your life around something so inconsistent," he said.

That holds for individuals as well.

"People would say to me that you should hurry up and get naturalized, you never know what could happen," said Ridhima Bhatia, a 22-year-old recent college graduate from India who became a citizen this month near Washington, D.C.

Bhatia had multiple reasons for becoming a citizen. After living in the U.S. with a green card, she believes a U.S. passport will make it easier for her to travel and will simplify her job search. But her decision to seek citizenship was also a response to the administration's hostility to immigrants, which she felt even in the affluent suburbs of Northern Virginia.

"You see a lot of people more comfortable being discriminatory, being more hostile, that I think might have been in part because of President Trump," she said. "He set an example, with his speeches, and how he acts."

A surge in new citizens like Bhatia is, perhaps surprisingly, one legacy of the Trump era.

There were more than 830,000 naturalizations last year, the highest since 2008. The total for all four years under Trump is expected to surpass 3.3 million.

The high figure from last year is a result of a larger-than-normal number of applicants at the start of his presidency, when many feared the changes to come, said Randy Capps, director of research at the Migration Policy Institute.

The administration increased the scrutiny of applicants, making the process more time-consuming and difficult, and it recently made the citizenship test longer and harder. But the overall approval rate stayed about the same, about 90%, because the fundamental rules for who qualifies for citizenship did not change, Capps said.

"For the most part, the legal immigration system, which is written by Congress, withstood the assaults by the Trump administration," he said.

While Trump may have been the cause of many of those naturalizations, he wasn't the beneficiary. Abramowska used her newfound status to cast her first ballot in an American election. She voted for Biden.

Trump's \$2,000 checks stall in Senate as GOP blocks vote

By LISA MASCARO and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's push for bigger \$2,000 COVID-19 relief checks stalled out in the Senate as Republicans blocked a swift vote proposed by Democrats and split within their own ranks over whether to boost spending or defy the White House.

The roadblock mounted Tuesday by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell may not be sustainable as pressure mounts. Trump wants the Republican-led chamber to follow the House and increase the checks from \$600 for millions of Americans. A growing number of Republicans, including two senators in runoff elections on Jan. 5 in Georgia, have said they will support the larger amount. But most GOP senators oppose more spending, even if they are also wary of bucking Trump.

Senators will be back at it Wednesday as McConnell is devising a way out of the political bind, but the outcome is highly uncertain.

"There's one question left today: Do Senate Republicans join with the rest of America in supporting \$2,000 checks?" Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said as he made a motion to vote.

Meanwhile, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said some of the \$600 payments might be sent by direct deposit to Americans' bank accounts as early as Tuesday night. Mnuchin tweeted that paper checks will begin to go out Wednesday.

The showdown over the \$2,000 checks has thrown Congress into a chaotic year-end session just days before new lawmakers are set to be sworn into office for the new year. It's preventing action on another priority — overturning Trump's veto on a sweeping defense bill that has been approved every year for 60 years.

Saying little, McConnell signaled an alternative approach to Trump's checks that may not divide his party so badly, but may result in no action at all.

The GOP leader filed new legislation late Tuesday linking the president's demand for bigger checks with two other Trump priorities — repealing protections for tech companies like Facebook or Twitter that the president complained are unfair to conservatives as well the establishment of a bipartisan commission to review the 2020 presidential election he lost to President-elect Joe Biden.

"The Senate will begin a process," the GOP leader said. He said little more, only that he would bring the president's demand for the \$2,000 checks and other remaining issues "into focus."

The president's last-minute push for bigger checks leaves Republicans deeply split between those who align with Trump's populist instincts and those 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.

Liberal senators led by Bernie Sanders of Vermont who support the relief aid are blocking action on the defense bill until a vote can be taken on Trump's demand for \$2,000 for most Americans.

"The working class of this country today faces more economic desperation than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s," Sanders said as he also tried to force a vote on the relief checks. "Working families need help now." But McConnell objected a second time.

The GOP blockade is causing turmoil for some as the virus crisis worsens nationwide and Trump amplifies his unexpected demands.

The two GOP senators from Georgia, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, announced Tuesday they support Trump's plan for bigger checks as they face Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock in runoff elections that will determine which party controls the Senate.

"I'm delighted to support the president," said Perdue on Fox News. Loeffler said in an interview on Fox that she, too, backs the boosted relief checks.

Trump repeated his demand in a tweet ahead of Tuesday's Senate session: "\$2000 for our great people, not \$600!"

Following Trump's lead, Republican Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri and Marco Rubio of Florida, among the party's potential 2024 presidential hopefuls, are pushing the party in the president's direction.

"We've got the votes. Let's vote today," Hawley tweeted.

Other Republicans panned the bigger checks saying the nearly \$400 billion price tag was too high, the

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relief is not targeted to those in need and Washington has already dispatched ample sums on COVID aid.

"We've spent \$4 trillion on this problem," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The House vote late Monday to approve Trump's request was a stunning turn of events. Just days ago, during a brief Christmas Eve session, Republicans blocked Trump's sudden demand for bigger checks 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, millions of Americans saw jobless aid lapse and the nation risked a federal government shutdown Tuesday.

Dozens of Republicans calculated it was better to link with Democrats to increase the pandemic payments rather than buck the outgoing president and constituents counting on the money. House Democrats led passage, 275-134, but 44 Republicans joined almost all Democrats for a robust two-thirds vote of approval.

It's highly possible that McConnell will set up votes ahead on both the House-passed measure supporting Trump's \$2,000 checks as well as his own new version linking it with the repeal of tech company liability shield in "section 230" of communications law as well as the new presidential election review commission.

That's a process that almost ensures neither bill will pass.

Trump's push could fizzle out in the Senate but the debate over the size and scope of the package — \$900 billion in COVID-19 aid and \$1.4 trillion to fund government agencies — is potentially one last confrontation before the new Congress is sworn in Sunday.

For now, the \$600 checks are set to be delivered, along with other aid, among the largest rescue packages of its kind.

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

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.

Biden supports the \$2,000 checks and said Tuesday the aid package is merely a "down payment" on what he plans to deliver once in office.

Economists said a \$600 check will help, but that it's a far cry from the spending power that a \$2,000 check would provide for the economy.

"It will make a big difference whether it's \$600 versus \$2,000," said Ryan Sweet, an economist with Moody's.

The president also objected to foreign aid funding that his own administration had requested and vowed to send Congress "a redlined version" with spending items he wants removed. But those are merely suggestions to Congress. Democrats said they would resist such cuts.

Colvin reported from West Palm Beach, Florida. Associated Press writers Bill Barrow in Atlanta, Ashraf Khalil in Washington and Matt Ott in Silver Spring, Maryland, contributed to this report.

Feds decline charges against officers in Tamir Rice case

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department says it will not bring federal criminal charges against two Cleveland police officers in the 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, saying video of the shooting was of too poor a quality for prosecutors to conclusively establish what had happened.

In closing the case Tuesday, the department brought to an end a long-running investigation into a high-profile shooting that helped galvanize the Black Lives Matter movement and became part of the national dialogue about police use of force against minorities, including children. The decision, revealed in a lengthy statement, does not condone the officers' actions but rather says the cumulative evidence was not enough to support a federal criminal civil rights prosecution.

Tamir was playing with a pellet gun outside a recreation center in Cleveland on Nov. 22, 2014, when he was shot and killed by Officer Timothy Loehmann, who is white, seconds after Loehmann and his partner, Officer Frank Garmback, arrived at the scene. The officers were called to the recreation center after a man

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drinking beer and waiting for a bus had called 911 to report that a "guy" was pointing a gun at people. The caller told a 911 dispatcher that it was probably a juvenile and the gun might be "fake," though that information was never relayed to the officers.

To bring federal civil rights charges in cases like these, the Justice Department must prove that an officer's actions willfully broke the law and are not simply the result of a mistake, negligence or bad judgment. It has been a consistently tough burden for federal prosecutors to meet across both Democratic and Republican administrations, with the Justice Department declining criminal charges against police officers in other high-profile cases in recent years, including in the deaths of Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

In a statement, Subodh Chandra, an attorney for the boy's family, said the Justice Department's "process was tainted" and the family has demanded prosecutors provide additional information about recommendations made during the probe.

"It's beyond comprehension that the Department couldn't recognize that an officer who claims he shouted commands when the patrol car's window was closed and it was a winter day is lying," Chandra said. "The Rice family has been cheated of a fair process yet again."

In this case, the Justice Department said poor-quality surveillance video recorded in the area where the shooting took place prevented prosecutors from being able to conclusively determine whether Rice was or was not reaching for his toy gun just prior to being shot. The two officers who were investigated told authorities soon after the shooting that Rice was reaching for the gun prior to being shot and was given multiple commands to show his hands.

But the video reviewed by federal prosecutors makes the sequence of events less clear. The grainy time-lapse video, which has no audio, "does not show detail or perspective" and the camera's view is obstructed by a police patrol car, prosecutors said. In addition, they said, though the positioning of the boy's arms suggests they were in the vicinity of his waist, "his hands are not visible in the video and it cannot be determined from the video what he was doing."

The Justice Department says seven use-of-force experts — three retained by the family, four by local authorities — reviewed the case, but the poor quality of the video on which they relied and their "conflicting opinions added little to the case." The experts used by the family said the shooting was unreasonable while the four others said that it was reasonable.

The New York Times reported in October that the department had effectively shut down the investigation, but Tuesday's announcement makes it official.

Inconsistent witness statements also complicated any prosecution. Neither of two witnesses who either saw part of the encounter or reported hearing gunshots said they saw exactly what Rice was doing just before the shooting, according to the Justice Department.

In a statement at the scene to three other law enforcement officers, Loehmann "repeatedly and consistently stated" that Tamir was reaching for a gun before he shot him, prosecutors said.

Both Loehmann and Garmback also said in statements after the shooting that Loehmann had given Tamir "multiple commands to show his hands before shooting" and both officers saw him reaching for the weapon. Prosecutors said Loehmann and Garmback were the only two witnesses in the "near vicinity of the shooting."

A state grand jury had declined to indict Loehmann, though he was later fired after it was discovered he was previously deemed "unfit for duty."

The Justice Department also investigated whether the officers obstructed justice in statements they made to other investigators soon after the shooting. Prosecutors concluded that though the statements included some different language, they were generally consistent. And since there was not enough evidence to prove the statements were untrue, there was also not enough evidence to prove that the officers sought to mislead investigators or to obstruct a probe into their actions.

Associated Press writer Mark Gillispie in Cleveland contributed to this report.

COVID cluckers: Pandemic feeds demand for backyard chickens

By TERENCE CHEA Associated Press

ROSS, Calif. (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic is coming home to roost in America's backyards.

Forced to hunker down at home, more people are setting up coops and raising their own chickens, which provide an earthy hobby, animal companionship and a steady supply of fresh eggs.

Amateur chicken-keeping has been growing in popularity in recent years as people seek environmental sustainability in the food they eat. The pandemic is accelerating those trends, some breeders and poultry groups say, prompting more people to make the leap into poultry parenthood.

Businesses that sell chicks, coops and other supplies say they have seen a surge in demand since the pandemic took hold in March and health officials ordered residents to stay home.

Allison and Ron Abta of Northern California's Marin County had for years talked about setting up a backyard coop. They took the plunge in August.

The couple's three kids were thrilled when their parents finally agreed to buy chicks.

"These chickens are like my favorite thing, honestly," said 12-year-old Violet, holding a dark feathered hen in her woodsy backyard. "They actually have personalities once you get to know them."

The baby birds lived inside the family's home for six weeks before moving into the chicken run in the yard. A wire-mesh enclosure now houses the five heritage hens — each a different breed — and protects them from bobcats, foxes and other predators.

Mark Podgwaite, a Vermont chicken breeder who heads the American Poultry Association, said he and other breeders have noticed an uptick in demand for chicks since the pandemic began. His organization, which represents breeders and poultry-show exhibitors, has seen a jump in new members.

"Without question, the resurgence in raising backyard poultry has been unbelievable over the past year," said Podgwaite, who keeps a flock of roughly 100 birds. "It just exploded. Whether folks wanted birds just for eggs or eggs and meat, it seemed to really, really take off."

The Abta family bought the chicks from Mill Valley Chickens, which sells chickens, feed and supplies and builds coops and runs. Owner Leslie Citroen also offers classes for first-time chicken keepers. She estimates her sales have grown 400% this year.

"Once COVID hit, my phone just started ringing off the hook and it just has not slowed down," Citroen said. "I don't think it's going to slow down. I think this new interest and passion in chickens is permanent."

Citroen said most of her customers this year are first-time chicken keepers. They range from parents looking for something to keep homebound children busy to "preppers" who want their own protein supply in case the world falls apart.

"Demand is just through the roof right now," Citroen said. "I've sold all my baby chicks. I've sold all my juveniles. And I'm starting to sell some of my family flock."

One of her newest customers is Ben Duddleston, who lives in nearby San Anselmo. He stopped by her home to buy three hens.

The self-described "first-time chicken dad" wanted to surprise his kids, ages 5 and 10, on Christmas.

"I think it's totally pandemic related. I don't think that I'd be doing this if in normal times," Duddleston said.

Principal Joe Clark who inspired film 'Lean on Me' has died

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Joe Louis Clark, the baseball bat and bullhorn-wielding principal whose unwavering commitment to his students and uncompromising disciplinary methods inspired the 1989 film "Lean on Me," died at his Florida home on Tuesday after a long battle with an unspecified illness, his family said in statement. He was 82.

Born in Rochelle, Georgia, on May 8, 1938, Clark's family moved north to Newark, New Jersey, when he was 6 years old. After graduating from Newark Central High School, Clark received his bachelor's degree from William Paterson College (now William Paterson University), a master's degree from Seton Hall University, and an honorary doctorate from the U.S. Sports Academy. Clark also served as a U.S. Army Reserve sergeant and a drill instructor.

Clark started teaching at a Paterson grade school in Essex County, N.J., before becoming principal of PS 6 Grammar School.

He was later hired as principal of the crime and drug-ridden Eastside High School. In one day, he expelled 300 students for fighting, vandalism, abusing teachers and drug possession, and lifted the expectations of those who remained, continually challenging them to perform better. Roaming the hallways with a bullhorn and a baseball bat, Clark's unorthodox methods won him both admirers and critics nationwide. President Ronald Reagan offered Clark a White House policy advisor position after his success at the high school.

Morgan Freeman starred as Clark in the 1989 film "Lean on Me" that was loosely based on Clark's tenure at Eastside.

After he retired from Eastside in 1989, Clark worked for six years as the director of Essex County Detention House, a juvenile detention center in Newark. He also wrote "Laying Down the Law: Joe Clark's Strategy for Saving Our Schools," detailing his methods for turning around Eastside High.

He retired to Gainesville, Florida.

Clark is survived by his children, Joetta, Hazel and JJ, and grandchildren, Talitha, Jorell and Hazel. His wife, Gloria, preceded him in death.

Feds decline charges against officers in Tamir Rice case

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department announced Tuesday that it would not bring federal criminal charges against two Cleveland police officers in the 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, saying video of the shooting was of too poor a quality for prosecutors to conclusively establish what had happened.

In closing the case, the department brought to an end a long-running investigation into a high-profile shooting that helped galvanize the Black Lives Matter movement and that became part of the national dialogue about police use of force against minorities, including children. The decision, revealed in a lengthy statement, does not condone the officers' actions but rather says the cumulative evidence was not enough to support a federal criminal civil rights prosecution.

Tamir was playing with a pellet gun outside a recreation center in Cleveland on Nov. 22, 2014, when he was shot and killed by Officer Timothy Loehmann, who is white, seconds after Loehmann and his partner, Officer Frank Garmback, arrived at the scene. The officers were called to the recreation center after a man drinking beer and waiting for a bus had called 911 to report that a "guy" was pointing a gun at people. The caller told a 911 dispatcher that it was probably a juvenile and the gun might be "fake," though that information was never relayed to the officers.

To bring federal civil rights charges in cases like these, the Justice Department must prove that an officer's actions willfully broke the law and are not simply the result of a mistake, negligence or bad judgment. It has been a consistently tough burden for federal prosecutors to meet across both Democratic and Republican administrations, with the Justice Department declining criminal charges against police officers in other high-profile cases in recent years, including in the deaths of Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

In a statement, Subodh Chandra, an attorney for the boy's family, said the Justice Department's "process was tainted" and the family has demanded prosecutors provide additional information about recommendations made during the probe.

"It's beyond comprehension that the Department couldn't recognize that an officer who claims he shouted commands when the patrol car's window was closed and it was a winter day is lying," Chandra said. "The Rice family has been cheated of a fair process yet again."

In this case, the Justice Department said poor-quality surveillance video recorded in the area where the shooting took place prevented prosecutors from being able to conclusively determine whether Rice was or was not reaching for his toy gun just prior to being shot. The two officers who were investigated told authorities soon after the shooting that Rice was reaching for the gun prior to being shot and was given multiple commands to show his hands.

But the video reviewed by federal prosecutors makes the sequence of events less clear. The grainy time-lapse video, which has no audio, "does not show detail or perspective" and the camera's view is obstructed by a police patrol car, prosecutors said. In addition, they said, though the positioning of the boy's arms suggests they were in the vicinity of his waist, "his hands are not visible in the video and it cannot be determined from the video what he was doing."

The Justice Department says seven use-of-force experts — three retained by the family, four by local authorities — reviewed the case, but the poor quality of the video on which they relied and their "conflicting opinions added little to the case." The experts used by the family said the shooting was unreasonable while the four others said that it was reasonable.

The New York Times reported in October that the department had effectively shut down the investigation, but Tuesday's announcement makes it official.

Inconsistent witness statements also complicated any prosecution. Neither of two witnesses who either saw part of the encounter or reported hearing gunshots said they saw exactly what Rice was doing just before the shooting, according to the Justice Department.

In a statement at the scene to three other law enforcement officers, Loehmann "repeatedly and consistently stated" that Tamir was reaching for a gun before he shot him, prosecutors said.

Both Loehmann and Garmback also said in statements after the shooting that Loehmann had given Tamir "multiple commands to show his hands before shooting" and both officers saw him reaching for the weapon. Prosecutors said Loehmann and Garmback were the only two witnesses in the "near vicinity of the shooting."

A state grand jury had declined to indict Loehmann, though he was later fired after it was discovered he was previously deemed "unfit for duty."

The Justice Department also investigated whether the officers obstructed justice in statements they made to other investigators soon after the shooting. Prosecutors concluded that though the statements included some different language, they were generally consistent. And since there was not enough evidence to prove the statements were untrue, there was also not enough evidence to prove that the officers sought to mislead investigators or to obstruct a probe into their actions.

Associated Press writer Mark Gillispie in Cleveland contributed to this report.

Argentine Senate weighs fate of abortion in pope's homeland

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA and DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — The decades-long fight by Argentine women's groups for legal abortion was being decided by the Senate in a debate that spilled into the early hours of Wednesday before a vote that could change the outlook for the procedure across a continent where it is still largely illegal.

The bill, which would legalize elective abortion in the first 14 weeks of a pregnancy, was already approved by Argentina's Chamber of Deputies and had the support of President Alberto Fernández, meaning the Senate vote would be its final hurdle in the homeland of Pope Francis.

A previous abortion bill was voted down by lawmakers in 2018, but this time it was being backed by the center-left government. Seventy senators, more than half of them men, were to vote on the measure sometime Wednesday. The outcome was considered uncertain.

"The vote is even," said Sen. Nancy González, a backer of the legislation. "This is vote by vote. We are still working on the undecided."

Outside the Senate in Buenos Aires, pro- and anti-abortion activists gathered, with the bill's supporters wearing the color green that represents their pro-abortion movement.

Argentina's feminist movement has been demanding legal abortion for more than 30 years and activists say the bill's approval could mark a watershed in Latin America, where the Roman Catholic Church's influence has long dominated. Abortion remains largely illegal in the region, except for in Uruguay, Cuba, Mexico City, the Mexican state of Oaxaca, the Antilles and French Guiana.

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"Our country is a country of many contradictions," said Ester Albarello, a psychiatrist with a network of health professionals that supports the bill, who was among the demonstrators outside the congressional building. "It is the only one in the world that brought members of its genocidal military dictatorship to justice with all the guarantees. But we still don't have legal abortion. Why? Because the church is together with the state."

Hours before the start of the historic session, the pope again once commented on abortion.

"The Son of God was born an outcast, in order to tell us that every outcast is a child of God," the pontiff said on his Twitter account. "He came into the world as each child comes into the world, weak and vulnerable, so that we can learn to accept our weaknesses with tender love."

The legislative debate was being presided over by Vice President Cristina Fernández, who was president in 2007-2015 and would vote only if there was a tie among the senators.

Supporters said the bill seeks to eradicate the clandestine abortions that have caused more than 3,000 deaths in the country since 1983, according to figures from authorities.

The uncertainty surrounding the vote was partly due to the fact that the political parties, including the governing Peronist movement, gave their legislators freedom to vote as they chose. Two of the 72 senators were absent, and 43 of the remaining senators were men.

Argentina currently penalizes women and those who help them abort. The only exceptions are cases involving rape or a risk to the health of the mother, and activists complain even these exceptions are not respected in some provinces.

Also gathered outside the legislature, a group that calls its members "defenders of the two lives" set up an altar with a crucifix under a blue tent. Dressed in a white smock and light-blue face mask, teacher Adriana Broni said that even if the abortion law won approval, "I will not teach that it is a right to kill, murder, a baby who has no voice."

In addition to allowing abortion within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, the legislation also would establish that even after that period, a pregnancy could be legally terminated if it was the result of rape or if the person's life or integral health was in danger.

It would allow conscientious refusal to participate in an abortion for health professionals and private medical institutions at which all doctors are against the procedure. But they would be required to refer the woman to another medical center. Conscientious objection also could not be claimed if a pregnant woman's life or health was in danger.

AP journalist Yesica Brumec contributed to this report.

Biden criticizes pace of vaccine rollout, vows to accelerate

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden criticized the Trump administration Tuesday for the pace of distributing COVID-19 vaccines and predicted that "things will get worse before they get better" when it comes to the pandemic.

"We need to be honest — the next few weeks and months are going to be very tough, very tough for our nation. Maybe the toughest during this entire pandemic," Biden said during remarks in Wilmington, Delaware on Tuesday.

His comments come as the coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 336,000 Americans, with experts warning holiday travel and gatherings could precipitate yet another spike in virus cases even as the virus has already been surging in states nationwide.

Biden encouraged Americans to "steel our spines" for challenges to come and predicted that "things are going to get worse before they get better."

He also went after the Trump administration over its vaccination efforts, warning that the project, dubbed Operation Warp Speed, is moving at a slower pace than needed.

"As I long feared and warned the effort to distribute and administer the vaccine is not progressing as

it should," he said.

Earlier this month, Trump administration officials said they planned to have 20 million doses of the vaccine distributed by the end of the year. But according to data provided by the Centers for Disease Control, just over 11.4 million doses have been distributed and only 2.1 million people have received their first dose.

At the current pace, Biden said, "it's gonna take years, not months, to vaccinate the American people."

President Donald Trump deflected Biden's critique. "It is up to the States to distribute the vaccines once brought to the designated areas by the Federal Government," he tweeted Tuesday. "We have not only developed the vaccines, including putting up money to move the process along quickly, but gotten them to the states."

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany issued a statement late Tuesday saying, "While partisan critics offer nothing but empty rhetoric to frighten Americans for political ends, President Trump delivers results."

Biden, who takes office Jan. 20, said he has directed his team to prepare a "much more aggressive effort, with more federal involvement and leadership, to get things back on track."

The president-elect said he would "move heaven and earth to get us going in the right direction."

He set a goal of administering 100 million shots of the vaccine within his first 100 days in office, but said to accomplish that, the pace of vaccinations would have to increase five to six times to 1 million shots a day. Even with that pace, however, Biden acknowledged it "will still take months to have the majority of Americans vaccinated."

Biden acknowledged one of his challenges will be public skepticism over the safety of a vaccine, and has already been working to alleviate public concerns. Biden received his first dose of the vaccine on live television last week, and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris received hers, also on television, on Tuesday.

The president-elect has made combating the coronavirus pandemic a central focus of his transition work. He has pledged that one of his first acts as president will be to release a comprehensive coronavirus aid bill to Congress that will include funding for expanded vaccinations and testing, among other things.

He also has a COVID-19 task force working on ways to better streamline the government response to the pandemic and help turn the tide of infections. On Tuesday, Biden announced nine new members of his COVID-19 response team, including aides focused on vaccinations, testing and supply chain management.

Still, Biden warned that it would take months after he's in office for Americans to see positive change in the course of the virus.

"Turning this around is going to take time. We might not see improvement until we're well into March, as it will take time for our COVID response plan to produce visible progress," he said.

Officers connected to Taylor's death could face dismissal

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Louisville police have taken steps that could result in the firing of two officers connected to Breonna Taylor's death — the one who sought the no-knock search warrant that led detectives to her apartment and another found to have opened fire.

Detective Joshua Jaynes received a pretermination letter, media outlets reported Tuesday. It came after a Professional Standards Unit investigation found he had violated department procedures for preparation of a search warrant and truthfulness, his attorney said.

Detective Myles Cosgrove also received a pretermination letter, media outlets later reported, citing his attorney, Jarrod Beck. Kentucky's attorney general has said it was Cosgrove who appeared to have fired the fatal shot at Taylor, according to ballistics tests.

The shooting death of the 26-year-old Black woman in her home sparked months of protests in Louisville alongside national protests over racial injustice and police misconduct.

Jaynes has a hearing with interim Chief Yvette Gentry and her staff on Thursday.

"Detective Jaynes and I will show up for the pretermination hearing to try to convince acting Chief Gentry that this action is unwarranted," attorney Thomas Clay told the Courier Journal. "Jaynes did nothing wrong."

Jaynes was not present during the shooting at Taylor's apartment in Louisville. About 12 hours earlier,

he secured a warrant with a “no-knock” clause from a judge.

In Jaynes’ pretermination letter, Gentry said, the officer committed “extreme violations of our policies, which endangered others.”

“Your actions have brought discredit upon yourself and the department,” she wrote. “Your conduct has severely damaged the image our department has established within our community.”

Officers were serving a narcotics warrant on March 13 when they shot Taylor, but no drugs or cash were found in her home. Taylor was an emergency medical worker who had settled in for the night when police busted through her door.

Former officer Brett Hankison was charged by a grand jury with wanton endangerment, a low-level felony, for firing into an adjacent apartment where people were present. The two officers who shot Taylor, according to ballistics evidence, were not charged by the grand jury. One of those officers was shot by Taylor’s boyfriend during the raid and returned fire. Taylor’s boyfriend said he thought an intruder was breaking into her apartment.

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 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.

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"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 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 not-for-profit organization 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 organization 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

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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 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.

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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 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

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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 RSPO'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.

"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 had previously 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 said. "Children can make change in the world. And we're going to."

1st reported US case of COVID-19 variant found in Colorado

By PATTY NIEBERG Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — The first reported U.S. case of the COVID-19 variant that's been seen in the United Kingdom has been discovered in Colorado, Gov. Jared Polis announced Tuesday, adding urgency to efforts to vaccinate Americans.

The variant was found in a man in his 20s who is in isolation southeast of Denver in Elbert County and has no travel history, state health officials said.

Elbert County is a mainly rural area of rolling plains at the far edge of the Denver metro area that includes a portion of Interstate 70, the state's main east-west highway.

Colorado Politics reported there is a second suspected case of the variant in the state according to Dwayne Smith, director of public health for Elbert County. Both of the people were working in the Elbert County community of Simla. Neither of them are residents of that county — expanding the possibility of the variant's spread throughout the state.

The Colorado State Laboratory confirmed the virus variant, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was notified.

Scientists in the U.K. believe the variant is more contagious than previously identified strains. The vaccines being given now are thought to be effective against the variant, Colorado health officials said in a news release.

For the moment, the variant is likely still rare in the U.S., but the lack of travel history in the first case means it is spreading, probably seeded by travelers from Britain in November or December, said scientist Trevor Bedford, who studies the spread of COVID-19 at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

"Now I'm worried there will be another spring wave due to the variant," Bedford said. "It's a race with

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the vaccine, but now the virus has just gotten a little bit faster.”

Public health officials are investigating other potential cases and performing contact tracing to determine the spread of the variant throughout the state.

“There is a lot we don’t know about this new COVID-19 variant, but scientists in the United Kingdom are warning the world that it is significantly more contagious. The health and safety of Coloradans is our top priority, and we will closely monitor this case, as well as all COVID-19 indicators, very closely,” Polis said.

Polis and state health officials are expected hold a news conference Wednesday.

The discovery of the new variant led the CDC to issue new rules on Christmas Day for travelers arriving to the U.S. from the U.K., requiring they show proof of a negative COVID-19 test.

Worry has been growing about the variant since the weekend before Christmas, when Britain’s prime minister said a new strain of the coronavirus seemed to spread more easily than earlier ones and was moving rapidly through England. The nation’s first variant case was identified in southeast England.

Dozens of countries barred flights from the U.K., and southern England was placed under strict lockdown measures. Scientists say there is reason for concern but the new strains should not cause alarm.

Japan announced Monday it would bar entry of all nonresident foreign nationals as a precaution against the new strain.

New variants of the coronavirus have been seen almost since the virus was first detected in China nearly a year ago. It is common for viruses to undergo minor changes as they reproduce and move through a population. The slight modifications are how scientists track the spread of a virus from one place to another.

But if the virus has significant mutations, one concern is that current vaccines might no longer offer the same protections. Although that’s a possibility to watch for over time with the coronavirus, experts say they don’t believe it will be the case with the latest variant.

The U.K. variant, known as B.1.1.7, has also been found in Canada, Italy, India and the United Arab Emirates.

South Africa has also discovered a highly contagious COVID-19 variant that is driving the country’s latest spike of confirmed cases, hospitalizations and deaths. The variant, known as 501.V2, is dominant among the newly confirmed infections in South Africa, according to health officials and scientists leading the country’s virus strategy.

This story has been corrected to refer to the announcement of the new variant by the British Prime Minister taking place the weekend before Christmas.

AP Medical Writer Carla K. Johnson in Washington state contributed.

Nieberg 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.

‘Like a bathtub filling up’: Alabama is slammed by the virus

By JAY REEVES and KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — With its dozen intensive care beds already full, Cullman Regional Medical Center began looking desperately for options as more and more COVID-19 patients showed up.

Ten beds normally used for less severe cases were transformed into intensive care rooms, with extra IV machines brought in. Video monitors were set up to enable the staff to keep watch over patients whenever a nurse had to scurry away to care for someone else.

The patch did the job — for the time being, at least.

“We’re kind of like a bathtub that’s filling up with water and the drain is blocked,” the hospital’s chief medical officer, Dr. William Smith, said last week.

Alabama, long one of the unhealthiest and most impoverished states in America, has emerged as one of the nation’s most alarming coronavirus hot spots.

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Its hospitals are in crisis as the virus rages out of control in a region with high rates of obesity, high blood pressure and other conditions that can make COVID-19 even more dangerous, where access to health care was limited even before the outbreak, and where public resistance to masks and other precautions is stubborn.

In another sign of how readily the virus can spread, the first reported U.S. case of the COVID-19 variant that's been seen in the United Kingdom has been discovered in Colorado.

The variant was found in a man in his 20s who is in isolation southeast of Denver and has no travel history, state health officials said Tuesday. Scientists in the U.K. believe the new variant is more contagious than previously identified strains.

In all, the coronavirus has killed more than 335,000 people across the U.S., including over 4,700 in Alabama. Places such as California and Tennessee have also been hit especially hard in recent weeks.

At Cullman Regional, a midsize hospital that serves an agricultural area 55 miles north of Birmingham, the intensive care unit as of last week was at 180% of capacity, the highest in the state. Other hospitals are also struggling to keep up with the crush of people sickened by the virus.

While a typical patient might need ICU treatment for two or three days, Smith said, COVID-19 patients often stay two or three weeks, causing the caseload to build up.

Alabama ranked sixth on the list of states with the most new cases per capita over the past week, according to Johns Hopkins University. Alabama's latest average positivity rate — the percentage of tests coming back positive for the virus — is almost 40%, one of the highest figures in the country. And the state is seeing an average of 46 deaths per day, up from 30 on Dec. 14.

While ICUs nationwide were at 78% capacity during the week of Dec. 18-24, Alabama's were 91% full, according to the U.S. Health and Human Services Department. As of last week, 15 Alabama hospitals had intensive care units that were at or above capacity, and the ICUs at six more hospitals were at least 96% full.

On Tuesday, 2,804 people were in Alabama hospitals with COVID-19, the highest total since the pandemic began.

Experts worry the strain will only increase after the holidays because of new infections linked to travel and gatherings of family and friends.

"I think we are in dire shape. I really do," said Dr. Don Williamson, head of the Alabama Hospital Association. "I fear our Christmas surge is going to be much worse than the Thanksgiving surge."

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, breaking at the time with some of her Southern counterparts, imposed a state-wide mask mandate that has been in place since July, but health officials have struggled to get people to comply. The Republican governor also issued a stay-at-home order early in the pandemic but has staunchly opposed doing so again, saying, "You can't have a life without a livelihood."

California, in contrast, has issued strict stay-at-home orders in recent weeks in areas where ICU occupancy has reached 85%.

"We have, unfortunately, people who are still getting together in groups, traveling for the holidays, doing things that are unsafe," said Dr. Scott Harris, Alabama's state health officer.

The Deep South state has some of the highest rates of certain chronic health conditions that increase the risk of death or serious illness from the coronavirus. Alabama has the sixth-highest rate of adult obesity in the U.S. and ranks third in the percentage of adults who have diabetes.

Alabama is also one of a dozen states that did not expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act and thus has large numbers of uninsured. About 15% of people ages 19 to 64 have no coverage, the 13th-highest percentage in the nation, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

The state has seen the closing of 17 hospitals, mostly small rural ones, in the last decade, a trend that left regional facilities to pick up the slack.

At Decatur Morgan Hospital, COVID-19 deaths have tripled since September and the intensive care unit is full, said Dr. James Boyle. The pulmonologist struggled to maintain his composure, pausing and pursing his lips, as he discussed the possibility of having to ration care in the new year.

"I've been practicing in this county since '98. I've never had more than two or three people on ventilators

with the flu in the last 20 years," he said. "We always have a lot of patients in the ICU in the wintertime. To have 16 patients on ventilators with an illness that we don't usually have is unprecedented."

UAB Hospital, which is affiliated with the University of Alabama at Birmingham, has brought in retired nurses and dozens of teachers and students from its nursing school to help.

Hospitals in Alabama are getting calls from neighboring states such as Mississippi and Tennessee as doctors seek extra space for COVID-19 patients, but they are not able to help as often as they did in the past. The same is true within the state, with hospitals that might help care for patients after a disaster like a tornado unable to assist right now.

With thousands of people already vaccinated with the first of the two doses needed to guard against COVID-19, the end of the pandemic is in sight. But the toll on medical workers in the meantime is mounting.

"We do see death. That's part of what we do; it's part of our training," Boyle said. "The difficulty this year is just the tremendous number. We can't grieve for one patient before we have to go take care of another."

Chandler contributed to this story from Montgomery, Alabama.

Police observed no threats from Andre Hill before shooting

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — An officer on the scene of the fatal shooting of Andre Hill in Ohio's capital city last week didn't perceive any threats and didn't see a gun, contrary to a mistaken claim by the fellow officer who killed Hill, according to records released Tuesday.

The records provide new details into the Dec. 22 shooting of 47-year-old Andre Hill, a Black man who was fatally shot by Officer Adam Coy, who is white, as Hill emerged from a garage holding a cellphone with his left hand and his right hand not visible.

The city fired Coy on Tuesday, accusing him of incompetence and "gross neglect of duty," among other charges.

Columbus Officer Amy Detwiler said she saw a man — later identified as Hill — walk away from a car after arriving at the scene of the non-emergency call, according to a summary of her internal affairs interview released Tuesday. Coy had gotten there first. Detwiler didn't see any interaction between Hill and Coy, but said Coy told her Hill had walked into a next-door garage.

After the officers crossed over to the garage they saw Hill, with Detwiler telling investigators "she felt Mr. Hill may need assistance to enter the residence," according to her interview.

Coy asked Hill in a "normal tone of voice" to exit the garage and Hill complied but without responding, Detwiler said.

As Hill walked out, Detwiler "did not observe any threats from Mr. Hill," nor did she see a gun, the internal affairs report said.

"Officer Detwiler stated Officer Coy observed a firearm and yelled, 'There's a gun in his other hand, there's a gun in his other hand!'" the report said. "Officer Detwiler heard gunfire at this moment."

No gun was found at the scene, police said.

Reports also indicate that Police Chief Thomas Quinlan felt something was off about the shooting as soon as he arrived, saw the officers and then saw the body cam video.

"I have responded to many officer-involved shooting scenes and spoken with many officers following these critical incidents," Quinlan wrote in a Dec. 26 report. "There was something very distinct about the officers engagement following this critical incident that is difficult to describe for this letter." He did not provide further details.

Coy's handling of the shooting "is not a 'rookie' mistake as a result of negligence or inadvertence," Quinlan said in his recommendation that the 17-year veteran be fired. Quinlan added that Coy's actions were "reckless and deliberate."

A review of Coy's personnel file shows more than three dozen complaints have been filed against him since he joined the department in January 2002, mostly for rude or abusive language with a dozen for

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use of force. No details about the allegations are contained in the sparse summaries the city provided from the department's internal affairs bureau. All but a few were marked "unfounded" or "not sustained."

Quinlan noted that he had first raised concerns about Coy in 2008, when Quinlan was his patrol lieutenant. "If sustained improvements are not fully realized a decision whether Officer Coy is salvageable must follow," Quinlan said, quoting from a letter he wrote.

Coy was fired Monday hours after a hearing was held to determine his employment.

"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," according to a statement from Columbus Public Safety Director Ned Pettus Jr. "The shooting of Andre Hill is a tragedy for all who loved him in addition to the community and our Division of Police."

Coy had the opportunity to participate in the hearing, Brian Steel, vice president of the police union, told reporters Monday. "He elected not to participate. I do not know why ... I would have liked to have him here, but it's his decision."

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

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.

Detwiler, who joined the department in 2011, has received several commendations over the years for helping injured or stricken individuals. They include a 2018 case in which she and other officers drove a shooting victim to the hospital in a police cruiser after it became clear an ambulance would be delayed, according to a copy of her personnel file released Tuesday.

"Had they not taken this initiative, the victim most likely would have succumbed to her injuries," the officers' commendation said.

New US dietary guidelines: No candy, cake for kids under 2

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Parents now have an extra reason to say no to candy, cake and ice cream for young children. The first U.S. government dietary guidelines for infants and toddlers, released Tuesday, recommend feeding only breast milk for at least six months and no added sugar for children under age 2.

"It's never too early to start," said Barbara Schneeman, a nutritionist at University of California, Davis. "You have to make every bite count in those early years."

The guidelines stop short of two key recommendations from scientists advising the government. Those advisers said in July that everyone should limit their added sugar intake to less than 6% of calories and men should limit alcohol to one drink per day.

Instead, the guidelines stick with previous advice: limit added sugar to less than 10% of calories per day after age 2. And men should limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day, twice as much as advised for women.

"I don't think we're finished with alcohol," said Schneeman, who chaired a committee advising the government on the guidelines. "There's more we need to learn."

The dietary guidelines are issued every five years by the Agriculture Department and the Department of Health and Human Services. The government uses them to set standards for school lunches and other programs. Some highlights:

INFANTS, TODDLERS AND MOMS

Babies should have only breast milk at least until they reach 6 months, the guidelines say. If breast milk isn't available, they should get iron-fortified infant formula during the first year. Babies should get supplemental vitamin D beginning soon after birth.

Babies can start eating other food at about 6 months and should be introduced to potential allergenic foods along with other foods.

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"Introducing peanut-containing foods in the first year reduces the risk that an infant will develop a food allergy to peanuts," the guidelines say.

There's more advice than in prior guidelines for pregnant and breastfeeding women. To promote healthy brain development in their babies, these women should eat 8 to 12 ounces of seafood per week. They should be sure to choose fish — such as cod, salmon, sardines and tilapia — with lower levels of mercury, which can harm children's nervous systems.

Pregnant women should not drink alcohol, according to the guidelines, and breastfeeding women should be cautious. Caffeine in modest amounts appears safe and women can discuss that with their doctors.

ALCOHOL AND MEN

In July, the science advisers suggested men who drink alcohol should limit themselves to one serving per day — a 12-ounce can of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine or a shot of liquor. Tuesday's official guidelines ignored that, keeping the advice for men at two drinks per day.

Dr. Westley Clark of Santa Clara University said that's appropriate. Heavy drinking and binge drinking are harmful, he said, but the evidence isn't as clear for moderate drinking.

Lowering the limit for men would likely be socially, religiously or culturally unacceptable to many, Clark said, which could have ripple effects for the rest of the guidelines.

"They need to be acceptable to people, otherwise they'll reject it outright and we'll be worse off," he said. "If you lose the public, these guidelines have no merit whatsoever."

More careful scientific research into the long-term effects of low or moderate levels of drinking is needed, he said.

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?

Most Americans fall short of following the best advice on nutrition, contributing to obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Much of the new advice sounds familiar: Load your plate with fruits and vegetables, and cut back on sweets, saturated fats and sodium.

The guidelines suggest making small changes that add up: Substitute plain shredded wheat for frosted cereal. Choose low-sodium canned black beans. Drink sparkling water instead of soda.

"It is really important to make healthier choices, every meal, every day, to develop a pattern of healthy eating," said Pam Miller of the Agriculture Department's food and nutrition service.

There's an app to help people follow the guidelines available through the government's My Plate website.

READ LABELS

The biggest sources of added sugars in the typical U.S. diet are soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts, snacks, candy and sweetened coffee and tea. These foods contribute very little nutrition, so the guidelines advise limits.

There's information on added sugar on the "Nutrition Facts" label on packaged foods. Information on saturated fats and sodium is on the label too.

Associated Press writer Marion Renault in Rochester, Minnesota, contributed.

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Boeing Max returns to US skies with first passenger flight

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

American Airlines flew a Boeing 737 Max with paying passengers from Miami to New York on Tuesday, the plane's first commercial flight in U.S. skies since it was grounded after two deadly crashes.

American flight 718 carried 87 passengers on the 172-seat plane, and the return flight from LaGuardia Airport to Miami International Airport held 151 passengers, according to an airline spokeswoman.

Last month, the Federal Aviation Administration approved changes that Boeing made to an automated flight-control system implicated in crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia that killed 346 people in all. In both

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crashes, the system pushed the nose down repeatedly based on faulty sensor readings, and pilots were unable to regain control.

The FAA cleared the way for U.S. airlines to resume using the plane if certain changes are made and pilots are provided with additional training including time in a flight simulator.

Brazil's Gol airlines operated the first passenger flight with a revamped Max on Dec. 9. Since then, Gol and Aeromexico have operated about 600 flights between them with Max jets, according to tracking service Flightradar24 and aviation-data firm Cirium.

American plans to make one round trip a day between Miami and New York with Max jets through Jan. 4 before putting the plane on more routes. United Airlines plans to resume Max flights in February, and Southwest Airlines expects to follow in March.

All three airlines say they will give customers the chance to change flights if they are uncomfortable flying on the Max.

The Max was grounded worldwide in March 2019, days after the second crash. Reports by House and Senate committees faulted Boeing and the FAA for failures in the process of certifying the plane. Congressional investigators uncovered internal Boeing documents in which company employees raised safety concerns and bragged about deceiving regulators.

FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson, a former military and airline pilot, operated a test flight in September and vouched for the reworked plane's safety, saying he would put his family on it. American Airlines President Robert Isom was on Tuesday's inaugural U.S. flight, according to the airline.

Some relatives of people who died in the second crash, a Max operated by Ethiopian Airlines, contend that the plane is still unsafe. They and their lawyers say that Boeing is refusing to hand over documents about the plane's design and development.

"The truth is that 346 people are now dead because Boeing cut corners, lied to regulators, and simply considers this the cost of doing business," Yalena Lopez-Lewis, whose husband died in the crash, said in a statement issued by her lawyers. "It is infuriating that American Airlines is in effect rewarding Boeing for the corrupt and catastrophic process that led to the Max."

Zipporah Kuria, a British citizen whose father also died in the Ethiopian crash, pointed to the recent disclosure in a Senate committee report that Boeing representatives coached FAA test pilots reviewing Boeing updates to the Max flight-control system.

"Boeing leadership is still riddled with deceit. Their priorities are not on consumer safety," she said in an interview.

Boeing spokesman Bernard Choi said the company "learned many hard lessons" from the crashes and is committed to safety.

"We continue to work closely with global regulators and our customers to support the safe return of the fleet to service around the world," Choi said.

The return of the plane to U.S. skies is a huge boost for Boeing, which has lost billions during the Max grounding because it has been unable to deliver new planes to airline customers. Orders for the plane have plunged. Boeing has removed more than 1,000 Max jets from its backlog because airlines canceled orders or the sales are not certain to go through because of the pandemic crisis gripping the travel industry.

David Koenig can be reached at www.twitter.com/airlinewriter

Wiser resolutions? Lessons from COVID's unfulfilled ones

By MELISSA RAYWORTH Associated Press

She'd wanted to frame and hang them — just three printed pictures that had been sitting in Lucy O'Donoghue's suburban Atlanta house since the year began. That's all. Yet with a full-time job and two small kids, she hadn't found the time.

But when COVID-19 slowed life to a quarantine-induced crawl, she began working remotely. It seemed like the perfect time to get this — and a slew of other small projects — done.

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Eight months later, O'Donoghue finally walked the two short blocks to a store near her house and bought a trio of ready-made frames.

"I put the pieces of art up in my house, and that made me so happy," she says. "How is it that something that only took me 45 minutes has taken me over a year to get around to doing?"

The answer, as it has been with so much, is this: Because 2020.

Ten months ago, Americans waded into unfamiliar waters. For many who were not plunged immediately into economic or medical emergency, it was as though some strange, protracted, fragmented snow day had begun. Plans and promises bloomed on social media like spring flowers. Bread was baked. Projects were launched.

"With the greatest of intentions, in the first few weeks people had rearranged their shoe closets and made their spice racks alphabetical," says psychologist Deborah Serani, an adjunct professor at Adelphi University in New York.

But when life is difficult, sustaining even a small amount of momentum can be tough.

PSYCHOLOGICAL LABOR

The pandemic requires new levels of vigilance and decision-making, and it has disrupted millions of families. The presidential election required deft calibration to get along peaceably with relatives or friends with differing views. This year saw an escalation in crises social, racial and environmental.

All of this has required tremendous psychological labor. That work is invisible, but it takes its toll, says Catherine Sanderson, chair of the psychology department at Amherst College.

For much of the nation, the sense in the early days of quarantine that the disruption would be brief soon melted into an amorphous uncertainty.

"Uncertainty," Sanderson says, "is extraordinarily psychologically taxing."

The normal guardrails that govern the days — getting dressed and out the door on time, driving kids to sports practices and dance classes on a tight schedule in the evenings — disappeared for many. So while having extra time might have seemed like a bright spot, it was also disorienting.

With too much unstructured time, "I feel this aimlessness," says Steph Auteri, a writer who lives in Verona, New Jersey. "The busier I am, the better I operate. The more time I have, I start to get down in the dumps."

That's a common experience, says Serani: In the United States, "it's a really high-octane life. And it was slammed. We hit the brakes and everybody had to stop, and it was hard for many people."

This year has required us to create new structures. That takes time and energy.

Pre-pandemic, "on a Saturday, you wouldn't wake up in your office. There's a distinction. And now, you have to actually think about, 'What am I doing?'" Sanderson says. "It requires a level of planning that you're not used to and that we don't have practice with."

Yet amid all this uncertainty and psychological labor, people are looking back and realizing they did discover a quiet productivity.

In her Queens, New York, home, months of quarantine led Neesa Sunar to return to playing viola after many years away. Auteri made progress too, reorganizing her schedule around helping her 6-year-old daughter with remote learning, and eventually launching an educational website in time for the start of school in September.

Yoga teacher Pamela Eggleston shifted her teaching online, filming a self-care course for Yoga Journal to help people thrive during this challenging year. Teaching exclusively online "was a challenge for me. But I did it," she says. Though she's based in the Washington, D.C., area, she soon had students tuning in from as far away as Scotland.

And something else: She returned to social justice activism this year.

"I've done more of that than I had done in a while," Eggleston says. "It feels good to me to return to these issues. They never leave me, as a Black woman."

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Tough times can be clarifying. They aren't always so, but they can be.

People may not have tackled the home improvement projects they planned or written novels. But many focused on their own well-being, and their kids', and asked themselves what really matters.

In the past, business coach Rachel Brenke says, she might have seen quarantine as a time to be highly productive — and would have beaten herself up if she wasn't. "I'm normally someone that thrives on always being busy, jumping from one thing to another," she says.

Instead, she prioritized keeping a healthy balance between managing her business and connecting with her family.

"My big thing this year, just out of purely trying to focus on my kids, myself and my mental health, was simplicity. So I'm carrying that over into 2021 with intentional simplifying," she says.

So with those early-quarantine resolutions in mind, how do we approach this weekend, the moment of shaking off 2020 and invoking fresh New Year's resolutions for 2021?

Serani expects many people's resolutions will be focused less on material goals and more on what they've decided is most important.

That might even include gratitude for the old, familiar, repetitive routines they used to dread.

"I've sort of longed for that bit of the day where I've got my handbag over my shoulder and my lunch bag. And I've shut down the laptop and I'm walking back to my car in the same parking spot as always, and I feel the fresh air," O'Donoghue says. "I almost dream of that moment."

Trump lashes out at GOP after override vote on defense bill

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump lashed out at congressional Republicans on Tuesday after the House easily voted to override his veto of a defense policy bill.

A total of 109 Republicans, including Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a member of GOP leadership, joined with Democrats on Monday to approve the override, which would be the first of Trump's presidency. The Senate is expected to consider the measure later this week.

Trump slammed GOP lawmakers on Twitter, charging that "Weak and tired Republican 'leadership' will allow the bad Defense Bill to pass."

Trump called the override vote a "disgraceful act of cowardice and total submission by weak people to Big Tech. Negotiate a better Bill, or get better leaders, NOW! Senate should not approve NDAA until fixed!!!"

The 322-87 vote in the House sends the override effort to the Senate, where the exact timing of a vote is uncertain.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., wants a vote as soon as Wednesday, but Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders objected to moving ahead until McConnell allows a vote on a Trump-backed plan to increase COVID-19 relief payments to \$2,000.

"Let me be clear: If Sen. McConnell doesn't agree to an up or down vote to provide the working people of our country a \$2,000 direct payment, Congress will not be going home for New Year's Eve," said Sanders, an independent who caucuses with Democrats. "Let's do our job."

McConnell said Tuesday that approval of the \$740 billion National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, is crucial to the nation's defense and to "deter great-power rivals like China and Russia."

The bill "will cement our advantage on the seas, on land, in the air, in cyberspace and in space," McConnell said. The bill also provides a 3% pay raise for U.S. troops, improvements for military housing, child care and more, McConnell said.

"For the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces, failure is not an option. So when it is our turn in Congress to have their backs, failure is not an option here either," he said.

Trump rejected the defense measure 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.

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

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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, said he was "disappointed" with Trump's veto and called the bill "absolutely vital to our national security and our troops."

"This is the most important bill we have," Inhofe said Tuesday on the Senate floor. "It puts members of the military first."

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.

Besides social media and military base names, Trump also said the defense 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 House veto override was supported by 212 Democrats, 109 Republicans and an independent. Twenty Democrats opposed the override, along with 66 Republicans and an independent.

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 benefited 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."

The defense bill 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.

6.3 earthquake kills 7 in Croatia, leaves others missing

By SASA KAVIC Associated Press

PETRINJA, Croatia (AP) — A strong earthquake in Croatia destroyed buildings and killed at least seven people Tuesday southwest of the capital, displacing scores of area residents or making them afraid to sleep indoors as emergency teams searched for those still missing by nightfall.

The European Mediterranean Seismological Center said the magnitude 6.3 quake hit 46 kilometers (28 miles) southeast of Zagreb just before 12:20 p.m. local time. It caused widespread damage in the hardest-hit town of Petrinja. The same area was struck by a magnitude 5.2 quake on Monday.

Officials said a 12-year-old girl died in Petrinja, a town of some 25,000 people. Another six people were killed in nearly destroyed villages close to the town, according to HRT state television. At least 26 people were hospitalized, six with serious injuries, officials said, adding that many more people remained unaccounted for.

In Petrinja, cries could be heard from underneath destroyed houses. One woman was found alive some four hours after the quake. Emergency teams used rescue dogs in the search for survivors, while family

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members looked on in despair.

"My town has been completely destroyed. We have dead children," Petrinja Mayor Darinko Dumbovic said in a statement broadcast by HRT. "This is like Hiroshima - half of the city no longer exists."

Firefighters worked to remove the debris from a collapsed building that fell on a car. A man and a small boy eventually were rescued from the vehicle and carried into an ambulance.

The town was left without electricity or running water as officials scrambled to set up temporary accommodation for all of the displaced residents in need. Residents fearing another earthquake seemed poised to spend the night outside their homes.

Petrinja resident Marica Pavlovic said the quake felt "worse than a war."

"It was horrible, a shock. You don't know what to do, whether to run out or hide somewhere," she told The Associated Press.

Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and other government ministers arrived in Petrinja after the earthquake.

"The biggest part of central Petrinja is in a red zone, which means that most of the buildings are not usable," Plenkovic said.

He said the army has 500 places ready in barracks to house people, while others will be accommodated in nearby hotels and other places.

"No one must stay out in the cold tonight," the prime minister said.

Officials also toured a damaged hospital in the nearby town of Sisak, which was also badly hit. Plenkovic said the patients will be evacuated in army helicopters and ambulances.

Health officials said a baby was delivered in a tent in front of the hospital in the aftermath of the earthquake.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Twitter that she spoke with Plenkovic and instructed an envoy to travel to Croatia as soon as possible.

As a Mediterranean country, Croatia is prone to earthquakes, but not big ones. The last strong quake struck in the 1990s when the picturesque Adriatic coast village of Ston was destroyed.

The Croatian military was deployed in the quake-hit region to help with the rescue operation.

Croatian seismologist Kresimir Kuk described the earthquake as "extremely strong," far stronger than another one that hit Zagreb and nearby areas in the spring. He warned people to keep out of potentially shaky old buildings and move to newer areas of the city because of aftershocks.

In the capital, people ran into the streets in fear.

The earthquake was felt throughout the country and in neighboring Serbia, Bosnia and Slovenia. It was felt as far away as Graz in southern Austria, the Austria Press Agency reported.

Authorities in Slovenia said the Krsko nuclear power plant was temporarily shut down following the earthquake. The power plant is jointly owned by Slovenia and Croatia and located near their border.

AP writers Dusan Stojanovic and Jovana Gec in Belgrade, Serbia, contributed to this report.

UK hospitals struggle; tougher rules eyed to fight variant

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British officials are considering tougher coronavirus restrictions as the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients surpasses the first peak of the outbreak in the spring.

Authorities are blaming a new, more transmissible variant of the virus, first identified in southeast England, for the soaring infection rates. An area home to almost half of the people in England is under tight restrictions on movement and everyday life in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. Nonessential shops are shut along with gyms and swimming pools, indoor socializing is barred and restaurants and pubs can only offer takeout.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to hold a meeting of his COVID-19 crisis committee later Tuesday. Health Secretary Matt Hancock is scheduled to update Parliament on Wednesday on whether more areas

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will be put into Tier 4 — the top level of lockdown measures — and whether the restrictions could be tightened even further.

Hospitals in the worst-hit areas of London and southern England are becoming increasingly overstretched, with ambulances unable to unload patients at some hospitals because all beds are full. A growing number of National Health Service staff are off work because they are sick with the virus or self-isolating.

England had 20,426 coronavirus patients in hospitals as of Monday morning — the last day for which figures are available — compared to its previous high of 18,974 on April 12. Britain has recorded more than 71,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths, the second-highest death toll in Europe after Italy.

A further 414 deaths were reported Tuesday, along with a record 53,135 new cases, although that figure may include a backlog from the Christmas holiday period.

Steve Hams, a chief nurse at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in western England, said medical staff were becoming “increasingly exhausted.”

“We felt during April that there would be an end to this. But actually, we’re now seeing a third peak so trying to keep our colleagues and our teams going through this time is just incredibly difficult,” he told the BBC.

Dr. Sonia Adesara, an emergency-room doctor in London, said “doctors and nurses are having leave cancelled, they’re doing extra shifts, they’re working extra long hours but its an extremely serious situation.”

“The situation is untenable and I think we are very close to becoming overwhelmed,” she said.

Some scientists are urging Johnson’s Conservative government to postpone plans to reopen schools next week after the Christmas break. The government plans to test students regularly for the virus and 1,500 armed forces personnel have been called in to support schools as they organize the testing.

Andrew Hayward, a professor of infectious diseases epidemiology at University College London, said the fast-spreading virus variant meant that for U.K. schools to reopen, other sectors would have to close.

“We’re going to have to have increased, strict restrictions in other areas of society to pay for that,” he said.

Simon Stevens, chief executive of the NHS, said health care workers were back in “the eye of the storm” as they had been in the spring.

Stevens said the coronavirus vaccines provided hope, and estimated that all vulnerable people in Britain could be inoculated against the virus by late spring 2021. So far, more than 600,000 people in the U.K. have been given a shot of a vaccine developed by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and German firm BioNTech, out of a population of 67 million.

On Tuesday some of the first people in the U.K. to be inoculated received their second and final injection.

Margaret Keenan, 91, who on Dec. 8 became the first person in the world to receive a rigorously tested COVID-19 vaccine, had the follow-up shot at a hospital in the central England city of Coventry.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is given in two doses three weeks apart. Its developers say it conferred 95% immunity in clinical trials.

Officials and medics hope U.K. regulators will soon authorize a second coronavirus vaccine for use in Britain. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is assessing a vaccine made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. Media reports say authorization for that could come this week and vaccinations with it could begin next week.

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

Belarus, Argentina start vaccinations with Russian shots

By DARIA LITVINOVA and ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Belarus and Argentina launched mass coronavirus vaccinations with the Russian-developed Sputnik V shot on Tuesday, becoming the first countries outside Russia to roll out the vaccine, which has faced criticism over the speed with which it was approved.

The first batch of Sputnik V arrived in the former Soviet republic of Belarus on Tuesday and the vaccination effort began almost immediately.

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"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," Belarus Health Minister Dmitry Pinevich was quoted as saying in a statement issued by his ministry and Russian health authorities.

Hours later, a similar campaign kicked off in South America as Argentine medical workers began receiving the vaccine and officials insisted it was safe. President Alberto Fernández called it the largest vaccination campaign in the country's modern history.

Teachers, those with complicating medical conditions and people over 60 were to be next in line in Argentina, which so far has received 300,000 doses, which also will be free and voluntary.

Argentina, a country of 45 million people, has recorded nearly 1.6 million infections with the new coronavirus and almost 43,000 deaths.

Belarus conducted its own trial of Sputnik V among 100 volunteers and gave the shot regulatory approval on Dec. 21, two days before Argentina did.

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 started shortly after the vaccine received the Russian government's go-ahead.

Russian health authorities say the study has now covered more than 30,000 people, with data suggesting the virus was 91% effective. That's still far fewer cases than Western drug makers have accumulated during final testing to analyze how well their candidates worked, and important demographic and other details from the study have not been released.

Former Argentine Health Secretary Adolfo Rubinstein complained that his country's authorities had approved the vaccine based on "a memo lacking data."

"I don't doubt that Sputnik V is an effective and safe vaccine," he said. "But the best way to undo a lack of confidence is with information," he said.

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.

Almudena Calatrava reported from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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>

French designer Pierre Cardin, licensing pioneer, dies at 98

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French fashion designer Pierre Cardin possessed a wildly inventive artistic sensibility tempered by a stiff dose of business sense. He had no problem acknowledging that he earned more from a pair of stockings than from a haute-couture gown with a six-figure price tag.

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Cardin, who died Tuesday at age 98, was the ultimate entrepreneurial designer. He understood the importance his exclusive haute couture shows played in stoking consumer desire and became an early pioneer of licensing. His name emblazoned hundreds of products, from accessories to home goods.

"The numbers don't lie," Cardin said in a 1970 French television interview. "I earn more from the sale of a necktie than from the sale of a million-franc dress. It's counterintuitive, but the accounts prove it. In the end, it's all about the numbers."

The French Academy of Fine Arts announced Cardin's death in a tweet. He had been among its illustrious members since 1992. The academy did not give a cause of death or say where the designer died.

Designer Jean-Paul Gaultier, who made his debut in Cardin's maison, paid tribute to his mentor on Twitter: "Thank you Mister Cardin to have opened for me the doors of fashion and made my dream possible."

Along with fellow Frenchman Andre Courreges and Spain's Paco Rabanne, two other Paris-based designers known for their avant-garde Space Age styles, Cardin revolutionized fashion starting in the early 1950s.

At a time when other Paris labels were obsessed with flattering the female form, Cardin's designs cast the wearer as a sort of glorified hanger, there to showcase the sharp shapes and graphic patterns of the clothes. Created for neither pragmatists nor wallflowers, his designs were all about making a big entrance — sometimes very literally.

Gowns and bodysuits in fluorescent spandex were fitted with plastic hoops that stood away from the body at the waist, elbows, wrists and knees. Bubble dresses and capes enveloped their wearers in oversized spheres of fabric. Toques were shaped like flying saucers; bucket hats sheathed the models' entire head, with cutout windshields at the eyes.

"Fashion is always ridiculous, seen from before or after. But in the moment, it's marvelous," Cardin said in the 1970 interview.

A quote on his label's website summed up his philosophy: "The clothing I prefer is the one I create for a life that does not yet exist, the world of tomorrow."

Cardin's name embossed thousands of products, from wristwatches to bed sheets. In the brand's heyday, goods bearing his fancy cursive signature were sold at some 100,000 outlets worldwide.

That number dwindled dramatically in later years, as Cardin products were increasingly regarded as cheaply made and his clothing designs — which, decades later, remained virtually unchanged from its '60s-era styles — felt dated.

A savvy businessman, Cardin used his fabulous wealth to snap up top-notch properties in Paris, including the belle epoque restaurant Maxim's, which he also frequented. His flagship store, located next to the presidential Elysee Palace in Paris, continues to showcase eye-catching designs.

Cardin was born on July 7, 1922, in a small town near Venice, Italy, to a modest, working-class family. When he was a child, the family moved to Saint Etienne in central France, where Cardin was schooled and became an apprentice to a tailor at age 14.

Cardin later embraced a status as a self-made man, saying in the 1970 TV interview that going it alone "makes you see life in a much more real way and forces you to take decisions and to be courageous.

"It's much more difficult to enter a dark woods alone than when you already know the way through," he said.

After moving to Paris, he worked as an assistant in the House of Paquin starting in 1945 and also helped design costumes for the likes of filmmaker Jean Cocteau. He was involved in creating the costumes for the director's 1946 hit, "Beauty and the Beast."

After working briefly with Elsa Schiaparelli and Christian Dior, Cardin opened his own fashion house in Paris' posh 1st district, starting with costumes and masks.

Cardin delivered his first real collection in 1953. Success quickly followed, with the 1954 launch of the celebrated "bubble" dress, which put the label on the map.

Cardin staged his first ready-to-wear show in 1959 at Paris' Printemps department store, a bold initiative that got him temporarily kicked out of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture. Cardin's relationship with the organization — the governing body of French fashion — was rocky, and he later left of his own volition to stage shows on his own terms.

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Cardin's high-profile relationship with French actress Jeanne Moreau, the smoky-voiced blonde of "Jules and Jim" fame, also helped boost the brand's profile. Described by both as a "true love," the couple's relationship lasted about five years, though they never married.

For Cardin, the astronomical expense of producing haute-couture collections was an investment. Even though the clothing's pharaonic prices didn't cover the cost of crafting the made-to-measure garments, media coverage generated by the couture shows helped sell affordable items, like hats, belts and underwear.

As Cardin's fame and fortune spiked, so did his real estate portfolio. He long lived an austere, almost monastic existence with his sister in a sprawling apartment just across from the Elysee Palace and bought up so much topflight real estate in the neighborhood that fashion insiders joked he could have mounted a coup d'état.

In addition to his women's and men's clothing boutiques, Cardin opened a children's shop, a furniture store and the Espace Cardin, a sprawling hall in central Paris where the designer would later stage fashion shows, as well as plays, ballet performances and other cultural events.

Beyond clothes, Cardin put his stamp on perfumes, makeup, porcelain, chocolates, a resort in the south of France and even the velvet-walled watering hole Maxim's — where he could often be seen at lunch.

The 1970s saw a huge Cardin expansion that brought his outlets to more than 100,000, with about as many workers producing under the Cardin label worldwide.

Cardin was in the vanguard in recognizing the importance of Asia, both as a manufacturing hub and for its consumer potential. He was present in Japan starting in the early 1960s, and in 1979 became the first Western designer to stage a fashion show in China.

In 1986, he inked a deal with Soviet authorities to open a showroom in the Communist nation to sell clothes locally made under his label.

In his later life, with no heir apparent, Cardin dismantled much of his vast empire, selling dozens of his Chinese licenses to two local firms in 2009.

Two years later, he told the Wall Street Journal that he'd be willing to sell his entire company, at that point including an estimated 500-600 licenses, for \$1.4 billion.

Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed. Former AP correspondents Suzy Patterson and Jenny Barchfield contributed biographical information to this obituary.

State capitols face showdown over COVID powers and spending

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — State lawmakers across the country will convene in 2021 with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic rippling through much of their work — even affecting the way they work.

After 10 months of emergency orders and restrictions from governors and local executive officials, some lawmakers are eager to reassert their power over decisions that shape the way people shop, work, worship and attend school.

They also will face virus-induced budget pressures, with rising demand for spending on public health and social services colliding with uncertain tax revenue in an economy that is still not fully recovered from the pandemic.

"COVID will frame everything," said Tim Storey, executive director of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The virus even will affect the mechanics of making laws. Some legislatures will allow their members to vote remotely, instead of gathering in tightly packed chambers. Temperature checks, health screenings, plexiglass dividers and socially distanced seating are planned in some capitols.

Lawmakers will be meeting as COVID-19 vaccines are being distributed, first to medical workers and high-risk groups such as the elderly. That may spark debates in some states about whether the distribution plans should be subject to legislative approval and whether workplaces and institutions can require people to receive the shots.

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All 50 states are scheduled to hold regular legislative sessions in 2021. In many, it will mark their first meeting since the November elections in which Republicans again secured statehouse supremacy. The GOP will control both legislative chambers in 30 states compared with 18 for Democrats. Minnesota is the only state where Republicans will control one chamber and Democrats the other. Nebraska's legislature is officially nonpartisan.

Though many of the bills seeking to limit gubernatorial powers are coming from Republicans, Storey said there are bipartisan frustrations among lawmakers. He expects well over half the legislatures to flex their authority by holding oversight hearings, reviewing administrative rules and passing bills aimed at limiting the emergency powers of governors during the pandemic.

The pushback is occurring even in states where the legislature and governor's office are controlled by the same party.

One of the hottest topics in the GOP-led Arkansas Legislature will be whether to support the state's disaster declaration, which has been used by Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson to impose a mask mandate, capacity limits and other restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus.

The GOP supermajority in the Tennessee Legislature has created a panel to study gubernatorial emergency powers and has come up with a number of suggestions to allow lawmakers to end, override or have the final say on the extension of a health-related state of emergency or executive order.

In Missouri, Republican lawmakers who hold large majorities in both chambers already have filed about a dozen bills that would limit the authority of state or local officials to impose restrictions.

One bill by state Sen. Bob Onder, a respiratory physician, would bar local health orders from lasting more than 30 days and require a two-thirds vote of the local governing body for rules extending beyond one week. His bill also would prohibit restrictions on religious activities that are greater than what others are facing.

Onder said he provided testimony for court cases challenging restrictions on churches and synagogues in California, New Jersey and New York. He also has opposed a local order by the St. Louis County executive prohibiting indoor dining at restaurants.

Onder said there is little evidence that the virus spreads easier in worship services and restaurants than other places where people gather.

"I think it is time that we reign in some of these public health orders, and public health so-called authorities, and at very least put them under political control of the local governing body," he said.

Opponents of pandemic restrictions on businesses cite their harmful effect on the economy.

A December report by Moody's Investors Service warned that states face a negative outlook for 2021 because of weak revenue and budget uncertainties caused by the pandemic. In many states, revenues aren't likely to recover until the end of 2021 or later, Moody's said. That could create tough financial choices for lawmakers, especially in states that have had to tap their reserves, borrow or rely on one-time revenue sources to balance their current budgets.

Democratic Washington Gov. Jay Inslee wants lawmakers to take quick action in 2021 on his proposals to spend \$100 million in additional rental assistance and \$100 million in additional business assistance. They are part of a broader spending plan that would be paid for by tapping into the state's rainy day fund, then raising taxes in 2022.

"We're in the middle of a pandemic and simply have to have relief for our families," Inslee said.

Democratic lawmakers in Colorado also are hoping to offer additional state aid for small businesses, child care centers and the unemployed in 2021.

Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine said his upcoming budget plan is likely to include more funding for the state's health agency and its 113 local public health departments.

"We have a health department and a public health system that's been neglected too long," DeWine said. "One of the lessons from this pandemic is we cannot continue that. We have to pay attention."

In Wisconsin, the Democratic governor and Republican-majority Legislature have competing COVID-19 proposals.

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Gov. Tony Evers has outlined a coronavirus package that includes an extension of immediate eligibility for jobless benefits, even though Republican lawmakers are unlikely to fully embrace it. A plan in the state Assembly would provide COVID-19 liability protections to businesses, health care providers and schools. It also would require schools to pay parents \$371 if their children had to spend at least half their time in virtual classes since September.

In California, lawmakers are racing to extend eviction protections for renters that are due to expire Jan. 31. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom also has promised to seek more money in his January budget proposal for businesses that have been devastated by his repeated stay-at-home orders, as well as for schools that are struggling to provide distance learning or safely reopen classrooms.

A bill by Democratic Assemblyman Phil Ting, who heads the Assembly Budget Committee, would require public schools to reopen within two weeks of their county leaving the state's most restrictive shutdown tier.

Several California Republican lawmakers are sponsoring bills that would limit the governor's emergency declarations to 60 days, instead of allowing them to continue indefinitely.

"The governor has been unilaterally changing laws and regulations with zero input from the Legislature," said Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham. He added: "It's time to restore California to a constitutional democracy."

Associated Press writers James Anderson in Denver; Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; Jonathan Mattise in Nashville, Tennessee; Don Thompson in Sacramento, California; and Andrew Welsh-Huggins in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

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 into 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.

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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.

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.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 30, the 365th day of 2020. There is one day left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 30, 1903, about 600 people died when fire broke out at the recently opened Iroquois Theater in Chicago.

On this date:

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In 1813, British troops burned Buffalo, New York, during the War of 1812.

In 1853, the United States and Mexico signed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to buy some 45,000 square miles of land from Mexico for \$10 million in a deal known as the Gadsden Purchase.

In 1860, 10 days after South Carolina seceded from the Union, the state militia seized the United States Arsenal in Charleston.

In 1865, author Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India.

In 1922, Vladimir Lenin proclaimed the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which lasted nearly seven decades before dissolving in December 1991.

In 1936, the United Auto Workers union staged its first "sit-down" strike at the General Motors Fisher Body Plant No. 1 in Flint, Michigan. (The strike lasted until Feb. 11, 1937.)

In 1940, California's first freeway, the Arroyo Seco Parkway connecting Los Angeles and Pasadena, was officially opened by Gov. Culbert L. Olson.

In 1972, the United States halted its heavy bombing of North Vietnam.

In 1994, a gunman walked into a pair of suburban Boston abortion clinics and opened fire, killing two employees. (John C. Salvi III was later convicted of murder; he died in prison, an apparent suicide.)

In 2004, a fire broke out during a rock concert at a nightclub in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 194 people. Bandleader and clarinetist Artie Shaw died in Thousand Oaks, California, at age 94.

In 2006, a state funeral service was held in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda for former President Gerald R. Ford.

In 2009, seven CIA employees and a Jordanian intelligence officer were killed by a suicide bomber at a U.S. base in Khost (hohst), Afghanistan.

Ten years ago: Republican Lisa Murkowski was officially named winner of Alaska's U.S. Senate race following a period of legal fights and limbo that had lasted longer than the write-in campaign she waged to keep her job. Top-ranked Connecticut's record 90-game winning streak in women's basketball ended when No. 9 Stanford outplayed the Huskies in a 71-59 victory at Maples Pavilion.

Five years ago: Bill Cosby was charged with drugging and sexually assaulting a woman at his suburban Philadelphia home in 2004; it was the first criminal case brought against the comedian out of the torrent of allegations that destroyed his good-guy image as "America's Dad." (Cosby's first trial ended in a mistrial after jurors deadlocked; he was convicted on three charges at his retrial in April 2018 and was sentenced to three to 10 years in prison.)

One year ago: Chinese state media said a scientist who had set off an ethical debate with claims that he had made the world's first genetically edited babies was sentenced to three years in prison because of the research. A fierce winter storm created blizzard conditions in parts of Minnesota and the Dakotas, shutting down interstates and leading to hundreds of vehicle crashes. The NFL's New York Giants fired coach Pat Shurmur after a 4-and-12 season.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Russ Tamblyn is 86. Baseball Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax is 85. Folk singer Noel Paul Stookey is 83. TV director James Burrows is 80. Actor Fred Ward is 78. Singer-musician Michael Nesmith is 78. Actor Concetta Tomei (toh-MAY') is 75. Singer Patti Smith is 74. Rock singer-musician Jeff Lynne is 73. TV personality Meredith Vieira is 67. Actor Sheryl Lee Ralph is 65. Actor Patricia Kalember is 64. Country singer Suzy Bogguss is 64. Actor-comedian Tracey Ullman is 61. Rock musician Rob Hotchkiss is 60. Radio-TV commentator Sean Hannity is 59. Sprinter Ben Johnson is 59. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is 57. Actor George Newbern is 57. Movie director Bennett Miller is 54. Singer Jay Kay (Jamiroquai) is 51. Rock musician Byron McMackin (Pennywise) is 51. Actor Meredith Monroe is 51. Actor Daniel Sunjata is 49. Actor Maureen Flannigan is 48. Actor Jason Behr is 47. Golfer Tiger Woods is 45. TV personality-boxer Laila Ali is 43. Actor Lucy Punch is 43. Singer-actor Tyrese Gibson is 42. Actor Eliza Dushku is 40. Rock musician Tim Lopez (Plain White T's) is 40. Actor Kristin Kreuk is 38. Folk-rock singer-musician Wesley Schultz (The Lumineers) is 38. NBA player LeBron James is 36. Rhythm-and-blues singer Andra Day is 36. Actor Anna Wood is 35. Pop-rock singer Ellie Goulding (GOL'-ding) is 34. Actor Caity Lotz is 34. Actor Jeff Ward is 34. Country musician Eric Steedly is 30. Pop-rock musician Jamie Follesé (FAHL'-es-ay) (Hot Chelle (shel) Rae) is 29.