

Groton Daily Independent

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Service Notice: Gary Heitmann

Services for Gary Heitmann, 83, of Groton will be 10:30 a.m., Thursday, January 7th at the United Methodist Church, Groton. Pastor Brandon Dunham will officiate. Inurnment will follow at a later date in the Black Hills National Cemetery, Sturgis. Services will be live streamed through GDILIVE.COM

Visitation will be held at the church on Wednesday from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Gary passed away January 1, 2021 at his home.

Church Services

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

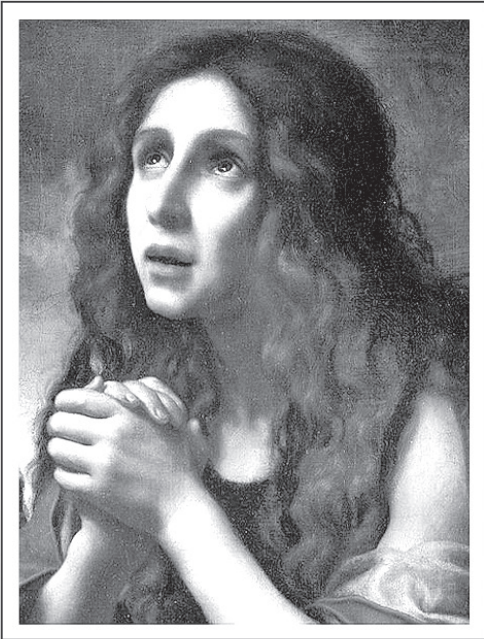


OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE



Detail of "The Penitent Magdalen" by Carlo Dolci (1670)

*If we confess our sins,
He is faithful and just
to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all
unrighteousness.*

1 JOHN 1:9

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BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Ruth in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. From 2 Kings 13, what prophet ordered a king to shoot arrows out of a window? *Paul, Job, Elisha, David*

3. How many books of the Bible (KJV) are three letters long when spelled? *0, 1, 2, 3*

4. What prophet saw “the tents of Cushan in affliction”? *Japheth, Noah, Hezekiah, Habakkuk*

5. Who said unto the Lord, “Increase our faith”? *Jonah, Apostles, Moses, Thieves*

6. From Joel 2:6, what shall all faces gather? *Sunlight, Blackness, Fear, Warmth*

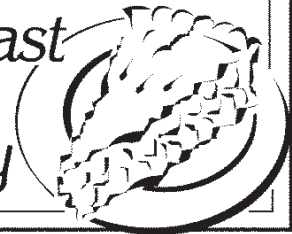
ANSWERS: 1) Old; 2) Elisha; 3) 1 (Job); 4) Habakkuk 3:7; 5) Apostles (Luke 17:5); 6) Blackness

“Test Your Bible Knowledge,” a book with 1,206 multiple-choice questions by columnist Wilson Casey, is available in stores and online.

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Comfort foods

Made fast
and
healthy



by Healthy Exchanges

Mexican BBQ Steaks

This ultra-easy (and healthy) steak dish really pleases the men in our families. Maybe it will in yours, too!

- 4 (4-ounce) lean tenderized minute or cube steaks
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1/2 cup chunky salsa (mild, medium, or hot)
- Sugar substitute to equal 1 tablespoon sugar, suitable for cooking
- 2 teaspoons dried onion flakes
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1. In a large skillet sprayed with butter-flavored cooking spray, brown meat for 3 to 4 minutes on each side.

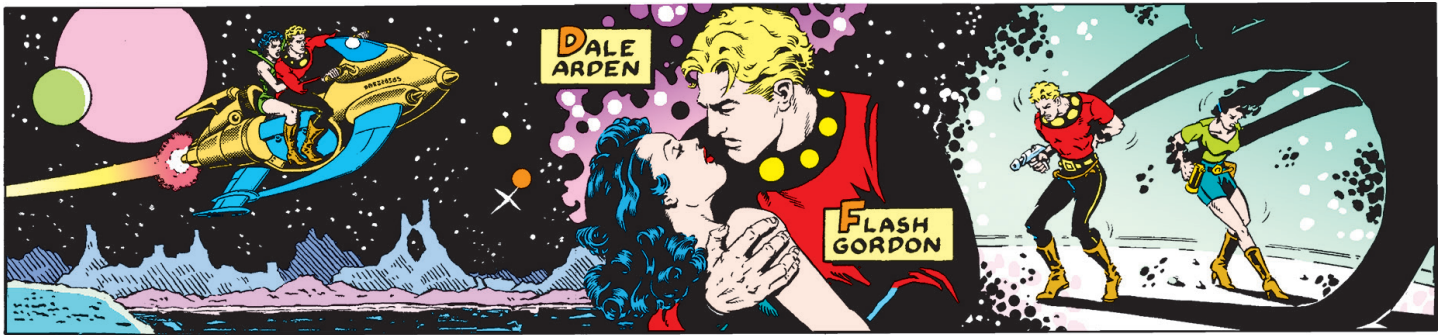
2. In a medium bowl, combine tomato sauce, salsa, sugar substitute, onion flakes and Worcestershire sauce. Spoon sauce mixture evenly over meat. Lower heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until meat is tender. When serving, evenly spoon sauce over meat. Makes 4 servings.

• Each serving equals: 217 calories, 5g fat, 36g protein, 7g carb., 603mg sodium, 1g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 3 Meat, 1 Vegetable.

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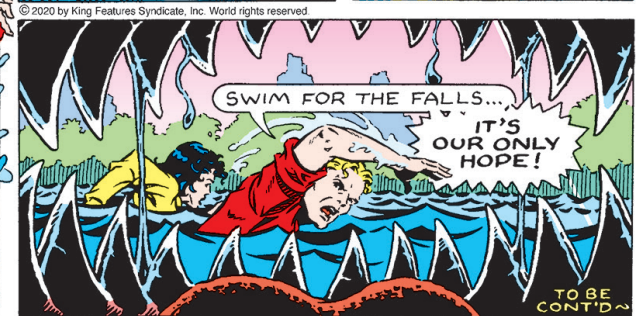
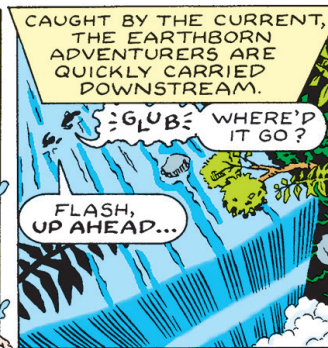
FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

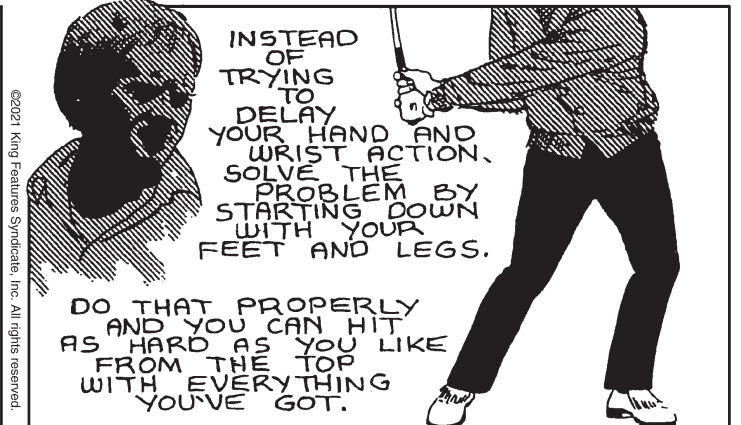
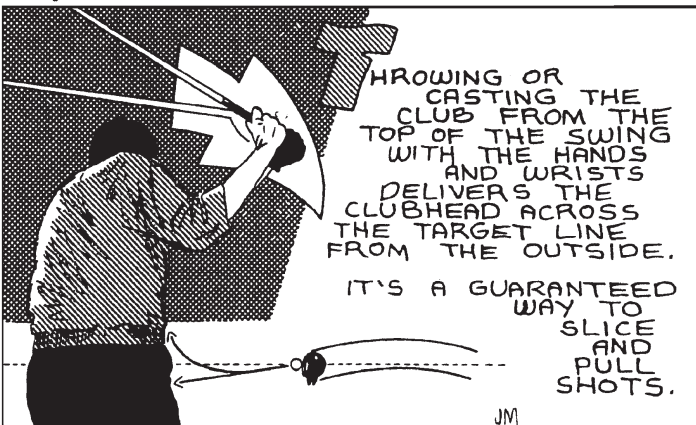
12-27
Pencils: LOSTON WALLACE

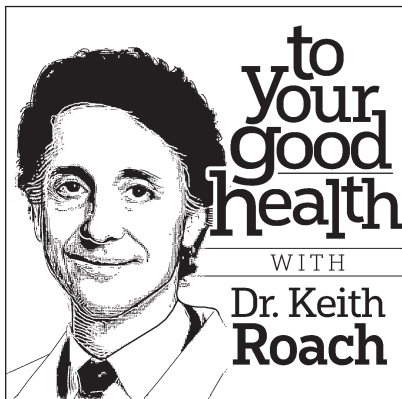
FLASH AND DALE SCRAMBLE TO GET OUT OF THE WATER BEFORE THE CREATURE UNDERNEATH REACHES THEM.

BRACE YOURSELF...



Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS





Raynaud's Patient: Can Viagra Help Cold Fingers

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have scleroderma with Raynaud's phenomenon, and friends and family members have told me that I might get help from Viagra.

Frankly, I hadn't read or heard that from either my rheumatologists or dermatologists. I already tried a short course of nifedipine over a decade ago (it just gave me a headache), so I just stick with mechanical means to keep my hands warm in winter and, maybe surprisingly to some, in summer. Believe me, air-conditioned grocery stores are torture from April to October. — M.A.P.

ANSWER: Raynaud's phenomenon is an excessive response of the blood vessels in the skin to changes in temperature, and sometimes to emotional stress. While most people will get cold hands and feet when it is cold, a person with Raynaud's can get a drastic response, even to air conditioning or freezer sections of grocery stores. The skin will turn white and then blue, then quite red on being rewarmed. Not everybody goes through all three colors, however.

Raynaud's can exist by itself, but is often seen in the presence of autoimmune conditions, such as the systemic sclerosis (scleroderma) you have. Treatment for Raynaud's is generally the same with or without other conditions. Everybody with Raynaud's should quit smoking and avoid medications that can trigger an attack (over-the-counter cold and flu remedies are the most common).

ly. Putting your hand in a refrigerator or holding a cold drink can trigger an attack. Many people with Raynaud's learn to keep gloves with them all the time and dress their entire body warmly. An attack can sometimes be aborted by rubbing hands in warm water or getting them into a warm place.

When medication treatment is necessary, a calcium channel blocker like nifedipine is often the first choice. Headache and dizziness can limit effectiveness of this treatment. Studies have shown these medications can cut the attacks by about 50%.

Sildenafil (Viagra) has been used in people with Raynaud's, and is about as effective as calcium channel blockers. However, for people with scleroderma, ulcers and Raynaud's, sildenafil has been shown in small trials to be very effective.

DEAR DR. ROACH: My wife has many allergies and asthma, as well as frequent migraines, about two or three a month. A family friend has been using Aimovig for the past six months with no migraine symptoms. What can you tell me about this relatively new drug? We're concerned that the side effects may interfere with her asthma, or any other negative drug interactions. — M.S.

ANSWER: Erenumab (Aimovig) has been recently approved for migraine. In the initial study, it reduced the number of migraine days from 8.3 to 4.6 per month. As an injection, it may cause pain and swelling at the injection site, and has also caused some people constipation and muscle cramps. There are very few drug interactions, and I found no indication that it should make asthma worse.

Your family friend has had a much better result than most of the people in the study, and there is no guarantee your wife will do as well. I am awaiting further long-term studies before recommending this class of migraine treatments.

It is given once per month, and costs about \$600 at goodrx.com.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email



1. "From This Day" appeared on which Machine Head album?

2. Who were the eight artists who jointly recorded "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me"?

3. Name the person who has won the most Grammys.

4. Where did the Tornados get the name "Telstar" for their 1962 instrumental?

5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "We'd laugh and we'd sing and do funny things, And it made our hearts glow."

Answers

1. "The Burning Red," released in 1999. Despite being called a "sell out" for the band's change in direction, it was their second-best-selling album.

2. Diana Ross & the Supremes and the Temptations, in 1968. Released at the time of their television special, the song shot to No. 1 within three weeks.

3. This is a tough one: the answer is Georg Solti, a Hungarian-British conductor with 31 awards. He's followed by Quincy Jones (28) and Alison Krauss (27).

4. Telstar was a television communications satellite. It's still up there, but no longer transmits.

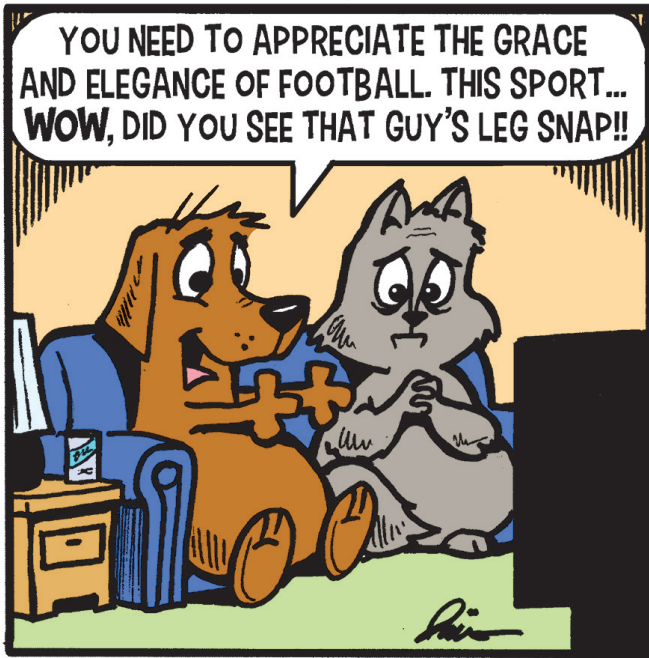
5. "Only Sixteen," by Sam Cook in 1959. The more successful version was released in 1975 by Dr. Hook. The song tells of teen love from the viewpoint of a 16-year-old boy.

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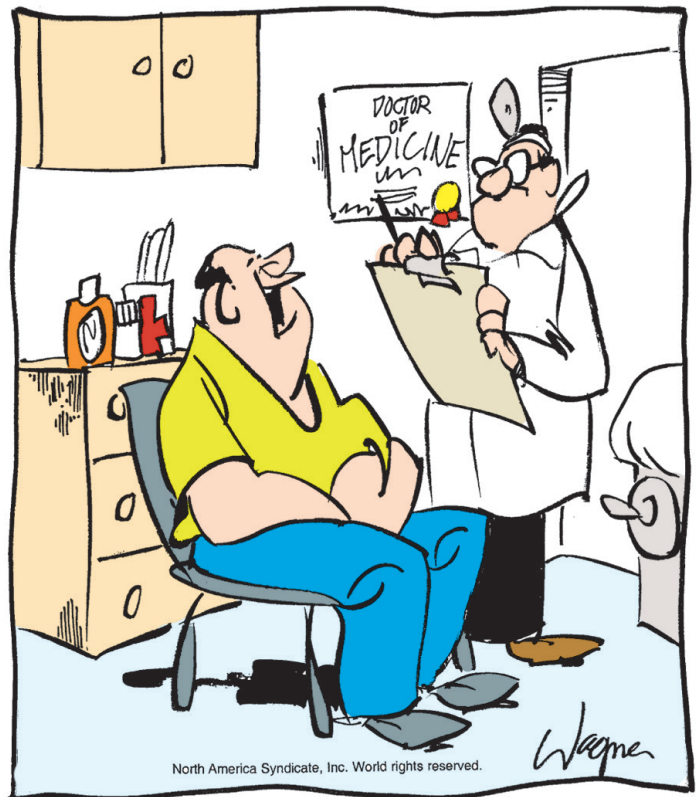
Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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GRIN and BEAR IT



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Wagner

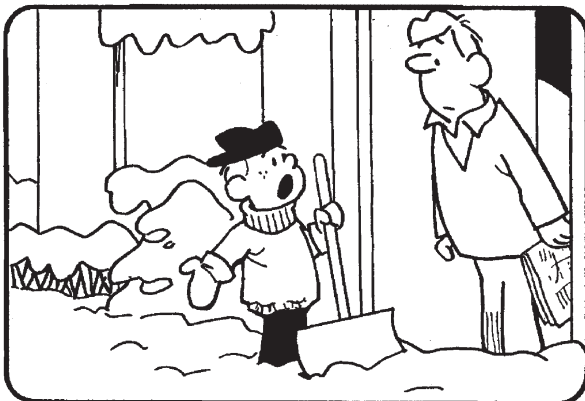
"I've already made all my New Year's resolutions, Doc ... I'll have to wait 'til next year to lose weight."

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTIKOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Panes are missing. 2. Cap is reversed. 3. Arm is moved. 4. Handle is shorter. 5. Neckline is different. 6. Paper is moved.

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- Purchase New Year's celebration items that are on sale in January if you have a graduating senior in 2021. You can get all kinds of items for a fraction of the price, and you will be ready with all the 2021 things you need!

- Got a neckache? Grab a pair of long socks, fill each with 2 cups of uncooked white rice and a couple of drops of your favorite essential oil. Knot the sock tightly to seal. Microwave for up to 2 minutes, and test temperature before draping it over your shoulders to apply heat to sore muscles. It's so nice, especially when you're laying down.

- J.P. in New Jersey advises that instead of using candles during a power outage — it can be dangerous! — try a battery-operated lantern instead. You can even use solar garden lights in a vase. You'd be surprised how much they can light a room.

- "To trick yourself into saving mon-

ey, round up purchases when you enter them into your checkbook register." — *S.W. in Arkansas*

- "If you're storing clothes in a storage tote, put a sheet of fabric softener in as well. It can help repel bugs and keep the fabrics smelling fresh." — *M.W. in Iowa*

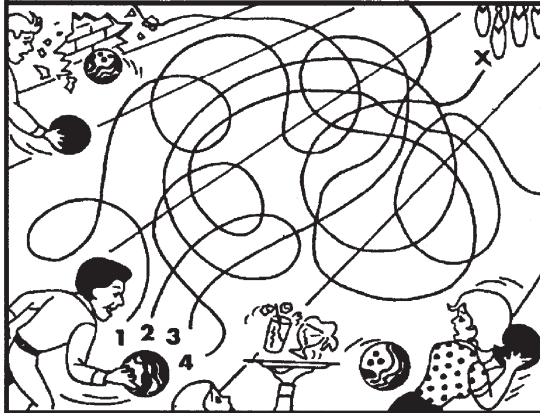
- "Spray nonwashable plush toys with dry shampoo to clean and freshen them. Rub vigorously with a terry cloth to remove any extra residue and fluff up!" — *P.H. in Pennsylvania*

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

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ALLEY OOPS! Which path does the bowling ball take to hit the pins above? Pick 1, 2, 3 or 4, and see if you are right.

Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman

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1	A	T				
2		A	T			
3			A	T		
4				A	T	
5					A	T
6						A

WHERE IT'S AT SPORTS-WISE

KNOW where it's AT in sporting terms? Let's see. Each of the six stepped-off AT teams at left has a sports connotation. See if you can puzzle terms out in accord with the following definitions:

1. Sports figure.
2. Pitcher-catcher duo.
3. Nonprofessional.
4. Boat race.
5. Wins out over foe.
6. Stadium location (two words).

Time limit: Two minutes.

1. Athlete, 2. Battery, 3. Amateur, 4. Regatta, 5. Defeats, 6. Box seat.

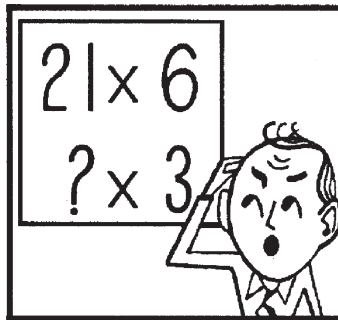
ZIP-ITTY DO! ZIP codes were introduced by the U.S. Postal Service in 1963. What do the letters ZIP stand for?
Zoning Improvement Plan.

VERSE OFF! From a number that's odd, cut off the head. It then will even be. Next, we say, cut off the tail. A time of day, you'll see. What number applies in this old verse?
Seven (even, eve).

FUN TIMES! Multiply 21 by 6 and the answer is 126, an instance in which all three digits used in the multiplication appear in the product. Just for fun, see if you can find another two-digit amount, which, when multiplied by 3, will function similarly. That is to say, will produce a product containing the three digits involved in the math.

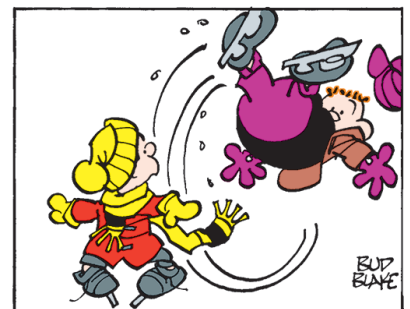
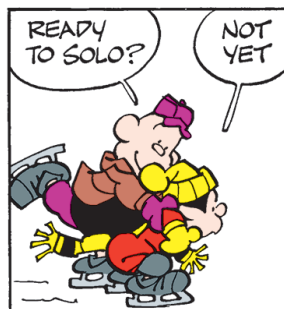
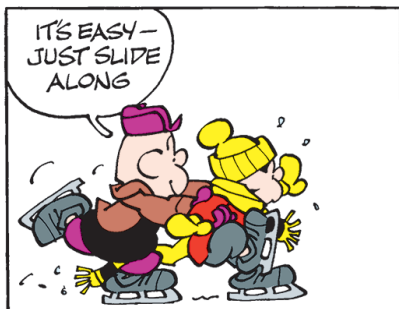
P.S.: Complying amount is over 50.

Fifty-one will do it: 51 times 3 equals 153.



TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Nile vipers
- 5 Cistern
- 8 Sprint
- 12 Guitarist Atkins
- 13 — -de-France
- 14 Formerly
- 15 Antelope's playmate
- 16 Its days are numbered
- 18 Degree of excellence
- 20 Endures
- 21 "Nova" ainer
- 22 Lass
- 23 Regions
- 26 Volcanic crater
- 30 "Entourage" agent

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16			17				
18				19				20				
			21				22					
23	24	25				26				27	28	29
30					31					32		
33			34	35				36	37			
			38				39					
40	41	42				43				44	45	46
47					48				49			
50					51				52			
53					54				55			

- 31 Branch
- 32 Felon's flight
- 33 Trinidad music
- 36 Fountain drinks
- 38 Fine, at NASA
- 39 Marry
- 40 Dishonor
- 43 Actor Rory
- 47 Squid dish
- 49 Big fair, for short
- 50 "Oops!"
- 51 Drench
- 52 Peruse
- 53 Facts and figures
- 54 Guitar master Paul
- 55 Tolkien creatures
- 11 Towel word
- 17 Israeli airline
- 19 Small ammo
- 22 Leg, in slang
- 23 Efron of "Parkland"
- 24 Man-mouse link
- 25 Zero
- 26 — -Magnon
- 27 Right angle
- 28 Squealer
- 29 Early hrs.
- 31 Request
- 34 Motorcycle maker
- 35 "The Raven," for one
- 36 Actor Gibson
- 37 Stick
- 39 Is patient
- 40 Gulf War missile
- 41 "Funny!"
- 42 Oodles
- 43 Manitoba tribe
- 44 They can take a yoke
- 45 — the crack of dawn
- 46 Agrees silently
- 48 Piercing tool

DOWN

- 1 Outlet letters
- 2 The Mets' old home
- 3 Rind
- 4 American flag feature
- 5 Bad habits
- 6 Winged
- 7 Aviv preceder
- 8 Disney duck
- 9 &&&&
- 10 Ella's style

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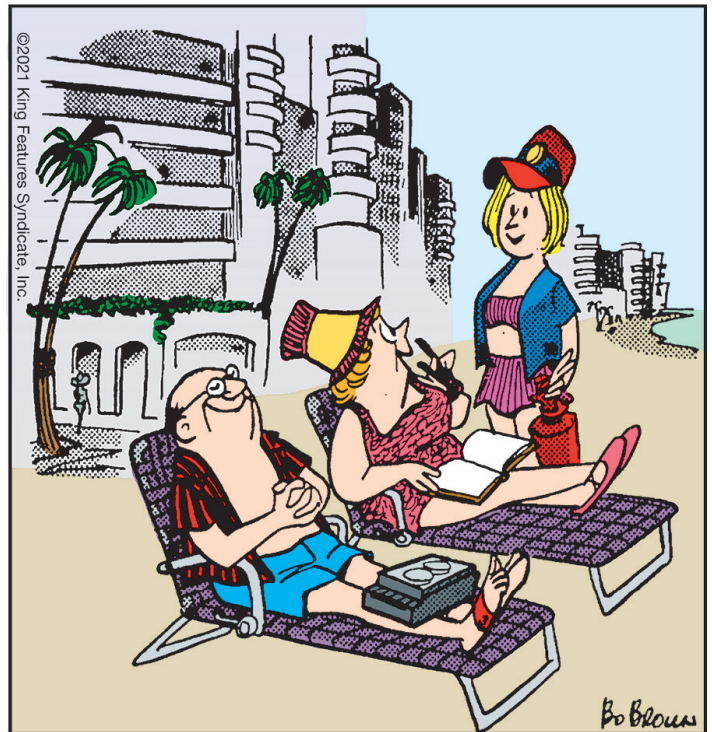
— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

A	S	P	S		V	A	T		D	A	S	H
C	H	E	T		I	L	E		O	N	C	E
D	E	E	R		C	A	L	E	N	D	A	R
C	A	L	I	B	E	R		L	A	S	T	S
			P	B	S		G	A	L			
Z	O	N	E	S		C	A	L	D	E	R	A
A	R	I			A	R	M		L	A	M	
C	A	L	Y	P	S	O		M	A	L	T	S
			A	O	K		W	E	D			
S	H	A	M	E		C	A	L	H	O	U	N
C	A	L	A	M	A	R	I		E	X	P	O
U	H	O	H		W	E	T		R	E	A	D
D	A	T	A		L	E	S		E	N	T	S

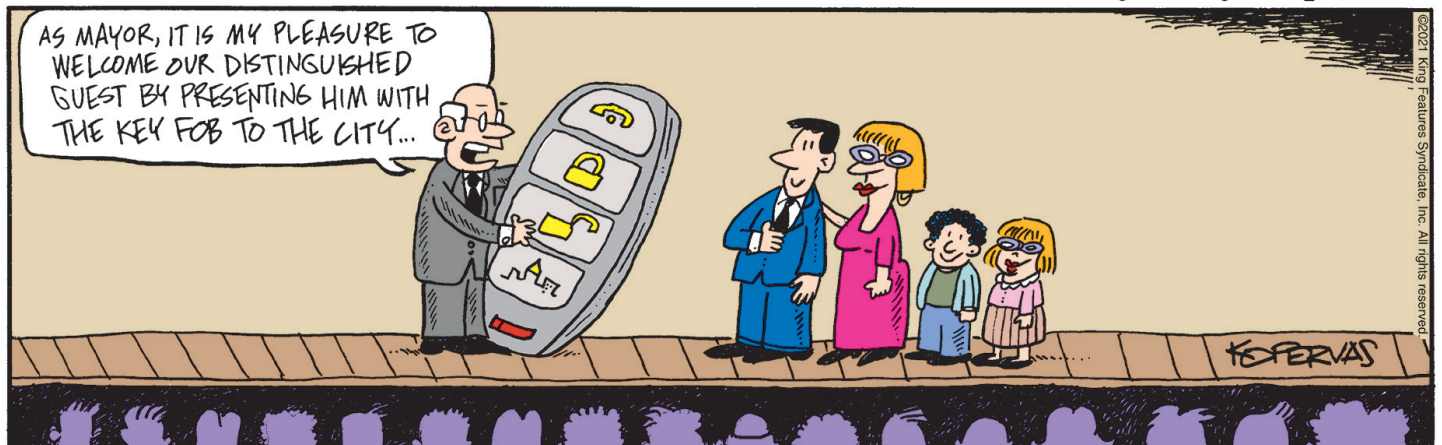
LAFF - A - DAY



"He's listening to a recording of our neighbor shoveling snow."

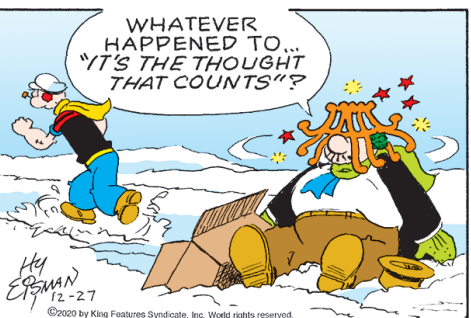
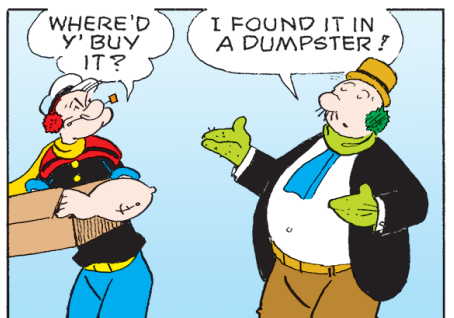
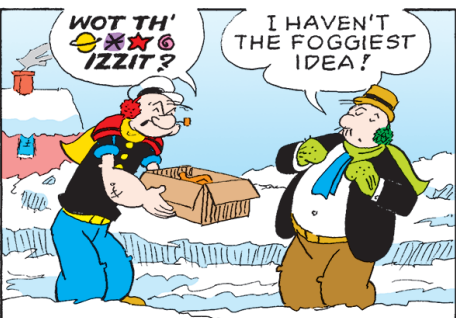
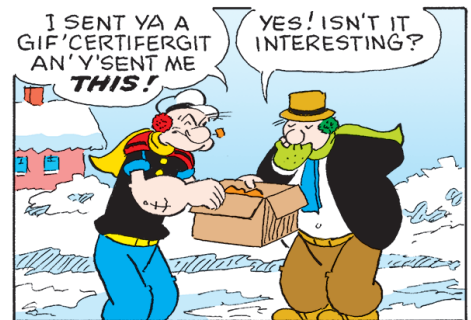
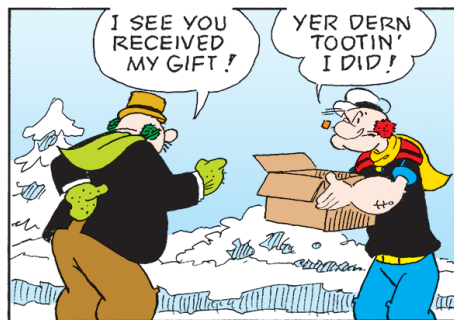
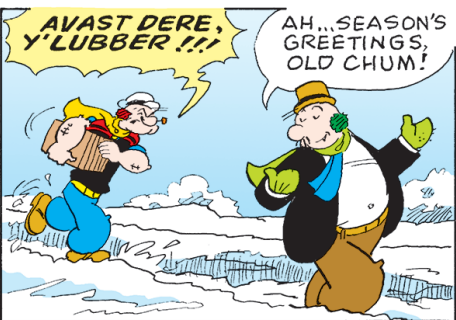
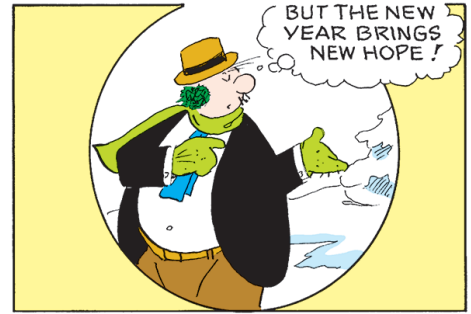
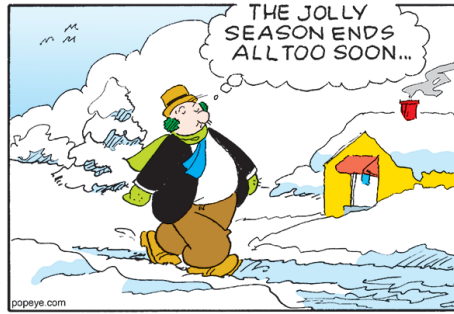
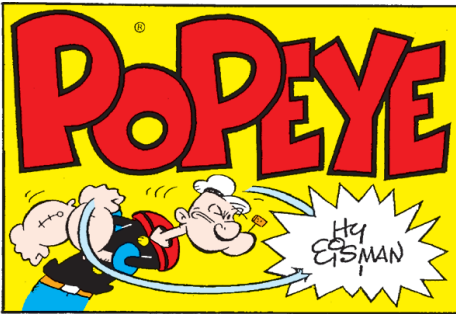
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



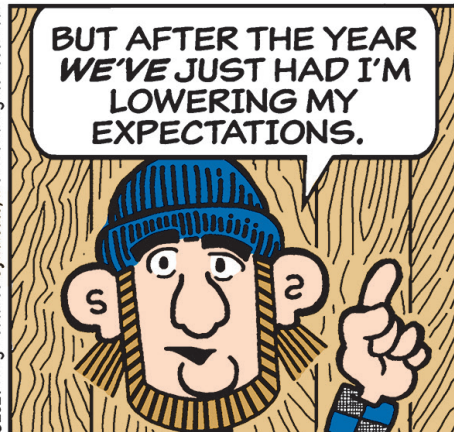
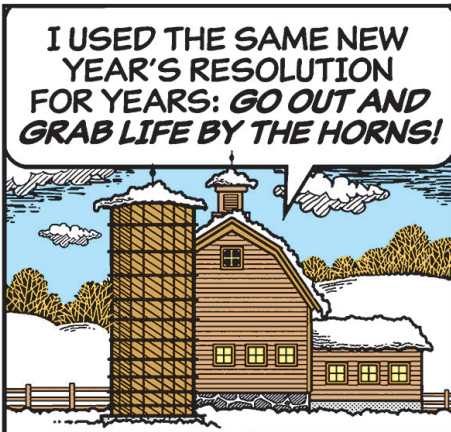
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R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



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Hal Foster's
Prince Valiant

GIANNI AND SCHULTZ

Our Story:
IG HAS FOUND
THE TRAIL OF THE
ABDUCTED WOMEN.
"I WANT THIS
HUMAN
BLOODHOUND
WITH ME DOWN
THERE!"



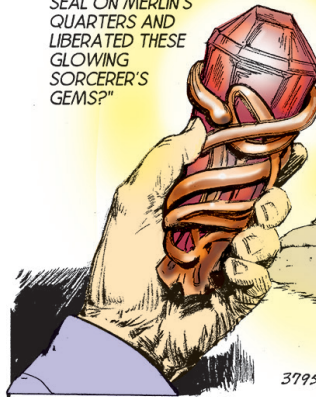
REGENT ARN STEPS
FORWARD: "INDEED! YOU
WILL ALSO HAVE A HUNDRED
MEN AT YOUR COMMAND!"

"NO, MY SON—TRUST ME, THIS IS A MISSION
FOR A SMALL, HAND-PICKED TEAM. TOO
MANY MEN IN THAT STYGIAN DARK WOULD
SPELL DISASTER."

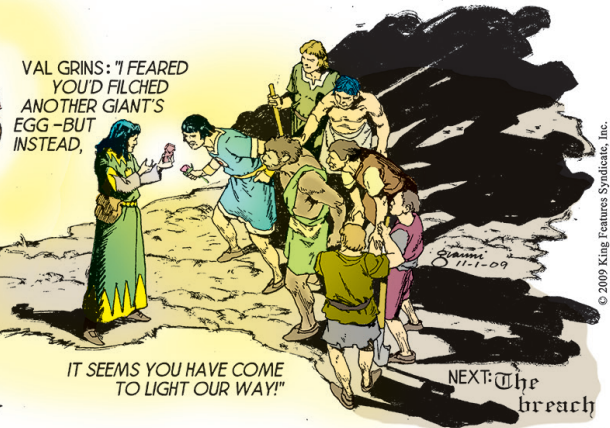


AS IF ON CUE, GAWAIN APPEARS, CARRYING
A LEATHERN POUCH: "YOU WOULDN'T
CONSIDER EXCLUDING YOUR LOYAL COMRADE
FROM THIS NOBLE QUEST, WOULD YOU?"

"ESPECIALLY AS I
HAVE BROKEN THE
SEAL ON MERLIN'S
QUARTERS AND
LIBERATED THESE
GLOWING
SORCERER'S
GEMS?"



VAL GRINS: "I FEARED
YOU'D FILCHED
ANOTHER GIANT'S
EGG—BUT
INSTEAD,



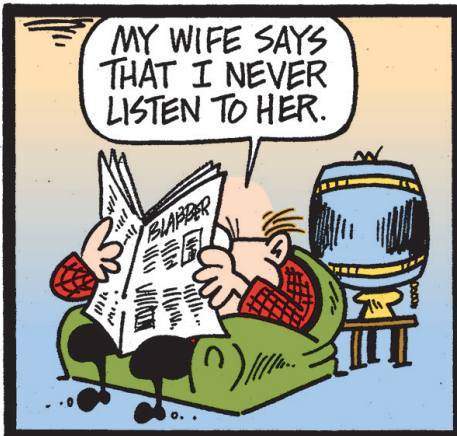
IT SEEMS YOU HAVE COME
TO LIGHT OUR WAY!"

NEXT: The
breach

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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

COVID Hits Our Wallets

You can learn all kinds of things from surveys, and not all of them are good.

A recent SimplyWise bi-monthly survey showed that 35% of seniors age 60 and older are willing to risk getting COVID in order to work.

Of those who are over age 50, only 27% have put any money aside recently for retirement. Nearly half could not last one month off their savings.

The number of people who plan to keep working after starting to collect Social Security benefits just keeps rising, up to 74% at the time of the survey.

Due to finances, 17% of us are considering selling our homes.

I scarcely know where to begin. Between seniors willing to risk getting COVID to keep working, seniors contemplating selling their homes and seniors not able to make it through even one month on savings — it's a dismal picture.

My thoughts on how to cut back on expenses and save money during COVID seem inadequate, but here they are:

- Stop impulse online purchases that you make out of boredom.

- Ask your auto insurance agent about discounts, since your driving is minimal now.

- Double down on asking for senior discounts for everything.

- Don't buy any new clothes (or even a new winter coat) if you're home all the time anyway.

- Take your former entertainment budget (dinner and a movie out) and keep the cash.

- If you're signed up for video streaming services you rarely use, cut all but one.

- Consider selling a second vehicle if it still has payments.

- Make a ritual of studying the weekly grocery sales.

None of these things alone will amount to much, but taken together they will keep more cash in your pocket.

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1. In 2012, what pro bowler celebrated his fifth U.S. Open title by exclaiming, "Who do you think you are? I am!"

2. Before beginning his broadcasting career in 1978, Bob Trumpy played tight end for what NFL team?

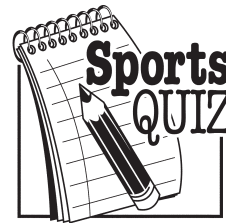
3. At the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, who scored the first ever Olympic goal for the U.S. Women's National Hockey Team?

4. The Bedlam Series is the name given to the athletic rivalry between what two universities?

5. What Seattle sports facility was demolished by implosion in March 2000?

6. In 1993, what Detroit Pistons "Bad Boy" was involved in a scuffle with teammate Isiah Thomas that resulted in Thomas suffering a broken hand?

7. What 1986 comedy film included a character named Cameron who



by Ryan A. Berenz

wore Gordie Howe's No. 9 Detroit Red Wings jersey?

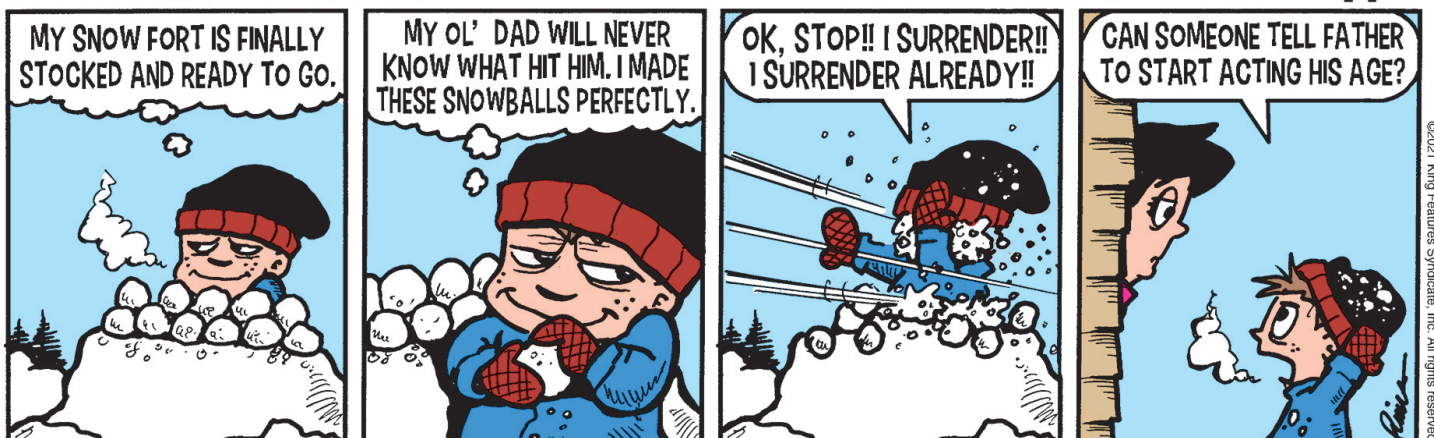
Answers

1. Pete Weber.
2. The Cincinnati Bengals.
3. Cammi Granato.
4. Oklahoma and Oklahoma State.
5. The Kingdome.
6. Bill Laimbeer.
7. "Ferris Bueller's Day Off."

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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Hyper, Yelping Terrier Is Handful During Walks

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: A have a wiry little terrier named "Chip" who is well-behaved inside. However, when it's time for his daily walk, he begins barking nonstop by the door. When I take him outside on the leash, he keeps barking, and pulls hard on the leash. So much so that he almost hurts himself when the collar digs into his neck. Then he'll yelp, as if I had hurt him. It's embarrassing to walk with this hyper, yelping little dog. How can I get him to calm down? — *Charity G., Albany, New York*

DEAR CHARITY: An energetic dog can be frustrating to handle, but don't lose hope. You can work with Chip to improve his behavior.

First, order Chip a properly sized halter online, and use this on walks.

A halter will spread out the contact points across the stronger parts of his little body. This will prevent injury when Chip pulls against the leash. Halters also are much more comfortable; the uncomfortable collar may be stressing him out.

I'd like you to look up a dog trainer in your area who specializes in small dogs, who can be little tornados on a good day. Many trainers are adapting their lessons to an online format, so you can meet with them at home over a conferencing app like Zoom or Google Meet.

While you're waiting for that first session, start working on reinforcing Chip's basic behavioral training. Work with him at home on the commands "come," "sit," "stay" and "lie down." During walks, work with him on "heel," "sit" and "stay." These training sessions also will help Chip work off some of that energy, and he'll be thrilled with all the attention he's getting, too.

Send your tips, comments and questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- Many people in South Korea opt to compress the remains of the dead person into gem-like beads in different colors, which are then displayed at home.
- Greenland sharks don't reach puberty until they are 150 years old.
- The first hoop skirt was worn by Queen Juana of Portugal, in a bid to hide the fact she was pregnant.
- In 2015, Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield released the first ever album recorded entirely in space, titled "Space Sessions: Songs from a Tin Can."
- The oldest known customer service complaint was written on a clay cuneiform tablet in Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago. In it, a customer named Nanni complains that he was sold inferior copper ingots.
- Russia only classified beer as an alcoholic drink in 2011.

- Japanese trains, reputedly the most punctual in the world, issue passengers with a "delay certificate" if a train is running more than five minutes behind schedule. The documents can be shown to bosses or teachers to explain a passenger's lateness.

- In 1984, New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon got drunk and decided to spontaneously call a general election, which he lost.

- Before battles, some Roman gladiators read product endorsements. The makers of the film "Gladiator" planned to show this but nixed the idea for fear that audiences wouldn't believe it.

- A person with geomelophagia has the urge to eat raw potatoes.

- In the late 1800s in Corinne, Utah, you could buy legal divorce papers from a vending machine for \$2.50.

- Late in his life, Guglielmo Marconi believed no sound ever dies completely. He dreamed of building a device strong enough to pick up the actual words of Jesus at the "Sermon on the Mount."

Thought for the Day: "There are years that ask questions, and years that answer." — *Zora Neale Hurston*

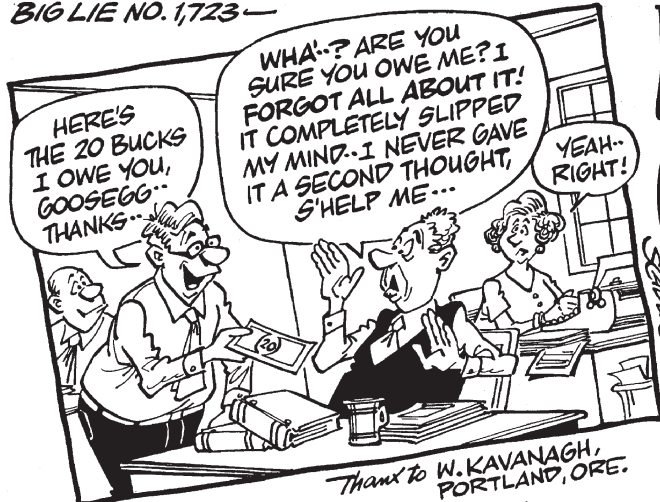
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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME

BY AL SCADUTO

BIG LIE NO. 1,723—



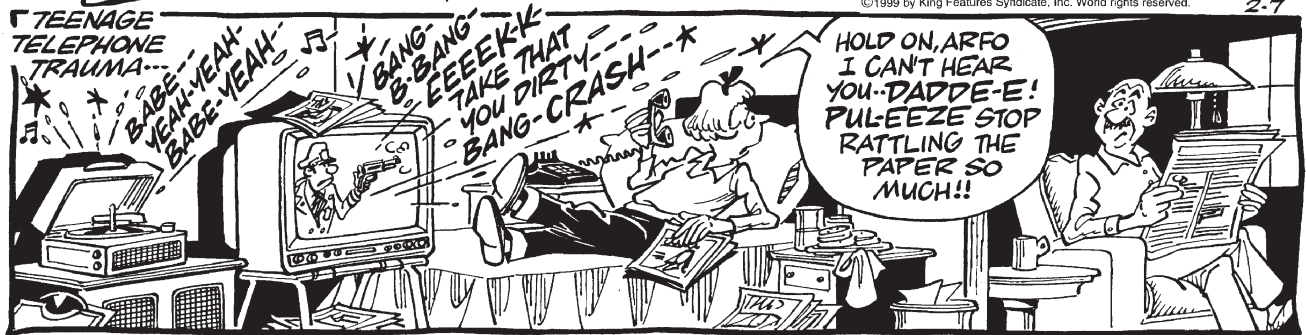
Thank to W. KAVANAGH, PORTLAND, ORE.



Thank to DOM CASSANO, GREENWICH, CT.

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2-7



The inner petals of this Grandiflora rose are pale orange, with the undersides slightly darker. The outer petals are edged in red, and curl under. The fully-bloomed flower can be 4 ½” across, have up to 25 petals, and carries a light, pleasing fragrance. A bush of this kind can grow 4 feet tall and 2 feet wide, and display many blooms at a time throughout a growing season. When set next to blue flowers such as delphinium it is especially striking.

Source: www.allaboutrosegardening.com — Brenda Weaver

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Has the VA Called About Solid Start?

Have you been separated from the service for less than a year? Did you receive your phone calls from the Department of Veterans Affairs? They will try to contact you at the 90, 180 and 365-day point. The reason: Solid Start.

Solid Start is a program to ensure that newly separated veterans know what their benefits are. Some that you might have questions about are housing assistance, health care, home loans, pension and employment. (Be sure you've updated contact info on eBenefits so they know how to find you.)

Solid Start is more than just benefits info. Many of us have a tough time when we make the switch to civilian life. With so many changes, some of us

don't do well with all the upheaval to our lives. But you're not alone. We've all made that trek.

If the stress is too much, the VA can help there, too. Even if you haven't signed up yet for VA health care, if you're struggling, walk into any VA medical center, day or night, or a Vet Center clinic during open hours. Just walk in.

Meanwhile, be sure you're signed up for VA health care. Start by calling (1-877-222-8387) Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET.

To learn more about Solid Start, go online to www.benefits.va.gov/transition/solid-start.asp and scroll around. Don't miss the Find Resources button. You'll see links to medical centers, PTSD programs, benefits, substance disorder programs, all of it.

If you get a call from 1-800-827-0611, that's the Solid Start folks. That's also their hotline should you need help. Call them if you haven't heard anything in the first 90 days.

Just a heads up: When these VA reps call you, they won't be asking for any financial info. If someone does, they're fakes and thieves, so hang up.

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



How is your family doing?

When I am traveling across South Dakota I get dozens of questions a day, from the budget deficit to healthcare to national defense to agriculture policy. Over the last two years I've regularly used this space to address many of the issues most often asked about.

There is a common question asked by South Dakotans I haven't written about in a while, though: "How is your family doing?"

Some South Dakotans assume we moved to Washington, DC, after the election two years ago. We didn't, and never really considered it. My wife has a successful business in Mitchell, but we also wanted our boys to grow up in South Dakota. There is a work ethic, kindness, and unassuming demeanor in our state that I didn't want my sons to miss out on.

That means I am in South Dakota every weekend, which keeps me better connected to the people I'm serving. I see South Dakotans when I'm at the post office, the grocery store, and attending school events. We have one son in high school, one in middle school, and one in elementary school, so we have most bases covered!

Like most South Dakota families, we've been impacted by COVID-19, but we are holding up well, all things considered. We've lost close family friends to the pandemic. We've had travel plans disrupted, had to consider the possibility of COVID impacts to my wife's business, and had to be thoughtful about when we see family members. We also have a sense of gratitude, though, that we've been able to have the kids in school. Study after study is showing that students are learning more when they are in the classroom and we are blessed to have Mitchell teachers and administrators working so hard to keep the kids safe and in the classroom.

COVID has meant a lot more time together as a family. Our family likes hiking and biking, and we've done more of that in 2020 than ever. Twelve-year-old Ben particularly likes the outdoors. He shot his first pheasant earlier this season, and he is regularly pushing me to take him to walk a field or to shoot trap. He has a 28-gauge and he's become quite a shot. I'm still the only one in the family that will clean a bird, though.

Fifteen-year old Max is a hard worker and a talented musician. Marching band and show choir have demanded a lot of time from him, but he still makes time to work a good number of hours at the World's Only Corn Palace as a tour guide and cashier. Both Max and Ben are good brothers to eight-year-old Owen. Owen is energetic and funny, and enjoys building things and exploring the neighborhood on foot, scooter, and bike. His ping pong skills are fast approaching mine, but that's probably not much to brag about.

It isn't easy to have a father and husband gone half the time, of course. Jacquelyn and our sons have to pick up a lot of my slack when I'm away. I'm grateful they are good people who love this country and who understand the value of what I'm trying to accomplish in Washington. They realize that it isn't just our family that matters; it's the thousands of families across South Dakota who want a fair, reasonable, and freedom-protecting federal government. Thank you for the opportunity for our family to serve.

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Grabbing the Bull by the Horns

I heard a story recently about a government bureaucrat from DC visiting real America for the first time. He worked on agriculture policy but grew up in the city so his only experience with food involved his plate. He bought a pair of shiny new boots and headed off to cow-calf country.

When his plane touched down, he was greeted by a man with a cowboy hat and a firm handshake. They jumped in the rancher's F-350, a vehicle so big the city slicker couldn't figure out how you'd parallel park it, and headed out to his ranch. When they arrived at the rancher's pasture, the bureaucrat thought he'd ask a tough question to impress the tough cowboy: "Why doesn't that cow have any horns?"

"Well," the rancher said, "there are many reasons why a cow doesn't have horns. Ya see, some don't have horns because we dehorned them as calves and some, like Angus, are a polled breed that naturally never grow horns. But the reason that cow doesn't have any horns is because it's a horse."

This joke illustrates a broader point: ranchers in cow-calf country work hard every day to produce the best beef in the world, but continue to lose hundreds of dollars per head because the deck is stacked against them. DC lobbyists and bureaucrats, who have never been to a sale barn or stepped foot on a ranch but still think they know better, continue to rig the system and line the pockets of the big packers. They're ripping off our ranchers, small processors and, ultimately, our consumers. That needs to stop now.

As we enter a new year and a new Congress, it would be easy to get discouraged, see the situation not changing and give up. But these issues are too important to quit on. There is fire in my belly and I'm going to fight like hell until we get this done.

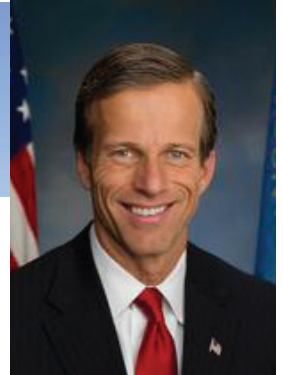
When I meet with ranchers in South Dakota in places like Wall or St. Onge or Ft. Pierre, it's clear they know what's best for their operation. They demand greater market transparency, new markets for state-inspected facilities, Product of the U.S.A. labeling and Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL). Those are the people I am fighting for in Washington.

Over the last year, I've introduced bipartisan, commonsense legislation that touches on each of these issues. We formed coalitions with folks on both sides of the aisle who care about the needs of our ranchers and processors. And while you'd think that'd be enough, it's not. When we attempted to force votes on these issues, our attempts were denied. The stranglehold on certain members of Congress is still too strong. DC dysfunction at its finest.

But the good news is that momentum is on our side. Every day we are continuing to win senators and members of Congress over to our way of thinking. They are beginning to understand that what's best for the consumer, in this case, is also what's best for the producer. It's going to take all of us working together to get this done. I don't care who I have to talk to - Republican or Democrat.

This is a priority for me now more than ever. We cannot stand idly by and watch our ranching community continue to suffer. As we enter a new year, it's time to discard DC dysfunction, grab the bull by the horns and deliver results.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



Optimism for the New Year

It was a year unlike any other, and as it comes to a close, I've been taking time to reflect on both the incredible challenges we've faced and the opportunities for the New Year. There's no way around the tough economic hardships, the lives we've lost, and the difficult moments in 2020 because of the coronavirus. But there are also plenty of good stories worth remembering that could bring light and joy to the darkest of any times.

In the face of incredible challenges and uncertainty, South Dakotans stepped up every day to help our communities. Nurses, doctors, and health care professionals across the state fought the coronavirus on the front lines, whether it was in a rural hospital in South Dakota or in New York City. Essential workers from law enforcement to farmers and grocery store employees showed everyday patriotism by doing their jobs. South Dakotans delivered food to nursing homes and volunteered to help others. And as the son of two educators, I have a particular gratitude for the teachers who have taken great lengths to help their students succeed this year, despite the pandemic.

The year comes to a close with other reasons to celebrate: coronavirus vaccines are being delivered throughout the state, and more are on the way. The virus remains serious and we aren't in the clear yet, but the safe and effective vaccines bring hope to 2021. We should all begin the year with the same spirit we began the pandemic with, and continue to take the necessary steps to slow the spread of the virus.

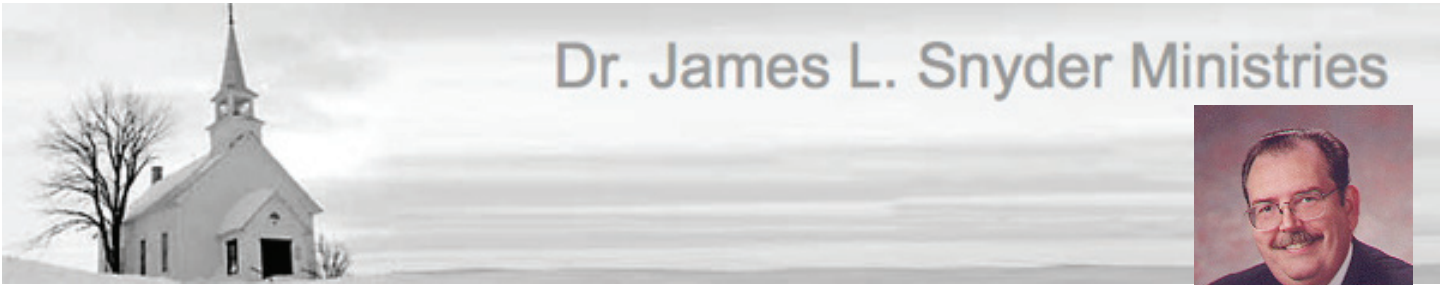
As we look ahead to a new year and the 117th Congress, Congress will also need to work together. My colleagues on both sides of the aisle and I ultimately have the same goal—to improve life for all Americans. We may have different views or approaches on how to do this, but if we keep our constituents' needs in mind, I am confident in what we can accomplish.

The year 2020 was a testament to the resilience of the American people. During these unprecedented and uncertain times, some of the best of humanity showed itself in South Dakota and across our country. I am counting these blessings as I reflect on the past year, with optimism for what 2021 has in store.

In this new year, my commitment to South Dakotans will remain the same: making sure they have a strong voice in Washington. I'll continue to work hard and fight for what really matters to the people of our state – you have my word.

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Red Isn't Always the Red I See

It is not that I am colorblind; I just am color indifferent. Red and blue and yellow are all the same to me.

This, on many occasions, has challenged the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, who is very meticulous when it comes to describing anything or anyone.

In remodeling my office at the parsonage my wife asked, "What color would you like the walls to be painted?"

That sounds like a good question to ask but it's not any question to ask if you know me.

"I don't care about the color. Whatever you think is best is okay with me."

Thinking I had solved the problem, I felt at ease, but her response caused me to realize the problem had not been solved.

"It's your office," she said, "what color would you like the walls to be painted?" With that, she looked at me with a very gregarious smile, which is infectious to me.

Knowing that she wouldn't stop until she got an answer from me I said, "Paint the walls purple."

As far as I was concerned, it didn't matter what color the walls were. I wasn't going to be studying the walls when I was in my study.

Looking at me for a moment, she finally said, "Okay, I'll paint it white."

I'm beginning to learn how to solve problems in our house.

Color doesn't mean very much to me. When I get dressed Sunday morning, my wife is very concerned that my tie matches my suit, and my suit matches my shoes as far as the color aspect is concerned.

To me, the only thing that counts is, does it fit?

It finally came down on me the other day. We were doing our final shopping for Christmas, and I still had a couple of gifts to purchase, and she had a shopping cart full of gifts to buy.

We were just about done when I remembered a present I wanted to get, and I had completely forgotten about it. So I asked my wife, who was the chauffeur at the time, if she could stop at a store so that I could go in and get my final Christmas gift. I was almost exhausted, but this was the end.

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She parked in the parking lot, and as I got out, I said, "I won't be long."

I did not pay attention to the parking lot as I left the car and went into the store. I have no reason to check it out and evaluate every vehicle on that parking lot. The only thing on my mind was to go in, purchase my gift, get out, back into the car and go home.

I do know the car my wife has is red. That's about as far as I can go with that. So, when I left the shopping store, I was looking for a red car.

It seemed like an effortless thing to do, but as I looked up and down the parking lot, there must've been thousands of red cars. Not quite, but it seemed that way. From my perspective, they all looked alike. I could not remember what kind of car my wife had, only that it was red. The fact that I remembered it was red was something.

I went to the first red car, there was nobody there and the doors were locked, so I went to several others. I could not find the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. I was almost tempted to phone in a missing person's alert; perhaps the police could find her better than me.

I did have my cell phone with me, and I thought about calling her to find out where she was. But if I did, I would have to live with that for the rest of my life. You know how that goes!

I decided to continue my search, and I looked at one red car after another and could not find her anywhere. Perhaps I took too long shopping, and she got tired of waiting and went home.

I'm thinking of putting a little white flag on the top of her car's antenna so that I could at least find her that way. But I had to find her first.

Then I heard a horn blow, and I looked down the row, and there was a hand out the window waving at me. So, there she was in plain view.

I was a little exasperated when I got to the car, but then it got a little worse. She was playing a joke on me. As soon as I walked into the store, she moved her car. There was no possibility of me finding it under those circumstances.

When I got to the car, she was laughing hysterically, and between laughs, she said, "I gotcha."

I had to admit that she did get me this time. Even if I could've remembered what kind of car it was, it was not where I had expected it to be. I don't think I will ever live this one down.

As we were driving home, she was sitting on the driver side smiling while I was sitting on the passenger side thinking. A verse of Scripture came to my mind. "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (Proverbs 20:12).

What I have learned in my lifetime is that hearing and seeing are crucial elements in every relationship.

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#314 in a series ~ Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Big numbers for a weekend; I'm thinking there's some catch-up from several states taking yesterday off. As I've mentioned before, we're not going to attach too much importance to any of these for a few more days.

There were 266,600 new cases reported today; that's our second worst day yet, and we're up to 20,439,900 cases in the US, 1.3% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations are only a couple hundred off the record at 125,047. And we're up to 350,172 deaths so far in this pandemic, 0.6% more than yesterday. There were 2216 deaths reported today.

I've been asked more than once about a post that's making its way around social media purporting to give home care advice for Covid-19 patients who are not hospitalized. I'm just going to reproduce it here in parts so we can address the items in it one by one:

"HOW TO FIGHT COVID AT HOME

"No one ever talks about how to fight Covid at home. I came down with Covid in November. I went to the hospital, running a fever of 103, a rapid heart beat, and other common symptoms that come with Covid. While I was there they treated me for the high fever, dehydration and pneumonia.

"The doctor sent me home to fight Covid with two prescriptions - Azithromycin 250mg & Dexamethason 6mg."

This purports to come from someone who was hospitalized for a short time and then sent home, apparently not yet recovered; so these recommendations could be treated as post-Covid-19 recovery advice or as general home-care advice for folks who are sick. Either way, there are problems.

Here's the first one. "When the nurse came in to discharge me, I asked her, 'What can I do to help fight this at home?' She said, 'Sleep on your stomach at all times with Covid. If you can't sleep on your stomach because of health issues sleep on your side. Do not lay on your back no matter what because it smashes your lungs and that will allow fluid to set in.'"

This advice comes, I presume, from the practice in hospitals of placing patients on ventilators in the prone position (on the stomach), a practice called proning which appears from some studies to offer benefit to those who are severely ill. I want to mention first that, if you are in severe respiratory distress such that you need a ventilator, you shouldn't be attempting home care. Secondly, there is currently no evidence proning offers benefit to mildly ill patients—the sort who are doing home care. There is a clinical trial underway for proning in these mild cases, and one of the principal investigators, David Vines, says that, with some 200 patients in their study, they have not yet seen any indication there is a benefit.

Next piece of advice is to "[s]et your clock every two hours while sleeping on your stomach, then get out of bed and walk for 15-30 min, no matter how tired or weak that you are. Also move your arms around frequently, it helps to open your lungs. Breathe in thru your nose, and out thru your mouth. This will help build up your lungs, plus help get rid of the Pneumonia or other fluid you may have."

Medical professionals do not recommend pushing yourself to exercise no matter how tired and weak you are. If you're short of breath from simple activities like walking, then you probably need to get yourself in to see a physician; this is a sign your lungs are not working well enough for you to treat yourself at home. You should not exert yourself beyond your tolerance for activity. And doing breathing exercises and accompanying them with arm movements are useful when you're coming out of the ICU; but the Johns Hopkins breathing exercise page says that is important not to rush your recovery. If exercises make you out of breath, then you should back off.

That brings us to this guidance: "Drink Pedialyte, Gatorade Zero, Powerade Zero & Water with Electrolytes to prevent you from becoming dehydrated.

" Do not drink anything cold - have it at room temperature or warm it up. Water with lemon, and little honey, peppermint tea, apple cider are good suggestions for getting in fluids."

Keeping yourself well-hydrated is a good idea at all times, whether you're sick or well; and if you have a fever, hydration becomes more important because you tend to lose fluids in that circumstance. So water and electrolytes are definitely beneficial. There is, however, zero evidence the temperature of the fluids

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matters. Jennifer Nuzzo, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said as much back in March in a podcast. Cold liquids are not a problem for the lungs or in respiratory conditions in general.

And now, we have some nutritional advice. "Eat at least 1 - 2 eggs a day, plus bananas, avocado and asparagus. These are good for Potassium.

"No milk products, or pork.

"Drink a smoothie of blueberries, strawberries, bananas, honey, tea and a spoon or two of peanut butter."

Now, there's nothing wrong with any of these recommended foods. They're all nutritious, but none of them is a miracle food that will prevent infection or illness; in fact, there's no such thing as miracle foods. So absolutely eat nutritious foods as you recover, but don't be looking for miracles, which are not, generally speaking, available at the grocery store. There is a possible link between potassium deficiency and severe Covid-19; but there is no evidence the potassium deficiency causes a tendency to more severe illness in those who are infected. There is no reason to believe additional potassium will be protective. People who are deficient in potassium may need more, but once again, we don't have any miracle cures. There is also no evidence that pork or dairy products will interfere with recovery. Historically, people have believed milk and pork cause the production of excess mucus in the lungs, but after a few hundred years responding to false claims these foods cause phlegm to build up, scientists are really sure these foods are harmless and are, in fact, nutritious.

So, let's move on to, "Vitamin's D3, C, B, Zinc, Probiotic One-Day are good ideas." They're not bad ideas, although unless you have a deficiency, we have no evidence supplementation will do you any particular good against a respiratory virus. We talked about most of these nutrients as recently as last week. My Update #310 posted December 29 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4300903866592653>, addressed them in somewhat more detail. There aren't really any specific nutrients which "boost" your immune response or magically cure any infection; I wish there were, but alas.

And finally, there is advice for over-the-counter medications:

"Tylenol for fever. Mucinex, or Mucinex DM for drainage, plus helps the cough.

"Pepcid helps for cramps in your legs. One baby aspirin everyday can help prevent getting a blood clot, which can occur from low activity.

Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if your doctor told you to use Tylenol to reduce a fever or to relieve aches and pains; and Mucinex does help to liquify mucus which makes it easier to clear it from your lungs by coughing. Aspirin can help to reduce the risk of abnormal blood clotting, but there is no evidence I could find to support using it to prevent Covid-19-associated clotting in mild cases. I would generally recommend you follow your physician's advice about at-home medications if you have Covid-19. I can find no evidence Pepcid, which is an antacid, is beneficial for leg cramps; but again, I'm going to suggest your physician's advice is the best you're likely to get, certainly more reliable than the medical advice available from strangers on Facebook.

We've all become accustomed to awful stories under the caption, "Hold my beer," generally about how someone managed to top someone else's tragic, cruel, or stupid acts with one even worse. Well, as of New Year's Eve, one such story comes in with a bit of a twist. On a beach on Oahu's north shore where the surf was something beyond rough, a woman got swept up by a huge wave which was sucking her out to sea. There are a couple of rather dramatic videos posted online where you can hear someone shout, "Oh, no! She's getting dragged out!"

It happens Australian pro surfer Mikey Wright, who happened to be in the state for the Pipeline Masters event, was walking along the beach at the time enjoying a beer in company with his wife and his sister. Wright described to NBC what happened next: "I was happening to be filming and then I realized and I was like wait this is going to turn really bad. And I . . . had a beer in hand and phone, and I was like 'Shenay,' my wife, like 'hey take this, like hold this, I've got to go,' and I just started running." He then hopped a fence, rushed into the pounding surf, and brought the woman safely to shore.

I don't think I'll ever hear, "Hold my beer" quite the same way again. Having had a somewhat less action-packed start to the new year, I'll offer a tip of the hat to a real-life action hero and bid you all good night.

Stay healthy. I'll be back tomorrow.

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Jan. 1-2 COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

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

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

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

Positive: +666 (99,829 total) Positivity Rate: 10.5%

Total Tests: 6354 (767,557 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1306 (373,946 total)

Hospitalized: +30 (5702 total). 282 currently hospitalized (-15)

Avera St. Luke's: 8 (-3) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 4 (+0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 1 (-1) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 6 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +13 (1501 total)

Females: 7, Males: 6

Age Groups: 40s=2, 50s=3, 60s=1, 70s=1, 80+=6

Counties: Brown-1, Corson-1, Haakon-1, Hamlin-2, Hughes-2, Minnehaha-3, Pennington-3.

Recovered: +615 (92,595 total)

Active Cases: +37 (5733)

Percent Recovered: 92.8%

Beadle (35) +4 positive, +5 recovered (72 active cases)

Brookings (30) +18 positive, +11 recovered (219 active cases)

Brown (61): +32 positive, +20 recovered (262 active cases)

Clark (2): +4 positive, +3 recovered (19 active cases)

Clay (12): +9 positive, +5 recovered (88 active cases)

Codington (70): +20 positive, +19 recovered (241 active cases)

Davison (53): +8 positive, +9 recovered (102 active cases)

Day (20): +3 positive, +5 recovered (38 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +7 positive, +6 recovered (59 active cases)

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

Grant (35): +0 positive, +3 recovered (26 active cases)

Hanson (3): +1 positive, +2 recovered (16 active cases)

Hughes (27): +4 positive, +10 recovered (116 active cases)

Lawrence (28): +22 positive, +19 recovered (116 active cases)

Lincoln (66): +43 positive, +54 recovered (424

active cases)

Marshall (4): +2 positive, +4 recovered (19 active cases)

McCook (22): +0 positive, +4 recovered (34 active cases)

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

Minnehaha (267): +131 positive, +144 recovered (1366 active cases)

Pennington (134): +150 positive, +119 recovered (801 active cases)

Potter (3): +3 positive, +1 recovered (10 active cases)

Roberts (32): +10 positive, +8 recovered (98 active cases)

Spink (24): +4 positive, +4 recovered (39 active cases)

Walworth (14): +10 positive, +6 recovered (39 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 2

- 4.5% rolling 14-day positivity
- 127 new positives
- 4358 susceptible test encounters
- 92 currently hospitalized (-2)
- 1999 active cases (+178)
- 1310 total deaths (+18)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	414	385	777	8	Substantial	25.00%
Beadle	2513	2406	5217	35	Substantial	7.95%
Bennett	356	341	1088	8	Moderate	3.45%
Bon Homme	1476	1416	1875	23	Substantial	25.40%
Brookings	2999	2750	10042	30	Substantial	6.39%
Brown	4458	4135	11117	61	Substantial	20.86%
Brule	627	611	1693	7	Moderate	6.25%
Buffalo	411	396	853	10	Minimal	14.29%
Butte	890	833	2836	18	Substantial	15.38%
Campbell	115	108	208	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1122	1053	3535	11	Substantial	14.55%
Clark	317	296	856	2	Moderate	6.38%
Clay	1634	1534	4511	12	Substantial	11.88%
Codington	3472	3161	8470	70	Substantial	15.29%
Corson	453	425	891	11	Moderate	13.04%
Custer	679	648	2409	9	Substantial	18.60%
Davison	2726	2571	5735	53	Substantial	14.34%
Day	540	482	1543	20	Substantial	23.44%
Deuel	413	381	996	7	Substantial	12.50%
Dewey	1300	1177	3500	12	Substantial	34.09%
Douglas	383	352	824	7	Substantial	32.00%
Edmunds	376	313	883	4	Substantial	20.45%
Fall River	455	421	2291	12	Substantial	17.65%
Faulk	313	297	602	12	Moderate	0.00%
Grant	826	765	1936	35	Substantial	4.11%
Gregory	484	446	1088	26	Substantial	9.09%
Haakon	233	200	469	8	Substantial	29.17%
Hamlin	608	536	1517	36	Substantial	15.49%
Hand	312	298	703	2	Moderate	0.00%
Hanson	312	293	604	3	Moderate	17.39%
Harding	89	85	154	1	Minimal	14.29%
Hughes	2027	1884	5657	27	Substantial	3.05%
Hutchinson	701	655	2043	16	Substantial	17.54%

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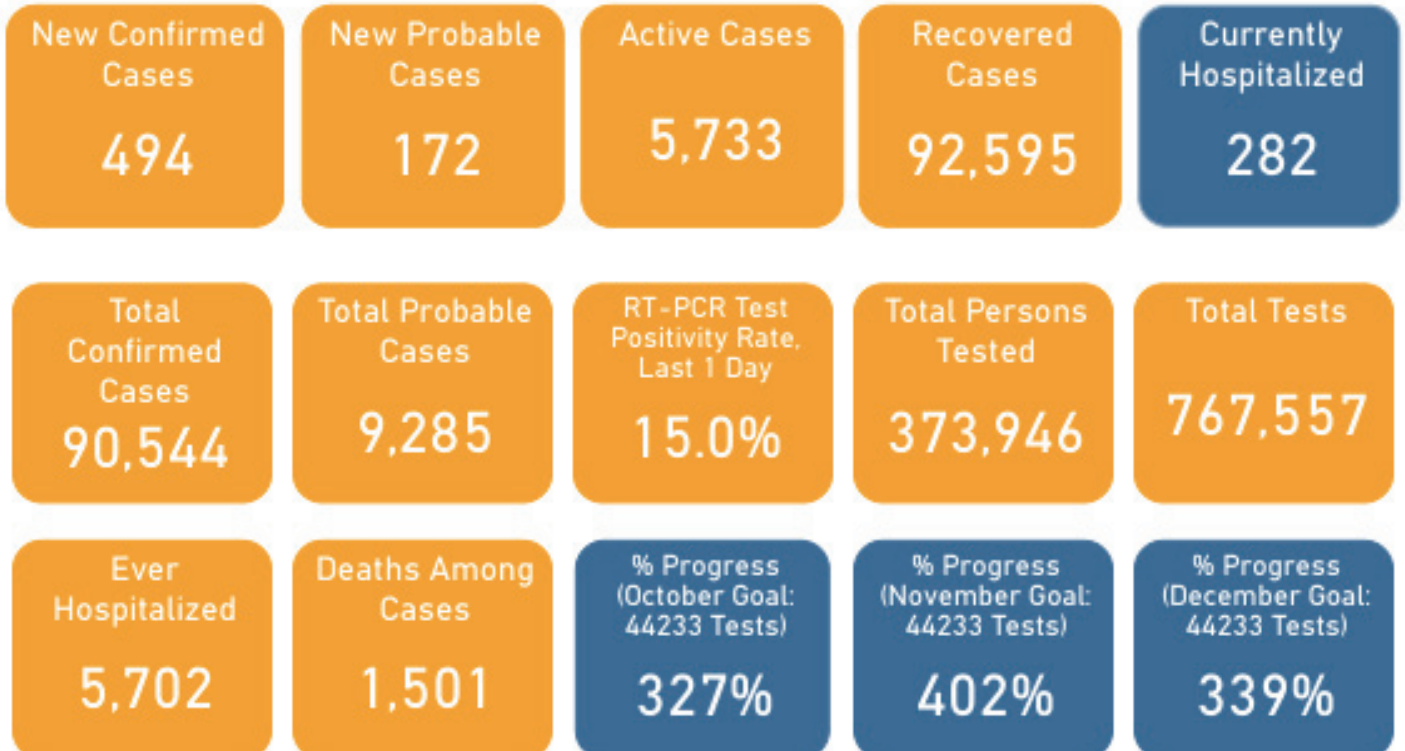
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Hyde	132	129	367	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	262	245	856	8	Moderate	18.18%
Jerauld	261	235	501	15	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	67	64	186	0	Minimal	14.29%
Kingsbury	541	491	1424	13	Substantial	31.25%
Lake	1027	954	2769	16	Substantial	19.28%
Lawrence	2577	2433	7565	28	Substantial	20.68%
Lincoln	6823	6333	17425	66	Substantial	15.60%
Lyman	524	496	1706	9	Moderate	6.45%
Marshall	262	239	1004	4	Substantial	20.59%
McCook	683	627	1410	22	Substantial	22.03%
McPherson	182	171	506	1	Moderate	2.86%
Meade	2262	2101	6703	24	Substantial	15.24%
Mellette	219	210	658	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	225	201	503	6	Moderate	31.25%
Minnehaha	25108	23475	67890	267	Substantial	12.16%
Moody	537	494	1590	14	Substantial	15.15%
Oglala Lakota	1929	1789	6185	35	Substantial	17.71%
Pennington	11347	10412	33870	134	Substantial	21.66%
Perkins	287	243	672	11	Substantial	32.43%
Potter	303	290	718	3	Moderate	9.30%
Roberts	994	864	3750	32	Substantial	24.54%
Sanborn	305	296	614	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	707	644	1861	24	Substantial	5.52%
Stanley	278	257	780	2	Substantial	0.00%
Sully	112	101	252	3	Minimal	28.57%
Todd	1166	1112	3815	19	Substantial	20.90%
Tripp	631	594	1326	12	Substantial	16.67%
Turner	974	872	2379	49	Substantial	14.93%
Union	1616	1469	5417	30	Substantial	17.10%
Walworth	628	575	1620	14	Substantial	16.67%
Yankton	2525	2268	8252	26	Substantial	24.28%
Ziebach	301	257	705	8	Moderate	9.09%
Unassigned	0	0	1915	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	3730	0
10-19 years	11003	0
20-29 years	18179	4
30-39 years	16520	13
40-49 years	14315	27
50-59 years	14169	78
60-69 years	11352	187
70-79 years	5980	324
80+ years	4581	868

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	52157	725
Male	47672	776

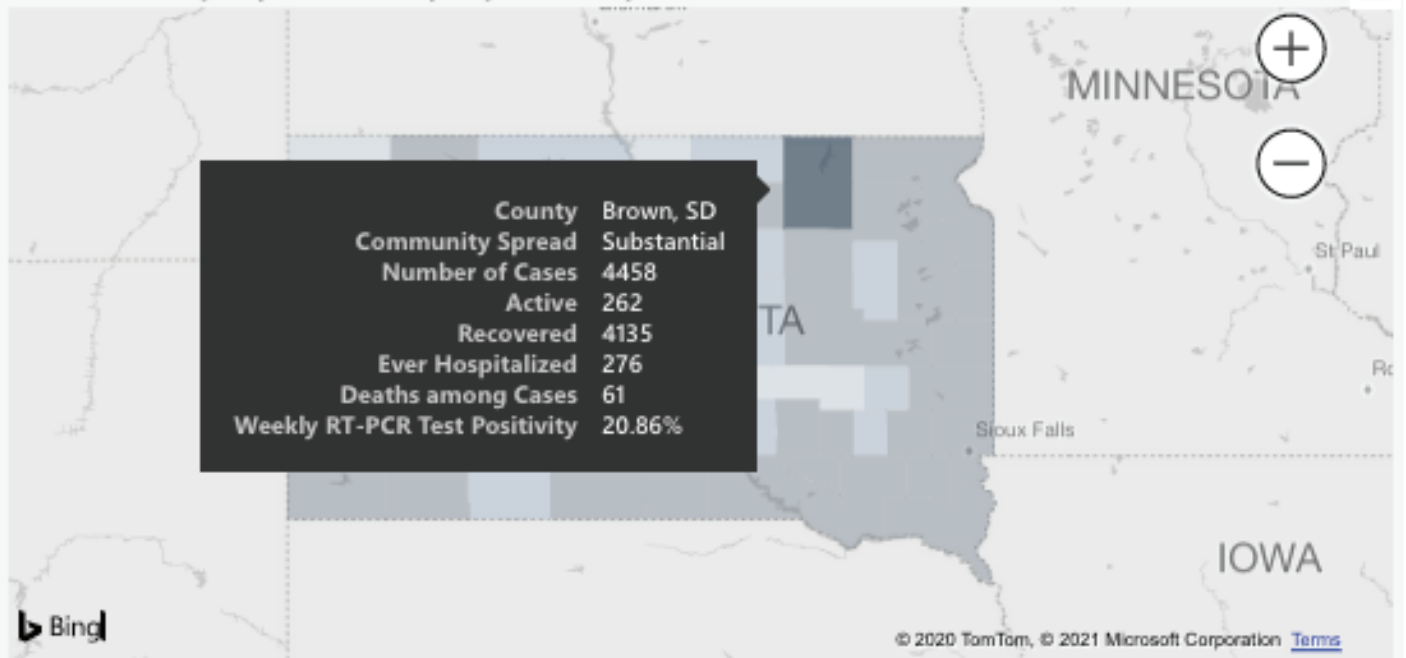
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



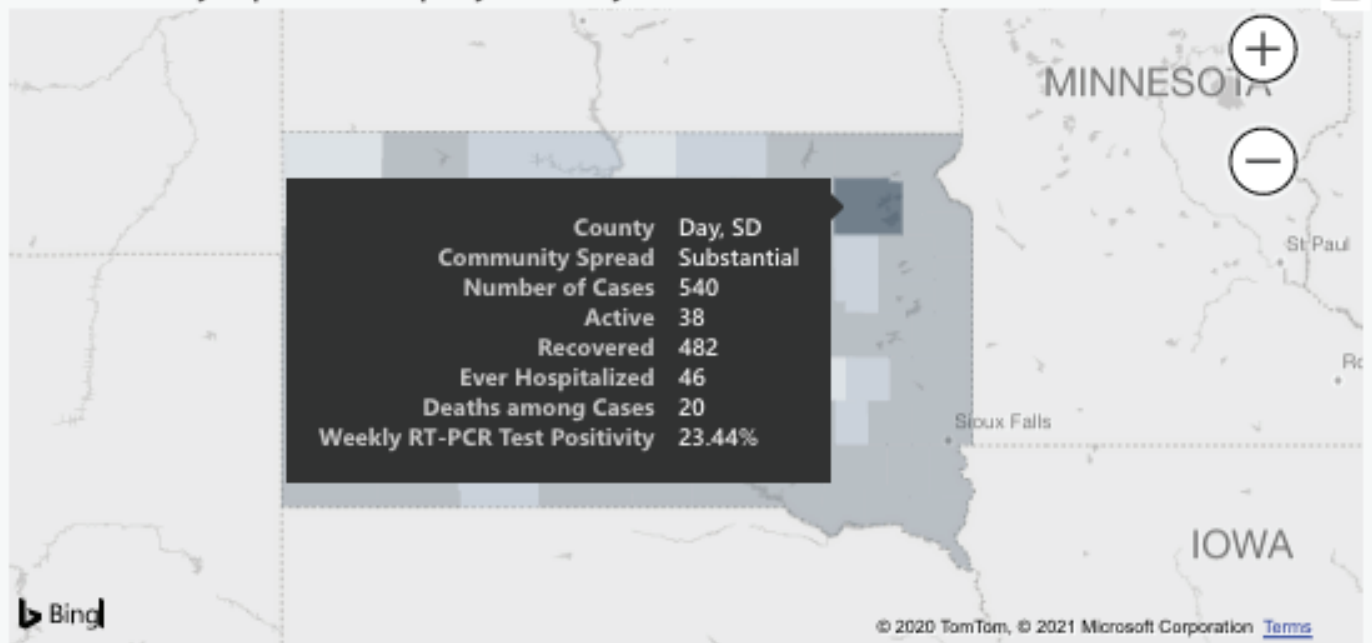
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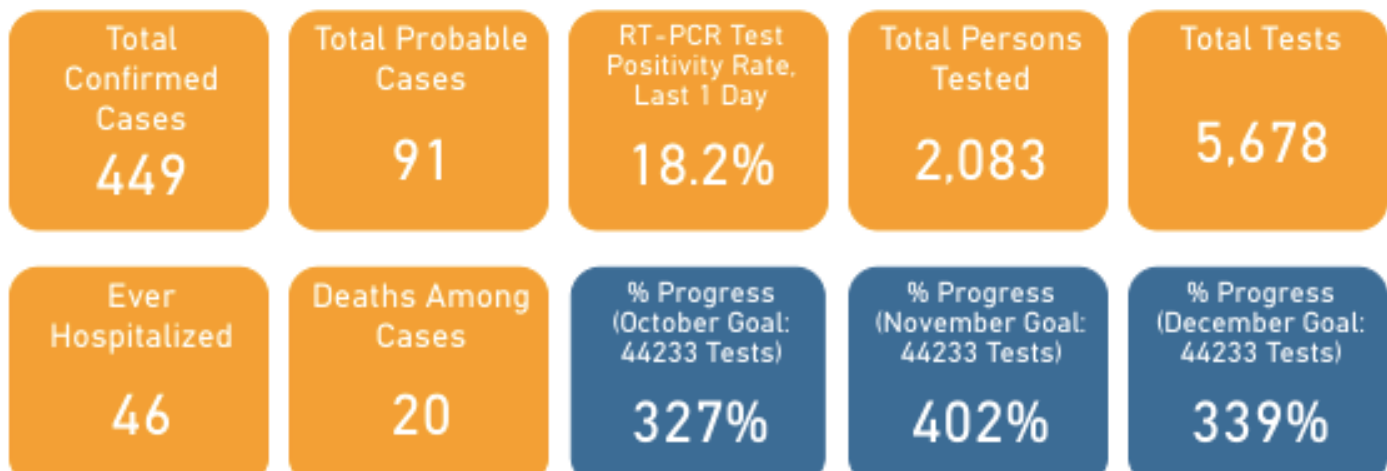
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Monson, Krueger place at Webster Invite

The Groton Area wrestling team traveled to Webster on Saturday where Dragr Monson placed first and Lane Krueger placed second at the tournament.

113: Dragr Monson (8-0) placed 1st and scored 26.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 8-0 received a bye () (Bye)

Quarterfinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 8-0 won by fall over Wiley Elwood (Chamberlain) 0-2 (Fall 0:19)

Semifinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 8-0 won by fall over Ian Metz (Sisseton) 4-3 (Fall 1:09)

1st Place Match - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 8-0 won by fall over Kellan Hurd (Miller/Highmore/Harold) 15-3 (Fall 0:52)

126: Christian Ehresmann (8-2) scored 10.0 team points.

Champ. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 8-2 won by fall over Kenny Smith (Deslacs-Burlington) 1-3 (Fall 1:40)

Quarterfinal - Boe Iverson (Sisseton) 4-3 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 8-2 (Dec 9-6)

Cons. Round 2 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 8-2 won by fall over Reese Peck (Deslacs-Burlington) 0-3 (Fall 1:54)

Cons. Round 3 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 8-2 won by fall over Declan Tveit (Chamberlain) 0-5 (Fall 0:43)

Cons. Semi - Elliot Bratland (Clark/Willow Lake) 11-6 won by forfeit over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 8-2 (For.)

160: Cole Bisbee (3-4)

Quarterfinal - Garret Ristau (Chamberlain) 10-10 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-4 (Fall 4:55)

Cons. Round 1 - Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-4 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Semi - Weston Wahus (Deslacs-Burlington) 9-5 won by major decision over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 3-4 (MD 8-0)

195: Lane Krueger (1-1) placed 2nd and scored 16.0 team points.

Quarterfinal - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 1-1 received a bye () (Bye)

Semifinal - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 1-1 won by fall over Kasey michalski (Clark/Willow Lake) 7-9 (Fall 3:14)

1st Place Match - Noah Hutmacher (Chamberlain) 13-5 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 1-1 (Fall 1:48)

285: Adrian Knutson (3-4)

Quarterfinal - Jackson Soulek (Chamberlain) 9-3 won by fall over Adrian Knutson (Groton Area) 3-4 (Fall 0:17)

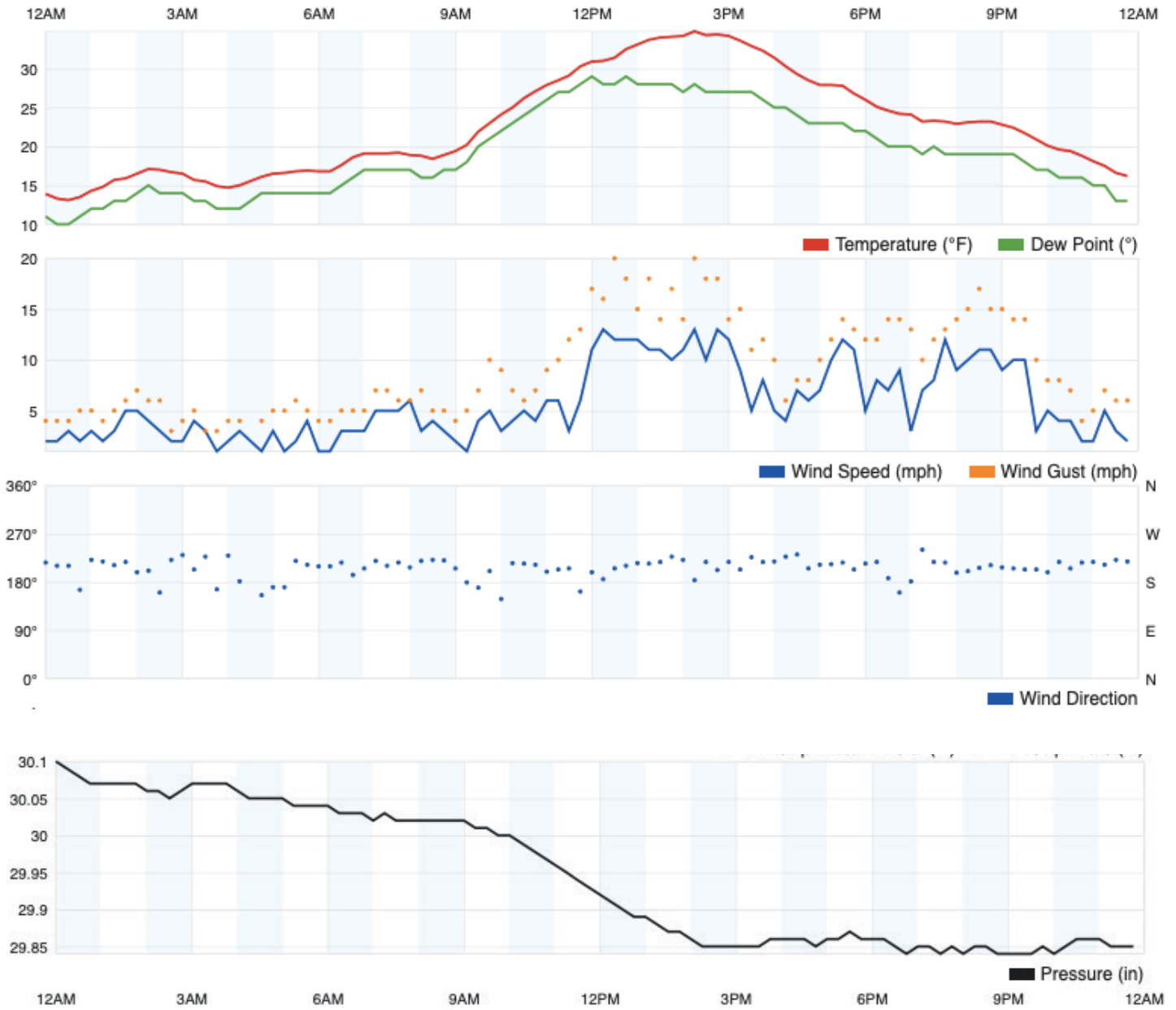
Cons. Round 1 - Adrian Knutson (Groton Area) 3-4 received a bye () (Bye)

Cons. Semi - Connor Logan (Sioux Valley) 5-5 won by decision over Adrian Knutson (Groton Area) 3-4 (Dec 8-4)

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 33 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance
Sleet and
Breezy

Low: 20 °F

Monday



Sunny and
Breezy then
Sunny

High: 37 °F

Monday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 14 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Cloudy

High: 37 °F



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Today:

*Partly Cloudy
Highs 30s east, 40s west*

Tonight:

*Mostly Cloudy with Chance of Mixed Precipitation
Lows in the 20s*

Monday:

*Mostly Sunny & Mild
Highs 30s east, 40s west*

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

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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.

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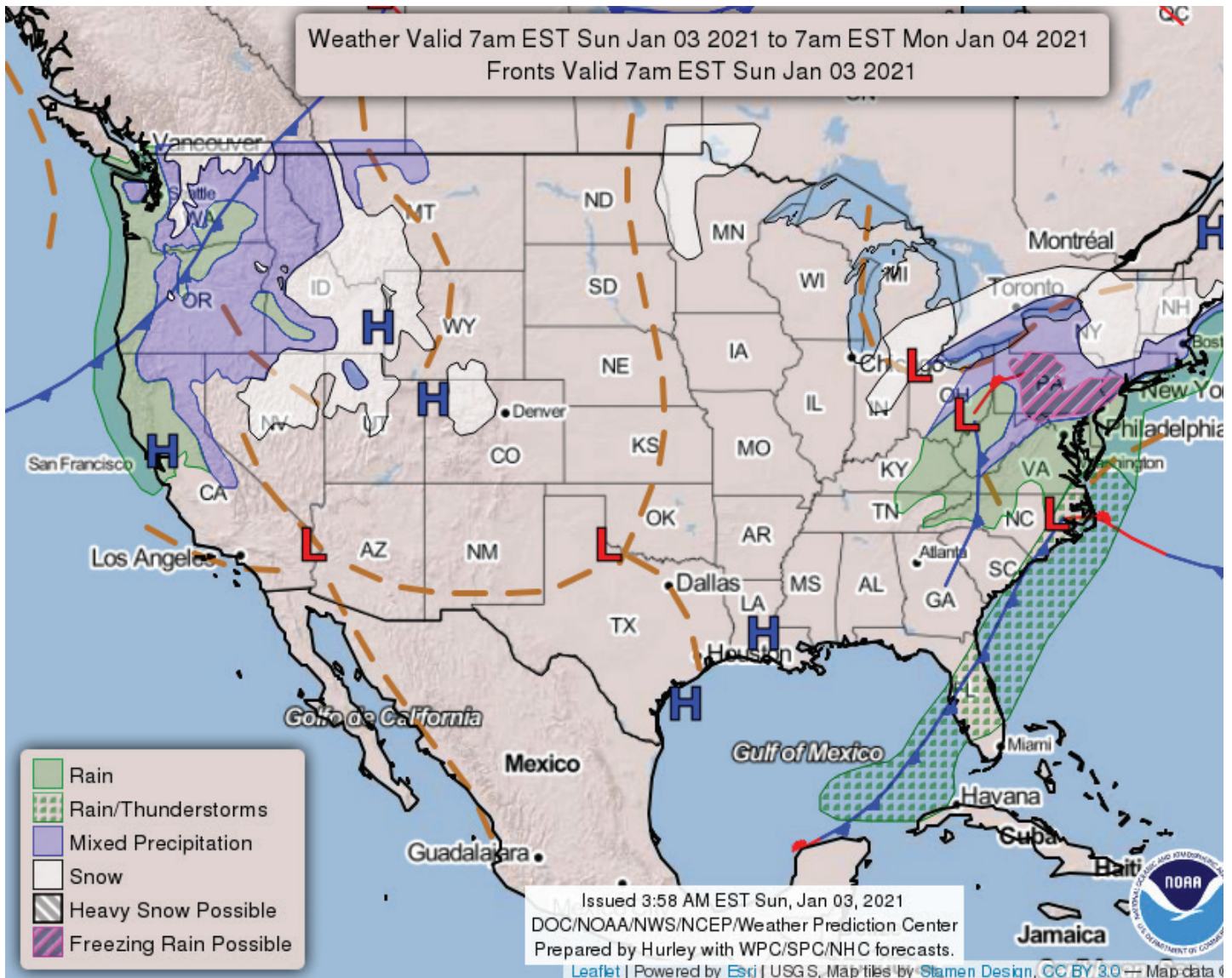
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 35 °F at 2:12 PM
Low Temp: 13 °F at 12:23 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 12:27 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 51° in 1962
Record Low: -34 in 1912
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.04
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.04
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:03 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:13 a.m.



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"WE'RE IN TERRIBLE SHAPE!"

It was the first day of geography class after spring break. The teacher was trying to get her class involved in a lively discussion. "What is the shape of the world?" she asked.

Immediately, James held up his hand and said, "My Dad says it's in terrible shape!" And, it seems that most people would agree with his dad.

Years ago a Psalmist gave us a reason for the condition of the world: "The kings and rulers of the earth," he said, "take their stand together against the Lord...and His Anointed One."

This Psalm points to "the One" who was to come – the Messiah. In it we find a description of Jesus – His life, death, resurrection, and future reign. This Psalm also described the rebellion of the nations of the world and their refusal to be obedient to the Word of God. The author wanted his readers to know and understand that God would fulfill His promises of peace and hope, grace and mercy, love and salvation. God, speaking to us through this Psalm, gave us His assurance that He is "the One" who is in control of all things – past, present and future. He wants us to know that through His Word we can become free from the worries and cares of this world and be certain of being with Him in eternity.

"Serve the Lord with reverent fear," said the Psalmist, and "submit to God's royal Son...and there will be joy for all who find protection in Him."

Prayer: Lord, we lift our hearts to You in worship and thanksgiving, knowing that Your peace will calm our fears, quiet our hearts, and bless our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities - for his anger flares up in an instant. But what joy for all who take refuge in him! Psalm 2:12

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

10-15-18-20-28

(ten, fifteen, eighteen, twenty, twenty-eight)

Estimated jackpot: \$62,000

Lotto America

14-15-16-36-41, Star Ball: 4, ASB: 5

(fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, thirty-six, forty-one; Star Ball: four; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.35 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$432 million

Powerball

03-04-11-41-67, Powerball: 5, Power Play: 2

(three, four, eleven, forty-one, sixty-seven; Powerball: five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$384 million

Saturday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 70, Grand Forks Red River, N.D. 52

Aberdeen Christian 72, Britton-Hecla 29

Beresford 46, Parker 33

Canistota 65, Elkton-Lake Benton 61, OT

Centerville 54, Colome 42

Deubrook 60, Wilmot 52

Estelline/Hendricks 51, James Valley Christian 38

Flandreau 65, Castlewood 51

Gregory 72, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 47

Harding County 65, Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 48

Harrisburg 81, Douglas 61

Huron 64, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58

Lemmon 46, Belle Fourche 33

Mobridge-Pollock 50, Sully Buttes 47

Potter County 74, Leola/Frederick 50

Rapid City Central 49, Rapid City Stevens 42

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 65, Watertown 46

Sioux Valley 49, Tea Area 48

Spearfish 56, Hot Springs 37

Sturgis Brown 63, Lead-Deadwood 33

Heritage Classic=

Cedar Rapids, Jefferson, Iowa 65, Canton 46

Dakota Valley 89, Fargo Davies, N.D. 65

DeSmet 58, Viborg-Hurley 54

Platte-Geddes 42, Sisseton 27

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St. Mary's, Remsen, Iowa 50, Florence/Henry 41
St. Thomas More 61, Hamlin 32
Tiospa Zina Tribal 59, Warner 43
Western Christian, Iowa 65, Dell Rapids 64
Sacred Hoops Classic=
Dell Rapids St. Mary 89, White River 72
Lower Brule 81, Freeman Academy/Marion 63
Madison 55, Lakota Tech 25
Parkston 45, Kimball/White Lake 30
West Central 52, Custer 41
Winner 58, Lennox 56
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Central 68, Grand Forks Red River, N.D. 66, OT
Aberdeen Christian 32, Britton-Hecla 30
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 50, Gregory 25
Belle Fourche 36, Wall 34
Beresford 46, Parker 33
Centerville 39, Colome 35
Florence/Henry 59, Milbank 28
Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 61, Harding County 48
Hill City 66, Chamberlain 50
James Valley Christian 54, Estelline/Hendricks 28
Lakota Tech 71, Langford 22
Mitchell 67, Brandon Valley 62
Mobridge-Pollock 45, Sully Buttes 40
Newell 69, McIntosh 20
Pierre 56, Watertown 47
Potter County 59, Leola/Frederick 40
Rapid City Stevens 48, Rapid City Central 46
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 48, Huron 43
Spearfish 56, Hot Springs 13
St. Thomas More 76, Rapid City Christian 35
Sturgis Brown 60, Lead-Deadwood 27
Tea Area 67, Dell Rapids 32
Viborg-Hurley 55, Dakota Valley 53
Winner 69, Parkston 40
Sacred Hoops Classic=
Kimball/White Lake 43, Lower Brule 32
Madison 34, Custer 23
White River 62, West Central 60

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

Plitzuweit leads South Dakota past Denver 93-54

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — A.J. Plitzuweit had 31 points as South Dakota easily defeated Denver 93-54 on Saturday.

Plitzuweit shot 5 for 6 from behind the arc. He added six rebounds.

Stanley Umude had 17 points and eight rebounds for South Dakota (3-6, 2-2 Summit League). Tasos Kamateros added 13 points.

Tristan Green had 13 points and seven rebounds for the Pioneers (1-7, 0-1), who have now lost seven straight games.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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South Dakota records 13 virus deaths, 666 cases

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota on Saturday reported 13 deaths of people who contracted COVID-19, along with 666 new coronavirus cases from a two-day reporting period.

The state has seen a steady decline in cases, with the average number of daily cases reported declining by 36% over the last two weeks. The average number of deaths reported has also declined, but a fall surge resulted in the state recording the nation's fifth-highest rate of COVID-19 deaths per capita, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

A total of 1,501 South Dakotans have died after contracting COVID-19.

The Department of Health also reported that 15% of the RT-PCR tests reported were positive. A positivity rate that high may indicate that many more people have infections than testing is indicating.

The number of people hospitalized by the virus declined to 282 people statewide.

This story has been corrected to show that 666 positive tests were reported Saturday, not 615. The Department of Health's Dashboard previously displayed an incomplete number of tests reported Saturday.

Fast rollout of virus vaccine trials reveals tribal distrust

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The news came during a hopeful time on the largest Native American reservation.

Daily coronavirus cases were in the single digits, down from a springtime peak of 238 that made the Navajo Nation a U.S. hot spot. The tribe, wanting to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine would be effective for its people, said it would welcome Pfizer clinical trials on its reservation spanning Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Right away, tribal members accused their government of allowing them to be guinea pigs, pointing to painful times in the past when Native Americans didn't consent to medical testing or weren't fully informed about procedures.

A Navajo Nation review board gave the study quicker approval than normal after researchers with Johns Hopkins University's Center for American Indian Health made the case for diversity. Without Native volunteers, how would they know if tribal members responded to vaccines the same as others?

"Unfortunately, Native Americans have effectively been denied the opportunity to participate in these clinical trials because almost all of the study sites are in large, urban areas that have not done effective outreach to Native Americans," said Dr. Laura Hammitt of Johns Hopkins.

About 460 Native Americans participated in the trials for the vaccine by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, including Navajos. The enrollment reflects a growing understanding of the role that people of color play in vaccine development and the push to rapidly deploy it to curb infections among populations that have been disproportionately affected by the virus.

Yet, few of the country's 574 federally recognized tribes have signed on for the studies, a hesitation often rooted in suspicion and distrust. Many tribes also require several layers of approval for clinical trials, a challenge researchers aren't always willing to overcome and don't face in the states.

While vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna Inc. roll out across Indian Country, others are being studied.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe plan to participate in a vaccine trial from another company, Novavax Inc. A Cheyenne River Sioux researcher plans to enroll Native

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Americans and others in South Dakota in the Novavax trial and another by Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline. On the Navajo Nation, Arvena Peshlakai, her husband, Melvin, and their daughter Quortnii volunteered for the Pfizer trials.

Arvena Peshlakai said the rumors were rampant: Navajos would be injected with the virus, and researchers would use plasma from people who got COVID-19.

She was assured that wasn't happening and let the words of her parents and grandparents guide her: Don't let our struggles be your struggles, begin with our triumphs.

"What else am I supposed to do? Just sit back and say, 'No, I don't trust them' and not try something new to see if we can find a breakthrough?" Peshlakai said. "We have to do something, we can't just sit by and wait and hope and pray."

She overcame her fear of needles to get the doses and keeps track of her well-being daily on an app. As trial participants, the family can get the vaccine if they initially received a placebo.

The Pfizer trials among the Navajo and White Mountain Apache tribes enrolled 275 people, about 80% of them Native American, Hammitt said. It wasn't as many as researchers had hoped for, but she said it's enough to compare immune and antibody responses in Native patients to others.

Vaccine trials nationwide have been moving quickly, which doesn't always align with tribal guidelines on considering research proposals.

"It must be done with respect for tribal sovereignty and knowing that each individual has truly been given informed consent," said Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute in Seattle.

It helped that Johns Hopkins has a decadeslong history with the Navajos and Apaches, including other clinical trials. Hammitt said the Navajo Human Research Review Board was receptive to a quick review of the vaccine trials because of the devastating impact of the pandemic.

In South Dakota, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribal health committee initially pushed back on Dr. Jeffrey Henderson's proposal for trials of the Novavax vaccine. Henderson, a tribal member, was sent into the community to gauge support.

He expects to get approval from a newly seated tribal council but for now, plans to set up a mobile unit outside the reservation.

"We refuse to do this type of research or any research within the boundaries of a tribe without having explicit approval from the tribe," Henderson said.

In Washington state, the Nooksack tribe is set to begin enrolling volunteers in the Novavax trials Monday, said Dr. Frank James, the tribe's health officer.

"I expect a slow start to it, and we have to get a few brave people who are comfortable with it and then people to follow," he said.

The nearby Lummi Nation is moving forward with a three-part review and approval process for the Novavax trials.

Initial hesitation among the tribe stemmed from a researcher who took photos of Lummi children years ago to develop a tool to diagnose fetal alcohol syndrome but didn't offer any ways to address it, said Dr. Dakotah Lane, executive medical director of the Lummi Tribal Health Clinic.

"I had already known and was aware of certainly some distrust with any kind of research within our community," Lane said. "But I also knew the only way out of this pandemic was with access to vaccines."

Other stories about the sterilization of Native American women, noted in a 1976 federal report, and military testing of radioactive iodine on Alaska Natives have bred distrust.

The Havasupai Tribe also settled a lawsuit a decade ago that accused Arizona State University scientists of misusing blood samples meant for diabetes research to study schizophrenia, inbreeding and ancient population migration without the tribe's permission.

That case came to mind when Annette Brown, a Navajo woman, heard about her tribe's willingness to participate in COVID-19 vaccine trials.

"There's this historical distrust when it comes to any type of experimenting," she said. "It's just experience, I don't know that there are many families out there who haven't been touched by some sort of

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experimentation (or) biological attacks on tribal communities.”

Brown has mixed feelings because she previously participated in a vaccine trial with Johns Hopkins.

It was related to research that determined the first generation of vaccines for bacterial meningitis was less effective among Navajo and Apache children 6 months and younger, Hammitt said. The rate of the disease used to be five to 10 times higher among those children than the general population.

Researchers and doctors in Native American communities also have found that standard doses for medications like blood thinners weren't always the best fit for tribal members.

For Marcia O'Leary, helping with a study that indirectly discovered HPV vaccines don't protect against a strain that's a leading cause of cancer among Native American women in the Great Plains shows the importance of having more Native researchers and being involved in clinical trials.

“We can't wait for this to trickle down,” said O'Leary, director of Missouri Breaks, a small Native American-owned research group on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation. “It seems like in Indian Country, we keep chasing the ball of health and we never get ahead of it.”

Fonseca is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/FonsecaAP>.

Congress opening new session as virus, Biden's win dominate

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is preparing to convene for the start of a new session, swearing in lawmakers during a tumultuous period as a growing number of Republicans work to overturn Joe Biden's victory over President Donald Trump and the coronavirus surge imposes limits at the Capitol.

Democrat Nancy Pelosi is set Sunday to be reelected as House speaker by her party, which retains the majority in the House but with the slimmest margin in 20 years after a November election wipeout.

Opening the Senate could be among Mitch McConnell's final acts as majority leader. Republican control is in question until Tuesday's runoff elections for two Senate seats in Georgia. The outcome will determine which party holds the chamber.

It's often said that divided government can be a time for legislative compromises, but lawmakers are charging into the 117th Congress with the nation more torn than ever, disputing even basic facts including that Biden won the presidential election.

Fraud did not spoil the 2020 presidential election, a fact confirmed by election officials across the country. Before stepping down last month, Attorney General William Barr, a Republican appointed by Trump, said fraud did not affect the election's outcome. Arizona's and Georgia's Republican governors, whose states were crucial to Biden's victory, have also stated that their election results were accurate.

Nevertheless, a dozen Republicans bound for the new Senate, led by Sens. Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, and even more in the House have pledged to become a resistance force to Biden's White House, starting with efforts to subvert the will of American voters. These GOP lawmakers plan to object to the election results when Congress meets on Wednesday to tally his 306-232 Electoral College victory over Trump. Vice President Mike Pence, as president of the Senate, presides over the session and declares the winner.

Pence is facing growing pressure from Trump's allies over that ceremonial role. His chief of staff, Marc Short, said in a statement Saturday that Pence “welcomes the efforts of members of the House and Senate to use the authority they have under the law to raise objections.”

Democrats, meanwhile, are pushing ahead, eager to partner with Biden on shared priorities, starting with efforts to stem the pandemic and economic crisis. They plan to revisit the failed effort to boost pandemic aid to \$2,000 for most people.

“This has been a moment of great challenge in the United States of America filled with trials and tribulations, but help is on the way,” Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., the chairman of the House Democratic caucus, said in an interview.

“America is a resilient nation, filled with resilient people,” he said. “We will continue to rise to the occa-

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sion emerged from this pandemic and continue to march toward our more perfect union.”

Among the House Republican newcomers are Trump-aligned Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who has given nod to conspiracy Q-Anon theories, and gun rights advocate Lauren Boebert of Colorado, who circulated a letter of support to retain the right of lawmakers to carry firearms in the Capitol.

Taylor Greene was among a group of House Republicans led by Rep. Mo Brooks of Alabama who visited with Trump at the White House during the holiday season about their effort to undo the election.

The “Jan. 6 challenge is on,” Taylor Greene said in a tweet pinned to the top of her social media account. Boebert also tweeted support for those challenging Biden’s victory.

House Republicans boosted their ranks in the November election, electing a handful of women and minorities, more than ever. Some of the new GOP lawmakers are being called the “Freedom Force,” and a counter to the “squad” — Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and other liberal Democratic women who swept to office in the last session.

Progressive Democrats bolstered their ranks with newcomers aligned with more liberal priorities.

The Capitol itself is a changed place under coronavirus restrictions. Lawmakers are arriving in Washington from all parts of the country potentially exposed to the virus during their travel.

Several lawmakers have been sickened by the virus. A memorial was held Saturday for newly elected Republican lawmaker Luke Letlow, 41, of Louisiana, who died of complications from COVID-19 days before the swearing in.

The Office of the Attending Physician has issued several lengthy memos warning lawmakers off meeting in groups or holding traditional receptions to prevent the spread of the virus. Masks have been ordered worn at all times and Pelosi has required them to be used in the House chamber. Members are required to have coronavirus tests and have access to vaccines.

“Do not engage any in-person social events, receptions, celebrations, or appointments, outside your family unit, and always wear a face covering outside your home,” the physician’s office warned in one memo. “You should strictly avoid any type of office-based reception or celebration during the days ahead.”

Even the traditional swearing in ceremonies will be limited in the House. No more big family portraits with new lawmakers taking the oath of office. Instead, each representative-elect can bring one guest in line with social distancing protocols.

The vice president typically swears in the senators.

Pelosi, who is returning as speaker, faces a tight race, with the House split 222-211, with one race still undecided and one vacancy after Letlow’s death.

The California Democrat can endure some defections from her ranks, but only a few, barring absences. Some lawmakers are on quarantine after coronavirus infections or exposure. She needs to win a majority of those present and voting to retain the speaker’s gavel.

Zimbabwe returns to restrictions amid rise in virus cases

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

MUTARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — In response to rising COVID-19 numbers, Zimbabwe has reintroduced a night curfew, banned public gatherings, and indefinitely suspended the opening of schools.

“We are being overwhelmed and overrun,” Information Minister Nick Mangwana warned, saying the country’s hospitals are rapidly reaching capacity with COVID-19 patients.

Zimbabwe recorded 1,342 cases and 29 deaths in the past week, “the highest number recorded so far,” Vice President Constantino Chiwenga said, announcing the strict measures.

Zimbabwe’s 7-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 0.90 new cases per 100,000 people on Dec. 19 to 1.47 new cases per 100,000 people on Jan. 2.

Funerals are now limited to 30 people while other gatherings such as weddings and church services are banned for 30 days. Restaurants and beer taverns have also been closed.

The government has postponed indefinitely the opening of schools for a new term that was supposed to start on Monday, Jan. 4.

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Airports will remain open to travelers who produce recent certificates showing they are free of COVID-19. Travel between Zimbabwe's cities is restricted to "essential services" while land borders are open for commercial cargo and vehicles transiting to other countries only.

But the new measures seem to have done little to reduce the country's general atmosphere of complacency.

Despite warnings, people gathered in large numbers for New Year's Eve revelries.

On Sunday, ignoring reports of the deaths of some high profile business leaders and political figures, many Zimbabweans moved around without wearing masks.

In the eastern city of Mutare, hundreds of people gathered close together under trees to attend church services without masks or social distancing.

In the city's Chikanga area, a group of men playing social soccer seemed undeterred by the renewed threat of COVID-19.

"It's the same alarm they raised in March (when the government first introduced a strict lockdown) but no one I know died or caught COVID. Life goes on," said Felix Matari, on the sidelines of the soccer match.

Senate race thrusts 'Black America's church' into spotlight

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — For decades, the red-bricked Gothic Revival church where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once preached has been a monument to the history of Black Americans' fight for civil rights and the legacy of an activist icon.

It took a high-stakes Senate race and a Trump-era cultural debate to thrust Ebenezer Baptist Church into the center of the current political debate.

Its senior pastor, the Rev. Raphael Warnock, is running for the Senate in one of two runoff elections that could decide which party ultimately controls Congress in the first years of the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden. But Warnock's preaching has become a focal point in the debate about race and justice in the election.

His opponent, Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler, has run attack ads using snippets of sermons Warnock preached from Ebenezer's pulpit to accuse him of being a far left, radical socialist who doesn't support police officers or military service members.

For King's former church, the intense spotlight isn't new. Its 6,000 members are accustomed to standing-room only Sunday services, due in large part to the out-of-town visitors who flocked to the church. Still, Loeffler's criticisms have renewed attention on a pillar of Black life in Atlanta and a tradition of political activism it represents.

"The Republican attack is not just against Warnock, it's against the Black church and the Black religious experience," said the Rev. Timothy McDonald III, pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta who served as assistant pastor of Ebenezer from 1978 to 1984.

McDonald describes Warnock's views as consistent with the church's opposition to racism, police brutality, poverty and militarism. Loeffler's attacks include selectively edited portions of Warnock's sermon in which he decries "police power showing up in a kind of gangster and thug mentality," as a criticism of law enforcement practices that have historically driven a wedge between departments and Black residents.

"I don't care what you think about Warnock," he said. "We've got to defend our church, our preaching, or prophetic tradition, our community involvement and engagement. We're going to defend that."

Ebenezer is "Black America's church," McDonald added. "It's bigger than any individual."

Loeffler has responded, saying in a tweet last month that she isn't attacking the Black church. "We simply exposed your record in your own words," she wrote in a reply to Warnock.

Commonly referred to as "Martin Luther King's church," Ebenezer sits in the middle of a national park dedicated to the civil rights icon's life and legacy, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors and tourists annually. Warnock's leadership at the church is his chief credential, a position so prestigious some note the U.S. Senate is a step down.

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Warnock has continued to preach as he campaigns for office — albeit pre-recorded in an empty sanctuary, due to the pandemic. In a message delivered over the Christmas holiday weekend, he reflected on the challenge of keeping one's faith in the midst of immense hardships.

"In 2020, all of us have been living, it seems, in a pit," Warnock said in a sermon broadcast from the church last Sunday.

"Hospitals full and schools closed. That's a pit!" he preached. "Churches not able to worship together like we would like to on a Sunday morning. That's a pit! Businesses closing and folks laid off. That's a pit!"

The church has kept some distance from Warnock's bid. Ebenezer declined interview requests for members of the pastoral staff. Instead, it issued a statement detailing its public ministry, including social services for the poor, elderly and formerly incarcerated people and more recently, free COVID-19 testing and flu shots.

"Ebenezer Baptist Church embodies the mission of Jesus Christ, through acts of service that strive to feed the poor, liberate the oppressed, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit those who are sick or imprisoned," the church said in a statement emailed to the AP.

Since before the abolition of slavery, the Black church has played a role in brokering congregants' relationship to political power. It's not uncommon for politicians, most often Democrats, to campaign from Black church pulpits. But it's still relatively rare for church leaders to cross over into public office.

If he were elected, Warnock would be sworn into a small group of other ministers who have served in Congress, including at least one other Black pastor, Rep. Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri.

Within the last year, Ebenezer has been part of a few major national news events.

It hosted the funeral of Rayshard Brooks, a Black man fatally shot in the back by Atlanta police in June, amid nationwide protests over George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police in late May.

Warnock was an officiant for that service, and for the late July funeral of civil rights icon and Atlanta congressman John Lewis, who was an Ebenezer member.

"This church is situated at the heart of Atlanta and it's leadership has always opened its doors to the community," said Daunta Long, pastor of Seed Planters Church of God In Christ in McDonough, about 40 miles southeast of the city.

Balancing pastoral duties and a national public profile is a common source of tension, noted McDonald, the former assistant pastor. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was not present for the voting rights march now known as Bloody Sunday because he was expected to preach at Ebenezer for communion Sunday, the first sabbath of the month, according to Clayborne Carson, the historian who maintains King's papers at Stanford University.

Ebenezer was founded in 1886. Its second pastor, the Rev. Adam Daniel Williams, brought on his son-in-law, Martin Luther King. Sr., as assistant pastor in 1927. His son, King Jr., co-pastored from 1960 to 1968.

The elder King, who served as pastor of Ebenezer for more than 40 years, continued in leadership after his son's assassination in Memphis in 1968. The Rev. Joseph Roberts, Jr. became Ebenezer's fourth pastor after King. Sr.'s retirement in 1975.

Warnock, who is Ebenezer's fifth pastor in more than 130 years, was selected as Roberts's successor in 2005.

Ebenezer's members, many who support Warnock's candidacy, say they worry about losing his leadership.

"People love him as their pastor," said Xernona Clayton, 90, a King family confidante and member of the church since 1963. "I think selfishly they don't want to lose him. They want the best of two areas: good representation in the political arena and a pastor in the pulpit."

"I'd imagine both of those jobs would be full-time," she added.

Morrison is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

The Latest: US virus death toll hits 350,000; surge feared

By The Associated Press undefined

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BALTIMORE, M.D. — The COVID-19 death toll in the United States has surpassed 350,000 as experts anticipate another surge in coronavirus cases and deaths stemming from holiday gatherings over Christmas and New Year's.

Data compiled by Johns Hopkins University shows the U.S. passed the threshold early Sunday morning. More than 20 million people in the country have been infected. The U.S. has begun using two coronavirus vaccines to protect health care workers and nursing home residents and staff but the rollout of the inoculation program has been criticized as being slow and chaotic.

Multiple states have reported a record number of cases over the past few days, including North Carolina and Arizona. Mortuary owners in hard-hit Southern California say they're being inundated with bodies.

The U.S. by far has reported the most deaths from COVID-19 in the world, followed by Brazil, which has reported more than 195,000 deaths.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— India has approved two COVID-19 vaccines, paving the way for a massive inoculation program. The vaccines are from Oxford University and AstraZeneca and local firm Bharat Biotech.

— Britain's prime minister is warning of new restrictions ahead as coronavirus infections soar. On Monday, the country plans to ramp up vaccinations using the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

— Louisiana Congressman-elect Luke Letlow, 41, who died from COVID-19 complications, was remembered as a man who loved people and felt called to serve others.

— Tokyo's Gov. Yuriko Koike is asking the national government to declare a "state of emergency" to curtail surging coronavirus infections. Concerns are growing ahead of hosting the Olympics in July.

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:

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Sunday that more onerous lockdown restrictions in England are likely as the country reels from a new coronavirus variant that has pushed infection rates to their highest recorded levels.

Johnson, though, insisted he has "no doubt" that schools are safe and urged parents to send their children back into the classroom in areas of England where they can. Unions representing teachers have called for schools to turn to remote learning for at least a couple of weeks more due to the new variant, which scientists have said is up to 70% more contagious.

The U.K. is in the midst of an acute outbreak, recording more than 50,000 new coronavirus infections a day over the past five days. On Saturday, it notched a daily record of 57,725 new cases. The country has seen nearly 75,000 virus-related deaths.

"We are entirely reconciled to do what it takes to get the virus under control, that may involve tougher measures in the weeks ahead," Johnson said in an interview with the BBC.

In some parts of the British capital and its surrounding areas, there are around 1,000 cases per 100,000 people.

BERLIN — A prominent German state governor is calling for the country's lockdown to be extended until the end of January and says there should be no rushed reopening of schools.

Germany's current lockdown took effect on Dec. 16 after a partial shutdown that started at the beginning of November failed to reduce new coronavirus infections. It was initially set to expire Jan. 10.

It's clear that Chancellor Angela Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors will agree to extend it when they review the situation on Tuesday. The question is by how long, and to what extent schools will open.

Bavarian governor Markus Soeder told Sunday's Bild am Sonntag newspaper that "the lockdown must be extended until the end of January." He said a "hasty easing would set us back a long way" and that

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Austria has shown "the open-closed-open-closed model doesn't work."

Some officials advocate opening primary schools early. But Soeder, whose state has above-average virus infections, said it would be "irresponsible" to send all students and teachers straight back to school.

NEW DELHI — India authorized two COVID-19 vaccines on Sunday, paving the way for a huge inoculation program to stem the coronavirus pandemic in the world's second-most populous country.

India's drugs regulator gave an emergency authorization for the vaccines developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca and another developed by the Indian company Bharat Biotech.

Drugs Controller General Dr. Venugopal G Somani said both would require two doses and the decision was made after "careful examination" by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization, India's pharmaceutical regulator. Both vaccines are cheaper and easier to use than ones by Pfizer and Moderna since they do not require ultra-cold storage facilities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the vaccine approval a "decisive turning point to strengthen a spirited fight." "Congratulations India," Modi tweeted.

India's initial immunization plan aims to vaccinate 300 million people — health care workers, front-line staff including police and those considered vulnerable due to their age or other diseases — by August.

SYDNEY — More Australian states and territories are reimposing travel restrictions to prevent coronavirus spreading from new outbreaks in New South Wales and Victoria states.

The Australian Capital Territory has shut out non-residents who have been in the northern beaches of Sydney, where the outbreaks are most concentrated, Greater Sydney and other smaller centers, unless they have an exemption.

The island state of Tasmania has barred anyone directly linked to the latest Victorian cases, listing exposure sites where confirmed cases are known to have been. The move followed Tasmania's declaration of Greater Sydney and the Wollongong area south of Sydney as medium-risk zones, requiring travelers to quarantine for 14 days on arrival, while those from Sydney's northern beaches are barred from entering.

Victoria reported three new cases Sunday. In total, there have been 21 locally acquired Victorian cases over recent days, all linked to the New South Wales outbreak. Victoria's border is now closed to all travelers from New South Wales.

On Sunday, New South Wales recorded eight new local cases. There are 161 active cases in the state, most of them in the northern beaches of Sydney, and 13 emanating from a liquor store.

BEIJING — Chinese officials have tested more than 4.4 million residents in the northeastern city of Shenyang after the discovery of a new coronavirus cluster there but confirmed only four cases.

Another case was reported Sunday in a different city in Liaoning province. China reported 11 new domestically transmitted cases on Sunday — five in Liaoning, four in in northeastern Heilongjiang province, one in Beijing and one in Hebei province, just outside of Beijing.

Authorities across China are on high alert as new cases continue to emerge. The city of Heihe in Heilongjiang province suspended bus and taxi services after it reported four new cases. It has also temporarily shut down all business venues in the city except for markets and sealed off residential communities.

PHOENIX — Arizona's Gov. Doug Ducey has rejected the state's top education official's call for Ducey to order public schools to use only online instruction for the next two weeks unless they have waivers from health officials.

Amid a coronavirus surge in the state, Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman said Saturday that schools need a two-week "quarantine period" while educators and local officials review health data and decide what type of instruction is appropriate for their communities.

A spokesman for the governor said Ducey wouldn't issue the order because how schools open is a local decision.

Arizona on Saturday reported nearly 8,900 additional known COVID-19 cases and 46 deaths.

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Many schools in Arizona are set to resume classes in the coming week after the winter holidays.

RALEIGH, N.C. -- North Carolina has reported its highest daily number of COVID-19 cases yet.

The state reported 9,527 confirmed cases on New Year's Day. That went over the state's previous high by more than 1,000 cases. It reported nearly as many on Saturday: 9,356 cases. Cases for both days were released by the state health department on Saturday.

"We begin 2021 in our most dangerous position in this pandemic," said Dr. Mandy Cohen, the state's health secretary.

North Carolina has reported a total of more than 558,000 cases.

On Saturday, 15.5% of tests were positive, the highest rate since the start of the pandemic. In addition, a record 3,479 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 and 783 people were in the intensive care unit. With another 144 deaths reported, the state total came to nearly 6,900.

NEW YORK — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo says the state has recorded more than 1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began.

New York reached that figure as it reported about 15,000 new positive tests on Friday. Experts say the official number of coronavirus cases represents a significant undercount, since many people in the New York City area were infected with the coronavirus last spring when testing was largely unavailable.

New York is the fourth state to report more than 1 million positive COVID-19 tests after California, Texas and Florida.

New York reported 128 COVID-19 deaths on Friday.

LOS ANGELES — Hospitals struggling to provide enough oxygen for the sickest coronavirus patients in the Los Angeles area received some relief Saturday when U.S. Army Corps of Engineers crews arrived.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office says crews helped some aging hospitals update their oxygen delivery systems. Besides the shortage of oxygen, they're also having difficulty keeping with demand for oxygen tanks for discharged patients to take home.

The southern half of the state has seen the worst effects, with hospitals swamped with patients and full intensive care units. Makeshift wards are set up in tents, arenas, classrooms and conference rooms.

California started the new year with a record 585 coronavirus deaths Friday in a single day. The state Department of Public Health on Saturday reported more than 53,341 new confirmed cases, bringing the total to 2.3 million.

There's been 26,357 total confirmed COVID-19 deaths in California.

PHOENIX — Arizona reported nearly 8,900 coronavirus cases, giving the state a two-day pandemic high.

There were 10,060 cases reported Friday for a two-day confirmed total of 18,943. The state's previous two-day high was 17,649 on Dec. 13-14.

Arizona reported 46 deaths on Saturday, increasing the total death toll to 9,061.

Arizona had the second-worst diagnosing rate in the past week, behind only California.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation has reported 266 confirmed coronavirus cases and seven more deaths.

The figures reported late Friday increased the tribe's totals since the pandemic began to 23,429 cases and 813 confirmed deaths.

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

The tribe's reservation includes parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. The reservation was under a weekend lockdown that began Friday evening and ends Monday at 5 a.m.

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LOS ANGELES — Southern California funeral homes are turning away bereaved families because they're running out of space for the bodies.

The head of the California Funeral Directors Association says mortuaries are being "inundated."

One funeral home is averaging 30 body removals a day, about five times more than usual. Mortuary owners are calling each other to see if anyone can handle overflow, and the answer is always the same - they're full.

Los Angeles County, the epicenter of the crisis in California, has surpassed 10,000 COVID-19 deaths. On Friday, California reported a record 585 coronavirus deaths.

UK's Johnson warns of more lockdown measures as virus soars

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Sunday that more onerous lockdown restrictions in England are likely as the country reels from a new coronavirus variant that has pushed infection rates to their highest recorded levels.

Johnson, though, insisted he has "no doubt" that schools are safe and urged parents to send their children back into the classroom in areas of England where they can. Unions representing teachers have called for schools to turn to remote learning for at least a couple of weeks more due to the new variant, which scientists have said is up to 70% more contagious.

The U.K. is in the midst of an acute outbreak, recording more than 50,000 new coronavirus infections a day over the past five days. On Saturday, it notched a daily record of 57,725 new cases. The country, with nearly 75,000 virus-related deaths, is alternating with Italy as the worst-hit European nation, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

"We are entirely reconciled to do what it takes to get the virus under control, that may involve tougher measures in the weeks ahead," Johnson said in an interview with the BBC. "Obviously there are a range of tougher measures that we would have to consider."

Johnson conceded that school closures, curfews and the total banning of household mixing could be on the agenda for areas under the most stress.

London and southeast England are facing extremely high levels of new infections and there is speculation that restrictions there will have to be tightened to bring the virus under control. In some parts of the British capital and its surrounding areas, there are around 1,000 cases per 100,000 people.

Johnson's government is using a tiered coronavirus restrictions system. Most of England is already at the highest Tier 4 level, which involves the closure of shops not selling non-essential items and places like gyms and recreation centers as well as a stay-at-home instruction.

"What we are using now is the tiering system, which is a very tough system, and alas probably about to get tougher to keep things under control," he said. "We'll review it and we have the prospect of vaccines coming down the tracks in their tens of millions, offering people literally life and hope."

The U.K. has moved quickly on the vaccination front. It was the first to begin vaccinating people over 80 and health care workers on Dec. 8 with the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine. Last week, regulators approved another vaccine made by Oxford University and pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca that is cheaper and easier to use than the Pfizer vaccine.

Hundreds of new vaccination sites are due to be up and running this week as the National Health Service ramps up its immunization program with the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab. Officials say around 530,000 doses of the new vaccine will be in place Monday as the country moves towards its goal of vaccinating 2 million people a week as soon as possible.

"We do hope that we will be able to do tens of millions in the course of the next three months," Johnson said.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca shot will be administered at a small number of hospitals for the first few days so authorities can be on the lookout for any adverse reactions. Hundreds of new vaccination sites — at both hospitals as well as local doctor's offices — are due to launch this week, joining the more than 700

already in operation, NHS England said.

In a shift from practices in the U.S. and elsewhere, Britain plans to give people second doses of both vaccines within 12 weeks of the first shot rather than within 21 days, to accelerate immunizations across as many people as quickly as possible.

"My mum, as well as you or your older loved ones, may be affected by this decision, but it is still the right thing to do for the nation as a whole," the government's deputy chief medical officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, said in an article for the Mail on Sunday newspaper.

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

India OKs AstraZeneca and locally made COVID-19 vaccines

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India authorized two COVID-19 vaccines on Sunday, paving the way for a huge inoculation program to stem the coronavirus pandemic in the world's second most populous country.

The country's drugs regulator gave emergency authorization for the vaccine developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and another developed by the Indian company Bharat Biotech.

Drugs Controller General Dr. Venugopal G. Somani said that both vaccines would be administered in two dosages. He said the decision to approve the vaccines was made after "careful examination" by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization, India's pharmaceutical regulator.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the vaccine approval a "decisive turning point to strengthen a spirited fight."

"It would make every Indian proud that the two vaccines that have been given emergency use approval are made in India!" Modi tweeted.

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

But questions have been raised by health experts over the vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech. They point out that clinical trials began only recently, making it almost impossible for the firm to have analyzed and submitted data showing that its shots are effective in preventing illness from the coronavirus.

India has confirmed more than 10.3 million cases of the virus, second in the world behind the U.S., though its rate of infection has come down significantly from a mid-September peak. It also has reported over 149,000 deaths.

The country's initial immunization plan aims to vaccinate 300 million people — healthcare workers, front-line staff including police, and those considered vulnerable due to their age or other diseases — by August 2021. For effective distribution, over 20,000 health workers have been trained so far to administer the vaccine, the Health Ministry said.

But the plan poses a major challenge. India has one of the world's largest immunization programs, but it isn't geared around adults, and vaccine coverage remains patchy. Still, neither of the approved vaccines requires the ultra-cold storage facilities that some others do. Instead they can be stored in refrigerators, making them more feasible for the country.

Although Serum Institute of India doesn't have a written agreement with the Indian government, its chief executive, Adar Poonawalla, said India would be "given priority" and would receive most of its stockpile of around 50 million doses.

Partial results from studies for the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot in almost 24,000 people in Britain, Brazil and South Africa suggest that the vaccine is safe and about 70% effective. That isn't as good as some other vaccine candidates, and there are also concerns about how well the vaccine will protect older people.

The other vaccine, known as COVAXIN, is developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with government agencies and is based on an inactivated form of the coronavirus. Early clinical studies showed that

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the vaccine doesn't have any serious side effects and produces antibodies for COVID-19. But late clinical trials began in mid-November. The second shot was to be given 28 days after the first, and an immune response prompted two weeks later.

That time frame means that it isn't possible that the company submitted data showing that the shots are effective in preventing infection from the virus, said Dr. Gagandeep Kang, an infectious diseases expert at the Christian Medical College at Vellore.

All India Drug Action Network, a public health watchdog, issued a statement demanding greater transparency.

Somani, the regulator, said that "the vaccine has been found to be safe," but refused to say whether any efficacy data was shared.

The Health Ministry said in a statement that permission was granted for Bharat Biotech's shot for restricted use in the "public interest as an abundant precaution in clinical trial mode, especially in the context of infection by mutant strains."

But Kang said that the claim that the vaccine could help against a mutant variant of the virus was "hypothetical" and without any evidence.

Indian regulators are still considering approvals for other vaccines, including one made by Pfizer.

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In Somalia, COVID-19 vaccines are distant as virus spreads

By HASSAN BARISE Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — As richer countries race to distribute COVID-19 vaccines, Somalia remains the rare place where much of the population hasn't taken the coronavirus seriously. Some fear that's proven to be deadlier than anyone knows.

"Certainly our people don't use any form of protective measures, neither masks nor social distancing," Abdirizak Yusuf Hirabeh, the government's COVID-19 incident manager, said in an interview. "If you move around the city (of Mogadishu) or countrywide, nobody even talks about it." And yet infections are rising, he said.

It is places like Somalia, the Horn of Africa nation torn apart by three decades of conflict, that will be last to see COVID-19 vaccines in any significant quantity. With part of the country still held by the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab extremist group, the risk of the virus becoming endemic in some hard-to-reach areas is strong — a fear for parts of Africa amid the slow arrival of vaccines.

"There is no real or practical investigation into the matter," said Hirabeh, who is also the director of the Martini hospital in Mogadishu, the largest treating COVID-19 patients, which saw seven new patients the day he spoke. He acknowledged that neither facilities nor equipment are adequate in Somalia to tackle the virus.

Fewer than 27,000 tests for the virus have been conducted in Somalia, a country of more than 15 million people, one of the lowest rates in the world. Fewer than 4,800 cases have been confirmed, including at least 130 deaths.

Some worry the virus will sink into the population as yet another poorly diagnosed but deadly fever.

For 45-year-old street beggar Hassan Mohamed Yusuf, that fear has turned into near-certainty. "In the beginning we saw this virus as just another form of the flu," he said.

Then three of his young children died after having a cough and high fever. As residents of a makeshift camp for people displaced by conflict or drought, they had no access to coronavirus testing or proper care.

At the same time, Yusuf said, the virus hurt his efforts to find money to treat his family as "we can't get close enough" to people to beg.

Early in the pandemic, Somalia's government did attempt some measures to limit the spread of the virus, closing all schools and shutting down all domestic and international flights. Mobile phones rang with

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messages about the virus.

But social distancing has long disappeared in the country's streets, markets or restaurants. On Thursday, some 30,000 people crammed into a stadium in Mogadishu for a regional football match with no face masks or other anti-virus measures in sight.

Mosques in the Muslim nation never faced restrictions, for fear of the reactions.

"Our religion taught us hundreds of years ago that we should wash our hands, faces and even legs five times every day and our women should take face veils as they're often weaker. So that's the whole prevention of the disease, if it really exists," said Abdulkadir Sheikh Mohamud, an imam in Mogadishu.

"I left the matter to Allah to protect us," said Ahmed Abdulle Ali, a shop owner in the capital. He attributed the rise in coughing during prayers to the changing of seasons.

A more important protective factor is the relative youth of Somalia's people, said Dr. Abdurahman Abdullahi Abdi Bilaal, who works in a clinic in the capital. More than 80% of the country's population is under age 30.

"The virus is here, absolutely, but the resilience of people is owing to age," he said.

It's the lack of post-mortem investigations in the country that are allowing the true extent of the virus to go undetected, he said.

The next challenge in Somalia is not simply obtaining COVID-19 vaccines but also persuading the population to accept them.

That will take time, "just the same as what it took for our people to believe in the polio or measles vaccines," a concerned Bilaal said.

Hirabeh, in charge of Somalia's virus response, agreed that "our people have little confidence in the vaccines," saying that many Somalis hate the needles. He called for serious awareness campaigns to change minds.

The logistics of any COVID-19 vaccine rollout are another major concern. Hirabeh said Somalia is expecting the first vaccines in the first quarter of 2021, but he worries that the country has no way to handle a vaccine like the Pfizer one that requires being kept at a temperature of minus 70 degrees Celsius.

"One that could be kept between minus 10 and minus 20 might suit the Third World like our country," he said.

3rd body found after landslide in Norway; 7 still missing

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Rescue teams searching for survivors four days after a landslide carried away homes in a Norwegian village found no signs of life Saturday amid the ruined buildings and debris.

Three bodies have been recovered but searchers are still looking for seven more people believed to be missing. The landslide in the village of Ask is the worst in modern Norwegian history and has shocked citizens in the Nordic nation.

Search teams patrolled with dogs as helicopters and drones with heat-detecting cameras flew amid harsh winter conditions over the ravaged hillside in Ask, a village of 5,000 people 25 kilometers (16 miles) northeast of Oslo.

Norwegian police pledged not to scale down the search even though a rescue team from neighboring Sweden has already returned home.

Local police chief Ida Melbo Oeystese said it may still be possible to find survivors in air pockets inside the destroyed buildings.

"Medically, you can survive for several days if you have air," she told reporters at a news conference.

By late Saturday, a second and third body had been found after a first one was discovered on Friday. Only a Dalmatian dog has been rescued alive from the ruins so far.

King Harald V, Queen Sonja and Crown Prince Haakon plan to visit the disaster area on Sunday to pay their respects to the victims and to meet with residents and rescue workers. The 83-year-old monarch said in his New Year's speech that the royal family had been deeply moved by the tragedy.

Norwegian police have published the names and birth years of the 10 people initially reported missing,

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including a 2-year-old child. Officials haven't yet identified the three recovered bodies.

The landslide early Wednesday cut across a road through Ask, leaving a deep, crater-like ravine. Photos and videos showed buildings hanging on the edge of the ravine, which grew to be 700 meters (2,300 feet) long and 300 meters (1,000 feet) wide. At least nine buildings with over 30 apartments were destroyed.

The rescue operation is being hampered by the limited number of daylight hours in Norway at this time of year and fears of further erosion. The ground is fragile at the site and unable to hold the weight of rescue equipment, including a heavy vehicle from the Norwegian military.

Over 1,000 people have been evacuated, and officials said up to 1,500 people may be moved from the area amid fears of further landslides.

The exact cause of the accident is not yet known but the Gjerdrum municipality, where Ask is located, is known for having a lot of quick clay, a material that can change from solid to liquid form. Experts said the substance of the clay combined with excessive precipitation and the damp weather typical for Norway at this time of year may have contributed to the landslide.

Norwegian authorities in 2005 warned people not to construct residential buildings in the area, but houses were eventually built there later in the decade.

Spokeswoman Toril Hofshagen from the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate called the landslide unique in its destruction.

"Not since 1893 has there been a quick clay landslide of this dimension in Norway," Hofshagen told the media on Saturday.

More GOP lawmakers enlist in Trump effort to undo Biden win

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A growing number of Republican lawmakers are joining President Donald Trump's extraordinary effort to overturn the election, pledging to reject the results when Congress meets next week to count the Electoral College votes and certify President-elect Joe Biden's win.

Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas on Saturday announced a coalition of 11 senators and senators-elect who have been enlisted for Trump's effort to subvert the will of American voters.

This follows the declaration from Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, who was the first to buck Senate leadership by saying he would join with House Republicans in objecting to the state tallies during Wednesday's joint session of Congress.

Trump's refusal to accept his defeat is tearing the party apart as Republicans are forced to make consequential choices that will set the contours of the post-Trump era. Hawley and Cruz are both among potential 2024 presidential contenders.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had urged his party not to try to overturn what nonpartisan election officials have concluded was a free and fair vote.

The 11 senators largely acknowledged Saturday they will not succeed in preventing Biden from being inaugurated on Jan. 20 after he won the Electoral College 306-232. But their challenges, and those from House Republicans, represent the most sweeping effort to undo a presidential election outcome since the Civil War.

"We do not take this action lightly," Cruz and the other senators said in a joint statement.

They vowed to vote against certain state electors on Wednesday unless Congress appoints an electoral commission to immediately conduct an audit of the election results. They are zeroing in on the states where Trump has raised unfounded claims of voter fraud. Congress is unlikely to agree to their demand.

The group, which presented no new evidence of election problems, includes Sens. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, James Lankford of Oklahoma, Steve Daines of Montana, John Kennedy of Louisiana, Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee and Mike Braun of Indiana, and Sens.-elect Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Roger Marshall of Kansas, Bill Hagerty of Tennessee and Tommy Tuberville of Alabama.

Biden's transition spokesman, Mike Gwin, dismissed the effort as a "stunt" that won't change the fact that Biden will be sworn in Jan. 20.

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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 and even Trump's attorney general that there was none. 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.

The days ahead are expected to do little to change the outcome.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, the top Democrat on the panel overseeing the Electoral College count, said the Republican effort to create a federal commission "to supersede state certifications" is wrong.

"It is undemocratic. It is un-American. And fortunately it will be unsuccessful. In the end, democracy will prevail," she said in a statement.

The convening of the joint session to count the Electoral College votes is usually routine. While objections have surfaced before — in 2017, several House Democrats challenged Trump's win — few have approached this level of intensity.

On the other side of the Republican divide, several senators spoke out Saturday against Cruz and Hawley's effort.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said in a statement that she will vote to affirm the election and urged colleagues in both parties to join her in "maintaining confidence" in elections "so that we ensure we have the continued trust of the American people."

Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania said a "fundamental, defining feature of a democratic republic is the right of the people to elect their own leaders." He said the effort by Hawley, Cruz and others "to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in swing states like Pennsylvania directly undermines this right."

Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah called the Cruz-led effort an "ill-conceived endeavor" and said Trump's call for supporters to converge on the Capitol had "the predictable potential to lead to disruption, and worse." He added: "I could never have imagined seeing these things in the greatest democracy in the world. Has ambition so eclipsed principle?"

Earlier this week, Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, another possible 2024 contender, urged his colleagues to "reject this dangerous ploy," which he said threatens the nation's civic norms.

Caught in the middle is Vice President Mike Pence, who faces growing pressure from Trump's allies over his ceremonial role in presiding over the session Wednesday. His chief of staff, Marc Short, said in a statement Saturday that Pence "welcomes the efforts of members of the House and Senate to use the authority they have under the law to raise objections."

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.

Sen. John Thune, the second-ranking Republican, told reporters at the Capitol that leadership was allowing senators to "vote their conscience."

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."

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 are mounted.

The latest failed effort to upend the election came from Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Arizona electors, who filed suit to try to force Pence to step outside mere ceremony and shape the outcome of the vote. U.S. District Judge Jeremy Kernodle, a Trump appointee, dismissed their suit late Friday. In another blow, Gohmert's appeal to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was rejected Saturday night, the panel of judges agreeing with Kernodle's ruling that the plaintiffs had no standing to bring the suit.

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.

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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.

Hawley's office said he sent an email afterward to his colleagues explaining his views. In the email, Hawley said constituents back home are "angry and disillusioned" with the outcome of the election.

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.

Floyd Little, Syracuse and Broncos great, dies at 78

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

Floyd Little, the versatile running back who starred at Syracuse and for the Denver Broncos, has died after a long bout with cancer. He was 78.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame said he died Friday night at his home in Nevada.

"Floyd Little was not only a Hall of Fame running back, he was a Hall of Fame person," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "Faith, family and football were the pillars of his life."

Little was a three-time All-American at Syracuse, where he wore No. 44 like Jim Brown and Ernie Davis before him. From 1964-66, he ran for 2,704 yards and 46 touchdowns.

Little was the sixth overall pick in the 1967 AFL-NFL draft. He played nine seasons in Denver, where he earned the nickname "The Franchise" because his signing was credited with keeping the team from relocating and helped persuade voters to approve funds for the old, iconic Mile High Stadium, which has since been replaced by Empower Field at Mile High.

"I know when I got there the talk was about the team moving to Chicago or Birmingham," Little told The Associated Press in an interview in 2009. "So, I supposedly saved the franchise."

Little was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2010.

"Floyd Little was a true hero of the game," said David Baker, president and CEO of the pro hall. "He was a man of great integrity, passion and courage. His contributions off the field were even greater than his amazing accomplishments he did on it. Floyd's smile, heart and character epitomized what it meant to have a Hall of Fame life."

A high school star in Connecticut at New Haven's Hillhouse High, Little overlapped at Syracuse with U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who said in a statement Saturday the pair had become friends and often spoke by phone after Orange football games.

"He was full of character, decency, and integrity," Biden said. "He was always gracious with his time with fans — parents and grandparents who wanted to introduce their children and grandchildren to a genuine role model."

Floyd's greatness transcended the football field, said former Broncos teammate Randy Gradishar.

"He was the strength and the roots of the Denver Broncos," said Gradishar, a linebacker on the "Orange Crush" defense whose career overlapped with Little's for two years. "He certainly wasn't the biggest, fastest or strongest guy that ever played NFL football, but he accomplished great things through his attitude. A really great football player but more than that, a great man."

Broncos president and CEO Joe Ellis called Floyd "one of the greatest Broncos of all-time and an unforgettable part of our history."

"He rightfully earned the nickname 'The Franchise' for his profound impact on this organization, helping to put the Broncos on the pro football map in the early days. As the first Pro Football Hall of Famer to star for the Broncos, Floyd brought credibility to this team while becoming one of the most dominant players of his era," Ellis said. "Seeing him finally receive that gold jacket was the culmination of a tremendous lifetime in football."

"Even after his retirement, Floyd was a wonderful ambassador for the game and the Denver Broncos, carrying himself with warmth, kindness and class-always with humility and a smile," Ellis added. "In recent

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months, he faced his cancer diagnosis with the same grit and determination that defined his incredible playing career."

A five-time Pro Bowler, Little led the NFL in rushing in 1971 with 1,133 yards and in touchdown runs in 1973 with 12. He also was one of the league's best kick returners, leading the AFL in punt returns as a rookie in 1967.

During his nine-year pro career, Little rushed for 6,323 yards and 43 touchdowns and caught 215 passes for 2,418 yards and nine TDs. He had the most all-purpose yards in pro football and ranked second only to O.J. Simpson in yards rushing over his career.

After a three-decade wait, Little made it into Canton in 2010. He told the AP when he was nominated by the hall's senior committee that he had given up hope of ever making it into the Hall of Fame.

"I was running out of guys who had seen me play," said Little, whose career in Denver spanned the years 1967-75, lean times in the former AFL franchise's history. "The people that had seen me play were starting to fade off and retire. All these guys were no longer there, so who's going to talk about Floyd Little? Nobody. I thought I'd just fallen through the cracks never to be seen or heard from again."

He was never forgotten in Denver, where the late team owner Pat Bowlen once hailed Little's "immeasurable contributions to this franchise and the NFL."

During his long wait for enshrinement, Little said he was regularly approached by fans wanting him to settle a bet: Which year did he go into the Hall of Fame?

"And I have to tell them I'm not in the Hall of Fame and I've never even been nominated," Little said in the months before his selection on Feb. 6, 2010.

Little decided not to get his hopes up anymore and a few years later, the senior committee nominated him, allowing him to dream anew about football immortality.

Hall Vice President Joe Horrigan called him with the good news the day before New Orleans' 31-17 win over Indianapolis in the Super Bowl.

"I was numb," Little said. "I knew he wasn't calling to tell me I was passed over again."

Little said he learned a valuable lesson that day: "Well, you don't give up on your dreams," even if it's to assuage the pain of envisioned rejection.

Little, who had sold his car dealership in Seattle after 32 years not long before his nomination, returned to Syracuse the following year as a special assistant to the athletic director, a position he held until 2016, when he received an honorary doctorate degree from the university.

After that, Little and his wife moved to Las Vegas.

A former teammate of Little's at Syracuse, Pat Killorin, made Little's cancer diagnosis public in May 2020 when he created a GoFundMe page to help the family with treatment costs.

Floyd is survived by his wife DeBorah.

Follow Arnie Melendrez Stapleton on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/arniestapleton>

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Report: Talk show host Larry King in hospital with COVID-19

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Former CNN talk show host Larry King has been hospitalized with COVID-19 for more than a week, the news channel reported Saturday.

Citing an unidentified person close to the family, CNN said the 87-year-old King is undergoing treatment at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Hospital protocols have kept King's family members from visiting him.

The Peabody Award-winning broadcaster was among America's most prominent interviewers of celebrities, presidents and other newsmakers during a half-century career that included 25 years with a nightly show on CNN.

He has had medical issues in recent decades, including heart attacks and diagnoses of diabetes and

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lung cancer.

Last year, King lost two of his five children within weeks of each other. Son Andy King died of a heart attack at 65 in August, and daughter Chaia King died from lung cancer at 51 in July, Larry King said then in a statement.

Biden flexes Georgia muscle alongside GOP in Senate races

By BILL BARROW and SUDHIN THANAWALA ATLANTA

President-elect Joe Biden is going all-in to help Democrats win two Senate runoffs in Georgia that will determine party control in the critical early years of his administration, a widespread effort that not long ago would have been unthinkable in a Republican-dominated state in the Deep South.

The push ahead of Tuesday's election comes with early voting making some Republicans nervous as President Donald Trump, who narrowly lost the state to Biden, continues to assert falsely that the Georgia election process is rigged.

Biden and his team have steered at least \$18 million to help Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock try to unseat Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler. Biden's campaign manager and incoming White House deputy chief of staff, Jen O'Malley Dillon, confirmed the figures Saturday, ahead of upcoming visits to the state by both Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. The money includes about \$6 million in staff and voter data support and \$12 million in fundraising for the two campaigns.

The president-elect and Harris also have recorded robocalls to blanket the state ahead of Tuesday. The pair has planned media interviews in markets across Georgia, including morning and late-afternoon "drive-time" radio on Election Day.

The effort reflects the high stakes, with Democrats needing a sweep to tilt the Senate in their favor, while Republicans need just one seat to keep their majority and force Biden to contend with divided government. Beyond what it means for Biden's legislative prospects, the president-elect's activity highlights the state's evolution into a legitimate two-party battleground and what Biden's team touts as his advantages as the first Democrat since 1992 to carry the state in a presidential election.

"We're not having any conversations about whether there's a value-add to have the president-elect be a part of this. There is," O'Malley Dillon said in an interview. "The party feels that way and sees the unique coalition that he's put together."

Biden will be in Atlanta on Monday, the same day that Trump heads to the north Georgia town of Dalton for an election-eve rally. Vice President Mike Pence also will be in Georgia on Monday. Harris will be in Savannah on Sunday.

Republicans face considerable pressure to maximize their expected Election Day advantage to make up for an apparent repeat of Democrats' success in early voting turnout in November's election.

"This is a turnout election, and the Democrats are turning out their votes," Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, warned a GOP crowd Saturday in Cumming, an Atlanta suburb where he campaigned with Loeffler.

In November, about 5 million ballots were cast altogether. That included 3.6 million early ballots and about 1.4 million on Election Day. Democrats posted a wide advantage in early ballots, but Republicans made up ground on Nov. 3. Biden defeated Trump by about 12,500 votes; Perdue led Ossoff by about 88,000 votes but fell short of the required majority to win outright. Loeffler and Warnock were forced into a runoff because both fell well shy of a majority.

Perdue's initial advantage gave Republicans confidence for much of the runoff campaign. But early turnout by Black voters, who lean overwhelmingly Democratic, is now of major concern for the GOP. Black voters make up about 31% of the early runoff electorate so far; several hundred thousand absentee ballots are still outstanding, according to nonpartisan data analyst Ryan Anderson of Atlanta. At this point in the general election, the Black share of the early electorate was less than 28%.

Meanwhile, more than 110,000 voters who didn't participate in November have cast runoff ballots; O'Malley Dillon said Democrats' analysis shows that group tilts heavily in their favor. All of that suggests Republicans will have to run up an even bigger Election Day advantage than they did in November.

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In the northern suburbs, where Democrats have made considerable gains in recent election cycles, Loeffler repeated the themes of her runoff blitz, caricaturing Warnock and Ossoff as radicals who don't fit Georgia's political makeup. But she didn't mince words about the possibility that Democrats could win.

"Make no mistake, they are energized. They're turning out," she said. "We need you to make sure that you get 10, 20 of your family members and friends to the poll on Tuesday. We have three days to get this done."

As Loeffler campaigned, the president took to Twitter with more false assertions that Biden's win in Georgia was fraudulent. In fact, Georgia elections officials, including Republicans, have vouched for the accuracy of the count, and multiple courts have rejected Trump and GOP elections challenges.

Perdue remained quarantined Saturday after being exposed to a campaign staffer who tested positive for the coronavirus. He told Fox News he would miss Monday's Trump rally.

In Biden's camp, meanwhile, O'Malley Dillon said there's a confidence that Georgia, regardless of its outcome, already has proven a new path for Democrats under Biden. She said the president-elect can energize the party's diverse, more liberal base while still appealing to more moderate voters, including metro-area white voters who may have leaned Republican. That, she said, makes it harder for rote GOP attacks about "radicals" and "socialism" to stick. And O'Malley Dillon said the Georgia investments demonstrate Biden's willingness to lend his brand across the country, even in GOP strongholds.

"Joe Biden is the guy who was always out there to help the party and to help candidates, doing more fundraisers than anyone else ... showing up to state party events. That's just a part of who he is," O'Malley Dillon said, adding that Georgia is "reflective of how the president-elect wants to drive" his political operation as president.

Thanawala reported from Cumming, Georgia.

California funeral homes run out of space as COVID-19 rages

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — As communities across the country feel the pain of a surge in coronavirus cases, funeral homes in the hot spot of Southern California say they must turn away grieving families as they run out of space for the bodies piling up.

The head of the state funeral directors association says mortuaries are being inundated as the United States nears a grim tally of 350,000 COVID-19 deaths. More than 20 million people in the country have been infected, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

"I've been in the funeral industry for 40 years and never in my life did I think that this could happen, that I'd have to tell a family, 'No, we can't take your family member,'" said Magda Maldonado, owner of Continental Funeral Home in Los Angeles.

Continental is averaging about 30 body removals a day — six times its normal rate. Mortuary owners are calling one another to see whether anyone can handle overflow, and the answer is always the same: They're full, too.

In order to keep up with the flood of bodies, Maldonado has rented extra 50-foot (15-meter) refrigerators for two of the four facilities she runs in LA and surrounding counties. Continental has also been delaying pickups at hospitals for a day or two while they deal with residential clients.

Bob Achermann, executive director of the California Funeral Directors Association, said that the whole process of burying and cremating bodies has slowed down, including embalming bodies and obtaining death certificates. During normal times, cremation might happen within a day or two; now it takes at least a week or longer.

Achermann said that in the southern part of the state, "every funeral home I talk to says, 'We're padding as fast as we can.'"

"The volume is just incredible and they fear that they won't be able to keep up," he said. "And the worst of the surge could still be ahead of us."

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Los Angeles County, the epicenter of the crisis in California, has surpassed 10,000 COVID-19 deaths alone. Hospitals in the area are overwhelmed, and are struggling to keep up with basics such as oxygen as they treat an unprecedented number of patients with respiratory issues. On Saturday, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers crews arrived to update some hospital's oxygen delivery systems.

Nationally, an average of just over 2,500 people have died of COVID-19 over the past seven days, according to Johns Hopkins data. The number of daily newly reported cases in that period has averaged close to 195,000, a decline from two weeks earlier.

It's feared that holiday gatherings could fuel yet another rise in cases.

Arkansas officials reported a record of more than 4,300 new COVID-19 cases Friday. Gov. Asa Hutchinson tweeted that the state is "certainly in the surge after Christmas travel and gatherings" and added, "As we enter this new year, our first resolution should be to follow guidelines."

North Carolina officials also reported a record 9,527 confirmed cases New Year's Day. That's more than 1,000 cases above the previous daily high.

In Louisiana, a funeral was being held Saturday for a congressman-elect who died of COVID-19 complications. Republican Luke Letlow died Tuesday at age 41. His swearing-in had been scheduled Sunday. He leaves behind his wife, Julia Letlow, and two children, ages 1 and 3.

In Texas, state officials say they have only 580 intensive care beds available as staff treat more than 12,480 hospitalized coronavirus patients, a number that has risen steadily since September and has set record highs this past week.

In Window Rock, Arizona, the Navajo Nation remained in the midst of a weekend lockdown to try to slow the rate of infection. The tribe late Friday reported another seven deaths, bringing its totals since the pandemic began to 23,429 cases and 813 deaths. The reservation includes parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

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.

Arizona on Saturday reported 18,943 new cases Friday and Saturday, a record for the state in any two-day period. It also reported 46 new deaths Saturday.

Paul Westphal, Hall of Famer and NBA champion, dies at 70

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

Paul Westphal, a Hall of Fame player who won a championship with the Boston Celtics in 1974 and later coached in the league and in college, died Saturday. He was 70.

He died in Scottsdale, Arizona, according to a statement from Southern California, where Westphal starred in college. He was diagnosed with brain cancer last August.

A five-time All-Star guard, Westphal played in the NBA from 1972-84. After winning a championship with the Celtics, he made the finals in 1976 with Phoenix, where he was a key part of one of the most riveting games in league history. He also played for Seattle and the New York Knicks.

He averaged 15.6 points, 4.4 assists and 1.9 rebounds during his career.

After his playing career ended, Westphal moved into coaching. He led the Suns to the NBA Finals in 1993, and also was head coach of Seattle and Sacramento. He had stints as an assistant with Dallas and Brooklyn.

"There may be just a handful of people who have as much influence and significance on the history of the Phoenix Suns," former team owner Jerry Colangelo said. "All he accomplished as a player and as a coach. Off the court, he was a gentleman, a family man, great moral character. He represented the Suns the way you want every player to represent your franchise."

At the college level, Westphal coached at Southwestern Baptist Bible College (now Arizona Christian University), Grand Canyon and Pepperdine.

Westphal played at USC from 1968-72, and the Trojans honored him with a moment of silence before their game Saturday. His No. 25 jersey hangs in the Galen Center rafters. He led the Trojans to a 24-2

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record in 1971. The following year, he was an All-American and team captain who led the Trojans with a 20.3-point average.

Born on Nov. 30, 1950, in the Los Angeles suburb of Torrance, Paul Douglas Westphal was drafted 10th overall in the first round of the 1972 NBA draft by the Celtics. The 6-foot-4 guard spent three seasons in Boston before being traded to Phoenix.

In 1976, Westphal helped the Suns reach their first NBA Finals against the Celtics. Game 5, a triple-overtime thriller in that series, is often called "the greatest game ever played."

The Suns trailed 94-91 in the closing seconds of regulation when Westphal stole the ball from JoJo White and got fouled. His 3-point play tied the game at 94.

In the second overtime, with 15 seconds left and the Suns trailing 109-108, Westphal stole the ball from John Havlicek, who had taken an inbounds pass. That led to a sequence in which the Suns scored to take a 110-109 lead.

Havlicek scored with five seconds left to put the Celtics ahead 111-110. The buzzer sounded and Celtics flooded the court, believing their team had won. However, the referee ruled that Havlicek scored with two seconds remaining.

One second was put back on the clock. Westphal called for a timeout that the Suns didn't have, resulting in a technical foul. The Celtics made the free throw for a 112-110 lead. After a timeout, the Suns inbounded at midcourt and scored to force a third overtime.

With 20 seconds left and the Celtics leading 128-122, Westphal scored two quick baskets to cut it to 128-126 and nearly stole the ball at midcourt, but failed and the Celtics ran out the clock to win.

The Suns retired his No. 44 jersey.

"Throughout the past 40 years, Westy has remained a great friend of the organization and as a trusted sounding board and confidant for me," Suns manager partner Robert Sarver said. "His number 44 will forever hold its place in our Ring of Honor, enshrined as one of the utmost deserving members."

Westphal returned to the Suns as an assistant in 1988.

"He led by example," said Eddie Johnson, 1989 Sixth Man of the Year. "He didn't change off of the court. It's just a positive atmosphere that he exudes when he's around. He always greets you with a pleasant smile. You always feel like you are a part of his clique. He's somebody we can put on a pedestal."

Westphal was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame as a player in 2019. He went into the College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2018.

He is survived by his wife, Cindy, and two children.

More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/NBA> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Iraq says it has dismantled mine on tanker in Persian Gulf

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's military on Saturday said explosives experts with its naval forces successfully dismantled a mine that was discovered stuck to an oil tanker in the Persian Gulf two days earlier.

The statement said Iraqi authorities have opened an investigation into the incident. No group has claimed responsibility for placing the mine.

The announcement came a day after Iraq confirmed reports by private security firms that a mine had been discovered attached to the side of a tanker rented from Iraq's Oil Marketing Company, known as SOMO, as it was refueling another vessel. It said that Iraqi teams were working to dismantle the mine.

Iraq has not provided further details, but the two private security firms said the discovery was likely a limpet mine on the MT Pola, a Liberian-flagged tanker.

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

Already, America has conducted B-52 bomber flyovers and sent a nuclear submarine into the Persian

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Gulf over what Trump officials describe as the possibility of an Iranian attack on the one-year anniversary of the U.S. drone strike near Baghdad that killed a top Iranian general, Qassem Soleimani, and top Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Iraq is marking the anniversary with a series of events this week, including a ceremony at Baghdad's airport Saturday night, where the strike that killed the two men occurred.

Thousands of mourners joined a mock funeral procession on the highway leading to the airport, which was blocked with cars Saturday evening.

Posters of the dead men adorned both sides of the road, which was lined with tents that served food and drinks for those who walked the highway. The scene of the bombing was turned into a shrine-like area sealed off by red ropes, with a photo of Soleimani and al-Muhandis in the middle, as mourners lit candles.

Shrapnel marks were still visible on the asphalt and walls in the area.

Soleimani headed Iran's Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, responsible for the Islamic Republic's foreign operations and frequently shuttling between Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. His assassination dramatically ratcheted up tensions in the region and brought the U.S. and Iran to the brink of war.

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, freeing them from prison after 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 that 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, 38, 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 months-long 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

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championed by Fox News personality Pete Hegseth, an Army veteran.

Trump's approach to pardons has been heavily influenced by personal appeals from allies. Throughout his presidency, including in his most recent round of pardons, he's wiped away punishments for 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 who spoke to reporters described old wounds being reopened. Soon after the announcement, a photograph of a smiling 9-year-old victim circulated widely online. The boy's father told the BBC that Trump "broke 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 fired only in the direction of an Iraqi police post; the guards had been concerned by infiltration by insurgents of police ranks. But 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 threatening and a potential car bomb. In a narrative disputed by prosecutors, the guards say they fired in response 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 dismissed 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. He admitted firing multiple rounds into the Kia — which actually contained a medical student and his mother — but denied having seen 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 thrown out 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 assisting 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."

UK hits daily virus record, is urged to keep schools closed

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — With daily coronavirus infections surging as a result of a new virus variant, the British government faced mounting pressure Saturday from teachers' unions to keep schools in England closed for at least another two weeks.

The government, which oversees schools in England, has already decided to keep all schools in London closed next week to try to stem new infections. Unions want the policy extended across the whole of England, expressing fears about the health of both teachers and children.

The U.K. on Saturday hit a daily record for new coronavirus infections — 57,725 — and looked set to soon overtake Italy once again to become the worst-hit country in Europe with nearly 75,000 COVID-19 deaths. The fear is that with rising infections, the number of deaths will also grow over the coming weeks.

The U.K. has recorded its five highest daily new infection numbers over the past five days — all above 50,000 and double the number of only a few weeks ago.

After an emergency meeting on Saturday, the National Education Union, which represents over 450,000 education workers, called on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government to move learning online for at least two weeks. It also told members they have a legal right not to have to work in an "unsafe environment" of accelerating coronavirus cases, hospital admissions and deaths.

"We are doing our job as a union by informing our members that they have a legal right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions which are a danger to their health and to the health of their school communities," said Kevin Courtney, the union's joint general secretary.

Another union representing teachers, the NASUWT, also called for an immediate nationwide move to remote education due to virus safety concerns. Its general secretary, Patrick Roach, said there's "genuine concern" that schools and colleges are not able to reopen safely at this time.

"The NASUWT will not hesitate to take appropriate action in order to protect members whose safety is put at risk as a result of the failure of employers or the government to ensure safe working conditions in schools and colleges," he said.

The government's own Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies warned at a Dec. 22 meeting that schools needed to stay closed to bring down virus transmission rates.

The U.K. is struggling with a sharp spike in new cases as a result of a new virus variant that officials say could be up to 70% more infectious.

The variant has been particularly prevalent in London and in surrounding areas, prompting Education Secretary Gavin Williamson to row back on plans to allow some primary schools — those for children 11 and under — in the capital to reopen as scheduled on Jan. 4.

Most other primary schools in England are still scheduled to open on Monday. High school reopenings have already been delayed for millions of students, with exam-year pupils scheduled to return on Jan. 11 and others a week later.

With many British hospitals at or near capacity, there are growing concerns over how the already stretched National Health Service will cope with an expected rise in people seeking treatment after getting infected over the holidays. Field hospitals are getting outfitted again to take in patients.

On the inoculations front, Britain began vaccinating people over 80 and health care workers on Dec. 8 with the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine. Last week, the government approved another vaccine made by Oxford University and pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca that is cheaper and easier to use.

The U.K. plans to ramp up vaccinations on Monday using 530,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and has set a goal of vaccinating 2 million people a week as soon as possible.

The Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath in southern England was one of the first to get the newly approved vaccine on Saturday.

Dr. George Findlay, the trust's chief medical officer, said the newly approved vaccine is "much easier" to administer than the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which needs to be stored at temperatures around minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 Fahrenheit).

More than a million people in the U.K. have already received their first jab of the Pfizer vaccine.

In a shift from practices in the U.S., Britain plans to give people second doses of both vaccines within 12 weeks of their first shot rather than within 21 days, to accelerate immunizations across as many people as quickly as possible.

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

11.

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 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."

The White House had no immediate comment and referred to a statement issued in December by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo after Iran's parliament passed a bill on increasing uranium enrichment. Pompeo condemned the law as "nothing more than the regime's latest ploy to use its nuclear program to try to intimidate the international community."

A spokesman for President-elect Joe Biden's transition team declined to comment.

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 President-elect 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.

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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.

McConnell, Pelosi homes vandalized after \$2,000 relief fails

By TIMOTHY D. EASLEY and TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Vandals lashed out at the leaders of the U.S. House and Senate over the holiday weekend, blighting their homes with graffiti and in one case a pig's head as Congress failed to approve an increase in the amount of money being sent to individuals to help cope with the coronavirus pandemic.

Spray paint on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's door in Kentucky on Saturday read, "WERES MY MONEY." "MITCH KILLS THE POOR" was scrawled over a window. A profanity directed at the Republican senator was painted under the mailbox.

At House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's home in San Francisco, someone spray-painted graffiti and left a pig's head and fake blood on New Year's Day, police said. The vandalism was reported around 2 a.m. Friday, a police statement said, and a special investigations unit is trying to determine who did it.

KGO-TV reported that graffiti found on the garage door of the Democratic leader's home included the phrases "\$2K," "Cancel rent!" and "We want everything," apparently referencing Democratic lawmakers' failed efforts to increase the coronavirus relief checks from \$600 to \$2000.

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The news station says security cameras surround the three-story brick home in the tony Pacific Heights neighborhood.

McConnell released a statement on Saturday condemning the vandalism at his home in Louisville.

"I've spent my career fighting for the First Amendment and defending peaceful protest," he stated. "I appreciate every Kentuckian who has engaged in the democratic process whether they agree with me or not. This is different. Vandalism and the politics of fear have no place in our society."

McConnell said he and his wife are not intimidated by the vandalism. "We just hope our neighbors in Louisville aren't too inconvenienced by this radical tantrum."

Louisville police are investigating the incident at McConnell's home, which occurred around 5 a.m. Saturday. There currently are no suspects, police spokesperson Dwight Mitchell said in an email.

On New Year's Day, Senate Republicans refused to allow debate over a bill to increase the amount of COVID-19 relief. The increase, supported by President Donald Trump, passed the Democratic-led House but was blocked by McConnell.

The government has begun sending out the smaller payments to millions of Americans. The \$600 payment is going to individuals with incomes up to \$75,000. Congress approved the payment in late December.

Loller reported from Nashville, Tennessee.

Fast rollout of virus vaccine trials reveals tribal distrust

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The news came during a hopeful time on the largest Native American reservation.

Daily coronavirus cases were in the single digits, down from a springtime peak of 238 that made the Navajo Nation a U.S. hot spot. The tribe, wanting to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine would be effective for its people, said it would welcome Pfizer clinical trials on its reservation spanning Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Right away, tribal members accused their government of allowing them to be guinea pigs, pointing to painful times in the past when Native Americans didn't consent to medical testing or weren't fully informed about procedures.

A Navajo Nation review board gave the study quicker approval than normal after researchers with Johns Hopkins University's Center for American Indian Health made the case for diversity. Without Native volunteers, how would they know if tribal members responded to vaccines the same as others?

"Unfortunately, Native Americans have effectively been denied the opportunity to participate in these clinical trials because almost all of the study sites are in large, urban areas that have not done effective outreach to Native Americans," said Dr. Laura Hammitt of Johns Hopkins.

About 460 Native Americans participated in the trials for the vaccine by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, including Navajos. The enrollment reflects a growing understanding of the role that people of color play in vaccine development and the push to rapidly deploy it to curb infections among populations that have been disproportionately affected by the virus.

Yet, few of the country's 574 federally recognized tribes have signed on for the studies, a hesitation often rooted in suspicion and distrust. Many tribes also require several layers of approval for clinical trials, a challenge researchers aren't always willing to overcome and don't face in the states.

While vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna Inc. roll out across Indian Country, others are being studied.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe plan to participate in a vaccine trial from another company, Novavax Inc. A Cheyenne River Sioux researcher plans to enroll Native Americans and others in South Dakota in the Novavax trial and another by Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline.

On the Navajo Nation, Arvena Peshlakai, her husband, Melvin, and their daughter Quortnii volunteered for the Pfizer trials.

Arvena Peshlakai said the rumors were rampant: Navajos would be injected with the virus, and researchers would use plasma from people who got COVID-19.

She was assured that wasn't happening and let the words of her parents and grandparents guide her:

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Don't let our struggles be your struggles, begin with our triumphs.

"What else am I supposed to do? Just sit back and say, 'No, I don't trust them' and not try something new to see if we can find a breakthrough?" Peshlakai said. "We have to do something, we can't just sit by and wait and hope and pray."

She overcame her fear of needles to get the doses and keeps track of her well-being daily on an app. As trial participants, the family can get the vaccine if they initially received a placebo.

The Pfizer trials among the Navajo and White Mountain Apache tribes enrolled 275 people, about 80% of them Native American, Hammitt said. It wasn't as many as researchers had hoped for, but she said it's enough to compare immune and antibody responses in Native patients to others.

Vaccine trials nationwide have been moving quickly, which doesn't always align with tribal guidelines on considering research proposals.

"It must be done with respect for tribal sovereignty and knowing that each individual has truly been given informed consent," said Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute in Seattle.

It helped that Johns Hopkins has a decadeslong history with the Navajos and Apaches, including other clinical trials. Hammitt said the Navajo Human Research Review Board was receptive to a quick review of the vaccine trials because of the devastating impact of the pandemic.

In South Dakota, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribal health committee initially pushed back on Dr. Jeffrey Henderson's proposal for trials of the Novavax vaccine. Henderson, a tribal member, was sent into the community to gauge support.

He expects to get approval from a newly seated tribal council but for now, plans to set up a mobile unit outside the reservation.

"We refuse to do this type of research or any research within the boundaries of a tribe without having explicit approval from the tribe," Henderson said.

In Washington state, the Nooksack tribe is set to begin enrolling volunteers in the Novavax trials Monday, said Dr. Frank James, the tribe's health officer.

"I expect a slow start to it, and we have to get a few brave people who are comfortable with it and then people to follow," he said.

The nearby Lummi Nation is moving forward with a three-part review and approval process for the Novavax trials.

Initial hesitation among the tribe stemmed from a researcher who took photos of Lummi children years ago to develop a tool to diagnose fetal alcohol syndrome but didn't offer any ways to address it, said Dr. Dakotah Lane, executive medical director of the Lummi Tribal Health Clinic.

"I had already known and was aware of certainly some distrust with any kind of research within our community," Lane said. "But I also knew the only way out of this pandemic was with access to vaccines."

Other stories about the sterilization of Native American women, noted in a 1976 federal report, and military testing of radioactive iodine on Alaska Natives have bred distrust.

The Havasupai Tribe also settled a lawsuit a decade ago that accused Arizona State University scientists of misusing blood samples meant for diabetes research to study schizophrenia, inbreeding and ancient population migration without the tribe's permission.

That case came to mind when Annette Brown, a Navajo woman, heard about her tribe's willingness to participate in COVID-19 vaccine trials.

"There's this historical distrust when it comes to any type of experimenting," she said. "It's just experience, I don't know that there are many families out there who haven't been touched by some sort of experimentation (or) biological attacks on tribal communities."

Brown has mixed feelings because she previously participated in a vaccine trial with Johns Hopkins.

It was related to research that determined the first generation of vaccines for bacterial meningitis was less effective among Navajo and Apache children 6 months and younger, Hammitt said. The rate of the disease used to be five to 10 times higher among those children than the general population.

Researchers and doctors in Native American communities also have found that standard doses for medi-

cations like blood thinners weren't always the best fit for tribal members.

For Marcia O'Leary, helping with a study that indirectly discovered HPV vaccines don't protect against a strain that's a leading cause of cancer among Native American women in the Great Plains shows the importance of having more Native researchers and being involved in clinical trials.

"We can't wait for this to trickle down," said O'Leary, director of Missouri Breaks, a small Native American-owned research group on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation. "It seems like in Indian Country, we keep chasing the ball of health and we never get ahead of it."

Fonseca is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/FonsecaAP>.

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 Maeen 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.

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

Houthi officials have denied being behind the attack, but sought to blame unspecified groups in the Saudi-led coalition. The rebel leaders have not offered any evidence nor answered requests for comment.

The Houthis have carried out similar attacks in the past. In 2015, former Yemeni Prime Minister Khaled Bahah and members of his Cabinet survived a missile attack, blamed on the Houthis, that struck an Aden hotel used by the government. Last year, the Houthis fired a missile at a military parade of a militia loyal to the UAE at a base in Aden, killing dozens.

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.

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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.

Safety issues mount as skiers hit backcountry in pandemic

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — On March 14, Colorado's governor issued an executive order shutting down ski resorts across the state. The coronavirus had arrived and was spreading rapidly in small mountain communities that were attracting hordes of spring break revelers.

The next day, with chairlifts and gondolas hanging idly overhead, a large group converged on Aspen Mountain, passed a closure sign and "skinned" up the slopes under their own power to get in a few hard-earned turns.

In the following weeks, skiers and snowboarders with nowhere else to go were increasingly lured by the untouched powder of the backcountry. In the nine weeks after resorts closed, 32 people were caught in avalanches, including two who were killed, according to the Colorado Avalanche Information Center. During the previous four months, 65 people were swept up in slides.

Now, with another ski season getting underway, avalanche forecasters and search-and-rescue groups are concerned that large numbers of skiers and snowboarders will again turn to the backcountry to avoid crowds and reservation systems at resorts.

"Pretty much everybody's worried about that," said Ethan Greene, director of the avalanche center, which has already recorded four backcountry skier deaths in Colorado this winter. "A lot of that is because of what we saw in the spring and then definitely what search-and-rescue saw over the summer, which was a dramatic increase in search-and-rescue calls."

The situation was similar in neighboring Utah, where avalanche forecasters recorded more than 100 human-triggered slides across the state from mid-March through the end of April, including 50 during one 48-hour period, according to Nikki Champion with the Utah Avalanche Center.

"(Backcountry) users increased tenfold during April and COVID in general. ... We've had a lot of new users traveling with techniques that kind of suggested that they haven't spent a lot of time in the backcountry," Champion said during a virtual forum in October that was organized by the trade association Snowsports Industries America.

In August and September, sales of alpine touring equipment — including bindings, boots and skis — and backcountry accessories such as avalanche shovels, beacons, probes and skins increased 46% compared to the same period in 2019, according to Snowsports Industries America and The NDP Group, a large market research company.

Sales of backcountry split boards — snowboards that separate into halves resembling skis and can be equipped with climbing skins — increased 191%, and snowshoe sales were up 221%, according to the study. A similar increase was seen in Nordic equipment, which includes cross-country skis, boots, bindings and poles.

"We've definitely seen an uptick in backcountry gear and that includes everything — beacons, shovels, probes, airbag systems," said Christopher Poepping, who works at White Pine Touring in Park City, Utah.

He said the outdoor retailer quickly sold out of its remaining backcountry gear when resorts closed last spring. That spike has continued into the fall and winter months, and the shop has at least doubled what