

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Schedule

- Saturday, Jan. 2: Webster Invitational Wrestling Tournament, 9 a.m.
- Tuesday, Jan. 5: Basketball doubleheader with Warner. Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5:15 p.m., Girls Varsity at 6:30 p.m., Boys Varsity at 8 p.m.
- Thursday, Jan. 7: Wrestling triangular in Groton starting at 6 p.m. with Redfield and Webster.
- Friday, Jan. 8: Girls Basketball at Sisseton with JV starting at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game.
- Saturday, Jan. 9: Quad Wrestling at Wolsey-Wessington High School starting at 10 a.m.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

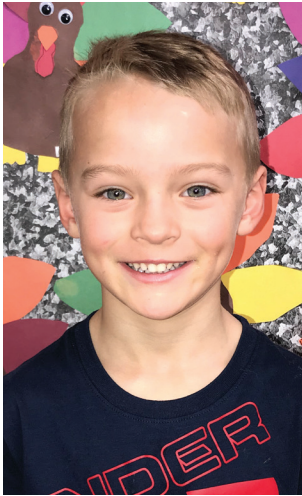
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Groton Area Junior Kindergarten 2020

I am thankful for...

Editor's Note: These were to run for Thanksgiving, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused some issues in putting this all together. So we are running them in our New Year's edition.



Saylor Gilchrist, son of Grant and Jennifer Gilchrist – my dog because he plays with me.



Taige Sombke, daughter of Rikki Clifford and Chris Sombke – my mom because she helps make me cookies and milk.



Sophia Gilchrist, daughter of Grant and Jennifer Gilchrist – my mom because she is nice.



Laken Kurth, daughter of Travis and Debbie Kurth – my mom because she lets me play with my friends.



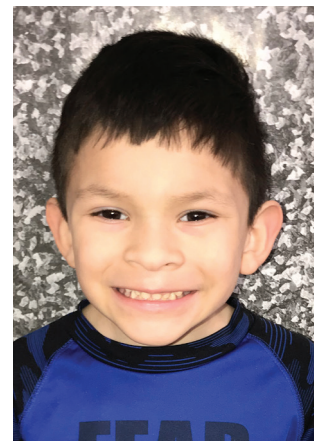
Paxton Eichler, son of Collin and Emily Eichler – my mom and dad because they read me a book at night.



Stetson Foertsch, son of Joe and Teri Foertsch – my family and friends because I love them so much.



Nolan Rose, son of Ian and Karen Rose – my family because we get to go to grandma and grandpas.



Michael Garcia, son of Tony and Melissa Garcia – Miss Schuring because she is my teacher.

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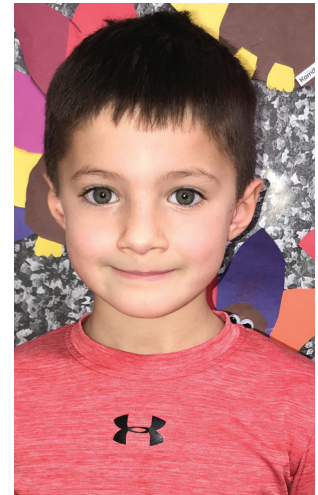
Maryn Sombke, daughter of Bryan and Whitney Sombke – my sister because she plays with me.



Gauge Johnson, son of Samantha Johnson – my mimi and papa because they come to my house.



Bennett Iverson, son of Jeremy and Jackie Iverson – my mom because she always plays Nintendo with me.



Braxten Sombke, son of Brett and Stephanie Sombke – my family because I like them.



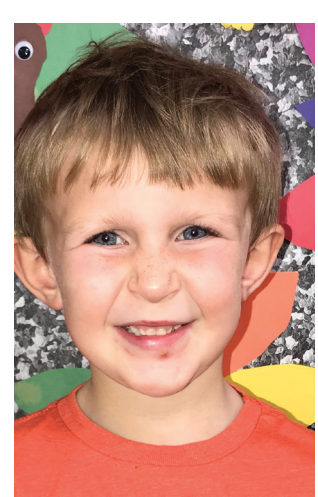
Madison Harry, daughter of Jeff and Betsy Harry – my family, friends, and Miss Schuring because they love me.



Ella Clocksene, daughter of Brandon and Alicia Clocksene – my mom because she works at Dollar General, so she can buy Cheetos.



Carter Zoellner, son of Darin and Anne Zoellner – my dog and my cat because they are my pets, and my mom and my dad.



Conrad Rix, son of Grant and Tracy Rix – daddy because I love him.

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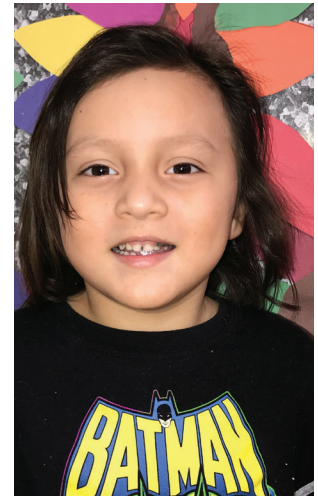
Jagger Penning, son of Brad and Janel Penning – my grandpa because he lets me go in the tractors and drive with him.



Kamden Gackle, son of Chad and Melissa Gackle – my mom and dad because they buy me toys.



KayLynn Furman, daughter of Sam Furman and Jessica Kjenstad – my mom and dad because they let me buy sweets when I don't have any sweets.



Deyner Rodriguez, son of Deyner Rodriguez and Sandra Briones – Miss Schuring, and my friends Matias and Diego because they come to my house.

Start Off 2021 On A New Journey to Fitness!



**New Year's
Day 2021
Only!**

*We'll even
show you how
the equipment
works!*

13 Main St., Downtown Groton

GDI

Living



Fitness

Open 24/7

Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460 or email paperpaul@grotonsd.net to set up a time slot for today!

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Sioux Valley has clean sweep of Groton Area's basketball teams

Sioux Valley won five games on Tuesday in basketball games played at Volga.

Sioux Valley won the C game game, 40-28. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the White House Inn.

The Cossacks won the girls junior varsity game, 63-26. Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with six points while Anna Fjeldheim and Lydia Meier each had four, Laila Roberts three, Sara Menzia, Brooklyn Hansen and Kennedy Hansen each had two points and Elizabeth Flihs added one.

The Groton Area junior varsity boys team lost, 56-49. Groton Area held a 16-11 lead, but then Sioux Valley scored 20 unanswered points to take a 31-16 lead. Sioux Valley led at the end of the third quarter, 46-31. The team then got a lecture from Coach Kyle Gerlach at the quarter break going into the fourth period. Groton Area closed to within seven, 49-42, and had a chance to close to within five, but the final margin was only seven, 56-49. Wyatt Hearnen led all scorers with 22 points while Favian Sanchez had 10, Jayden Zak seven, Cade Larson four, and Colby Dunker, Jackson Cogley and Logan Ringgenberg each had two points.

Both junior varsity games were broadcast live on GDLIVE.COM, sponsored by ThunderSeed with John Wheeting.

In the girls varsity game, Groton Area had a 9-7 lead, but then fell behind, 15-9, before Sioux Valley scored 20 straight points to take a 35-10 lead en route to a 53-31 win.

Groton Area was plagued with 20 turnovers and made 24 percent of its field goals. Sioux Valley had 12 turnovers and made 32 percent of its field goals. Gracie Traphagen led the Tigers with 14 points followed by Brooke Gengerke with 10, Allyssa Locke had five and Alyssa Thaler added two points

Sioux Valley finished off the night with a 63-44 win in the varsity boys game. Early in the game, there were five lead changes and the game was tied four times before the Cossacks started to pull away, unleashing six three-pointers. Tate Larson and Lane Tietz each had one three-pointer for the Tigers.

Tietz led the Tigers with 14 points followed by Larson with 13, Jacob Zak had six, Lucas Simon five, and Cole Simon, Favian Sanchez and Isaac Smith each had two points.

Groton Area had 14 turnovers and made 35 percent of its field goals. Sioux Valley had 10 turnovers and made 51 percent of its field goals.

Both varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Joel Bierman Farm Service, John Sieh Agency, Milbrandt Enterprises, Mary Johnson - Still Massage Therapy & Yoga Studio of Webster, Harr Motors with Bary Keith, Blocker Construction, Groton Vet Clinic and Allied Climate Professionals with Kevin Nehls.

#312 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I've been reading articles about enormous clandestine New Year's Eve parties being arranged across the country. As social media platforms and app companies have become aware of and removed posts about these gatherings, folks are finding old-fashioned ways to connect and plan their celebrations. I have also recently read that half of the nation's nursing home employees are refusing vaccination when it is offered; these are people in daily contact with our most vulnerable members of society. It appears we have large numbers of citizens who simply don't care who they kill, and that makes me sad. I had thought better of us.

And the old year is retiring with a bang: huge numbers. There were 249,600 new cases reported today, which is our fourth-worst day ever. And that means we broke 20 million cases before the year ran out on us, bringing us to 20,026,400, 1.3% more than yesterday. One last time this year, here's this history:

- April 28 – 1 million – 98 days
- June 11 – 2 million – 44 days
- July 8 – 3 million – 27 days
- July 23 – 4 million – 15 days
- August 9 – 5 million – 17 days
- August 31 – 6 million – 22 days
- September 24 – 7 million – 24 days
- October 15 – 8 million – 21 days
- October 29 – 9 million – 14 days
- November 8 – 10 million – 10 days
- November 15 – 11 million – 7 days
- November 21 – 12 million – 6 days
- November 27 – 13 million – 6 days
- December 3 – 14 million – 6 days
- December 7 – 15 million – 4 days
- December 12 – 16 million – 5 days
- December 17 – 17 million – 5 days
- December 21 – 18 million – 4 days
- December 26 – 19 million – 5 days
- December 31 – 20 million – 5 days

Hospitalizations were at another new record level today for the third consecutive day with 125,379. There were 3835 deaths reported today, just a handful off the record. This year, we've lost 346,037 Americans to this virus we'd barely heard of at the beginning of the year, 1.1% more than we'd lost yesterday. Let's hope January is the month when we turn a corner.

You may recall just a couple of weeks ago I reported on a second experimental concert held in Europe to study transmission in crowds. The first such experiment was done in Germany, and this latest one was done in Barcelona. The basic set-up for the Barcelona experiment was that concert-goers were screened upon entry to the venue using an antigen test, a less-accurate, but rapid, diagnostic test that gives on-the-spot results; and the primary interest was in determining how effective it is in preventing transmission to screen with these quick tests at an event like this. Half of those who tested negative were admitted to the event, and the other half were sent home to serve as controls. Those who attended the five-hour event were required to wear masks and use hand sanitizer, but were free to dance and sing and crowd together. Specimens were also collected upon entry and again after an interval of time; these were subjected to the more accurate RT-PCR testing. Preliminary data have been released on the nearly 1000 participants. Everyone was retested after eight days, and the results showed zero infections among the 463 concert attendees and two positive tests among the 496 controls. We have no word on whether anyone tested positive with the RT-PCR on Day 1, and that will surely be relevant; but I would think we're shaping up to draw some preliminary conclusions about holding large events if everyone in attendance is screened.

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We'll watch for further and more complete data in coming weeks.

I have an update on more vaccine clinical trials. Johnson & Johnson has just finished enrolling 45,000 volunteers in a phase 3 study in the US and several other countries. This is a candidate which is using a harmless adenovirus to insert a DNA version of the gene for spike protein into cells where it will cause production of the protein and, if all goes as expected, an immune response to that protein. This one is a single-dose vaccine, which would certainly be easier to distribute and administer, what with no need to keep track of recipients for a call-back in three or four weeks. It is also notable that, because DNA is far more stable in solution, the vaccine can be stored under normal refrigeration. A read-out of trial results is expected in January.

The Oxford/AstraZeneca clinical trial we discussed a couple of days ago is still enrolling US volunteers, although administration of the candidate can begin before all have been enrolled. That trial should return some data within several weeks as well. Having crazy rates of spread is bad for the public, but good for getting quick answers from clinical trials.

Yesterday, the CDC fleshed out its recommendations around allergic reactions to the two authorized Covid-19 vaccines now on the market. I want to point out that serious allergic reactions have been rare, but also remind you that, when they happen, they're nothing to mess with; it's good to keep in mind, however, these reactions are treatable. The current list of recommendations in this regard, a couple of which have been in place for some time and then some new ones, are as follows:

(1) If you have a severe allergic reaction to the first dose of vaccine, you should not receive the second dose. (It is not unusual for allergic reactions to worsen each time you are exposed to the same allergen, so this recommendation comes as no surprise.)

(2) Patients should all be observed for a minimum of 15 minutes after vaccination, and those with a history of severe allergic reactions to other vaccines or injections should be observed for at least 30 minutes. Most severe allergic reactions occur within minutes, so this safety measure, along with vaccination venues having appropriate treatment on hand, is vastly reassuring.

(3) People who have had allergic reactions to polyethylene glycol or to polysorbate should not be vaccinated. This precaution comes because there is polyethylene glycol in both of these vaccines and polysorbate, while it is not an ingredient in either one, has shown cross reactivity with polyethylene glycol.

(4) People with a history of immediate allergic reaction to vaccines or injected drugs in the past are encouraged to put off receiving these vaccines until they have consulted with an allergist or immunologist.

(5) People with allergies to other substances—foods, drugs taken orally, environmental substances like pollen—may be vaccinated, but definitely should observe the 15-minute waiting period.

I've been doing this for just over 10 months now. I can assure you that, when I began, I hadn't a clue we'd still be here and still talking about this virus day after day after day right into another year; yet here we are. As this thing has dragged on, we've all had our moments feeling sorry for ourselves and generally pitiful. I get that. But I am going to suggest, as we, together, close out this sorry excuse for a year, still deep in a pandemic, that we give ourselves a chance to reconsider our perspective, that we contemplate taking a walk around to the other side of this big problem we all share so we can look at it from a new angle.

A few days ago, my friend and former colleague Brian Spielbauer did just that, and with his permission I am sharing the new perspective he gained from the exercise.

"The Gifts of 2020

"There are many gifts that 2020 offers, but we must look and take note of them.

"1. Take nothing for granted. Not a child's game, time with friends, a phone call with loved ones, or a casual conversation on a walk (or the walk!). Everything can be gone and we lost many moments and people this year. Don't take them for granted, ever.

"2. Realize we need others and they need us. We enjoy helping others and have been in a place where we have been able to do that. This year we needed help, and lot's of it. Friends are closer friends, families are closer, and our understanding of our connectedness has hopefully grown.

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"3. Realize how great our world is. I have seen countless pictures of sunsets, sunrises, campfires, and families. We were forced to slow down and take note, and I think we liked what we saw. The world can drive us crazy, but you don't have to get on that ride if you don't want to.

"4. Live with urgency. With every passing, another life ends. I read posts about parents, friends, and family members who have gone. I am sad for their passing and feel for the hurt of the people left behind, but it only drives me to get the most of every day. All of our days are numbered, so let's stop wasting them."

Then, after giving us plenty to think about in terms of how we frame the year we are leaving behind, he offers us this wish for 2021: "I hope you learned your own lessons this year that you will pass forward in either how you act or your words of wisdom to younger generations. Don't live in fear, live with urgency and passion to do more, help more, be there for others, and allow them to help you if and when needed. If we don't learn the lessons of 2020 we will be doomed to repeat it, and I would just as soon not!"

While I was thinking about that, I read a piece in the New York Times by Julia Cho, a mom who had urged her 12-year-old daughter, Audrey, to write down her feelings as she was feeling challenged during this difficult time. Audrey did, in the form of a letter to her future self. The text of the letter, published in her mom's piece with the wish that future-Audrey will read it every New Year's Eve, begins with "I've come from 2020 to remind you not to forget. . . . I am begging you to remember." Here's the meat of it: "I am struggling and would do anything to get out of 2020 and this pandemic, to see my friends and family normally. You are able to do that. You have what I want so badly. So please, I urge you to enjoy your life, your friends, your family, your experiences."

In fact, there's really no reason to wait—until tomorrow, until you feel more energetic, until the pandemic is over—to find that enjoyment. I suspect we've all wasted too much time this year—waiting to live until

. . . .

Maybe just start.

I wish you good health, good cheer, and the joy of living as we close the door on 2020 and open the door on the future we're going to build together. Happy new year to each of you!

We'll talk next year.

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December 31 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: +445 (99,164 total) Positivity Rate: 8.1%

Total Tests: 5518 (761,203 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1181 (372,640 total)

Hospitalized: +33 (5672 total). 297 currently hospitalized (+4)

Avera St. Luke's: 11 (+2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 4 (+1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 2 (+1) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 7 (+3) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-1) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +24 (1488 total)

Females: 12, Males: 12

Age Groups: 30s=1, 40s=1, 50s=1, 70s=7, 80+=14

Counties: Beadle-1, Brookings-1, Brown-3, Clay-1, Codington-2, Davison-1, Faulk-1, Grant-2, Lincoln-1, McCook-1, Minnehaha-2, Pennington-2, Potter-1, Roberts-1, Tripp-1, Turner-2, Yankton-1.

Recovered: +553 (91,527 total)

Active Cases: -9 (5729)

Percent Recovered: 92.8%

Beadle (35) +7 positive, +8 recovered (73 active cases)

Brookings (30) +25 positive, +15 recovered (212 active cases)

Brown (60): +27 positive, +11 recovered (251 active cases)

Clark (2): +1 positive, +0 recovered (18 active cases)

Clay (12): +2 positive, +3 recovered (84 active cases)

Codington (70): +31 positive, +15 recovered (240 active cases)

Davison (53): +11 positive, +4 recovered (103 active cases)

Day (20): +8 positive, +2 recovered (40 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +7 positive, +5 recovered (58 active cases)

Faulk (12): +0 positive, +2 recovered (4 active cases)

Grant (35): +5 positive, +2 recovered (29 active cases)

Hanson (3): +0 positive, +0 recovered (17 active cases)

Hughes (25): +14 positive, +9 recovered (124 active cases)

Lawrence (28): +14 positive, +15 recovered (113 active cases)

Lincoln (66): +22 positive, +25 recovered (435 active cases)

Marshall (4): +0 positive, +1 recovered (21 active cases)

McCook (22): +0 positive, +1 recovered (38 active cases)

McPherson (1): +1 positive, +1 recovery (10 active case)

Minnehaha (264): +81 positive, +113 recovered (1382 active cases)

Pennington (131): +80 positive, +73 recovered (773 active cases)

Potter (3): +0 positive, +1 recovered (8 active cases)

Roberts (32): +7 positive, +9 recovered (96 active cases)

Spink (24): +5 positive, +1 recovered (39 active cases)

Walworth (14): +4 positive, +3 recovered (35 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 30:

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 31:

- 4.5% rolling 14-day positivity
- 303 new positives
- 7,859 susceptible test encounters
- 94 currently hospitalized (-2)
- 1,821 active cases (+68)
- 1,292 total deaths (+10)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	414	383	775	8	Substantial	25.00%
Beadle	2509	2401	5190	35	Substantial	7.95%
Bennett	355	341	1084	8	Moderate	3.45%
Bon Homme	1477	1415	1874	23	Substantial	25.40%
Brookings	2981	2739	10024	30	Substantial	6.39%
Brown	4426	4115	11093	60	Substantial	20.86%
Brule	627	608	1691	7	Moderate	6.25%
Buffalo	410	395	853	10	Minimal	14.29%
Butte	881	824	2831	18	Substantial	15.38%
Campbell	115	107	207	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1112	1052	3534	11	Substantial	14.55%
Clark	313	293	857	2	Moderate	6.38%
Clay	1625	1529	4510	12	Substantial	11.88%
Codington	3452	3142	8431	70	Substantial	15.29%
Corson	449	424	889	10	Moderate	13.04%
Custer	672	641	2406	9	Substantial	18.60%
Davison	2718	2562	5714	53	Substantial	14.34%
Day	537	477	1543	20	Substantial	23.44%
Deuel	412	379	994	7	Substantial	12.50%
Dewey	1263	1164	3489	12	Substantial	34.09%
Douglas	382	351	824	7	Substantial	32.00%
Edmunds	369	307	885	4	Substantial	20.45%
Fall River	454	420	2287	12	Substantial	17.65%
Faulk	313	297	598	12	Moderate	0.00%
Grant	826	762	1931	35	Substantial	4.11%
Gregory	482	444	1087	26	Substantial	9.09%
Haakon	233	199	469	7	Substantial	29.17%
Hamlin	606	535	1512	34	Substantial	15.49%
Hand	312	298	700	2	Moderate	0.00%
Hanson	311	291	603	3	Moderate	17.39%
Harding	89	85	154	1	Minimal	14.29%
Hughes	2023	1874	5634	25	Substantial	3.05%

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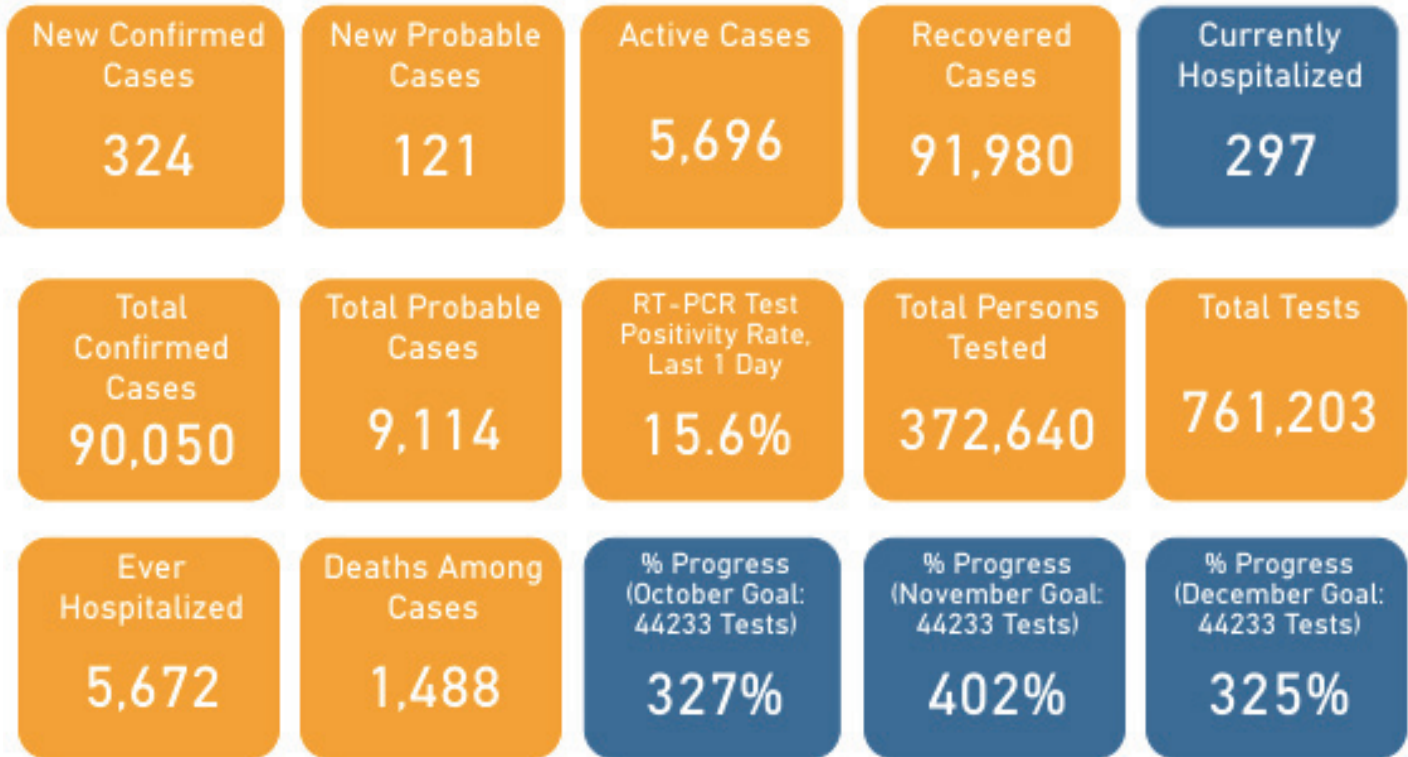
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Hutchinson	700	648	2037	16	Substantial	17.54%
Hyde	132	129	367	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	262	241	855	8	Moderate	18.18%
Jerauld	259	234	499	15	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	67	63	184	0	Minimal	14.29%
Kingsbury	538	487	1421	13	Substantial	31.25%
Lake	1020	948	2763	16	Substantial	19.28%
Lawrence	2555	2414	7554	28	Substantial	20.68%
Lincoln	6780	6279	17401	66	Substantial	15.60%
Lyman	520	495	1706	9	Moderate	6.45%
Marshall	260	235	1002	4	Substantial	20.59%
McCook	683	623	1406	22	Substantial	22.03%
McPherson	181	170	505	1	Moderate	2.86%
Meade	2231	2087	6692	24	Substantial	15.24%
Mellette	215	209	659	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	225	201	501	6	Moderate	31.25%
Minnehaha	24977	23331	67740	264	Substantial	12.16%
Moody	535	490	1585	14	Substantial	15.15%
Oglala Lakota	1927	1780	6175	35	Substantial	17.71%
Pennington	11197	10293	33782	131	Substantial	21.66%
Perkins	285	242	670	11	Substantial	32.43%
Potter	300	289	715	3	Moderate	9.30%
Roberts	984	856	3743	32	Substantial	24.54%
Sanborn	305	296	613	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	703	640	1858	24	Substantial	5.52%
Stanley	272	255	776	2	Substantial	0.00%
Sully	111	99	252	3	Minimal	28.57%
Todd	1162	1106	3793	19	Substantial	20.90%
Tripp	629	592	1324	12	Substantial	16.67%
Turner	970	868	2376	49	Substantial	14.93%
Union	1608	1455	5394	30	Substantial	17.10%
Walworth	618	569	1619	14	Substantial	16.67%
Yankton	2514	2248	8244	26	Substantial	24.28%
Ziebach	291	254	693	8	Moderate	9.09%
Unassigned	0	0	1899	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	3702	0
10-19 years	10905	0
20-29 years	18082	4
30-39 years	16424	13
40-49 years	14211	25
50-59 years	14070	75
60-69 years	11274	186
70-79 years	5937	323
80+ years	4559	862

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	51808	718
Male	47356	770

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Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

18

New Probable Cases

9

Active Cases

251

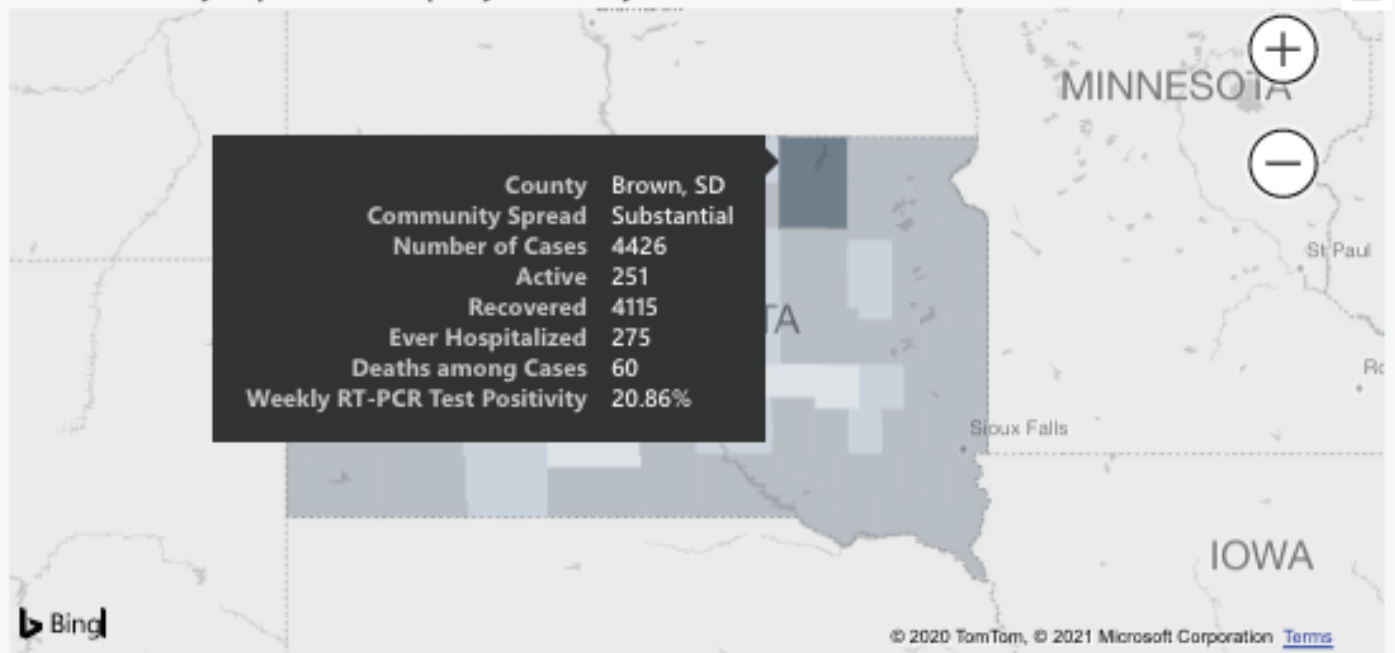
Recovered Cases

4,115

Currently Hospitalized

297

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases

4,149

Total Probable Cases

277

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

24.3%

Total Persons Tested

15,519

Total Tests

36,197

Ever Hospitalized

275

Deaths Among Cases

60

% Progress (October Goal: 44233 Tests)

327%

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

325%

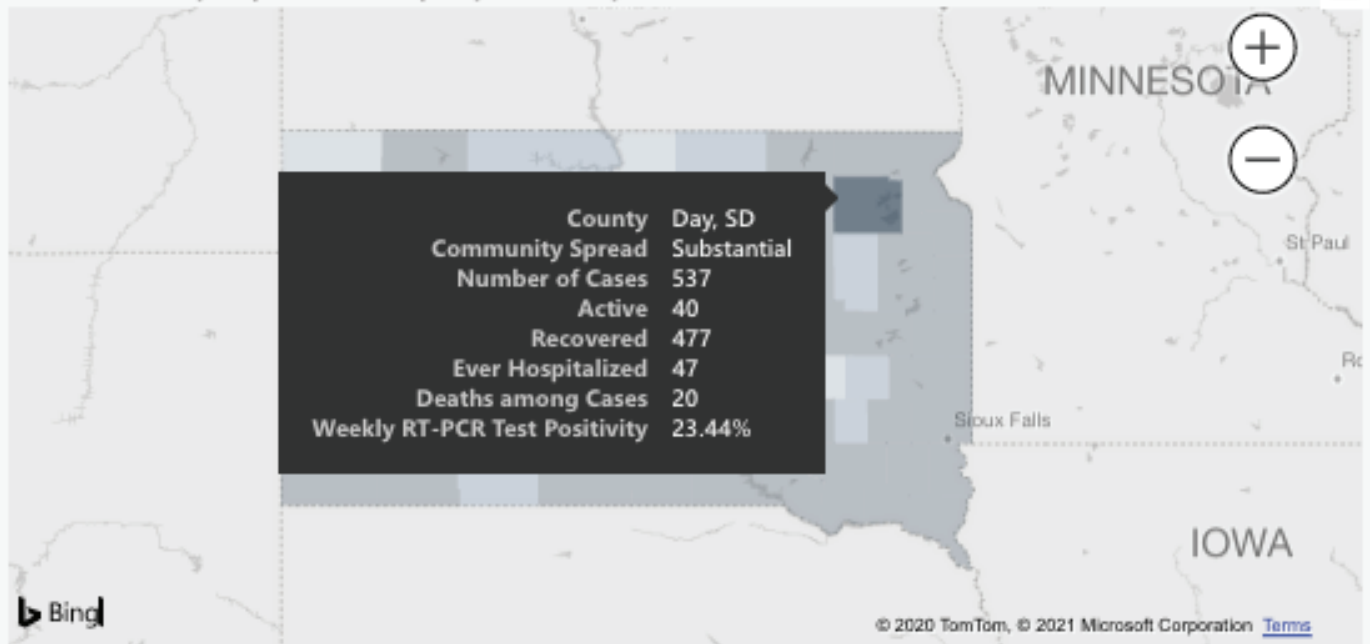
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



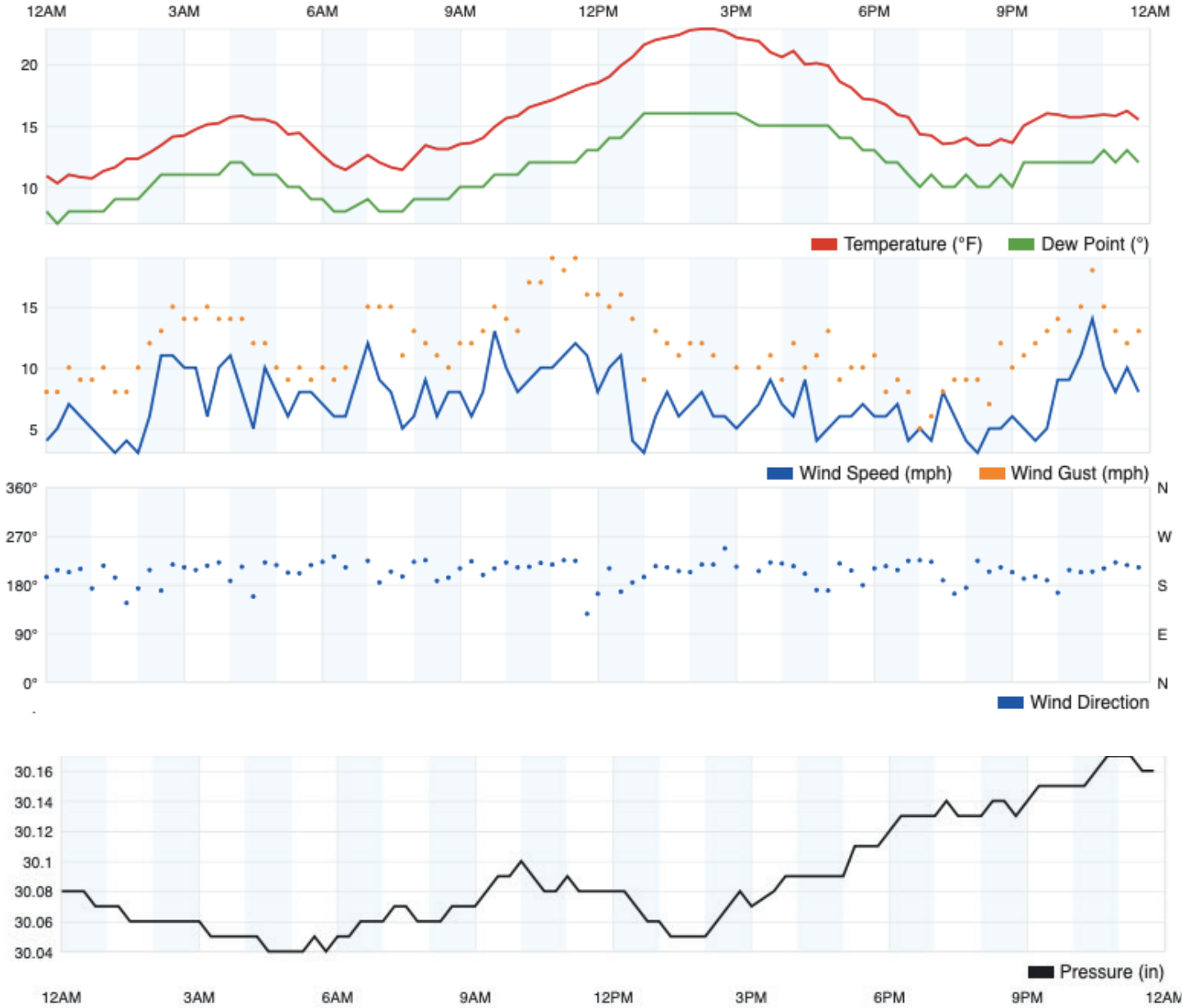
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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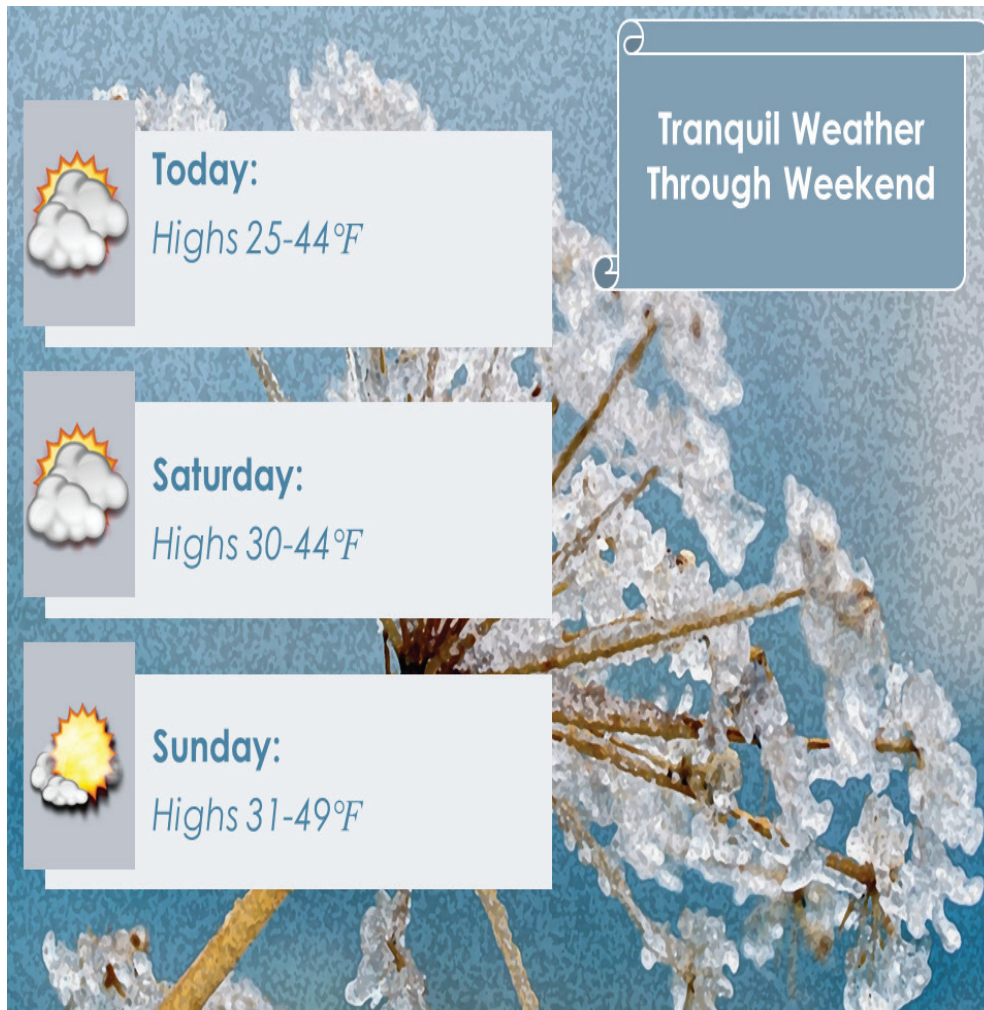
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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New Year's Day	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Patchy Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Decreasing Clouds	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 30 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 16 °F	High: 37 °F



Today:
Highs 25-44°F

Saturday:
Highs 30-44°F

Sunday:
Highs 31-49°F

Tranquil Weather Through Weekend

Dry and tranquil weather is expected region-wide this weekend, with generally above normal temperatures. #sdwx #mnwx

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Today in Weather History

January 1, 1960: The winter storm began on New Year's Eve as a low-pressure center moved from Colorado northeast to the Great Lakes. Snowfall ranged from 5 to 10 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. High winds on the 1st and 2nd caused low visibilities and drifted highways over affecting holiday travel. There were scattered power and telephone outages due to breakage from wind and ice. The storm wended down in the afternoon of the 2nd.

1767: The morning temperature in Boston was -8°F!

1864: A historic cold blast of air charged southeast from the Northern Plains to Ohio Valley. Chicago had a high temperature of -16°. A farmer near Hometown, Indiana, reported the same high temperature as Chicago, with a low of 21 degrees below zero. He remarked "rough day" in his weather diary. Minneapolis had a temperature of 25 degrees below zero at 2 PM. St. Louis, Missouri, saw an overnight low of 24 degrees below zero. The Mississippi was frozen solid with people able to cross it.

1886: Norway's coldest night on record occurred as the low temperature dropped to -60.5°F at Karasjok. Meteorologisk Institutt.

1888: The Signal Corps office opened in Rapid City, South Dakota, on January 1, 1888. It was located in the Sweeney Building at the corner of 7th and Main Streets. The high and low temperature that day was 6 and -17°F.

1892: At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dandelions were in bloom in parks.

1935: The Associated Press Wire Photo Service made its debut, delivering the great weather maps, twice each day to newspapers across the country. The first photo transmitted was a plane crash in the Adirondack of New York on this day. The plane crashed during the evening hours on December 28, but the rescue did not occur until New Year's Day.

1961: A three-day-long ice storm was beginning over northern Idaho, which produced an accumulation of ice eight inches thick, a U.S. record. Dense fog, which blanketed much of northern Idaho from Grangeville to the Canadian border, deposited the ice on power and phone lines, causing widespread power outages.

1964: A snowstorm struck the Deep South on December 31st, 1963 through January 1st, 1964. Meridian MS received 15 inches of snow, 10.5 inches blanketed Bay St Louis MS, and 4.5 inches fell at New Orleans, LA. The University of Alabama Head Football Coach "Bear" Bryant said that the only thing that could have messed up his team's chances in the Sugar Bowl against Ole Miss in New Orleans, LA was a freak snowstorm. Well, much to his chagrin, 4.5 inches of snow fell the night before the big game. Alabama won the game 12-7 anyway. Freezing temperatures then prevailed for New Year's Day.

1999: The start of 1999 was ushered in with snow, ice, and freezing weather across central and south-central Nebraska. On New Year's Day, a steady snowfall along and north of Interstate 80 dumped from 1 to 5 inches of snow. By late morning, freezing drizzle developed southeast of Hastings and eventually coated area roads with a layer of ice. Light snow later that evening made travel even more treacherous. Several accidents occurred on the Interstates and Highway 30. Once the ice and snow ended, arctic air spilled across the area abroad 20 to 30 mph north winds. Blowing and drifting of the fallen snow caused reduced visibilities for a time on the 2nd. Temperatures dropped to 5 to 15 below zero through midday the 3rd.

2011: Southern and central Mississippi saw 11 tornadoes during the night of December 31st into the morning hours of January 1st. Of the 11, two were EF-3 with two more EF-2. Six were EF-1 with one EF-0.

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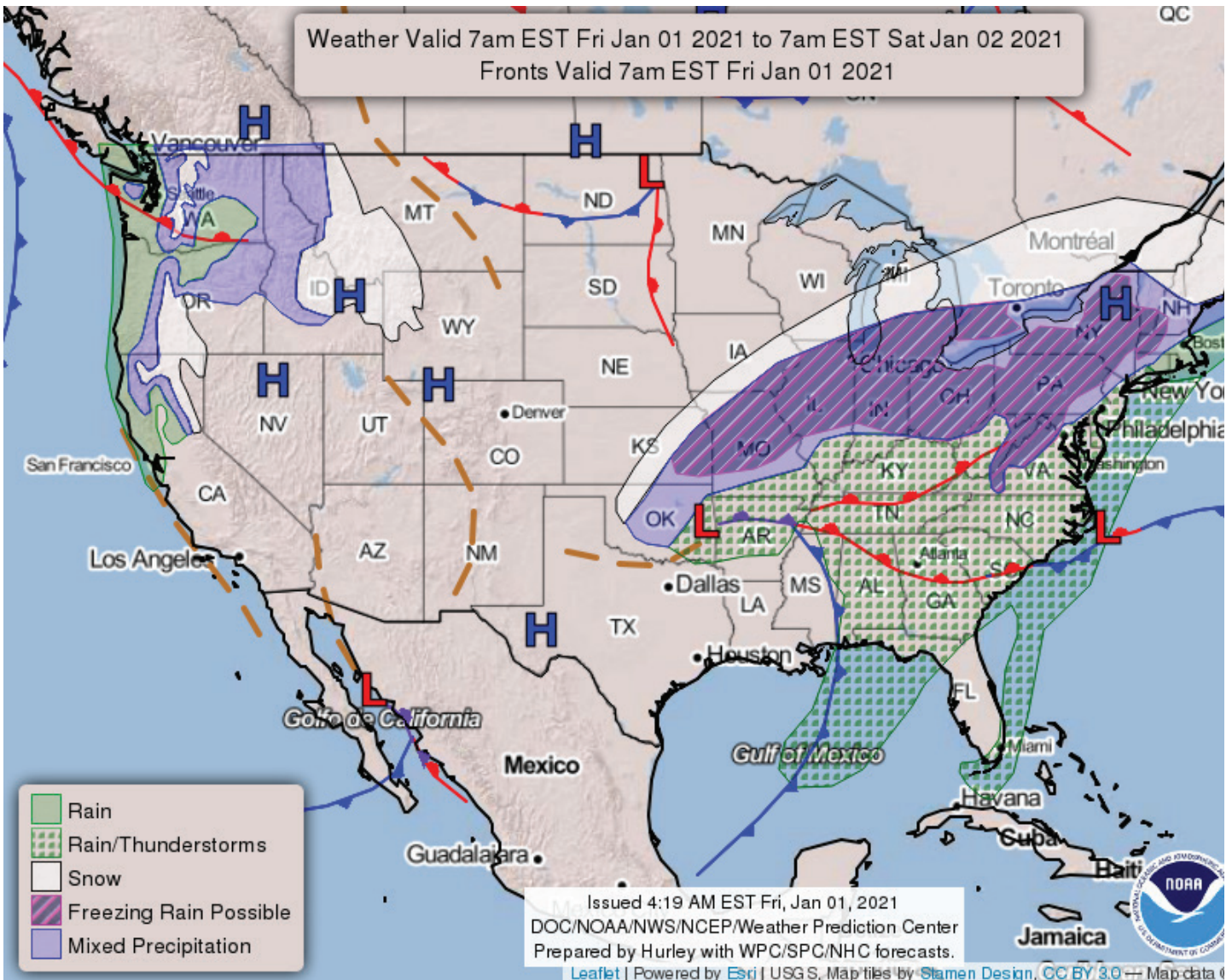
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 23 °F at 2:10 PM
Low Temp: 10 °F at 12:11 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 10:55 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 53° in 1998
Record Low: -32 in 1918
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.52
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.72
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 5:02 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:14 a.m.



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THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Have you ever caught "lightning bugs" and placed them in a jar with vents in the lid so they could breathe? It was a favorite activity for children in our neighborhood when I was a child. We would "capture" them and then place them in a glass jar where their tiny bright "lights" would glow in the darkness of the night. After watching them go "on and off" for a while, we would "free" them, and they would fly off into the darkness fulfilling God's purpose for them.

Had they remained in the jar, they would have eventually died. God, however, intended for them to be free and happy and live the life He planned for them.

It's like that with us. God planned a unique life for everyone: a life of happiness and peace. But happiness can only come if we are free. Some think that happiness and pleasure are synonymous. They are not. Happiness is not derived from possessions nor destroyed by poverty. There is a story of a king who wanted the shirt "off the back" of the happiest man in his kingdom. When they found the man, he did not have a shirt - he only had a ragged cloak.

Happiness is not what happens to us - it is what happens within us. It is the by-product of what occurs in us if we live in agreement with the will of God. Life in His will brings us freedom from being "contaminated" by the things of the world. Happiness fills lives that are "regulated" by the Word of God. Following His Word and His way will bring pleasure and peace.

Psalm 1:1 promises "a blessed - or - a happy life" to those who delight in and obey His law. His law will set us free from being contained and controlled by worldly things that fade.

Prayer: Father, may we set our eyes on things that are permanent and not passing. May we discover the joy and peace and satisfaction that only comes from You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. Psalm 1:1

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Hanson 62, Irene-Wakonda 43

Sioux Falls Lincoln 61, Pierre 52

Waubay/Summit 77, Wilmot 52

Winner 71, Bon Homme 42

Entringer Classic=

Baltic 60, Colman-Egan 36

Dell Rapids 71, Dell Rapids St. Mary 56

Deubrook 76, Garretson 50

Deuel 71, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 57

Elkton-Lake Benton 60, Milbank 47

Estelline/Hendricks 63, Chester 53

Flandreau 72, Arlington 36

Hamlin 70, Lake Preston 60

Madison 73, Castlewood 43

Sioux Valley 54, DeSmet 50

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Alcester-Hudson 47, Elk Point-Jefferson 40

Hanson 46, Irene-Wakonda 45

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 45, Watertown 40

Winner 57, Bon Homme 37

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

Man found dead of gunshot wound on Sioux Falls street

SIOX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say a man was found dead with a gunshot wound to the chest in a western Sioux Falls neighborhood.

The Argus Leader reports police responded to a call around 11:43 p.m. Wednesday to a report of a person lying in the street. Police Lt. Terrance Matia identified the victim as 27-year-old Mitchell James Houchins.

Police said the man was pronounced dead at a Sioux Falls hospital. Matia said police are certain it's a homicide and not a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Matia said a suspect in the shooting is believed to be someone known to Houchins.

December marks deadliest month for South Dakota virus deaths

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials have reported 445 new coronavirus cases and 24 new deaths.

The deaths confirmed Thursday bring December's death toll to 542, up from the previous high of 521 in November. The state's overall death toll since the pandemic began is 1,488.

The state's death count is the 38th highest in the country and the sixth highest per capita at 167.8 deaths per 100,000 people, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

Hospitalizations increased by four to 297 on Thursday.

Active cases declined Thursday by 33 to 5,696 and recoveries increased by 453.

There were 693.4 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks

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30th in the country for new cases per capita. One in every 329 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

There have been more than 21,000 South Dakota residents vaccinated as of Thursday.

Pence seeks dismissal of suit aiming to overturn election

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has asked a federal judge to dismiss a last-gasp lawsuit led by a House Republican that seeks to give Vice President Mike Pence the power to overturn the results of the presidential election won by Joe Biden when Congress formally counts the Electoral College votes next week.

Pence, as president of the Senate, will oversee the Wednesday session and declare the winner of the White House race. The Electoral College this month cemented Biden's 306-232 victory, and multiple legal efforts by President Donald Trump's campaign to challenge the results have failed.

The suit names Pence, who has a largely ceremonial role in next week's proceedings, as the defendant and asks the court to throw out the 1887 law that spells out how Congress handles the vote counting. It asserts that the vice president "may exercise the exclusive authority and sole discretion in determining which electoral votes to count for a given State."

The Justice Department is representing Pence in a case that aims to find a way to keep his boss, President Donald Trump, in power. In a court filing in Texas on Wednesday, the department said Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Republican electors from Arizona "have sued the wrong defendant" — if, in fact, any of those suing actually have "a judicially cognizable claim."

"It is the role prescribed for the Senate and the House of Representatives in the Electoral Count Act to which plaintiffs object, not any actions that Vice President Pence has taken. ... A suit to establish that the Vice President has discretion over the count, filed against the Vice President, is a walking legal contradiction."

Trump, the first president to lose a reelection bid in almost 30 years, has attributed his defeat to widespread voter fraud. But a range of nonpartisan election officials and Republicans has confirmed there was no fraud in the November contest that would change the results of the election. That includes former Attorney General William Barr, who said he saw no reason to appoint a special counsel to look into the president's claims about the 2020 election. He resigned from his post last week.

Trump and his allies have filed roughly 50 lawsuits challenging election results, and nearly all has been dismissed or dropped. He's also lost twice at the Supreme Court.

Biden's pick to lead Treasury made over \$7M in speaking fees

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's choice to be treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, collected more than \$7 million in speaking fees in 2019 and 2020 from major financial firms and tech giants including Citi, Goldman Sachs and Google, according to disclosure forms filed as part of her nomination.

Yellen's was one of three financial disclosures filed by Biden transition officials that were made public on Thursday by the Office of Government Ethics. In a separate filing, Yellen listed firms and banks where she had received speaking fees and said she intended to "seek written authorization" from ethics officials to "participate personally and substantially" in matters involving them.

Yellen was the Federal Reserve chair from 2014 to 2018. Her term was not renewed by President Donald Trump.

Her selection by Biden to lead the Treasury Department has been cheered by progressive Democrats, who support Yellen's work as a labor economist who has long prioritized combating economic inequality. Since her nomination was announced, Yellen has pledged to work to combat systemic racism and climate change.

But receiving steep payments from Wall Street bankers and other powerful corporations could become an issue as her nomination works its way through a closely divided and potentially contentious Senate. Hillary Clinton faced criticism from the left wing of the Democratic Party while running for president in

2016 for having received past, lucrative speaking fees at Wall Street firms.

Also released Thursday were disclosure forms from Biden's choice to be secretary of state, Antony Blinken, who detailed advising clients including Bank of America and Facebook as part of a consulting firm he co-founded. Avril Haines, Biden's choice to be national intelligence director, disclosed being a consultant at the same firm, WestExec Advisors.

Quiet New Year gives breathing room after UK-EU Brexit split

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A steady trickle of trucks rolled off ferries and trains on both sides of the English Channel on Friday, a quiet New Year's Day after a seismic overnight shift in relations between the European Union and Britain.

The busy goods route between southeast England and northwest France is on the front line of changes now that the U.K. has fully left the economic embrace of the 27-nation bloc, the final stage of Brexit.

"For the majority of trucks, they won't even notice the difference," said John Keefe, spokesman for Eurotunnel, which transports vehicles under the Channel. "There was always the risk that if this happened at a busy time then we could run into some difficulties, but it's happening overnight on a bank holiday and a long weekend."

Britain left the European bloc's vast single market for people, goods and services at 11 p.m. London time on New Year's Eve, in the biggest single economic change the country has experienced since World War II. A new U.K.-EU trade deal will bring restrictions and red tape, but for British Brexit supporters, it means reclaiming national independence from the EU and its web of rules.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson called it "an amazing moment for this country."

"We have our freedom in our hands, and it is up to us to make the most of it," he said in a New Year's video message.

The historic moment passed quietly, with U.K. lockdown measures against the coronavirus curtailing mass gatherings to celebrate or mourn. Brexit, which had dominated public debate in Britain for years, was even pushed off some newspaper front pages by news of the huge vaccination effort against COVID-19.

In the subdued streets of London — which voted strongly to remain in the EU in Britain's 2016 membership referendum — there was little enthusiasm for Brexit.

"I think it is a disaster, among many disasters this year," said Matt Steel, a doctor. "It is a crappy deal. I don't really see any positives in it, to be honest."

The break comes 11 months after a political Brexit that left the two sides in a "transition period" in which EU rights and rules continued to apply to Britain.

The trade agreement sealed on Christmas Eve after months of tense negotiations ensures that the two sides can continue to buy and sell goods without tariffs or quotas. But companies face sheaves of new costs and paperwork, including customs declarations and border checks.

The English Channel port of Dover and the Eurotunnel braced for delays as the new measures were introduced.

The vital supply route was snarled after France closed its border to U.K. truckers for 48 hours during Christmas week in response to a fast-spreading variant of the virus identified in England. Some 15,000 truckers needed emergency virus tests just to get into France, a process that left many stuck in their trucks for days.

But the pandemic and a holiday weekend meant cross-Channel traffic was light on Friday. Britain has also delayed imposing full customs checks for several months so that companies can adjust.

In the French port of Calais, officials said the new computer systems were working well and truckers had the right paperwork.

"Brexit ... is not a synonym for congestion, as we say in English, nor a synonym for traffic disruption, but everyone must do their work," said Jean-Marc Puisseuseau, president of the Ports of Calais and Boulogne-Sur-Mer.

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Jean Marc Thillier, director of customs for the region, warned that the border faced a "trial by fire" when traffic picks up after the holiday weekend.

Brexit also brought new checks across the Irish Sea. A dozen trucks rolled off the first ferry to arrive at Dublin Port from Wales before dawn, clearing the new customs inspections without delays.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said trade would change "fundamentally."

"We're now going to see the 80 billion euros (\$97 billion) worth of trade across the Irish Sea between Britain and Ireland disrupted by an awful lot more checks and declarations, and bureaucracy and paperwork, and cost and delay."

Hundreds of millions of individuals in Britain and the bloc also face changes to their daily lives, with new rules for work visas, travel insurance and pet paperwork.

And years of discussion and argument lie ahead, over everything from fair competition to fish quotas, as Britain and the EU settle into their new relationship as friends, neighbors and rivals.

Brexit could also have major constitutional repercussions for the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, which shares a border with EU member Ireland, remains more closely tied to the bloc's economy under the divorce terms. So while goods will continue to flow freely across the Irish land border, there will be new procedures for trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. In the long run that could pull Northern Ireland away from the rest of the U.K. and toward Ireland.

In Scotland, which voted strongly in 2016 to remain, Brexit has bolstered support for separation from the U.K. The country's pro-independence First Minister Nicola Sturgeon tweeted: "Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on."

European leaders, whose patience with Britain has run short during years of Brexit melodrama, expressed regret at the U.K.'s departure, and anger at the forces that drove it.

"The United Kingdom remains our neighbor but also our friend and ally," said French President Emmanuel Macron in his New Year's address. "This choice of leaving Europe, this Brexit, was the child of European malaise and lots of lies and false promises."

Video journalists Jo Kearney in Folkestone, England and Alex Turnbull in Calais, France contributed to this story.

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

EXPLAINER: Should vaccine volunteers now get the real thing?

By MARION RENAULT Associated Press

Tens of thousands of Americans have volunteered to test COVID-19 vaccines, but only about half of them got the real thing during trials.

Now, with the first vaccine rollouts and a surge in coronavirus infections, experts are debating what to do about the half that got a dummy shot.

Should everyone now be offered a vaccine? Or should the two groups in the Pfizer and Moderna studies remain intact in order to collect long-term data on how well the vaccines work?

"There's a real tension here," said Dr. Jesse Goodman, an infectious disease specialist and former chief scientist at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "There's not an easy answer."

HOW VACCINE STUDIES WORK

New drugs, vaccines or treatments usually go through rigorous tests and evaluations before reaching regulators for approval.

For vaccines, researchers compare what happens when a large group of volunteers gets the shots, versus what happens to another large group that doesn't. They compare side effects in each group. And they measure the vaccine's effectiveness by looking at how many in each group pick up infections.

To do this fairly, researchers randomly assign participants to receive a vaccine or a dummy shot, usually a dose of salt water.

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Volunteers know there's a 50-50 chance they could be put in either group — and they are not told which group they landed in. Often, the researchers or others involved in the testing are also "blinded" and don't know either.

SHOULD TEST VOLUNTEERS BE TOLD?

About 17,000 of Moderna's study participants received a placebo, as did about 22,000 people in Pfizer's trial.

With the ongoing coronavirus crisis, health experts worry about leaving them in the dark and unprotected. They argue they should be given a vaccine now in recognition of their willingness to be a part of the trials during the pandemic.

"Volunteers have been instrumental," said Moncef Slaoui, chief scientist of the government's Operation Warp Speed program. "They should be rewarded for it."

The companies would have to "unblind" or "unmask" the studies, revealing whether participants got the vaccine or the dummy shot.

Unmasking is usually done at the end of testing. Moderna and Pfizer, though, designed their studies to last two years to do long-term follow-up.

"I don't think there's anybody who thinks it's reasonable or feasible to keep the people blinded for two years," said Susan Ellenberg, an expert in clinical trials at the University of Pennsylvania.

"Given we have a pandemic, people are ready to settle for the short-term results."

PROS AND CONS OF "UNMASKING"

With the rollout of vaccines and the uncertainty of their status, volunteers could decide to drop out once they are eligible to get one. They might stay in the study if they're told what they got, said Dr. Ana Iltis, a bioethicist at Wake Forest University.

"Participants could leave in droves. They could say, 'If you don't tell me what I got, I'm out of here,'" said Iltis. "You cannot force people to stay."

In an ideal world, participants could hold off to discover whether they received the dummy shot or the vaccine. But experts agree the current circumstances are extraordinary.

Still, unmasking participants would undoubtedly affect the trials' scope and results.

If someone learns they've already been vaccinated, for example, they may stop social distancing or wearing masks — increasing their potential exposure to the virus and possibly spreading it. It's not yet known if vaccinated people can still carry and transmit the virus.

On the flip side, if a person finds out they only received the dummy shot, they might take precautions they wouldn't otherwise.

Either outcome, Goodman said, "means the trial has basically come to an end."

Before granting its emergency use approval, the FDA required Pfizer and Moderna to provide two months of follow-up data. If studies are cut short, it becomes harder to get long-term effects, including how long immunity lasts.

"There's a reason we do clinical research in a certain way," Iltis said. "We should not abandon our norms and our principles. Are we going to be happy with short-term evidence in a year?"

WHAT THE COMPANIES SAY

Pfizer plans to eventually vaccinate all its study participants. It's opting for a more gradual, voluntary process. The company will offer that option to those who got dummy shots as soon as they would have access to the vaccine outside of the study.

Moderna is considering immediately offering the vaccine to all who got dummy shots. More than one-quarter of them are health care workers and first in line for the vaccine anyway, the company noted.

"Many have already left. Sadly, it's not a small number," said Dr. Lindsey Baden, who's involved in testing Moderna's vaccine at Brigham and Women's hospital in Boston. "This is not theoretical. It's happening."

British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, which has enrolled at least 23,000 so far in its ongoing U.S. study, recently decided to offer individual participants the opportunity to be unmasked as they become eligible for the approved vaccines.

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"You never really want to unblind," said Dr. William Hartman, a researcher for AstraZeneca's trial at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

However, he added, the pandemic has complicated things.

"A lot of people are nervous and scared," Hartman said. "And everyone comes into the trial hoping they'll get the vaccine."

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

Chewy sends pet paintings to keep customers from straying

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Danielle Schwartz didn't ask for an oil painting of her cat. But she loves the portrait of Stinky that hangs in her upstate New York home, a surprise gift from an unlikely place: an online pet store.

It's one of the more than 1,000 free paintings that Chewy sends to select customers each week — even during the pandemic — tapping into people's obsession with their fur children and, it hopes, winning customers for life.

In the cutthroat world of online shopping, that personal touch and a bit of kitsch is how Chewy is looking to stand out among the competition, which has only gotten stiffer as more people shop online and add pandemic pets to their families. Pet ownership is expected to grow 4% in 2020, the first increase in several years, according to the Petco Foundation.

Chewy's strategy seems to be working on Schwartz, whose blue-eyed cat likes to rub up against the painting from his cat tree.

"I just want to buy everything from them," she says. "They're a big company. I was shocked that they did something so personal."

The portraits have become a hit on social media, where people share images of them or beg for their pets to be turned into works of art.

Eric Sheridan, a sales specialist from Lee, Florida, asked for a portrait through the Twitter account of Gozer, his Boston terrier with more than 3,000 followers. A Chewy representative messaged back: "My paws are crossed that we'll be able to send you one." It arrived a month and a half later. "Christmas came early," Sheridan tweeted from Gozer's account.

Not everyone is delighted by getting a mystery portrait — the company acknowledges that some confused customers send them back. But many who get a pet portrait document it for social media, giving Chewy free advertising — a trend the company noticed when it first started shipping them out.

"Customers were going bananas," says co-founder Ryan Cohen, who helped come up with the idea in 2013 before leaving the company.

Chewy was founded in 2011, marrying the fast delivery of Amazon with the friendliness of a local pet store. It also aimed to grab a piece of the fortune Americans spend on their pets, which was expected to total \$99 billion in 2020, according to the American Pet Products Association. Pet store chain PetSmart bought Chewy in 2017 for more than \$3 billion to grow its online business, but then spun Chewy off two years later into a publicly-traded company now worth about \$40 billion, even though it has never made a profit.

Amazon and Chewy dominate the online pet supplies industry, with Amazon's market share at more than 50% and Chewy's at 34%, according to retail consulting firm 1010data. But the pandemic has been especially good for Chewy as people avoid physical stores. Its stock price more than tripled in 2020. Sales soared 45% in the August to October quarter. And it added 5 million new customers in the last year, bringing its total customer base to nearly 18 million.

Phillip M. Cooper, a pet industry consultant, credits the customer service. "It set the standard," he says.

The company's 2,500 agents are trained to answer pet parents' questions, like which foods are best for older pooches or where to find a shelter. Chewy sends new customers handwritten notes and all shoppers get snail-mail holiday cards. It even sends flowers to people whose pets died.

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"It helped ease the pain," says Jordan Redman of Norman, Oklahoma, who received a bouquet of flowers after Bud, her golden retriever, died.

But it's the paintings that have customers panting. There's no way to purchase one from Chewy, and the company doesn't exactly say how someone will be selected. But it typically sends them out to those that have pet photos on their Chewy account or have shared one with a customer service agent.

For clues, look to the experience of Danielle Moore, who said Chewy asked her to send a photo of her Australian cattle dog Kana during a call about returning an order. Kana's likeness showed up three months later. Moore loved it so much she tried to purchase another through Chewy, but the customer service agent wouldn't budge. Instead, the chemist from Dallas commissioned one for \$36 on Etsy, and the paintings hang on a wall together.

Chewy doesn't disclose the cost of making and sending the portraits. It has worked with hundreds of artists around the country who are emailed photos of their subjects by the company.

Josh Lawson, who paints 20 to 50 portraits a week, has done snakes, goats and even what he thinks were bison. It can take two hours or more to do a portrait. Fluffy kittens, for example, need extra attention and a long-tip brush to get the right amount of fluff. "I want to make them look real," he says.

There's pressure to do so. Chewy says it rejects artwork that doesn't look enough like the pet or sends it back to be reworked. The goal is for people to talk up Chewy to others and to get a prime spot on shopper's walls, serving as a billboard for the company.

Annesley Clark, a law student in St. Louis, was surprised by how much the free painting looked like her pit bull mix, Willow. "I was beside myself," she says. "It's her exactly."

She couldn't wait to show it off. The next day, she took it to a socially-distanced picnic with four others and held up the artwork. "I said, 'Look at this. It's perfect.'" Her friends agreed.

Follow Joseph Pisani on Twitter: @ josephpisani

EXPLAINER: Stakes high for U.S. Senate runoffs in Georgia

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Two months after the November elections, Georgia voters have unfinished business. The outcome will determine partisan control of the U.S. Senate and how lawmakers deal with a new White House.

Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler are both on the ballot Tuesday in runoff elections because neither got enough votes Nov. 3 to win outright.

Democratic challengers Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock have raised staggering sums as they try to capitalize on President-elect Joe Biden's narrow victory in Georgia over GOP President Donald Trump.

Here's a look at how two key Georgia elections pushed into 2021, who's running and what's at stake.
WHO'S RUNNING?

Both of Georgia's Senate seats weren't supposed to be up for grabs in 2020.

Perdue is wrapping up a six-year term. The Republican was first elected in 2014 after running as a political outsider and former CEO of Reebok and Dollar General. In his first term, Perdue became known as one of Trump's chief defenders in the Senate.

The race got shaken up in August 2019 when fellow GOP Sen. Johnny Isakson announced he was resigning because of failing health. Georgia's governor appointed Loeffler to fill the seat, but she would have to run in the November election to fill the last two years of Isakson's term.

Like Perdue, Loeffler's background was in business rather than politics. Before joining the Senate, she worked at Intercontinental Exchange, a company founded by her husband that operates the New York Stock Exchange. One of the Senate's wealthiest members, Loeffler has spent more than \$20 million of her own cash running and traveled the state in her private jet.

As for the challengers, Ossoff and Warnock are seeking to become the first Democrats to win a U.S. Senate election in Georgia since 2000.

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If he defeats Perdue, Ossoff would be the Senate's youngest member at age 33. His introduction to politics came as a college student when he interned for Georgia U.S. Rep. John Lewis, the Democrat and civil rights hero who died in July. Ossoff runs a company that produces documentary films and ran for a House seat in 2017, which he lost but proved a formidable fundraiser.

In the wide-open race for Loeffler's seat, Democratic leaders united early to endorse Warnock, pastor of the Atlanta church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached and one of Georgia's best-known Black ministers. Warnock's activism from the pulpit on issues such as bail reform and expanded voting rights have become centerpieces of his campaign — just as his sometimes fiery sermons have provided ammunition for attacks by Republicans.

WHY IS GEORGIA STILL VOTING?

Georgia law requires candidates for Congress and state offices to win by getting more than 50% of the vote. Otherwise, races get forced into a runoff between the top two finishers.

In November, Perdue finished 88,000 votes ahead of Ossoff but fell just short of a majority with 49.7% of the vote in a three-way race that included Libertarian Shane Hazel.

A runoff was virtually assured in the special election for Loeffler's seat. Because she was running to complete her predecessor's unfinished term, state law requires a political free-for-all with multiple Republicans and Democrats sharing the ballot. Loeffler and Warnock were the top finishers out of 20 candidates, with neither getting more than one-third of the vote.

Why wait until 2021 to resolve those races?

Georgia amended its election laws in 2014 to require nine weeks between general elections and runoffs. The runoff period had been just four weeks. But that changed after the U.S. Justice Department sued Georgia, arguing military members stationed overseas didn't have enough time to receive and mail back absentee ballots.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

If Perdue and Loeffler both lose their seats, Republicans lose control of the U.S. Senate after six years holding a majority in the chamber.

The November elections resulted in Republicans holding 50 Senate seats and Democrats controlling 48. Only the two seats in Georgia remain undecided.

A win by either Perdue or Loeffler would keep the Senate in Republican hands.

But victories by both Ossoff and Warnock would leave both parties with 50 seats each — and therefore tilt control to Democrats. That's because Democratic Vice President-elect Kamala Harris will serve as the Senate's presiding officer and will vote as needed to break any ties.

It would be a big win for Biden, as Democrats would control both houses of Congress.

WHERE DO THINGS STAND?

Perdue and Loeffler have cast themselves as the last line of defense against Democratic control of Washington. But their closing arguments have been complicated by Trump siding with Democrats in calling for one-time cash payments of \$2,000 for pandemic relief, an amount most congressional Republicans oppose.

Both GOP senators have said they support Trump's demand for the extra money after months of caricaturing Democrats as socialists who favor wasteful spending. Ossoff and Warnock insist their rivals haven't done enough to try to force a vote on the higher relief payments in the Senate.

The two Democrats reported staggering fundraising of more than \$100 million each during the past two months. Their hauls far outpaced the Republican incumbents, with Perdue reporting \$68 million and Loeffler just under \$64 million.

Georgia voters, meanwhile, have already been turning out in huge numbers despite the holidays and the pandemic. More than 2.8 million have voted early either in person or by mail — more than half of the 5 million total votes cast in Georgia in November.

Both sides are calling on their heaviest hitters to help turn out supporters. Trump has scheduled a Monday rally with Perdue and Loeffler in conservative northwest Georgia. Harris plans to campaign with Ossoff and Warnock on Sunday in Savannah, followed by Biden in Atlanta on Monday.

Heading into the final days, Perdue's campaign said Thursday that he and his wife learned they had

been in close contact with a staffer who tested positive for COVID-19 and the senator was in quarantine despite having tested negative.

Iraq team working to 'neutralize' mine found on oil tanker

BAGHDAD (AP) — An Iraqi explosives-handling team is working to neutralize a "large" mine discovered on an oil tanker in the Persian Gulf and evacuate its crew, authorities said Friday.

The statement came a day after two private security firms said sailors feared they had found a limpet mine on the MT Pola, a Liberian-flagged tanker in the waters off the Iraqi port of Basra. A limpet mine is a type of naval mine that attaches to the side of a ship, usually by a diver-member of special forces. It later explodes, and can significantly damage a vessel.

The Iraqi statement said the mine had been attached to a tanker rented from Iraq's Oil Marketing Company SOMO that was refueling another vessel. Iraq's naval forces were making "a great effort to accomplish the mission" safely, said Iraq's Security Media Cell, which is affiliated with the country's security forces.

It was the first official Iraqi confirmation that a mine was discovered on an Iraqi tanker transferring fuel in the Persian Gulf to another vessel. It did not identify either vessels or provide more details.

The discovery came amid heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. in the waning days of President Donald Trump's administration.

Already, America has conducted B-52 bomber flyovers and sent a nuclear submarine into the Persian Gulf over what Trump officials describe as the possibility of an Iranian attack on the one-year anniversary of the U.S. drones strike in Baghdad that killed a top Iranian general and a top Iraqi militia leader.

Iraq is marking the anniversary with a series of events this week.

On Thursday, the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations, an organization under Britain's royal navy, said on its website that an "unknown object" had been attached to a ship's hull in the vicinity of Iraq's Khor Al-Zubair Port, without providing further information.

The Pola serves as floating fuel oil storage of Iraq's State Organization of Marketing of Oil, said Sudharshan Sarathy, a senior oil analyst at the data-analysis firm Refinitiv. Smaller vessels carry the fuel oil to the ship, which then conducts ship-to-ship transfers in the Persian Gulf to clients.

Sarathy said the Pola was conducting a ship-to-ship transfer with the MT Nordic Freedom, a Bermuda-flagged tanker.

Friday's statement said an explosives-handling team from Iraq's Interior Ministry was airlifted to the scene after a "foreign body" was observed attached to one of the ships in the waiting area in Iraq's international waters, 28 nautical miles from Iraqi oil ports.

Despite high waves, the vessel receiving the fuel was evacuated while the Iraqi team was still working on neutralizing the mine and evacuating the refueling ship, it said.

In 2019, the U.S. blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all the world's oil passes. Iran denies being involved.

Once a model, California now struggles to tame COVID-19

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ambulances waited hours for openings to offload coronavirus patients. Overflow patients were moved to hospital hallways and gift shops, even a cafeteria. Refrigerated trucks were on standby, ready to store the dead.

For months, California did many of the right things to avoid a catastrophic surge from the pandemic. But by the time Gov. Gavin Newsom said on Dec. 15 that 5,000 body bags were being distributed, it was clear that the nation's most populous state had entered a new phase of the COVID-19 crisis.

Now infections have been racing out of control for weeks, and California has routinely set new records for infections and deaths. It remains at or near the top of the list of states with the most new cases per

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capita.

Experts say a variety of factors combined to wipe out the past efforts, which for much of the year held the virus to manageable levels. Cramped housing, travel and Thanksgiving gatherings contributed to the spread, along with the public's fatigue amid regulations that closed many schools and businesses and encouraged — or required — an isolated lifestyle.

Another factor could be a more contagious variant of the virus detected in Southern California, although it's not clear yet how widespread that may be.

California's woes have helped fuel the year-end U.S. infection spike and added urgency to the attempts to beat back the scourge that has killed more than 340,000 Americans. Even with vaccines becoming available, cases are almost certain to continue growing, and yet another surge is expected in the weeks after Christmas and New Year's.

The southern half of the state has seen the worst effects, from the agricultural San Joaquin Valley to the Mexico border. Hospitals are swamped with patients, and intensive care units have no more beds for COVID-19 patients. Makeshift wards are being set up in tents, arenas, classrooms and conference rooms.

Hospitalizations statewide have gone up more than eightfold in two months and nearly tenfold in Los Angeles County. On Thursday, the total number of California deaths surpassed 25,000, joining only New York and Texas at that milestone.

"Most heartbreaking is that if we had done a better job of reducing transmission of the virus, many of these deaths would not have happened," said Barbara Ferrer, the county's public health director, who has pleaded with people not to get together and worsen the spread.

Crowded houses and apartments are often cited as a source of spread, particularly in Los Angeles, which has some of the densest neighborhoods in the U.S. Households in and around LA often have several generations — or multiple families — living under one roof. Those tend to be lower-income areas where residents work essential jobs that can expose them to the virus at work or while commuting.

The socioeconomic situation in LA County is "like the kindling," said Paula Cannon, a professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Southern California. "And now we got to the stage where there was enough COVID out in the community that it lit the fire."

Home to a quarter of the state's 40 million residents, LA County has had 40% of the state's deaths and a third of its 2.2 million cases. The virus has hit Latino and Black communities harder.

Cannon said there's a moral imperative for people who can follow stay-home orders to help prevent spread that is harder to contain in other areas.

"What you can't do is say to people, 'Can you stop living in a house with eight other people, five of whom are working essential worker jobs?'" she said. "This is the structure that we can't change in LA. This is, I think, contributing to why our levels have suddenly got scarily high and looks like they're going to keep going up and keep staying that way."

In March, during the early days of the pandemic, Newsom was hailed for issuing the nation's first state stay-home order.

The Democrat eased business restrictions in May, and when a broader restart led to another surge, imposed more rules. In early December, with cases out of control, he issued a looser stay-home order. He also closed businesses such as barbershops and salons, halted restaurant dining and limited capacity in retail stores. The latest restrictions apply everywhere except in rural Northern California.

But Dr. Lee Riley, an infectious diseases professor at the University of California at Berkeley, said that while the state managed to flatten the curve of rising cases, it never effectively bent the curve downward to the point infections would die out.

When cases rose in June and July, California was never able to do enough contact tracing to isolate infected people and those they may have exposed before they spread the disease — often unwittingly — to others, he said. And public health directives were never adequately enforced.

"What California did was to maybe delay the peak," Riley said. Infections "really just never got low enough. And we started lifting the restrictions, and that just allowed the transmissions to just continue to increase. We never really saw a real decline."

California's health secretary, Dr. Mark Ghaly, said if state and local leaders had not made difficult decisions early on that saved lives, the current surge might not be the worst the state has seen.

He acknowledged the exhaustion many people feel after enduring months of disruptions to their lives. Public health officials, he said, need to find a way to reach people who have given up or not followed rules on social distancing and masks.

Across California, local officials have reminded people that the fate of the virus lies in their behavior and asked for one more round of shared sacrifice. They reminded people that activities that were safe earlier this year are now risky as the virus becomes more widespread.

"You can practice safety and low-risk behavior from March to October. But all that is erased. Nothing matters except what you are doing to fight the virus right now," said Corinne McDaniels-Davidson, director of the Institute for Public Health at San Diego State University. "This pandemic is an ultra-marathon. In our culture, we are used to sprints."

Associated Press Writer Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

New Year comes to COVID ward, with hope for end to nightmare

By ANDREA ROSA Associated Press

ROME (AP) — While the world said goodbye — or good riddance — to 2020, a year in which the pandemic brought hardship and pain to billions, some of those who have been fighting the virus on the front lines soldiered on even as the clock passed midnight.

At the Casalpallocco Covid 3 Hospital on the outskirts of Rome doctors and nurses barely seemed to register the new year as they tended to 100 patients struggling with serious to critical illness as a result of coronavirus infections.

In one intensive care ward, all but one of a dozen beds were occupied. Medical staff calmly tended to patients lying in dimly lit rooms, dispensed medication, checked respiratory machines and filled in medical records.

"This particular one (New Year's Eve) is a surreal night, as was Christmas, as will be the Epiphany, as was the past Easter and all the other holidays," said Dr. Paolo Petrassi, the night shift coordinator. "They are, let's say, holidays detached from what was the real world once, as we have known it forever."

The 53-year-old recounted the experience now familiar to so many in the medical profession worldwide who have had to treat COVID patients: having to constantly monitor patients and manage their condition, with each having their own set of complicated problems.

Over 83 million infections with the coronavirus have been confirmed worldwide, and over 1.8 million deaths. Along with the elderly, medical staff have been particularly hard hit, struggling to save patients even as their own colleagues have fallen ill with a disease almost nobody could have imagined a year ago.

"It was all unexpected," Petrassi told The Associated Press.

Italy was the early epicenter of the pandemic in Europe in the spring. Images of Italian nurses and doctors, exhausted as they briefly removed their protective gear, became a grim portent of what would happen to their colleagues in Spain, France, the United States and elsewhere, months later.

Last month, after a summer in which Italy seemed to have beaten back the scourge, it again became the country with the highest death toll in Europe. And once more, the grim reality was reflected in the eyes of Italy's medical staff.

"Now we are almost reaching the 12 months of this pandemic and unfortunately we still don't have the possibility to say it's over," said Petrassi. "We only have the hope of the mass vaccination that, we hope, will contribute to control this ominous phenomenon."

European regulators approved the first vaccine shortly before Christmas. Countries across the European Union began administering the shots on Dec. 27, but it will be a long time before a sizeable number of the bloc's 450 million inhabitants are immunized.

Experts say at least 60-70% of the population need to be vaccinated to prevent the virus from getting

a foothold.

Petrassi hopes the nightmare of COVID will end soon.

"We all live in uncertainty, but at the same time we hope, and we are all doing our best," he said. "We are using all of our professional and physical resources, our knowledge, our conscience, giving up time with our families, ours and our beloved ones' free time."

"We are investing all this so that all these efforts will not be in vain."

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

'Our children die in our hands': Floods ravage South Sudan

By MAURA AJAK Associated Press

OLD FANGAK, South Sudan (AP) — On a scrap of land surrounded by flooding in South Sudan, families drink and bathe from the waters that swept away latrines and continue to rise.

Some 1 million people in the country have been displaced or isolated for months by the worst flooding in memory, with the intense rainy season a sign of climate change. The waters began rising in June, washing away crops, swamping roads and worsening hunger and disease in the young nation struggling to recover from civil war. Now famine is a threat.

On a recent visit by The Associated Press to the Old Fangak area in hard-hit Jonglei state, parents spoke of walking for hours in chest-deep water to find food and health care as malaria and diarrheal diseases spread.

Regina Nyakol Piny, a mother of nine, now lives in a primary school in the village of Wangchot after their home was swamped.

"We don't have food here, we rely only on U.N. humanitarian agencies or by collecting firewood and selling it," she said. "My children get sick because of the floodwaters, and there is no medical service in this place."

She said she eagerly waits for peace to return to the country, with the belief that medical services will follow "that will be even enough for us."

One of her nieces, Nyankun Dhoal, delivered her seventh child into a world of water in November.

"I feel very tired and my body feels really weak," she said. One of her breasts was swollen, and her baby had rashes. She wishes for food, and for plastic sheeting so that she and her family can stay dry.

The mud sucks at people's feet as they engage in the daily struggles to hold back the waters and find something to eat.

Nyaduoth Kun, a mother of five, said the floods destroyed her family's crops and life has been a struggle for months, with people selling their prized cattle to buy food that's never enough.

The family eats just two meals a day and the adults often go to bed on empty stomachs, she said. She has begun collecting water lilies and wild fruits for food.

She said she had little knowledge of the coronavirus pandemic ravaging other parts of the world and spreading largely undetected in poorly resourced South Sudan. "There are many diseases living among us, so we can't figure out if it's coronavirus or not," she said.

Instead, her fear is that the makeshift water dike around their home could collapse at any time, flooding the young children.

The chief of Wangchot village, James Diang, made the decision early during the flooding to send badly affected children to the town center after several drowned "and everything was being destroyed rapidly."

Now cattle are dying, he said, and survivors have been transported to drier areas.

Remaining residents are eating tree leaves and sometimes fish to survive, he said. Fevers and joint pain are widespread.

When there is no canoe to transport people during times that waters surge, "our children die in our hands because we are helpless," he said.

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He hopes, like everyone, for sustainable peace, and for an improved dike so the community can have enough dry ground for planting.

The people of South Sudan put their trust in President Salva Kiir and former armed opposition leader Riek Machar to lead during this transition period, "but now they are failing us," said the government's acting deputy director in the area, Kueth Gach Monydhot. "We don't have hope, we lost confidence in them."

The situation in Fangak county remains volatile, with almost all of its more than 60 villages affected by the flooding and "no response from the government," he said. "Do you think they will plan for other people when they have failed to implement the peace agreement?"

At the clinic in Old Fangak run by the medical charity Doctors Without Borders, Nyual Chol said the dike she tried to build against the floodwaters collapsed, and her home quickly collapsed, too.

She had been alone at home with her four children. As with many families, her husband was away on duty in another part of the country as a soldier.

She reached the clinic by canoe after an hour of travel, seeking help for her sick child. There, she also received a ration of food.

The Doctors Without Borders project coordinator in Old Fangak, Dorothy I. Esonwune, recalled the sight of newly displaced people sheltering under trees without mats, blankets or mosquito nets.

Meanwhile, the charity's mobile clinics were suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, further complicating efforts to reach sick people stranded by the flooding.

"The water continues to rise and the dikes continue to break and there are people still displaced, yet they don't have the main necessities," she said, describing several people often crammed into a single shelter.

Now the international community has rung the alarm about likely famine in another flood-hit part of Jonglei state.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization representative in South Sudan, Meshak Malo, has appealed to the parties that signed the country's peace accord to cease violence and ensure safe humanitarian access to prevent the dire situation from turning into a full-blown catastrophe.

The new report of likely famine is an eye-opener and a signal to the government, which has not endorsed its findings, said the chairman of the National Bureau of Statistics, Isaiah Chol Aruai.

"There is no way that the government would ignore or downplay an emergency when it's really found out to be an emergency," he said.

UK in 'eye of the storm' amid surging new coronavirus cases

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British medics warned Friday that hospitals around the country face a perilous few weeks amid surging new coronavirus infections that have been blamed on a new variant of the virus.

A day after the U.K. posted a record 55,892 new infections and another 964 coronavirus-related deaths, concerns are mounting about the impact on the overstretched National Health Service. Field hospitals that were constructed in the early days of the pandemic but that were subsequently mothballed are being reactivated.

The Royal College of Nursing's England director, Mike Adams, told Sky News that the U.K. was in the "eye of the storm" and that it was "infuriating" to see people not following the social distancing guidance or wearing masks.

A leading physician also warned of burnout among health workers on the front line of the outbreak in hospitals, while also urging people to follow the rules.

"I am worried," Adrian Boyle, vice president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, told the BBC. "We are very much at battle stations."

New infections have more than doubled in recent weeks after a new variant that is said to be around 70% more contagious was found to be behind a big spike in cases around London and the southeast of England.

Given the lags between new cases and hospitalizations and subsequently deaths, there are huge concerns

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about the path of the pandemic over the coming month or two in a country that has Europe's second-highest virus-related death toll at nearly 74,000.

As a result of the spike, which has spread around the country and seen lockdown restrictions tightened, the strategy around the rollout of vaccines has been changed to get more people an initial jab as soon as possible, with a scheduled second one delayed.

In a joint statement Thursday, the chief medical officers for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, said the first vaccine dose offers "substantial" protection.

Currently, two vaccines have been approved for use in the U.K.

Just under 1 million people have received the first dose of the vaccine developed by American pharmaceutical firm Pfizer and German biotechnology company BioNTech, with a small minority also getting the second dose as planned after 21 days.

Alongside the approval earlier this week of the vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and British pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca, a new dosing regimen was outlined, aimed at providing a speedier rollout. This means the second dose of both vaccines will be within 12 weeks of the first.

The four medical officers said they were "confident" the first dose of both vaccines would provide "substantial" protection.

"In the short term, the additional increase of vaccine efficacy from the second dose is likely to be modest; the great majority of the initial protection from clinical disease is after the first dose of vaccine," they said.

The new plan has faced widespread criticism, with the U.K.'s main union for doctors warning that delaying the second dose causes huge problems for thousands of partially vaccinated elderly and vulnerable people.

"It is grossly and patently unfair to tens of thousands of our most at-risk patients to now try to reschedule their appointments," said Richard Vautrey from the British Medical Association.

Follow AP coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccines> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Report: Ethiopian forces killed scores in June-July unrest

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopian security forces killed more than 75 people and injured nearly 200 during deadly ethnic unrest in June and July following the killing of a popular singer, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said Friday.

The commission's report said 123 people in all were killed and at least 500 injured amid one of the country's worst outbreaks of ethnic violence in years, a "widespread and systematic attack" against civilians that points to crimes against humanity. Some victims were beheaded, tortured or dragged in the streets by attackers.

Ethnic violence is a major challenge for Nobel Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who has urged national unity among more than 80 ethnic groups in Africa's second most populous country.

The unrest in June and July followed the killing of singer Hachalu Hundessa, who had been a prominent voice in the anti-government protests that led to Abiy taking office in 2018 and announcing sweeping political reforms. Those reforms, however, opened the way for long-held ethnic and other grievances to flare.

The commission found that amid the street protests following Hachalu's death, "civilians were attacked inside their homes by individual and grouped perpetrators and were beaten and killed in streets in a gruesome and cruel manner with sticks, knives, axes, sharp iron bars, stones and electric cables."

More than 6,000 people were displaced and at least 900 properties looted, burned or vandalized, the report said. The attacks often targeted ethnic Amhara or Orthodox Christians.

"While it is understandable that security forces had the challenging task of restoring order in the face of such widespread violence, the proportionality of the force employed in some contexts is highly questionable," the report said.

As an example, in several communities, "the commission found that there were people killed with bullet

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wounds to the head, shots to the chest area or the back. People not participating in the protests — passersby, bystanders observing from their doorsteps, young people, elderly people trying to mediate, people with mental illnesses, and even police officers — also lost their lives.”

In other cases, the commission found that “local authorities and security did not respond to victims’ repeated calls for help, being told instead ‘that higher ups gave no order to intervene’ ... Survivors and witnesses also recount how sometimes police stood watching as the attacks took place.”

Some watchdogs have warned of a return to repressive measures in Ethiopia as authorities grapple with hate speech and ethnic violence.

The unrest was not related to the conflict in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region that began in early November, but it was another sign of the tensions straining the country of some 110 million people at the heart of the Horn of Africa.

A spokeswoman for Abiy’s office did not immediately comment on the report, and the commission did not say what the government’s response had been. Interviews with government officials and security figures were part of the commission’s investigation, which also involved visiting some 40 communities.

The commission said it found no indication of “ongoing efforts to investigate the use of force by security officers during the unrest and to hold to account those who caused unnecessary human suffering.”

The report noted that “crimes against humanity of this nature combined with the current national context are signs that the risk of atrocity crimes, including genocide, is increasing,” and it called for investigations, justice and “a lasting and institutional solution for the increasing trend of discrimination and attacks against minorities.”

North Korea’s Kim thanks people in rare New Year’s cards

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un thanked the public for their trust and support “in the difficult times” and wished them happiness and good health in his first New Year’s Day cards sent to his people.

Kim usually gives a televised speech on Jan. 1, but he is widely expected to skip it this year since he will address the country’s first ruling party congress in five years sometime in early January.

“I will work hard to bring earlier the new era in which the ideals and desires of our people will come true,” Kim said in his letter, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

“I offer thanks to the people for having invariably trusted and supported our party even in the difficult times,” he said. “I sincerely wish all the families across the country greater happiness and beloved people, good health.”

North Korea is one of the world’s most cloistered countries, and it’s virtually impossible to independently confirm whether all its 25 million people received Kim’s letter.

KCNA said the letter was handwritten by Kim. The last time the North Korean leader sent such a letter to ordinary citizens was on Jan. 1, 1995, by Kim’s father, Kim Jong Il, according to Seoul’s Unification Ministry.

Kim, who succeeded his father upon his death in late 2011, is facing the toughest challenges of his nine-year rule due to the pandemic, several natural disasters last summer and persistent U.S.-led sanctions amid a diplomatic impasse over his nuclear program.

Kim will likely use the Workers’ Party congress as a venue to muster a stronger unity and lay out new development goals for the next few years.

North Korea’s pandemic-related border closure with China, its biggest trading partner, is hurting the economy. Bilateral trade volume in the first 11 months of 2020 plunged by about 79% from the same period in 2019, analyst Song Jaeguk at Seoul’s IBK Economic Research Institute said.

The congress, the first since 2016, is officially the party’s top decision-making body though real day-to-day decisions are made by Kim and his close associates. The rubber stamp body of delegates is expected to endorse Kim’s new initiatives without major debates.

State media didn’t say when exactly the meeting will take place. In 2016, the congress was held for

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four days.

Ushering in the new year, a large crowd packed Pyongyang's main square to watch fireworks, a concert and a flag-hoisting ceremony. State TV showed people wearing masks and heavy coats, waving and standing close together.

North Korea has steadfastly claimed to be coronavirus-free — an assertion doubted by outsiders. But experts also say any outbreak likely wasn't widespread and so North Korea considered it safe to hold big events like the party congress in Pyongyang.

Also Friday, North Korea said it has successfully completed "an 80-day battle," a productivity campaign it often launches to press citizens to work extra hours and report bigger production numbers ahead of major political events. During the congress, experts say North Korea will likely underscore building a stronger self-reliant economy to tackle the difficulties in an attempt to squeeze people to work harder.

KCNA said "the all-people advance by dint of self-reliance" achieved "a proud victory of the historic 80-day battle." It said the North Koreans have either fulfilled or exceeded newly set quotas at factories, mines, farms, flooding recovery works, anti-coronavirus steps and various other areas.

This story corrects the year of the last ruling party congress.

Bomb-sniffing dogs? Check. Times Square crowd? Not this year

By ROBERT BUMSTED and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Gone were the revelry and shoulder-to-shoulder crowds that typify Times Square on New Year's Eve, replaced by empty streets and an eerie quiet as the final moments of 2020 ticked away.

This was New Year's Eve in the age of COVID-19.

Crowd control gave way to crowd prevention, as police closed the Crossroads of the World to vehicles and onlookers hoping to catch a glimpse of the glittering, crystal ball that still descended down a flagpole to mark the stroke of midnight. Would-be partygoers were urged to watch the ball drop on television.

Still, modest throngs of people gathered just outside the police perimeter, which took on the feel of a tailgate as midnight neared. Many said they wanted to end a challenging year on their own terms.

Small groups of revelers, some wearing glittery hats, filmed their distant view of Times Square on their phones and broke out in cheers at midnight. There were kisses and toasts, but police quickly broke up the crowds gathered along Broadway after the ball fell.

One reveler, Daniel Camacho, 36, of Manhattan, described the experience as "anticlimactic" given the small crowd.

"I'm just glad it's over," he said of 2020.

Preparing for the worst, the New York Police Department deployed its bomb-sniffing dogs and sand-filled sanitation trucks intended to guard against explosions. But the department's playbook included an unusual mandate this year: preventing crowds of any size from gathering at the spot of what is usually the nation's biggest New Year's Eve party.

Some celebrity performers took to stages set up in the mostly empty square to sing to a small group of masked essential workers. In the final minutes before midnight, Jennifer Lopez sang the Aerosmith classic "Dream On" beneath a blast of confetti.

A brief burst of fireworks blasted and more confetti flew as the countdown hit midnight.

The coronavirus has upended public life for months, and New Year's Eve proved no different for a city that's counted over 25,000 deaths blamed on the virus. The blocks surrounding the ball drop were blocked off, leaving a scene that Police Commissioner Dermot Shea described as "surreal."

Even a group of National Guardsmen engaged in fighting the coronavirus since March was denied entry.

"It just would have been great to ring in 2021 the New York way," said Billy Merola, a Marine from Long Island.

The turning of the calendar, he said, "provides hope."

Others who passed through the area in the hours before midnight said the celebration was a melancholy

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one.

"It makes me a little bit sad," said Cole Zieser, who recently moved to New York City and was looking forward to "what everyone dreams about in New York."

Merchants in the area were also lamenting the lack of crowds.

"It's dead," said Ali Jameel early Thursday, who owns a store a block from Times Square. "We are dreaming for it to come back again like before."

The NYPD announced a two-part freeze that became more expansive at 3 p.m. Even guests at five hotels in the area were told to stay inside. Officials urged people to stay away.

"Coming to Times Square is a family tradition for some. It is a bucket list item for others. But this year is different," said the department's chief of patrol, Juanita Holmes. "I can't emphasize enough how important it is for everyone to stay home."

The Police Department still rolled out heavy weapons teams, explosive-sniffing dogs, drones and sand trucks. But it also planned a drastically scaled-back presence, including an 80% reduction in its typical workforce assigned to the area.

Despite the restrictions, Mayor Bill de Blasio vowed that New Year's Eve "would be a joyous night, if ever there was one. Goodbye, 2020. Here comes something better: 2021."

Associated Press writers Jennifer Peltz and Tom Hays contributed to this report.

Israel's virus surveillance tool tests its democratic norms

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — In the early days of the pandemic, a panicked Israel began using a mass surveillance tool on its civilians, tracking people's cellphones in hopes of stopping the spread of the coronavirus.

The government touted the technology, normally used to catch wanted Palestinian militants, as a breakthrough against the virus. But months later, the tool's effectiveness is being called into question and critics say its use has come at an immeasurable cost to the country's democratic principles.

"The idea of a government watching its own citizens this closely should ring the alarm," said Maya Fried, a spokeswoman for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which has repeatedly challenged the use of the tool in court. "This is against the foundations of democracy. You can't just give up on democracy during a crisis."

Little is known about the technology. According to the Yediot Ahronot daily, the Shin Bet internal security service has used the tool for two decades, sweeping up metadata from anyone who uses telecom services in Israel. Information collected includes the cellular device's location, web browsing history and calls and texts received and made, but not their content. That has reportedly helped the agency track militants and halt attacks, although it's unclear what happens to all of the data.

Israel first brought the Shin Bet into its virus outbreak battle in March. By tracking the movements of people infected with the coronavirus, it could determine who had come into contact with them and was at risk of infection, and order them into quarantine.

With the contact tracing capabilities of Israel's Health Ministry limited, the Shin Bet was seen as the best option to pick up the slack, even though its own leaders were reluctant to deploy the tool. The Shin Bet declined to comment.

Officials say the technology has been a critical tool in keeping track of the outbreak and insist they have struck a balance between protecting individual rights and public health.

"We believe that the cost is certainly reasonable," Deputy Health Minister Yoav Kisch told a parliamentary committee last month. "We haven't seen this tool be used exploitatively. This tool saves lives."

Initially, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used emergency regulations to approve the use of the tool. After the hasty deployment was challenged in court, the government was forced to legislate limits on its use in July, submitting it to some parliamentary oversight.

The law says the Shin Bet must keep the information separate from other data it gathers for other pur-

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poses and that after a certain period of time, it must be deleted. The law also limits those who are able to access the information and stipulates that Israel must present and popularize a civilian alternative to the surveillance, such as a phone app. Israel has developed such an app but it is not widely used.

Critics say there is no proper oversight on how the Shin Bet data is gathered, stored, used or deleted.

Michal Cotler-Wunsh, a legislator on the parliamentary committee overseeing the tool, said Israel's reliance on the Shin Bet prevented it from moving toward more transparent civilian technology that could have done the job. "We really should have resisted the temptation," she said.

Under their partnership, the Health Ministry sends the Shin Bet the names, ID numbers and contact details of those diagnosed with COVID-19. The security agency can then go back through two weeks of data to determine what cellphones were within a two-meter (six-foot) radius of the sick person for more than 15 minutes. They are then alerted and ordered to self-quarantine.

At the time, there was little outcry against the inclusion of the Shin Bet from ordinary Israelis, who have great faith in their security services.

But as the months went by, Israelis found themselves caught in what appeared to be a dragnet that scooped up tens of thousands of contacts. Many claimed the data was inaccurate, forcing them into a needless 14-day home quarantine. Making things worse, it was difficult to appeal to overwhelmed Health Ministry hotline operators.

The tool's accuracy indoors is said to be problematic. If an infected person is in one apartment, it might send the entire building into quarantine.

The Health Ministry says that since July, 950,000 people detected by the tool have been sent into quarantine, among which 46,000 were found to be infected. The ministry said some 900,000 have been sent into quarantine through traditional contact tracing and 63,000 of those were found to be infected since July. Beginning in August, the Israeli military took over contact tracing responsibilities for the Health Ministry.

Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, a think tank, disputes the Health Ministry's figures. Based on her own analysis of official data, she believes the Shin Bet has snagged far fewer of the infected than contact tracers. She also estimates at least 100,000 people were wrongly quarantined.

An interim report from October by the state comptroller, a government oversight body, backed up the claims that the tool hasn't been entirely effective, saying contact tracing was significantly more so. The report also found that the Shin Bet did not always adhere to the limits imposed by the law, for example failing to delete information gathered in a number of cases.

A ministerial committee decided last month that Israel would begin scaling back the tool and limiting its use. But the decision is not final and more recently Israel has indicated it will seek to continue its widespread use, despite a Supreme Court challenge against the technology.

With the tool having been used on its citizens in a health crisis, critics say the door is open for it to be used again in other matters unrelated to state security.

"What happened with the Shin Bet needs to be a wake-up call," said Shwartz Altshuler. "State authorities know everything about you, all the time, about where you are located. And we will need to think about the long-term consequences of that in the future. It won't go away. They will use it again."

Shutdown, impeachment, virus: Chaotic Congress winds down

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is ending a chaotic session, a two-year political firestorm that started with the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history, was riven by impeachment and a pandemic, and now closes with a rare rebuff by Republicans of President Donald Trump.

In the few days remaining, GOP senators are ignoring Trump's demand to increase COVID-19 aid checks to \$2,000 and are poised to override his veto of a major defense bill, asserting traditional Republican spending and security priorities in defiance of a president who has marched the party in a different direction.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a top Trump ally, tried to bridge the divide Thursday, saying Congress could

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try again to approve Trump's push for bigger COVID aid checks in the new session, which opens Sunday.

"I am with President Trump on this," Graham said on Fox News.

"Our economy is really hurting here," he said. "There's no way to get a vote by Jan. 3. The new Congress begins noon Jan. 3. So the new Congress, you could get a vote."

As the Senate grinds through the New Year's holiday, the one-two rebuke of Trump's demands punctuates the president's final days and deepens the divide between the Republican Party's new wing of Trump-styled populists and what had been mainstay conservative views.

The stalemate is expected to drag into the weekend.

An exasperated Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said this week, "After all the insanity that Senate Republicans have tolerated from President Trump — his attacks on the rule of law, an independent judiciary, the conduct that led to his impeachment — is this where Senate Republicans are going to draw the line — \$2,000 checks to the American people?"

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has shown little interest in Trump's push to bolster the \$600 relief checks just approved in a sweeping year-end package, declaring Congress has provided enough pandemic aid, for now, as he blocked repeated Democratic attempts to force a vote.

Opening the Senate on Thursday, McConnell called the House-passed bill matching Trump's \$2,000 request "socialism for rich people" who don't need the federal help. He prefers a more targeted approach.

The refusal to act on the checks, along with the veto Friday or Saturday of the defense bill, could very well be among McConnell's final acts as majority leader as two GOP senators in Georgia are in the fights of their political lives in runoff elections next week that will determine which party controls the Senate.

Trump made an early return Thursday to the White House from his private club in Florida.

Trump and President-elect Joe Biden are separately poised to campaign in Georgia ahead of Tuesday's election as GOP Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler face Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock.

It's a dizzying end to a session of Congress that resembles few others for the sheer number of crises and political standoffs as Trump's presidency defined and changed the legislative branch.

Congress opened in 2019 with the federal government shutdown over Trump's demands for money to build the border wall with Mexico. Nancy Pelosi regained the speaker's gavel after Democrats swept to the House majority in the midterm election.

The Democratic-led House went on to impeach the president over his request to the Ukrainian president to "do us a favor" against Biden ahead of the presidential election. The Republican-led Senate acquitted the president in 2020 of the charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

When the pandemic struck, Congress rallied with unusual speed and agreement to pass a \$2 trillion relief package, the largest federal intervention of its kind in U.S. history.

The COVID-19 crisis also shuttered the Capitol and altered the workings of Congress. The House changed its rules to allow proxy voting, a first, so lawmakers could avoid the health risks of travel to Washington. The Senate ultimately halted its traditional daily lunches.

The usually bustling halls of Congress became eerily silent most days. Many members tested positive for the virus.

The Congress had few other notable legislative accomplishments, and could not agree on how to respond to the racial injustice reckoning that erupted after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement.

Instead, the Senate was primarily focused on filling the courts with Trump's conservative judicial nominees, including confirming his third Supreme Court justice, Amy Coney Barrett.

As the session appeared to be winding down, Trump stunned Washington days before Christmas by delaying his signature on the latest \$2 trillion-plus COVID relief and year-end funding package over his fresh demands for additional aid.

Trump's push for \$2,000 checks gained sudden momentum when dozens of House Republicans joined Democrats in approving the measure Monday. But the effort fizzled in the GOP-led Senate.

Democrats embraced Trump's demand, a rare alliance with the Republican president, but his own party

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split between those few joining his push for more aid and others objecting to more spending they said was not targeted to those who need it most.

Liberal senators, led by Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who support the relief boost are blocking action on the defense bill until a vote is taken on Trump's demand.

McConnell offered an alternative aid bill, linking the \$2,000 checks with Trump's other priorities, including a complicated repeal of protections for tech companies like Facebook or Twitter and the establishment of a bipartisan commission to review the 2020 presidential election.

But the GOP leader has scheduled no votes on his measure and it would be unlikely to have enough support in Congress to pass.

For now, the smaller \$600 checks are being sent to households. Americans earning up to \$75,000 qualify for the payments, which are phased out at higher income levels, and there's an additional \$600 payment per dependent child.

The outgoing president has been berating Republican leaders for the standoff, but he appears more focused on gathering GOP support for his extraordinary Electoral College challenge of Biden's victory when the vote is tallied in a joint session of Congress on Jan. 6.

Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri is among those leading Trump's challenge to the Electoral College result, but he was rebuked Thursday by GOP Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, who warned colleagues off what he called a "dangerous ploy" that could damage trust in elections.

The challenge is not expected to change the election outcome, with Biden set to be inaugurated Jan. 20. But it will be among the first votes tallied in the new Congress.

New Year's revelries muted by virus as curtain draws on 2020

By FRANK JORDANS and DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

This New Year's Eve is being celebrated like no other in most of the world, with many bidding farewell to a year they'd prefer to forget.

From the South Pacific to New York City, pandemic restrictions on open air gatherings saw people turning to made-for-TV fireworks displays or packing it in early since they could not toast the end of 2020 in the presence of friends or carousing strangers.

As midnight rolled from Asia to the Middle East, Europe, Africa and the Americas, the New Year's experience mirrored national responses to the virus itself. Some countries and cities canceled or scaled back their festivities, while others without active outbreaks carried on like any other year.

Australia was among the first to ring in 2021. In past years, 1 million people crowded Sydney's harbor to watch fireworks. This time, most watched on television as authorities urged residents to stay home to see the seven minutes of pyrotechnics that lit up the Sydney Harbor Bridge and its surroundings.

In New York's Times Square, the ball dropped like always, but police fenced off the site synonymous with New Year's Eve to prevent crowds of any size from gathering.

Another of the world's most popular places to be on December 31, Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, pressed ahead with its revelry despite a surge of infections. Images of masked health care workers briefly lit up Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower, before fireworks exploded in the sky over the building. Tens of thousands of people flooded the streets and squares marked out for social distancing were largely ignored.

Still, the pandemic robbed the night of its freewheeling spirit. Authorities implemented a raft of anti-virus measures to control rowdy crowds in downtown Dubai. At luxury bars and restaurants, music blared and people drank, but dancing was strictly prohibited.

The gleam of Las Vegas brought a similar crowd, with tens of thousands of people walking on the Strip by early evening despite a plea from the governor to avoid gatherings.

South Africans were also urged to cancel parties. Many instead lit candles as a way to honor health workers and people who have died in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many European countries, authorities warned they were ready to clamp down on revelers breaching public health rules, including nightly curfews in France, Italy, Turkey, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Greece.

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"No one will be on the streets after 10 p.m. (Athens) will be a dead city to make sure no more restrictions are imposed," said Greece's public order minister, Michalis Chrisohoidis.

France's government flooded the streets with 100,000 law enforcement officers to enforce the nationwide curfew.

A few families gathered in Madrid's sunny central Puerta de Sol square to listen to the rehearsal of the traditional ringing of the bells that is held at midnight. They followed the Spanish custom of eating 12 grapes with each stroke of the bells before police cleared the area that normally hosts thousands of revelers.

"That's it, life goes on. Despite what happened we have to celebrate," said Cesar Pulido, 32, who celebrated in Madrid. "We have to eat the 12 grapes in order to ask 12 wishes like health, love, money, everything and good vibes."

As the clock struck midnight, fireworks erupted over Moscow's Red Square and the Acropolis in Athens, but the explosions echoed across largely empty streets as people obeyed orders to stay home.

From Berlin to Brussels, normally raucous celebrations were muted by the pandemic.

Even the British government, keen to celebrate the U.K.'s definitive split from the EU, ran ads imploring the public to "see in the New Year safely at home" amid a record number of newly confirmed cases. London's annual New Year's Eve fireworks display was canceled, but an unannounced display was broadcast before midnight, with tributes to health care workers, a reference to the Black Lives Matter movement and even a voice saying "you're on mute" in reference to a bugbear of virtual work meetings.

In Scotland, residents normally mark the new year with parties and "first footing," where a home's first visitor of the year comes bearing gifts. The tradition is among the list of activities the government warned against.

"No gatherings, no house parties, no first-footing. Instead, we should bring in 2021 in our own homes with just our own households," Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said.

Many around the world looked toward 2021 with hope, partly due to the arrival of vaccines that offer a chance of beating the pandemic.

"Although this was a very difficult year, a year of many losses, I'm grateful to be safe, to follow the rules, to do my part," said Marilia Rafael, 33, who celebrated in Portugal, "and would like to ask that the next year may be better for all of us, may it be a year of hope, peace and love."

More than 1.8 million deaths worldwide have been linked to the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic.

Some leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, used their New Year's address to thank citizens for enduring hardship during the lockdown and criticize those who defied the rules. Others, like Italy's President Sergio Mattarella, flew the flag for science, urging citizens to discard their fears about getting immunized against COVID-19.

"Faced with an illness so highly contagious, which causes so many deaths, it's necessary to protect one's own health and it's dutiful to protect those of the others – family members, friends, colleagues," said Mattarella, 79.

In Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, where official fireworks and celebrations also were canceled to limit the rapid spread of the virus, police officers braced for what promised to be a long night.

Rio officials decided to seal off Copacabana, where millions of people dressed in white usually gather on the beach to marvel at fireworks and attend large concerts. This year, between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. on Jan. 1, only local residents will be able to access the city's iconic shore, authorities said.

In South Korea, Seoul's city government canceled its annual New Year's Eve bell-ringing ceremony in the Jongno neighborhood for the first time since the event was first held in 1953, months after the end of the Korean War.

New Zealand, which is two hours ahead of Sydney, and several of its South Pacific island neighbors that also have no active COVID-19 cases held their usual New Year's activities.

In Chinese societies, the virus ensured more muted celebrations of the solar New Year, which is less widely observed than the Lunar New Year that in 2021 will fall in February. Initial reports about a mystery respiratory illness sickening people in the Chinese city of Wuhan emerged exactly a year ago.

Jordans reported from Bonn, Germany, and Gatopoulos from Athens, Greece. AP reporters around the world contributed to this report.

California passes 25,000 deaths, finds 3 more variant cases

By BRIAN MELLEY and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California surpassed 25,000 coronavirus deaths since the start of the pandemic and officials disclosed Thursday that three more cases involving a mutant variant of the virus have been confirmed in San Diego County.

The grim developments came as an ongoing surge swamps hospitals and pushes nurses and doctors to the breaking point as they brace for another likely increase after the holidays.

"We're exhausted and it's the calm before the storm," said Jahmaal Willis, a nurse and emergency room leader at Providence St. Mary Medical Center in Apple Valley. "It's like we're fighting a war, a never-ending war, and we're running out of ammo. We have to get it together before the next fight."

Public health officials continued to plead with residents just hours before the start of 2021 not to gather for New Year's Eve celebrations.

In Los Angeles County, where an average of six people die every hour from COVID-19, the Department of Public Health tweeted out snippets every 10 minutes on lives that have been lost.

"The hair stylist who worked for 20 years to finally open her own shop."

"A grandmother who loved to sing to her grandchildren."

"The bus driver who put her daughter through college and was beaming with pride."

The tweets, which included messages to wear a mask, physically distance, stay home and "Slow the spread. Save a life," came on a day when the county reported a record 290 deaths. That would be a rate of one death every five minutes, though it included a backlog.

Los Angeles County, which has a quarter of the state's 40 million residents, has had 40% of the deaths in California, the third state to reach the 25,000 death count. New York has had nearly 38,000 deaths, and Texas has had more than 27,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Infections are spreading rapidly. San Diego County confirmed Thursday that it had found a total of four cases of the virus variant that appears to be more contagious. A 30-year-old man tested positive for the variant on Wednesday and three more men — two in their 40s and one in his 50s — also have been confirmed to have the strain. Other cases involving the variant have been confirmed in Florida and Colorado.

At least two of the men in San Diego County hadn't traveled outside of the country and none had "any known interaction with each other," the county said. Officials believed many more cases will surface.

San Diego County also reported a record high number of new deaths in a single day at 62, well over the previous record of 39 reported only a week earlier.

Hospitals, particularly in Southern California and the agricultural San Joaquin Valley in the middle of the state, have been overrun with virus patients and don't have any more intensive care unit beds for COVID-19 patients.

In Los Angeles County, hospitals have been pushed "to the brink of catastrophe," said Dr. Christina Ghaly, health services director. "This is simply not sustainable. Not just for our hospitals, for our entire health system."

Cathy Chidester, director of the county's Emergency Medical Services Agency, said hospitals are facing problems with oxygen with so many COVID-19 patients needing it because they are struggling to breathe. Older hospitals are having difficulty maintaining oxygen pressure in aging infrastructure and some are scrambling to locate additional oxygen tanks for discharged patients to take home.

Ambulances are being forced to wait in bays as long as eight hours before they can transfer patients inside hospitals — and in some cases, doctors are treating patients inside ambulances, she said.

At Providence St. Mary Medical Center, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) east of Los Angeles, there is a cacophany of alarms that sound when a patient's heart stops and a constant hiss from the oxygen keeping

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so many alive, Willis said. The hospital has filled the triage area with beds and is assessing new arrivals in the parking lot. Three dozen patients were waiting to be admitted.

"We're overflowing," Willis said. "We're treating patients in chairs, we're treating patients in the hallways."

In Santa Clara County, home to Silicon Valley, only 8% of ICU beds were available, which is better than many places. Hospitals are still "stretched to the limit," said Dr. Ahmad Kamal, county director of health-care preparedness.

Two months ago, the county had 4.5 cases per 100,000 people. Now it has 50 cases per 100,000.

"What we are seeing now is not normal," Kamal said. "It is an order of magnitude more than we saw just two months ago. We are not out of the woods. We are in the thick of the woods. And we all need to redouble our efforts."

Kamal said the one bit of good news was that hospitals hadn't felt the additional pressure of new cases after Christmas that they did after Thanksgiving, which has led to the current surge.

But public health officials fear a double-whammy from people who gathered at Christmas and New Year's will create a surge upon a surge. They made their final pleas to persuade people to stay home on what is typically one of the biggest party nights of the year.

"We recognize the temptation and the frustration," Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said. "You may simply want to stray for one night to celebrate with friends. However, all it takes is one slip to have one exposure and the coronavirus has found another host, another victim, and our dangerous surge continues."

Most of the state is under a 10 p.m. curfew and newly extended restrictions that have closed or reduced capacity of businesses. People are being urged to stay home as much as possible to try to slow the spread of infections.

Police in Los Angeles will be patrolling streets and looking to shut down large New Year's Eve gatherings, Mayor Eric Garcetti said. San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria issued an executive order directing stricter enforcement of state and local public health rules.

This story has been corrected to show that 25,000 coronavirus deaths were reported Thursday, not Friday, and that the San Diego man with the new variant of COVID-19 is 30 years old, not 20.

Last of singing McGuire Sisters dies in Vegas; Phyllis, 89

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Phyllis McGuire, the last surviving member of the three singing McGuire Sisters who topped the charts with several hits in the 1950s, has died. She was 89.

The lead singer and younger sister of Dorothy and Christine McGuire died on Tuesday in Las Vegas, the Palm Eastern Mortuary and Cemetery confirmed on Thursday. A cause of death was not provided.

Known for their sweet harmonies and identical outfits and hairdos, the McGuire Sisters earned six gold records for hits including 1954's "Sincerely" and 1957's "Sugartime."

The group performed for five presidents and Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain. They were inducted into the National Broadcasting Hall of Fame in 1994 and the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 2001.

The Las Vegas Sun reported Phyllis McGuire died at her mansion she called "the Beverly Hills of Las Vegas" in the Rancho Circle estates near downtown Las Vegas. The 26,000-square-foot (2,415-square-meter) home includes a 45-foot (14-meter) version of the Eiffel Tower.

The sisters began singing together as children at their mother's Ohio church and then performed at weddings and church revivals.

They rose to popularity during World War II and got their show business break in 1952 with an appearance on the "Kate Smith Show." They quit performing as a trio but returned to the stage as a threesome in 1985.

The three last performed together in the mid-2000s, and were featured on a 2004 PBS show called "Magic Moments - Best of 50s Pop."

"They were amazing. They brought the country together by singing wonderful songs," Lovee Arum, one

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of McGuire's longtime friends, told the Sun. "Phyllis McGuire was beautiful, talented and was part of the Las Vegas allure."

Phyllis Jean McGuire was born in Middletown, Ohio, on Feb. 14, 1931. Dorothy McGuire Williamson died in 2012. Christine McGuire died in 2018.

Phyllis McGuire married broadcaster Neal Van Ells in 1952. They divorced in 1956.

She also was known for her relationship with 1960s mobster Sam Giancana. Mary Louise-Parker played the role of Phyllis McGuire in the 1995 HBO film "Sugartime," which portrayed Giancana's love affair with her.

Britain ends long Brexit journey with economic break from EU

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's long and sometimes acrimonious divorce from the European Union ended Thursday with an economic split that leaves the EU smaller and the U.K. freer but more isolated in a turbulent world.

Britain left the European bloc's vast single market for people, goods and services at 11 p.m. London time, midnight in Brussels, completing the biggest single economic change the country has experienced since World War II. A different U.K.-EU trade deal will bring new restrictions and red tape, but for British Brexit supporters, it means reclaiming national independence from the EU and its web of rules.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose support for Brexit helped push the country out of the EU, called it "an amazing moment for this country."

"We have our freedom in our hands, and it is up to us to make the most of it," he said in a New Year's video message.

The break comes 11 months after a political Brexit that left the two sides in the limbo of a "transition period" — like a separated couple still living together, wrangling and wondering whether they can remain friends. Now the U.K. has finally moved out.

It was a day some had longed for and others dreaded since Britain voted in a 2016 referendum to leave the EU, but it turned out to be something of an anticlimax. U.K. lockdown measures to curb the coronavirus curtailed mass gatherings to celebrate or mourn the moment, though a handful of Brexit supporters defied the restrictions to raise a toast outside Parliament as the Big Ben bell sounded 11 times on the hour.

A free trade agreement sealed on Christmas Eve after months of tense negotiations ensures that Britain and the 27-nation EU can continue to buy and sell 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 companies face sheaves of new costs and paperwork, including customs declarations and border checks. Traders are struggling to digest the new rules imposed by the 1,200-page trade deal.

The English Channel port of Dover and the Eurotunnel passenger and freight route braced for delays as the new measures were introduced, though the pandemic and a holiday weekend meant cross-Channel traffic was light, with only a trickle of trucks arriving at French border posts in Calais as 2020 ended. The vital supply route was snarled for days after France closed its border to U.K. truckers for 48 hours last week in response to a fast-spreading variant of the virus identified in England.

The British government insisted that "the border systems and infrastructure we need are in place, and we are ready for the U.K.'s new start."

But freight companies were holding their breath. Youngs Transportation in the U.K. suspended services to the EU until Jan. 11 "to let things settle."

"We figure it gives the country a week or so to get used to all of these new systems in and out, and we can have a look and hopefully resolve any issues in advance of actually sending our trucks," said the company's director, Rob Hollyman.

The services sector, which makes up 80% of Britain's economy, does not even know what the rules will be for business with the EU in 2021. Many of the details have yet to be hammered out. Months and years of further discussion and argument over everything from fair competition to fish quotas lie ahead as Britain and the EU settle into their new relationship as friends, neighbors and rivals.

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Hundreds of millions of individuals in Britain and the bloc also face changes to their daily lives. Britons and EU citizens have lost the automatic right to live and work in the other's territory. From now on, they will have to follow immigration rules and obtain work visas. Tourists face new headaches including from travel insurance and pet paperwork.

For some in Britain, including the prime minister, it's a moment of pride and a chance for the U.K. to set new diplomatic and economic priorities. Johnson said the U.K. was now "free to do trade deals around the world, and free to turbocharge our ambition to be a science superpower."

Conservative lawmaker Bill Cash, who has campaigned for Brexit for decades, said it was a "victory for democracy and sovereignty."

That's not a view widely shared across the Channel. In the French president's traditional New Year's address, Emmanuel Macron expressed regret.

"The United Kingdom remains our neighbor but also our friend and ally," he said. "This choice of leaving Europe, this Brexit, was the child of European malaise and lots of lies and false promises."

The divorce could also have major constitutional repercussions for the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, which shares a border with EU member Ireland, remains more closely tied to the bloc's economy under the divorce terms, a status that could pull it away from the rest of the U.K.

In Scotland, which voted strongly in 2016 to remain, Brexit has bolstered support for separation from the U.K. The country's pro-independence First Minister Nicola Sturgeon tweeted: "Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on."

Many in Britain felt apprehension about a leap into the unknown that is taking place during a pandemic that has upended life around the world.

"I feel very sad that we're leaving," said Jen Percy-Edwards, a filmmaker in London. "I think that COVID has overshadowed everything that is going on. But I think the other thing that has happened is that people feel a bigger sense of community, and I think that makes it even sadder that we're breaking up our community a bit, by leaving our neighbours in Europe."

"I'm hopeful that we find other ways to rebuild ties," she said.

Associated Press writers Renee Graham in London and John Leicester in Le Pecq, France, contributed to this report.

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Shutdown, impeachment, virus: Chaotic Congress winds down

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is ending a chaotic session, a two-year political firestorm that started with the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history, was riven by impeachment and a pandemic, and now closes with a rare rebuff by Republicans of President Donald Trump.

In the few days remaining, GOP senators are ignoring Trump's demand to increase COVID-19 aid checks to \$2,000 and are poised to override his veto of a major defense bill, asserting traditional Republican spending and security priorities in defiance of a president who has marched the party in a different direction.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a top Trump ally, tried to bridge the divide Thursday, saying Congress could try again to approve Trump's push for bigger COVID aid checks in the new session, which opens Sunday.

"I am with President Trump on this," Graham said on Fox News.

"Our economy is really hurting here," he said. "There's no way to get a vote by Jan. 3. The new Congress begins noon Jan. 3. So the new Congress, you could get a vote."

As the Senate grinds through the New Year's holiday, the one-two rebuke of Trump's demands punctuates the president's final days and deepens the divide between the Republican Party's new wing of Trump-styled populists and what had been mainstay conservative views.

The stalemate is expected to drag into the weekend.

An exasperated Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said this week, "After all the insanity that

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Senate Republicans have tolerated from President Trump — his attacks on the rule of law, an independent judiciary, the conduct that led to his impeachment — is this where Senate Republicans are going to draw the line — \$2,000 checks to the American people?”

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has shown little interest in Trump’s push to bolster the \$600 relief checks just approved in a sweeping year-end package, declaring Congress has provided enough pandemic aid, for now, as he blocked repeated Democratic attempts to force a vote.

Opening the Senate on Thursday, McConnell called the House-passed bill matching Trump’s \$2,000 request “socialism for rich people” who don’t need the federal help. He prefers a more targeted approach.

The refusal to act on the checks, along with the veto Friday or Saturday of the defense bill, could very well be among McConnell’s final acts as majority leader as two GOP senators in Georgia are in the fights of their political lives in runoff elections next week that will determine which party controls the Senate.

Trump made an early return Thursday to the White House from his private club in Florida.

Trump and President-elect Joe Biden are separately poised to campaign in Georgia ahead of Tuesday’s election as GOP Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler face Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock.

It’s a dizzying end to a session of Congress that resembles few others for the sheer number of crises and political standoffs as Trump’s presidency defined and changed the legislative branch.

Congress opened in 2019 with the federal government shutdown over Trump’s demands for money to build the border wall with Mexico. Nancy Pelosi regained the speaker’s gavel after Democrats swept to the House majority in the midterm election.

The Democratic-led House went on to impeach the president over his request to the Ukrainian president to “do us a favor” against Biden ahead of the presidential election. The Republican-led Senate acquitted the president in 2020 of the charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

When the pandemic struck, Congress rallied with unusual speed and agreement to pass a \$2 trillion relief package, the largest federal intervention of its kind in U.S. history.

The COVID-19 crisis also shuttered the Capitol and altered the workings of Congress. The House changed its rules to allow proxy voting, a first, so lawmakers could avoid the health risks of travel to Washington. The Senate ultimately halted its traditional daily lunches.

The usually bustling halls of Congress became eerily silent most days. Many members tested positive for the virus.

The Congress had few other notable legislative accomplishments, and could not agree on how to respond to the racial injustice reckoning that erupted after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement.

Instead, the Senate was primarily focused on filling the courts with Trump’s conservative judicial nominees, including confirming his third Supreme Court justice, Amy Coney Barrett.

As the session appeared to be winding down, Trump stunned Washington days before Christmas by delaying his signature on the latest \$2 trillion-plus COVID relief and year-end funding package over his fresh demands for additional aid.

Trump’s push for \$2,000 checks gained sudden momentum when dozens of House Republicans joined Democrats in approving the measure Monday. But the effort fizzled in the GOP-led Senate.

Democrats embraced Trump’s demand, a rare alliance with the Republican president, but his own party split between those few joining his push for more aid and others objecting to more spending they said was not targeted to those who need it most.

Liberal senators, led by Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who support the relief boost are blocking action on the defense bill until a vote is taken on Trump’s demand.

McConnell offered an alternative aid bill, linking the \$2,000 checks with Trump’s other priorities, including a complicated repeal of protections for tech companies like Facebook or Twitter and the establishment of a bipartisan commission to review the 2020 presidential election.

But the GOP leader has scheduled no votes on his measure and it would be unlikely to have enough support in Congress to pass.

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For now, the smaller \$600 checks are being sent to households. Americans earning up to \$75,000 qualify for the payments, which are phased out at higher income levels, and there's an additional \$600 payment per dependent child.

The outgoing president has been berating Republican leaders for the standoff, but he appears more focused on gathering GOP support for his extraordinary Electoral College challenge of Biden's victory when the vote is tallied in a joint session of Congress on Jan. 6.

Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri is among those leading Trump's challenge to the Electoral College result, but he was rebuked Thursday by GOP Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, who warned colleagues off what he called a "dangerous ploy" that could damage trust in elections.

The challenge is not expected to change the election outcome, with Biden set to be inaugurated Jan. 20. But it will be among the first votes tallied in the new Congress.

Wisconsin hospital worker arrested for spoiled vaccine doses

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Authorities arrested a suburban Milwaukee pharmacist Thursday suspected of deliberately ruining hundreds of doses of coronavirus vaccine by removing them from refrigeration for two nights.

The arrest marks another setback in what has been a slower, messier start to vaccinate Americans than public health officials had expected. Leaders in Wisconsin and other states have been begging the Trump administration for more doses as health care workers and senior citizens line up for the lifesaving vaccine.

Police in Grafton, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Milwaukee, said the Advocate Aurora Health pharmacist was arrested on suspicion of reckless endangerment, adulterating a prescription drug and criminal damage to property, all felonies. The pharmacist has been fired and police said in a news release that he was in jail. Police did not identify the pharmacist, saying he has not yet been formally charged.

His motive remains unclear. Police said that detectives believe he knew the spoiled doses would be useless and people who received them would mistakenly think they'd been vaccinated when they hadn't.

Advocate Aurora Health Care Chief Medical Group Officer Jeff Bahr told reporters during a teleconference Thursday afternoon that the pharmacist deliberately removed 57 vials that held hundreds of doses of the Moderna vaccine from refrigeration at a Grafton medical center overnight on Dec. 24 into Dec. 25, returned them, then left them out again on the night of Dec. 25 into Saturday. The vials contained enough doses to inoculate 570 people.

A pharmacy technician discovered the vials outside the refrigerator on Saturday morning. Bahr said the pharmacist initially said that he had removed the vials to access other items in the refrigerator and had inadvertently failed to put them back.

The Moderna vaccine is viable for 12 hours outside refrigeration, so workers used the vaccine to inoculate 57 people before discarding the rest. Police said the discarded doses were worth between \$8,000 and \$11,000.

Bahr said health system officials grew more suspicious of the pharmacist as they reviewed the incident. After multiple interviews, the pharmacist acknowledged Wednesday that he removed the vaccine intentionally over the two nights, Bahr said.

That means that the doses people received Saturday are all but useless, he said. Moderna has told Aurora that there's no safety concerns, but the hospital system is closely monitoring the people who received the spoiled doses, he said.

Bahr declined to comment on the pharmacist's motive. He said the hospital system's security protocols are sound.

"This was a situation involving a bad actor," he said, "as opposed to a bad process."

The number of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin has been rising in recent days after dipping in early December. The state Department of Health Services reported 3,810 newly confirmed cases on Thursday, marking the third straight day of rising daily infections. The state has now seen 481,102 cases.

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COVID-19 was a factor in 41 more deaths, pushing the state's overall death toll to 4,859. The survival rate remained unchanged at 99%.

A little more than 47,150 people had been vaccinated in Wisconsin as of Monday morning, according to the latest data from the health agency. The state has been allocated 265,575 doses of both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. As of Monday morning, only about 157,000 doses had arrived.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers wrote a letter to President Donald Trump earlier in December asking him to prioritize more doses for Wisconsin due to high case numbers, swamped hospitals and a lack of statewide mitigation mandates.

Follow Todd Richmond on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/trichmond>

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Nashville explosion was caused by a bomb, not a missile

CLAIM: Video shows that Nashville explosion was caused by a missile or some kind of directed energy weapon.

THE FACTS: The explosion was caused by a bomb inside a parked recreational vehicle in downtown Nashville. Social media users shared grainy surveillance video from the Dec. 25 explosion, and pointed to a streak of smoke to falsely claim that the blast was caused by a bomb or a directed energy weapon. "Looking like a missile strike now. Video proof. Explains why the airspace was locked down," wrote one Twitter user on Dec. 26. Similar false claims circulated widely on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit and Parler. Police were responding to a report of shots fired when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes. Police have identified Anthony Quinn Warner, 63, who was killed in the explosion, as the person responsible for the blast. A motive has not been determined. Surveillance video from a Metro Nashville Police Department camera at the intersection of 2nd Avenue North and Commerce Street captured the explosion and offers proof that the blast came from the parked recreational vehicle. Social media users were sharing a different grainy, black-and-white surveillance video from a local business that showed the explosion from a distance. WKRN-TV, a Nashville television station, aired the footage. Posts pointed to what appears to be a streak of smoke captured in the video, falsely asserting it was a "missile trail" from a strike in the area. Other posts said a directed energy weapon caused the damage. A frame-by-frame review of the video revealed the smoke was ascending from the source of the blast. "That is not a missile strike. Missiles don't leave smoke trails as they come back down," Jeffrey Lewis, an expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies told The Associated Press in an email. The explosion outside an AT&T building in downtown Nashville, interfered with communications in several Southern states, damaged dozens of buildings and injured three people, the AP reported. Some posts falsely alleged a missile targeted AT&T because the company got a contract to do a forensic audit of Dominion Voting Systems machines and those machines were recently moved to the AT&T building in Nashville that was damaged in the explosion.

— The Associated Press

AT&T not conducting voting machine audit near Nashville explosion site

CLAIM: AT&T got a contract to do a forensic audit of Dominion Voting Systems machines and those machines were recently moved to Nashville, Tennessee — to the same AT&T building that was damaged in a Christmas morning explosion.

THE FACTS: AT&T did not have a contract to audit Dominion machines and was not holding Dominion

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machines in its Nashville building, both companies confirmed to The Associated Press. But as federal officials work to piece together a motive for the Christmas morning blast that rattled downtown Nashville, including damage to an AT&T-owned building, social media users have made baseless claims connecting the explosion to voting machines used in the Nov. 3 election. "AT&T got a contract to do forensic audit on Dominion voting machines and those machines were being moved to Nashville this past week," read one post. "So, the explosion 'just happened' to be at the AT&T location where they 'just so happen' to control the cooling system for the super computer and house the dominion voting machines and drives for forensic audit..." Another groundless post reads: "Wait, the bombing in Nashville was at the AT&T data center right after they got the contract to audit the Dominion voting machines? That's an interesting coincidence." Spokespeople for AT&T and Dominion confirmed to the AP that AT&T had no contract to audit Dominion machines, and no Dominion machines were to be sent to Nashville. Some of the posts attempted to further link AT&T to Dominion by claiming a former owner of the AT&T building was a board member of a firm that owns Dominion. Cerberus Capital Management, the firm named in the posts, does not own Dominion, nor does it own the company that does own Dominion, Staple Street Capital. "Dominion has no connection to AT&T, the building, Nashville, family members of the Bidens or the Clintons, and Staple Street is not owned by Cerberus," said Tony Fratto, a partner at the public relations firm Hamilton Place Strategies who emailed the AP on behalf of Dominion. "These are conspiracies manufactured out of whole cloth." Dominion has been the target of a wide range of false posts since American voters chose Joe Biden as their next president, despite no evidence of widespread fraud or irregularities in the 2020 election.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson reported from Seattle.

Brother of Georgia SOS is not a Chinese tech firm executive

CLAIM: Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has a brother, Ron, who works for a Chinese tech firm, Huawei.

THE FACTS: Social media posts and a fictitious story circulating online falsely claim that the top election official in Georgia has a brother named Ron, who works as an executive for the Chinese tech giant Huawei. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger does not have a brother named Ron, his office confirmed Wednesday. He has three sisters and a brother, his office said. A 2018 family obituary the AP reviewed also confirms his brother is not named Ron. Social media posts making the false claim suggest Raffensperger should be investigated because of his brother's Huawei connection. The company has been at the center of rising tensions between the U.S. and Chinese over technology security. President Donald Trump's administration has imposed restrictions on the Chinese company, cutting off its access to U.S. components and technology. Trump also tweeted out the false claim about Raffensperger's brother on Tuesday night. "Now it turns out that Brad R's brother works for China and they definitely don't want 'Trump'. So disgusting!" Trump said in his inaccurate tweet. Raffensperger, who oversees Georgia's elections, has been the target of death threats and misinformation since President Donald Trump's presidential race loss in Georgia by more than 11,000 votes. A spokesman for Huawei did not immediately respond to AP's request for comment.

— Associated Press writer Amanda Seitz reported from Chicago.

Posts misrepresent study examining household coronavirus transmission

CLAIM: University of Florida researchers found "no asymptomatic or presymptomatic spread of Covid" in a study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association.

THE FACTS: Social media users are misrepresenting a recent study, leading to the spread of misinformation about COVID-19. A false post that was shared on Dec. 27 reads: "University of Florida researchers have found no asymptomatic or presymptomatic spread of Covid. The study was published online by the Journal of the American Medical Association. This could change everything." The post had amassed more than 35,000 retweets a day later, and was also shared widely on Facebook. Social media users shared the false post to justify arguments that shutting down businesses and schools during the pandemic was

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unnecessary. But a spokesperson for the network of journals published by the Journal of the American Medical Association confirmed to The Associated Press that no study with such conclusions had been published by the network. "Numerous reports support transmission of SARS-CoV-2 by individuals who are asymptomatic," Deanna Bellandi, media relations manager for JAMA Network wrote in an email. "Claims that any JAMA Network journal has published evidence to the contrary is incorrect and misleading." The false claims follow the release of a study by University of Florida researchers that was published on Dec. 14 on the website of JAMA Network Open, one of the journals in the JAMA network. The study analyzed data from 54 previous studies about household spread of SARS-CoV-2, and found rates of transmission to other household members was higher if the infected person had symptoms rather than was asymptomatic. The analysis also found transmission was higher between adults rather than children, and between spouses rather than other family contacts. The study did not conclude there is no asymptomatic or presymptomatic spread of COVID-19 as social media users claim it does. "No, no we didn't say that," said Natalie E. Dean, a co-author of the study and a University of Florida assistant professor of biostatistics "This is a misinterpretation of our message of our scientific findings and conclusions." Dean said it is important for the public to understand her study was only analyzing household studies and there is limited data at this point. She said "there does seem to be evidence that people who never have symptoms do appear to be less infectious," but she said that does not mean that people without symptoms cannot transmit the virus that causes COVID-19. "Certainly we are seeing presymptomatic transmissions before they develop symptoms," Dean said, a point that is also made clearly in the article text. She called presymptomatic transmission "an important feature of this virus" and said "our policies need to reflect that." People who are infected with COVID-19 but are not experiencing symptoms cannot know whether or not they will develop them. Dean noted that even if it is the case that people who have symptoms and are coughing are more infectious, someone without symptoms could wind up spreading the virus more if they are continuing to interact with other people. The published study says "important questions remain" about household spread, including how infectious asymptomatic, mildly ill and severely ill cases are.

— Associated Press writer Jude Joffe-Block reported from Berkeley, Calif.

There were not more votes than voters in Pennsylvania

CLAIM: There were 205,000 more votes than voters in the 2020 election in Pennsylvania.

THE FACTS: A misleading claim about election results based on incomplete data is circulating widely on social media a week before Congress meets to reaffirm Joe Biden's decisive presidential win. The claim emerged in a Monday press release from Pennsylvania Republican state lawmakers, including state Rep. Frank Ryan. "A comparison of official county election results to the total number of voters who voted on Nov. 3, 2020, as recorded by the Department of State shows that 6,962,607 total ballots were reported as being cast, while DoS/SURE system records indicate that only 6,760,230 total voters actually voted," the release said. The claim then spread to several right-wing websites and social media influencers, including Trump, whose tweet claiming Pennsylvania had 205,000 more votes than voters was retweeted more than 117,000 times. However, these claims rely on incomplete data, according to Wanda Murren, communications director for the Pennsylvania Department of State, who called the lawmakers' release "obvious misinformation." It was not immediately clear where the numbers cited in the release originated and Ryan did not respond to a call seeking comment on Tuesday. However, the apparent reference to SURE (Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors) in Pennsylvania points to state data on the voting history of registered voters, which some large counties have not finished uploading yet. "These counties, which include Philadelphia, Allegheny, Butler and Cambria, would account for a significant number of voters," Murren told The Associated Press in an emailed statement. "The numbers certified by the counties, not the uploading of voter histories into the SURE system, determines the ultimate certification of an election by the secretary." The numbers certified by Pennsylvania counties in November show that more than 6.9 million voters cast ballots in the 2020 election, electing Biden the winner by more than 80,000 votes. Social media users in recent weeks have also made similar claims that there were more votes counted

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than registered voters in battleground states and key cities. Those claims are easily debunked. In Pennsylvania, for example, there were nearly 7 million votes cast. The total number of registered voters in 2020 was just over 9 million. "This obvious misinformation put forth by Rep. Ryan and others is the hallmark of so many of the claims made about this year's presidential election," Murren told the AP in an emailed statement. "When exposed to even the simplest examination, courts at every level have found these and similar conspiratorial claims to be wholly without basis."

— Ali Swenson

Posts falsely claim there are only 133 million registered voters in the US

CLAIM: There are 133 million registered voters in the United States so if President Donald Trump got 74 million votes, President-elect Joe Biden could not have received 81 million votes.

THE FACTS: The number of registered voters in the U.S. is much greater than 133 million. But false claims about the 2020 presidential election persist online, including the bogus allegation that vote tallies in the presidential race don't add up because they exceed the total number of registered voters in the country. "Donald Trump got 74 million votes and There are 133 million registered voters in the USA," reads a popular but inaccurate tweet that was shared thousands of times on both Twitter and Facebook. "If every single registered voter went out and voted there would only be 59 million votes left for Biden. How did he get 81 million votes?" The posts are false because they rely on an incorrect number of total registered voters. A survey of election officials from all over the country by the Election Assistance Commission found there were 211 million Americans on voter rolls ahead of the 2018 election. The 133 million figure shared on social media is also far lower than the more than 136 million ballots cast in the 2016 election. "The number of 133 million registered voters is plainly false," said Michael McDonald, a University of Florida political scientist who runs the election data site, U.S. Election Project. While experts all agree the 133 million figure is far too low for 2020, coming up with the precise number of American registered voters at a given moment is not straight forward. Each state manages its own voter rolls, and people are constantly registering, dying and moving to new states, leading to changes in the totals and duplications. Furthermore, states differ in how they manage their rolls. For example, some states have a category of registered voters who are marked as "inactive" and North Dakota does not have voter registration. Jonathan Robinson, lead research scientist at Catalist, which provides voter data and other services to civic and progressive organizations, said it is challenging to pinpoint the number of registered voters in the U.S. "These numbers are ever-evolving, there really isn't one number," Robinson said. Robinson estimates the number of registered voters ahead of the Nov. 3 election was somewhere between 195 million and 215 million, depending on how the data is analyzed and which suspected duplicate or ineligible voters were excluded. Brandi Travis, a spokesperson for the voter list vendor Aristotle, told the AP that the company has more than 215 million registered voters in its database. L2, another voter list vendor whose customers include the AP, estimated the number at eligible registrants at 200 million before the Nov. 3 election. Paul Westcott, L2 senior vice president, said that figure accounted for removing duplicate voters, people who have died and people who appeared on the rolls of more than one state due to a recent move. Most election researchers calculate voter turnout based on the number of eligible voters, rather than how many were registered to vote. The U.S. Elections Project estimates 239 million Americans were eligible to vote in the 2020 election based on their age, citizenship and criminal record, and that more than 159 million — or 67.7% — participated. According to Dec. 18 data from the AP, Biden received 81,281,888 votes and Trump received 74,223,251 votes.

— Jude Joffe-Block

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Sen. Perdue quarantines for virus exposure before GA runoff

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Republican Sen. David Perdue was forced into quarantine Thursday in the home stretch of Georgia's high-stakes Senate runoffs, disclosing just five days before the election that he had been exposed to a campaign worker infected with the coronavirus.

Perdue's campaign did not say how long he plans to stay in quarantine, but guidelines of the federal Centers for Disease Control say those exposed to the virus can resume normal activities after seven days if they have a negative test result.

It's bad timing for Perdue and fellow Republicans heading into critical runoffs that will determine control of the Senate. Following the CDC's guidance would keep Perdue in isolation for the remainder of the campaign, including a planned Georgia rally Monday with President Donald Trump.

"This morning, Senator Perdue was notified that he came into close contact with someone on the campaign who tested positive for COVID-19," the Perdue campaign's statement said. "Both Senator Perdue and his wife tested negative today, but following his doctor's recommendations and in accordance with CDC guidelines, they will quarantine."

The statement went on to say Perdue's campaign "will continue to follow CDC guidelines."

Both Perdue and fellow GOP Sen. Kelly Loeffler are on Georgia's runoff ballot Tuesday. Perdue faces Democrat Jon Ossoff, while Loeffler faces Democrat Raphael Warnock.

If both Republican incumbents lose, Democrats will control the Senate.

Perdue's campaign did not identify the worker who tested positive for the virus.

In late November, Loeffler went into self-quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19. Her campaign said she developed no symptoms, and she resumed campaigning after later tests came back negative.

Both Perdue and Loeffler have frequently worn masks on the campaign trail, but have also attended large events — including rallies with Trump and Vice President Mike Pence — where people attending crowded close together, many of them without masks.

Perdue had been scheduled to join Trump along with Loeffler on Monday for a rally to fire up turnout in heavily conservative northwest Georgia.

Democrats are also bringing their heavy hitters to the state. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris plans to campaign Sunday for Ossoff and Warnock in Savannah, followed by President-elect Joe Biden sharing a stage with the Democrats on Monday in Atlanta.

Perdue is seeking his second Senate term in a state where Democrats are gaining influence, largely because of a growing non-white population in Atlanta's suburb. In November, Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Georgia since 1992.

More than 2.8 million Georgia voters have already cast runoff ballots either by mail or during in-person early voting. That's more than half the 5 million overall votes cast statewide in the Nov. 3 election.

Census: Early analysis shows falsifying data was rare

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Responding to criticism that a shortened schedule jeopardized data quality, the U.S. Census Bureau on Thursday said less than a half percent of census takers interviewing households for the 2020 head count may have falsified their work, suggesting such problems were few and far between.

The statistical agency said in a statement that a preliminary look at the data suggests 0.4% of the hundreds of thousands of census takers, also known as enumerators, may have either falsified data or performed their jobs unsuccessfully.

"Therefore, enumerators who may have falsified data or performed poor quality work were very rare," the statement said.

The Census Bureau issued its statement after a report from its watchdog agency Wednesday that expressed concerns over lapses in quality control checks on the data used for deciding how many congressional

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seats each state gets and how \$1.5 trillion in federal funding is distributed each year. The lapses raised concerns about the quality of the census data, according to the report by the Office of Inspector General.

The report said the Census Bureau failed to complete 355,000 reinterviews of households to verify their information was accurate. Reinterviews also were not conducted with more than a third of the census takers who completed a household interview, and 70,000 cases that were red-flagged for reinterviews were given a pass even though a census clerk was unable to determine if the original interview data was correct, the report said.

About a third of the nation's 130 million households required visits from census takers, while residents in the remaining two-thirds of households self-responded either online, by phone or by mail.

Because of the failure to conduct the reinterviews, the Census Bureau can't provide a full picture of the falsification that may have taken place, said Rob Santos, president of the American Statistical Association.

"Just like with COVID testing, you won't find it if you don't look for it," Santos said Thursday in an email.

Plus, there are other concerns about data quality besides falsification, such as inconsistent responses and the reliance on getting information from neighbors or landlords when residents of a household were unavailable, he said.

"Where are the assessments of these aspects of quality?" Santos said. "They are arguably more important than falsification because they will be more prevalent."

The Associated Press has documented cases of census takers being pressured to enter false information into a computer system about homes they had not visited so they could close cases during the waning days of the once-a-decade national headcount. Other census takers told the AP that they were instructed to make up answers about households where they were unable to get information, in one instance by looking in the windows of homes and in another by basing a guess on the number of cars in a driveway or bicycles in the yard.

The Census Bureau announced it will miss Thursday's deadline for turning in the numbers used for divvying up congressional seats but aims to deliver a population count of each state in early 2021, as close to the missed deadline as possible.

In a year-end blog post, Census Bureau director Steven Dillingham said 2020 — a year when the agency was conducting the census amid a pandemic, wildfires and hurricanes — "has tested our patience, faith and strength."

"But despite all the extraordinary circumstances happening around the world, we have succeeded through the tenacity and creativity of the women and men who work at this extraordinary agency," Dillingham wrote Thursday.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>.

Chief: Police didn't show care for Andre Hill after shooting

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — In the minutes that ticked by after a police officer shot Andre Hill inside his friend's garage, officers scoured the driveway for shell casings, strung crime scene tape around the house and blocked off the street.

At one point, two Columbus officers rolled Hill over and put handcuffs on him before leaving him alone again. None of them, according to body camera footage released Thursday, offered any first aid even though Hill, a 47-year-old Black man, was barely moving, groaning and bleeding while laying on the garage floor.

Roughly 10 minutes passed before a police supervisor showed up and asked, "Anybody doing anything for him?" It wasn't until then that an officer began pumping the chest of Hill, who later was pronounced dead at a hospital on Dec. 22.

While Officer Adam Coy, who is white, was fired this week over accusations of incompetence and gross neglect of duty in the fatal shooting, the officers who failed to treat Hill also are under investigation for failing to follow department policy.

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Police Chief Thomas Quinlan said he was horrified by the lack of compassion shown in the bodycam videos. "As a police chief, and just as a human being, the events of the last week have left me shaken, and heartbroken for the family of Andre Hill," Quinlan said in a statement. "Every man and woman who wears this badge should feel the same."

Family members on Thursday blasted officers' treatment of Hill at an emotional news conference. "The way that my brother was treated, to me, it's like an animal," said his sister, Michelle Hairston. "He was preyed upon. He wasn't given any kind of chances."

"Where is the humanity?" said Benjamin Crump, a civil rights and trial attorney representing the family and who, with family members, called on Coy to be arrested and charged. "This is a couple days before Christmas. Why is nobody being Christ-like?"

Coy, a 17-year member of the force, shot Hill when he emerged from the garage holding a cellphone with his left hand and his right hand not visible. Another officer on the scene said she didn't perceive any threats and didn't see a gun, contrary to a mistaken claim by Coy.

According to the bodycam video released Thursday, Coy told another officer leading him away from the home: "I've got to figure out what I missed."

"We'll take care of that, I promise you," Officer Jared Barsotti responded.

Coy and Officer Amy Detweiler were responding to a neighbor's nonemergency call when they encountered Hill.

A woman inside a house where Hill was shot told the officers moments after the shooting that he was coming over to bring her money, according to the bodycam footage.

"He was bringing me Christmas money. He didn't do anything," she shouted.

Roughly five minutes after Hill was shot, one officer shouted: "Let's cuff him up. He's still moving."

Shawna Barnett, another one of Hill's sisters, called out officers directly for their lack of action.

"How can you sleep at night knowing that you did this, and left him there, and had the nerve to turn him over and handcuff him but not offer him any type of help?" she said Thursday.

Hill was shot two weeks after a white Franklin County sheriff's deputy shot 23-year-old Casey Goodson Jr., who was Black, outside Goodson's house on the north side of Columbus.

Twenty faith leaders, including the Roman Catholic bishop for the Columbus diocese, called for changes Thursday in central Ohio policing. The problem goes deeper than a "few bad apples" in departments, the leaders said in a letter sent to Columbus city and police officials.

"The deeper problem is the existence of a systemic culture within many police departments, as evidenced here in Columbus, where Black men are perceived as threats by the police," the letter said. "The result is that Black communities always feel harassed and threatened."

Seewer reported from Toledo. Kantele Franko in Columbus and Mark Gillispie from Cleveland contributed.

Breakthroughs come on, off field in 2020 for women's sports

By ERIC OLSON AP Sports Writer

It was a milestone year for women in sports, starting with Katie Sowers becoming the first woman to coach in the Super Bowl and ending with Becky Hammon serving as an NBA head coach.

In between was a series of breakthroughs for women who just wanted a chance — and got it.

Sarah Fuller became the first woman to score in a major college football game and Kim Ng became the first to be hired as a general manager for a major league team.

WNBA players achieved a higher level of financial security and professional women's hockey got a boost in exposure. International soccer saw an unprecedented transfer fee paid for a woman to move from one team to another, and the U.S. women's national soccer team took a step toward its goal of equitable treatment.

"2020 was certainly a tumultuous and challenging year," the Women's Sports Foundation said in a statement to The Associated Press on Thursday. "It was also transformational, with many exciting, history-

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making firsts for women's sports, athletes, coaches and leaders. Sports is a connector, a unifier and a microcosm of society. As we reflect on the power of women athletes and teams who spoke up, challenged the norms, shattered glass ceilings and showed girls, boys and everyone the limitless potential one can achieve, it gives us all hope for 2021 and beyond."

Sowers had been working as a San Francisco 49ers offensive assistant since 2017 but wasn't widely known until she was featured in a Microsoft television commercial that began running in January.

When the 49ers played the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl, she became the first female assistant and first openly gay coach to take the sideline in pro football's biggest game.

Hammon became the first female coach to take charge of a team during an NBA game, taking over the San Antonio Spurs on Wednesday night against the Los Angeles Lakers following Gregg Popovich's ejection in the second quarter.

"I look forward to the day where none of this is news, just people accomplishing things and everybody having a chance and everybody having a shot at the same thing," said the Spurs' Rudy Gay, who is close with Hammon.

Hammon, a star player in the college and pro ranks, already was the first full-time female assistant coach in league history. Hammon acknowledged it was "a substantial moment" but said she was more interested in winning the game.

"Becky Hammon is an enormously talented coach and it was outstanding to see her reach such a truly significant milestone," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "She continues to be an inspiration to so many people, especially countless young women and girls."

Fuller was the goalkeeper on Vanderbilt's Southeastern Conference championship soccer team before she rose to national prominence in November when she became the first woman to play in a Power Five conference game. She was on the field once that day, driving a low kickoff to open the second half as the Commodores got shut out at Missouri.

Two weeks later, Fuller kicked two extra points in a loss to Tennessee, with the second ball she put through the uprights sent to the College Football Hall of Fame.

In November, the Miami Marlins made Ng the first female GM in baseball, a feat accomplished after she was turned down for a similar job by at least five other teams over the past 15 years.

Ng started her baseball career as a Chicago White Sox intern in 1990 and for the past nine years was a senior vice president for MLB. Her hiring came 10 months after Alyssa Nakken became the first female coach on a major league staff when she was named an assistant for the San Francisco Giants.

On the business side, there were several notable strides made in 2020.

The WNBA and its union announced a eight-year labor deal allowing top players to earn more than \$500,000 and raising the average annual salary to \$130,000 a year. The agreement also guarantees full salaries for players who are on maternity leave and provides enhanced family benefits.

National Women's Hockey League games will be televised live in the United States for the first time when NBC Sports Network airs playoff games in early February.

In international soccer, Chelsea signed Denmark captain Pernille Harder from Wolfsburg after paying what the German club said was "a record transfer fee for the women's game." The clubs did not disclose the fee — the amount paid when a team sells a player to another team, with a portion typically going to the player — but media reports said it was about 300,000 euros (\$355,000).

In the United States, the women's national team players and the U.S. Soccer Federation settled their long-running lawsuit over inequitable working conditions compared with the men's team. The deal with the world champion American women calls for charter flights, hotel accommodations, venue selection and professional staff support equitable to that of the men's team.

The women's dispute over pay remains unsettled.

AP Basketball Writer Tim Reynolds, AP Sports Writers Dave Skretta, Steven Wine, Teresa M. Walker, Doug Feinberg, Stephen Whyno, Anne M. Peterson and Ronald Blum and AP freelance writer Raul Dominguez

contributed.

Microsoft says hackers viewed source code, didn't change it

By TALİ ARBEL AP Technology Writer

Microsoft said Thursday in a blog post that hackers tied to a massive intrusion of dozens of U.S. government agencies and private companies sneaked further into its systems than previously thought, although the intrusion doesn't appear to have caused any additional harm.

The company said the hackers were able to view some of the code underlying Microsoft software, but weren't able to make any changes to it.

Microsoft played down any risk associated with the additional intrusion, noting that its software development relies on code sharing within the company, a practice called "inner source." Likewise, Microsoft said it doesn't rely on keeping program code secret as a security measure and instead assumes that adversaries have seen its code and uses other defensive measures to frustrate attacks.

The company said it found no evidence of hacker access to customer data and no indication that its systems were used to attack others.

The hack began as early as March when malicious code was snuck into updates to SolarWinds software that monitors computer networks. Microsoft helped respond to the breach with cybersecurity firm FireEye, which discovered the hack when the security firm itself was targeted.

Cybersecurity experts and U.S. officials suspect Russia was behind the hack. Microsoft said earlier this month that it identified more than 40 government agencies, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations and IT companies infiltrated by the hackers. Russia has denied that it is to blame.

Trump returns to White House early, offers year-end message

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump delivered a year-end video message Thursday after returning early from vacation, highlighting his administration's work to rapidly develop a vaccine against COVID-19 and rebuild the economy.

As the end of his presidency neared, Trump cut short his stay at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and got back to the White House a day ahead of schedule.

Upon his return, Trump released a video message over Twitter to underscore his administration's work on the vaccine, economic stimulus checks and America's "grit, strength and tenacity" in the face of challenges.

He called the vaccine, which is rolling out nationwide, a "truly unprecedented medical miracle" and said it would be available to every American early this coming year. "We have to be remembered for what's been done," Trump said in the nearly five-minute message.

The White House didn't give a reason for Trump's early return, and the schedule change means Trump will miss the glitzy New Year's Eve party held annually at his Palm Beach club.

But it comes as tensions escalate between the United States and Iran in the final weeks of his administration. There is concern in Washington that Iran could order further military retaliation for the U.S. killing last Jan. 3 of top Iranian military commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Iran's initial response, five days after that deadly U.S. drone strike, was a ballistic missile attack on a military base in Iraq that caused brain concussion injuries to about 100 U.S. troops.

Iranian-supported Shiite militia groups launched a rocket attack on the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Dec. 20. No one was killed, but Trump said days later that Iran was on notice.

"Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over," Trump tweeted on Dec. 23. He added, "We hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq."

The White House announced the abrupt change in the president's schedule late Wednesday, hours after Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said he would raise objections next week when Congress meets to affirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the November election.

It's the latest futile attempt by Trump and his allies to fight his election defeat and overturn the will of

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the voters, and scores of previous challenges have failed, including at the Supreme Court. Former Attorney General William Barr and other administration officials have said they saw no evidence of mass voter fraud, as Trump has claimed.

Trump, accompanied by first lady Melania Trump, arrived at Mar-a-Lago after dark on Dec. 23 and spent practically the entire vacation focused on subverting the election results. That includes an effort to get Republican lawmakers to challenge the vote when Congress meets Jan. 6 to affirm Biden's 306-232 win in the Electoral College.

A group of Republicans in the Democratic-controlled House already had said they will object on Trump's behalf. They needed at least one senator to join them to force votes in both chambers, and Hawley stepped up.

The GOP objections, however, will not prevent Biden from being sworn in as president on Jan. 20, and Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., a Black woman of South Asian descent, from becoming vice president.

During his vacation, Trump also took near daily swipes on Twitter at Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp and other state elections officials over his loss to Biden in that state.

While he has remained focused on the effort to stay in power, Trump has stayed mum on major developments during the holiday break, including a Christmas Day bombing in Nashville, Tennessee, the discovery of a new and apparently more contagious variant of the coronavirus in the United States and the death of Rep.-elect Luke Letlow, R-La., from COVID-19 complications.

Since losing the election, the usually chatty Trump has avoided engaging with reporters, even those who accompanied him to Florida. He went as far as barring them from his Christmas Day remarks to the troops, the type of event the White House typically opens for news coverage.

Before he left Washington, Trump stunned Capitol Hill by objecting to spending in a government funding bill that had been paired with a fresh round of needed coronavirus relief that included \$600 payments to most Americans. Much of that spending had been sought by his own administration.

Trump jeopardized the financial aid and flirted with a government shutdown by implying that he wouldn't sign the sweeping legislation unless lawmakers increased the payments to \$2,000, a sum sought by most Democrats and some Republicans.

Trump eventually signed the bill Sunday night after several days of uncertainty in exchange for congressional votes on his demands. He also wants Congress to lift certain protections for social media companies and investigate his unfounded claims of fraud in the election.

The House voted this week in favor of increasing the payments, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., all but shut the door Wednesday when he declared that Congress had provided enough pandemic aid. McConnell blocked attempts by Democrats to force a vote in that chamber on the higher payments sought by Trump.

Dick Thornburgh, ex-governor and US attorney general, dies

By MARK SCOLFARO Associated Press

Dick Thornburgh, who as Pennsylvania governor won plaudits for his cool handling of the 1979 Three Mile Island crisis and as U.S. attorney general restored credibility to a Justice Department hurt by the Iran-Contra scandal, has died. He was 88.

Thornburgh died Thursday morning at a retirement community facility outside Pittsburgh, his son David said. The cause is not yet known. He suffered a mild stroke in June 2014.

Thornburgh built his reputation as a crime-busting federal prosecutor in Pittsburgh and as a moderate Republican governor. As the nation's top law enforcement official, he prosecuted the savings and loan scandal. He also shepherded the Americans with Disabilities Act; one of his sons had been severely brain damaged in an auto accident.

After leaving public office, Thornburgh became a go-to troubleshooter who helped CBS investigate its news practices, dissected illegalities at telecommunications company WorldCom and tried to improve the United Nations' efficiency.

"I've always had an opportunity to right a vessel that was somewhat listing and taking on water," he

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told The Associated Press in 1999. "I wouldn't object to being characterized as a 'Mr. Fix It.' I've liked the day-in, day-out challenges of governance."

President Ronald Reagan appointed Thornburgh attorney general in the waning months of his administration. Thornburgh succeeded the embattled Edwin Meese III, who was investigated by a special prosecutor for possible ethics violations, and his appointment in August 1988 was hailed on Capitol Hill as an opportunity to restore the agency's morale and image.

He was asked to stay on as attorney general when George H.W. Bush became president in 1989.

Thornburgh ran into trouble with the press and members of Congress who were put off by his imperious manner. He also battled liberals and conservatives in Congress over Justice Department appointments.

Despite the difficulties, Thornburgh enjoyed the continued backing of President Bush and won unprecedented increases from Congress in the Justice Department's budget to fight crime.

The prosecution of savings and loan operators and borrowers increased during his tenure as the nation faced a growing crisis in the thrift industry. He set up securities fraud and S&L task forces in several major cities.

Also under Thornburgh, the Justice Department pursued the prosecution of deposed Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who was brought to Miami to face drug trafficking charges after a U.S. invasion.

Thornburgh tried to halt unauthorized leaks of information about criminal investigations, but he ran into trouble in the spring of 1989 when CBS News aired a story that the FBI was investigating the congressional office of Rep. William Gray, D-Pa. The story produced expressions of outrage among Democrats because it was aired when Gray was seeking to be elected House majority whip.

An internal investigation later showed that Thornburgh's own chief spokesman played a role in confirming the story.

U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey said Thornburgh led Pennsylvania and the Department of Justice "successfully and with integrity."

"The steady nature in which he guided Pennsylvania through one of its most dangerous crises – the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island – should serve as an example for all elected officials," the Republican senator said.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, shared Toomey's sentiment, describing Thornburgh during the accident as a "necessary and steady voice of calm in the midst of a crisis."

As Pennsylvania governor from 1979 to 1987, Thornburgh won a reputation as a squeaky-clean, reform-minded executive who cut the state government's payroll, but his defining moment came barely two months into office.

In March 1979, he was confronted with the worst nuclear accident in American history when a routine equipment failure at the Three Mile Island power plant turned into a partial meltdown, which released radioactive elements.

Thornburgh agonized over whether to order an evacuation of the area around the plant. He recalled years later that "some people were telling us more than they knew and others were telling us less than they knew."

He eventually ordered pregnant women and young children to leave an area five miles around the plant, which caused thousands of others near Harrisburg to flee.

His cool handling of the 10-day crisis was credited with averting panic.

He was praised in later years for recognizing that Pennsylvania's manufacturing industry was fading and pumping state money into economic development for new businesses.

Thornburgh's career in government services stretched back to the 1960s. He was U.S. attorney in western Pennsylvania from 1969 to 1975, prosecuting drug traffickers, organized crime figures and corrupt politicians.

From 1975 to 1977, he was assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's criminal division, where he stepped up federal prosecutions of public corruption in the post-Watergate era.

He showed his sense of humor at events during his first gubernatorial campaign in 1978, mocking the state Legislature's generous compensation to the tune of "My Favorite Things." "Nice big fat paychecks

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and liberal pensions / Fringes and perks that we won't even mention ..." As attorney general, he referred to white-collar crime as "crime in the suites," as opposed to streets.

When Thornburgh left the U.S. attorney general post in 1991, he made a run for U.S. Senate, losing to Harris Wofford in the general election.

The election landed Thornburgh in a courtroom in Texas, where Karl Rove, one of George W. Bush's closest advisers, sued him to try to get back nearly \$300,000 in back campaign debts. Thornburgh lost in court, appealed and eventually settled the case.

In 1992, Thornburgh accepted a top administrative job at the United Nations to fight bureaucratic excess and corruption. He left the job after his one-year contract ended, expressing frustration at inefficiency and saying the U.N. is "almost totally lacking in effective means to deal with waste, fraud and abuse by staff members."

In recent years, Thornburgh was tapped to investigate wrongdoing in the corporate world.

In 2002, the Justice Department tapped Thornburgh to help investigate WorldCom for mismanagement, irregularities and fraud. He described the company, which made the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history, as "the poster child of corporate governance failures."

Thornburgh was co-leader of an investigation conducted by CBS when its "60 Minutes Wednesday" program used faked documents to bolster a 2004 story that questioned George W. Bush's Vietnam War-era military service. The probe's damning final report led to the firing of three news executives.

Richard Lewis Thornburgh was born July 16, 1932, and grew up in Rosslyn Farms, near Pittsburgh. He trained as an engineer at Yale, seeking to follow his civil-engineer father's footsteps, but went to law school at the University of Pittsburgh.

Upon graduation, he went to work as a corporate lawyer, later joining the law firm of Kirkpatrick and Lockhart.

Thornburgh married his childhood sweetheart, Virginia "Ginny" Hooton, in 1955. She was killed in an automobile crash in 1960 that left one of their three sons, Peter, severely brain damaged.

Three years later, Thornburgh married Ginny Judson, who raised his three sons and bore another, William. (He wrote in his memoir that "Ginny and my first wife shared not only a name but many characteristics that would no doubt have made them fast friends.")

He said the accident was a defining moment that forced him to refocus his life on what his mission and legacy would be.

Both he and his second wife became active in programs for the disabled. In 1985, the Thornburghs were named "Family of the Year" by the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens.

Five years later, the Americans With Disabilities Act was signed into law after Thornburgh played a key role in negotiating compromises with Congress.

Race to vaccinate millions in US off to slow, messy start

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Terry Beth Hadler was so eager to get a lifesaving COVID-19 vaccination that the 69-year-old piano teacher stood in line overnight in a parking lot with hundreds of other senior citizens. She wouldn't do it again.

Hadler said she waited 14 hours and that a brawl nearly erupted before dawn on Tuesday when people cut in line outside the library in Bonita Springs, Florida, where officials were offering shots on a first-come, first-served basis to those 65 or older.

"I'm afraid that the event was a super-spreader," she said. "I was petrified."

The race to vaccinate millions of Americans is off to a slower, messier start than public health officials and leaders of the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed had expected.

Overworked, underfunded state public health departments are scrambling to patch together plans for administering vaccines. Counties and hospitals have taken different approaches, leading to long lines, confusion, frustration and jammed phone lines. A multitude of logistical concerns have complicated the

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process of trying to beat back the scourge that has killed over 340,000 Americans.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is asking for patience, noting the vaccine supply is limited.

"It may not be today for everyone, may not be next week. But over the next many weeks, as long as we continue getting the supply, you're going to have the opportunity to get this," he said Wednesday.

Florida has placed a priority on residents 65 and over to receive the vaccine once medical workers and long-term care residents and staff get the shots. The decision bucks a suggestion from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to place a priority on people 75 and older and essential workers like teachers and first responders as the next to get vaccinated.

Dr. Ashish Jha, a health policy researcher and dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, said the main problem is that states are not getting adequate financial or technical support from the federal government. Jha said the Trump administration, principally the Department of Health and Human Services, has set states up to fail.

"There's a lot states still need to do," he said, "but you need a much more active role from the federal government than what they have been willing to do. They've largely said to states, 'This is your responsibility. Figure it out.'"

Lags in reporting vaccination numbers explain in part why many states aren't meeting their year-end goals, but officials blame logistical and financial hurdles for the slow pace.

Many states lack the money to hire personnel, pay for overtime or reach out to the public. The equipment required to keep the vaccines cold complicates their distribution. Also, providers need to track vaccinations so they have enough to dispense the required second doses 21 days after the first.

Dr. James McCarthy, chief physician executive at Memorial Hermann in Houston, said the hospital system has administered about half of the roughly 30,000 doses that it has received since Dec. 15.

The system had to create a plan from scratch. Among other things, administrators had to ensure that everyone in the vaccination areas could socially distance, and they had to build in a 15-minute observation period for each patient so that recipients could be watched for any side effects.

"We can't just hand it out like candy," McCarthy said.

Pasadena, California, is vaccinating its firefighters in groups of 50 after their two-day shifts are over so they can recuperate during their four days off. "We don't want the majority of our workforce — if they do experience side effects — to be out all at the same time," city spokeswoman Lisa Derderian said.

In South Carolina, state lawmakers are questioning why the state has administered just 35,158 of the 112,125 Pfizer doses it had received by Wednesday. State Sen. Marlon Kimpson said officials told him that some front-line health care workers are declining to be vaccinated, while others are on vacation.

Lin Humphrey, a college professor whose 81-year-old mother lives with him in a high-rise apartment in Miami, said it took him about 80 calls to get someone on the phone at a Miami Beach hospital that began inoculating elderly people last week.

"It reminded me of the '80s where you had to call into a radio station to be the 10th caller to get concert tickets," Humphrey said. "When I finally got through, I cried on the phone with the woman."

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio on Thursday set an ambitious goal of vaccinating 1 million residents in January — a task that he said would require outside cooperation and dramatically increased access to the shots.

Over the past few weeks, Trump administration health officials had talked about a goal of shipping enough vaccine by the end of the month to inoculate 20 million Americans. But it's unclear if the U.S. will reach that mark.

Army Gen. Gustavo Perna, Operation Warp Speed's chief operating officer, said Wednesday that 14 million doses had been shipped around the country so far. Tracking by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that as of Wednesday, nearly 2.8 million injections had been given.

Officials said there is a lag in reporting vaccinations, but they are still happening more slowly than expected. Perna predicted the pace would pick up next week.

"We agree that that number is lower than what we hoped for," said Dr. Moncef Slaoui, Warp Speed's chief scientist.

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On Tuesday, President-elect Joe Biden said the Trump administration is “falling far behind” and vowed to ramp up the pace once he takes office on Jan. 20. In early December, Biden vowed to distribute 100 million shots in the first 100 days of his administration.

Jha said Biden’s goal is ambitious but achievable.

“It’s not going to be easy if what they pick up on Jan. 20 is an infrastructure that’s not ready to execute on Day One,” he said.

In Tennessee, health officials had hoped to reach a goal of dispensing 200,000 doses by the end of the year, but delays in shipments might prevent that from happening. Health officials said the state received 20,300 doses on Tuesday that had been expected to arrive last week.

“There’s just nothing we could have done about that,” said Dr. Lisa Piercey, Tennessee’s health commissioner.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press reporters John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia; Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles; Adriana Gomez Licon in Miami; Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City; Lauran Neergaard in Alexandria, Virginia; Marion Renault in Rochester, Minnesota; Michael Schneider in Orlando, Florida; Desiree Mathurin in Atlanta; and Michelle Liu in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

Religious leaders worldwide, across faiths who died in 2020

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Catholic priest who for decades had been one of the Vatican’s top experts on the Latin language died on Christmas Day at a nursing home in Milwaukee. A United Methodist Church bishop in the West African nation of Sierra Leone died in a traffic accident in August as he was engaged in efforts to resolve the denomination’s conflicts over inclusion of LGBTQ people. Back in March, a 49-year-old priest in Brooklyn became the first Catholic cleric in the United States killed by the coronavirus. They were among many religious leaders — some admired worldwide, others beloved only locally — who died in 2020. Here are some of them.

Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, 88, senior pastor of New St. Paul Tabernacle Church of God in Christ in Detroit and second-in-command in the Black denomination’s national leadership. Official obituaries did not specify the cause of Brooks’ death. It occurred in April, during a period in which numerous Church of God in Christ bishops and pastors died of COVID-19.

Ernesto Cardenal, 95, a renowned poet and Roman Catholic cleric who became a symbol of revolutionary verse in Nicaragua and across Latin America. He was suspended from performing his priestly duties by St. John Paul II for defying the Church by serving as a cabinet minister in the Sandinista government. The penalty lasted more than three decades before being lifted by Pope Francis in February 2019.

Thich Quang Do, 91, a Buddhist monk who became the public face of religious dissent in Vietnam while the Communist government kept him in prison or under house arrest for more than 20 years. Do was the highest leader of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which has constantly tangled with the government over religious freedom and human rights.

Reginald Foster, 81, a Milwaukee-born Catholic priest who for 40 years served as one of the Vatican’s paramount experts on Latin. He died on Christmas Day at a Milwaukee nursing home; the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that he had tested positive for COVID-19 less than two weeks earlier.

Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, 84, a scholar of the Talmud, the ancient text that forms the foundation of Jewish law. Born in the Soviet Union, he came to the United States in 1956 and spent more than 50 years as the top academic at the Talmudical Seminary Oholei Torah in Brooklyn. He was also a member of the Central Committee of Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbis.

Ayatollah Hashem Bathaei Golpayegani, in his late 70s, a prominent Shiite cleric in Iran. He was one of the representatives for Tehran in the Assembly of Experts, an all-cleric body that will choose the succes-

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sor of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. One of his teachers in seminary was the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Rev. Robert Graetz, 92, the only local white minister to support the bus boycott that unfolded in Montgomery, Alabama, after the December 1955 arrest of Rosa Parks. Graetz was pastor of the majority-Black Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church. He and his wife, Jeannie, faced harassment, threats and bombings as a result of their stance.

Rev. Dr. Ron Hampton, 64, pastor at New Vision Community Church, a Free Methodist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. Days before COVID-19 killed him in May, Hampton sent a livestreamed message from his bed in a hospital isolation ward: Do not be afraid, be faithful and praise God.

Patriarch Irinej, 90, the top leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who died within a month of testing positive for the coronavirus. Irinej and the church's No. 2 leader, Bishop Amfilohije -- who also died after COVID-19 complications -- both downplayed the dangers of the pandemic and avoided wearing masks in public.

Harry R. Jackson Jr., 67, bishop of an independent charismatic megachurch in Maryland and one of several conservative Black church leaders who became close allies of President Donald Trump. Jackson was an outspoken opponent of abortion and same-sex marriage.

Edward Kmiec, 84, who between 1992 and 2012 served as the Roman Catholic bishop of Nashville, Tennessee, and Buffalo, New York. While leading the Buffalo diocese, he reduced the number of parishes from 265 to 169 and closed 25 Catholic elementary schools.

Sister Ellen Lorenz, 85, was a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame with a distinguished career in Catholic education. She began as a high school teacher, later joined the faculty of Mount Mary University, and served as its president from 1979 until 1987. She was among nine nuns at a Milwaukee-area retirement home who died of COVID-19 complications in December; dozens of other U.S. nuns died of the coronavirus earlier in the year.

Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, 98, a veteran civil rights leader who helped the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and fought against racial discrimination. Lowery led the SCLC for two decades and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom during the Obama presidency.

Rev. Franco Minardi, 94, arrived in the Italian farming town of Ozzano Taro in 1950 and served as its parish priest for 70 years before the coronavirus killed him. Intent on kindling the Catholic faith in young people, he arranged for construction of a tennis court, a games room and a theater where he projected the town's first movies in the mid-1950s. He was among scores of Italian priests who died of COVID-19.

Archbishop John Myers, 79, who between 1990 and 2016 served as the Roman Catholic bishop of Peoria, Illinois, and the archbishop of Newark, New Jersey.

Rev. Jorge Ortiz-Garay, 49, pastor of St. Brigid Church in New York City who is believed to have been the first Catholic cleric in the U.S. to die from the coronavirus. Ortiz grew up in Mexico, enrolled in seminary in Italy, then studied theology in New Jersey before being ordained in 2004. A decade later, he began his work at St. Brigid in a neighborhood straddling the border of Brooklyn and Queens that is home to many Hispanics.

Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, 89, president of Agudath Israel of America, an advocacy organization for ultra-Orthodox Jews. He also was leader of the Novominsker Hasidic dynasty, which was founded in Poland by his grandfather and later relocated to Brooklyn. Perlow died in April of complications arising from COVID-19, shortly after urging Orthodox Jews to follow social distancing guidelines.

Sister Ardeth Platte, 84, an American nun in the Dominican order who spent time in jail for anti-war and anti-nuclear protests. In one incident, Platte and two other Dominican nuns poured their own blood on a Minuteman III missile loaded with a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb in Weld County, Colorado, in October 2002. They were convicted of sabotage; Platte received the harshest sentence -- 41 months.

Rev. Georg Ratzinger, 96, the older brother of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI who earned renown in his own right as a director of an acclaimed German boys' choir. Ordained on the same day as his brother, Ratzinger oversaw the recording of numerous concert tours around the world by the Regensburger Domspatzen, a choir that traces its history back to the 10th century.

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Jonathan Sacks, 72, the former chief rabbi in Britain, who reached beyond the Jewish community with his regular radio broadcasts. Sacks was leader of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth for 22 years, stepping down in 2013.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, 83, a Jewish scholar who spent 45 years compiling a ground-breaking translation of the Talmud. Steinsaltz, who established a network of schools in Israel and the former Soviet Union, wrote more than 200 books on subjects ranging from zoology to theology, but the Talmud was his greatest passion.

Rev. Darius Swann, 95, whose challenge of the system of segregated public schools in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district helped spark the use of busing to integrate schools across the U.S. Early in his career, he served as a Presbyterian missionary in China and India. He later taught at George Mason University in Virginia and the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

Sister Maria Ortensia Turati, 88, one of several nuns killed by the coronavirus in a convent in the northern Italian town of Tortona. Turati trained as a social worker, served as mother general of the Little Missionary Sisters of Charity from 1993-2005, and traveled the world, founding missions in the Philippines and Ivory Coast.

Rev. C.T. Vivian, 95, an early and key adviser to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who organized pivotal civil rights campaigns and spent decades advocating for justice and equality. Vivian received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

John Yambasu, 63, a bishop of the United Methodist Church in Sierra Leone who died in a traffic accident in August. He played a lead role in UMC negotiations seeking resolve conflicts over whether the denomination should ordain LGBTQ people as ministers and fully recognize same-sex marriages.

Ravi Zacharias, 74, a popular author and speaker who founded and led Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, an organization devoted to presenting persuasive arguments for the existence of God and the importance of Christianity. A law firm hired by the ministry, in the wake of newly surfacing allegations, said on Dec. 22 — months after Zacharias' death — that it found "significant, credible evidence that Mr. Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct over the course of many years."

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One Good Thing: Special Olympian spreads message of love

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Sports Writer

Gary Schottle arrived in time to see the other kids in line hitting and jumping on his young son.

Nicknamed "Tank," Derek towered over the pestering kids, yet lacked the confidence to stick up for himself and was too kindhearted to intentionally hurt anyone. Head down, he took the blows without reacting. Special Olympics changed everything.

Tank felt accepted and confident. He blossomed into a leader, became an inspiration to everyone he met.

Self-assuredness allowed Tank to take his message of hope and love to social media, where his daily affirmations have been a beacon of joy to more than 100,000 followers during the bleak days of a pandemic.

"If you'd have told me back then what he's doing now, I wouldn't have believed it. There's just no way," Gary Schottle said. "It truly is amazing."

Special Olympics, founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, have melded competition and confidence for people with intellectual disabilities since the first games in 1968. Special Olympics has since branched out to more than 170 countries, empowering more than 5 million athletes who had often been cast aside.

The mission has always been one of acceptance and inclusion.

Tank, a seven-sport athlete, paid it forward.

As a young boy, he lacked social skills, had few friends and was often picked on by other kids.

In 20 years of Special Olympics competition, Tank's confidence has soared, his leadership spreading across playing fields, the Houston area and beyond.

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Tank, 31, has received local and national awards for being an advocate for Special Olympics and anti-bullying. He regularly gives speeches about love and hope.

Tank appeared on CNN and other networks to fight for Special Olympics when Education Secretary Betsy DeVos threatened to halt funding for the organization in 2019.

Once one of the bullied, he has become a living embodiment of the Special Olympics message.

"He's a gregarious individual, extremely outgoing, always positive," said Aaron Keith, executive director of the Special Olympics Texas east region, where Tank competes. "What he's done as a leader and a change agent for individuals with ID is way bigger than what he's done on the field."

The followers soared when Tank brought his message to Twitter.

Tank posts daily messages of love, hope and inspiration that have attracted the attention of celebrities like Mark Hamill, Marlee Matlin, Maureen McCormick, Rachel Maddow, former NBA player Rex Chapman — a social media juggernaut in his own right — and NFL player J.J. Watt

He's thanked doctors and nurses, comforted those who have suffered losses, offered congratulations for accomplishments and encouragement to others with disabilities.

"I love to spread love and hope for our country and our world," Tank said. "We should all love one another and bring hope and inspiration to other people."

It's turned him into a celebrity.

Tank has been featured on local TV and in newspaper stories, and is regularly asked to serve as the announcer on the first tee at golf tournaments.

Tank was such a popular batboy for the Sugarland Skeeters, the minor league baseball team honored him with a bobblehead night. Fans lined up to take pictures with him after the game.

The mayors of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Concord, Massachusetts, declared Dec. 12 and 13 Derek "Tank" Schottle Day when he received awards there.

"It's interesting because you never know what the next day is going to bring," Gary Schottle said.

The exposure does occasionally make him a target.

Twitter can a vitriolic place and keyboard bullies have tried to attack Tank and his message.

Sometimes he gets down or doesn't understand when people say mean things to him. Most of the time, he overwhelms them with love and quickly dissolves the situation.

He's also armed with a legion of defenders.

Anyone who dares to take a virtual shot at Tank faces the wrath of his 101,800 followers. The haters almost always back down.

"There's always negative people on Twitter and a lot of people do protect me," Tank said. "I'm just an athlete who wants to spread love on social media who wants to make this a better world someplace down the line."

A protector being protected. The perfect message.

"One Good Thing" is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Read the collection of stories at <https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing>

Changes, challenges: The not-so-secret life of pandemic pets

By DAN SEWELL Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) — Olivia Hinerfeld's dog Lincoln and Kate Hilts' cat Potato have something in common: They both like to interrupt Zoom calls as their owners work from home.

"Sometimes it's better to preemptively put him on your lap so he can fall asleep," says Hilts, a digital consultant in the Washington, D.C., area.

Jealous of the attention that Hinerfeld is paying to her video conference call, Lincoln, a golden retriever, will fetch "the most disgusting" tennis ball he can find from his toy crate to drop into the lap of the Georgetown University Law School student.

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For many dogs, this is life as it was meant to be: humans around 24/7, walks and treats on demand, sneaking onto beds at night without resistance. Cats — many of whom, let's be honest, were already socially distancing before humans knew what that was — are more affectionate than ever, some now even acting hungry for attention.

Ten months into quarantines and working from home because of the pandemic, household pets' lives and relationships with humans have in many cases changed, and not always for the better. With this month's U.S. rollout of vaccinations offering hope for normalcy in 2021, long-term impacts aren't known.

"If we think how much time most of our pets prior to the pandemic typically would spend without people, being around us now 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it's quite a lot," Candace Croney, a Purdue University professor who teaches about animal behavior.

While estimates vary on how many pets there are in the United States, there's general agreement that the majority of U.S. households have at least one pet, with dogs, and then cats, far outnumbering other pets such as birds and fish. There also was a surge in pet adoptions this year as stay-at-home restrictions took effect.

For all those tens of millions of dogs and cats, it's been an opportunity to teach humans a thing or two about themselves.

Croney has enjoyed watching how her long-hair cat Bernie and Havanese-mix dog Des play together. She finds herself getting "bookended" by the pair in bed at night.

"I've been learning things that I probably had been missing about how these two interact with each other and have found out that I need to take my cues from them," Croney says. "Which is funny, because I do this for a living and this is the kind of thing we tell other people to do and clearly, I was missing some of it myself."

In the Washington area, Emily Benavides, a U.S. Senate staffer, is learning her cat's language. Humito (Spanish for Smoky), the 3-year-old rescue cat she has had for much of his life, has different-sounding meows to communicate that he wants to eat, wants to nap or has knocked his toy under the refrigerator.

"I think the more time you spend with them, the more you can see them eye to eye," she says. "The pandemic has brought us closer together."

Devika Ranjan, a theater director in Chicago, wanted pandemic company and got a rescue cat she named Aloo during the summer. The formerly feral cat is believed to be around 3 and seems to be very comfortable with a slow-paced, high-attention pandemic life.

"My working from home, I think he loves it," she says. "I think he is just ready to settle down in life. If he were human, he'd probably sit on the couch with a PBR and watch TV all day."

The pandemic hasn't been positive for all pets, though, such as those with owners who are struggling financially.

Veterinarians and owners report some pets are being medicated for anxiety, and others are being put on diets because of too many treats and not enough exercise in parks that humans may be avoiding because of virus concerns.

Hilts says her cat, a rescue who joined their household in March 2019, always seemed to enjoy attention from strangers but now hides from visitors.

Kursten Hedgis, a herbalist in Decatur, Georgia, says her dog Bitsy, also a rescue, misses the attention from other humans on their walks.

"He got really bummed out because no one would talk to him or pet him," she says. "People would walk 6 feet around us. I think he took it personally."

Bitsy, a yorkie, is 14 and has been with her six years after a life as a breeder in a puppy mill. He is blind in one eye and suffers periodic infections and incontinence. Trips to the veterinarian have been "really scary" because of the masks and reduced contacts, Hedgis says.

However, Hedgis and other pet owners say they have become more than companions in recent months — they provide emotional support to their humans.

Humito appears to sense when she is feeling stressed and will take the initiative to cuddle into her lap, says Benavides, spokesperson for Republican U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, of Ohio. "It's a relationship built on

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mutual care and comfort," Benavides says.

As humans begin to return to work and vaccines roll out, the next year likely will bring a test of those relationships and new habits. Says Ranjan of Aloo: "I hope he will take it in stride."

Crony, the animal behavior professor with some two decades of experience, says she worries what will happen when she returns to work, and not only to her pets.

"I'm starting to worry a little bit for me," she admits. "I'm becoming a little co-dependent of my animals."

Dan Sewell is Cincinnati correspondent for The Associated Press. At some point during the pandemic, his household's Bichon dog, Mimi, went from jumping into bed in the morning to having her own pillow in bed at night. Follow Sewell on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/dansewell>

Nashville bombing spotlights vulnerable voice, data networks

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

The Christmas Day bombing in downtown Nashville led to phone and data service outages and disruptions over hundreds of miles in the southern U.S., raising new concerns about the vulnerability of U.S. communications.

The blast seriously damaged a key AT&T network facility, an important hub that provides local wireless, internet and video service and connects to regional networks. Backup generators went down, which took service out hours after the blast. A fire broke out and forced an evacuation. The building flooded, with more than three feet of water later pumped out of the basement; AT&T said there was still water on the second floor as of Monday.

The immediate repercussions were surprisingly widespread. AT&T customers lost service — phones, internet or video — across large parts of Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama. There were 911 centers in the region that couldn't take calls; others didn't receive crucial data associated with callers, such as their locations. The Nashville police department's phones and internet failed. Stores went cash-only.

At some hospitals, electronic medical records, internet service or phones stopped working. The Nashville airport halted flights for about three hours on Christmas. Rival carrier T-Mobile also had service issues as far away as Atlanta, 250 miles away, because the company uses AT&T equipment for moving customer data from towers to the T-Mobile network.

"People didn't even realize their dependencies until it failed," said Doug Schmidt, a Vanderbilt University computer science professor. "I don't think anyone recognized the crucial role that particular building played" in the region's telecom infrastructure, he said.

The explosion, which took place in the heart of the Nashville's historic downtown, killed the bomber, injured several people and damaged dozens of buildings. Federal officials are investigating the motive and haven't said whether the AT&T building was specifically targeted.

AT&T said 96% of its wireless network was restored Sunday. As of Monday evening, AT&T said "nearly all services" were back up. On Wednesday, it was "activating the last of the remaining wireline equipment."

AT&T said it sent temporary cell towers to help in affected areas and rerouted traffic to other facilities as it worked to restore power to the Nashville building. But not all traffic can be rerouted, spokesperson Jim Greer said, and there was physical equipment that had to be fixed in a building that was part of an active crime scene, which complicated AT&T workers' access.

"We are all too dependent on phone, cell phone, TV and internet to have outages for any reason," Rep. Jim Cooper, the Democrat who represents Nashville in Congress, said in an emailed statement Wednesday. He said the U.S. "needs to harden our telecom facilities so we have greater redundancy and reliability" and called for congressional hearings on reducing telecom vulnerabilities.

The impact on emergency services may have raised the most serious flags. At one point, roughly a hundred 911 centers had service problems in Tennessee alone, said Brian Fontes, head of the National Emergency Number Association. A 911 call center should still be operational even if there is damage to a phone company's hub, said David Turetsky, a lecturer at the University at Albany and a former public

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safety official at the Federal Communications Commission. If multiple call centers were out of service for several days, "that is of concern," he said.

Cooper and experts like Fontes also gave AT&T credit for their work on reinstating services. "To be able to get some services up and running within 24 to 48 hours of a catastrophic blast in this case is pretty amazing," Fontes said.

Local authorities turned to social media on Christmas Day, posting on Facebook and Twitter that 911 was down and trying to reassure residents by offering other numbers to call. A Facebook page for Morgan County 911 in northern Alabama said Saturday that Alabama 911 centers were up and running but advised AT&T customers with issues to try calling via internet, and to go to the local police or fire station for help if they couldn't get through.

The Nashville police department uses the FirstNet system built by AT&T, which the carrier boasts can provide "fast, highly reliable interoperable communications" in emergencies and that is meant to prioritize first responders when networks are stressed. But problems emerged around midday Friday, said spokesperson Kristin Mumford. The department had to turn to a backup provider, CenturyLink, for its landlines and internet at headquarters and precincts and obtained loaner cellphones and mobile hotspots from Verizon.

The transition to backups was "actually rather seamless," Mumford said, although the public couldn't make calls to police precincts. She said the AT&T service started coming back Sunday and as of Wednesday morning, overall service with cellphones, internet and landlines was "about 90% up."

The Parthenon, a museum replica of the Parthenon in Athens located about three miles from the explosion, still didn't have a working phone four days after the blast. But its credit-card system came back online Tuesday, said John Holmes, an assistant director of Metro Parks, the museum's owner. During the weekend, the museum was cash-only, although it let in people without cash for free.

It's not as if the physical vulnerability of communications networks comes as a surprise. Natural disasters like hurricanes frequently wipe out service as the power goes out and wind, water or fire damage infrastructure. Recovery can take days, weeks or even longer. Hurricane Maria left Puerto Rico in a near communications blackout with destroyed telephone poles, cell towers and power lines. Six months later there were still areas without service.

Software bugs and equipment failures have also caused widespread problems. A December 2018 CenturyLink outage lasted for more than a day and disrupted 911 calls in over two dozen states and affected as many as 22 million people. That included blocked calls for Verizon customers and busy signals for Comcast customers, which both used CenturyLink's network.

"Avoiding single points of failure is vital for any number of reasons, whether it has to do with physical damage, human error, hostile action or any of the above," Turetsky said. "We need our networks to be resilient regardless of earthquake, tornado, terrorist, cyber attacker or other threat."

Calamity? Anomaly? 2020 was a box office year like no other

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

When the sun sets on the 2020 film box office, it'll be difficult to look at the numbers as anything but disastrous.

After five consecutive years of North American revenues exceeding \$11 billion, this year they're expected to cap out at an almost 40-year low of around \$2.3 billion. That'll be down 80% from last year according to data firm Comscore. Globally, where markets have been able to recover more fully, ticket sales will likely end up somewhere between \$11 and \$12 billion. Last year, that total hit \$42.5 billion. But of course, 2020 is a year with a big asterisk.

"It's a year like no other," said Jim Orr, president of domestic theatrical distribution for Universal Pictures. "We've never seen this little business in this industry."

Outside of January and February, it's impossible to judge the year's box office by pre-pandemic standards. Box office, in aggregate, is fairly predictable in a normal year. But when the theaters shut down March 20, that "all went out the window," said Paul Dergarabedian, a senior media analyst with Comscore. "The unpredictability became the constant."

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Most North American theaters weren't open for six months straight through the summer season, which typically accounts for around 40% of the year's profits. For the past two years, the summer movie season has netted over \$4.3 billion. This year it brought in \$176.5 million, much of that from drive-in theaters.

"The drive-in became the hero of the summer," Dergarabedian said.

When indoor theaters did start to reopen in late August and early September, it was at limited capacity and with limited product. Currently, about 35% of theaters are open in the U.S. and some of the biggest markets, including New York and Los Angeles, remain closed. Although there have been a steady stream of new releases, the blockbuster tentpoles have been few and far between. Some went to streaming services, others became premium digital rentals, but most simply retreated into 2021 and beyond.

Perhaps there is no more telling fact than that 2020 was the first time in over a decade without a Marvel movie. The Walt Disney Co.'s superhero factory has for the past two years topped the year-end charts with "Avengers: Endgame" and "Black Panther," and has regularly had two or more films in the top 10.

Unsurprisingly, the 2020 top 10 is a little chaotic and comprised mostly of films from the first two months of the year. Sony's Will Smith sequel "Bad Boys for Life" has stayed in first place in North America since its January release with \$206.3 million. Globally it's in second place to the Chinese film "The Eight Hundred" — the first time that the top worldwide film originated outside of Hollywood. The only post-shutdown films to crack the top 10 are Christopher Nolan's "Tenet," in eighth place with \$57.2 million and the animated family sequel "The Croods: A New Age," which was released at Thanksgiving and has earned \$30.8 million so far to put it in 10th place.

And at least 15 films in the top 100 were retro releases, including "Hocus Pocus," "The Empire Strikes Back," and "The Nightmare Before Christmas."

"The silver lining for movie theaters is even though people had unlimited options at home, people still sought out the movie theater," Dergarabedian said. "People have a desire to go outside the home and be entertained. That desire hasn't changed but the ability to do that was profoundly limited."

It's even changed the way opening weekends, once a reliable indicator of a film's long-term prospects, are judged and it might remain that way for a while.

"The instant gratification that we used to be able to deliver on Sunday mornings after opening on a Friday? It's probably not going to happen again for quite some time," Orr said.

Theaters have embraced enhanced safety protocols and experimented with different ways to get people back into seats, including private theater rentals, but attendance throughout the fall and winter remained limited.

"People go to movie theaters to escape. If you're going to a movie theater where you have to wear a mask and you have to sit apart and you have to be hyper conscious of your surroundings, that is not how the theatrical experience is supposed to work," said John Sloss, principal at the media advisory firm Cinetic. "To judge this year at all in terms of theater attendance, I think is doing a disservice overall to what's really going on."

Moviegoing in 2020 is the story of an industry that employs some 150,000 fighting to stay afloat until normalcy returns, which everyone expects will happen even if it's not in the near future. Small movie theater owners will get a bit of a lifeline from the pandemic relief package.

But effects on the businesses have been staggering and it may be a while before the full impact is known, although there have been some historic developments and compromises. Some innovations have been well-received, like Universal's landmark agreement with various exhibitors to shorten the theatrical window from 90 days to as little as 17 days in some cases. Others, like Warner Bros.' decision to release all of its 2021 films on HBO Max and in theaters simultaneously, have not.

It's no secret that streaming services, whether subscription or on demand, filled a huge gap for film fans looking for new content. While at-home options will continue to compete with theaters for consumer eyes and dollars, few believe that they are a death-knell for theaters. By and large, studios are not looking to abandon the theatrical model, even if some priorities have shifted to streaming.

"I do think there's a bright light at the end of the tunnel," Orr said. "As vaccinations continue to roll out, I am 100% convinced that people will come running back into theaters when it's possible in their area."

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The model is not going away.”

Disney CEO Bob Chapek noted at the company’s recent investor day that they made \$13 billion at the box office in 2019.

“That’s not something to sneeze at,” Chapek said.

This past weekend, “Wonder Woman 1984,” which was available to stream on HBO Max for free, also collected \$16.7 million from 2,100 North American theaters. That number would have been a disaster before. For the pandemic? It’s a record.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ladbahr

Immigrants get help from states, cheer inclusion in US bill

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press/Report for America

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Lily Guido was having trouble hearing and she felt warm while talking to her co-worker at a California nursing home. She knew something was wrong.

Fearing the coronavirus, Guido, 30, of Santa Rosa, California, didn’t go home to avoid possibly spreading it to her five children, isolating in a hotel room provided for health care workers like her.

“They confirmed that I had COVID, and my husband was like, ‘Oh God, what’s going to happen?’” she said last week. “I couldn’t take it. I was in tears. I was in denial.”

Out of work, her family’s bills began to pile up this summer. While Guido is a U.S. citizen, and so are her children, her family hadn’t gotten a relief check from the federal government in the spring because she files taxes jointly with her husband, Erik, who is an immigrant in the country illegally and not eligible for any federal payments.

An estimated 1.4 million spouses and 3.7 million children who are U.S. citizens or legal residents in mixed-status families like Guido’s were cut out of the payments that many needed as the pandemic tanked the economy, according to tax data analysis by the Migration Policy Institute.

That’s changed in the latest federal relief package. Guido celebrated that her family and others like them would get checks this time around, as well as a retroactive \$1,200 tax credit.

“Mixed-status families with children count,” Guido said. “That makes such a big difference. And I jump for joy, you know, for those people that unfortunately aren’t able to work during this pandemic.”

But even in the latest bill, some 2.2 million children who are U.S. citizens or legal residents will be left out again because both their parents are in the country illegally, according to the Migration Policy Institute. That means no \$600 check per child.

During the pandemic, officials in Democratic-controlled places have targeted rent relief and direct payments to all immigrant families who didn’t receive checks. States like California and Vermont have distributed federal relief money to community groups helping immigrants, saying they pay taxes and work essential jobs, while New Mexico lawmakers sent U.S. funds directly to those without legal status.

When Guido got sick, her husband, Erik, had already lost hours at his pest control job, so he stopped working for two and a half weeks to take care of their kids.

Alone in the hotel, the virus took her appetite, strained her breath and tanked her heart rate. She prayed and talked to her husband every day. Though she isolated away from home, he and the kids got the virus, too, but not as badly.

“I was stressing on top of it, not knowing how we were gonna make it, how we’re gonna pay my mortgage, how we’re gonna pay the rest of the bills,” Guido said.

They maxed out their credit cards to buy food and other necessities. Erik, who was 10 when he arrived from Mexico, doesn’t have a Social Security number and pays taxes using a special number for non-resident immigrants. Guido asked that his last name be withheld, fearing it could affect an immigration application.

Guido says she tried to apply by phone for financial help from California but never got through. California’s governor distributed money to a network of regional nonprofits to give to mixed-status families and adults in the country illegally early in the pandemic.

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Recent aid packages passed by legislatures in New Mexico and Vermont directed federal relief funds to those who didn't get checks in April, mostly through cash payments to mixed-status families and immigrants without legal status. In Phoenix, immigration advocates successfully sued to ensure residents could access rent and bill relief regardless of legal status.

New Mexico's effort is unique because it paid applicants through direct deposit, instead of relying on community groups to distribute the funds, like California and Vermont.

"These are families — many of them with young children — these are essential workers, these are folks whose livelihoods have been interrupted by this pandemic," said state Rep. Javier Martínez, who's credited with getting the measure into New Mexico's larger emergency relief bill.

Some 15,000 New Mexico residents have received about \$465 each from a \$5 million fund created by the Legislature. It's not just immigrants benefiting. The only requirements for the money are being a state resident and having not received a federal check in April, which includes homeless and elderly Americans who didn't get a check because of IRS rules.

After getting about four times the number of applicants that the fund could support, state officials reduced the maximum amount and prioritized the lowest-income households.

The fund faced no resistance from minority Republicans in the New Mexico House, but some of them voted against the entire bill.

Cities also have used federal funds for direct payments to immigrants.

Angelica Rodriguez and her husband are restaurant cooks in Santa Fe and had their hours cut in half. But they have been able to catch up on rent thanks to the city's pandemic relief: a \$750 payment last month and \$1,500 this month.

She's a member of Somos Un Pueblo Unido, a Latino-focused group that advocated for the inclusion of immigrants in state relief efforts. It's also educated immigrants about not worrying that pandemic assistance will count against them in immigration applications, which ask about public aid like food stamps.

Despite the city payments, Rodriguez's family still can't afford to fix a broken washing machine and couldn't splurge on Christmas presents this year. She and her husband are in the country without permission while their three children are U.S. citizens.

"It's really hard because the 15-year-old boy, the 13-year-old girl, they get it — we told them there won't be Christmas presents this year because we're working very little, and the money we are getting is to pay bills and rent," said Rodriguez, 43.

"But the 6-year-old boy still doesn't get it," she said. When she told him Santa couldn't come this year because the family had gotten COVID-19, he shot back: "He can leave my present outside the door and not come in."

China OKs 1st homegrown vaccine as COVID-19 surges globally

By HUIZHONG WU and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China authorized its first homegrown COVID-19 vaccine for general use Thursday, adding another shot that could see wide use in poorer countries as the virus surges back around the globe.

The Sinopharm vaccine had already been given to groups such as health care professionals and essential workers under emergency-use guidelines as part of China's program to inoculate 50 million people before the Lunar New Year holiday in February. But the go-ahead should allow it to be supplied more broadly at home and moves Beijing closer to being able to ship it abroad. It comes one day after British regulators authorized AstraZeneca's inexpensive and easy-to-handle vaccine.

Both shots have been closely watched by developing countries, many of which have been unable to secure the Pfizer and Moderna doses being snapped up by rich nations. Pakistan's science minister said Thursday that his government will buy 1.2 million doses of a Sinopharm shot, two days after its death toll topped 10,000.

The greenlight came a day after the state-owned company announced that preliminary data from last-stage trials had shown it to be 79.3% effective. That announcement did not detail the size of the control

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group, how many people were vaccinated and at what point the efficacy rate was reached after injection, and experts have cautioned that trial data needs to be shared.

Officials have said the vaccine standards were developed in "close cooperation" with the World Health Organization. Securing WHO's so-called pre-qualification could go some way toward assuring the rest of the world about the quality of Chinese vaccines, which already face a reputation problem back home. It would also open the path for the shots to be distributed in the global vaccine consortium, COVAX, and potentially in countries that don't have their own regulatory agencies.

China is eager to ship its vaccines globally, driven by a desire to repair the damage to its image caused by the pandemic that started a year ago in the central city of Wuhan.

Technically, China granted conditional approval for the vaccine, meaning that research is still ongoing, and the company will be required to submit follow-up data as well as reports of any adverse effects after the vaccine is sold on the market, Chen Shifei, the deputy commissioner of the National Medical Products Administration, told a news conference. Final proof of its effectiveness will depend on publication of more data.

Sinopharm, which has another shot under development, is one of at least five Chinese developers that are in a global race to create vaccines for the disease that has killed more than 1.8 million people. While the Pfizer and Moderna shots have been greeted with much fanfare in the West, those shots must be stored at ultra-cold or freezer temperatures, complicating distribution.

The Sinopharm vaccine, like the AstraZeneca one, could be easier for countries around the world to handle since they can be stored at normal fridge temperatures.

Both shots, as well as Russia's Sputnik, are expected to be supply much of the developing world. That means the cost will also be important. AstraZeneca is expected to cost about \$2.50 a dose, while Russia has said its doses will be priced at \$10 for the global market. Pfizer's vaccine costs about \$20, while Moderna's is \$15 to \$25, based on agreements with the U.S. government.

Chinese officials declined to name a particular price and gave conflicting statements about it. One official said it would be affordable for the Chinese public, but another jumped in to clarify that it will be free. President Xi Jinping had previously vowed to donate a Chinese-made vaccine as a public good to the world.

The Sinopharm shot is already under mass production, though officials did not answer questions about current capacity. It has already been approved in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and is slated for use next in Morocco.

Other countries have also been buying doses of another Chinese vaccine candidate, made by Sinovac Biotech. Turkey received shipments this week of 3 million doses, and Indonesia and Brazil have also purchased it.

Belarus and Argentina both launched mass vaccinations Wednesday using Russia's vaccine, and Guinea has begun giving it to government officials.

In addition to the emergency vaccinations already underway in China, the country plans to start vaccinating high-risk population, such as seniors as well as people with existing chronic illnesses. Officials did not say what percentage of the population they will vaccinate in China.

"This is very exciting that there is another vaccine and one that can be distributed in locations that don't have the cold chain," said Ashley St. John, an immunologist at the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore. "But at the same time we have to temper the excitement. We have to understand the long term efficacy, effect on transmission and effect on severe disease."

Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan.

The name of China's drug regulator has been corrected to the National Medical Products Administration, not the Medical Production Administration.

Today in History

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By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 1, the first day of 2021. There are 364 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that slaves in rebel states shall be "forever free."

On this date:

In 1660, Englishman Samuel Pepys (peeps) began keeping his famous diary.

In 1892, the Ellis Island Immigrant Station in New York formally opened.

In 1953, country singer Hank Williams Sr., 29, was discovered dead in the back seat of his car during a stop in Oak Hill, West Virginia, while he was being driven to a concert date in Canton, Ohio.

In 1954, NBC broadcast the first coast-to-coast color TV program as it presented live coverage of the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California.

In 1959, Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries overthrew Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista, who fled to the Dominican Republic.

In 1975, a jury in Washington found Nixon administration officials John N. Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and Robert C. Mardian guilty of charges related to the Watergate cover-up (Mardian's conviction for conspiracy was later overturned on appeal).

In 1979, the United States and China held celebrations in Washington and Beijing to mark the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In 1984, the breakup of AT&T took place as the telecommunications giant was divested of its 22 Bell System companies under terms of an antitrust agreement.

In 1992, Boutros Boutros-Ghali succeeded Javier Perez de Cuellar (hah-vee-EHR' PEHR'-ehs day KWAY'-yahr) as secretary-general of the United Nations.

In 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two new countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

In 2005, desperate, homeless villagers on the tsunami-ravaged island of Sumatra mobbed American helicopters carrying aid as the U.S. military launched its largest operation in the region since the Vietnam War. Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress, died near Daytona Beach, Florida, at age 80.

In 2014, the nation's first legal recreational pot shops opened in Colorado at 8 a.m. Mountain time.

Ten years ago: A suicide bomber killed 21 people outside a church in Alexandria, Egypt, in one of the country's worst attacks targeting Coptic Christians. Third-ranked TCU finished a perfect season by beating No. 4 Wisconsin 21-19 in the Rose Bowl. Oprah Winfrey launched her OWN cable network.

Five years ago: Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign said it had raised \$37 million in the previous three months and more than \$112 million in all of 2015 to support her bid for the Democratic nomination. Ohio State defeated Notre Dame 44-28 in the Fiesta Bowl; Stanford beat Iowa 45-16 in the Rose Bowl; Mississippi toppled Oklahoma State 48-20 in the Sugar Bowl. Death claimed former Arkansas governor and U.S. Senator Dale Bumpers at age 90; former U.S. Rep. Mike Oxley at age 71; and cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond at age 85.

One year ago: Militiamen backed by Iran withdrew from the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad after two days of clashes with American security forces. David Stern, who spent 30 years as the NBA's commissioner as it grew into a global power, died at the age of 77, three weeks after suffering a brain hemorrhage. A fire at the Krefeld Zoo in western Germany killed more than 30 primates, including five orangutans and two gorillas.

Today's Birthdays: Documentary maker Frederick Wiseman is 91. Actor Frank Langella is 83. Rock singer-musician Country Joe McDonald is 79. Writer-comedian Don Novello is 78. Actor Rick Hurst is 75. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., is 67. The former head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, is 65. Rapper Grandmaster Flash is 63. Actor Renn Woods is 63. Actor Dedee Pfeiffer is 57. Country singer Brian Flynn (Flynnville Train) is 55. Actor Morris Chestnut is 52. Rhythm and blues singer Tank is 45. Model

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Elin Nordegren is 41. Actor Jonas Armstrong is 40. Actor Eden Riegel is 40. Olympic gold medal ice dancer Meryl Davis is 34. Rock musician Noah Sierota (Echosmith) is 25.