

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 1 of 54

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[1- Bowling Scores](#)

[2- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)

[3- GDI Living Heart Fitness Center Ad](#)

[4- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)

[5- Weather Pages](#)

[8- Daily Devotional](#)

[9- News from the Associated Press](#)



Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Shuh Tzus 8, Jackelopes 8, Chipmunks 5, Cheetahs 3

Men's High Games: Randy Stanley 196, Tony Waage 187, Roger Spanier 181

Women's High Games: Sue Stanley 165, Nicole Kassube 163, Brenda Waage 155

Men's High Series: Randy Stanley 530, Roger Spanier 518, Brad Waage 513

Women's High Series: Sue Stanley 441, Nicole Kassube 433, Darci Spanier 433

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.

#313 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Some states did not report today, and this is reflected in the numbers. I'm not sure what the reporting plans are for the weekend, but I'm thinking we will be down through Tuesday or so.

We're at 20,173,300 cases, 0.7% more than yesterday. There were 146,900 new cases reported today, well below where we've been running. Hospitalizations were just a bit off yesterday's record at 125,379. And there were just 1919 deaths reported today. We are now at 347,956, 0.6% over yesterday's total.

That new viral variant we've seen in South Africa and the UK, B.1.1.7, has reared its head in a third state, Florida. None of the cases we've turned up, two in Colorado, one in California, and now another in Florida, have a history of international travel, which means, as we've discussed before, that this variant is undoubtedly already circulating in the US—and probably widely at that. If we did more genomic testing on positive specimens, we'd be in a better position to assess that; but alas, here's another thing we're not getting right.

Experts are estimating this variant is maybe 50% more transmissible than the others around with some estimates running to 70%. There is preliminary evidence people infected with it carry greater viral loads in their respiratory tracts, so they'd be shedding more; this would account for increased transmissibility since we know the exposure dose influences whether you get sick. Contact tracing suggests that, whereas the previous variants will lead to about 10 percent of people having close contact with a case (within six feet for at least 15 minutes) developing infection, maybe 15 percent will with the new variant. That would mean any activity becomes about 50 percent more risky. On the other hand, other evidence points to the new variant having the ability to bind to host cells more efficiently. Maybe both of those are true; it's early days yet. Muge Cevik, infectious disease expert at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, told the New York Times it is important to view evidence "as preliminary and accumulating." Bottom line: We should be doing all the things we should have been doing all along; and if we don't, the new variant isn't our biggest problem. At least, not yet.

Word is the UK is handing out all of the vaccine supply they have at any time to new patients for a first dose right up until folks start showing up for their second doses. The result of the UK's approach could be that, when someone is due for a second dose, there may not be an available dose of the appropriate vaccine to administer at that time; this would depend on production and distribution chains. As a result, they plan to permit patients to mix and match vaccines: take a first dose of one vaccine and then a second dose of a different one if the first kind is not available or the person doesn't know which one they received. And in addition to supply issues, it looks as though they plan to deliberately delay second doses in the interest of getting more folks a first dose so they can cover more of their population sooner.

This is a different approach from what we're doing here in the US where we are holding back half of our doses to make sure the same kind of vaccine will be available for second doses on schedule in three or four weeks (depending which vaccine the patient gets).

What the UK is doing has some experts worried because we have zero evidence vaccines work under mix-and-match or delayed dosing regimens. We only know that these vaccines work under the conditions in which they were tested, so we have no idea whether these people vaccinated on alternate regimens will be effectively protected.

In fact, in commenting on the UK's plans, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told CNN, "I would not be in favor of that." Now I realize Dr. Fauci doesn't need validation from me, but for whatever it's worth, I completely agree with him. I encourage you, when you are vaccinated, to keep track of the little card that tells you which vaccine you received so there's no chance of a mistake because we do not know how it would work to receive a different one for your second dose. Dr. Phyllis Tien, infectious disease physician at the University of California, San Francisco, told the New York Times that straying from the tested regimens "is like going into the Wild West. It needs to be data driven if they're going to make a change." And we do not have data for any of these deviations from the plan, which is not where you want to be during a pandemic. Take pains to get this right for yourself after

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 3 of 54

your first dose until we know more.

There is an interesting project in Taipei, Taiwan, called the "Midnight Cafeteria." It is a feeding and care program for stray cats in the city. There are many feral cats in Taipei, and while residents often feed and attempt to care for them individually, that can lead to messes and angry neighbors complaining. A researcher at the Taiwan Animal Equality association Chen Chen-yi decided to do something more, and conceived of the idea of small wooden houses across the city where cats are fed and which confine the mess to an area that is more easily maintained. Volunteers pitch in on these efforts, buying food, cleaning the 45 houses, and discussing with residents who have complaints.

They also help to capture cats who are injured or need spaying so they can receive veterinary attention. The houses have been decorated by a local artist, and one house has basic medicine for the cats. Some neighbors have purchased cushions and decorated smaller boxes which are placed in the houses for the cats. There is a team of residents who work with city government and local leaders and volunteer to care for these cats who are, after all, seldom responsible for the circumstances in which they find themselves.

A math teacher Hung Pei-ling, who volunteers with the cats, told the AP, "We want to push forward this philosophy that you don't have to be part of a very top-level association or something that takes up all of your time. You can just be one person doing something a little bit at a time, a little bit, and taken all together, you can achieve a lot." She's preaching to the choir here; I am a proponent of doing your bit to make your own little corner of the world a better place without waiting for some massive effort by everyone else.

As we begin this bright new year, can we all resolve to try "doing something a little bit at a time" so that taken all together, we can achieve a lot? That would be a lovely beginning for our shared future.

Be well. We'll talk again.

Start Off 2021 On A New Journey to Fitness!

Sign Up today (Jan. 2) for 30% discount off of regular rate!

Discounts decrease each day - Jan. 3 will be 29%, Jan. 4 will be 28%, etc.

13 Main St., Downtown Groton

GDI

Living



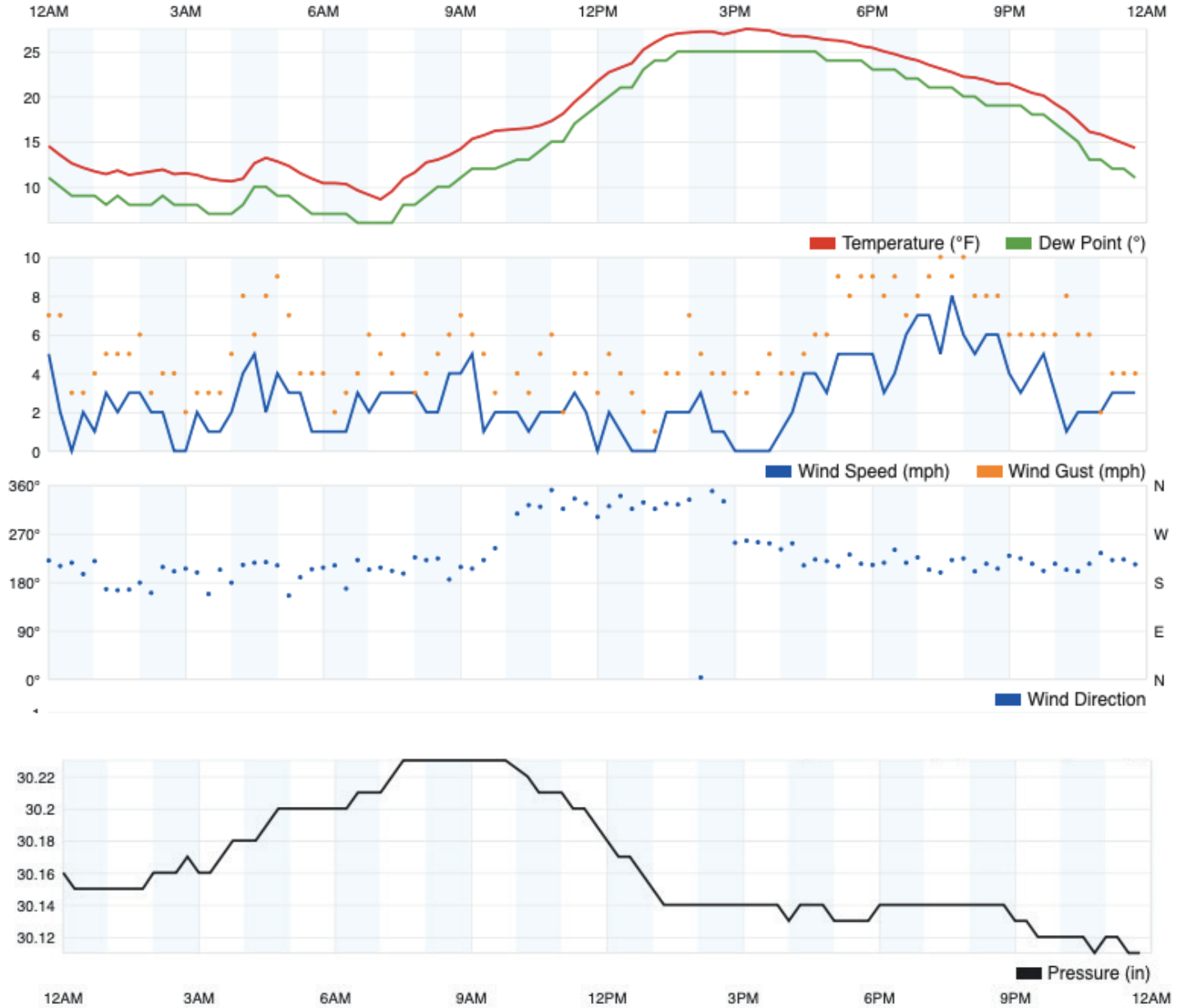
Open 24/7
Fitness

Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460 or Tina at 605/397-7285

Groton Daily Independent






Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 4 of 54

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 5 of 54

Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Mostly Sunny	Areas Fog	Areas Fog then Mostly Sunny	Decreasing Clouds	Sunny
High: 31 °F	Low: 15 °F	High: 35 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 39 °F

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Today

- AM Patchy Fog East, Partly Sunny.
- Highs 30s to around 40°

Tonight

- Increasing Clouds.
- Lows teens & 20s.

Sunday

- Mostly Sunny & Milder.
- Highs 30s east, 40s west.

Graphic Created 1/2/2021 3:03 AM



Patchy morning fog is still possible over the eastern part of the area; otherwise it should be partly sunny. The weekend, overall, will be dry and increasingly mild. #sdwx #mnwx

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 6 of 54

Today in Weather History

January 2, 1999: Heavy snow of 6 to 8 inches fell across part of northeast South Dakota from the late afternoon hours of the 1st to the early morning hours of the 2nd. Strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph combined with temperatures in the single digits generated wind chills from 25 to 40 below and visibilities below 1/4 of a mile at times. Holiday travel along Interstate-29 and Highway 12 was most affected by this winter storm. There were some travel delays and some stranded motorists as a result. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Kidder, Victor, Sisseton, Webster, Waubay, Wilmot, and 8 inches at Britton and near Peever.

1839: It is believed Louis Daguerre took the first daguerreotype of the moon. Unfortunately, in March of that same year, his entire laboratory burnt to the ground, destroying all his written records and much of his early experimental work—and that historical image of the moon. A year later, John William Draper, an American doctor, and chemist took his own daguerreotype of the moon.

1897: Tornadoes in January? Two tornadoes touched down on this day. The first tornado touched down in the town of Mooringsport, Louisiana, killing five people and injuring 21 others. The second tornado occurred at Benton, Arkansas. Although this tornado was more destructive regards to property damage, it caused one death.

1949: A blizzard raged and brought heavy snow, strong winds, and cold temperatures to South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska.

1955: Hurricane Alice passed through the Islands of Saint Martin and Saba in the Caribbean Sea on this day. Alice, which developed on December 30, 1954, is the only known Atlantic hurricane to span two calendar years.

1999: A powerful winter storm developed over the Texas panhandle and moved northeast through the Missouri bootheel, and then north northeast through eastern Illinois and into Michigan. Snow began accumulating in east-central Illinois and areas south of Chicago during the early evening hours of New Year's Day and overspread the city and north suburbs by midnight. Snow continued through the night and much of the day Saturday, January 2. The heaviest snow fell during the daytime hours Saturday and tapered off by late afternoon or early evening and ended by late evening. Northeast winds were 20 to 30 mph with a few higher gusts during the day Saturday. Winds gusted to over 50 mph along the Lake Michigan shoreline. The strong wind coming off the lake enhanced snowfall totals within about 10 miles of the lake. Snowfall was generally 9 to 15 inches over north central and east central Illinois and in the Chicago suburbs. Snowfall in Chicago and the north suburbs in Lake County was 18 to 22 inches. Winds subsided Saturday evening as the storm center passed over southern Lake Michigan. Then strong northwest winds developed Sunday causing considerable blowing and drifting and hampering clean-up efforts.

The 21.6 inches at O'hare, the official observing site for Chicago, was the second greatest storm total snowfall. The record was 23.0 inches January 26-27, 1967. Of the 21.6 inches, 18.6 fell on January 2, setting a record for the most snowfall on a calendar day. Other snowfall amounts included; Algonquin 14.0, Aurora 14.4, Barrington 18.0, Brookfield 15.1, Bourbonnais 14.0, Channahon 13.0, Chatsworth 17.0, Coal City 13.0, Compton 9.7, Crestwood 14.2, DeKalb 12.4, Dixon 16.4, Earlville 11.3, Fairbury 13.0, Geneva 13.0, Glenwood 16.0, Harvard 9.0, Lake Villa 17.9, LaGrange Park 15.0, Midway Airport 20.6, Mundelein 10.0, Naperville 11.0, Olympia Fields 15.8, Orland Park 13.8, Rochelle 9.6, Rockford 9.0, Streamwood 14.0, Willow Springs 12.0. The heavy snow and blowing snow caused hazardous travel. Lake Shore Drive was closed down for the first time ever. State, county and local road crews worked around the clock. The City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation spent 12 million dollars on snow removal efforts. Three hundred flights were canceled at O'Hare and Midway airports.

2006: Six tornadoes impacted central and northern Georgia. The tornadoes were rated from F0 to F3.

2017: 36 confirmed tornadoes impacted the Deep South from Louisiana to Georgia. Many of the tornadoes came from line segments of storms known as quasi-linear convective systems. A larger convective system also created numerous wind damage reports, and in Alabama, four people died from straight-line winds.

Groton Daily Independent

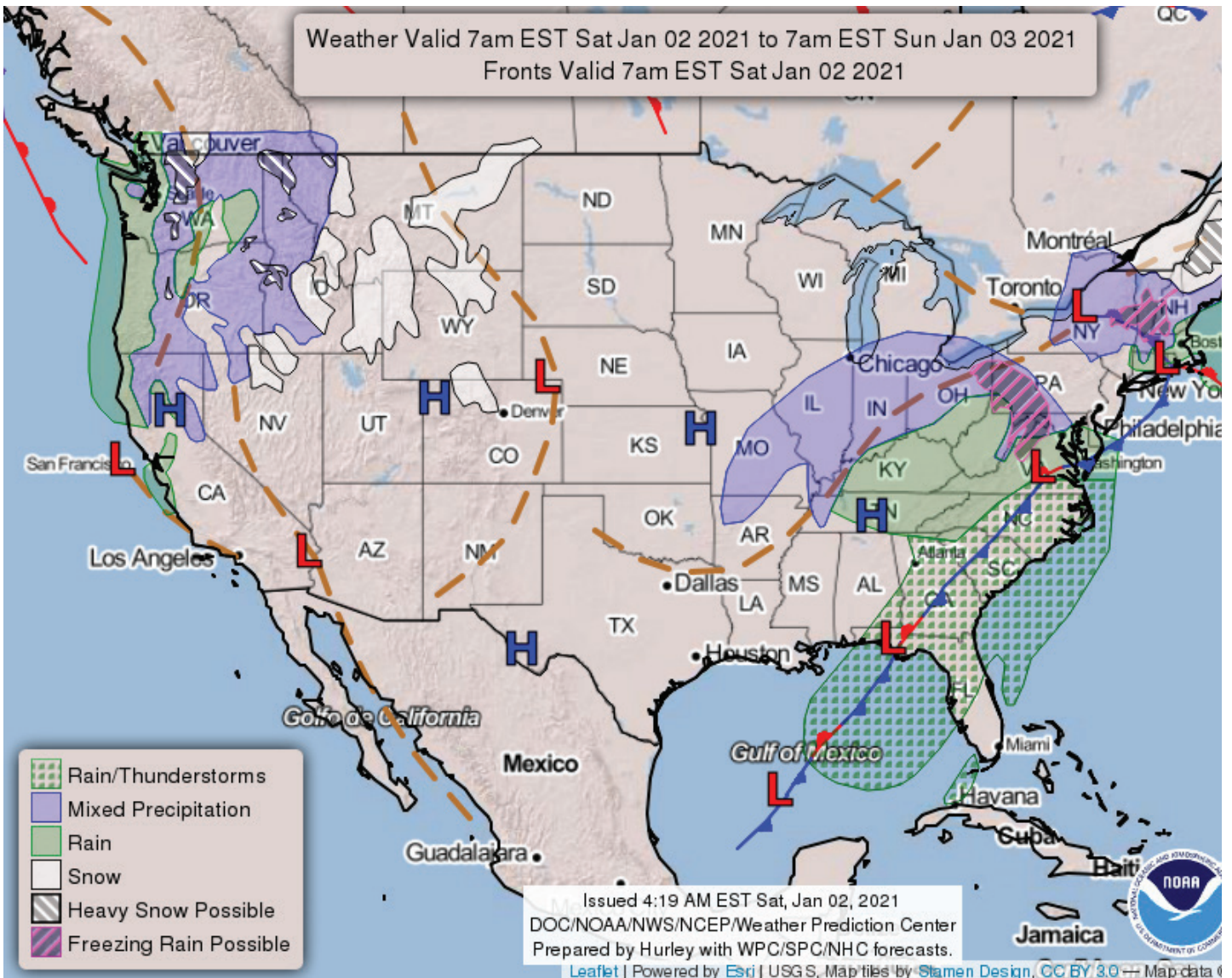
Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 7 of 54

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 3:11 PM
Low Temp: 8 °F at 7:11 AM
Wind: 10 mph at 7:24 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1963
Record Low: -30 in 2010
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.02
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.72
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 5:03 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:14 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 8 of 54



GOING BEYOND THE ORDINARY

What does it take to "go beyond" others and find happiness? Education? Wealth? Family? Networking? Occupation? Power? Recognition? Prestige?

What about "going beyond" for the Christian? Are there standards for "happiness?"

The first Psalm almost explodes with a joyful exclamation of one who "goes beyond." That one is called "blessed," or in many translations, "happy." And it is not "everyone" who attains this plateau of happiness. It is "the one" who is a believer in the Word of God – Christ Jesus.

To look at some who profess to be followers of the Lord does not provide an easy answer. They do not seem to be satisfied with life, have a sense of peace about them, or look forward to living each day with expectancy and joy. They appear "ordinary." They give the world the wrong impression of what God has to offer us through His Son.

The first Psalm provides the "do's" and "do not's" to "go beyond" the ordinary Christian and become an extraordinary Christian.

Negatively, the extraordinary Christian does not follow the advice of the wicked, spend time talking to them, or listening to their advice, and even avoids being in their presence whenever possible.

Positively, the extraordinary Christian takes pleasure in honoring God, following His teachings, and being obedient to His Word.

The extraordinary Christian is always seeking ways to grow into the likeness of Christ, to follow His teachings, and to worship and serve Him daily.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to willingly make any and every sacrifice that is necessary to become all that we can become in You and through You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. Psalm 1:1-4

News from the Associated Press

Mild weather leads to mixed results for annual bird count

By MARY GALES ASKREN Madison Daily Leader

MADISON, S.D. (AP) — The mild December weather was a blessing and a handicap when area birders joined forces to conduct the annual Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, in Lake County last week.

"The weather was nice, so it made for a pleasant day for counting birds," said John Bame, district park manager with the state Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

The Christmas Bird Count has been held annually since 1901 and is conducted by volunteers.

"It's done across the country, so you have a nice basis of comparison over time. It gets a lot of people interested in what's out there," said Jeff Palmer, professor of mathematics at Dakota State University and local compiler.

Local organizers can choose any date between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5 to conduct the count. In Lake County, it's usually done early because the weather tends to get colder toward the end of the year. However, this year's mild weather was a bit of a handicap when it comes to counting birds, the Madison Daily Leader reported.

"It's harder to find birds when it's nice like this because things are a lot more spread out," Palmer said. Among those difficult to find were the horned lark, snow bunting and Lapland longspur.

However, the mild weather has resulted in an unusual number of snow geese in the area. That was the most notable observation made this year. Palmer still doesn't have all of the numbers from those who counted birds but doesn't expect any other unusual results.

"There's nothing that I had to drop what I was doing and go see this bird," he said.

A birder since grade school, he would drop everything to see a rare bird. He makes birding trips around the country, including two to Alaska and numerous trips to Arizona. When asked if he's seen anything remarkable, his first response is simply, "Oh! Gosh!"

Given time to collect his thoughts, he said that within the state of South Dakota, he's most excited about the five firsts he put on record: Pacific loon, harlequin duck, Arctic tern, purple gallinule and Virginia's warbler.

"Nobody had ever documented those species in South Dakota before," he said.

Documentation includes either a photograph or confirmation by other birders. Without that confirmation, it's considered a hypothetical sighting.

Palmer noted that being a birder has been a boon during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a hobby that can be enjoyed without risking exposure to the coronavirus.

While winter is not an ideal time to start birding -- spring is better -- Lake Herman State Park is an ideal location for those who are interested in cultivating birdwatching as a hobby, according to Palmer.

"The best way to get started is to get a pair of binoculars and get a field guide for birds," he said. "Take a little walk and see what you can see."

He said that some people approach it as a social activity and go birding with others.

"For other people, they just like the birds. A lot of the birds are very striking and very beautiful," Palmer said.

Still others engage in the friendly competition of sighting birds that others have not yet seen in a given area. He admits that when he was younger, that was a primary attraction for him.

Regardless of the reason for engaging in birdwatching, he said one aspect of the experience is true for all. "It's a relaxing, enjoyable hobby."

Palmer said the number of volunteers for the Christmas Bird Count was down a little this year, but he said he is fortunate because people from DSU, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Lake Herman State Park are always willing to help. He had volunteers walking in all seven areas of the count circle, which measures 15 miles in diameter with the center being near the northwest corner of Lake Madison.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 10 of 54

Bame was among those responsible for counting birds in the area which includes Lake Herman State Park. He was joined by employees Melissa Ziegenhage-Riedesel and Walker Ruhd, retired employee Scott Gustaf and Angela Behrends, who sometimes works as the park naturalist during the summer months.

"We're not experts by any means," Bame said, exempting Gustaf from that classification. "We know just enough to get ourselves in trouble."

Gustaf, who Bame does consider an expert, was their local go-to person for bird identification and settled a dispute regarding a sparrow. The similarities between a house sparrow and tree sparrow are such that articles have been written to help birders distinguish between the two.

"We saw a good number of species," Bame said, noting that he and Behrends watched the bird feeder for a couple of hours and then walked the Abbot Trail.

"It was a fun little hike. We spooked three or four does. We actually saw a great horned owl," he said. Among the species he reported seeing were the hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, black-capped chickadee, red breasted nuthatch, white breasted nuthatch and red-bellied woodpecker.

"We only have one in the park," Bame said.

The red-bellied woodpecker is not a rare bird, but there's only been one which has made Lake Herman its home, according to Bame. For three or four years it had a mate but seems to be on its own again.

He noted they saw some hawks as well, but weren't able to identify the kind of hawk.

"You have to make sure to positively identify them to count them," Bame said.

Like Palmer, he recommends birdwatching as a hobby. He noted that people can begin by drawing birds to them.

"If you're looking for something fun to do, put a bird feeder in the back yard and watch to see what comes," he said.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

08-24-53-68-69, Mega Ball: 7, Megaplier: 5

(eight, twenty-four, fifty-three, sixty-eight, sixty-nine; Mega Ball: seven; Megaplier: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$401 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$384 million

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Lennox 57, Canton 48

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Canton 52, Lennox 46

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

Judge: South Dakota can't use COVID-19 to delay trial

ST. LOUIS, Mo. (AP) — A federal judge says a state court in South Dakota can't use the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to delay a Codington County trial.

The Argus Leader reports U.S. District Judge Charles B. Kornmann also criticized South Dakota's response to the pandemic, saying it has done "little, if anything," to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Kornmann ordered that unless the Codington County state court resolves Matthew Kurtenbach's May

2019 case by Jan. 15, Kurtenbach will win a federal petition he filed claiming wrongful imprisonment and a violation of his right to a speedy trial.

"South Dakota cannot 'take advantage' of its own failures to follow scientific facts and safeguards in entering blanket denials of the rights of speedy trials," the judge wrote.

Kurtenbach petitioned the court at least 25 times for a right to a speedy trial.

The state court had scheduled a January 2020 trial for the case, which accused him of aggravated assault and in subsequent cases, violating a no-contact order, but the trial was never held. The state court did, however, hold a hearing in January on that aggravated assault case and a separate forgery case, to rule on Kurtenbach's motions to drop the case, which were denied.

At one point, Kornmann directly criticized Gov. Kristi Noem's actions during the pandemic.

"The Governor has steadfastly refused to impose a statewide mask mandate. She has often questioned publicly the scientific fact that mask wearing prevents the virus from spreading," the judge wrote.

Noem spokeswoman Maggie Seidel told the Rapid City Journal that the judge's order appeared to be politically motivated.

"It's very unfortunate Judge Kornmann, a Clinton appointee and the former general counsel for the South Dakota Democrat Party, chose to use his judicial platform to level a personal attack on Governor Noem," Seidel said. "She will take the high road and not respond in kind."

Dakotas tribe prioritizes vaccine for native speakers

FORT YATES, N.D. (AP) — The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is prioritizing the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to those who speak Dakota and Lakota languages.

Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Mike Faith tells KXMB-TV it's about keeping customs alive.

"It's something we have to pass on to our loved ones, our history, our culture our language. We don't have it in black and white, we tell stories. That's why it's so important," Faith said.

The Standing Rock reservation straddles the North Dakota and South Dakota border and is home to about 8,000 people, more than half of whom live in North Dakota.

Faith said only about 300 people on the reservation are fluent in the language.

Frontline health care workers already have begun receiving the vaccine at the Fort Yates hospital, but starting next week priority will be for those who speak their native language.

In addition to those who can carry on the culture, the next phase includes elders, law enforcement, tribal courts and the school system, tribal officials said.

Tribal Health Director Margaret Gates said the Lakota and Dakota speakers "are the most important asset to our tribe and people because of the language."

India tests vaccine delivery system with nationwide trial

By RISHABH R. JAIN and ALTAF QADRI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India tested its COVID-19 vaccine delivery system with a nationwide trial on Saturday, as it prepares to roll out an inoculation program to stem the coronavirus pandemic.

The trial included data entry into an online platform for monitoring vaccine delivery, along with testing of cold storage and transportation arrangements for the vaccine, the health ministry said in a statement.

The massive exercise was followed by India's drug regulator recommending the emergency-use approval of two vaccines for COVID-19 — one developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and another by the Indian manufacturer Bharat Biotech.

Both the vaccines will now have to wait for final approval from the Indian regulator.

Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturing company, has been contracted by AstraZeneca to make 1 billion doses for developing nations, including India. On Wednesday, Britain became the first to approve the shot.

The vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech is based on an inactivated form of the coronavirus. It is being made in collaboration with agencies of the Indian government. Early clinical studies showed that the

vaccine doesn't have any serious side effects and produces antibodies for COVID-19. The company said in November that it was starting late clinical trials.

The government plans to inoculate 300 million people in the first phase of the vaccination program, which will include healthcare and front-line workers, police and military troops, and those with comorbidities who are over the age of 50.

The government is expected to initially lean on the vaccine produced by Serum Institute of India, which doesn't require the ultra-cold storage facilities that some others do. Instead, it can be stored in refrigerators. This makes it a feasible candidate, not just for India but also for other developing nations.

Indian Health Minister Harsh Vardhan reviewed the preparedness for the vaccination drive at a government hospital in New Delhi on Saturday and urged the public not to pay heed to anti-vaccine rumors. "We will not compromise on any protocol before approving a vaccine," he told reporters.

Pooja Moriya, a health worker in the capital who will be one of the first to be inoculated, said hospital staff has had several meetings about the vaccine and how it works. "Our seniors have told us to not be scared at all," Moriya said.

India has confirmed over 10.3 million coronavirus cases, second in the world behind the U.S. More than 149,000 people have died from the virus in India.

France's giant curfew-busting party is over after two nights

PARIS (AP) — French police detained five people Saturday in an investigation into an underground New Year's Eve rave party that drew at least 2,500 people in western France despite a coronavirus curfew and other restrictions.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin tweeted that actions by police around the site at Lieuron, in Brittany, "led to the end of the illegal party without violence" on Saturday morning, 36 hours after it began. He said a judicial investigation has been opened to identify and prosecute organizers.

Prefect Emmanuel Berthier, head of the local state authority, said in a news conference Saturday that police officers issued at least 1,200 fines, including 800 under virus-related rules for not respecting the curfew, not wearing a mask and illegally taking part in a gathering.

Hundreds of people were also fined for using illicit drugs and sound equipment and power generators were confiscated, Berthier said.

Ravers from France and abroad converged on a hangar in Lieuron on Thursday night to party into the New Year. Officials said ravers attacked the police on the first night, torching one police vehicle and slightly injuring three officers with volleys of bottles and stones.

Video images showed lines of ravers' trucks and cars leaving on Saturday morning.

The party took place despite France's nationwide night-time curfew, which seeks to dissuade people from gathering during the pandemic.

The aid group Techno+ distributed masks, anti-virus gel and health advice inside the party. One volunteer there, who only gave her name as Omblin, said the pandemic has been very hard on youths and something positive was needed to fight the depression that many are facing.

The Regional Health Agency of Brittany warned that party-goers had a high risk of spreading the virus and urged participants to self-isolate for a week and get a test in seven days.

France has reported more than 64,000 virus-related deaths.

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

UK judge to rule on US extradition for WikiLeaks' Assange

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will find out Monday whether he can be extradited from the U.K. to the U.S. to face espionage charges over the publication of secret American military documents.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 13 of 54

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser is due to deliver her decision at London's Old Bailey courthouse at 10 a.m. Monday. If she grants the request, then Britain's home secretary, Priti Patel, would make the final decision.

Whichever side loses is expected to appeal, which could lead to years more legal wrangling.

However, there's a possibility that outside forces may come into play that could instantly end the decade-long saga.

Stella Moris, Assange's partner and the mother of his two sons, has appealed to U.S. President Donald Trump via Twitter to grant a pardon to Assange before he leaves office on Jan. 20.

And even if Trump doesn't, there's speculation that his successor, Joe Biden, may take a more lenient approach to Assange's extradition process.

U.S. prosecutors indicted the 49-year-old Assange on 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse that carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison.

Lawyers acting on behalf of the U.S. government said in their closing arguments after the four-week hearing in the fall that Assange's defense team had raised issues that were neither relevant nor admissible.

"Consistently, the defense asks this court to make findings, or act upon the submission, that the United States of America is guilty of torture, war crimes, murder, breaches of diplomatic and international law and that the United States of America is 'a lawless state,'" they said. "These submissions are not only non-justiciable in these proceedings but should never have been made."

Assange's defense team argued that he is entitled to First Amendment protections for the publication of leaked documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan and that the U.S. extradition request was politically motivated.

In their written closing arguments, Assange's legal team accused the U.S. of an "extraordinary, unprecedented and politicized" prosecution that constitutes "a flagrant denial of his right to freedom of expression and poses a fundamental threat to the freedom of the press throughout the world."

Defense lawyers also said Assange was suffering from wide-ranging mental health issues, including suicidal tendencies, that could be exacerbated if he is placed in inhospitable prison conditions in the U.S.

They said his mental health deteriorated while he took asylum inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for years and that he was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Assange jumped bail in 2012 when he sought asylum at the embassy, where he stayed for seven years before being evicted and arrested. He has been held at Belmarsh prison in London since April 2019.

His legal team argued that Assange would, if extradited, likely face solitary confinement that would put him at a heightened risk of suicide. They said if he was subsequently convicted, he would probably be sent to the notorious ADX Supermax prison in Colorado, which is also inhabited by Unabomber Ted Kaczynski and Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.

Lawyers for the U.S. government argued that Assange's mental state "is patently not so severe so as to preclude extradition."

Assange has attracted the support of high-profile figures, including the dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei and actress Pamela Anderson.

Daniel Ellsberg, the famous U.S. whistleblower, also came out in support, telling the hearing that they had "very comparable political opinions."

The 89-year-old, widely credited for helping to bring about an end to the Vietnam War through his leaking of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, said the American public "needed urgently to know what was being done routinely in their name, and there was no other way for them to learn it than by unauthorized disclosure."

There are clear echoes between Assange and Ellsberg, who leaked over 7,000 pages of classified documents to the press, including The New York Times and The Washington Post. Ellsberg was subsequently put on trial for 12 charges in connection with violations of the Espionage Act, which were punishable by up to 115 years in prison. The charges were dismissed in 1973 because of government misconduct against him.

Assange and his legal team will be hoping that developments in the U.S. bring an end to his ordeal if the judge grants the U.S. extradition request.

After pardon, Blackwater guard defiant: 'I acted correctly'

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Evan Liberty was reading in the top bunk of his cell one evening late last month when a prison supervisor delivered news he had hoped for.

"He says, 'Are you ready for this?'" Liberty recalled. "I said, 'Uh, I'm not sure. What is going on?' He said, 'Presidential pardon. Pack your stuff.'"

Liberty is one of four former Blackwater contractors pardoned by President Donald Trump in one of Trump's final acts in office, wiping away their convictions in a 2007 shooting rampage in Baghdad that killed more than a dozen Iraqi civilians. Even for a president who has repeatedly exercised his pardon power on personal associates and political supporters, Trump's clemency for the contractors was met with especially intense condemnation, both in the United States and the Middle East.

Historically, presidential pardons have been reserved for nonviolent crimes, not manslaughter or murder, and the traditional process led by the Justice Department values acceptance of responsibility and remorse from those convicted of crimes. The Blackwater contractors meet none of those criteria. They were convicted in the killings of unarmed Iraqi women and children and have long been defiant in their assertions of innocence.

In an interview with The Associated Press, his first since being released from prison, Liberty again expressed little remorse for actions he says were defensible given the context.

"I feel like I acted correctly," he said of his conduct in 2007. "I regret any innocent loss of life, but I'm just confident in how I acted and I can basically feel peace with that."

The Blackwater rampage marked one of the darkest chapters of the Iraq war, staining the U.S. government reputation and prompting an international outcry about the role of contractors in military zones. The guards have long maintained they were targeted by insurgent gunfire at the traffic circle where the shooting occurred. Prosecutors argued there was no evidence to support that claim, noting that many victims were shot while in their cars or while taking shelter or trying to flee.

After a monthslong trial in 2014, a jury convicted the men in the deaths of 14 civilians and of injuring even more. A judge called the shootings an "overall wild thing" that cannot be condoned.

Liberty said he understands many may view him undeserving of clemency but attributes it to what he insists is a misguided narrative of the shooting. In the interview, he maintained that he did not shoot in the direction of any of the victims. "I didn't shoot at anybody that wasn't shooting at me," he said.

He said he and the others would "never take an innocent life. We responded to a threat accordingly."

Liberty, whose 30-year sentence was cut by roughly half last year, isn't certain how he came to be pardoned and said he has not spoken with Trump. But the group does have supporters, some with ties to the White House. The Blackwater firm, whose name has since changed, was founded by former Navy SEAL Erik Prince, a Trump ally whose sister, Betsy DeVos, is education secretary. Their cause also was championed by Fox News personality Pete Hegseth, an Army veteran.

Trump's approach to pardons have been heavily influenced by personal appeals from allies. Throughout his presidency, including in his most recent round of pardons, he's cleared the convictions of his political backers, including former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and a pair of Republican congressmen who were early supporters of his 2016 campaign. Trump has also shown a willingness to intervene on behalf of service members accused of war crimes.

In announcing the Blackwater pardons, the White House cited the men's military service, the support they received and the tangled history of a case that zigzagged for years in Washington's federal court, turning on radically different interpretations of the shooting.

Criticism was swift. A Washington Post editorial called the pardons a "unique threat to national security" and suggested the guards had committed "astonishing acts of inhumanity." Iraqi citizens described old wounds being reopened. Soon after the announcement, a photograph of a 9-year-old victim in a blue-patterned shirt smiling faintly circulated widely online. The boy's father told the BBC that Trump "broke

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 15 of 54

my life again.”

“They haven’t denied doing what they did,” said Paul Dickinson, who represented victims in a lawsuit over the shootings. “They haven’t apologized for what they did. They haven’t admitted any wrongdoing in what they did.”

Blackwater guards, who as State Department contractors were responsible for providing diplomatic security, were already seen as operating with impunity in Iraq. The rampage further escalated international scrutiny of them, prompted multiple investigations and strained U.S.-Iraqi relations.

On Sept. 16, 2007, the guards were summoned to create an evacuation route for a diplomat after a car bomb explosion.

By prosecutors’ account, the shooting began after the guards’ four-vehicle convoy took up positions at Baghdad’s crowded Nisour Square, where the contractors launched an unprovoked attack using sniper fire, machine guns and grenade launchers. Liberty says he shot only in the direction of an Iraqi police post; the guards had been concerned by infiltration by insurgents of police ranks. Prosecutors say he and the others fired indiscriminately.

Defense lawyers say the shooting began only after a white Kia broke from the traffic and moved toward the convoy in ways the guards perceived as a threat and a potential car bomb. In a narrative disputed by prosecutors, the guards say they responded to insurgent gunfire. One contractor who received immunity described hearing the incoming “pop” of what sounded like AK-47 rounds shortly before another guard fired.

The case was bitterly contested for more than a decade, with the Justice Department reviving the prosecution after an original indictment was thrown out because of government missteps and flying in dozens of Iraqi witnesses to testify. Liberty and two others, Paul Slough and Dustin Heard, were convicted of manslaughter. Another, Nicholas Slatten, was convicted of first-degree murder.

A fifth guard, Jeremy Ridgeway, pleaded guilty and testified against the others, admitting firing multiple rounds into the Kia — which actually contained a medical student and his mother — but denied that he saw Iraqis pointing guns or that he felt threatened. Defense lawyers sought to undercut his credibility by noting that he’d previously told a different story.

The lawyers challenged the verdict, citing in part newly discovered evidence — an Iraqi witness statement — they said contradicted what the jury was told.

Slatten’s murder conviction was overturned but he was retried and convicted. The 30-year sentences for the others were shortened after a federal appeals court said the punishments were excessive even though what happened “defies civilized description.”

After six years behind bars, Liberty had tried to not get his hopes up about a pardon. “Dumbfounded” when the news came, he grabbed a photograph of his grandfather, a list of Spanish vocabulary he’d been studying and a motivational book on discipline, leaving the rest behind.

The New Hampshire native and Marine veteran said he is uncertain of future plans, though he’s passionate about physical fitness and interested in helping veterans’ organizations. He says he’s grateful to his supporters and to Trump for what he calls a “second chance at life.”

“I feel like it’s my duty to go out and do something positive and live a good life because they gave me a second chance, so that’s basically my goal.”

The Latest: India tests storage, delivery of vaccine program

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW DELHI — India has tested its COVID-19 vaccine delivery system with a nationwide trial as it prepares to roll out an inoculation program to stem the coronavirus pandemic.

The exercise Saturday included data entry into an online platform for monitoring vaccine delivery, along with testing of cold storage and transportation arrangements for the vaccine.

The massive exercise came a day after a government-appointed panel of experts held a meeting to review the applications of potential vaccine candidates, including front-runner Covishield, developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 16 of 54

The government plans to inoculate 300 million people in the first phase of the vaccination program, which will include healthcare and front-line workers, police and military troops and those with underlying medical conditions over age 50.

India has confirmed more than 10.3 million coronavirus cases, second in the world to the U.S. More than 149,000 people have died in India, third behind the U.S. (347,000) and Brazil (195,000).

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

India, which plans to vaccinate 300 million people in its first phase, has tested its coronavirus vaccine delivery system with a nationwide trial of storage and delivery. Meanwhile, Tokyo's Gov. Yuriko Koike is asking the national government to declare a "state of emergency" to curtail the surging coronavirus "in the name of valuing life." Tokyo reported a daily record of 1,337 cases on New Year's Eve and concerns are growing ahead of hosting the Olympics in July. In Italy, older people are defying the stereotypes that they need care and protection amid the pandemic and many are key workers.

California started the new year by reporting a record 585 coronavirus deaths in a single day as infections are surging and hospitals reach capacity. Texas reported a record for hospitalizations for the fifth straight day. There were 12,481 COVID-19 patients on New Year's Day, an increase of more than 1,750 from a week ago.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

TOKYO — Officials in Tokyo and three nearby prefectures have asked the national government to declare a state of emergency to curtail the surging spread of the coronavirus.

"In the name of valuing life, we made this plea together," said Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike after meeting Saturday with the minister in charge of coronavirus measures, along with the governors of Saitama, Chiba and Kanagawa.

Japan has seen a recent rise in reported cases of the coronavirus, especially in urban areas. Tokyo had a daily record of 1,337 cases on New Year's Eve.

There's concern about hosting the Olympics in July, with 11,000 Olympic athletes set to enter Japan, as well as tens of thousands of officials and media.

"Corona knows no calendar," says Koike. "Hospitals are getting packed, affecting medical care for all."

Japan has never had a lockdown, attempting to juggle the need to keep the economy going with health risks. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has come under criticism over what some see as his mishandling of the pandemic. Japan has more than 3,500 confirmed deaths related to the coronavirus.

BERLIN — The CEO of Germany-based travel operator TUI is predicting a "largely normal summer" in 2021 as more and more people are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

TUI chief Fritz Jousen was quoted as telling Saturday's edition of the daily Rheinische Post that the company's market research shows "people have an enormous longing to be able to go on nice journeys again after the difficult corona period."

He said that "we expect a largely normal summer." However, he added that the company will only offer around 80% of the flights it did in pre-pandemic years "to achieve optimal occupancy."

Resurgent coronavirus infections in the fall and winter have prompted national and regional restrictions on travel and hotel stays, along with quarantine requirements, largely shutting down tourism in Europe after something of a revival last summer.

Vaccinations started in Europe last month but will take some time to have a significant impact on the situation.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea is extending stringent distancing rules for two more weeks as authori-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 17 of 54

ties seek to suppress a viral resurgence, while confirming its first case of an apparently more contagious coronavirus variant detected in South Africa.

Health Minister Kwon Deok-cheol said Saturday the second highest level of distancing rules will remain in place for the Seoul region until Jan. 17. He says the third highest level of restrictions will stay in other areas until then.

The curbs include bans on social gatherings of more than five people and in-person religious services. The government will require foreigners entering South Korea to submit negative virus test results starting Jan. 8.

LONDON — The British government is facing growing calls to keep all schools in England closed for at least two weeks as a result of surging coronavirus cases following another sudden reversal of policy.

The call from the National Education Union, which represents over 450,000 members working in schools, came after Education Secretary Gavin Williamson changed tack and said all schools for younger pupils in London should remain shut next week as the capital battles with high levels of infections.

Mary Bousted, the union's joint head, said the decision was "entirely necessary" but slammed the government for originally planning to allow some schools to reopen in areas where new infections were running high.

The U.K. is in the midst of a sharp spike in new coronavirus cases that many have blamed on a new virus variant that is said to be up to 70% more infectious.

LOS ANGELES — California started the new year by reporting a record 585 coronavirus deaths in a single day.

The state Department of Public Health said Friday there were more than 47,000 new confirmed cases reported, bringing the total to more than 2.29 million.

Hospitals in the state ended the year on "the brink of catastrophe," a health official said as the pandemic pushed deaths and sickness to staggering levels and some medical centers scrambled to provide oxygen for the critically ill.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office announced Friday that California would begin collaborating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate and upgrade outdated oxygen delivery systems at six Los Angeles area hospitals.

The collaboration comes as older hospitals are having difficulty maintaining oxygen pressure in aging infrastructure and some were scrambling to locate additional oxygen tanks for discharged patients to take home.

California this week became the third state to exceed 25,000 COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas hit a new record high for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 for the fifth consecutive day Friday, in a continued surge of the disease caused by the coronavirus following holiday gatherings and travel.

Texas reported 12,481 COVID-19 patients in state hospitals on New Year's Day, an increase of more than 1,750 from a week ago.

State health officials on Friday reported 12,369 new, confirmed cases of the virus and another 3,658 probable cases.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, intensive care units in several parts of Texas were full or nearly full.

The grim count has continued to climb as some Texans gathered to celebrate the new year, despite warnings from health officials that congregation is likely to further spread the virus.

CARSON CITY, Nev. — Nevada on Friday reported 2,315 additional known COVID-19 cases along with

21 more deaths from the coronavirus.

The state's totals since the pandemic began increased to 227,046 cases and 3,146 deaths.

Seven-day rolling averages of daily new cases and daily deaths in Nevada dropped over the past two weeks. That's according to data from Johns Hopkins University and The COVID Tracking Project.

The number of infections is thought to be far higher than reported because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected with the virus without feeling sick.

—
LONDON — British medical authorities are warning that hospitals around the country face a perilous few weeks amid surging new coronavirus infections blamed on a new virus variant.

Concerns are mounting about the ability of the already stretched National Health Service to handle the anticipated increase in the number of people seeking treatment for COVID-19.

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 says the U.K. is in the "eye of the storm."

Over 55,280 new infections and another 613 deaths were recorded Friday, putting the U.K. on track to once again overtake Italy as Europe's worst-hit country in the pandemic.

The spike in new cases is said to be due to a new, more contagious variant of the virus first identified around London and the southeast of England.

Yemen's PM says airport attack aimed to 'eliminate' Cabinet

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Yemen's prime minister on Saturday said that a missile attack on the airport in Aden was meant "to eliminate" the country's new government as it arrived in the key southern city — a daring assault which he blamed on Iran-backed rebels.

Prime Minister Maen Abdulmalik Saeed spoke to The Associated Press in an interview conducted at his office in the Mashiq Palace in Aden. It was the leader's first interview with international media after he survived Wednesday's attack that killed at least 25 people and wounded 110 others.

"It's a major terrorist attack that was meant to eliminate the government," the premier said. "It was a message against peace and stability in Yemen."

Saeed repeated his government's accusations that Yemen's Houthi rebels were responsible for the missile attack on the airport and a drone assault on the palace, shortly after the premier and his Cabinet were transferred there.

The new Yemeni government was formed in December to end a dangerous political rift with southern separatists who are backed by the United Arab Emirates. The internal rift threatened the UAE's partnership with Saudi Arabia that is fighting the Houthis in Yemen.

He said that the "techniques" used in the airport missile attack were hallmarks of the Houthis' strategy.

The attack took place moments after a plane carrying Saeed and his Cabinet members landed at the airport. AP footage from the scene at Aden's airport showed members of the government delegation disembarking as the blast shook the tarmac, with many ministers rushing back inside the plane or running down the stairs, seeking shelter.

Saeed said three precision-guided missiles had struck the facility, targeting his plane, the arrival hall and the VIP lounge of the airport.

"The guidance accuracy was great. The operation was huge," he said.

The prime minister said Yemeni investigators have collected the remains of the missiles and that experts from the Saudi-led coalition and the U.S. would help determine the type and origins of the missiles.

Saeed and his newly formed Cabinet were returning to Yemen a week after they were sworn in before Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, where the embattled leader resides.

The Cabinet reshuffle was part of a power-sharing deal between the Saudi-backed Hadi and the secessionist Southern Transitional Council, an umbrella group of militias seeking to restore an independent southern Yemen, which existed from 1967 until unification in 1990.

Saeed, the prime minister, said his government would prioritize "security and stability" in government-held areas after months of infighting between Hadi's government and the STC.

"Whatever the challenges in Aden, the government remains," he said.

He also pointed to "huge" economic challenges as being the focus of his government.

The conflict in the Arab world's most impoverished nation began when the Houthis captured the capital of Sanaa in 2014, forcing Hadi's government to flee.

The following year, the Saudi-led coalition intervened against the Iran-backed rebels in what has turned into a stalemated war. Since then, more than 112,000 people — fighters and civilians — have been killed.

Aden's airport is expected to reopened Sunday, Transportation Minister Abdel-Salam Hamied announced while visiting the facility.

Pakistan arrests key militant on terror financing charges

By ASIM TANVEER Associated Press

MULTAN, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's security forces arrested Saturday an alleged leader of the militant group that was behind the bloody 2008 Mumbai attacks in India.

An official with the Pakistani counterterrorism police, Shakil Ahmed, said that Zaikur Rehman Lakhvi was seized in the eastern city of Lahore, on terrorism financing charges.

Lakhvi is alleged to be a leader of the Lashker-e-Taiba group that organized the Mumbai attacks in 2008 that killed 166 people. Lakhvi was detained days after the Mumbai attacks but released in 2015 by Pakistani courts.

Pakistani authorities allege that Lakhvi was running a dispensary in Lahore as a front for financing militant activities.

Lakhvi was a prominent figure in Hafiz Saeed's charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which is believed to be a front for Lashker-e-Taiba.

Saeed, who has been designated a terrorist by the U.S. Justice Department and has a \$10 million bounty on his head, is presently serving multiple jail terms in Pakistan after being convicted in several cases in recent months. The Pakistani government has seized Saeed's extensive network of mosques, schools, seminaries and charities and other assets in the country.

Relations between Pakistan and India were strained after the attack on India's financial hub in 2008. The rival South Asian powers have fought two wars since gaining independence from Britain in 1947.

Iran plans 20% uranium enrichment 'as soon as possible'

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran said Saturday it plans to enrich uranium up to 20% at its underground Fordo nuclear facility "as soon as possible," pushing its program a technical step away from weapons-grade levels as it increases pressure on the West over the tattered atomic deal.

The move comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. in the waning days of the administration of President Donald Trump, who unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal in 2018.

That set in motion an escalating series of incidents capped by a U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad a year ago, an anniversary coming Sunday that has American officials now worried about possible retaliation by Iran.

Iran's decision to begin enriching to 20% a decade ago nearly brought an Israeli strike targeting its nuclear facilities, tensions that only abated with the 2015 atomic deal. A resumption of 20% enrichment could see that brinkmanship return.

Even Ali Akbar Salehi, the U.S.-educated head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, offered

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 20 of 54

a military analogy to describe his agency's readiness to take the next step.

"We are like soldiers and our fingers are on the triggers," Salehi told Iranian state television. "The commander should command and we shoot. We are ready for this and will produce (20% enriched uranium) as soon as possible."

Iran's decision comes after its parliament passed a bill, later approved by a constitutional watchdog, aimed at hiking enrichment to pressure Europe into providing sanctions relief. It also serves as pressure ahead of the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who has said he is willing to re-enter the nuclear deal.

The International Atomic Energy Agency acknowledged Iran had informed its inspectors of the decision by a letter after news leaked overnight Friday.

"Iran has informed the agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country's parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium ... up to 20 percent at the Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant," the IAEA said in a statement.

The IAEA added Iran did not say when it planned to boost enrichment, though the agency "has inspectors present in Iran on a 24/7 basis and they have regular access to Fordo." The parliamentary bill also called on Iran to expel those inspectors, though it appears Tehran still hasn't decided to take that step.

Salehi said Iran would need to switch out natural uranium in centrifuges at Fordo for material already enriched to 4% to begin the process of going to 20%.

"It should be done under IAEA supervision," Salehi added.

Since the deal's collapse, Iran has resumed enrichment at Fordo, near the Shiite holy city of Qom, some 90 kilometers (55 miles) southwest of Tehran.

Shielded by the mountains, Fordo is ringed by anti-aircraft guns and other fortifications. It is about the size of a football field, large enough to house 3,000 centrifuges, but small and hardened enough to lead U.S. officials to suspect it had a military purpose when they exposed the site publicly in 2009.

The 2015 deal saw Iran agree to limit its enrichment in exchange for sanctions relief. The accord also called for Fordo to be turned into a research-and-development facility.

Under Iran's former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran began 20% enrichment. Israel, which has its own undeclared nuclear weapons program, feared Tehran was building a bomb.

After the discovery of Fordo, the U.S. worked on so-called "bunker buster" bombs designed to strike such facilities. As Israel threatened at one point to bomb Iranian nuclear sites like Fordo, U.S. officials reportedly showed them a video of a bunker-buster bomb destroying a mock-up of Fordo in America's southwestern desert.

Israel, which under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued to criticize Iran's nuclear program, offered no immediate comment Saturday.

As of now, Iran is enriching uranium up to 4.5%, in violation of the accord's limit of 3.67%. Experts say Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium stockpiled for at least two nuclear weapons, if it chose to pursue them. Iran long has maintained its nuclear program is peaceful.

Iran separately has begun construction on a new site at Fordo, according to satellite photos obtained by The Associated Press in December.

Iran's announcement coincides with the anniversary of the U.S. drone striking Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad last year. That attack later saw Iran retaliate by launching a ballistic missile strike injuring dozens of U.S. troops in Iraq. Tehran also accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet that night, killing all 176 people on board.

As the anniversary approached, the U.S. has sent B-52 bombers flying over the region and sent a nuclear-powered submarine into the Persian Gulf.

On Thursday, sailors discovered a limpet mine on a tanker in the Persian Gulf off Iraq near the Iranian border as it prepared to transfer fuel to another tanker owned by a company traded on the New York Stock Exchange. No one has claimed responsibility for the mining, though it comes after a series of similar attacks in 2019 that the U.S. Navy blamed on Iran. Tehran denied being involved.

In November, an Iranian scientist who founded the country's military nuclear program two decades

earlier was killed in an attack Tehran blames on Israel.

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

In graying Italy, the old defy biases laid bare by pandemic

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — From his newsstand at the bottom of two hilly streets in Rome, Armando Alviti has been dispensing newspapers, magazines and good cheer to locals from before dawn till after dusk nearly every day for more than a half-century.

"Ciao, Armando," his customers greet him as part of their daily routine. "Ciao, amore (love)" he calls back. Alviti chuckled as he recalled how, when he was a young boy, newspaper deliverers would drop off the day's stacks at his parents' newsstand, sit him in the emptied baskets of their motorbikes and take him for a spin.

Since he turned 18, Alviti has operated the newsstand seven days a week, with a wool tweed cap to protect him from the Italian capital's winter dampness and a tabletop fan to cool him during its torrid summers. A mighty battle therefore ensued when the coronavirus reached Italy and his two grown sons insisted that Alviti, who is 71 and diabetic, stay home while they took turns juggling their own jobs to keep the newsstand open.

"They were afraid I would die. I know they love me crazy," Alviti said.

Throughout the pandemic, health authorities around the world have stressed the need to protect the people most at risk of complications from COVID-19, a group which infection and mortality data quickly revealed included older adults. With 23% of its population age 65 or older, Italy has the world's second-oldest population, after Japan, with 28%.

The average age of Italy's COVID-19 dead has hovered around 80, many of them people with previous medical conditions like diabetes or heart disease. Some politicians advocated limiting how much time elders spent outside of their homes to avoid lockdowns of the general population that were costly to the economy.

Among them was the governor of Italy's northwestern coastal region of Liguria, where 28.5 percent of the population is age 65 or older. Gov. Giovanni Toti, who is 52, argued for such an age-specific strategy when a second surge of infections struck Italy in the fall.

Older people are "for the most part in retirement, not indispensable to the productive effort" of Italy's economy, Toti said.

To the news vendor in Rome, those were fighting words. Alviti said Toti's remarks "disgusted me. They made me very angry."

"Older persons are the life of this country. They're the memory of this country," he said. Self-employed older adults like him especially "can't be kept under a bell jar," he said.

The pandemic's heavy toll on older people, particularly those in nursing homes, might have served to reinforce ageism, or prejudice against the segment of population generally referred to as "elderly."

The label "old" means "40, 50 years of life being lumped in one category," said Nancy Morrow-Howell, a professor of social work at Washington University in St. Louis who specializes in gerontology. She noted that these days, people in their 60s often are caring for parents in their 90s.

"Ageism is so accepted ... it's not questioned," Morrow-Howell said in a telephone interview. One form it takes is "compassionate ageism," Morrow-Howell said, the idea that "we need to protect older adults. We need to treat them as children."

Alviti's family won the first round, keeping him away from work until May. His sons implored him to stay home again when the coronavirus rebounded in the fall.

He struck a compromise. One of his sons opens the newsstand at 6 a.m. and Alviti takes over two hours later, limiting his exposure to the public during the morning rush.

Fausto Alviti said he's afraid for his father, "but I also realize for him to stay home, it would have been worse, psychologically. He needs to be with people."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 22 of 54

In the open-air food market in the Trullo neighborhood of Rome, produce vendor Domenico Zoccoli, 80, also scoffs at the belief that people past retirement age "don't produce (and) must be protected."

Before dawn broke on a recent rainy day, Zoccoli had transformed his stall into a cheerful array of colors: boxes of red and green cabbages, radicchio, purple carrots, leafy beet tops, and cauliflower in shades of white, violet and orange, all harvested from his farm some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) away.

"Old people must do what they feel. If they can't walk, then they don't walk. If I feel like running, I run," Zoccoli said. After packing up his stall at 1:30 p.m., he said he would work several hours more in his field, skipping lunch.

Marco Trabucchi, a psychiatrist based in the northern Italian city of Brescia who specializes in the behavior of older adults, thinks the pandemic has gotten people to reconsider their attitudes for the better.

"Little attention was given to the individuality of the old. They were like an indistinct category, all equal, with all the same problems, all suffering," Trabucchi said.

In Italy, with childcare centers chronically scarce, legions of older adults, some decades beyond retirement, effectively double as essential workers by caring for their grandchildren.

According to Eurostat, the European Union's statistics bureau, 35% of Italians older than 65 look after grandchildren several times a week.

Felice Santini, 79, and his wife, Rita Cintio, 76, are such a couple. They take care of the two youngest of their four grandchildren multiple times per week.

"If we didn't care for them, their parents couldn't work," said Santini. "We're helping them (a son and daughter-in-law) stay in the productive work force."

Santini still works himself, a half-day as a mechanic at an auto repair shop. Then, when he comes home, his hands keep busy in the kitchen: stuffing homemade cannelloni with sausage, making meat sauce and baking orange-flavored Bundt cakes for his grandkids.

Cintio finds it painful not being able to hug and kiss her grandchildren. But she embraced 9-year-old Gaia Santini when the girl ran joyfully toward her after her grandmother navigated Rome's narrow streets to pick her up at school. Cintio will take Gaia home for a break, before next accompanying her to an ice-skating lesson.

Worried about COVID-19's second surge, the couple's son, Cristiano Santini, said he tried to limit the frequency with which his parents watch the children, but to little avail.

"They're afraid (of infection), but they are more afraid of not living much longer" due to their ages and missing previous time with their grandchildren, he said.

Fields' day: No. 3 Ohio State routs No. 2 Clemson 49-28

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Numbers have fueled Ohio State all year.

There was 29-23, the score of last season's painful playoff loss to Clemson.

Six, the number of games the Buckeyes played in this pandemic-altered season, which a lot of people thought was too few for them to deserve a return trip to the College Football Playoff.

Then there was No. 11, where Clemson coach Dabo Swinney placed Ohio State on his ballot in the final regular-season coaches' poll.

In a rematch with Swinney's Tigers in the Sugar Bowl, Justin Fields and the Buckeyes had Clemson's number.

Fields threw six touchdown passes to outshine Trevor Lawrence, and No. 3 Ohio State buried the second-ranked Tigers 49-28 in the Sugar Bowl semifinal Friday night.

"Everybody doubting us just pushed us a little more," Fields said.

The Buckeyes (7-0) head to the CFP title game for the first time since the inaugural playoff to face No. 1 Alabama on Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Stadium in South Florida. Ohio State beat the Crimson Tide in the semifinals on the way to the 2014 national championship.

Buckeyes coach Ryan Day called it a statement game for the program.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 23 of 54

"I think this performance, not only by Justin, but this team, hopefully will go down in Ohio State history as a landmark game," Day said. "Because we want to go on to win the national championship. But there was a lot of tough days, a lot of tough days over the last six months."

In a matchup of quarterback prodigies from Georgia, Fields might have given the Jacksonville Jaguars something to think about with that first pick in the NFL draft. Lawrence is the presumptive No. 1, but Fields outplayed him on this night, going 22 of 28 for 385 yards. He set a Sugar Bowl record for TD passes and did it playing more than half the game after taking a vicious shot to the side that forced him to miss a play and spend time in the medical tent.

Lawrence was 33 of 48 for 400 yards and three total touchdowns in what is expected to be the junior's final college game.

"We were confident and prepared," he said. "This was just one of those nights."

Lawrence's final pass was intercepted, but Clemson (10-2) finished 34-2 in his starts and won a national title when he was a freshman.

The third meeting between Clemson and Ohio State in the playoff, and fourth bowl matchup since the 2013 season — all Clemson wins — was a game the Buckeyes had been pointing toward ever since that 29-23 loss in the Fiesta Bowl last year.

That score was everywhere the Buckeyes turned in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in Columbus the past year.

A chance for revenge was nearly derailed when the Big Ten canceled fall football in August because of the pandemic. An abbreviated Big Ten season caused more headaches, with the Buckeyes having three games canceled because of COVID-19 issues, including their own outbreak.

The playoff committee still liked Ohio State enough to put the Buckeyes in the final four, despite much griping from various parts of the country, including Clemson.

Day talked all week about what a remarkable story it would be for the Buckeyes to endure the roller-coaster season and still reach their goal.

"It's been an emotional season," Day said, "and to come back and have a chance to play Clemson and then win the way we did — unbelievable."

Clemson took a 14-7 lead in the first quarter with Lawrence and Travis Etienne running for scores.

From there it was all Buckeyes. Fields threw touchdown passes to tight ends Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert to give Ohio State a 21-14 lead early in the second.

Operating without offensive coordinator Tony Elliott, who did not make the trip while in COVID-19 protocol, the Clemson offense couldn't respond. The Buckeyes kept rolling behind Fields, though not without a major scare.

Fields scrambled on a third-and-long and took a hard shot to the right side from Clemson linebacker James Skalski that put the Buckeyes star into a fetal position before rolling over onto his back in obvious pain.

The play was reviewed for a targeting foul that resulted in Clemson's top linebacker being ejected and a first-and-goal for the Buckeyes.

Fields came out for one play and returned to immediately throw a 9-yard touchdown pass to Chris Olave that made it 28-14.

"My body's pretty beat up, but I'm happy," Fields said. "I know I'm going to be feeling it tomorrow, but it was worth it."

Fields went to the injury tent with Ohio State medical staff on Clemson's next possession. He said afterward he got a shot for the pain, but it still hurt after almost every throw.

He was right back out there on the next Buckeyes drive. Fields moved gingerly, but with Trey Sermon running hard and the line providing good protection, Fields continued to carve up the Tigers.

He hit Ruckert for a 12-yard score with 11 seconds left in the half.

A year after blowing a 16-0 first-half lead to Clemson, the Buckeyes handed the Tigers their largest halftime deficit (21) since the 2012 Orange Bowl against West Virginia (29 points).

The second half started with Clemson looking as though it might have another comeback in store. Fields

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 24 of 54

was intercepted in the Tigers' end zone and Lawrence came back with a touchdown pass.

Nervous time for the Buckeyes? Not for long. Fields threw a perfectly placed bomb to Olave for a 56-yard touchdown pass that made it 42-21 with 4:55 left in the third quarter.

"They were awesome," Swinney said. "They absolutely dominated the line of scrimmage. You can't win games like this if you can't stop the run and big plays."

THE TAKEAWAY

Ohio State: Sermon followed up his school-record 331 yards rushing in the Big Ten championship game with 193 on the ground and another 61 receiving. The Oklahoma transfer is having a late-season breakout similar to Ezekiel Elliott's in 2014.

Clemson: Swinney complained about Ohio State's six-game schedule, saying it might even give the Buckeyes an unfair advantage in the playoff. Yes, he said the Buckeyes were good enough to beat the Tigers, but he placed Ohio State 11th on his coaches' poll ballot just the same. It was nothing personal, Swinney said, but the Buckeyes sure looked as if they took it that way.

"No, I don't regret any of that and the poll had nothing to do with motivation," Swinney said.

Only a few thousand fans were permitted in the Superdome because of COVID-19 restrictions. The thousand or so on the Buckeyes' side of the field derisively chanted "Daaa-boooo! Daaa-boooo!" as the clock wound down on Clemson's season.

MISSING

The Buckeyes were without second-leading rusher Master Teague, starting guard Harry Miller and two defensive ends in Tyler Friday and Zach Harrison. Ohio State did not give details about their absences, but all four had played in the Big Ten championship two weeks ago.

NEXT

Ohio State: The Buckeyes will make their second appearance in the College Football Playoff championship game. They beat Oregon to win the 2014 national title.

Clemson: The Tigers open next season with a doozy of a nonconference game against Georgia in Charlotte.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at <https://twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP> and listen at <https://westwoodonepodcasts.com/pods/ap-top-25-college-football-podcast/>

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

No snake soup for Hong Kong's young snake catcher

By ALICE FUNG and NICOLE KO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong is home to a variety of snakes — from the venomous king cobra to larger species such as the Burmese python. Whenever one of these reptiles is spotted slithering into a home or coming alarmingly close to a residential area, Ken Lee is among the snake catchers called to capture the creatures.

But unlike commercial snake catchers of yesteryear, whose catch is often served up as soup in the city's snake shops, Lee doesn't sell the snakes he captures. He is part of a new breed of snake catchers who strive to release the reptiles back into nature.

"There are occasions where people have caught the snakes before I arrived on the scene, but unfortunately some of them were killed or fatally injured," said 31-year-old Lee, who is one of Hong Kong's youngest registered snake catchers. "Some people caught the snakes bravely, but actually it caused harm to wildlife."

Like many other snake catchers in the city, Lee is self-taught. He first started handling snakes at the age of 17, when he worked as an apprentice in a Hong Kong snake shop. His experience spurred him to learn more about biodiversity and biology, and he eventually went on to study that at a university in Taiwan.

When Lee catches snakes, he uses a range of equipment — puncture-proof gloves, sticks, hooks, a torch

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 25 of 54

and bags. At times, he even uses his bare hands.

In early December, he made headlines when he successfully captured a 3-meter-long (10-foot-long) Burmese python in a village located in a rural part of Hong Kong. The same month, Lee was also called to a high-rise residential building in a rural area to capture a bamboo pit viper — a common, venomous green snake whose bite can cause a nasty swell.

The snakes he catches are sent to the Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden, a local nonprofit organization that shelters rescued wild animals. After a health check, most of the creatures are then released back into the local parks.

"I hope all these wild animals could be returned to nature," Lee said.

Currently, he works as a research assistant at four universities in the city and volunteers at the Hong Kong Society of Herpetology Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the study of reptiles and amphibians.

Even though Hong Kong has ample green areas that serve as different habitats for snakes, Liz Rose-Jeffreys, Kadoorie Farm's conservation officer, thinks the city's urban development may threaten the survival of snake species.

"I think this is one of mutual respect, really. They are our wild neighbors, they've been here a lot longer than us, and I think we have a duty to respect nature," she said. "They form an important part of our ecosystem, so if we have to remove snakes, then it would upset the balance that has been established for many years."

In Georgia, Biden's presidency meets early defining moment

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Usually it's a president's first midterm election that reorders a White House's political approach and priorities. For President-elect Joe Biden, his most defining congressional election is coming before he takes office.

Two runoffs Tuesday in Georgia will decide which party controls the Senate and, thus, how far the new president can reach legislatively on issues such as the pandemic, health care, taxation, energy and the environment. For a politician who sold himself to Americans as a uniter and a seasoned legislative broker, the Georgia elections will help determine whether he's able to live up to his billing.

"It's not that you can't get anything done in the minority or get everything done in the majority, but having the gavel, having that leadership control can be the difference in success or failure for an administration," said Jim Manley, once a top aide to former Democratic Senate Leader Harry Reid, who held his post opposite current Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Both Georgia Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock must win Tuesday to split the Senate 50-50. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, as president of the Senate, would provide the tiebreaker needed to determine control.

To be sure, even a closely divided Democratic Senate wouldn't give Biden everything he wants. Senate rules still require 60 votes to advance most major legislation; for now, there aren't enough Democrats willing to change that requirement. So, regardless of Georgia's results, Biden will have to win over Republicans in a Senate where a bipartisan group of more centrist senators stand to see their stock rise.

A Democratic Senate still would clear an easier path for Biden's nominees to key posts, especially on the federal judiciary, and give Democrats control of committees and much of the floor action. Conversely, a Senate led by McConnell almost certainly would deny Biden major legislative victories, as it did late in President Barack Obama's tenure, by keeping his agenda from even getting up-or-down votes.

Biden's team is keenly aware of the stakes. The president-elect will travel to Atlanta on Monday, the eve of the runoffs, to campaign with Ossoff and Warnock for the second time in three weeks. Biden's campaign aides have helped raise millions to boost the party infrastructure that helped Biden become the first Democratic presidential nominee since 1992 to carry the state. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris will campaign Sunday in Savannah.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 26 of 54

In his last visit, Biden called Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler “roadblocks” and urged Georgians “to vote for two United States senators who know how to say the word ‘yes’ and not just ‘no.’”

Congressional makeup shapes any administration, but perhaps even more so for Biden, who spent 36 years in the Senate, plus eight as Obama’s vice president and top congressional liaison. Biden leaned on that resume to pitch himself to the country as a consensus builder; he also criticized presidents’ increased use of executive action to go around Congress and insisted it would be different in his presidency.

Even some Republicans are hopeful. Michael Steel, once a top adviser to Republican House Speaker John Boehner, a chief Obama foil along with McConnell, blamed Obama’s Capitol Hill troubles on his personal approach to his fellow politicians. Conversely, Steel said, “President-elect Biden is a legislator by avocation, by training, by instinct, by experience in a way that former President Obama was not.”

Steel predicted Biden and McConnell, two former colleagues, can find “common ground” on infrastructure and immigration — policy areas that have stumped multiple administrations. Steel noted a handful of Republican senators, including Marco Rubio of Florida and Rob Portman of Ohio, could face tough reelection fights in 2022, potentially making them eager to cut deals they could tout in campaigns.

Still, there’s no indication McConnell would allow consideration of other top Biden priorities, most notably a “public option” expansion of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which passed without a single Republican vote when Democrats controlled both chambers on Capitol Hill. Biden’s proposed tax hikes on corporations and the wealthiest Americans also are likely dead in a GOP Senate.

Biden will need his negotiating skills to navigate the left flank of his own party as well. While progressives say they’ve lowered their expectations of what’s possible — even under a Democratic Senate — they still intend to push Biden.

Larry Cohen, chairman of Our Revolution, the offshoot of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders’ 2016 presidential bid, said progressives will press Democrats in Congress to use the “budget reconciliation” process to work around the Senate’s 60-vote filibuster threshold. Cohen argued that tactic might be used to accomplish long-sought goals like ending tax subsidies to fossil fuel companies and enabling the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to negotiate as a single customer with pharmaceutical companies.

Those moves, Cohen noted, could generate considerable savings, creating new revenue even if Republicans won’t agree to any tax increases.

He also said progressives will push Biden to use executive authority. He named two initiatives Biden has called for publicly: ending new drilling on federal lands and raising the minimum wage for federal contractors to \$15 per hour, even if Congress won’t set that floor across the economy. Another progressive priority, cancelling student debt under federal loan programs, is something Biden has not said whether he’d be willing to attempt unilaterally.

Democrats’ limited expectations about their own power, even with a potential majority, belie the exaggerated claims Republicans have used in the Georgia races.

In Perdue’s and Loeffler’s telling, a Democratic Senate would “rubber stamp” a “socialist agenda,” from “ending private insurance” and “expanding the Supreme Court” to adopting wholesale a “Green New Deal” that would spend trillions and raise taxes on every U.S. household by thousands of dollars each year. Besides misrepresenting Biden’s and most Democratic senators’ policy preferences, that characterization ignores the reality of the Senate’s roster.

At one campaign stop this week, Ossoff said Perdue’s “ridiculous” attacks “blow my mind.” He scoffed at the claim that his policy ideas, which align closely with Biden, amount to a leftist lunge. But the challenger agreed with the incumbent on how much the Georgia runoffs matter.

“We have too much good work to do,” Ossoff said, “to be mired in gridlock and obstruction for the next few years.”

Roll Tide! No. 1 Alabama beats Notre Dame 31-14 in Rose Bowl

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — A truly untraditional Rose Bowl setting, a very common result for Alabama

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 27 of 54

in the College Football Playoff.

With Heisman Trophy finalists DeVonta Smith and Mac Jones, the top-ranked Crimson Tide rolled into its fifth CFP championship game in six seasons.

Smith caught three of Jones' four touchdown passes and Najee Harris ran for 125 yards with a high-hurdling highlight in a 31-14 victory over No. 4 Notre Dame in a CFP semifinal Rose Bowl played inside about 1,400 miles from Pasadena, California.

"I don't think there's anything quite like the Rose Bowl, the tradition, the setting, the mountains. It's just a phenomenal experience," coach Nick Saban said. "Wish our players had gotten that opportunity."

But Saban and the Tide (12-0, No. 1 CFP) will take yet another win in the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, which the coach called one of college football's finest venues, and advancing again in the playoff.

The Tide earned a spot in the Jan. 11 championship game in suburban Miami, against No. 3 Ohio State, which beat Clemson 49-28 in the other CFP semifinal at the Sugar Bowl on Friday night.

Alabama missed the CFP last year for the only time since the four-time playoff debuted at the end of the 2014 season. The Buckeyes were the initial CFP champions, after beating the top-seeded Tide 42-35 in a semifinal that year.

Notre Dame (10-2, No. 4 CFP), in football's final four for only the second time, has lost seven consecutive New Year's Six games since 2000.

Alabama scored TDs on its first three possessions, including an 97-yard drive on which Harris leaped over 6-foot cornerback Nick McCloud just after crossing the line of scrimmage, landed on both feet and then sprinted for a 53-yard gain before getting run out of bounds.

"I don't know why I'm surprised every time he does it. I've seen it for three years, but still, 'Geez!,' tight end Miller Forristall said.

"I actually try to teach him not to do it, and it didn't work," Saban said, laughing. "Anyway, for a big guy, it's pretty amazing that he can do that. He's kind of got a great feel when a guy's going to try to cut him. ... When he sees that head go down, he'll go over the top of them in a heartbeat."

Jones, who completed 25 of 30 passes for 297 yards, threw a 12-yard TD to tight end Jahleel Billingsley on the next play.

That came between drives when Smith, with 16 TD catches his last seven games, turned short passes into scores of 26 and 34 yards. Smith finished with seven catches for 130 yards, later adding a nifty toe-tapping 7-yarder in the front corner of the end zone right on the pylon.

CFP officials moved the Rose Bowl because of COVID-19 restrictions in California that would have kept family — or any fans — from attending the game at its normal home. There was a limited capacity crowd of 18,373 at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys, just a bit higher than attendance for the Cotton Bowl game there two nights earlier when Oklahoma beat SEC runner-up Florida 55-20.

It was another thud of a finish for the Fighting Irish after winning all 10 regular-season games, including a home victory over Clemson. But Notre Dame then lost 34-10 in the ACC title game to the Tigers.

"Today was about making the plays. They made them on the perimeter. Their skill players showed up today as they have all year," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "We battled. I thought we did some of the things that we wanted to today but we simply didn't make enough plays."

Notre Dame lost 30-3 to Clemson in the CFP semifinal Cotton Bowl two years ago at AT&T Stadium. It was the first time the Irish had played Alabama since the Tide beat them 42-14 in the BCS national championship game eight seasons ago.

The Alabama defense kept quarterback Ian Book scrambling. The winningest starting QB ever for the Irish at 30-5, Book completed 27 of 39 passes for 229 yards and only his third interception in 353 attempts this season.

PERFECT AT COWS HOME

Alabama is 5-0 at AT&T Stadium, with a pair of convincing CFP semifinal wins there. The Tide beat Michigan State 38-0 in the Cotton Bowl five seasons ago.

THE TAKEAWAY

Notre Dame: The Fighting Irish have gone 32 seasons since winning their last national title with a 12-0 record under Lou Holtz in 1988. The Irish were down only 21-7 when they got the ball for the first time in the second half. But any chance to get some momentum evaporated when Book threw an interception when under pressure, and Alabama turned that into another Smith's third TD catch.

Alabama: The outcome wasn't unexpected with the Tide a three-TD favorite, but the 31 points were its fewest since losing to Clemson 41-16 in the CFP title game two years ago — a span of 25 games. The 437 total yards were the lowest since 414 against Missouri in the opener of this pandemic-affected season.

"We kind of protected the lead a little bit," Jones said. "We have to do better job playing the plays."

UP NEXT

Notre Dame goes into another offseason still trying to figure out how to close the gap. The Irish play their 2021 season opener Sept. 5 at Florida State.

Alabama gets a chance to win its sixth national title in Saban's 14 seasons in the CFP national championship game.

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

GOP torn over Trump's Electoral College challenge of Biden

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's extraordinary challenge of his election defeat by President-elect Joe Biden is becoming a defining moment for the Republican Party before next week's joint session of Congress to confirm the Electoral College results.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is urging Republicans not to try to overturn the election, but not everyone is heeding him. Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri vows to join House Republicans in objecting to the state tallies. On the other side of the party's split, GOP Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska warns such challenges are a "dangerous ploy" threatening the nation's civic norms.

Caught in the middle is Vice President Mike Pence, who faces growing pressure and a lawsuit from Trump's allies over his ceremonial role in presiding over the session Wednesday.

The days ahead are expected to do little to change the outcome. Biden is set to be inaugurated Jan. 20 after winning the Electoral College vote 306-232. But the effort to subvert the will of voters is forcing Republicans to make choices that will set the contours of the post-Trump era and an evolving GOP.

"I will not be participating in a project to overturn the election," Sasse wrote in a lengthy social media post.

Sasse, a potential 2024 presidential contender, said he was "urging my colleagues also to reject this dangerous ploy."

Trump, the first president to lose a reelection bid in almost 30 years, has attributed his defeat to widespread voter fraud, despite the consensus of nonpartisan election officials that there wasn't any. Of the roughly 50 lawsuits the president and his allies have filed challenging election results, nearly all have been dismissed or dropped. He's also lost twice at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Still, the president has pushed Republican senators to pursue his unfounded charges even though the Electoral College has already cemented Biden's victory and all that's left is Congress' formal recognition of the count before the new president is sworn in.

"We are letting people vote their conscience," Sen. John Thune, the second-ranking Republican, told reporters at the Capitol.

Thune's remarks as the GOP whip in charge of rounding up votes show that Republican leadership is not putting its muscle behind Trump's demands, but allowing senators to choose their course. He noted the gravity of questioning the election outcome.

"This is an issue that's incredibly consequential, incredibly rare historically and very precedent-setting," he said. "This is a big vote. They are thinking about it."

Pence will be carefully watched as he presides over what is typically a routine vote count in Congress

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 29 of 54

but is now heading toward a prolonged showdown that could extend into Wednesday night, depending on how many challenges Hawley and others mount.

The vice president is being sued by a group of Republicans who want Pence to have the power to overturn the election results by doing away with an 1887 law that spells out how Congress handles the vote count.

Trump's own Justice Department may have complicated what is already a highly improbable effort to upend the ritualistic count Jan. 6. It asked a federal judge to dismiss the last-gasp lawsuit from Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Republican electors from Arizona who are seeking to force Pence to step outside mere ceremony and shape the outcome of the vote.

In a court filing in Texas, the department said they have "have sued the wrong defendant" and Pence should not be the target of the legal action.

"A suit to establish that the Vice President has discretion over the count, filed against the Vice President, is a walking legal contradiction," the department argues.

A judge in Texas dismissed the Gohmert lawsuit Friday night. U.S. District Judge Jeremy Kernodle, a Trump appointee, wrote that the plaintiffs "allege an injury that is not fairly traceable" to Pence, "and is unlikely to be redressed by the requested relief."

To ward off a dramatic unraveling, McConnell convened a conference call with Republican senators Thursday specifically to address the coming joint session and logistics of tallying the vote, according to several Republicans granted anonymity to discuss the private call.

The Republican leader pointedly called on Hawley to answer questions about his challenge to Biden's victory, according to two of the Republicans.

But there was no response because Hawley was a no-show, the Republicans said.

His office did not respond to a request for comment.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., who has acknowledged Biden's victory and defended his state's elections systems as valid and accurate, spoke up on the call, objecting to those challenging Pennsylvania's results and making clear he disagrees with Hawley's plan to contest the result, his office said in a statement.

McConnell had previously warned GOP senators not to participate in raising objections, saying it would be a terrible vote for colleagues. In essence, lawmakers would be forced to choose between the will of the outgoing president and that of the voters.

Several Republicans have indicated they are under pressure from constituents back home to show they are fighting for Trump in his baseless campaign to stay in office.

Hawley became the first GOP senator this week to announce he will raise objections when Congress meets to affirm Biden's victory in the election, forcing House and Senate votes that are likely to delay — but in no way alter — the final certification of Biden's win.

Other Republican senators are expected to join Hawley, wary of ceding the spotlight to him as they, too, try to emerge as leaders in a post-Trump era.

A number of Republicans in the Democratic-majority House have already said they will object on Trump's behalf. They only needed a single senator to go along with them to force votes in both chambers.

When Biden was vice president, he, too, presided over the session as the Electoral College presented the 2016 vote tally to Congress to confirm Trump the winner. The session was brief, despite objections from some Democrats.

Jen Psaki, speaking for the Biden transition team, dismissed Hawley's move as "antics" that will have no bearing on Biden being sworn in on Jan. 20.

Associated Press writer Aamer Madhani in Chicago contributed to this report.

Loeffler, Perdue run hard-line pitch in swing state Georgia

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The merchandise featured in Sen. Kelly Loeffler's online campaign store includes T-shirts and bumper stickers bearing Donald Trump's name and the message: "Still my president."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 30 of 54

The Georgia Republican is running television ads ahead of Tuesday's Senate runoff elections that lambastes her opponent, the Rev. Raphael Warnock, as "dangerous" and "radical."

Loeffler's colleague, Sen. David Perdue, meanwhile, is warning Georgians that Democrats will enact a "socialist agenda" if his challenger, Jon Ossoff, wins on Tuesday.

In the final days of campaigns that will decide control of the U.S. Senate, the Republican incumbents are appealing to the most conservative part of the electorate. Their steady embrace of the hard-right, Trump wing of the GOP — even repeatedly refusing to acknowledge Trump's defeat — and their caricatures of the Democratic challengers may seem like a risky approach in a state that narrowly voted for Democrat Joe Biden for president in November after years of steady Democratic gains.

Yet the strategy reflects prevailing GOP wisdom in the Trump era: Republicans' clearest path to victory, even in swing states, is to drive up support among a GOP base motivated by allegiance to the president and fear of Democrats. Still, the approach comes at the expense of a once-broader Republican coalition that included more urban and suburban moderates and GOP-leaning independents who have rejected the Republican brand under Trump.

"The president resonates with a lot of people, and so do the buzzwords, so you hear 'Trump' and 'socialism' a lot," said Michael McNeely, a former vice chair of the Georgia Republican Party. "I wish we lived in a society where people talked about ideas, but that's just not where we are."

Trump may have complicated Perdue's and Loeffler's gamble even more with how he's handled his defeat to Biden.

The president has spread unfounded assertions of voter fraud and blasted Georgia Republican officials, including Gov. Brian Kemp, who have defended the elections process. When Trump allies, including Perdue and Loeffler, backed up the claims, some Republicans expressed concern it could discourage some Trump loyalists from voting in the runoff. Now, other Republicans are worried that GOP candidates have instead turned off the more moderate voters repelled by Trump.

"No Republican is really happy with the situation we find ourselves in," said Chip Lake, a longtime GOP consultant and top adviser to Loeffler's vanquished rival, Rep. Doug Collins. "But sometimes when you play poker, you have to play the hand you're dealt, and for us that starts with the president."

Trump will visit Georgia for a final rally with Loeffler on Monday evening, hours before polls open. It is unclear whether Perdue will attend. The senator said Thursday he was quarantining after being exposed to an aide who tested positive for coronavirus.

Democrats are fine with the GOP senators' decision to run as Trump Republicans and use exaggerated attacks. Opposition to the president has been a unifying force among their core supporters, and Democrats believe Republicans' overall tenor falls flat with voters in the middle.

"We talk about something like expanding Medicaid. We talk about expanding Pell Grants" for low-income college students, Ossoff said at a recent stop in Marietta, north of Atlanta. "David Perdue denounces those things as socialism?"

Ossoff noted Perdue's claims that a Democratic-run Senate would abolish private insurance; Ossoff and Warnock, in fact, back Biden's proposal to add a federal insurance plan to private insurance exchanges, not abolish private insurance. "I just want people to have the choice," Ossoff said.

November returns demonstrate the GOP snare. Biden beat Trump by about 12,000 votes out of 5 million cast in Georgia, making him the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the state since 1992. Biden's record vote total for a Democrat in the state was fueled by racially and ethnically diversifying metro areas but also shifts in key Atlanta suburbs where white voters have historically leaned Republican.

Yet Perdue landed within a few thousand votes of Trump's total and led Ossoff by about 88,000 votes. Republican turnout also surged in small towns and rural areas, while Georgia Democrats had a disappointing general election down-ballot, failing to make expected gains in legislative races.

"We've won this race once already," Perdue says at some of his runoff campaign stops, echoing his advisers' belief that their top priority is maintaining enthusiasm from Trump's base. They add that they can corral the narrow slice of swing voters with arguments that warn against handing Democrats control of the House, Senate and White House.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 31 of 54

Lake and McNeely, however, predicted that hard-right attacks and Trump-centric appeals won't deliver votes beyond the base, particularly amid a crush of advertising in a runoff campaign whose total expense could top \$500 million.

"We reached the point of diminishing returns a long time ago," Lake said.

They also bemoaned Trump's continued grievances about his defeat even after his own attorney general said there was no evidence the election was marred by fraud and courts across the country rejected challenges to the outcome.

"If, for some reason, the Republican candidates lose," Lake said, "it's going to be hard to write a post-mortem on this runoff and not look directly at all the chaos that has been created on voter fraud."

Early voting ended Thursday with just more than 3 million Georgians casting absentee or in-person ballots. That trails the final early vote count of 3.65 million ahead of the general election. But the early vote already has set a statewide Georgia runoff turnout record.

Jen Jordan, a Democratic state senator who in 2017 won a suburban Atlanta district long held by Republicans, acknowledges her party, too, has moved to base strategy. But Jordan argued that Democrats still root their pitch more in policy ideas, especially on health care access and public education, that she said has wide appeal. She said Perdue and Loeffler undermined their "socialism" warnings by splitting from most congressional Republicans to support the president's call for \$2,000 pandemic aid payments to individual Americans.

"I've never heard the word socialism so much in my life, and then they're both like, yeah, let's give everybody \$2,000 checks," Jordan said.

McNeely, the former state GOP leader, lamented that even if Perdue and Loeffler win, their campaigns move Georgia further away from a more centrist tradition. He cited Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson, whose retirement opened the way for Kemp to appoint Loeffler.

Unlike many Southern Republicans of his generation, Isakson was never a Democrat. But he rose through the Georgia General Assembly in an era when Democrats dominated the state. In Washington, Isakson was a reliable Republican vote but shunned partisan jousting and intently avoided talking about Trump whenever possible.

"Sen. Isakson learned to see things from a different perspective," McNeely said, adding that Republican politicians should "think beyond campaigns and what the president is thinking" and that more voters should decide that "it doesn't make you a bad guy or gal because you compromise."

Bolsonaro's tough 2021 balance between ideology, pragmatism

By DIANE JEANTET and DÉBORA ÁLVARES Associated Press

BRASILIA (AP) — Brazil's pugnacious president, Jair Bolsonaro, survived 2020 in surprisingly good shape personally and politically, with buoyant popularity ratings despite his own bout of COVID-19 and a broader pandemic that has killed nearly 200,000 of his countrymen.

But the new year — and a looming reelection campaign — bring risks on all sides for the populist who has fought to limit environmental protections and rein in leftist influence on government and culture while feuding even with fellow conservatives in Latin America's largest nation.

Resurgent COVID-19 has lifted Brazil's death rate to its highest in three months, despite the president's insistence the pandemic is petering out. His sons face corruption investigations. He has no firm block of support in congress. And he's losing his main international ally with the exit of U.S. President Donald Trump, whose off-the-cuff rhetoric and tendency to test democratic norms had emboldened the Brazilian leader.

Perhaps most damaging is the expiration with the new year of a pandemic-inspired financial aid program that has helped fend off hunger for tens of millions of poor Brazilians — among whom his popularity has been growing.

Bolsonaro may be famous for breaking the rules, but he's going to have to be more pragmatic, said Lucas de Aragão, a partner at Brasilia-based political consultancy Arko Advice. "He's never going to be a president who plays by the book, but he has to start picking his fights."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 32 of 54

More pragmatism starts with choosing his enemies more carefully, de Aragão said.

During the 2018 presidential campaign, Bolsonaro's broadsides against the political establishment and intellectual elite resonated with disaffected voters, including many moderates. He won handily, and has since kept up his confrontational tone, hammering away at congressional leaders, federal prosecutors, governors and the Supreme Court — many of them people who potentially could help him get bills through congress or win reelection in 2022.

In the United States, Trump held to his polarizing tone and lost. Unlike Trump, Bolsonaro does not have a powerful party standing behind him. As a matter of fact, since leaving the Social Liberal Party a year ago, he does not have a party at all — and is now trying to cobble together a working majority in congress, where a Feb. 1 leadership vote could determine the fate of his legislative ambitions.

Bolsonaro has shown some signs of reaching out. After months of demonizing the Supreme Court as biased against him, he was photographed in October hugging Supreme Court Justice Dias Toffoli at an informal meeting in Toffoli's house.

The reaction illustrated his dilemma. Many of his firmest supporters turned to social media to express their surprise, if not bewilderment.

"I need to govern," Bolsonaro said in response to concerns raised by a supporter on his official Facebook account.

Last month's municipal elections alarmed the Presidential Palace. Only five of the 16 mayoral candidates who Bolsonaro publicly backed won — none of them in the country's biggest cities. Three senior government officials told The Associated Press that the results took Bolsonaro by surprise. "He did not expect to have so little influence," said one of the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity for lack of authorization to comment publicly.

Recent polls say Bolsonaro is roughly as popular as when he was elected. But his ratings have declined among richer and better educated Brazilians while increasing among the poor, who have been receiving the government's pandemic financial aid.

The end of that aid is likely to dent the president's popularity, said Arko's de Aragão.

It is the only income for more than a third of those who received it, according to a December study by Brazilian polling institute Datafolha. As many as 70 million Brazilians ended up getting financial support during the health crisis, costing the government a hefty \$61 billion at a time when economists are warning of an unsustainable deficit and rising inflation.

The cutoff could leave 24 million of them in extreme poverty, International Monetary Fund Director Kristalina Georgieva warned in December.

With no firm congressional bloc of his own, Bolsonaro has been courting a group of centrist lawmakers known as the Centrao in hopes of winning leadership in the lower house of congress.

Such efforts might not be enough to assure a majority, and if their candidate, Arthur Lira, loses, Bolsonaro will struggle to achieve promised legislation, such as the loosening of gun laws or opening up the Amazon rainforest to development.

The group's support did not come for free and Bolsonaro faces pressure to grant its members some ministerial positions — the sort of political horse trading he had promised his supporters that he would never do.

For many Bolsonaro voters, the Centrao bloc represents the kind of corrupt politics the president tried to distance himself from during the campaign.

But any signs of conciliation seem to be overshadowed by Bolsonaro's hardline stands against pandemic restrictions on gatherings and his skepticism over vaccines.

Bolsonaro, who recovered from a bout of COVID-19, has said he will not take any of the vaccines, and has actively undermined confidence in the Chinese-made CoronaVac shot backed by Sao Paulo Gov. João Doria, who is widely expected to run against Bolsonaro in 2022.

Prominent health experts and opposition lawmakers have accused the government of dragging its feet on a national immunization program. It only presented a plan in mid-December when forced to by the Supreme Court.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 33 of 54

With no approved vaccine ready for delivery, Latin America's largest nation is running behind other Latin American countries.

Oliver Stuenkel, a political scientist who teaches at the Getulio Vargas Foundation in Sao Paulo, said the president still relies heavily on polarization.

"He continues as a radical ... This is something that is deeply embedded in his political DNA: to polarize, divide and not govern," Stuenkel said.

Pereira echoed that view: "He needs to moderate to govern, but he needs to polarize to win elections. This is the contradiction of the Bolsonaro government."

Associated Press writer Diane Jeantet reported this story from Rio de Janeiro and AP journalist Débora Álvares reported in Brasilia.

The Latest: S Korea extends distancing rules for 2 weeks

By The Associated Press undefined

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea is extending stringent distancing rules for two more weeks as authorities seek to suppress a viral resurgence, while confirming its first case of an apparently more contagious coronavirus variant detected in South Africa.

Health Minister Kwon Deok-cheol said Saturday the second highest level of distancing rules will remain in place for the Seoul region until Jan. 17. He says the third highest level of restrictions will stay in other areas until then.

The curbs include bans on social gatherings of more than five people and in-person religious services. The government will require foreigners entering South Korea to submit negative virus test results starting Jan. 8.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— In California, coronavirus infections are racing out of control.

— Only about half of the Americans who volunteered to test COVID-19 vaccines got the real thing. Now experts debate whether all volunteers should.

— Israel says it has vaccinated 1 million people against COVID-19 as it rolls out one of the world's earliest and most rapid inoculation campaigns.

— Police in Wisconsin say they've arrested a hospital employee suspected of intentionally spoiling COVID-19 vaccines.

— Authorities in Belgium say a 27th elderly person has died in an outbreak at a nursing home from a super-spreading St. Nick party last month.

— Turkey's health minister says the country has identified 15 people who carry a highly contagious coronavirus variant that was discovered in the United Kingdom.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

LOS ANGELES — California started the new year by reporting a record 585 coronavirus deaths in a single day.

The state Department of Public Health said Friday there were more than 47,000 new confirmed cases reported, bringing the total to more than 2.29 million.

Hospitals in the state ended the year on "the brink of catastrophe," a health official said as the pandemic pushed deaths and sickness to staggering levels and some medical centers scrambled to provide oxygen for the critically ill.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office announced Friday that California would begin collaborating with the U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 34 of 54

Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate and upgrade outdated oxygen delivery systems at six Los Angeles area hospitals.

The collaboration comes as older hospitals are having difficulty maintaining oxygen pressure in aging infrastructure and some were scrambling to locate additional oxygen tanks for discharged patients to take home.

California this week became the third state to exceed 25,000 COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas hit a new record high for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 for the fifth consecutive day Friday, in a continued surge of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus following holiday gatherings and travel.

Texas reported 12,481 COVID-19 patients in state hospitals on New Year's Day, an increase of more than 1,750 from a week ago.

State health officials on Friday reported 12,369 new, confirmed cases of the virus and another 3,658 probable cases.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, intensive care units in several parts of Texas were full or nearly full.

The grim count has continued to climb as some Texans gathered to celebrate the new year, despite warnings from health officials that congregation is likely to further spread the virus.

CARSON CITY, Nev. — Nevada on Friday reported 2,315 additional known COVID-19 cases along with 21 more deaths from the coronavirus.

The state's totals since the pandemic began increased to 227,046 cases and 3,146 deaths.

Seven-day rolling averages of daily new cases and daily deaths in Nevada dropped over the past two weeks. That's according to data from Johns Hopkins University and The COVID Tracking Project.

The number of infections is thought to be far higher than reported because many people have not been tested, and studies suggest people can be infected with the virus without feeling sick.

LONDON — British medical authorities are warning that hospitals around the country face a perilous few weeks amid surging new coronavirus infections blamed on a new virus variant.

Concerns are mounting about the ability of the already stretched National Health Service to handle the anticipated increase in the number of people seeking treatment for COVID-19.

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 says the U.K. is in the "eye of the storm."

Over 55,280 new infections and another 613 deaths were recorded Friday, putting the U.K. on track to once again overtake Italy as Europe's worst-hit country in the pandemic.

The spike in new cases is said to be due to a new, more contagious variant of the virus first identified around London and the southeast of England.

BALTIMORE — The number of confirmed U.S. coronavirus cases has surpassed 20 million, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

That's nearly twice as many as the No. 2 country, India, and nearly one-quarter of the more than 83 million cases globally.

The U.S. continued to surpass other countries in COVID-19 cases as it reached 20 million at the start of the new year, according to data kept by Johns Hopkins University.

COVID-19 deaths have also increased in the country, now totaling more than 346,000.

India and Brazil trail behind the U.S. in coronavirus cases at over 10 million and 7 million, respectively.

The increase comes as officials race to vaccinate millions of Americans but have come off to a slower

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 35 of 54

and messier start.

President-elect Joe Biden criticized the Trump administration Tuesday for the pace of distributing COVID-19 vaccines and vowed to ramp up the current speed of vaccinations. However, Biden acknowledged that it "will still take months to have the majority of Americans vaccinated."

— WASHINGTON — Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah is assailing the slow pace of vaccinations against the coronavirus.

He says it's "incomprehensible" and "inexcusable" that the Trump administration has not developed an efficient federal vaccination model for the states.

Romney says it was unrealistic to assume that health care workers already overburdened caring for COVID-19 patients could carry the brunt of the vaccination program or that the big drugstore chains would have the workers to inoculate millions.

He's suggesting that public health authorities seek to enlist all retired or active medical professionals who are not otherwise engaged in care, as well as veterinarians, combat medics, medical students and first responders in the effort. He says they could be easily trained to administer the vaccines.

Overworked, underfunded state public health departments have been scrambling to get up to speed on vaccinations even for the frontline workers and long-term care residents who were given priority.

— MILAN, Italy — Italy added another 462 virus deaths on Friday for a known pandemic death toll of 74,621, the highest in Europe.

Italy's daily death toll remains stubbornly high more than two months into restrictive measures and in the second week of a modified lockdown.

The number of new positives dipped by 5% from a day earlier, to 22,211, while 15% fewer tests were administered, according to Health Ministry statistics. Italy is launching its vaccine campaign and is first targeting residents of nursing homes and medical personnel.

— PORTLAND, Ore. — An Oregon health care worker has been hospitalized after having a severe allergic reaction to the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

The Oregon Health Authority says the employee at Wallowa Memorial Hospital experienced anaphylaxis after receiving a first dose of the vaccine this week.

The health authority said vaccines for COVID-19 can cause mild to moderate side effects in some people. This can include pain and swelling on the arm and sometimes fever, chills, tiredness and headache. In rare cases, some people have experienced severe allergic reactions.

Health officials will continue to track adverse reactions.

So far, 38,698 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the state of Oregon since the week of Dec. 13.

— FORT YATES, N.D. — The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota is prioritizing the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to those who speak Dakota and Lakota languages.

Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Mike Faith tells KXMB-TV it's about keeping customs alive.

"It's something we have to pass on to our loved ones, our history, our culture our language. We don't have it in black and white, we tell stories. That's why it's so important," Faith said.

The Standing Rock reservation straddles the North Dakota and South Dakota border and is home to about 8,000 people, more than half of whom live in North Dakota.

Faith said only about 300 people on the reservation are fluent in the language.

Frontline health care workers already have begun receiving the vaccine at the Fort Yates hospital, but starting next week priority will be for those who speak their native language.

— PARIS — Ravens at an underground, curfew-violating New Year's Eve party that drew at least 2,500

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 36 of 54

people in western France attacked police units sent to shut them down, torching a vehicle and injuring officers with bottles and stones, officials said Friday.

Hundreds of vehicles carrying party-goers started converging on hangars in Lieuron, Brittany, on Thursday night, the regional government Friday said in a statement.

Gendarmes and their vehicles were attacked when they tried to stop the ravers from installing their party gear. Some officers suffered light injuries, the statement said. On Friday morning, 2,500 ravers from France and abroad were still partying, circled by a reinforced police presence.

First aid workers were distributing masks and hand gel to try to limit coronavirus infections.

BANGKOK — The Thai capital is shutting down venues including schools and entertainment parks as coronavirus cases continue to spread.

Thailand reported 279 new cases on Friday including two deaths.

Seven provinces including Bangkok have been designated red zones where places including entertainment venues, boxing rings, gyms and flea markets are ordered closed. Restaurants are allowed to serve only takeouts.

The restrictions are in place until mid-January.

The new outbreak has spread from the country's largest wholesale seafood market in Samut Sakhon south of Bangkok and the gambling den in Rayong, and both places continue to log the highest number of infections. Bangkok reported 180 cases in the last 24 hours.

A spokesman for the COVID-19 center, Dr. Taweelap Visanuyothin, said that the Health Ministry had contacted Oxford-AstraZeneca to purchase a second batch of 26 million doses of the vaccine. The deal would double the number of doses to be supplied by the British vaccine manufacturer.

The first 2 million doses are expected in February and March and will be given to medical staff.

BEIJING — Two major airports in northeastern China are requiring departing passengers show a negative coronavirus test taken over the previous 72 hours before they can board their planes.

The requirements by the Shenyang and Dalian come amid a small but persistent growth in cases in the two cities located in Liaoning province just north of the capital Beijing.

Four new cases were announced Friday in Liaoning, along with another five cases in Beijing, where emergency testing was ordered for more than a million people following the detection of a small cluster in the northeastern suburbs.

Wary of another wave of infections, China is urging tens of millions of migrant workers to stay put during next month's annual Lunar New Year holiday, usually the world's largest annual human migration. Classes are also being dismissed a week earlier than usual and tourists are being told not to come to Beijing for holidays.

China on Friday reported a total of 19 new virus cases, including 10 that were brought from outside the country. Since the novel coronavirus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, China has reported a total of 87,071 cases and 4,634 deaths, although some question whether those figures underreport the full extent of the outbreak in China the country.

GOP torn over Trump's Electoral College challenge of Biden

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's extraordinary challenge of his election defeat by President-elect Joe Biden is becoming a defining moment for the Republican Party before next week's joint session of Congress to confirm the Electoral College results.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is urging Republicans not to try to overturn the election, but not everyone is heeding him. Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri vows to join House Republicans in objecting to the state tallies. On the other side of the party's split, GOP Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska warns such challenges are a "dangerous ploy" threatening the nation's civic norms.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 37 of 54

Caught in the middle is Vice President Mike Pence, who faces growing pressure and a lawsuit from Trump's allies over his ceremonial role in presiding over the session Wednesday.

The days ahead are expected to do little to change the outcome. Biden is set to be inaugurated Jan. 20 after winning the Electoral College vote 306-232. But the effort to subvert the will of voters is forcing Republicans to make choices that will set the contours of the post-Trump era and an evolving GOP.

"I will not be participating in a project to overturn the election," Sasse wrote in a lengthy social media post.

Sasse, a potential 2024 presidential contender, said he was "urging my colleagues also to reject this dangerous ploy."

Trump, the first president to lose a reelection bid in almost 30 years, has attributed his defeat to widespread voter fraud, despite the consensus of nonpartisan election officials that there wasn't any. Of the roughly 50 lawsuits the president and his allies have filed challenging election results, nearly all have been dismissed or dropped. He's also lost twice at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Still, the president has pushed Republican senators to pursue his unfounded charges even though the Electoral College has already cemented Biden's victory and all that's left is Congress' formal recognition of the count before the new president is sworn in.

"We are letting people vote their conscience," Sen. John Thune, the second-ranking Republican, told reporters at the Capitol.

Thune's remarks as the GOP whip in charge of rounding up votes show that Republican leadership is not putting its muscle behind Trump's demands, but allowing senators to choose their course. He noted the gravity of questioning the election outcome.

"This is an issue that's incredibly consequential, incredibly rare historically and very precedent-setting," he said. "This is a big vote. They are thinking about it."

Pence will be carefully watched as he presides over what is typically a routine vote count in Congress but is now heading toward a prolonged showdown that could extend into Wednesday night, depending on how many challenges Hawley and others mount.

The vice president is being sued by a group of Republicans who want Pence to have the power to overturn the election results by doing away with an 1887 law that spells out how Congress handles the vote count.

Trump's own Justice Department may have complicated what is already a highly improbable effort to upend the ritualistic count Jan. 6. It asked a federal judge to dismiss the last-gasp lawsuit from Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Republican electors from Arizona who are seeking to force Pence to step outside mere ceremony and shape the outcome of the vote.

In a court filing in Texas, the department said they have "have sued the wrong defendant" and Pence should not be the target of the legal action.

"A suit to establish that the Vice President has discretion over the count, filed against the Vice President, is a walking legal contradiction," the department argues.

A judge in Texas dismissed the Gohmert lawsuit Friday night. U.S. District Judge Jeremy Kernodle, a Trump appointee, wrote that the plaintiffs "allege an injury that is not fairly traceable" to Pence, "and is unlikely to be redressed by the requested relief."

To ward off a dramatic unraveling, McConnell convened a conference call with Republican senators Thursday specifically to address the coming joint session and logistics of tallying the vote, according to several Republicans granted anonymity to discuss the private call.

The Republican leader pointedly called on Hawley to answer questions about his challenge to Biden's victory, according to two of the Republicans.

But there was no response because Hawley was a no-show, the Republicans said.

His office did not respond to a request for comment.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., who has acknowledged Biden's victory and defended his state's elections systems as valid and accurate, spoke up on the call, objecting to those challenging Pennsylvania's results and making clear he disagrees with Hawley's plan to contest the result, his office said in a statement.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 38 of 54

McConnell had previously warned GOP senators not to participate in raising objections, saying it would be a terrible vote for colleagues. In essence, lawmakers would be forced to choose between the will of the outgoing president and that of the voters.

Several Republicans have indicated they are under pressure from constituents back home to show they are fighting for Trump in his baseless campaign to stay in office.

Hawley became the first GOP senator this week to announce he will raise objections when Congress meets to affirm Biden's victory in the election, forcing House and Senate votes that are likely to delay — but in no way alter — the final certification of Biden's win.

Other Republican senators are expected to join Hawley, wary of ceding the spotlight to him as they, too, try to emerge as leaders in a post-Trump era.

A number of Republicans in the Democratic-majority House have already said they will object on Trump's behalf. They only needed a single senator to go along with them to force votes in both chambers.

When Biden was vice president, he, too, presided over the session as the Electoral College presented the 2016 vote tally to Congress to confirm Trump the winner. The session was brief, despite objections from some Democrats.

Jen Psaki, speaking for the Biden transition team, dismissed Hawley's move as "antics" that will have no bearing on Biden being sworn in on Jan. 20.

Associated Press writer Aamer Madhani in Chicago contributed to this report.

In a first, Congress overrides Trump veto of defense bill

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress on Friday overrode President Donald Trump's veto of a defense policy bill, a first by lawmakers since he took office nearly four years ago, ensuring that the measure becomes law.

In an extraordinary New Year's Day session, the Republican-controlled Senate easily turned aside the veto, dismissing Trump's objections to the \$740 billion bill and handing him a stinging rebuke just weeks before he leaves the White House.

Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying the Senate missed an opportunity to eliminate protections for social media platforms that he said give "unlimited power to Big Tech companies. Pathetic!!!"

Trump also slammed lawmakers for rejecting his call to increase COVID-19 relief payments to \$2,000: "Not fair, or smart!"

The 81-13 vote in the Senate on the widely popular defense bill followed an earlier 322-87 override vote in the House. The bill affirms a 3% pay raise for U.S. troops and guides defense policy, cementing decisions about troop levels, new weapons systems and military readiness, personnel policy and other military goals.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said the "sweeping and overwhelmingly bipartisan votes" in the House and Senate "delivered a resounding rebuke to President Trump's reckless assault on America's military and national security."

Trump's veto of the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, "would have hurt the health, financial security and safety of our servicemembers, their families, our veterans and our allies and partners worldwide," Pelosi said. "Instead of keeping Americans safe, the president continues to use his final moments in office to sow chaos and undermine our security."

The defense bill, which now has the force of law, "looks after our brave men and women who volunteer to wear the uniform," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "But it's also a tremendous opportunity: to direct our national security priorities to reflect the resolve of the American people and the evolving threats to their safety, at home and abroad. It's our chance to ensure we keep pace with competitors like Russia and China."

The Senate override was delayed after Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., objected to moving ahead until McConnell allowed a vote on the Trump-backed plan to boost COVID relief payments to \$2,000. McConnell did not allow that vote; instead he used his parliamentary power to set a vote limiting debate on the de-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 39 of 54

fense measure, overcoming a filibuster threat by Sanders and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

Without a bipartisan agreement, a vote on the bill could have been delayed until Saturday night. Lawmakers, however, agreed to an immediate roll call Friday once the filibuster threat was stopped.

Trump vetoed the defense measure last week, saying it failed to limit Twitter and other social media companies he claimed were biased against him during his failed reelection campaign. Trump also opposed language that allows for the renaming of military bases that honor Confederate leaders.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a close Trump ally, hailed the override vote.

"Today, the Senate sent a strong message of support to our troops," Inhofe said. "Not only does this bill give our service members and their families the resources they need, but it also makes our nation more secure — pushing back against China and Russia (and) strengthening our cyber defenses."

Trump has succeeded throughout his four-year term in enforcing party discipline in Congress, with few Republicans willing to publicly oppose him. The bipartisan overrides on the defense bill showed the limits of Trump's influence in the final weeks of his term.

Earlier this week, 130 House Republicans voted against the Trump-backed COVID relief checks, with many arguing they were unnecessary and would increase the federal budget deficit. The Democratic-controlled House approved the larger payments, but the plan fizzled in the Senate amid opposition from McConnell and other Republicans, another sign of Trump's fading hold over Congress.

Only seven GOP senators voted with Trump to oppose the defense bill override. Forty Republicans — including the entire GOP leadership — voted for the override, along with 41 Democrats. Sanders and five other liberals who opposed the defense bill also voted against the override.

Besides his concerns about social media and military base names, Trump also complained that the bill restricted his ability to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan and Germany. The measure requires the Pentagon to submit reports certifying that the proposed withdrawals would not jeopardize U.S. national security.

Trump has vetoed eight other bills, but those were all sustained because supporters did not gain the two-thirds vote needed in each chamber for the bills to become law without Trump's signature.

Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, called Trump's Dec. 23 veto a "parting gift" to Russian President Vladimir Putin "and a lump of coal for our troops. Donald Trump is showing more devotion to Confederate base names than to the men and women who defend our nation."

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 remains at or near the top of the list of states with the most new cases per capita. It has routinely set new marks for infections and deaths, and began the new year reporting a record 585 deaths in a single day.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 40 of 54

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.

On Friday, the number of confirmed U.S. coronavirus cases surpassed 20 million, nearly twice as many as the No. 2 country, India, and nearly one-quarter of the more than 83 million cases globally, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

In California, 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. Some hospitals are having difficulty keeping up with the demand for oxygen.

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 2.3 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 deci-

sions 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.

Appeals court vacates order delaying woman's execution

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court has cleared the way for the only woman on federal death row to be executed before President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

The ruling, handed down Friday by a three-judge panel on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, concluded that a lower court judge erred when he vacated Lisa Montgomery's execution date in an order last week.

U.S. District Court Judge Randolph Moss had ruled the Justice Department unlawfully rescheduled Montgomery's execution and he vacated an order from the director of the Bureau of Prisons scheduling her death for Jan. 12.

Montgomery had been scheduled to be put to death at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, in December, but Moss delayed the execution after her attorneys contracted coronavirus visiting their client and asked him to extend the time to file a clemency petition.

Moss concluded that the under his order the Bureau of Prisons could not even reschedule Montgomery's execution until at least Jan. 1. But the appeals panel disagreed.

Meaghan VerGow, an attorney for Montgomery, said her legal team would ask for the full appeals court to review the case and said Montgomery should not be executed on Jan. 12.

Montgomery was convicted of killing 23-year-old Bobbie Jo Stinnett in the northwest Missouri town of Skidmore in December 2004. She used a rope to strangle Stinnett, who was eight months pregnant, and then cut the baby girl from the womb with a kitchen knife, authorities said. Montgomery took the child with her and attempted to pass the girl off as her own, prosecutors said.

Montgomery's lawyers have argued that their client suffers from serious mental illnesses. Biden opposes the death penalty and his spokesman, TJ Ducklo, has said he would work to end its use. But Biden has not said whether he will halt federal executions after he takes office Jan. 20.

Loeffler, Perdue run hard-line pitch in swing state Georgia

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The merchandise featured in Sen. Kelly Loeffler's online campaign store includes T-shirts and bumper stickers bearing Donald Trump's name and the message: "Still my president."

The Georgia Republican is running television ads ahead of Tuesday's Senate runoff elections that lambastes her opponent, the Rev. Raphael Warnock, as "dangerous" and "radical."

Loeffler's colleague, Sen. David Perdue, meanwhile, is warning Georgians that Democrats will enact a "socialist agenda" if his challenger, Jon Ossoff, wins on Tuesday.

In the final days of campaigns that will decide control of the U.S. Senate, the Republican incumbents are appealing to the most conservative part of the electorate. Their steady embrace of the hard-right, Trump

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 42 of 54

wing of the GOP — even repeatedly refusing to acknowledge Trump's defeat — and their caricatures of the Democratic challengers may seem like a risky approach in a state that narrowly voted for Democrat Joe Biden for president in November after years of steady Democratic gains.

Yet the strategy reflects prevailing GOP wisdom in the Trump era: Republicans' clearest path to victory, even in swing states, is to drive up support among a GOP base motivated by allegiance to the president and fear of Democrats. Still, the approach comes at the expense of a once-broader Republican coalition that included more urban and suburban moderates and GOP-leaning independents who have rejected the Republican brand under Trump.

"The president resonates with a lot of people, and so do the buzzwords, so you hear 'Trump' and 'socialism' a lot," said Michael McNeely, a former vice chair of the Georgia Republican Party. "I wish we lived in a society where people talked about ideas, but that's just not where we are."

Trump may have complicated Perdue's and Loeffler's gamble even more with how he's handled his defeat to Biden.

The president has spread unfounded assertions of voter fraud and blasted Georgia Republican officials, including Gov. Brian Kemp, who have defended the elections process. When Trump allies, including Perdue and Loeffler, backed up the claims, some Republicans expressed concern it could discourage some Trump loyalists from voting in the runoff. Now, other Republicans are worried that GOP candidates have instead turned off the more moderate voters repelled by Trump.

"No Republican is really happy with the situation we find ourselves in," said Chip Lake, a longtime GOP consultant and top adviser to Loeffler's vanquished rival, Rep. Doug Collins. "But sometimes when you play poker, you have to play the hand you're dealt, and for us that starts with the president."

Trump will visit Georgia for a final rally with Loeffler on Monday evening, hours before polls open. It is unclear whether Perdue will attend. The senator said Thursday he was quarantining after being exposed to an aide who tested positive for coronavirus.

Democrats are fine with the GOP senators' decision to run as Trump Republicans and use exaggerated attacks. Opposition to the president has been a unifying force among their core supporters, and Democrats believe Republicans' overall tenor falls flat with voters in the middle.

"We talk about something like expanding Medicaid. We talk about expanding Pell Grants" for low-income college students, Ossoff said at a recent stop in Marietta, north of Atlanta. "David Perdue denounces those things as socialism?"

Ossoff noted Perdue's claims that a Democratic-run Senate would abolish private insurance; Ossoff and Warnock, in fact, back Biden's proposal to add a federal insurance plan to private insurance exchanges, not abolish private insurance. "I just want people to have the choice," Ossoff said.

November returns demonstrate the GOP snare. Biden beat Trump by about 12,000 votes out of 5 million cast in Georgia, making him the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the state since 1992. Biden's record vote total for a Democrat in the state was fueled by racially and ethnically diversifying metro areas but also shifts in key Atlanta suburbs where white voters have historically leaned Republican.

Yet Perdue landed within a few thousand votes of Trump's total and led Ossoff by about 88,000 votes. Republican turnout also surged in small towns and rural areas, while Georgia Democrats had a disappointing general election down-ballot, failing to make expected gains in legislative races.

"We've won this race once already," Perdue says at some of his runoff campaign stops, echoing his advisers' belief that their top priority is maintaining enthusiasm from Trump's base. They add that they can corral the narrow slice of swing voters with arguments that warn against handing Democrats control of the House, Senate and White House.

Lake and McNeely, however, predicted that hard-right attacks and Trump-centric appeals won't deliver votes beyond the base, particularly amid a crush of advertising in a runoff campaign whose total expense could top \$500 million.

"We reached the point of diminishing returns a long time ago," Lake said.

They also bemoaned Trump's continued grievances about his defeat even after his own attorney general said there was no evidence the election was marred by fraud and courts across the country rejected

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 43 of 54

challenges to the outcome.

"If, for some reason, the Republican candidates lose," Lake said, "it's going to be hard to write a post-mortem on this runoff and not look directly at all the chaos that has been created on voter fraud."

Early voting ended Thursday with just more than 3 million Georgians casting absentee or in-person ballots. That trails the final early vote count of 3.65 million ahead of the general election. But the early vote already has set a statewide Georgia runoff turnout record.

Jen Jordan, a Democratic state senator who in 2017 won a suburban Atlanta district long held by Republicans, acknowledges her party, too, has moved to base strategy. But Jordan argued that Democrats still root their pitch more in policy ideas, especially on health care access and public education, that she said has wide appeal. She said Perdue and Loeffler undermined their "socialism" warnings by splitting from most congressional Republicans to support the president's call for \$2,000 pandemic aid payments to individual Americans.

"I've never heard the word socialism so much in my life, and then they're both like, yeah, let's give everybody \$2,000 checks," Jordan said.

McNeely, the former state GOP leader, lamented that even if Perdue and Loeffler win, their campaigns move Georgia further away from a more centrist tradition. He cited Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson, whose retirement opened the way for Kemp to appoint Loeffler.

Unlike many Southern Republicans of his generation, Isakson was never a Democrat. But he rose through the Georgia General Assembly in an era when Democrats dominated the state. In Washington, Isakson was a reliable Republican vote but shunned partisan jousting and intently avoided talking about Trump whenever possible.

"Sen. Isakson learned to see things from a different perspective," McNeely said, adding that Republican politicians should "think beyond campaigns and what the president is thinking" and that more voters should decide that "it doesn't make you a bad guy or gal because you compromise."

This story has been corrected to show that Perdue began quarantining Thursday, not Friday.

VIRUS TODAY: California struggles to tame COVID-19

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— After months of serving as a role model in the fight against COVID-19, California has seen infections race out of control for weeks. It now has the worst coronavirus diagnosis rate in the U.S. Experts say a variety of factors combined to wipe out California's past efforts, which for much of the year tamped down on surges and kept the virus at 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.

— Health officials say they've found evidence in a Florida man of the latest U.S. case of the new and apparently more contagious coronavirus variant first seen in England. The Florida Health Department tweeted a statement late Thursday that the variant was detected in a man in his 20s with no recent travel history. It comes after recent reports of confirmed cases elsewhere, in Colorado and California. The cases have triggered questions about how the COVID-19 variant circulating in England arrived in the U.S., where experts say it probably already is spreading.

— Ten months into quarantines and working from home because of the pandemic, household pets' lives and relationships with humans have in many cases changed. For many dogs, pandemic life is life as it was meant to be: Humans around 24/7, walks and treats on demand, and sneaking onto their bed at night. Cats are more affectionate than ever, some even acting needy for attention. Long-term impacts aren't known.

THE NUMBERS: The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. decreased in the last two weeks from 2,646 on Dec. 17 to 2,387.7 on Dec. 31, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 44 of 54

DEATH TOLL: The number of COVID-19-related deaths in the U.S. stands at more than 346,000.

QUOTABLE: "I think January is going to be worse at this point than we have imagined," said Dr. Don Williamson, the head of the Alabama Hospital Association after watching Christmas events online that showcased many people not wearing a mask. "We will absolutely reap the whirlwind of new cases because of our unwillingness to simply do simple things."

ICYMI: Authorities have arrested a suburban Milwaukee pharmacist suspected of deliberately ruining hundreds of doses of coronavirus vaccine by removing them from refrigeration for two nights. The Grafton Police Department said the former Advocate Aurora Health pharmacist was arrested on suspicion of reckless endangerment, adulterating a prescription drug and criminal damage to property. Advocate Aurora Health Care Chief Medical Group Officer Jeff Bahr says the pharmacist deliberately removed 57 vials containing hundreds of doses of the Moderna vaccine from refrigeration overnight on Dec. 24, returned them, then left them out again the night of Dec. 25.

ON THE HORIZON: Congress is ending a chaotic session with a rare rebuff by Republicans of President Donald Trump. GOP senators are ignoring the outgoing president's demand to increase the \$600 COVID-19 aid checks to \$2,000. They are poised to override his veto of a major defense bill. Trump ally Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina says Congress could try again to approve bigger COVID-19 aid checks after the new session opens Sunday. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says Congress has provided enough pandemic aid, for now. The stalemate is expected to drag into the weekend.

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

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 over the past two years from major financial firms and tech giants including Citigroup, Goldman Sachs and Google, according to disclosure forms filed as part of her nomination.

Yellen's was among three financial disclosures turned in 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. She took in the speaking fees in 2019 and 2020.

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 fight 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 Senate. Hillary Clinton faced criticism from the left wing of the Democratic Party while running for president in 2016 for having received lucrative speaking fees at Wall Street firms.

A Biden transition spokesperson said Friday that, since leaving the Fed, Yellen has "spoken at economic conferences, universities and to business groups and financial institutions about her experiences and her views on what we can do as a country to build a stronger economy and increase our competitiveness." He added that "this is not someone who pulls punches when it comes to bad actors or bad behavior."

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden, ranking member of the chamber's Finance Committee, said he expects Yellen's nomination to "move forward quickly, with her hearing held before Inauguration Day" on Jan. 20.

"In the last few years, she has shared her views in a range of forums — congressional testimony, media interviews, speaking engagements, and opinion pieces," Wyden said in a statement. "She's been fully

transparent.”

Also released Thursday were disclosure forms from Biden’s choice to be secretary of state, Antony Blinken, who detailed his work at a consulting firm he co-founded, WestExec Advisors, LLC. They show that Blinken was paid more than \$1.1 million and has entered into an agreement, negotiated in October, to sell his equity interest in the firm, where he advised clients including Bank of America and Facebook.

Avril Haines, Biden’s choice to be national intelligence director, disclosed being a consultant at WestExec Advisors and collecting around \$55,000 in fees between October 2017 and last summer. In a separate letter to ethics officials, Haines promised to recuse herself for one year in issues involving WestExec as well as her other past employers, including Columbia University, Syracuse University and the Brookings Institution think tank.

Some advocacy groups began warning just after Election Day that Biden, who was a senator from Delaware for 36 years and served as vice president for two terms, could rely too heavily on officials with strong ties to past Democratic administrations. Many of those left public sector posts for jobs in the private sector and are now seeking to return to government, raising concerns about the “revolving door” between policy and corporate and financial influence.

Biden, however, has largely shrugged off such concerns, saying he’s not afraid to rely on advisers with deep governmental experience. He’s pledged to assemble a Cabinet well versed in the workings of government and full of members from across the racial and ideological spectrum who look like the diverse country they will represent.

The transition spokesperson said Biden’s incoming administration is committed to “restoring trust in government by establishing an administration of the highest ethical standards” while calling the release of financial disclosures “merely one step in the process of ensuring the highest degrees of transparency and ethics.”

Biden’s transition team says it expects to announce more Cabinet picks next week. Among those positions yet to be filled are the president-elect’s selection for labor secretary and attorney general — a choice that could be complicated by federal prosecutors investigating the finances of Biden’s son Hunter.

Some Mexicans struggle to get oxygen amid virus case surge

By DIEGO DELGADO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — On New Year’s Day, dozens of people stood in line with empty oxygen tanks in one of Mexico City’s hardest hit boroughs to take advantage of a city offer of free oxygen refills for COVID-19 patients.

Jorge Infante took his place in line at 8 a.m. with three tanks he wanted to fill for sick relatives. He had learned about the offer, only in its third day Friday, via Facebook.

The demand for oxygen as the virus spreads through the capital of 9 million residents has driven prices up and made lines long. Infante said that by getting his three tanks filled for free, his family would save about \$45 per day.

Iztapalapa, the capital’s largest borough and one of the hardest hit by the pandemic, is a sprawling area of low resources.

“The economic conditions are not first world,” said Carlos Morales, Iztapalapa’s health director. “That means that people are suffering to get tanks.”

Morales said they are trying to fill about 50 tanks per day.

Elsewhere in the capital, some residents spent New Year’s Eve in lines that snaked down a street and around a corner, waiting to refill oxygen canisters for relatives suffering from COVID-19.

The city has seen a surge in coronavirus infections and the city’s hospitals are 87% occupied, straining oxygen supplies.

Blanca Nina Méndez Rojas was waiting in line Thursday to refill a tank for her brother, who was recently discharged from a public hospital after contracting COVID-19.

“We just left him disconnected (from oxygen), so he has to stay completely reclined so he won’t get agitated or have a problem, until we return with the tank,” Méndez Rojas said, noting “two weeks ago a

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 46 of 54

refill cost 70 pesos (\$3.50), and now it is 150 pesos (\$7.50)."

In a city where people are afraid to go to hospitals, and where those that will go have trouble finding a bed, it becomes a question of life and death.

Juan José Ledesma, a Mexico City retiree, got sick along with his wife and son. When his test came back positive on Dec. 16, he had to stay home — and consult a private doctor — because the local hospital had no room.

"I have been taking medication prescribed by a private doctor because what happened was we went to a health center and there was no room," Ledesma said. "There was no room because too many people were coming in" for treatment.

Since then, his son — who recovered — has had to go out three or four times every day to try to refill his father's oxygen tank.

"The price has risen two or three times," Ledesma said. Reflecting on the problem, he began to weep softly. "I think about rural areas, where things are tougher, tougher, and people have to wait longer, or they really can't afford it."

Iván, an employee of one oxygen refill store who gave only his first name because his bosses hadn't authorized him to speak to reporters, acknowledged that sometimes there were so many people waiting, desperate for gas, that they couldn't fill all of their canisters completely.

"There are times when we don't have enough oxygen to fill everybody's tanks completely," he said. "There are times when we have to reduce the refill, so that everybody who is in line can at least bring some oxygen home to their relatives."

To top off the problems, city officials have done little to combat price hikes that doubled or tripled the price of a refill — but they have shut down a black market in which producers of industrial-grade oxygen were selling canisters for medical use. Industrial oxygen, used to operate acetylene torches, is not as pure as the medical-grade gas.

The city government has started a program to give some people oxygen canisters or oxygen concentrators, which are machines that pull oxygen from the air and don't need to be refilled. But there aren't enough to go around, and buying one of the machines on the private market is prohibitively expensive for most families.

Before the pandemic, basic machines started around \$900, but prices have since reported risen to \$1,500 or more.

"The prices for concentrators have gone through the roof, there has been too much profiteering," Méndez Rojas said.

Belgian St. Nick party for elderly leads to 27 virus deaths

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Authorities in Belgium say a 27th elderly person has died in an outbreak at a nursing home from a super-spreading St. Nick party last month but they hope the situation is now under control.

The Hemelrijck home in the northern Belgium city of Mol had organized a Dec. 4 visit from a troupe playing the beloved saint who usually spreads mirth and presents. But the city and families of some of the deceased have complained that the nursing home should never have organized the party when restrictive measures on events were in place throughout the country to contain the pandemic.

The Mol municipality said "the event was not coordinated with the crisis cell," and if they had heard about it beforehand they would have stopped it.

The municipality said on New Year's Eve that a 27th person had died.

At the Hemelrijck nursing home, no one was available for comment Friday. At last count, the home had 88 infections among residents and 42 among staff.

Lily Lenaerts, whose sister Angele, 85, was the first to die after the outbreak, is upset at how the nursing home is treating family members.

"I still have not received a condolence card (from the nursing home) and I have been visiting for four

years," she told the Het Laatste Nieuws.

St. Nicholas is the traditional Dec. 6 day to give presents and is much more important to children in Belgium than Santa Claus on Dec. 25, which is primarily a family gathering.

Initially, one of the actors of the St. Nick group had been thought to be the source of the outbreak, but subsequent research could not be fully conclusive.

Belgium's eminent virologist, Marc Van Ranst, said it could "not be said with 100% certainty that he introduced it in the care home." He added "the man was a volunteer in the care home and theoretically could have been infected by a resident or a staff member."

The city said the outbreak was finally stabilizing.

"The health condition of the residents has shown a marked improvement," the city said in a statement.

Belgium, a nation of 11.5 million, has been badly hit by the pandemic with 19,528 confirmed virus deaths so far, many of them in nursing homes.

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

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 carries 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.

British 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, which is surging across the country.

In the subdued streets of London — which voted strongly to remain in the EU in Britain's 2016 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."

But in seaside Folkestone, at the English end of the Channel Tunnel, retired bank manager David Binks said he was relieved that the tortuous Brexit saga was — just possibly — over.

"It's been going on for so long now that the time is now, I think, that we move on and go from there," he said.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 48 of 54

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 Puissesseau, president of the Ports of Calais and Boulogne-Sur-Mer.

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 people 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 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 are new checks between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. Over time, 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 in the EU, 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."

Video journalists Jo Kearney and Jason Parkinson in Folkestone, England and Alex Turnbull in Calais, France contributed.

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

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

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British hospitals around the country face a perilous situation in January, medical workers warned Friday amid surging coronavirus infections blamed on a new virus variant. Authorities pressed to reactivate field hospitals previously mothballed just to handle the crush of new patients.

Concerns are mounting about the ability of the already stretched National Health Service to cope with the anticipated increase in people seeking treatment for COVID-19 infections over the coming weeks that could be further fueled by holiday gatherings over Christmas and New Year's.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 49 of 54

On Friday, the U.K. recorded another 53,285 new infections, down slightly from the previous day's record high of 55,892. Although comparisons with the outset of the pandemic are difficult given that testing was limited in the spring, the U.K. has recorded its four highest daily new infection numbers over the past four days — all above 50,000 and around double the daily number of a few weeks ago.

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 social distancing guidance or wearing masks.

A leading physician also warned of burnout among health workers on the front line 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."

The spike in new cases is said to be due to a new, more contagious variant of the virus first identified around London and the southeast of England.

Given the time lags between new cases, hospitalizations and COVID-19 deaths, there are huge concerns about the path of the pandemic over the coming month or two. Britain already has Europe's second-highest virus death toll at 74,125 after another 613 deaths were recorded Friday. The country looks set to overtake Italy and become Europe's worst-hit country once again.

As a result of the spike in new infections, which has prompted even tighter lockdown restrictions, British authorities have changed their strategy for rolling out coronavirus vaccines, choosing to get more people an initial jab as soon as possible, and delaying the second shot for up to three months.

In a joint statement, 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. and both require two doses per person.

Around 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.

Earlier this week, Britain also approved a vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and British pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca that is substantially cheaper and easier to use.

Authorities then outlined the new dosing regimen, which delays a person's second vaccine shot from being done at three weeks to being given up to 12 weeks after the first shot.

"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," the medical officers said.

Still, the new plan has faced some criticism. The U.K.'s main union for doctors warned that delaying the second dose causes huge scheduling 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>

EXPLAINER: As Georgia awaits, GOP still has Senate control

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The consequences of Georgia's twin Senate runoff elections are well known: They'll determine which party controls the Senate in the new Congress.

Right?

Long term, yes, that's the case. But the circumstances of Georgia's seats make the near term a bit messy. One of two Georgia races is a regular election for a six-year term. The other is a special election for an

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 50 of 54

unexpired term. The timing of the Jan. 5 runoffs, coming two days after the new Congress convenes and 15 days before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, further complicates things.

That means Republicans will have a bare majority of 51 senators to begin the new Congress and potentially in the opening days of Biden's presidency, regardless of Georgia's results. At the least, that will allow current Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky to open the Senate's organizing session in his familiar — and influential — post, while the national political spotlight continues to shine on Georgia officials managing another high-stakes election.

Here's how it works:

THE LANDSCAPE

A new Congress is elected every two years. November elections guaranteed Republicans at least 50 Senate seats for the 117th Congress, which convenes for the first time in January as set by federal law. Democrats won 48 Senate seats. The Georgia seats remain up for grabs because no candidates got an outright majority as state law requires. So Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, both Republicans, face runoffs against their respective Democratic challengers, Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock.

One Republican victory would keep the Senate under GOP control throughout the next Congress (barring an unforeseen vacancy). Democrats need a sweep for a 50-50 Senate, positioning Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to tilt the chamber to Democrats with the tiebreaking vote. The quirk that affects the initial Senate majority, though, is that Loeffler will still be a senator to start the new Congress, while Perdue will not. That yields a 51-48 advantage for Republicans until the Georgia winners take their oaths of office.

TWO SENATORS, DIFFERENT TERMS

All 435 House seats are on general election ballots every federal election cycle, but the 100 seats of the Senate, where terms are six years, are staggered in three classes. Perdue was elected in the 2014 class. His six-year term began in January 2015 and will end when the current Congress gives way to the new body. Because that happens before the runoffs, Perdue will technically be a former senator when polls open Jan. 5.

Loeffler, alternately, was appointed to the seat that opened when Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson resigned from a six-year term that runs through January 2023. Her matchup against Warnock is for the remainder of that term. But her appointment from Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp remains in effect until the winner of the election is sworn in, so there'd be no vacancy in that seat at any point.

KEY DATES AND ACTIONS

The new Congress convenes Jan. 3, with Loeffler still holding office.

Congress will ratify Biden and Harris' election on Jan. 6, but Georgia's results won't be settled by then. The runoff elections are expected to be close, given that Biden won the state's electoral votes by about 12,000 out of 5 million votes, and with another expected large batch of absentee ballots, the initial count could take several days, as it did in November. Further, there's a three-day window — ending Jan. 8 — for officials to receive overseas and military ballots and for voters who cast provisional ballots to settle questions about their eligibility and have their votes counted.

Georgia counties have until Jan. 15 to certify results. The secretary of state, Republican Brad Raffensperger, has until Jan. 22 — two days after Biden is inaugurated — to certify statewide results. Raffensperger's office notes the law doesn't require him to wait that long if everything is in order, but if November is any indication, there could be court fights or moves by officials across Georgia's 159 counties that require the maximum timetable.

JOINING THE SENATE

The Office of the Secretary of Senate confirmed that the winning candidates do not formally become senators until the chamber receives "a properly executed certificate of election from the state" and they take the oath of office. Georgia law spells out that the governor must issue a certificate of election "immediately" upon his receipt of certified vote totals from Raffensperger. Kemp spokesperson Cody Hall affirmed that his boss would "follow the law," just as he did in certifying Biden's slate of presidential electors in November despite President Donald Trump and his allies falsely asserting that Kemp could block or overturn the outcome. Pending recounts or unsettled court challenges do not override an official certificate of election.

HOW IT MATTERS

Practically speaking, the scenarios are mostly about what Democrats can't do rather than what Republicans will do. McConnell has defined his tenure as majority leader in two ways: confirming judges and blocking Democratic legislative priorities. If Democrats had secured an outright Senate majority in the November elections, they could have started legislating on Jan. 3 and, with the Democratic House majority, even cast votes on some of Biden's legislative priorities. They could have held hearings on Biden's Cabinet nominees, setting up quick votes after the inauguration. They could have settled any rules changes — such as addressing whether to abolish or tinker with the filibuster rule that requires 60 votes to pass major legislation — before Biden took office.

As it is, Democrats' best hope is that Ossoff and Warnock pull off victories and give them a late start as the majority, probably no earlier than Jan. 23. Even then, it would come only after what is likely another contentious vote count in Georgia and after McConnell, at minimum, has another brief run as majority leader to dictate his terms on Capitol Hill.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 52 of 54

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 <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccines> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Iraq explosives experts working to defuse mine on oil tanker

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi explosives experts were working to defuse 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 Sudharan 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.

After criticism, Bosnia sets up tents for freezing migrants

By KEMAL SOFTIC Associated Press

BIHAC, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Trying to resolve a humanitarian disaster, the Bosnian military set up tents Friday for hundreds of migrants who have been stuck in a burned-out refugee camp that has no facilities to fend off freezing winter weather.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 53 of 54

Bosnia has faced international criticism for leaving some 1,000 migrants without shelter after a fire engulfed the squalid Lipa refugee camp near its northwest border with Croatia over a week ago.

The armed forces said Friday that about 150 soldiers had arrived to put up tents for the migrants, which will be run by the International Organization for Migration.

Earlier Friday, the migrants held a protest to highlight the horrendous conditions they are facing in Bosnia. Aid groups said hundreds of migrants rejected food and held up banners calling for international help.

The authorities announced earlier this week that they would move the migrants from Lipa to a former army compound in central Bosnia but plan was rejected after local residents organized protests.

The migrants spent 24 hours in a convoy of buses, waiting to move, but ended up back in the burned-out Lipa camp instead. For the past two nights, they have lit fires to warm up at the muddy camp site.

Bosnia has struggled with the influx of thousands of people fleeing war and poverty in their countries in the Mideast, Africa and Asia. Migrants mostly flock to Bosnia's northwestern corner, which borders European Union member Croatia, from where they hope to move toward wealthier European countries. But many have reported violent pushbacks by Croatian border forces as well as hostility from Bosnian residents.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 2, the second day of 2021. There are 363 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 2, 1974, President Richard Nixon signed legislation requiring states to limit highway speeds to 55 miles an hour as a way of conserving gasoline in the face of an OPEC oil embargo. (The 55 mph limit was effectively phased out in 1987; federal speed limits were abolished in 1995.)

On this date:

In 1788, Georgia became the fourth state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1811, Sen. Timothy Pickering, a Federalist from Massachusetts, became the first member of the U.S. Senate to be censured after he'd improperly revealed the contents of an executive document.

In 1921, religious services were broadcast on radio for the first time as KDKA in Pittsburgh aired the regular Sunday service of the city's Calvary Episcopal Church.

In 1959, the Soviet Union launched its space probe Luna 1, the first manmade object to fly past the moon, its apparent intended target.

In 1960, Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts launched his successful bid for the presidency.

In 1967, Republican Ronald Reagan took the oath of office as the new governor of California in a ceremony that took place in Sacramento shortly just after midnight.

In 1971, 66 people were killed in a pileup of spectators leaving a soccer match at Ibrox (EYE'-brox) Stadium in Glasgow, Scotland.

In 1981, police in Sheffield, England, arrested Peter Sutcliffe, who confessed to being the "Yorkshire Ripper," the serial killer of 13 women.

In 1983, the original Broadway production of the musical "Annie" closed after a run of 2,377 performances.

In 2007, the state funeral for former President Gerald R. Ford began with an elaborate service at Washington National Cathedral, then moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In 2015, California began issuing driver's licenses to immigrants who were in the country illegally. Little Jimmy Dickens, a diminutive singer-songwriter who was the oldest cast member of the Grand Ole Opry, died at age 94.

In 2018, Sen. Al Franken formally resigned from the Senate a month after the Minnesota Democrat announced his plan to leave Congress amid a series of sexual misconduct allegations. NBC News announced that Hoda Kotb (HOH'-duh KAHT'-bee) would be the co-anchor of the first two hours of the "Today" show, replacing Matt Lauer following his firing due to sexual misconduct allegations.

Ten years ago: The U.S. Navy said it would investigate raunchy videos broadcast to the crew of the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise. (Capt. Owen P. Honors, who'd produced the videos as the ship's execu-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Jan. 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 182 ~ 54 of 54

tive officer, was removed as the Enterprise's commander but was later allowed to remain in the Navy.) A magnitude 7.1 earthquake shook southern Chile, sending tens of thousands of people fleeing to higher ground. Maj. Richard "Dick" Winters, who'd fought in several major battles in World War II and whose quiet leadership was chronicled in the book and television miniseries "Band of Brothers," died in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, at age 92. Actor Anne Francis, 80, died in Santa Barbara, California.

Five years ago: A heavily armed group led by Ammon and Ryan Bundy seized the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, beginning a 41-day standoff to protest the imprisonment of two ranchers convicted of setting fires on public land and to demand the federal government turn over public lands to local control. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' campaign said it had raised more than \$33 million during the previous three months in his bid to win the Democratic nomination, just short of the amount brought in by rival Hillary Clinton during the same period. The mayor of Temixco, Mexico, Gisela Mota, was assassinated a day after being sworn into office; two suspects were killed in a clash with police and three others arrested. Saudi Arabia executed 47 prisoners, including a prominent Shiite cleric; Shiite leaders in Iran and elsewhere across the Middle East swiftly condemned Riyadh and warned of a sectarian backlash.

One year ago: Former Obama housing secretary Julian Castro, the only Latino candidate in the 2020 Democratic presidential race, announced that he was ending his bid, saying he had determined "that it simply isn't our time." The Trump administration announced that it would begin cracking down on most flavored e-cigarettes that were popular with underage teenagers; the plan included exceptions benefitting vaping manufacturers, retailers and adults who used the nicotine-delivery devices.

Today's Birthdays: Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert is 79. TV host Jack Hanna is 74. Actor Wendy Phillips is 69. Actor Cynthia Sikes is 67. Actor Gabrielle Carteris is 60. Movie director Todd Haynes is 60. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher David Cone is 58. Baseball Hall of Famer Edgar Martinez is 58. Actor Tia Carrere is 54. Actor Cuba Gooding Jr. is 53. Model Christy Turlington is 52. Actor Taye Diggs is 50. Actor Renée Elise Goldsberry is 50. Rock singer Doug Robb (Hoobastank) is 46. Actor Dax Shepard is 46. Actor Paz Vega is 45. Ballroom dancer Karina Smirnoff (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 43. Rock musician Jerry DePizzo Jr. (O.A.R.) is 42. Rhythm-and-blues singer Kelton Kessee (IMX) is 40. Pop singer-musician Ryan Merchant (Capital Cities) is 40. Actor Kate Bosworth is 38. Actor Anthony Carrigan is 38. Actor Peter Gadiot is 36. Jazz singer-musician Trombone Shorty is 35. Singer-songwriter Mandy Harvey (TV: "America's Got Talent") is 33. Rhythm-and-blues singer-rapper Bryson Tiller is 28.