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Games Scores from Last Night

Girls Varsity:
Groton Area 38, Aberdeen Christian 27
Girls Junior Varsity:
Groton Area 51, Aberdeen Christian 12



Upcoming Schedule

Thursday, Jan. 14

5 p.m.: Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli with C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and then varsity

Friday, Jan. 15

6 p.m.: Girls Basketball at Roncalli with JV game followed by varsity

Saturday, Jan. 16

10 a.m.: Wrestling at Potter County Invitational (Gettysburg)

Monday, Jan. 18

5:30 p.m.: Junior High Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian with 7th grade at 5:30 p.m. followed by 8th grade at 6:30

6:30 p.m.: Girls Basketball at Langford Area with JV followed by Varsity



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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2021 State of the State (as prepared)

By Governor Kristi Noem

January 12, 2021

Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, Chief Justice Jensen, Justices of the Supreme Court, constitutional officers, and fellow South Dakotans, it is my privilege to stand before you today to discuss the state of our state.

The year 2020 was one for the history books. We faced some incredible challenges in South Dakota. We met this adversity head on. And the PEOPLE of South Dakota deserve all the credit.

People struggled, they lost loved ones, and their livelihoods were threatened. But they never lost hope. They were resilient.

That fortitude enabled us to emerge from 2020 stronger, as individuals and as a state.

Last year, a good portion of this speech was dedicated to explaining why South Dakota is the perfect place to work or run a business.

Our people – their work ethic and their values – are second to none.

All of us in this room, who work for them, respect the rights of our people to live their lives.

We don't have a corporate income tax. There is no business inventory tax.

We have no personal income tax. We also do not have a personal property tax or an inheritance tax.

The taxes that we do have to fund state government are stable and predictable. In short, for those who might be worried about tax increases, you do not need to be.

The government in South Dakota lives within its means. We balance our budget without accounting gimmicks or tricks.

We proudly hold a triple-A credit rating, and our state pension plan is fully funded.

Our state believes in smart regulation. We roll out the red carpet, and cut up the red tape.

We are the pheasant capital of the world. And our state parks and outdoor recreational opportunities are unmatched.

For those who have spent the last nine months shut down or locked up in other states, South Dakota is open. We have stayed open the entire time. And that's how we will operate for as long as I am Governor.

One of my chief priorities as Governor is to grow South Dakota. That is why you hear me inviting those who cherish and value our way of life to come join us. South Dakota is the perfect place to raise your family, grow your business, and live your life as you see fit.

My administration continues to do everything in its power to help in this effort.

This last year, we assisted with projects that will result in more than \$2.8 billion in capital investment across South Dakota – projects ranging from agriculture to manufacturing to technology. We announced that Amazon is building a \$200 million distribution center in Sioux Falls. But it wasn't just our largest community that saw success. Towns like Fort Pierre, Belle Fourche, Watertown, Rapid City, Parker, and Lead all saw companies growing in their communities.

In total, the projects we have worked on over the past year are expected to result in more than 2,100 new jobs in the state of South Dakota. And just yesterday, we announced the largest project in the history of the Governor's Office of Economic Development: a \$500 million investment from Schwan's, which will bring 600 full-time jobs to Sioux Falls. CJ Foods and Schwan's are building a world-class facility, the most high-tech facility of its kind in the world. That's a great start to 2021 for our state.

This economic development provides opportunities for our families and our communities to grow. It allows our kids to start and develop their careers here. When they start their families, that will mean they are closer to home – to Mom, Dad, grandparents, and extended family. Strong families have always been the backbone of South Dakota.

President Reagan once said: "Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation for our freedoms."

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Today, more than ever, it is important we work to strengthen families. I am committed to being a family-first governor – fighting to strengthen the family unit and preserve the values South Dakotans have long embraced.

Today, I am joined by two families that will help explain one of my priorities this session: the Fite and the Duffy families.

Aaron and Tami Fite live in Platte, South Dakota, with their four children.

Sean and Rachel Duffy live in Wisconsin. They have 9 children. And you might remember that Sean served with me while I was in Congress.

I have known both families for years. The reason I asked them to join us today is to highlight two of their children.

Cody Fite and Valentina Duffy both have Down syndrome. God blessed these beautiful children with an additional chromosome. Their gorgeous smiles, distinct personalities, and that vibrancy you see before you are all gifts from God. For those who have had the privilege of knowing someone with Down syndrome, you know that person ends up being a gift to all of us.

I share this because even today, in 2021, some European countries, like Iceland and Denmark, are on pace to virtually eliminate children with Down syndrome. They do this one way and one way only: through abortion. As actress Patricia Heaton points out, Iceland is simply killing everyone that has it.

As South Dakotans, frankly, as human beings, we should all be appalled by this. We are better than that.

The Declaration of Independence summarizes what we all know in our hearts to be true. God created each of us and endowed all of us with the right to life. This is true for everyone, including those with an extra chromosome.

I look forward to the day when the Supreme Court recognizes that all preborn children inherently possess this right to life, too. Until that time comes, I am asking the South Dakota legislature to pass a law that bans the abortion of a preborn child, just because that child is diagnosed with Down syndrome.

Let's make South Dakota a symbol of hope, justice, and love for children like Cody and Valentina. With the help of several pro-life groups across the state, my team will present legislation for your consideration and swift passage.

Aaron and Tami, Sean and Rachel would you and your families please stand. Thank you for being here. And thank you for being a voice for so many who can't speak for themselves.

Protecting children begins in the womb, but children of all ages need a loving family to care for and support them throughout their lives. In my first state of the state, I stood at this podium and asked people to open their hearts and homes to foster children. I asked you to consider giving a child a forever home. In FY 2020, we licensed a 5-year high of 238 new foster homes.

I want to commend these families that have opened their hearts and homes to these children. Let me explain why this work is important.

Oftentimes, these kids just need a bridge. They just need someone to believe in them.

It's important to note there are a lot of people inside and outside government providing that bridge. Today, I want to recognize a very special friend of mine. Jack, where are you? Would you please stand.

Jack Brewer, for those who might not know him, is a former NFL safety. Today, he is an ordained minister and the executive director of the Jack Brewer Foundation. He runs inner-city youth programs and teaches in prisons all across America. He is an advocate for strong families and highlights the significance of having a father in every home.

Jack is in South Dakota this week to join Bryon on a couple of visits to the men's and women's prisons, as well as the McCrossan Boys Ranch in Sioux Falls. Jack, thank you for your advocacy work and all that you do here and around the globe. We all welcome you to South Dakota. Would you all join me in rec-

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ognizing Jack?

As I outlined in my Budget Address, I believe we must create an environment where families are not forced to choose between the modern economy on the one hand and life in their hometown on the other. That's why I am proposing that we invest to finish connecting the state with broadband.

Even the most remote communities across our state should be provided the tools they need to be connected. Thriving communities from border to border will yield much better results for our state and our families, rather than concentrated growth in just two cities.

There are still 135,000 South Dakotans without high-speed broadband access that meets the needs of the 21st Century. A state investment, coupled with industry funding and federal grants, is enough to get the job done.

Success would mean our rural communities would have the opportunity to grow, and families would have the chance to stay together.

Take for example the story of Jeff O'Dell. Jeff works for one of the largest computer network infrastructure companies in the world. He grew up in Lemmon, South Dakota.

He went to junior high and high school in Aberdeen. After attending one year of college at the School of Mines, Jeff made his way west. For twenty years, Jeff lived in sunny, southern California. But every summer for the last 10 years, he would come back to South Dakota. At first, his trips were a week or two at a time. Then, they got longer.

In April of 2019, Jeff started building a home in Lemmon. When COVID hit, thanks to broadband access, Jeff was able to move to Lemmon full-time and work remotely. Most of his work days are spent on video conference calls. But he says he doesn't mind it because he is surrounded by open spaces, fresh air, and great people. His cousins and their kids live in Lemmon. And his folks and sister are just three hours away in Aberdeen with another sister in Bismarck.

There's also a woman named Stacey. Every day, she enjoys a view of the Missouri River and – with her dog by her side – works remotely. According to Stacey, having a strong broadband connection means she can work where she wants to live, instead of having to live where she works.

Stories like Jeff and Stacey's are very common in South Dakota as of late. People with big city salaries are moving to small-town South Dakota. They enjoy the lower cost of living and end up spending their money in our communities. They believe in the freedom that South Dakota has to offer.

My hope is that we can work together to get our state connected, so we can set up this generation and the next for success, no matter where they want to live.

Speaking of where people want to live, residential home sales are up all across the state. And home construction in South Dakota is especially strong. New home construction in South Dakota is more than one-and-a-half times greater than the national average. And over the past 10 months, construction employment in South Dakota is up 10% compared to a year ago.

As I told you all last month, we're in a much stronger financial position than other states across the country. States that shut down their economies are now looking at tax increases or drastic spending cuts to make ends meet.

We made different choices than virtually any other state over the past year. To be fair, I never once thought the decisions we were making in South Dakota during the pandemic would be unique. But other states based a lot of their decisions on fear and emotion, and now they're seeing the results of that. In South Dakota, we do not make policy out of fear. We prepare for the worst but always remain optimistic that the best is yet to come.

We continue to get good news about South Dakota's revenue situation. Ongoing general fund revenues are up tens of millions of dollars through December, compared to last fiscal year.

A similar story can be found in the agriculture industry. The blizzards and flooding of 2019 prevented nearly 4 million of our 19 million acres from being planted. The result was a 24% decrease in corn production and 36% loss in soybeans from 2018.

But USDA is forecasting that corn production will grow by 31% from last year with yields estimated to increase to record highs. Soybeans also had a banner year, with overall production forecast to grow by 53%.

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This is very good news, because our agricultural industry is critically important. Our farmers and producers not only feed our families, but also serve as a catalyst for our economy.

In July, the reforms we made to standardize and streamline the permitting process took effect. The result is a more competitive and attractive environment for ag businesses. To date, I am pleased to report we had 23 new ag projects resulting in more than 320 new jobs across the state.

But even with all this good news, we need to continue to bolster our largest industry.

That's why the ag investments I proposed in my budget address are so crucial. The meat processing grants, the investment in the Dakota Events Complex, the creation of a program to give farmers more opportunity to market South Dakota meat products, and the merger of the Departments of Agriculture and DENR too – each of these items will help reinvigorate our number one industry – and all the families it serves -- for many years to come.

As we continue to look toward the year ahead, I am excited to report a light at the end of the tunnel with regard to our fight against COVID-19. South Dakota is leading the nation in disbursing the COVID vaccine. In just over a month, tens of thousands of people across the state have received their first dose. This is a testament to the incredible work the team at the Department of Health and all our medical professionals are doing.

We shouldn't be surprised. Our medical professionals stepped up in all kinds of unforeseen ways in 2020, and their stories deserve to be told.

Take for example what has happened the last month or so in Wagner. Just before Christmas, the CEO of Wagner Community Memorial Hospital shared some really outstanding news about the work his team has been doing. They used an out-patient, innovative COVID-19 therapy to treat patients, including 30 residents in the nursing home. In total, more than 80 patients ranging in age from 50 to 104 have received this treatment without having to take up hospital beds. 78 patients have recovered.

A similar story has taken place here in Pierre. Dr. Darrell Plumage normally works at the clinic here in town. But when COVID hit, he and his team turned their attention away from the clinic to acute COVID care. That included the Avantara Pierre facility.

Every single resident in the Avantara facility is considered high-risk. Of the 53 residents, 52 tested positive for the virus, after a staffer unknowingly brought it into the facility. But like so many other long-term care facilities, the residents weren't the only issue – half the staff tested positive as well.

At times, Dr. Plumage and his team ended up working around the clock. During one stretch, some staff worked 12-hour days for 22 days straight.

Despite being understaffed and overworked, this team was determined to handle the acute care needs of these residents. Admitting 52 people to the hospital in Pierre would have overwhelmed that facility, so Dr. Plumage and his team treated them at Avantara. The expectation was that half the residents would not survive. That number ended up being far less because of the work of Dr. Plumage and his team. 70% of the Avantara residents recovered from the virus.

These stories are not unique to Pierre and Wagner. What these medical professionals have done over the last 9 months to battle this virus is nothing short of remarkable.

With us today are the Wagner hospital CEO – Bryan Slaba, Dr. Plumage, and some of the team members that made this possible. Would you all please stand so that we can recognize your efforts and all the efforts of our health care professionals all across the state.

What you did, what your teams did, and what all the medical professionals across the state have done deserve recognition. Thank you.

We also made sure that our approach to caring for South Dakotans was holistic – focusing on physical wellbeing, but also mental health.

In February 2020, the Department of Health worked with several other groups to focus on suicide prevention this year. Our 605 Strong initiative connected South Dakotans fighting mental health issues with trained crisis counselors. This initiative proved critical in the face of a global pandemic. In 2020, we have seen suicides decline.

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Another tool we greatly expanded access to is telehealth. Since March, people have used tech services like these more than 70,000 times in South Dakota's Medicaid program alone. This year, I'm going to ask that you support legislation to make these flexibilities permanent. In 2021, we should build on telehealth advancements and continue to find ways to remove government red tape in health care.

Lastly on healthcare, I want to provide an update on the state's work to curtail substance abuse. We know that drug and alcohol abuse can destroy a family. And even though this kind of challenge can happen anywhere, there are key problems that must be addressed in our tribal communities.

Earlier this year, the third annual state tribal meth summit was held virtually in partnership with the Departments of Tribal Relations and Social Services. These summits are a bedrock in bringing state and tribal healthcare providers and leaders together. The state stands ready to work with our tribes and all South Dakota communities to combat substance abuse.

As we look to improve the overall health and wellbeing of every South Dakotan, recreation is a key part of that conversation.

This last year, social distancing created a great opportunity for South Dakotans to get outside. Nature and the outdoors provided our families an escape from the pandemic. Because South Dakota remained open and didn't lock down, more Americans from out of state came to enjoy our natural spaces too.

Custer State Park surpassed 2 million visits this year for the first time ever.

We saw increases in youth and first-time hunters. We also sold a record number of licenses for youth-mentored hunting. We saw huge increases in youth combo licenses as well as resident and nonresident fishing licenses.

Getting our youth to put down the Xbox and pick up the tackle box has been a priority of mine for many years. In March, a young woman named Savannah Hendricks, a junior high student from Vivian had a great idea.

With the goal of getting out in the field more with her family, Savannah created a petition urging the Game, Fish, and Parks Commission to extend the youth pheasant season from five to nine days. At the May meeting, the Commission adopted Savannah's proposal. It is my hope that more young people will get involved – like Savannah did – finding new ways to secure South Dakota's outdoor heritage for the next generation.

Savannah is here with us today. Would you please stand? It is my hope that her story will serve as an example to all South Dakotans to get involved in policymaking.

We are going to continue finding ways to create more hunting and fishing opportunities in our state for those young and old. This year, I'm asking the legislature to adopt simpler licensure requirements for kids under the age of 18. The goal is to get more people engaged at an early age, so they continue those experiences long into their adulthood.

This is one of the reasons why I have so heavily emphasized the importance of the Bounty Program. Over the last two years, nearly 4,300 people participated in the nest predator bounty program, many being youth and first-time trappers. They have removed roughly 81,000 nest predators – a great thing for our pheasant numbers. And we are just getting started.

Anecdotally, everything we have heard this year is that our pheasant numbers are through the roof. Long-time hunters say they have never seen as many roosters as they did this year.

Hunters are not the only people who came to our state this year. As I mentioned, this was a challenging year for tourism, but South Dakota has outperformed almost every other state in the country in this category.

Our visitor inquiries have skyrocketed, and one thing is clear: Folks from all across the country want to visit South Dakota.

In 2021, we are going to build on this momentum and ensure that we continue to grow. Our tourism department will be working on a new strategic plan to guide its overall efforts for the next several years to take advantage of the huge amount of interest we've received.

This includes enhancing our promotion of the state in new markets and especially targeting key demographics that have an interest in our parks, history, culture, and great outdoors. Given that three of our

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state's rodeos were recently chosen as the very best in the country by the NFR, we will also be improving our facilities for hosting equestrian and rodeo events. We know that our state has the potential to be the best place in the country for some of these events, and we want to capitalize on these opportunities in the years ahead.

This complements the department's ongoing work with Agritourism and the First Gentlemen's small-town initiative to get visitors off the beaten path and experience all that South Dakota has to offer.

Our tourism department continues to make steady progress working with tribal partners around the state to lay the groundwork to enhance tribal tourism on our reservations.

Every visitor we welcome to our state has an impact that resonates. Their visits help support good jobs and lifelong careers for South Dakotans. Their spending benefits our small businesses. And the tax revenue they generate goes right back into our communities and helps make this state the best place to live in America.

One of the main reasons our tourism numbers have been so strong this year is the resilience of our people and small businesses.

The South Dakotans who run these small businesses inspire all of us. And our businesses will have a better chance of success if South Dakota's students have excellent educational opportunities.

Everyone in this room knows that good education starts in the home. It starts with strong parents. We have decades of research to show that parents are the most critical influence on a child's success in the classroom. COVID-19 underscored just how involved parents need to be in their children's day-to-day education. It's our duty to find innovative solutions that empower parents to set their children up for success.

This includes improving the civic education of our kids. Students should be taught our nation's history and all that makes America unique. They should see first-hand the importance of civic engagement. And they should have robust discussions in the classroom so they can develop critical thinking skills.

Our young people need more experience engaging with elected officials and practicing the art of debate. It is also our responsibility to show them how government works.

Here's how:

I have tasked my administration with creating instructional materials and classroom resources on America's founding, our nation's history, and the state's history. We must also do a better job educating teachers on these three subjects. Through all of this, our common mission and key objective needs to be explaining why the United States of America is the most special nation in the history of the world.

With this knowledge as a foundational building block, every South Dakotan can then chart their own path in the future. Our technical colleges provide them one such excellent opportunity.

South Dakota's technical colleges have received national awards, attention, and funding for the high-quality programs they offer in key, growing industries. All four of our tech schools are in the top 4% of the country for upward mobility. Students who graduate from our colleges are fully equipped for high-demand, technical careers the moment they receive their diplomas.

A young woman named Vanessa is a student in the Licensed Practical Nursing Program at Southeast Technical College. She is a first-generation college student, and an incredibly hard worker. Vanessa is set to graduate this spring and already has a job lined up in our state.

Our technical colleges are full of stories like Vanessa's. And South Dakota is investing in our students to expand these opportunities moving forward.

Last week, we made an exciting announcement regarding the future of the Build Dakota Scholarship. Together over the next 5 years, we will invest approximately \$40 million to match students with high-demand career opportunities.

We also announced the creation of the PREMIER Scholarship, a needs-based scholarship endowment for our state. Denny and PREMIER have already delivered a check for \$50 million, and have pledged another \$50 million going forward. I am asking you to allocate \$50 million in one-time money to match this transformational gift.

The PREMIER Scholarship requires that students live and work in South Dakota for three years after graduation. Otherwise, the scholarship turns into a loan. The endowment for this critical scholarship fund

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needs \$200 million to be self-sustaining into the future. Denny and PREMIER are getting us halfway there. Your action will get the fund to \$150 million dollars. Together, let's get it done.

In partnership with the Department of Labor, the technical college system also launched the South Dakota UpSkill program this fall. This program supports workers dislocated by COVID-19. UpSkill consists of 22 online certificate programs in high-demand fields, including business, healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing. More than 100 individuals are taking advantage of this assistance.

Workforce Development remains a top concern for South Dakota companies. Some businesses are tackling this concern by building their own Registered Apprenticeship training programs. In fact, 44 organizations have built Registered Apprenticeship programs since 2018. More than 700 South Dakotans are improving their skills through one of these programs.

For example, in Huron the Executive Director of Independent Health Solutions built a Home Health Aide Registered Apprenticeship program. This structured training and mentorship improved team morale and confidence. It led to less than 1% turnover, allowing for a 20% increase in the number of Home Health Aides on staff.

While Registered Apprenticeships are just one solution to workforce development, it lays a strong foundation for our future workforce and our state economy.

I want to now turn to a subject that we all hold dear to our hearts: our veterans and the military.

This year, South Dakota was ranked the #1 state in America for veterans to live and work.

We have expanded the tuition program for veterans to include technical colleges. We have increased property tax exemptions for veterans who have disabilities. We have a tax exemption for paraplegic and amputee veterans. We have increased the number of beds at the Hot Springs Veterans Home so that we can care for more veterans. We also broke ground on the first ever State Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls.

These veterans are special members of our state and are like family to so many in their communities. I'd like to highlight a story to illustrate this point.

Gerri Opsal (Op-sawl) is a veteran who served our country in the United States Air Force. Today, she is the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Tribal Veterans Service Officer and works with the Department of Veteran Affairs. It was her love of country that guided her to continue down the path of serving our heroes.

Gerri has a sincere drive and passion to serve veterans. This year, Gerri was awarded the South Dakota Department of Veteran Affairs Outreach Officer of the Year Award.

Gerri is with us today. Would you please join me in thanking her for her service to our nation and all the veterans across our state?

Another group of men and women who deserve our recognition are the members of the South Dakota National Guard. The Guard's response to the pandemic is now the longest-sustained, state-supported mission in the history of the Guard. Our Soldiers and Airmen have provided COVID-19 support since March.

Our Guard's support for federal commitments also continued in 2020. South Dakota committed roughly 490 Soldiers and Airmen from five units to stateside missions or overseas contingency operations.

But there is one Battalion and their commander who I would like to single out today.

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Moore commanded the Guard's 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. Under his command, and for the second time in three years, the Pierre-based 152nd was recognized as the most outstanding Army National Guard battalion in America.

On behalf of the unit, Lieutenant Colonel Dave Moore says "it is an incredible honor to receive these awards. And that their selection is a testament to the professionalism and dedication of all the 152nd soldiers and a validation of all the hard work they put in."

Collectively, the 152nd has received 13 Bronze Stars; 50 Army Accommodation Medals; 20 Army Achievement Medals; and 67 Combat Action Badges.

Would you all please join me in recognizing Lt. Col. Moore, the 152nd unit, and the entire South Dakota National Guard for their commitment to service, sacrifice, and this great state.

The folks serving at Ellsworth Air Force Base also deserve our recognition. We are joined today by Airman First Class Emily Campos. Emily was born and raised in Box Elder. She and her six siblings were raised

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by a single working mom. After graduating from Black Hills State, Emily joined the Air Force and became a radiology tech. She was named Distinguished Graduate of her class. She then completed specialized radiology training at the Air Force Academy, where she was recognized by the 10th Surgical Squadron Commander for her academic achievements.

Airman Campos relocated to Ellsworth Air Force Base in August. In her role, she serves the base's 17,000 Active Duty military personnel, military dependents, and retiree beneficiary population. She also volunteered to help with the base's COVID response training. Her efforts directly contributed to the protection of military personnel in support of two Bomber Task Force missions to the Indo-Pacific Theater.

Emily would you please stand, so we can recognize all your efforts and the efforts of your fellow airmen and airwomen? Our state is incredibly grateful for your work and your service to our nation.

The work that Emily and all those that serve at Ellsworth Airforce Base is so crucial to our national defense. This year in my budget, I asked you to fund the Liberty Wellness Center project. I hope that you will support it for Ellsworth and for the surrounding community.

Last year, we started the Governor's heroism award to honor heroes who risk their lives to save the life of another. And I'd like to talk to you about this year's honoree.

Joining us today is also the family of Chief Deputy Lee Weber of the Hughes County Sheriff's Department.

Chief Deputy Weber had served the department since 2015. Before that, he enlisted in the U.S. Army soon after 9/11 and completed two tours in the Middle East in service to our great country. He was active in the Army National Guard and loved hunting and fishing, watching football, and spending time with his wife, Wendy, and their six children, whom he loved deeply.

This past July 3rd, Lee was boating with his family on the Missouri River. His son fell out of the boat with no life vest on. Without hesitation, Lee dove into the water to save his son. While he was able to get his son to safety, Lee was not able to save himself. He died a hero that day.

We grieve the loss of this great man, and we honor Lee for his courage, his sacrifice and his selfless commitment to you and your family. Wendy, I want to extend my prayers and condolences to you and to your entire family.

Would you and your family please stand? Today, given his selfless courage and sacrifice, I am awarding the Governor's Award for Heroism to your husband, Chief Deputy Lee Weber.

Strengthening families, no matter what they look like, is a key element to every decision I make as governor, and I am committed to keeping family at the center of my policy decisions. The family is the cradle of civil society. Strong families create strong communities. And strong communities will produce the strongest state in the nation.

This session, I hope you all will join me in standing up for families.

Last year, we found so many ways to work together to maintain the freedoms of our people, promote our outdoor heritage, and rein in the endless expansion of government into our daily lives. This year, it is my hope that we will find even more opportunities to work together – advancing common sense solutions to the problems we can solve on behalf of the people of this great state.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to thank my family. Bryon, Cassidy, Kyle Kennedy, and Booker – thank you for your support and your energy and your love. The reason I am in public service is to make South Dakota a better place. A better place to live, to do business, and to raise a family. One of the reasons I care so deeply about these issues is because I want these things for my family and every other family. I know that's why you serve as well.

I look forward to working with each of you and all of South Dakota's leaders to improve our state for today and for the next generation.

Thank you. And may God bless South Dakota.

#324 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today is not the worst or the best we've seen lately. We're up in all categories, but some of the increases aren't as large as we usually see coming off a weekend.

We're now up to 22,893,000 total cases in the pandemic, 1.1% over yesterday's total, which means, of course, we're going to notch another million tomorrow, probably blowing well past the mark. We'd been holding in a five-days-per-million pace for a while, but now appear to be settling in at four-days-per-million, which is horrifying territory. I expect that we will, at best, show no improvement for the rest of the month, and I fear we're going to do a great deal worse than that.

Hospitalizations are hanging right where they've been for a week or more; today, the reported number is 129,748. Arizona has been leading the states in new cases lately, and it's showing up now in hospitalization numbers; the state has a record number of ICU patients today. Their numbers have been climbing for a month, and they're well over the summer peaks they experienced.

We did set one record today, and it's the grim one: deaths. There were 4476 of them reported today, well over the previous record. We have now lost 380,699 Americans to this virus, 1.2% more than yesterday's total. It is unusual to see a percentage increase in deaths surpass the percentage increase in new cases. If this continued, it might mean we've turned some sort of corner; but I'm going to need a much stronger trend before I get all excited about that. I do not see any other signs we're anywhere near the peak here yet. Soon, I hope.

Today, some major changes in the vaccination program were announced by the federal task group on vaccination. First, the government will stop holding back half of the doses delivered by manufacturers; this is in the interest of getting more people vaccinated faster. This is the second of the two approaches to supply management we discussed just last night. With the speed with which manufacturing is ramping up, it looks like a fair bet that there will be a sufficient supply to get second doses out on schedule. New supplies will be prioritized for second doses so that there is not a delay between doses to individuals, but then whatever's left can be used for as many first doses as possible. According to an official from the task group, they will release "a steady cadence for second shots and new additional first shots. If anything were to happen, you would cover the second doses first and pause any additional first ones." This is extremely good news.

Secondly, recommendations have been changed to broaden the range of people who qualify for vaccines at this time, also in the interest of speeding up the process of getting them out. Expanding on the original priority groups, the new recommendation is that vaccine be offered to anyone 65 and over, as well as to those with preexisting conditions that place them at risk. Without having to fuss around so much about who meets qualifications and who doesn't, the actual administration process should be faster.

Third, the federal government is now going to begin offering technical assistance from the National Guard and FEMA to set up mass vaccination sites in order to speed administration. I hope this will alleviate the kinds of problems I described last night from one county and get vaccine used as quickly as it is delivered.

The last change is that allocations are going to be made according to the over-65 population in each state and the pace of administration, which means states that have administered higher proportions of their supply will receive higher amounts. I don't get the idea this is intended to be punitive, but rather to serve that same purpose of getting all the vaccine we can into people as quickly as we can. If a state has a huge pile of doses going unused because they haven't been able to get it out to people, then there's no point adding to that stockpile. And with the logistical support that appears to be forthcoming, this should keep the vaccines going out and into arms. What we really want is for every state to run out of vaccine before the next shipment comes; that would mean we are getting people protected just as quickly as we can.

This is all excellent, excellent progress. It should be a huge help in overcoming the abysmally bad start we've had. We need to get ahead of transmission, and as we discussed last night, vaccines are key in the effort.

I saw a Facebook discussion today about these vaccines. The original post asked people what they

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thought about getting it, and the comment stream was full of garbage about how dangerous it is and how we “don’t know” and how we should wait a while to see. I was asked to construct a reply to all of that, and I figure, having done the work, I might as well double-dip and share it here too. So here it is:

This is a dangerous disease. While it is more dangerous for older people and those with certain health conditions, it has killed people of all ages, including the healthy and fit, including children and infants, including people just like you and me. I’ve watched as people I know have died. I’ve watched friends, young and old, suffer, some of them spending weeks in intensive care. The reports of people with permanent heart and kidney and brain damage from this infection are heart-breaking. Your current state of good health is no guarantee you can’t get very sick and even die from Covid-19. So if there is a way to prevent getting sick, it is wise to seriously consider it.

So what about these vaccines? I’m not a vaccinologist, so here’s how I reached the conclusion they’re safe and effective: The full data from the clinical trials—45,000 participants—were released for infectious disease experts, epidemiologists, and vaccinologists to examine in detail. Not a one of those folks raised the least sign of alarm about anything in those data. The FDA’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee is a group of just such experts, none of whom is employed by the vaccine producers or the government; they’re completely independent. They went over these data with a fine-tooth comb, held an open meeting to discuss and took questions from the public, then recommended emergency use authorization (EUA) for both vaccines. The only dissent in these decisions was about whether to extend the age down to 16 for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine; everyone agreed unanimously that they should be authorized.

So what about all of those safety concerns? One at a time:

The mRNA in these vaccines is highly fragile; that’s why they have to be kept frozen and why the mRNA is suspended in lipid particles—to protect it long enough for it to do its work in your body. The chance it’s going to hang around long enough to have a long-term effect is zero; it was a trick to get it to last long enough to provoke the needed immune response. The mRNA cannot incorporate itself into your DNA because RNA is incompatible with DNA; they’re two different things. No RNA from any source can get into your DNA; things just don’t work that way.

There isn’t anything in these vaccines which could cause cancer. They contain mRNA which disappears quickly, too quickly to cause the kind of genetic change that could give you cancer. They also contain lipids, which are fats, the same kind of fats you eat in your dinner and that you make and deposit on your hips if you eat too much dinner. Nothing sinister there at all. We know a lot about carcinogenic (cancer-causing) substances, and there aren’t any of those in this vaccine. Going outside without sunscreen is a whole lot scarier in those terms than these vaccines are.

These vaccines have zero components in common with whooping cough vaccine or any other vaccine on the market, so any bad reaction you’ve had to any other vaccine is simply not relevant here.

It is also not scary that the vaccines were produced quickly. It could have been if dangerous shortcuts were taken, but as discussed above, there weren’t any of those. Basically, it turns out the mRNA vaccine platform is one that can be quickly produced. The developers of the Moderna vaccine had it designed two days after the viral genome was published back last January and were making it within days. They were also produced quickly because the government threw a ton of money at them and dispensed with the usual bureaucratic shuffle at each step of the paperwork. That means they didn’t shortcut the part where they examined the evidence and the data; they shortcut the part where the file sits on some dude’s desk for eight weeks before he opens it up. And they were produced quickly because the manufacturers took the unprecedented step of producing vaccine for distribution before it was even through clinical trials. That means they spent millions of dollars producing vaccine they didn’t even know was going to work; if the trials had ended badly, they’d have had to throw the whole lot of it away. They were able to do this because, once again, the government gave them money to do this. We risked millions and millions of taxpayer dollars (that’s your money and mine) on the off-chance this stuff was going to work; we just hit the jackpot when it didn’t just work, but worked brilliantly with no serious safety issues. For the record, there are millions more of our dollars getting spent right now doing the same thing with some other vaccines.

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Chances are they're not all going to work out, and some of that money will be wasted. I don't care. I call it money well spent, and I'm no richer than anyone else here, so I don't throw money around carelessly. Desperate times call for desperate measures. This was an expensive gamble that paid off. In spades.

As for allergic reactions, there have been some of those. Pretty much every vaccine is going to have some. They have been infrequent enough to be categorized as "rare events," somewhat more common than for flu vaccine, but far from common. People who have had these reactions have all been successfully treated. The recommendation is that everyone who's vaccinated wait at the vaccination site for 15 minutes in case a reaction occurs, and people with certain kinds of allergies are asked to wait 30 minutes. Vaccination sites all have the proper treatment on hand to treat such a reaction, just in case; most of them never open it up. The number of severe allergic events that have occurred, last time I saw, was less than a dozen, even though millions of vaccinations have been done.

That's the only serious side effect that's been seen. Everything else—some minor allergic rashes and such, pain at the injection site, muscle aches, mild fever, fatigue—has been more common, but has not been serious. Worst they've seen is folks having to take a day off work. These have mostly occurred after a second dose, so if I had a job where it's hard to get time off or I wouldn't get paid if I had to stay home, I'd arrange for the second dose the day before my regular day off, just in case. Most people don't feel bad enough to stay home, but that would be good insurance.

You cannot give Covid-19 to someone because of being recently vaccinated. The vaccines don't contain the virus at all, just a small piece of it. So there is zero chance this vaccine can cause infection or transmit it. Zero.

Last objection: "Why should I get this vaccine if it means I still need to wear a diaper on my face?" Because you will be protected from getting sick yourself. That seems like a big, big deal to me. The reason you still need the "diaper" is that we cannot yet be sure you are incapable of becoming asymptotically infected and passing the virus along to others. If you're not a complete jerk, this should matter to you.

The vaccines were not licensed (full approval) because a longer data stream is needed for that; but the EUAs were issued because the potential benefit was deemed to outweigh the potential harm. Every expert who examined these data from the clinical trials agreed on that—no dissents at all. And with a potentially fatal disease for which there is no specific therapy available running rampant around the country, killing thousands of us every single day, especially now that we have this new highly-transmissible variant on the loose, I'm going to hedge my bets and get the vaccine as soon as I can. In fact, once it's available for people my age, watch me body-block other people out of my path as I shove my way to the head of the line. I will take this vaccine because I want to help my country stop this virus and get back to normal; that's going to take a whole lot of us signing up. I will take this vaccine because it has been demonstrated to be safe and effective. I will take this vaccine because I want my life back. I want to see my family, I want to travel, I want to go out in public, and I want people to stop dying. There's been entirely too much of that. Make your own decision, but be sure you don't spread misinformation. Facts matter.

It seems we are incapable of learning the simplest lessons, even when our teacher is death. Looks as though folks were so delighted the University of Alabama won a national football championship that they decided to celebrate by spreading a plague. Around 5000 of them packed themselves into a public area known locally as "the Strip" in Tuscaloosa. They were partying like it's 2019, mostly without masks, drinking, and (of course) getting into the occasional fight. Cases are on the upswing in Alabama, showing a 30% increase in the past week alone. The city currently has just four intensive care rooms available, and the police force has only about 70% of its officers available because of infected or quarantined personnel. Seems like a great time for a superspreader event. Really, what could go wrong?

And speaking of superspreader events, it appears that, in addition to the actual insurrection, the lockdown in the US Capitol last Wednesday may also become one. Apparently, lawmakers were packed into some pretty tight spaces and some of them refused to wear masks while in these rooms, despite being asked to do so by their colleagues. These folks also mocked those who asked them to wear masks, which seems unnecessarily jerkish to me; if you've decided you don't care whether your colleague dies, you could, it seems to me, at least be courteous while you're at it. Predictably, three members of the House have been

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diagnosed since, pretty much right on schedule for an infection acquired—checks notes—five days prior. There could well be more cases for another week or so. Perfect. No word yet on Senators. Most of these folks either have not yet been vaccinated or are too recently vaccinated for that to offer much protection.

Ben Berman is a graduate student at the Wharton school who was doing a lot of cooking after he started back to school; and since pizza is one of his favorite foods, he likes to make it for friends. But when the pandemic started, he couldn't really have friends over anymore; so he found himself one day with this big batch of dough and no way to serve pizza to his friends. That gave him an idea, and so he went ahead and baked, then held what he calls a "pizza drop;" he lowered a few slices to each of his hungry friends on the street below his second-story window using a 40-foot rope system he rigged for the purpose.

The pizza's apparently pretty good because the word got out, and he started to have a lot of demand for pizzas from the wider community. Berman adjusted and started up something he calls "Good Pizza." People in Philadelphia can sign up on his Instagram page twice a month, and he selects 20 lucky winners each time via lottery; with over 900 entrants each time, there's a lot of disappointment, but that sort of goes with the territory. This guy's making 20 pizzas at a time and giving them away, lowering each one out his window to the lucky winner on the street below. The pizza's free, but "customers" make a donation, which Berman turns over to two local charities. Best of all, you don't just get a tasty pizza for your donation; you also get a special message from Berman. He handwrites a note that comes with every pizza, just to offer some encouragement during what has been a hard time for everybody.

He pays for ingredients out of his own pocket, so the entire donation goes to the charities. He told the local ABC affiliate, "The original thinking was, I can either give away \$100 of my own dollars directly . . . or maybe I can spend \$100 on pizza ingredients. I can make someone smile in the interim by making them a delicious pizza and maybe I can turn that \$100 into \$200, or \$300, or \$500." Nice trick. And that's not all.

Barstool Sports learned about the pizza drops and interviewed him. That brought in more dollars and bigger donors as they offered \$7500 to match donations. Then a couple of members of the Philadelphia 76ers, Tobias Harris and Matisse Thybulle, stopped by and offered to match the next \$5000 in donations. That awakened more interest, further multiplying Berman's contributions. He is now soliciting other donors to match contributions, and he is receiving donations from around the world, clearly from folks who never get any pizza at all. He now has a line of Good Pizza merchandise too, and all of those proceeds are going to the same charities as well.

Berman told the TV reporter, "I started this for two reasons, one I just wanted to make people smile during what has been a pretty crappy year for a lot of people, and pizza was my way of doing that . . . And the other reason is it's become a platform to give back to people that really need it this year." I think the people he wanted smiling were the ones getting the pizza and the donations, but I know this guy has me smiling too. Nice work, Mr. Berman.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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Jan. 12 COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota: Community Spread for week of Jan. 11:

Moderate: Faulk, Sanborn changed from minimal to moderate.

Positive: +244 (103,743 total) Positivity Rate: 7.0%

Total Tests: 3498 (810,847 total)

Total Persons Tested: 670 (385,382 total)

Hospitalized: +26 (5943 total) 240 currently hospitalized (-2)

Avera St. Luke's: 6 (-3) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 5 (0) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +0 (1585 total)

Recovered: +595 (97,407 total)

Active Cases: -351 (4751)

Percent Recovered: 93.9%

Vaccinations: +1047 (46714)

Vaccinations Completed: +159 (7465)

Brown County Vaccinations: +29 (1885) 19 (+0) completed

Beadle (38) +0 positive, +3 recovered (80 active cases)

Brookings (31) +13 positive, +25 recovered (227 active cases)

Brown (68): +16 positive, +36 recovered (264 active cases)

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

Clay (12): +9 positive, +9 recovered (73 active cases)

Codington (72): +7 positive, +23 recovered (191 active cases)

Davison (53): +6 positive, +13 recovered (94 active cases)

Day (21): +1 positive, +6 recovered (24 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +1 positive, +9 recovered (51 active cases)

Faulk (13): +0 positive, +0 recovered (4 active cases)

Grant (35): +2 positive, +3 recovered (28 active cases)

Hanson (3): +1 positive, +1 recovered (12 active cases)

Hughes (29): +2 positive, +16 recovered (85 active cases)

Lawrence (31): +2 positive, +11 recovered (93 active cases)

Lincoln (68): +25 positive, +52 recovered (330 active cases)

Marshall (5): +0 positive, +2 recovered (11 active

cases)

McCook (22): +2 positive, +3 recovered (26 active cases)

McPherson (3): +3 positive, +4 recovery (14 active case)

Minnehaha (285): +56 positive, +128 recovered (1106 active cases)

Pennington (144): +27 positive, +78 recovered (587 active cases)

Potter (3): +2 positive, +1 recovered (27 active cases)

Roberts (32): +2 positive, +15 recovered (77 active cases)

Spink (24): +0 positive, +3 recovered (27 active cases)

Walworth (14): +3 positive, +4 recovered (49 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 12:

- 4.3% rolling 14-day positivity
- 248 new positives
- 5,370 susceptible test encounters
- 70 currently hospitalized (-4)
- 1,763 active cases (-118)
- 1,355 total deaths (+3)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	430	400	789	11	Moderate	17.24%
Beadle	2556	2438	5325	38	Substantial	10.69%
Bennett	369	347	1090	8	Moderate	4.44%
Bon Homme	1500	1447	1910	23	Substantial	15.52%
Brookings	3214	2956	10392	31	Substantial	13.38%
Brown	4682	4350	11339	68	Substantial	22.59%
Brule	652	620	1709	7	Moderate	26.09%
Buffalo	415	403	855	10	Minimal	19.05%
Butte	926	872	2891	20	Substantial	16.13%
Campbell	116	108	225	4	Minimal	25.00%
Charles Mix	1164	1093	3598	13	Substantial	12.05%
Clark	323	311	884	2	Moderate	2.22%
Clay	1691	1606	4676	12	Substantial	16.74%
Codington	3614	3351	8745	72	Substantial	19.61%
Corson	454	439	908	11	Moderate	19.35%
Custer	696	671	2467	9	Substantial	12.79%
Davison	2808	2661	5849	53	Substantial	15.84%
Day	565	520	1592	21	Substantial	17.65%
Deuel	439	400	1021	7	Substantial	9.09%
Dewey	1342	1266	3541	14	Substantial	21.25%
Douglas	396	373	841	9	Substantial	31.58%
Edmunds	418	362	899	5	Substantial	9.09%
Fall River	470	442	2344	13	Substantial	9.41%
Faulk	316	299	620	13	Moderate	14.29%
Grant	851	788	1984	35	Substantial	21.05%
Gregory	492	457	1116	26	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	237	222	482	9	Moderate	10.00%
Hamlin	635	561	1567	37	Substantial	10.75%
Hand	319	306	717	4	Minimal	8.33%
Hanson	323	308	626	3	Moderate	23.81%
Harding	89	88	160	1	Minimal	0.00%
Hughes	2088	1974	5807	29	Substantial	4.11%
Hutchinson	721	672	2096	20	Substantial	13.21%

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Hyde	134	130	372	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	267	250	869	12	Minimal	33.33%
Jerauld	265	241	511	16	Minimal	15.79%
Jones	71	68	186	0	Minimal	10.00%
Kingsbury	574	525	1460	13	Substantial	9.33%
Lake	1073	1010	2866	16	Substantial	29.13%
Lawrence	2657	2533	7716	31	Substantial	11.54%
Lincoln	7114	6716	18000	68	Substantial	19.74%
Lyman	555	516	1738	9	Moderate	16.67%
Marshall	270	254	1038	5	Moderate	4.00%
McCook	707	659	1449	22	Substantial	29.31%
McPherson	202	183	506	3	Moderate	2.94%
Meade	2365	2221	6877	24	Substantial	21.02%
Mellette	227	219	673	2	Minimal	10.34%
Miner	244	212	514	7	Moderate	10.00%
Minnehaha	26028	24637	69896	285	Substantial	16.17%
Moody	562	523	1611	14	Substantial	22.73%
Oglala Lakota	1981	1863	6300	37	Substantial	16.17%
Pennington	11838	11109	35011	144	Substantial	21.05%
Perkins	303	271	701	11	Substantial	16.67%
Potter	329	299	741	3	Moderate	8.57%
Roberts	1063	954	3822	32	Substantial	20.27%
Sanborn	316	299	621	3	Moderate	35.71%
Spink	723	672	1912	24	Substantial	10.20%
Stanley	294	278	801	2	Substantial	6.52%
Sully	122	108	254	3	Moderate	10.00%
Todd	1187	1141	3896	19	Substantial	8.42%
Tripp	639	616	1352	13	Substantial	12.12%
Turner	1003	912	2430	49	Substantial	23.53%
Union	1737	1572	5566	30	Substantial	14.38%
Walworth	665	602	1669	14	Substantial	23.00%
Yankton	2597	2423	8433	27	Substantial	12.68%
Ziebach	320	280	730	8	Moderate	14.29%
Unassigned	0	0	2053	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	3920	0
10-19 years	11410	0
20-29 years	18757	4
30-39 years	17063	14
40-49 years	14774	30
50-59 years	14652	84
60-69 years	11767	198
70-79 years	6221	345
80+ years	4754	910

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	54022	761
Male	49296	824

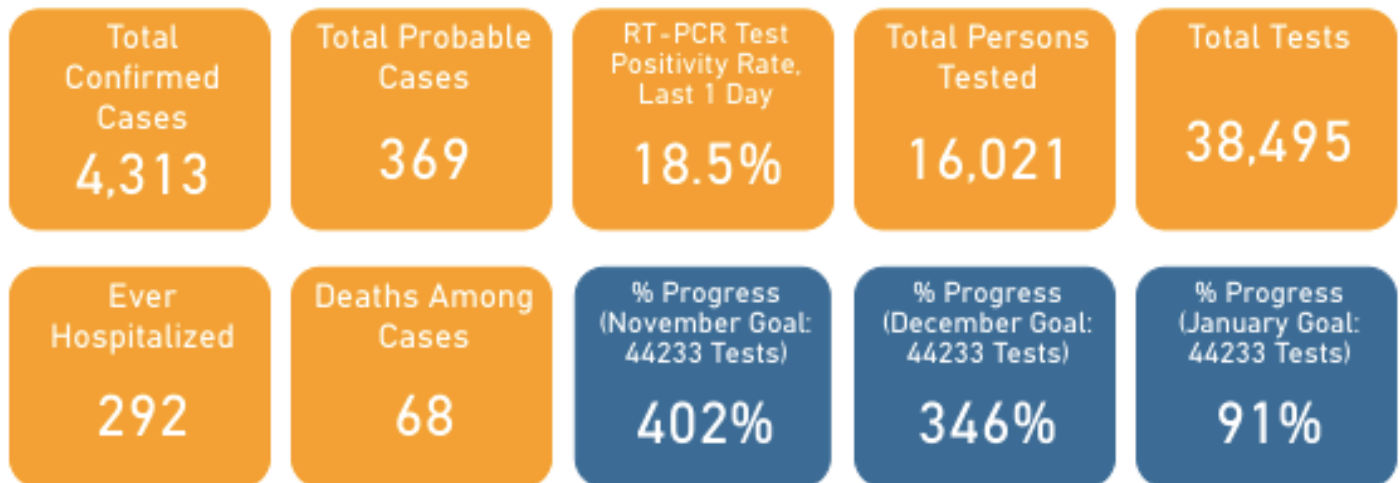
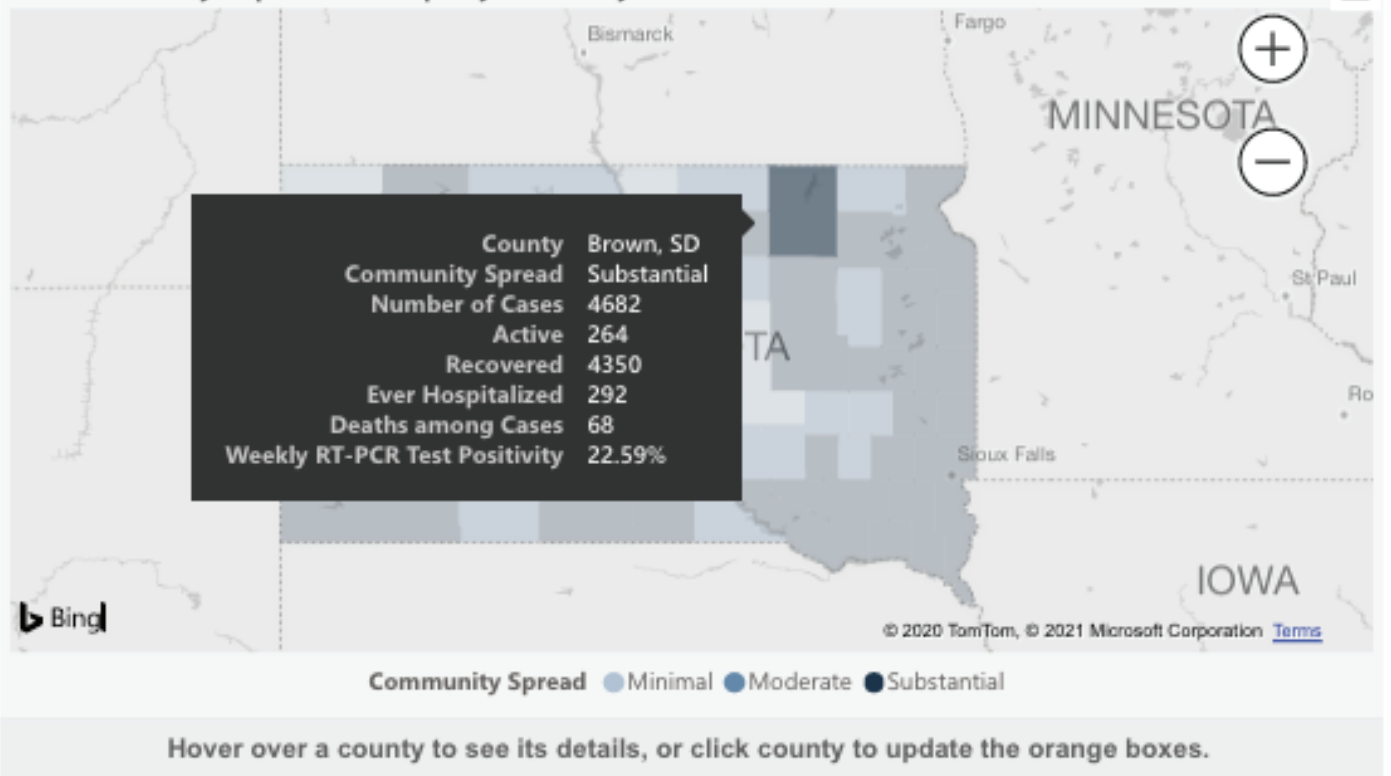
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



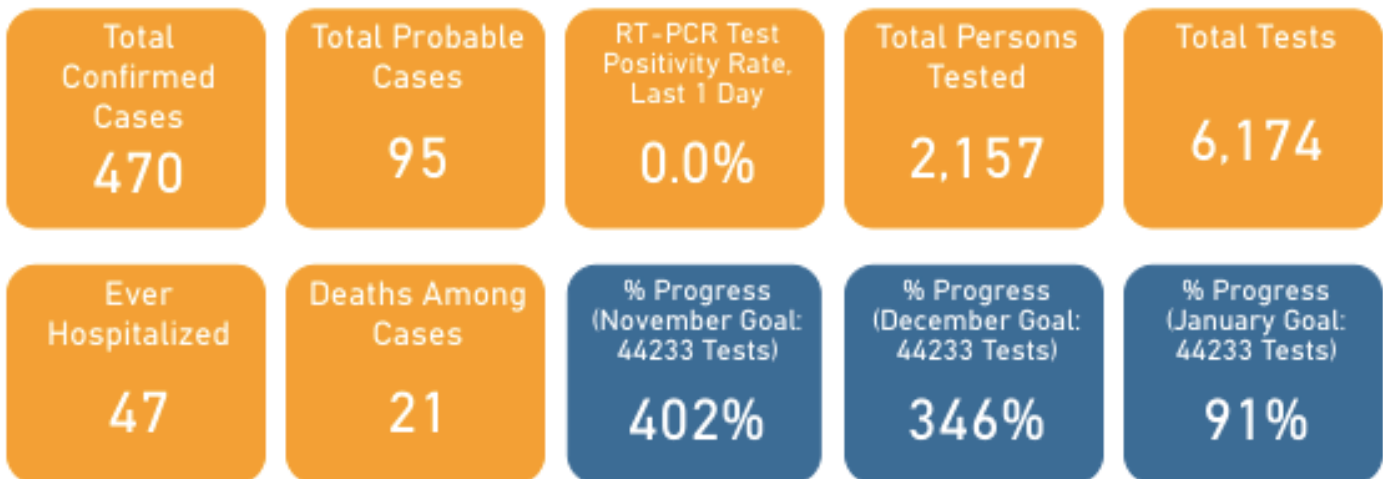
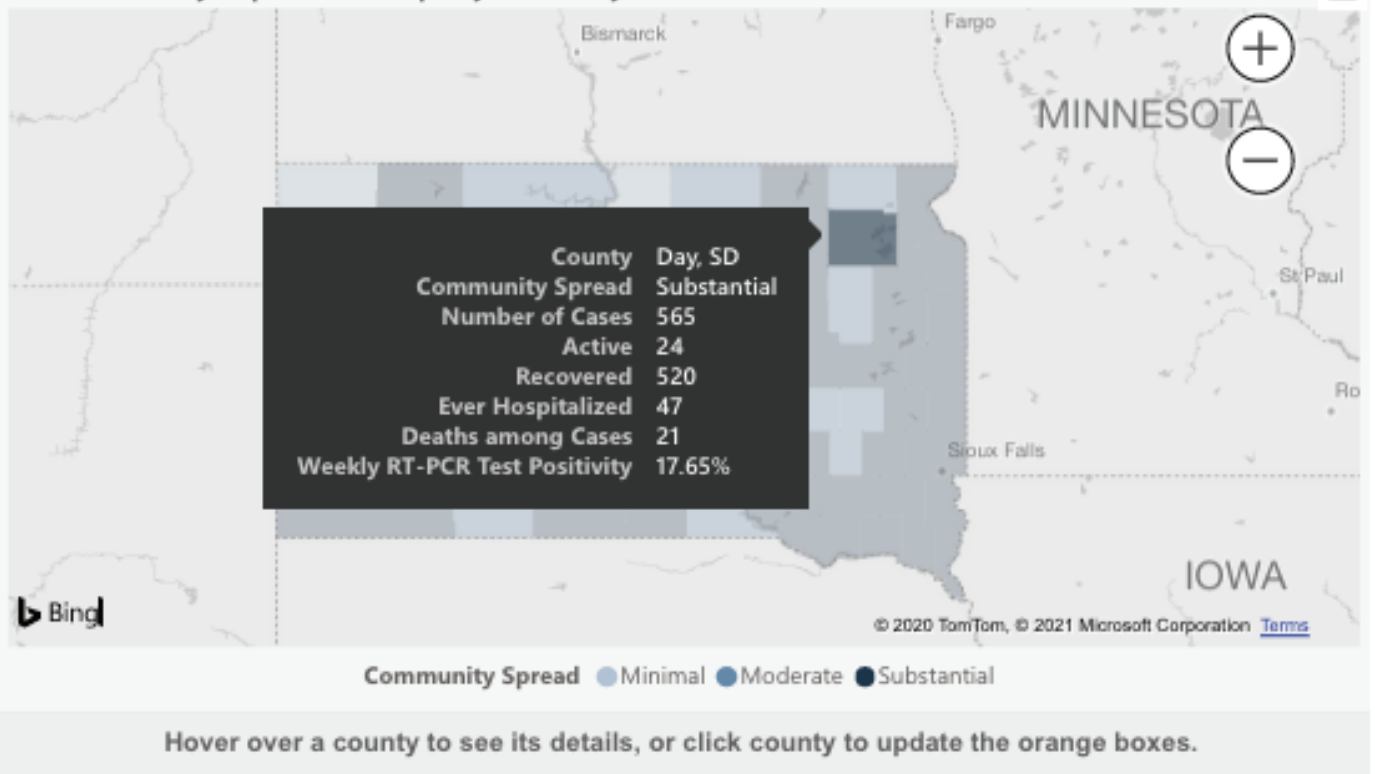
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

46,714

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

39,245

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	22,139
Pfizer	24,575

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	22,139
Pfizer - 1 dose	9,645
Pfizer - Series Complete	7,465

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	81	81	0	81
Beadle	822	440	191	631
Bennett*	50	46	2	48
Bon Homme*	404	390	7	397
Brookings	1207	803	202	1,005
Brown	1885	1,847	19	1,866
Brule*	212	208	2	210
Buffalo*	3	3	0	3
Butte	141	137	2	139
Campbell	146	120	13	133
Charles Mix*	302	296	3	299
Clark	122	110	6	116
Clay	682	628	27	655
Codington*	1465	1,109	178	1,287
Corson*	14	12	1	13
Custer*	267	237	15	252
Davison	1368	1,316	26	1,342
Day*	278	262	8	270
Deuel	169	141	14	155
Dewey*	63	61	1	62
Douglas*	185	183	1	184
Edmunds	124	124	0	124
Fall River*	234	228	3	231
Faulk	35	33	1	34
Grant*	383	369	7	376
Gregory*	229	225	2	227
Haakon*	81	81	0	81

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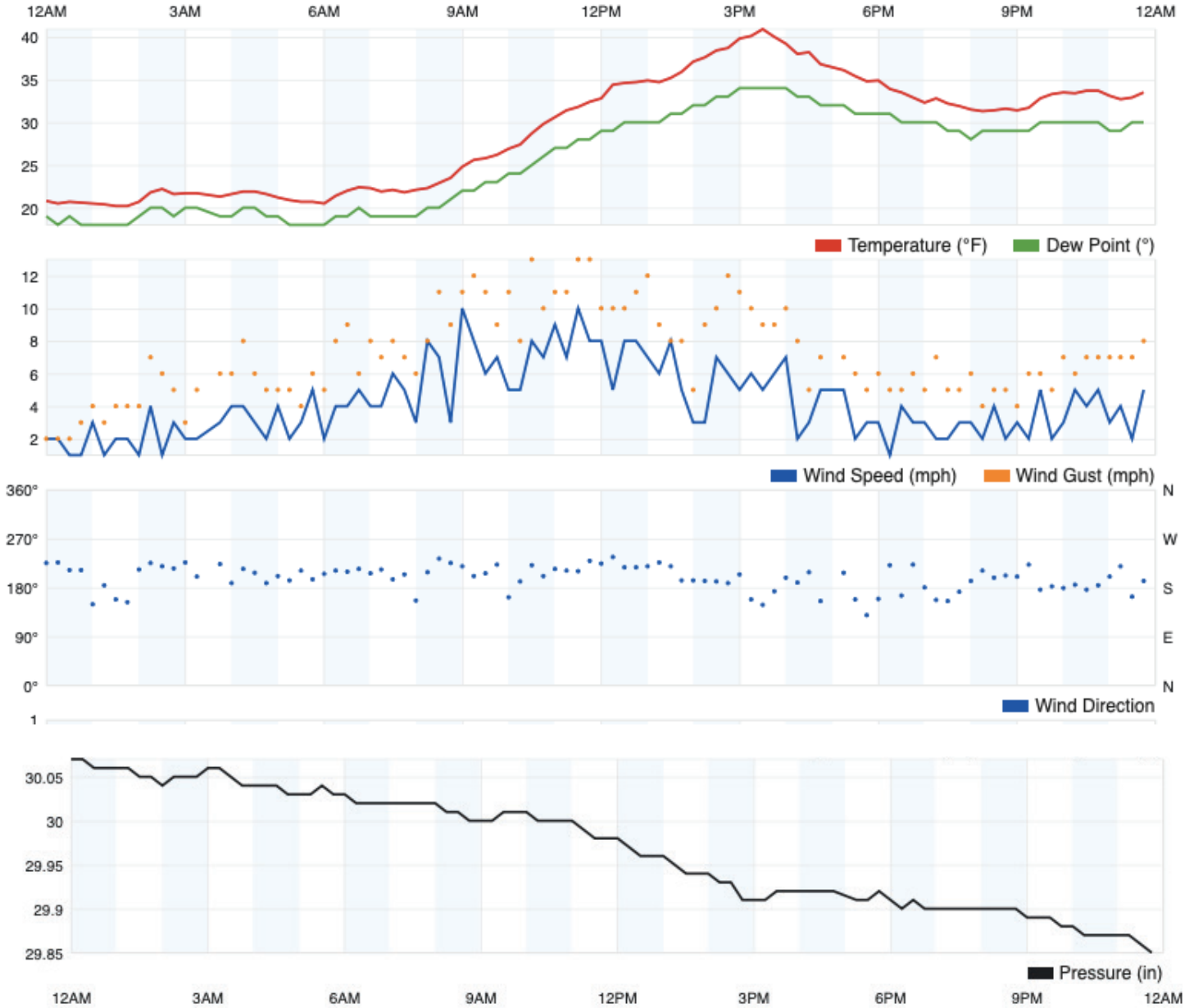
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Hamlin	214	170	22	192
Hand	180	164	8	172
Hanson	62	56	3	59
Harding	2	2	0	2
Hughes*	895	867	14	881
Hutchinson*	546	514	16	530
Hyde*	92	92	0	92
Jackson*	38	38	0	38
Jerauld	74	60	7	67
Jones*	48	44	2	46
Kingsbury	291	219	36	255
Lake	554	254	150	404
Lawrence	508	480	14	494
Lincoln	6047	2,914	1,566	4,480
Lyman*	57	57	0	57
Marshall*	183	177	3	180
McCook	303	209	47	256
McPherson	19	19	0	19
Meade*	604	429	87	516
Mellette*	4	4	0	4
Miner	87	65	11	76
Minnehaha	14962	7,990	3,486	11,476
Moody*	216	186	15	201
Oglala Lakota*	15	7	4	11
Pennington*	4565	2,889	837	3,726
Perkins*	37	37	0	37
Potter	115	111	2	113
Roberts*	308	298	5	303
Sanborn	96	88	4	92
Spink	411	393	9	402
Stanley*	127	121	3	124
Sully	30	24	3	27
Todd*	22	18	2	20
Tripp*	226	224	1	225
Turner	578	474	52	526
Union	206	184	11	195
Walworth*	304	142	81	223
Yankton	1396	1,376	10	1,386
Ziebach*	10	10	0	10
Other	1330	884	223	1,107

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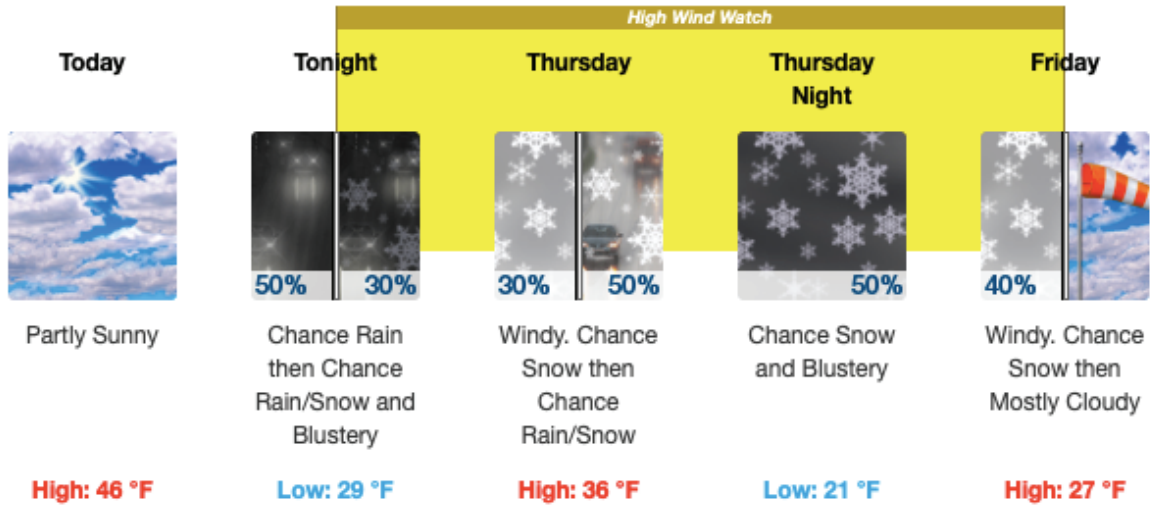
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

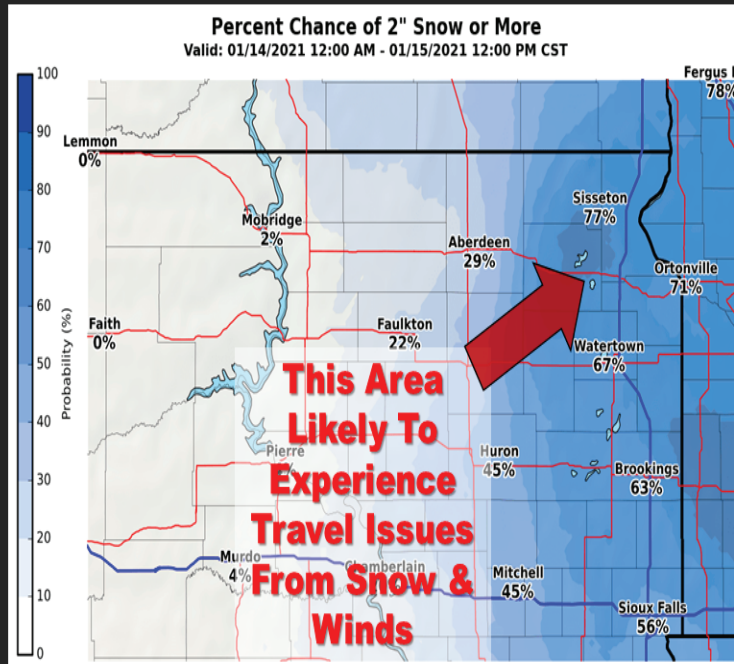


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Hazardous Travel - Combination of Strong Winds & Snow Main Impact Timing Thursday & Friday



Tonight

Winds Develop West-River
Precipitation – Light Rain

Thursday

Winds Increase – Peak Intensity +60mph
Precipitation – Light Rain & Snow
Little if Any Snow Accumulations

Thursday Night

Winds – Peak Intensity +60mph
Precipitation – Accumulating Snow
East of James into western Minnesota
Impacts: Difficult Travel Conditions -
Reduced Visibility/Blowing Snow

Friday

Winds – Slowly Weakening
Precipitation – Accumulating Snow
East of James into western Minnesota
Impacts: Difficult Travel Conditions -
Reduced Visibility/Blowing Snow

A system still looks to cause travel difficulties for the area Thursday into Friday. Main focus for snow accumulations remains across the Sisseton hills area into western Minnesota. Winds will be fairly strong (greater than 60mph at times) across the Dakotas and western Minnesota as well, meaning the combination of snow and strong winds will result in low visibility for some areas.

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Today in Weather History

January 13, 1913: The temperature at Rapid City, South Dakota, rose sixty-four degrees in just fourteen hours.

January 13, 1916: Extreme cold affected central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota on January 13th, 1916. Record low temperatures were set at Kennebec, Timber Lake, Wheaton, and Watertown. Timber lake recorded a low temperature of 37 degrees below zero, Wheaton fell to 38 degrees below zero, Kennebec recorded a low of 39 degrees below zero, with 40 degrees below zero recorded at Watertown on this day in 1916. Aberdeen and Mobridge recorded 38 degrees below zero and 36 degrees below zero, respectively.

January 13, 2009: After a clipper system dropped from 1 to 4 inches of snow on the 13th, Arctic air and blustery north winds pushed into the area. The coldest air and the lowest wind chills of the season spread across much of central and northeast South Dakota. Wind chills fell to 35 to 50 degrees below zero late in the evening of the 13th and remained through the 14th and into the mid-morning hours of the 15th. Across northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota, wind chills were as low as 60 degrees below zero by the morning of the 15th. Many vehicles did not start because of the extreme cold, and several schools had delayed starts. The Arctic high-pressure area settled in on the morning of the 15th bringing the coldest temperatures to the region in many years. The combination of a fresh and deep snowpack, clear skies, and light winds allowed temperatures to fall to record levels at many locations on the 15th. Daytime highs remained well below zero across the area. This was one of the coldest days that most areas experienced since the early 1970s. The records were broken by 1 to as much as 7 degrees. Some of the record lows included, -30 degrees at Kennebec; -31 degrees at Sisseton; -32 degrees at Milbank; -33 degrees at Mobridge; -35 degrees at Andover and near Summit; -38 degrees at Eureka; -39 degrees 8 miles north of Columbia and Castlewood; -42 degrees at Aberdeen; and -47 degrees at Pollock. Some near-record low temperatures included, -24 degrees at Pierre; -29 degrees at Redfield and Victor; -32 degrees at Roscoe; and -34 degrees at Watertown. In Aberdeen, the low temperature of -42 degrees tied the third coldest temperature ever recorded.

1862: Known as the Great Flood of 1862, a series of storms from December 1861 to January 1862 produced the largest flood in the recorded history of Oregon, Nevada, and California. Estimated property damage in California alone was \$10 million in 1862 dollars. More than 200,000 head of cattle lost their lives. The State of California went bankrupt, and the economy evolved from ranching to farm based. The same areas are expected to be flooded again if another ARkStorm (USGS name) was to impact California, which is predicted to cause over \$750 billion (2011 USD), making it more disastrous than California's long-overdue major earthquake. California is currently overdue for a Megastorm, and such an event would have severe impacts on the entire U.S. economy.

1950: January 1950 was one of the worst winter months on record for Seattle, Washington, and surrounding areas. By the end of the month, Seattle measured 57.2 inches of snow, the most snowfall in any month since records began in 1894. Normal January snowfall is 1.4 inches. On this day, a crippling blizzard produced 40 to 50 mph winds and an astounding 20 inches.

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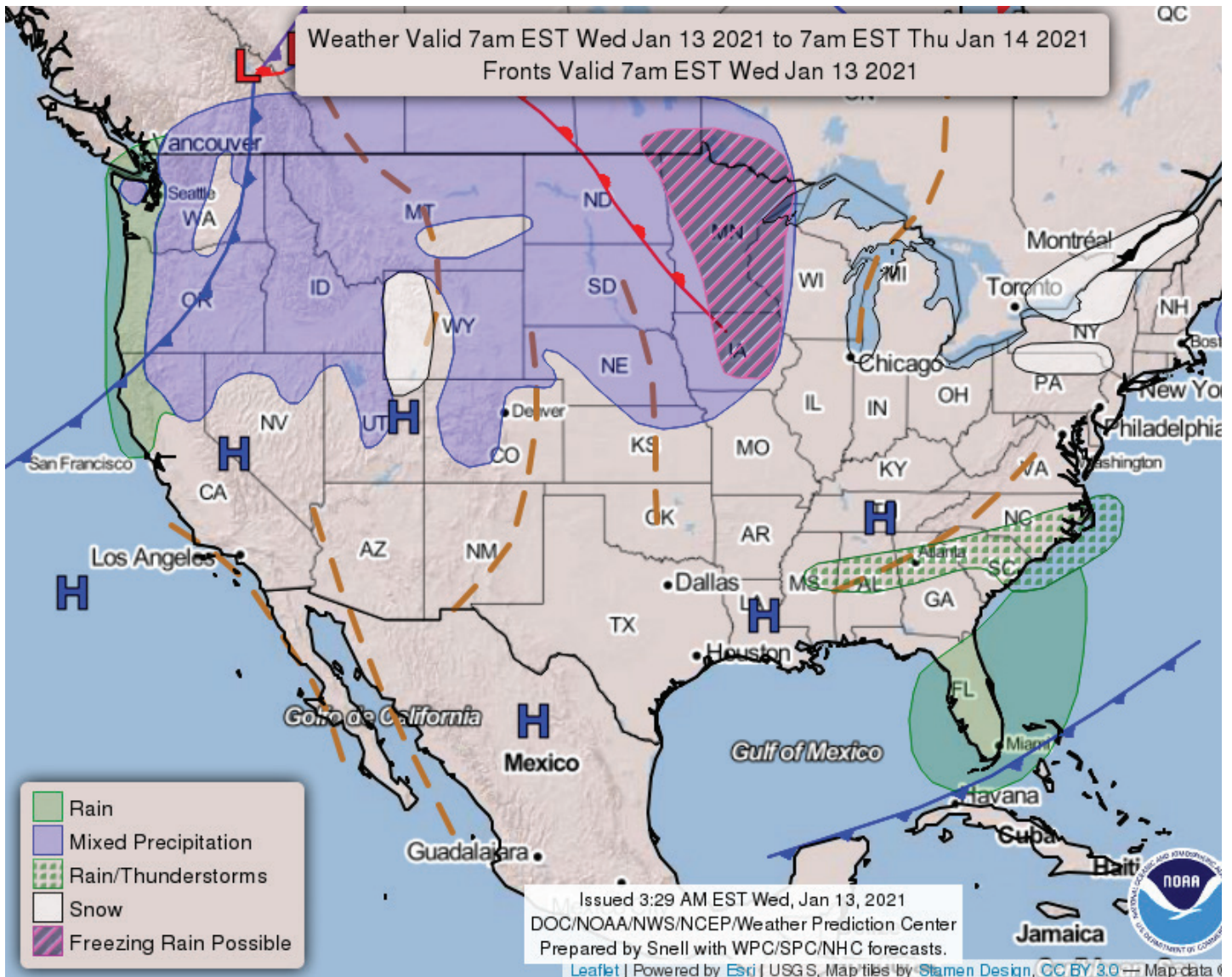
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 3:27 PM
Low Temp: 20 °F at 12:20 AM
Wind: 13 mph at 10:28 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 56° in 1987
Record Low: -40 in 1912
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.21
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.21
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:15 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10 a.m.



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CONFIDENCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

The school of suffering has many graduates. It seems that most of the alumni provide insight into the grace and mercy of God for those willing to hear them speak and give Him glory.

King David was a graduate of this school. What he learned about suffering is revealed in the sixth Psalm. He begins by describing his pain and the fear he has of his enemies. He shares with us a list of symptoms that most of us have experienced at one time or another: emotional stress and distress, crying, sleepless nights, being attacked by others. However, when he cried out to God for help, God heard him, helped him, and healed him.

Whatever brought about the distress of David was relieved when he called on God for His mercy. Here we find a pattern for us to follow when we need God to rescue us from the consequences of our sin or the pain of sickness or suffering. First, he asked God not to abandon or punish him in his time of need. Then he asked for God's compassion and care, admitting that he was weak, "sick at heart" and could not handle the situation by himself. He described his weeping as so intense that "my bed is wet with tears." He was remorseful for what he had done and what God might do to punish him – if He chose. So, he cried out for God's "unfailing love" knowing that God heard him and could then declare with confidence: "The Lord has heard my crying and my plea (and) the Lord will answer my prayer."

God always hears and answers the prayers of anyone at any time who asks for His forgiveness and mercy. There are no limits to His love nor conditions for His grace.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for Your willingness to accept us as we are and grant us Your help, healing, and hope we desperately need yet could never earn. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer. Psalm 6:9

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News from the Associated Press

Pro-Trump group will gather at state Capitol Sunday

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A pro-Trump Christian group has a permit to gather at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre Sunday.

Members of Jericho March plan to walk around the Capitol and pray for the country. About 50 people are expected to gather, according to the group's permit.

Past gatherings of the group at the Capitol have been peaceful and no arrests were made, according to state Department of Public Safety spokesman Tony Mangan.

The FBI has issued bulletins warning of armed protests at all 50 state capitols, as well as Washington, D.C., in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20.

Members of the nationwide organization were in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 5 and 6 taking part in a march to support President Trump before the storming of the U.S. Capitol building, the Argus Leader reported.

Jericho March condemned the violence that followed, saying their mission is about "peace and prayer."

"It is the mission and goal of Jericho March to exercise and pray for our religious freedoms and other freedoms under the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States," a statement on their website said.

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 67, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 57

Arlington 59, Deuel 58

Beresford 60, McCook Central/Montrose 57

Centerville 49, Scotland 34

Corsica/Stickney 87, Mitchell Christian 43

Dakota Valley 78, West Central 70

DeSmet 54, Howard 51

Douglas 92, Lead-Deadwood 46

Dupree 53, Harding County 49

Elk Point-Jefferson 59, Irene-Wakonda 44

Elkton-Lake Benton 76, Dell Rapids St. Mary 70

Ellendale, N.D. 49, Leola/Frederick 28

Ethan 59, Bridgewater-Emery 56

Faulkton 63, Highmore-Harrold 54

Florence/Henry 65, Northwestern 45

Freeman Academy/Marion 62, Avon 28

Huron 51, Brookings 46

Ipswich 56, Sully Buttes 53

Langford 56, North Central Co-Op 45

Mobridge-Pollock 62, Bennett County 30

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 72, James Valley Christian 53

Parker 62, Freeman 13

Pierre 79, Sturgis Brown 39

Redfield 81, Miller 59

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 58, Kimball/White Lake 49

Sioux Falls Christian 84, Dell Rapids 69

Sioux Valley 72, Hamlin 48

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Sisseton 77, Wilmot 40
Spearfish 54, Belle Fourche 38
Tea Area 84, Tri-Valley 54
Viborg-Hurley 56, Alcester-Hudson 17
Wagner 63, Gregory 58, OT
Warner 51, Hitchcock-Tulare 19
Wessington Springs 59, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 48
White River 85, Lower Brule 55
Wolsey-Wessington 67, Iroquois 21
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Roncalli 47, Faulkton 20
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 51, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 36
Arlington 45, Deuel 15
Avon 55, Freeman Academy/Marion 33
Belle Fourche 56, Spearfish 42
Bowman County, N.D. 54, Harding County 38
Centerville 51, Scotland 39
Chamberlain 41, Wall 35
Corsica/Stickney 69, Mitchell Christian 20
Elk Point-Jefferson 45, Irene-Wakonda 27
Ellendale, N.D. 46, Leola/Frederick 43
Ethan 61, Bridgewater-Emery 58
Groton Area 38, Aberdeen Christian 27
Hamlin 57, Sioux Valley 24
Hanson 49, McCook Central/Montrose 45
Huron 56, Brookings 30
James Valley Christian 52, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 42
Jones County 50, Colome 39
Kimball/White Lake 48, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 36
Lead-Deadwood 45, Douglas 41
Lower Brule 62, Sunshine Bible Academy 21
Miller 45, Redfield 39
Mobridge-Pollock 71, Bennett County 45
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 60, Wessington Springs 22
New Underwood 43, Kadoka Area 21
Parker 62, Freeman 48
St. Thomas More 54, Custer 27
Tea Area 63, Tri-Valley 39
Vermillion 56, Madison 46
Viborg-Hurley 53, Alcester-Hudson 34
Wagner 64, Gregory 50
Waverly-South Shore 47, Milbank 34
West Central 59, Dakota Valley 47
West River Tournament=
Moorcroft, Wyo. 55, Hot Springs 34
Upton, Wyo. 51, Faith 48, OT
First Round=
Newell 58, Bison 39
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Potter County vs. Stanley County, ppd.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

12-14-26-28-33, Mega Ball: 9, Megaplier: 2

(twelve, fourteen, twenty-six, twenty-eight, thirty-three; Mega Ball: nine; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$625 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$550 million

Noem, criticized for remarks, passes on 2 media sessions

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Facing criticism for falsely accusing two Democrats who won Georgia's Senate election of being communists, Gov. Kristi Noem has been avoiding taking direct questions from reporters in South Dakota.

The Republican governor said she would not be talking to reporters after Tuesday's State of the State speech, and she cancelled a planned news conference on Monday. Noem, who held news conferences after her State of the State speeches each of the last two years, has been less accessible this week just as the Republican Party faces a reckoning over the riot at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump.

The governor has been a close Trump ally, campaigning for him and lending credence to his efforts to contest the results of the presidential election. But she has limited her comments on the Capitol attack to a pair of tweets.

Last week, she falsely called Raphael Warnock and Jon Osoff, Democrats who won U.S. Senate seats in Georgia, "communists" in an opinion article that was adapted from a speech at the Republican National Convention's winter meetings.

In a tweet the day after the Capitol insurrection, Noem wrote: "There are consequences for how we talk to each other in this country. Today, let's all pray for healing and peace for our nation."

Noem's office on Monday canceled a news conference to announce plans for construction of an Asian food production plant in South Dakota. On Tuesday, her office indicated she would break from tradition and not answer questions from reporters after her State of the State address.

Noem's spokesman Ian Fury said the media could hear from Noem during the address, but did not explain why she was not holding a news conference Tuesday. He said her office would field any follow-up questions.

Fury said the cancellation on Monday was due to a schedule change.

Noem also decided not to have a news conference after her budget address last month as the state faced a rising rate of deaths from COVID-19.

Democrats in South Dakota have shot back at Noem's comments on the Georgia senators.

"We cannot let the recent comments by Governor Kristi Noem go unchecked," House Minority Leader Jamie Smith and Senate Minority Leader Troy Heinert said in a joint statement. "Branding the newly elected Senators from Georgia, the Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, as Communists is simply not true."

Noem's address features Down Syndrome abortion ban, economy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Tuesday used her State of the State address to

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return to themes that have marked her two years in office, touting the state's economy, focusing on job development and unveiling a proposal to ban abortions based on a Down Syndrome diagnosis.

The Republican governor has become a rising figure among conservatives nationwide since she last stood before the Legislature to deliver the annual address a year ago, carving out a reputation for her hands-off approach to the pandemic. She defended that strategy to lawmakers, pointing out that the state's economy has weathered the pandemic relatively well. Thanks to a windfall of federal coronavirus aid, the state has over \$250 million in one-time funds to put towards projects like broadband and college scholarships.

Noem's proposal to ban abortions motivated by a Down Syndrome diagnosis is likely to further endear her to conservatives, both within South Dakota and nationwide. Republican legislative leaders said they have not been able to review the bill banning the abortions, but predicted it would sail through the House and Senate. Noem's office has not yet introduced the bill and declined to explain how the proposed law would determine whether the abortion is motivated by a Down Syndrome diagnosis.

"For those who have had the privilege of knowing someone with Down Syndrome, you know that person ends up being a gift to all of us," she said.

Even Democratic legislative leaders, who have seen their numbers dwindle in the Capitol, acknowledged their caucus was not likely to present a full-fledged opposition to Noem's abortion bill.

"South Dakota is already extremely restrictive in abortion, and if the legislation is redundant or if it's already not possible in this state, then I don't know why we would need this bill," said Senate Minority Leader Troy Heinert, a Democrat from Mission, adding that he would be examining the bill and polling fellow Democrats.

Noem billed herself as a "family-first governor," tying that theme into attracting new business projects to the state, pushing for broadband internet expansion projects and new school curriculae that will teach American history and civics.

"I believe that we can create an environment where families are not forced to choose between the modern economy on the one hand, and then life in their hometown on the other," Noem said.

Her administration has come up with roughly \$250 million in one-time funds as it used federal coronavirus relief aid to offset state expenses tied to the pandemic. She would like \$100 million to go towards expanding broadband internet access and another \$50 million to an endowment for scholarships for South Dakota college students.

First Premier Bank and T. Denny Sanford, a South Dakota philanthropist, have donated \$50 million to the fund, and plan to make another \$50 million donation. Noem is hoping to build the endowment to \$200 million to generate scholarship funds, which would come with the contingency that scholarship recipients stay in the state for three years after graduation.

"I think we'll be able to look back and say in 20 years, what we did in 2021 was something transformational," said House Majority Leader Kent Peterson, a Rapid City Republican.

Noem's address was mostly forward-looking as the governor described 2020 "as one for the history books." The governor's speeches last year started with a moment of silence for those lost to COVID-19, but on Tuesday, she said there is a "light at the end of the tunnel" with the state is leading the country in its rate of vaccinations against the disease.

But for the moment, the realities of the pandemic are still affecting the Legislature. One lawmaker was away from the Capitol with an infection. Though the House had posted signs encouraging masks, many Republicans crowded into the chamber floor without wearing them.

Peterson acknowledged that the state saw some of the worst virus numbers in the country during November, but praised Noem's overall approach to the pandemic.

"I'm hopeful that we've gotten through the worst of it here in South Dakota," he said. "But one of the things you can't fault her on with the decisions that she made was how it affected our economy."

Environmentalists fight move to reduce beetle's protections

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By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — An environmental group said Tuesday that it plans to sue the U.S. government over a decision to reclassify a large scavenging beetle as threatened instead of endangered.

The Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity said it will sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services over its move last fall to list the American burying beetle as threatened. It had been considered an endangered species since 1989, and the location of its habitat in Plains states created issues for the Keystone XL oil pipeline and other oil and gas projects.

“Far from having recovered, this striking orange-and-black beetle is facing dire threats from climate change and habitat destruction,” said attorney Kristine Akland with the center. Akland said the rule change was a result of pressure from the oil and gas industry.

Federal officials have said that conservation efforts over the past three decades have helped the beetle’s population recover, and it can now be found in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota and on Nantucket Island off the coast of Massachusetts. At the time the beetle was termed endangered, it was found only in small populations in eastern Oklahoma and Block Island off the coast of Rhode Island.

Fish and Wildlife Services spokeswoman Lesli Gray said the agency “used the best available science in its decision to downlist the American burying beetle.” She declined to comment about the threatened lawsuit because officials haven’t had a chance to review it.

The agency has acknowledged that the beetle continues to face threats from climate change and land use changes, but officials have said the beetle no longer meets the definition of endangered.

Over the years, the oil and gas industry has borne significant costs to protect the beetle and other endangered species. The large, black, nocturnal beetle has hardened protective wing covers marked by two scalloped shaped orange patterns. The beetles are scavengers that eat decaying animals. They lay their eggs beside a small carcass that they bury, then feed their larvae from that carcass.

Mallori Miller with the Independent Petroleum Association of America trade group said she is confident the new threatened listing for the beetle will be upheld.

“The beetle’s listing was rooted in faulty assumptions about the species’ range, distribution, and abundance,” Miller said.

The presence of the beetle in Nebraska’s Sandhills region — along with landowner concerns — prompted TC Energy to reroute its Keystone XL pipeline through part of the state. And last year, questions about the potential impact on endangered species, including the beetle and a fish called the pallid sturgeon, led a federal judge to cancel a key permit that would have allowed the pipeline to cross hundreds of rivers and streams along the route.

Construction of the Keystone XL pipeline is underway along parts of its 1,200 mile (1,930-kilometer) route from Canada to Nebraska while officials reevaluate the impact of its water crossings. The Fish and Wildlife Services said last week that Keystone XL wouldn’t have a significant impact on the beetle’s population, so the project received a permit to move forward with work where the beetle lives in Nebraska and South Dakota.

TC Energy spokeswoman Robynn Tysver said the company is “committed to taking detailed steps throughout the construction and operation of the pipeline to minimize and mitigate any impact on the American burying beetle.”

US high court to hear case on virus relief for tribes

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The U.S. Supreme Court will hear a case that centers on who gets a share of \$8 billion in federal coronavirus relief allocated for Native American tribes.

Lower courts split on whether Alaska Native corporations, which own most Native land in the state under a 1971 settlement, should be in the mix. The U.S. Treasury Department sought review from the high court after a federal appeals court ruled in September that the corporations aren’t eligible.

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The Treasury Department said if the decision stands, the corporations will lose out on "hundreds of millions of dollars" in funding and be deprived of their ability to help Alaska Natives when it comes to health care, education and economic well-being.

The Supreme Court included the case on its order list Friday. It's unclear whether it will be argued in the spring or fall session. The key question is whether the corporations are considered "tribes" under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

The case has required judges, attorneys, Native American tribes and the Alaska corporations to pick apart language of the act, congressional intent and a 1975 federal law meant to strengthen tribes' ability to govern themselves.

More than a dozen Native American tribes sued the U.S. Treasury Department last year to try to keep the money out of the hands of the corporations. They argued it should go only to the 574 tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the United States.

Most of the money, except for about \$530 million, has been distributed to Native American governments, according to court documents.

Tribes initially had until Dec. 30, 2020, to spend the money, but a bill that President Donald Trump recently signed extended the deadline for another year.

The case is being closely watched around Indian Country for its broader implications.

"The case is also about more than money," said Paul Spruhan, an attorney with the Navajo Nation, which is a plaintiff in the case. "It is also about the role of the Alaska Native corporations as opposed to Native Villages and other actual tribal sovereigns and whether such business entities should ever have the same status of bona fide tribes."

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta in Washington, D.C., ruled in June that the corporations can be treated as tribal governments for limited purposes, in an initial victory for the U.S. Treasury Department.

The corporations have argued their roles are essential in supporting the more than 230 Alaska Native villages through employment opportunities, job training, scholarships, cultural preservation programs, land management and economic development.

"We hold strong our belief that Alaska Native people should not be punished for the unique tribal system that Congress established for the state 50 years ago," the ANCSA Regional Association and the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association said in a statement on Friday.

In a related matter, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit revived a case that the Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma filed against the Treasury Department over the initial disbursement of CARES Act funding to tribes based on population. The department relied on a formula used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which showed the Shawnee and two dozen other tribes had no citizens. Each received the minimum \$100,000 in relief funding.

The Shawnee Tribe said its actual population is more than 3,000 and argued it was shortchanged by millions of dollars.

Mehta also heard that case and ruled that the Treasury Department has discretion in how it distributes the funding and, therefore, it wasn't subject to court review.

The appellate court has sent the case back to the district court for a ruling on the merits.

Recovered Midwestern bird soars off endangered species list

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — The interior least tern, a hardy Midwestern bird that survived a craze for its plumage and dam-building that destroyed much of its habitat, has soared off the endangered species list.

Federal officials said Tuesday that 35 years of legal protection and habitat restoration efforts had brought the tern back from the brink of extinction.

"Dozens of states, federal agencies, tribes, businesses and conservation groups have worked tirelessly over the course of three decades to successfully recover these birds," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Aurelia Skipwith said.

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The smallest members of the tern family, weighing less than 2 ounces (56 grams), they feed mostly on small fish and build nests on the ground. While most least terns are considered seabirds, some species live by rivers, lakes and wetlands.

Their most important nesting areas are along more than 2,800 miles (4,500 kilometers) of river channels in the Great Plains and the Lower Mississippi Valley. They migrate to the Caribbean and South America for the winter.

Their numbers plummeted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when their feathers became a popular feature of women's hats.

Then came a wave of dam and levee construction and other engineering measures to control Middle America's great rivers — particularly the Missouri and the Mississippi. Those structures wiped out much of the bird's shoreline habitat.

When listed as endangered in 1985 as a distinct population segment, fewer than 2,000 interior least terns remained, along with a few dozen nesting sites.

The Army Corps of Engineers played a key role in the bird's recovery, changing river management strategies and placing dredged material to create new nesting and dwelling spots for terns and other imperiled shorebirds such as the piping plover.

The steps paid off. The interior least tern's population is now estimated at more than 18,000, with about 480 nesting sites available in 18 states.

The Endangered Species Act requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor the tern for at least five years to make sure its numbers remain stable.

The engineering changes have drawn criticism and legal action from some Missouri River farmers, who contend they have worsened flooding since the mid-2000s.

But the Army Corps says it will continue conservation and monitoring efforts in an area affecting about 80% of the tern's breeding population.

Its partnership with other agencies and nonprofits has shown that "we can protect and recover an endangered species while continuing to provide critical navigation and flood control benefits to the nation," said Major General Diana Holland, Commander of the Mississippi Valley Division of the Corps.

The Corps and the Fish and Wildlife Service teamed with the American Bird Conservancy to develop a computer modeling system to track the bird's status with and without continued management in certain areas.

States known to have colonies of the terns include: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas.

Environmental groups that sometimes have opposed dropping species from the endangered list supported the removal of the interior least tern.

"We consider it an Endangered Species Act success story for sure," said Noah Greenwald of the Center for Biological Diversity.

But he cautioned that vigilance was needed to make sure the bird's river habitat remains secure.

"Scientists are warning that we're in danger of losing 1 million species to extinction," Greenwald said. "Efforts to manage rivers in a more natural way are the kinds of things we need to do to avoid the extinction crisis."

Two men arrested in fatal shooting in Mitchell

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — Two men have been arrested in the shooting death of a Mitchell man.

Police say the men, ages 27 and 28, were arrested on a tentative charge of second-degree murder. Officers responded to a call about 11 p.m. Saturday and found the victim with multiple gunshot wounds in the hallway of a building on Main Street.

The man was pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators said they did not believe the shooting was random.

The men were arrested after investigators collected surveillance video from the area and interviewed witnesses.

Guilty plea expected for failing to report Pine Ridge murder

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A woman accused of helping a murder suspect avoid police and then failing to report the crime in Pine Ridge is expected to plead guilty to criminal charges.

According to court documents, Jamie Ann Richards, is expected to enter the plea to failing to report a felony Wednesday in federal court in Rapid City. She could be sentenced up to three years in prison.

Prosecutors say Richards drove the suspect, Colton Bagola, from Pine Ridge to Rapid City in December 2019. Bagola has since been charged with premeditated first-degree murder in the death of 30-year-old Sloane Bull Bear who was shot in the head at a party.

Bagola was arrested several days later after he surrendered to authorities following a brief standoff.

Richards knew that Bagola shot and killed Bull Bear on Dec. 17, according to the factual basis document she signed, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Richards' plea deal calls for two other charges to be dropped, including being an accessory after the fact.

What to watch as House moves to impeach Trump for 2nd time

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's fiery speech at a rally just before the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol is at the center of the impeachment charge against him, even as the falsehoods he spread for months about election fraud are still being championed by some Republicans.

A Capitol police officer died from injuries suffered in the riot, and police shot and killed a woman during the siege. Three other people died in what authorities said were medical emergencies.

What to watch as the Democratic-controlled House moves to impeach Trump for the second time in 13 months — now with just days left in the defeated president's term.

BUT FIRST, A VOTE ON THE 25TH AMENDMENT

Before proceeding with impeachment, the House pressed Vice President Mike Pence and the Cabinet to remove Trump more quickly and surely, warning that he is a threat to democracy in the few remaining days of his presidency.

The House approved a resolution late Tuesday calling on Pence and the Cabinet to invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to declare the president unable to serve. Pence, who was among those forced to take shelter inside the Capitol complex during the attack, said before the vote that he would take no such action, leaving lawmakers with impeachment as their only option to remove Trump from office before Jan. 20, when President-elect Joe Biden is set to be sworn in as president.

THE DEMOCRATIC CASE FOR IMPEACHMENT

Trump faces a single charge — "incitement of insurrection" — after the deadly Capitol riot in an impeachment resolution that the House will begin debating Wednesday. It's a stunning end for Trump's presidency as Democrats and a growing number of Republicans declare he is unfit for office and could do more damage after inciting a mob that ransacked the Capitol.

"President Trump gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government," reads part of the four-page impeachment bill. "He will remain a threat to national security, democracy and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said impeachment is needed despite the limited number of days left in Trump's term. "The president's threat to America is urgent, and so too will be our action," she said.

Trump's actions were personal for Pelosi and many other lawmakers. She was among those forced to huddle in a bunker during the Capitol riots, and armed rioters menaced staffers with taunts of "Where's Nancy?"

HOW MANY REPUBLICANS WILL SUPPORT?

Unlike the last time Trump was impeached, when no House Republicans supported charges against

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Trump over a call he made to Ukraine's new president, the current impeachment effort has drawn support from some Republicans.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California and his deputy, Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, are again expected to oppose impeachment, but Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House Republican, said Tuesday she will support it.

Cheney, whose father, Dick Cheney, served as vice president under George W. Bush, has been more critical of Trump than other GOP leaders. She said in a statement Tuesday that Trump "summoned" the mob that attacked the Capitol, "assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack." She added: "Everything that followed was his doing" and noted that Trump could have immediately intervened to stop his supporters from rioting but did not.

Reps. John Katko, R-N.Y., and Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., also said they would back impeachment, and some other Republicans seem likely to follow.

McCarthy, one of Trump's closest allies in Congress, echoed Trump in declaring that "impeachment at this time would have the opposite effect of bringing our country together."

WILL HOUSE CENSURE TRUMP?

In a move short of impeachment, McCarthy and other Republicans have floated the idea of a House censure of Trump. Although it was not clear how much support the proposal has, McCarthy said censure or some other mechanism — such as a bipartisan commission to investigate the attack — would "ensure that the events of January 6 are rightfully denounced and prevented from occurring in the future."

Democrats, with the votes to impeach in hand, aren't buying it.

HOW WILL TRUMP RESPOND?

So far, Trump has taken no responsibility for his part in fomenting the violent insurrection, despite his comments encouraging supporters to march on the Capitol and praising them while they were still carrying out the assault. "People thought that what I said was totally appropriate," he said Tuesday.

In the days leading up to the Jan. 6 certification vote, Trump encouraged his supporters to descend on Washington, D.C., promising a "wild" rally in support of his baseless claims of election fraud, despite his own administration's findings to the contrary.

Speaking for more than an hour to a crowd assembled near the White House, Trump encouraged supporters to "fight like hell" and suggested they march down to the Capitol to encourage GOP lawmakers to "step up" and overturn the will of voters to grant him another term in office. He also said he would join them in marching on the Capitol, although he returned to the White House immediately after the speech and watched the riot on TV.

One significant difference from Trump's first impeachment: He no longer has a Twitter feed to respond in real time.

STEPPED-UP SECURITY

In a sign of the increase tensions in the wake of the attack, House lawmakers will for the first time be required to go through a metal detector before being allowed to enter the chamber.

This new security measure will stay in effect every day the House is in session for the foreseeable future, according to a directive by Timothy Blodgett, the acting House sergeant-at-arms. Blodgett replaced the longtime sergeant-at-arms who resigned after widespread criticism about poor security planning for the Jan. 6 certification vote.

Members of Congress have previously enjoyed nearly free roam at the Capitol, able to bypass security screening stations at most entrances to the building. In the House chamber, there have been Capitol Police officers and civilian door monitors but no screening stations.

Blodgett also told lawmakers they must wear masks during the COVID-19 crisis and that they face removal from the chamber if they fail to do so.

WILL LAWMAKERS REIN IN EMOTIONS ON THE FLOOR?

While debate on the House is often impassioned, emotions are expected to run unusually high as lawmakers debate impeachment. Not only is it the second time they have voted on such a measure, the

debate comes exactly one week after a majority of House Republicans objected to the certification of Biden's victory, setting the stage for the hourslong siege that rocked the Capitol and the nation.

In the end, 121 House Republicans voted against Arizona's certification of Biden's victory — and 138 GOP lawmakers opposed Pennsylvania's certification — even after the assault on the Capitol, an unprecedented break with tradition that has Democrats seething. A recent breakout of COVID-19 among lawmakers who were held in lockdown with others who refused to wear masks has only heightened tensions.

The Latest: Germany: Some Moderna shots may have spoiled

By The Associated Press undefined

BERLIN — German authorities in Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg say they're holding off on using the first batch of the Moderna coronavirus vaccine over concerns it may have spoiled by not being kept cold enough during transport.

Berlin health authorities said Wednesday that the state's first 2,400 doses of the vaccine arrived as planned on Tuesday but that after initial quality control assessments, there are "doubts as to whether the vaccine was transported and refrigerated properly." Both the carrier and the manufacturer are being asked for clarification.

Meantime, officials say, planned vaccinations will go ahead using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

The Brandenburg Health Ministry told the dpa news agency that it was also holding off using its first 2,400 doses of the Moderna vaccine over the same concerns. It was not immediately clear whether the Berlin and Brandenburg deliveries were made by the same truck.

Nearly 65,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine arrived in Germany on Monday and were being kept at a military facility in Quakenbrueck in the west of the country. From there, boxes were being distributed by truck to Germany's 16 states.

No other problems were immediately reported, and the state of Saxony-Anhalt already started using the Moderna vaccine on Tuesday, dpa reported.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— Indonesia begins a mass COVID-19 vaccination effort with the president and public figures getting shots to encourages others

— Dutch authorities begin mass coronavirus testing in one town to get an idea of how many people have the new coronavirus variant

— Aspiring US college students are grappling with how to show their potential when so many exams and activities have been canceled

— Beach sunsets in Goa are still magical but the pandemic is sapping the Indian beach destination of its tourism livelihood

— 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:

AMSTERDAM — Residents of a Dutch town filed into a sports hall Wednesday to take part in the country's first mass coronavirus testing program, which aims to find out more about the spread of a new more transmissible coronavirus variant.

The makeshift testing center in Bergschenhoek, near the port city of Rotterdam, was set up after a cluster of COVID-19 cases linked to an elementary school turned up 30 cases of the new variant that is sweeping through Britain and Ireland, putting hospitals in those countries under severe strain.

On Tuesday night, as the Dutch government extended its current lockdown by three more weeks, Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said that only 2% to 5% of all COVID-19 cases in the Netherlands are now the new variant. But he added that "the expectation is that it will, just as in England, get the upper hand."

"The only question is how long that will take," De Jonge added. "And anybody who lets the dramatic images and stories from London sink in knows it can get much, much worse very quickly and we have to

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do whatever it takes to prevent that.”

Ernst Kuipers, head of a national organization that distributes patients among hospitals, warned lawmakers Wednesday of the gravity of the threat.

“If you get a transmission that goes as fast as in England, then there is no care system, not in Germany, not in England and not in the Netherlands either, that can cope,” he said.

TOKYO — Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency for seven more prefectures Wednesday, affecting more than half the population amid a surge in infections across the country.

Prime Minister Yoshide Suga also said Japan will suspend fast-track entry exceptions for business visitors or others with residency permits, fully banning foreign visitors while the state of emergency is in place.

Suga’s announcement comes less than a week after he declared a state of emergency for Tokyo and three nearby prefectures. The new declaration, which adds seven other prefectures in western and central Japan, takes effect Thursday and lasts until Feb. 7.

“The severe situation is continuing, but these measures are indispensable to turn the tide for the better,” Suga told a news conference, bowing as he sought understanding from the public.

Suga said he put the seven prefectures in urban areas under the state of emergency to prevent the infections from spilling over to smaller cities where medical systems are more vulnerable.

BERLIN — Police say 30 adults and children celebrating a kid’s birthday in Germany tried to hide from officers who were called to investigate reports of people breaking pandemic restrictions.

Hameln police said Wednesday that most guests hid in cupboards, while a woman and five children locked themselves in a bathroom when officers arrived.

Police said none of those present at Tuesday’s birthday bash wore required face coverings and the 15 adults will be charged with minor infractions.

Under Germany’s current restrictions intended to limit the spread of coronavirus, people are forbidden from gathering with more than one person who isn’t part of their own household.

PARIS — France’s government scientific adviser is expressing strong concern over the variant of the coronavirus that is circulating widely in the U.K. and is now spreading in France.

Dr. Jean-François Delfraissy, president of the scientific council that advises the French government on the virus, said on news broadcaster France Info that a two-day study based on 100,000 positive tests showed that about 1% of people were infected with the more contagious variant that has been discovered in the U.K.

“In any case we’ll see an extension (of the variant), but we’re going to try to slow it down,” he said.

France is engaged in a “speed race” to vaccinate the most vulnerable people, he added.

French President Emmanuel Macron is holding a virus defense council on Wednesday aimed at assessing the impact of end-of-year holiday gatherings in France and deciding whether new measures are needed.

France already applies a national curfew from 6 p.m. or 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. depending on the region. The country has reported more than 68,000 deaths from the virus.

SEOUL, South Korea — A South Korean court has acquitted a religious sect leader of charges that he deliberately disrupted the government’s anti-virus response early last year after thousands of his worshippers were infected with the coronavirus.

However, the Suwon District Court on Wednesday found the 89-year-old Lee Man-hee guilty of separate charges that he embezzled more than \$5 million in church funds and organized unauthorized worship services in public spaces. His three-year prison term will be suspended for four years.

Lee’s church, the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, issued a statement denying his wrongdoings and confirming plans to appeal. Kang Susana, a prosecutor in Suwon, said her office would decide whether to appeal after analyzing the ruling.

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Prosecutors had sought a five-year prison term for Lee, who was arrested in August before his release on bail in November. They accused Lee and his church of violating the country's infectious disease law by deliberately hiding some of the church's membership and under-reporting its gatherings to avoid broader quarantines following the outbreak around the southeastern city of Daegu in February and March last year.

But the court said it was unclear whether the church's failure to provide a full list of its membership was a crime.

DHAKA, Bangladesh — The government in Bangladesh has started training up to 40,000 healthcare workers and volunteers for the administration of COVID-19 vaccines across the country.

Shamsul Haque of the government's Directorate of Health Services said Wednesday initially 5 million doses would be administered among 2.5 million people. Authorities say the country would get the first consignment of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by Jan. 25 through India's Serum Institute. The vaccination drive is expected to start from the first week of February.

Bangladesh has primarily targeted Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines while it is also exploring options for buying the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

The World Health Organization and global alliance GAVI have offered Bangladesh about 400,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine but the country lacks the super-cold storage that vaccine needs. Bangladesh has reported 7,833 deaths in the pandemic.

AMMAN, Jordan — Jordan has begun administering coronavirus vaccines with the goal of inoculating 10,000 people in the first two days.

Wael Hayajneh, the Health Ministry official in charge of combatting the virus, said Wednesday that the first doses will go to medical personnel, the elderly and those with chronic diseases. The country hopes to vaccinate 20% of its population of 10.5 million by the end of the year.

Jordan received a first batch of China's Sinopharm vaccine on Saturday and a first batch of Pfizer's vaccine on Monday. Prime Minister Bishr al-Khasawneh and other officials received shots, in part to encourage others to get vaccinated.

More than 150,000 Jordanians have registered to receive a vaccine, while others are hesitant because of safety concerns. The government has set up 29 vaccination centers across the country and eased a nationwide curfew.

Jordan has reported more than 309,000 confirmed cases and 4,076 virus-related deaths.

The coronavirus crisis has taken a heavy toll on the economy in Jordan, a Western-allied monarchy that is home to hundreds of thousands of refugees.

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Florida attorney Fred Levin, who won a major legal battle against the tobacco industry in the 1990s, has died several days after contracting the coronavirus. He was 83.

An attorney at the Levin Papantonio Rafferty legal firm says Levin died Tuesday from complications of COVID-19, the disease that can be caused by the virus.

The Pensacola News Journal says Levin's career began in 1961 when he joined the law firm founded by his brother.

In the 1990s, Levin was able to get the Florida Legislature to change the state Medicaid law, allowing it to recoup money for the cost of treating lung cancer. That change helped Levin lead an effort to reach a \$13 billion settlement with the tobacco industry.

BEIJING — Millions of Chinese are lining up in subzero temperatures to receive a second round of coronavirus tests in a city south of Beijing that is at the heart of China's most serious latest outbreak of COVID-19.

Officials on Wednesday announced 90 newly confirmed cases in Hebei province, whose capital Shijiazhuang has accounted for the vast majority of recent cases. The Hebei outbreak is of particular concern

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because of the province's close proximity to Beijing.

Travel to and from three cities — Shijiazhuang, Xingtai and Langfang — has been suspended and residents of some communities have been told to stay home for the next week.

All Shijiazhuang's roughly 10 million people have been ordered to undergo a second round of testing as authorities seek to isolate the sources of infection.

MEXICO CITY — Mexico has posted another high for its daily increase in coronavirus cases, with 14,395 newly confirmed infections and a near-record of 1,314 more deaths.

The country has now topped 1.55 million total infections and has seen 135,682 deaths so far in the pandemic. Because of Mexico's extremely low testing rate, official estimates suggest the real death toll is closer to 195,000.

Mexico received a shipment of almost 440,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine Tuesday, its biggest shipment to date but still inadequate for the 750,000 front-line health care workers.

Mexico has pinned much of its hopes on cheaper, easier-to-handle vaccines made by China's CanSino. But that vaccine has not yet been approved for use.

PHOENIX — Arizona high school sports officials have voted to allow winter sports, reversing a decision made four days earlier to cancel the season because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Arizona Interscholastic Association voted 5-4 to reinstate basketball, soccer and wrestling. The season is expected to start next week.

All students, coaches and officials will be required to wear a face covering during games and events. Each school also must complete a coronavirus monitoring form the day of every game and provide a copy to the opposing school.

Only two parents or legal guardians will be able to attend a child's home games. The Arizona Republic reports that Association executive director David Hines says no general fans will be allowed, but that policy may be reconsidered at some point.

Fury at the shaken Capitol over the attack, security, virus

By CALVIN WOODWARD and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This time the fury enveloping the U.S. Capitol comes not from an insurgent mob but from within.

The anger on display is searing — Democrat against Republican; Republican against Republican; legislators of both parties against the catastrophic security failure that left top leaders of the government vulnerable to last week's violence as well as to the coronavirus in their ranks.

The rage is being stoked even hotter by the passions aroused by Democrats' fresh drive to impeach President Donald Trump.

This is a "powder keg" moment, one Democrat said. It's certainly a historic one.

The House is moving toward making Trump the first president to be impeached twice as part of an extraordinary effort to remove him from office before Democrat Joe Biden's inauguration a week from Wednesday. The charge to be brought against him: "incitement of insurrection."

Once again the phrase of the founders, "high crimes and misdemeanors," has been turned against Trump, who was acquitted by the Senate in his first impeachment trial. And tempers are flaring in congressional hallways and offices still cleaning up from the trashing by the attackers.

Shaken members, long accustomed to protective bubbles, inquired whether they can expense their own bulletproof vests to taxpayers (yes they can). Democrats assailed a collection of always-Trumpers — Republicans who pressed the president's false accusations of a fraudulent election even after the mob, motivated by the same lies, had finally been cleared away.

Democratic Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, among others, called for the expulsion or censure of Republican members who argued Trump's case for overturning the will of the voters, if those lawmakers

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refuse to resign. Democrats were primarily after Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and a selection of House lawmakers who had also tried to throw up obstacles to Biden's election certification.

"Failing to hold those responsible for the insurrection accountable would be a profound injustice and give a green light to future authoritarians," Casey said.

Said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland: "They have a full-blown independent reality, totally cut apart from the world of facts, and that is the groundwork for fascism. When you add racism, anti-Semitism, conspiracy theory and magical thinking, that is an absolute powder keg in terms of an assault on democracy."

There was Republican to Republican finger-pointing, too. Much of it was aimed at House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California for not showing enough leadership, according to some former lawmakers as well as congressional GOP aides who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Some House Republicans are upset that McCarthy, one of Trump's staunchest defenders in Washington, defended him too forcefully and for too long, making it harder to dissociate themselves from Trump after the Capitol siege.

In contrast, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky explicitly criticized Trump's drive to overturn Biden's election, saying it would "damage our republic forever." He did so even as the mob breached the Capitol and lunged toward the chambers against outnumbered police.

McCarthy acknowledged outrage among his Republican colleagues over the attack in a letter to them Monday declaring "I share your anger and your pain" and making sure they knew the mob's threat also came close to him.

"Zip ties were found on staff desks in my office," he wrote. "Windows were smashed in. Property was stolen. Those images will never leave us."

As if nerves weren't raw enough over the actions of Trump and his diehard loyalists, three Democrats who sheltered with Republican House members when they were spirited to a secure room disclosed they had since tested positive for COVID-19. Some of the Republicans in that room over those hours had refused to wear masks.

Indeed, one of the newly infected, Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, said "several Republicans not only cruelly refused to wear a mask but recklessly mocked colleagues and staff who offered them one."

Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman of New Jersey and Brad Schneider of Illinois were the others who announced positive tests after their time in the room as everyone waited to hear whether more cases were coming.

Democrats were livid.

"In the midst of a deadly assault on our United States Capitol, a number of our Republican colleagues laughed off rules designed to keep not just their colleagues safe, but to protect the lives of the teams of workers keeping things going, law enforcement, and staff throughout the Capitol," said Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich.

On Tuesday, the House sergeant at arms office issued a statement saying all members and others going into the chamber must be screened for prohibited items, including firearms, and anyone failing to wear a mask on the House floor will be removed. The House was also voting to impose fines on lawmakers without face coverings.

The screening requirement comes as at least one lawmaker, freshman Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., has talked openly about carrying her firearm around town and onto the Capitol grounds, which has infuriated gun-control Democrats.

The new metal detectors outside the House chamber also galled some Republicans, some of whom uttered obscenities or ignored the devices, claiming they were impeding them from voting.

At a virtual meeting of the House rules committee, Democrats implored Republicans to stop peddling Trump's myths of a stolen election. Trump's accusations have been refuted for weeks by judges and election officials but motivated the mob and are still believed by legions of Trump supporters.

"When does service to Donald Trump end?" demanded Democratic Rep. Joe Morelle of New York. "It

should be an easy one to answer.”

“When the people speak, it’s over,” he went on. Otherwise, “we have nothing. There is no America.”

There were some signs that the top Republican in the House was backing off his unwavering show of loyalty to Trump.

McCarthy had joined most House Republicans in December in supporting a lawsuit to block Biden’s election, and again last week in two votes against certifying Biden’s win. The lawsuit and both votes failed. He has so far avoided lambasting Trump publicly. But in a private conference call Monday with GOP colleagues, he expressed an openness to censuring Trump.

McCarthy “amplified the president’s disinformation about widescale election fraud,” former Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., who often clashed with Trump, said in an interview last week. “That has been irresponsible. Mitch doesn’t fall in that category.”

“McCarthy is all in with Trump,” said Paul Cook, who retired in January as a GOP congressman from California and had differences with him over the years. “I think sometimes you have the greater good of the country, it’s not always the party.”

To Cook, it all comes down to the oath of office. “You take an oath, a lot of people kind of forget the words to that,” he said.

In their oath of office, lawmakers vow to defend the Constitution “against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

Trump’s Republican wall eroding ahead of impeachment vote

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

Republicans offered only modest reproach when President Donald Trump said there were “very fine people” on both sides of a white supremacist rally. They stayed in line when Trump was caught pressuring a foreign leader and later defended his handling of a deadly pandemic.

But with a sudden force, the wall of Republican support that has enabled Trump to weather a seemingly endless series of crises is beginning to erode.

Trump’s weakened standing among his own party will come into sharper focus on Wednesday when the House is expected to impeach the president for inciting a riot at the U.S. Capitol last week. A handful of Republicans have already said they’ll join the effort, a number that could grow as the vote nears.

The choice facing Republicans isn’t just about the immediate fate of Trump, who has just seven days left in his presidency. It’s about whether the party’s elected leaders are ready to move on from Trump, who remains popular with the GOP but is now toxic in much of Washington.

How they proceed could determine whether the party remains viable in upcoming elections or splinters in a way that could limit their relevance.

“We’re at the moment now where we’re seeing a fracturing, a breaking, because of the unprecedented situation — the sedition, the violence, the death,” said Steve Schmidt, a longtime Republican strategist who left the party because of Trump.

The stunning nature of the deadly insurrection — and Trump’s role in fueling it — has shaken many lawmakers. Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 Republican in the House, gave rank-and-file conservatives the green light to abandon Trump in a scathing statement Tuesday evening.

“There has never been a greater betrayal by a president of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution,” she charged.

While stunning, the fast-moving developments do not ensure Trump will be forced from office before Democrat Joe Biden’s Jan. 20 inauguration. The timing of a Senate trial is unclear and could spill into Biden’s presidency.

But for the first time, there are real signs that a significant faction of Republicans want to purge Trump from their party.

Already, three Trump Cabinet members have resigned in protest. Former Attorney General Bill Barr, who left the White House less than a month ago, accused his former boss of a “betrayal of his office.”

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It took almost a week for Vice President Mike Pence, whose relationship with Trump has soured considerably since he and his family were forced into hiding during the Capitol siege, to publicly declare he would not to invoke the 25th Amendment of the Constitution to remove Trump from office.

The president still enjoys some level of Republican support. Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, a top Trump ally just honored this week at the White House, refused on Tuesday to concede that President-elect Joe Biden won the election outright, the same demonstrable falsehood that sparked the riot.

Trump emerged from his White House fortress for the first time since the riots for a trip to the wall his administration built along the Texas border. As he left Washington, he was careful to insist "we want no violence," but denied any responsibility for the insurrection.

Once he reached the border, his remarks to a small crowd were fairly muted. In the end, he spoke for just 21 minutes and spent less than 45 minutes on the ground in what was expected to be the final trip of his presidency.

Before leaving, he offered an ominous warning to Democrats leading the charge to remove him from office: "Be careful what you wish for."

That veiled threat came as the nation — and members of Congress — braced for the potential of more violence ahead of Biden's inauguration. The FBI warned this week of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington.

Capitol security officials made the extraordinary decision to require members of Congress to pass through metal detectors to enter the House chamber beginning on Tuesday, although some Republicans resisted the new rule.

It's unclear whether the chaos in Washington represents an existential threat to the party, but it almost certainly threatens to undermine the GOP's short-term political goals.

Several major corporations, many of them reliably Republican donors, have promised to stop sending political donations to any of the 147 Republicans who perpetuated Trump's false claims of election fraud by voting to reject Biden's victory last week.

The fundraising challenge comes at a bad time for the GOP. History suggests that the Republican Party, as the minority party in Washington, should regain control of the House or Senate in 2022.

At the same time, a collection of ambitious Republicans are trying to position themselves to run for the White House in 2024. They are also contending with Trump's legacy.

One of them, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, reminded reporters on Tuesday that he's condemned the Trump presidency from the very beginning.

"I've been in the same place I've been for the whole four years. A lot of people have just changed their position," Hogan said, while vowing not to leave the GOP. "I don't want to leave the party and let these people who did a hostile takeover four years ago take over."

Despite Hogan's confidence, a significant portion of the Republican Party's political base remains deeply loyal to the president, and has already shown a willingness to attack anyone — especially Republicans — who is not. That helps explain why two other 2024 prospects, Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Josh Hawley of Missouri, voted to reject Biden's victory last week, even after the uprising.

"Republican leaders do not know how to move forward," Republican pollster Frank Luntz said. "Everybody's afraid that Donald Trump will tell people to come after them, but they also realize they're losing the center of America. They're trapped."

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin in Alamo, Texas, and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Kremlin foe Navalny says he will fly home despite threats

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Top Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny says he plans to go home to Russia next weekend despite the authorities' threats to put him once again behind bars.

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Navalny, who has been convalescing in Germany from an August poisoning with a nerve agent that he has blamed on the Kremlin, charged that Russian President Vladimir Putin was now trying to deter him from coming home with new legal motions. The Kremlin has repeatedly denied a role in the opposition leader's poisoning.

"Putin is stamping his feet demanding to do everything so that that I don't return home," Navalny said Wednesday while announcing his return on Instagram. "The people who tried to kill me got offended because I survived and now they are threatening to put me behind bars."

He said he will fly home from Germany on Sunday.

At the end of December, the Federal Penitentiary Service warned Navalny that he faced a real prison term if he fails to immediately report to its office in line with the terms of a suspended sentence he received for a 2014 conviction on charges of embezzlement and money-laundering that he rejected as politically motivated. The European Court for Human Rights had ruled that his conviction was unlawful.

In a parallel move just before the New Year, Russia's main investigative agency also opened a new criminal case against Navalny on charges of large-scale fraud related to his alleged mishandling of \$5 million in private donations to his Anti-Corruption Foundation and other organizations. Navalny has also dismissed those accusations as crudely fabricated.

"They are doing everything to scare me," Navalny said in his Instagram video. "The only thing left for Putin to do is to put up a giant billboard on top of the Kremlin saying "Alexei, please don't return home under any circumstances!"

Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on Aug. 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later.

Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities insisted that the doctors who treated Navalny in Siberia before he was airlifted to Germany found no traces of poison and have challenged German officials to provide proof of his poisoning. They refused to open a full-fledged criminal inquiry, citing the lack of evidence that Navalny was poisoned.

Last month, Navalny released the recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him in August and then tried to cover it up.

The FSB dismissed the recording as fake.

Indonesia starts mass COVID-19 vaccinations with president

By EDNA TARIGAN and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday received the first shot of a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine after Indonesia approved it for emergency use and began efforts to vaccinate millions of people in the world's fourth most populated country.

After Widodo, top military, police and medical officials were vaccinated, as well as the secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council, the clerical body that last week ruled the vaccine was halal and could be taken by Muslims. Others such as a health care worker, businesspeople and a social media influencer also received the shots to encourage people to get the vaccine when it is available to them.

"We need to do the vaccination to stop the chain spread of COVID-19 and give health protection to us and the safety to all Indonesian people. It will also help accelerate economic improvement," Widodo said.

"This vaccine is the instrument we can use to protect us. But more importantly, the vaccine is the instrument to protect our family, our neighbor, Indonesian people and the human civilization," Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said on Wednesday.

"This vaccine is given to achieve herd immunity. All 70% of the world's people must be vaccinated for that to be achieved. The participation of all Indonesians will greatly determine the success of this program," he said.

Conditional use of the Sinovac Biotech Ltd. vaccine is scheduled to be rolled out in the coming months

with health care workers, civil servants and other at-risk populations prioritized. It will be free for all Indonesian citizens.

For Indonesia to vaccinate two-thirds of its population, 181.5 million people, Sadikin said the two-shot vaccine would require almost 427 million doses, including the estimate that 15% may be wasted.

Distribution will not be easy in the vast archipelago where transportation and infrastructure are limited in places. Health officials have cited concerns about keeping the vaccine refrigerated at the required 36–46 degrees Fahrenheit to maintain its safety and effectiveness.

“We know that the cold-chain distribution is not complete. This is the obstacle,” Sadikin said Tuesday. “The cold-chain facilities are not enough so we are still distributing some of the vaccines. We are worried.”

Indonesia received its first shipment of the Sinovac vaccines on Dec. 6 and began distributing the doses around the country while awaiting emergency use authorization. It was cleared for emergency use based on clinical trial data and after the Indonesian Ulema Council declared the vaccine holy and halal.

Indonesia’s vaccination program is the first large-scale use of the Sinovac vaccine outside of China.

Indonesia has recorded more than 846,000 cases of the virus, including over 24,600 deaths.

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Dutch hold mass coronavirus testing amid new variant fears

By PETER DEJONG and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

BERGSCHENHOEK, Netherlands (AP) — Residents of a Dutch town filed into a sports hall Wednesday to take part in the country’s first mass coronavirus testing program, which aims to find out more about the spread of a new more transmissible coronavirus variant.

The makeshift testing center in Bergschenhoek, near the port city of Rotterdam, was set up after a cluster of COVID-19 cases linked to an elementary school turned up 30 cases of the new variant that is sweeping through Britain and Ireland, putting hospitals in those countries under severe strain.

On Tuesday night, as the Dutch government extended its current lockdown by three more weeks, Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said that only 2% to 5% of all COVID-19 cases in the Netherlands are now the new variant. But he added that “the expectation is that it will, just as in England, get the upper hand.”

“The only question is how long that will take,” De Jonge added. “And anybody who lets the dramatic images and stories from London sink in knows it can get much, much worse very quickly and we have to do whatever it takes to prevent that.”

Ernst Kuipers, head of a national organization that distributes patients among hospitals, warned lawmakers Wednesday of the gravity of the threat.

“If you get a transmission that goes as fast as in England, then there is no care system, not in Germany, not in England and not in the Netherlands either, that can cope,” he said.

Bergschenhoek residents played their part as a steady stream of people — from elderly men and women to young families with babies — went to get tested. The municipality of Lansingerland, which includes the town and other nearby villages, wants to test all of its 62,000 residents aged over two years in coming days.

The testing came the morning after Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte extended his country’s tough five-week lockdown amid concerns that infection rates are not falling quickly enough and fears about the new more transmissible variant.

Under the lockdown, all schools and nonessential shops are closed, along with public venues such as cinemas, museums and libraries. There also are strict limits on the size of gatherings both indoors and outside.

“Almost everybody will understand that there was no other choice, because numbers are not falling fast enough and we are now also have to face the threat of the British virus variant,” Rutte said.

Confirmed new COVID-19 infections in the Netherlands over the last week fell 12% to 49,398, the Dutch

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public health institute said Tuesday. Hospital admissions for virus patients fell 18% and new COVID-19 patients in intensive care units declined by 12%.

The overall Dutch death toll from COVID-19 now stands at more than 12,500.

Corder contributed from The Hague, Netherlands.

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World warily watches America's postelection aftershocks

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — For America's allies and rivals alike, the chaos unfolding during Donald Trump's final days as president is the logical result of four years of global instability brought on by the man who promised to change the way the world viewed the United States.

From the outside, the United States has never looked so vulnerable — or unpredictable.

Alliances that had held for generations frayed to a breaking point under Trump — from his decision to back out of the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear deal, to quitting the World Health Organization amid a pandemic.

And then, by seeking to overturn his loss to Joe Biden, Trump upended the bedrock principle of democratic elections that the United States has tried — and sometimes even succeeded — in exporting around the world. How long those aftershocks could endure is unclear.

"It is one of the biggest tasks of the future for America and Europe — to fight the polarization of society at its roots," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said. "We will only be able to preserve the belief in togetherness, in democracy as the most humane form of statehood, and the conviction in science and reason if we do it together."

But in many ways Europe has already moved on, forging ahead on the deal with Iran, negotiating a trade agreement with China spearheaded by Germany, and organizing global actions to protect the environment.

On the same day an angry mob stormed the Capitol to try to overturn the presidential election won by Biden, a record number of Americans died of coronavirus. One other recent event also showed U.S. vulnerability: the cyberespionage operation still working its way through an untold number of government computers and blamed on elite Russian hackers.

World leaders who saw the deadly violence in Washington "will need to consider whether these events are an outlier event — a 'black swan' — or whether these extremist white supremacist groups will continue to be a significant influence on the direction of U.S. foreign and domestic policy, instead of receding with the end of the Trump administration," the Soufan Group, a global intelligence and security firm, wrote Tuesday.

People tend to think of fragile countries "in terms of war as the biggest problem, rather than violence, and thinking in terms of state collapse as the biggest problem rather than states that internally disintegrate," said Rachel Kleinfeld, a scholar of democracy and violence at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Kleinfeld, like many others, said the assault on the U.S. Capitol may have come to a head in a matter of weeks but was years in the making.

And the U.S. capacity to fight for democracy was already tarnished before the mob egged on by Trump sought to overturn his election loss. For many, those events were merely confirmation.

Adversaries including Russia, China and Iran used the violence to question U.S. democracy more generally.

In an internal note on the State Department's "dissent channel" obtained by The Associated Press, American diplomats said Trump's actions had made their job harder. "It is critical that we communicate to the world that in our system, no one — not even the president — is above the law or immune from

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public criticism," the note said. "This would be a first step towards repairing the damage to our international credibility."

Trump showed no contrition, however, saying Tuesday his fiery rally remarks to supporters were "totally appropriate."

In Iraq, a country that still struggles with the controversial legacy of a U.S.-led invasion in the name of democracy, many people followed the Washington events with a mixture of shock and fascination.

Then-U.S. President George W. Bush boasted that Iraq would become a model of democracy in a region ruled by dictators. Instead, the country fell into protracted war between Sunnis and Shiites in which tens of thousands of people died. Although it has an active parliament and regular elections, it is a dysfunctional democracy based on a sectarian power sharing agreement, with corrupt parties haggling over ministries and posts so they can give jobs to supporters while lining their own pockets.

Ahmad al-Helfi, a 39-year-old Iraqi political cartoonist, said what happened at the U.S. Capitol is a blow to the democracy it tried to bring to Iraq and other countries.

"By mobilizing his followers in an effort to overturn the results of the election, Trump confirmed that instead of exporting democracy to Iraq, America imported the chaos, non-peaceful transition of power, and failure to accept election results," al-Helfi said.

Anahita Thoms, a German lawyer and trade expert who spent years living and working in the United States, said last week's events would indelibly mark America's image abroad. Thoms is a board member of the Atlantic Bridge, a think tank promoting cooperation between Europe and the U.S. — the kind of organization founded in the aftermath of World War II when the U.S. helped to rebuild the economies of many countries in western Europe that had been destroyed by the war.

Germany was one country that benefited the most from those U.S. financial and democracy-building efforts.

Looking ahead, she said American officials may have a tougher time promoting democracy abroad.

"The U.S. remains a country that lives its democratic values. But this aspiration, which is presented very strongly to the outside world, mustn't get too many cracks," Thoms said. "I think a lot of diplomatic skill is going to be necessary to counter those pictures."

The International Crisis Group, which normally focuses on global war zones, wrote its first assessment ever about the risk of election-related violence in the United States in October. Stephen Pomper, who helped lead the work on the report and lives in the D.C. area, said in the best of circumstances, the United States could eventually point to the decision of Congress to resume certification of Biden's election after the breach as a first step in successfully protecting its democracy.

"Look, we created these institutions. They did become a source of resiliency for us. They helped us get through this very difficult period. Let us help you develop the same kind of resiliency," he said, describing a hypothetical future conversation between the U.S. and a struggling government. "That would be a positive story to be able to tell at some point, but I don't think the pieces are quite there yet."

Pope Francis was more optimistic, telling Italian broadcaster Mediaset: "Thank God this exploded" into the open because "we have been able to see why this is, and how it can be remedied."

Associated Press writers Kirsten Grieshaber and Frank Jordans in Berlin, Abdulrahman Zeyad in Baghdad, Matt Lee in Washington; and Frank Bajak in Boston contributed.

Trump on verge of 2nd impeachment after Capitol siege

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is on the verge of being impeached for a second time, the House planning the unprecedented vote one week after he encouraged a mob of loyalists to "fight like hell" against election results and the U.S. Capitol became the target of a deadly siege.

While the first impeachment of Trump last year brought no Republican votes in the House, a small but significant number of leaders and other lawmakers are breaking with the party to join Democrats on

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Wednesday, unwilling to put American decency and democracy at further risk, even with days remaining in the president's term.

The stunning collapse of Trump's final days in office, against alarming warnings of more violence ahead by his followers, leaves the nation at an uneasy and unfamiliar juncture before Democrat Joe Biden is inaugurated Jan. 20.

"If inviting a mob to insurrection against your own government is not an impeachable event, then what is?" said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., a drafter of the articles of impeachment.

Trump, who would become the only U.S. president twice impeached, faces a single charge of "incitement of insurrection."

The four-page impeachment resolution relies on Trump's own incendiary rhetoric and the falsehoods he spread about Biden's election victory, including at a White House rally on the day of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, in building its case for high crimes and misdemeanors as demanded in the Constitution.

Confronting his potential place in history, Trump warned lawmakers off it, suggesting it was the drive to oust him rather than his actions around the bloody riot that was dividing the country.

"To continue on this path, I think it's causing tremendous danger to our country, and it's causing tremendous anger," Trump said Tuesday, his first remarks to reporters since last week's violence.

A Capitol police officer died from injuries suffered in the riot, and police shot and killed a woman during the siege. Three other people died in what authorities said were medical emergencies. Lawmakers had to scramble for safety and hide as rioters took control of the Capitol and delayed by hours the last step in finalizing Biden's victory.

The outgoing president offered no condolences for those dead or injured, only saying, "I want no violence."

At least five Republican lawmakers, including third-ranking House GOP leader Liz Cheney of Wyoming, were unswayed by the president's logic. The Republicans announced they would vote to impeach Trump, cleaving the Republican leadership, and the party itself.

"The President of the United States summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack," said Cheney in a statement. "There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution."

Unlike a year ago, Trump faces impeachment as a weakened leader, having lost his own reelection as well as the Senate Republican majority.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky is said to be angry at Trump, and it's unclear how an impeachment trial would play out. In the House, Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, a top Trump ally, scrambled to suggest a lighter censure instead, but that option crumbled.

So far, Republican Reps. John Katko of New York, a former federal prosecutor; Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, an Air Force veteran; Fred Upton of Michigan; and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington state announced they, too, would join Cheney to vote to impeach.

The House tried first to push Vice President Mike Pence and the Cabinet to intervene, passing a resolution Tuesday night calling on them to invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to remove Trump from office. The resolution urged Pence to "declare what is obvious to a horrified Nation: That the President is unable to successfully discharge the duties and powers of his office."

Hours before the vote, however, Pence made it clear he would not do so. In a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Pence said it was "time to unite our country as we prepare to inaugurate President-elect Joe Biden."

Debate over the resolution was intense after lawmakers returned the Capitol for the first time since the siege.

Rep. Sylvia Garcia, D-Texas, argued that Trump must go because, as she said in Spanish, he's "loco" — crazy.

In opposition, Republican Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio said the "cancel culture" was just trying to cancel the president. He said the Democrats had been trying to reverse the 2016 election ever since Trump took office and were finishing his term the same way.

While more Republicans may vote to impeach — and leaders are allowing them to vote as they wish — it's far from clear there would then be the two-thirds vote in the evenly divided Senate needed to convict and remove Trump. Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania joined Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska over the weekend in calling for Trump to "go away as soon as possible."

Unprecedented events, with just over a week remaining in Trump's term, are unfolding as the FBI warned ominously of potential armed protests by Trump loyalists ahead of Biden's inauguration. Capitol Police urged lawmakers to be on alert.

With new security, lawmakers were required to pass through metal detectors to enter the House chamber, not far from where Capitol police, guns drawn, had barricaded the door against the rioters. Some Republican lawmakers complained about the screening.

Biden has said it's important to ensure that the "folks who engaged in sedition and threatening the lives, defacing public property, caused great damage — that they be held accountable."

Fending off concerns that an impeachment trial would bog down his first days in office, the president-elect is encouraging senators to divide their time between taking up his priorities of confirming his nominees and approving COVID-19 relief while also conducting the trial.

The impeachment bill draws from Trump's own false statements about his election defeat to Biden. Judges across the country, including some nominated by Trump, have repeatedly dismissed cases challenging the election results, and former Attorney General William Barr, a Trump ally, has said there was no sign of widespread fraud.

Like the resolution to invoke the 25th Amendment, the impeachment bill also details Trump's pressure on state officials in Georgia to "find" him more votes and his White House rally rant to "fight like hell" by heading to the Capitol.

While some have questioned impeaching the president so close to the end of his term, there is precedent. In 1876, during the Ulysses Grant administration, War Secretary William Belknap was impeached by the House the day he resigned, and the Senate convened a trial months later. He was acquitted.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Belgian high schoolers demand to get back in-person learning

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — A late-stage side effect of the coronavirus pandemic has turned up in Belgium, where a group of teenagers is begging to go back to school.

Fed up with the COVID-19 restrictions keeping them at home most of the time, students in the last two years of a high school in the city of Liege launched an online petition asking for more in-person class time.

"It's been six months now that we have been going to class only once a week," the students enrolled at the Athénée Léonie de Waha wrote last week. "Get ready, and open your ears: We want to go to school more often. Yes, yes, you heard it right!"

The students' efforts paid off Tuesday following an online meeting with Mayor Willy Demeyer and education officials in the city, which is known for its universities. The officials pledged to revisit the current COVID-19 protocol in a bid to get the 16 to 18-year-olds in-person instruction at least half-time starting Monday.

Months of learning exclusively or mostly online took a toll on the school's more than 200 students, the petition writers said. Concerned that prolonged distance learning would eventually derail their academic progress, they complained about the lack of social interaction and a growing loss of motivation sitting alone in front of their computers.

"We could not take it anymore," student Lena Piazza told The Associated Press. "With the fatigue and the loss of concentration, many people were about to disengage."

Piazza said she felt like "an old person" with headaches, pain in her neck and a lot of stress.

Since the start of the pandemic, academic studies and accounts from parents and teachers in many

countries have highlighted the global challenges of remote learning. But as confirmed coronavirus cases keep soaring across Europe and authorities face a more contagious virus variant and overwhelmed hospitals, a general return to regular schooling is not foreseen for months in many countries.

In Italy, students and parents have protested continued school closures, with some high schoolers declaring an online "strike" on Monday. Most Italian elementary and middle schools remained open for in-person learning throughout the fall, but high schools shifted back to remote learning at the end of October.

The Liege students had an advantage in getting officials to take their pleas seriously. They attend classes at a school that employs the alternative pedagogy developed by French educational reformer Celestin Freinet. His philosophy rejected the traditional lines of authority in schools, holding that children's views should be taken into account.

Athénée Léonie de Waha Director Rudi Creten said the students had his support in their battle to attend school in person more often. He said they had shown patience and dedication to remote learning over the past months but started to "suffer" recently.

"Their struggles to go through the current situation have been heard," Creten told the AP. The decision made Tuesday "opens a door. It says that we can trust the youth."

In Belgium, like in other countries, decisions whether to close or open schools vary greatly, depending on the course of the pandemic, on whether schools are public, private or church-run, and which grades are involved. At Léonie de Waha, only the oldest students were restricted to attending school once a week.

The virus has played havoc with education across the continent, with schools opening and reclosing often at short notice and the status of crucial student exams constantly in flux.

French schools went back full-time in September and have largely remained that way, even after new virus restrictions were imposed nationwide in October. Britain closed schools last week in response to surging numbers of new infections, although the children of essential workers still can attend in person.

In Spain, most students returned to school following the Christmas and New Year's holidays. But the unprecedented weekend blizzard that left 20 inches of snow in much of Spain has led many regions to cancel all classes at least until Wednesday.

And in Germany, where infections are also soaring, authorities in Berlin backtracked last week on plans to partially resume in-person teaching, following protests from parents, teachers and the federal government.

Associated Press writers Angela Charlton in Paris, Jill Lawless in London, Geir Moulson in Berlin, Aritz Parra in Madrid, and Nicole Winfield in Rome contributed to this report.

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Nostalgia for old era challenges Tunisia's democratic gains

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

MONASTIR, Tunisia (AP) — Flanked by columns of private security, Tunisian lawmaker Abir Moussi recently swept onto a stage to address an adoring crowd at a rally filled with symbols evoking the North African country's past.

Since winning a parliamentary seat in 2019, Moussi has become one of the country's most popular — and most controversial — politicians, riding a wave of nostalgia for a more stable and prosperous time, just as Tunisia marks 10 years since protesters overthrew autocratic former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Moussi, a lawyer and former official in Ben Ali's ruling party, freely stokes that yearning and purports to offer a way back, telling the crowd in the coastal town of Monastir on a recent afternoon that "Tunisia is bleeding, that Tunisia is sick and wounded. Tunisia wants us to save her from this situation."

Tunisian President Kais Saied, overwhelmingly elected in 2019, holds a strong anti-dictatorship stance. But some see Moussi and the backward-looking movement she espouses as a threat to Tunisia's young democracy, and criticize her refusal to even acknowledge the flagrant repression under Ben Ali, who was

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toppled on Jan. 14, 2011, in a revolution that unleashed uprisings across the region known as the Arab Spring.

Ben Ali fled in disgrace to Saudi Arabia and died in 2019. A truth commission found tens of thousands of victims of torture, execution or corruption under him and his predecessor.

While countries in democratic transition often experience such nostalgia, Moussi has tapped into widespread frustration with the failure of Tunisia's post-revolution democratically elected governments to tackle searing poverty.

Since 2011, Tunisia has been plagued by sinking wages, growing joblessness and worsening public services. Unemployment has risen amid the coronavirus pandemic from 15% to 18%. Attempts to migrate to Europe by sea have soared.

"It's not nostalgia for a dictator — Tunisians still hate this fallen regime — it's the nostalgia for the certainty that has been lost," says Michaël Bechir Ayari, a senior analyst of Tunisia at the International Crisis Group.

"People want public services," he said. "They feel that under Ben Ali it was easier because the paternalistic system was much more reliable than now."

Moussi often denies the legitimacy of the Tunisian revolution, and says that Islamist movement Ennahda, the largest party in parliament, is a terrorist group that should be banned. She advocates returning to a strong presidency and security apparatus but is careful not to overly praise Ben Ali.

She finds a welcome ear in many quarters: Her Facebook lives of sit-ins that frequently disrupt parliament are watched and shared by thousands. Her Free Destourian Party, known by its French acronym PDL, took 17 seats in 2019, but two recent surveys suggest it could win the most votes if parliamentary elections were held today.

"Abir speaks the truth. She's a lion. She's the one that's going to save Tunisia," said Morad Jaaidi, a retired bank manager, who attended the Monastir rally.

"What happened is not a revolution, what happened was a coup d'état," says Abir Jlassi, 27, who is studying to become a lawyer. "Abir's program of recovery is a clear vision for the future."

But critics say it's exactly because she lacks a concrete political program that she resorts to populist rhetoric.

Symbols harkening back to Tunisia's past abounded at the Monastir rally. A portrait of the country's first leader Habib Bourguiba — who led Tunisia to independence from France — gazed paternally upon the crowd. Speakers played a song popular during the Ben Ali dictatorship, with gauzy lyrics about perfect beaches and sunny weather. Even a few shouts of "God Bless Ben Ali!" could be heard.

Mohammed Jegham worked under Ben Ali for 13 years, including as interior minister, defense minister and the president's chief of staff.

"If you try and do an assessment of those 23 years that Ben Ali was in power, there is the good and the bad," Jegham, who now runs an air conditioning company on the outskirts of the capital, Tunis, told The Associated Press. "The country without question advanced during those years. There was lots of investment."

But Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission, established by the democratically elected government in 2013, uncovered numerous abuses in a sweeping investigation of the governments of Bourguiba and Ben Ali and the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

The commission received 63,000 complaints, identified 30,000 victims of serious violations and transferred 200 cases of corruption, torture, rape and assassination to the courts. Its report details the grim torture methods of the former security apparatus, including mock executions, drownings, rape and electrocution. One testimony details how a pregnant woman was beaten so badly she miscarried, another how a man was suspended from the ceiling, burnt with cigarettes and flayed alive.

Moussi herself appears in the report in documents showing that she was paid to give the Ben Ali government information on her fellow lawyers. She has previously attacked the work of the commission; she declined requests to be interviewed.

Asked about accusations that Moussi glosses over such abuses, fellow PDL parliamentarian Mohammed

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Krifa said: "If you give us freedom of speech and we are starving, what does that mean?"

"Even with the mistakes of the old regime, with the bad things, the growth of the country was 7%," he added.

Human rights activist Sihem Bensedrine, who led the truth commission, recognizes Tunisia's economic troubles, but says: "A citizen is in need of both his freedom and his security. You can't have one without the other."

She emphasizes the strides Tunisia has made since 2011: the establishment of democratic institutions, an independent justice system, free and fair elections — but acknowledges there's still work to be done and warns against backsliding.

Still, analyst Ayari calls it "a sign of good health of the Tunisian democracy" that people like Moussi are allowed to participate in the public debate.

"It's better to have ideas, even extremist ideas, framed by political parties and conflicts that are peaceful but inside parliament not out in the streets," he said. "What is a threat is the economic and social situation. This is much more dangerous."

US carries out its 1st execution of female inmate since 1953

By MICHAEL TARM and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — A Kansas woman was executed Wednesday for strangling an expectant mother in Missouri and cutting the baby from her womb, the first time in nearly seven decades that the U.S. government has put to death a female inmate.

Lisa Montgomery, 52, was pronounced dead at 1:31 a.m. after receiving a lethal injection at the federal prison complex in Terre Haute, Indiana. She was the 11th prisoner to receive a lethal injection there since July when President Donald Trump, an ardent supporter of capital punishment, resumed federal executions following 17 years without one.

As a curtain was raised in the execution chamber, Montgomery looked momentarily bewildered as she glanced at journalists peering at her from behind thick glass. As the execution process began, a woman standing over Montgomery's shoulder leaned over, gently removed Montgomery's face mask and asked her if she had any last words. "No," Montgomery responded in a quiet, muffled voice. She said nothing else.

She tapped her fingers nervously for several seconds, a heart-shaped tattoo on her thumb, showed no signs of distress, and quickly closed her eyes. As the lethal injection began, Montgomery kept licking her lips and gasped briefly as pentobarbital, a lethal drug, entered her body through IVs on both arms. A few minutes later, her midsection throbbed for a moment, but quickly stopped.

Montgomery lay on a gurney in the pale-green execution chamber, her glasses on and her grayish brown hair spilling over a green medical pillow. At 1:30 a.m., an official in black gloves with a stethoscope walked into the room, listened to her heart and chest, then walked out. She was pronounced dead a minute later.

"The craven bloodlust of a failed administration was on full display tonight," Montgomery's attorney, Kelley Henry said in a statement. "Everyone who participated in the execution of Lisa Montgomery should feel shame."

"The government stopped at nothing in its zeal to kill this damaged and delusional woman," Henry said. "Lisa Montgomery's execution was far from justice."

It came after hours of legal wrangling before the Supreme Court cleared the way for the execution to move forward. Montgomery was the first of the final three federal inmates scheduled to die before next week's inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who is expected to discontinue federal executions.

But a federal judge for the District of Columbia halted the scheduled executions later this week of Corey Johnson and Dustin Higgs in a ruling Tuesday. Johnson, convicted of killing seven people related to his drug trafficking in Virginia, and Higgs, convicted of ordering the murders of three women in Maryland, both tested positive for COVID-19 last month.

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

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as her own.

An appeals court granted Montgomery a stay of execution Tuesday, shortly after another appeals court lifted an Indiana judge's ruling that found she was likely mentally ill and couldn't comprehend she would be put to death. But both appeals were lifted, allowing the execution of the only female on federal death row to go forward.

As the only woman on federal death row, Montgomery had been held in a federal prison in Texas and was brought to Terre Haute on Monday night.

Montgomery's legal team says she suffered "sexual torture," including gang rapes, as a child, permanently scarring her emotionally and exacerbating mental-health issues that ran in her family.

At trial, prosecutors accused Montgomery of faking mental illness, noting that her killing of Stinnett was premeditated and included meticulous planning, including online research on how to perform a C-section.

Henry balked at that idea, citing extensive testing and brain scans that supported the diagnosis of mental illness. She said the issue at the core of the legal arguments are not whether she knew the killing was wrong in 2004 but whether she fully grasps why she is slated to be executed now.

U.S. District Judge James Patrick Hanlon, who had halted Montgomery's execution before the stay was overturned on appeal, cited defense experts who alleged Montgomery suffered from depression, borderline personality disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Montgomery, the judge wrote, also suffered around the time of the killing from an extremely rare condition called pseudocyesis in which a woman's false belief she is pregnant triggers hormonal and physical changes as if she were actually pregnant.

Montgomery also experiences delusions and hallucinations, believing God spoke with her through connect-the-dot puzzles, the judge said, citing defense experts. The government has acknowledged Montgomery's mental issues but disputes that she can't comprehend that she is scheduled for execution for killing another person because of them.

Details of the crime at times left jurors in tears during her trial.

Prosecutors told the jury Montgomery drove about 170 miles (274 kilometers) from her Melvern, Kansas, farmhouse to the northwest Missouri town of Skidmore under the guise of adopting a rat terrier puppy from Stinnett. She strangled Stinnett performing a crude cesarean and fleeing with the baby.

Prosecutors said Stinnett regained consciousness and tried to defend herself as Montgomery cut the baby girl from her womb. Later that day, Montgomery called her husband to pick her up in the parking lot of a Long John Silver's in Topeka, Kansas, telling him she had delivered the baby earlier in the day at a nearby birthing center.

Montgomery was arrested the next day after showing off the premature infant, Victoria Jo, who is now 16 years old and hasn't spoken publicly about the tragedy.

Prosecutors said the motive was that Montgomery's ex-husband knew she had undergone a tubal ligation that made her sterile and planned to reveal she was lying about being pregnant in an effort to get custody of two of their four children. Needing a baby before a fast-approaching court date, Montgomery turned her focus on Stinnett, whom she had met at dog shows.

Anti-death penalty groups said Trump was pushing for executions prior to the November election in a cynical bid to burnish a reputation as a law-and-order leader.

The last woman executed by the federal government was Bonnie Brown Heady on Dec. 18, 1953, for the kidnapping and murder of a 6-year-old boy in Missouri.

The last woman executed by a state was Kelly Gissendaner, 47, on Sept. 30, 2015, in Georgia. She was convicted of murder in the 1997 slaying of her husband after she conspired with her lover, who stabbed Douglas Gissendaner to death.

Hollingsworth reported from Kansas. Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

Demoted? Pushed aside? Fate of Kim Jong Un's sister unclear

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By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — What has happened to Kim Yo Jong, the North Korean leader's influential sister?

That is a question many who watch the cloistered, nuclear-armed country are wondering after she failed to appear in absolute leader Kim Jong Un's newly released lineup for the country's powerful Politburo in recent days.

Some say Kim Jong Un may have demoted his sister over general policy failures. Others, however, believe he could be worried about her rapid rise and increasingly high profile as he tries to bolster his domestic authority in the face of growing economic challenges.

Rumors that Kim Yo Jong is her brother's heir apparent could be dangerous because they "raise the issue of Kim's hold on power and health inside North Korea," said Oh Gyeong-seob, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification. This, he said, is why Kim Jong Un is slowing down her rise in power.

The development is a surprise because Kim Yo Jong, who became an alternate member of the Politburo last year, was widely expected to receive a full bureau membership during a ruling Workers' Party congress that ended Tuesday. A Politburo membership is viewed as crucial for high-level officials hoping to thrive in Kim Jong Un's government because he's made key decisions at bureau meetings, including the 2013 move to execute his powerful uncle Jang Song Taek, and the 2012 purge of military chief Ri Yong Ho.

When the eight-day congress, the first of its kind since 2016, opened last week, Kim Yo Jong, who is thought to be about 32, sat on the leadership podium, standing out amid the often elderly, overwhelmingly male party cadres. But when the congress on Monday announced a list of 30 alternate and full members of the Politburo, including the 37-year-old Kim Jong Un, her name wasn't there.

Kim Yo Jong hasn't been purged or forced to quit politics, a fate that some officials have met under Kim Jong Un, and she still retains her membership in the party's Central Committee, also a high-level body. But when she released a statement criticizing South Korea on Wednesday, state media identified her as a "vice department director" of the party, a lower rank than her previous title of "first vice department director."

Kim Jong Un is urging his 25 million people to rally behind his leadership to overcome what he has called his nation's "worst-ever" difficulties. North Korea has faced coronavirus-related economic shocks, a spate of natural disasters last summer and persistent U.S.-led sanctions over its pursuit of illicit nuclear weapons. During the congress, Kim vowed to expand his nuclear arsenal and build a stronger, self-reliant economy.

"The congress' purpose is to solidify Kim Jong Un's leadership. If Kim Yo Jong had become a full Politburo member, all eyes would have been on her ... and Kim Jong Un likely felt that as a burden," Ko Young-hwan, a former deputy head of the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank run by South Korea's spy agency, said during a TV news program Monday.

Previously little known to outsiders, Kim Yo Jong has soared politically since her brother inherited power after their father, Kim Jong Il, died in late 2011.

The current Kims are the third generation of their family to rule North Korea, and their leadership is based on a personality cult established after their grandfather Kim Il Sung founded the country in 1948. Their mythical "paektu" bloodline, named after the North's most sacred mountain, allows only direct family members to rule the country.

Kim Yo Jong rose to international prominence after her brother's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with President Donald Trump and other world leaders in 2018 and 2019. In those meetings, her proximity to Kim Jong Un sparked speculation that she was serving as her brother's chief of staff.

In South Korea, she built an image as "a peace messenger" after she attended the opening ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, becoming the first member of the North's ruling family to visit the South since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Last year, however, she abruptly changed course by launching harsh diatribes against South Korea and putting pressure on the United States to make concessions amid deadlocked nuclear diplomacy. North Korea's state media said she was in charge of relations with South Korea, and outside experts speculated

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that she might be handling U.S. affairs as well.

In her statement on Wednesday, she slammed South Korea for provoking the North by announcing that it had detected intelligence that North Korea held a military parade or a rehearsal for such a parade this week.

When unconfirmed global rumors about Kim Jong Un's health rose last year, some observers said Kim Yo Jong was next in line to rule North Korea if her brother became incapacitated. South Korea's spy agency said later that she was virtually the North's No. 2 official but hadn't been anointed as her brother's heir.

"Kim Jong Un likely held his sister responsible for worsened (external) ties, as she had no achievements in relations with the U.S. and South Korea," said Kim Yeol Soo, an analyst with South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs.

Whatever the reason for her apparent loss of the Politburo job, many experts say her political clout likely remains unchanged thanks to her direct link to the paektu bloodline. There's also a feeling that Kim Jong Un could eventually give her another high-profile job.

Oh, the analyst, said Kim Yo Jong is likely the second-most powerful woman in North Korean history after Kim Song Ae, the late second wife of Kim Il Sung.

"Kim Yo Jong can meet and talk to Kim Jong Un freely anytime ... so we can't help saying that she has a tremendous influence," Oh said. "As she gets older, her roles will be bigger."

But, he added, her rise could end if she covets more power. "She has to be careful about that," he said.

'Safest place in Washington' no more. A reporter's disbelief

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — I still can't stop watching the videos.

There are so many of them, each with new clues about what happened a week ago today in familiar corners of the sprawling U.S. Capitol complex. Thousands of insurrectionists outside calling for a revolution. Images of broken windows and defaced relics. My own raw footage of the chaos in the House chamber. And of course the heroic Capitol Police officer who appeared to lead a mob away from the Senate doors by himself as they advanced up a staircase I have climbed so many times.

In the last week, I have pored over the images again and again, muting videos if my children are nearby, pausing and rewinding. Finding new details.

I still can't believe it happened. But it did, and the videos are the terrifying proof.

I want to piece it all together, to better understand my own experience that day as hundreds of angry rioters supportive of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol to protest his defeat in the election. At the time, I was convinced I would be OK even as I ducked on the floor in the upper gallery of the House chamber with members of Congress and other reporters.

It's now clear from the footage that there were rioters close to breaching at least three separate entrances of the House as we waited, the last group left in the chamber. Below, at the main entrance, we could see police keeping them out with a furniture barricade, shouting with their guns drawn, and broken glass in the door. What we didn't know then was that on the other side of the House, rioters were also breaking the glass doors of the ornate speaker's lobby, a frequent gathering spot for members and reporters. We did hear a gunshot as an officer shot one of them, dispersing the crowd. The woman struck by that bullet later died.

When we were finally taken out of the House gallery, police leading us quickly down a grand stairway, we passed another group of at least six intruders laying on the floor, officers over them with enormous guns pointed down. It appeared that they had been close to the area where we had waited.

Just an hour earlier, as TV reports started to come in about the insurgents outside, my mother sent me a text telling me to stay safe. I told her I was sitting in the press gallery overlooking the House chamber, covering the counting of electoral votes.

"Probably the safest place in Washington right now," I texted back, not joking.

I believed that up until the moment I heard them pounding on the House door — probably even after

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that. I've covered the Hill on and off for almost 20 years, and I've always felt safe in the Capitol.

Sometimes overly so. During Trump's impeachment trial a year ago, what seemed like hundreds of police lined the same hallways and staircases that the officer in the Senate defended alone last Wednesday. They were there ostensibly to protect the senators from the press, and our movements were unusually — and we thought unfairly — restricted.

But the police are also a comforting presence. In the summer of 2004, just three years after 9/11, I was sitting in a Senate press gallery when the entire Capitol evacuated in just a few minutes because there were reports of a plane headed toward the building. It ended up being a false alarm, but I have always marveled at how quickly the Capitol Police emptied the building, yelling at us to take off our shoes and run. "There is a plane headed for the Capitol! You have two minutes!" they yelled as we ran out.

Since then, and last week, I had faith that there would be similar procedures in place. If there was a problem, there would be a well-executed plan to keep everyone safe. Of course there would. This is the U.S. Capitol. A fortress. The seat of American government. It wasn't a question.

But my strong sense of safety was eroded on Wednesday in slow motion, as the rioters gradually approached the inner sanctum of the U.S. House.

How could this be happening? Everyone was asking the same question in their heads, and to each other after we were rushed to safety. Not here.

In the days after, I have sorted through the video evidence, much of it recorded by the rioters themselves. And I have pored over the small details of the day with my husband, a reporter for another publication who was in a different part of the Capitol. His photos and videos, like mine, are chilling.

When I saved his images to my phone, making sure they were kept for posterity, they mixed with my own in chronological order. The time stamps told a story.

At 2:20 p.m., my husband filmed rioters trying to break through a main door on the east front of the Capitol. The door is unprotected, with no police visible nearby. At 2:33 p.m., from a different location, he filmed the rioters walking through Statuary Hall toward the House chamber, with two police walking by in the opposite direction. At 2:37 p.m., my photo of lawmakers on the House floor putting on gas masks. Two minutes later, video of lawmakers streaming out of the chamber. By 2:42 p.m., I am filming from a different location in the upper gallery, where they have moved those of us who remained, and peeking my phone above the balcony to capture the armed standoff below. At 2:50, a video I didn't even realize I had taken, chaotic footage of the ground as they hustled us out of the chamber.

I am focusing on the good things, and the people who helped. None of us was hurt inside the House chamber, or across the Capitol on the Senate side, where an AP colleague was evacuating as the rioters pushed up those stairs. The rioters eventually were pushed out. Press gallery staff moved extremely quickly and got us out of the House safely.

Still, I am sad to lose that sense of safety I always had in the Capitol, not only for myself but for my country.

I'll be back there soon, and security will be much tighter. But it's not the safest place in Washington.

EXPLAINER: How Trump's 2nd impeachment will unfold

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is expected to impeach President Donald Trump for his encouragement of supporters who stormed the U.S. Capitol, a vote that would make him the first American president to be impeached twice.

While the previous three impeachments — those of Presidents Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and Trump — took months before a final vote, including investigations and hearings, this time it will have only taken a week. After the rioting at the Capitol, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said "we must take action," and Democrats — and some Republicans — share her view ahead of Wednesday's vote.

For now, the Republican-led Senate is not expected to hold a trial and vote on whether to convict Trump before Democrat Joe Biden is sworn in as president Jan. 20. Still, Democrats feel that action by the House

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would send an important message to the country.

A look at what will happen as the House moves closer to impeaching Trump in his last week in office:

THE BASICS OF IMPEACHMENT

In normal order, there would be an impeachment investigation and the evidence would be sent to the House Judiciary Committee, which would hold hearings, draft articles and send them to the full House. That's what happened in 2019, when the House impeached Trump over his dealings with the president of Ukraine. It took three months.

This time, with so few days to act — and a feeling among Democrats that there is little need to investigate what happened, since most members of Congress heard Trump speak to his supporters and were in the Capitol when the mob broke in — impeachment is going straight to the House floor for a vote, which would come as soon as Wednesday.

Once the House votes to impeach, the articles and evidence would be sent to the Senate, where a trial would be held and there would be final votes to convict or acquit. That's what the Senate did in early February of last year after Trump was impeached the first time.

THE ARTICLES

Democrats will begin debate Wednesday on a single impeachment charge: "incitement of insurrection."

"President Trump gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government," reads the four-page impeachment article, which was introduced by Democratic Reps. David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Ted Lieu of California and Jamie Raskin of Maryland.

"He will remain a threat to national security, democracy, and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office," it reads.

The article says the behavior is consistent with Trump's prior efforts to "subvert and obstruct" the results of the election and references his recent call with the Georgia secretary of state, in which he said he wanted him to find him more votes after losing the state to Biden.

Trump has falsely claimed there was widespread fraud in the election, and the baseless claims have been repeatedly echoed by congressional Republicans and the insurgents who descended on the Capitol. Just before the riots, Trump spoke to the supporters near the White House and encouraged them to "fight like hell."

As the protesters broke in, both chambers were debating GOP challenges to the electoral vote count in Arizona as part of the process for certifying Biden's election win.

REPUBLICAN SUPPORT

On Tuesday, five Republicans said they would support impeachment. No Republicans supported Trump's first impeachment in 2019.

Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 Republican in the House and the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, said she would vote to impeach Trump because "there has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution."

Cheney said Trump "summoned" the mob that attacked the Capitol last week, "assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack."

New York Rep. John Katko was the first Republican to say he'd vote to impeach. A former federal prosecutor, he said he did not make the decision lightly.

"To allow the president of the United States to incite this attack without consequence is a direct threat to the future of our democracy," Katko said. "I cannot sit by without taking action."

Also saying they would vote for impeachment were Reps. Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, Fred Upton of Michigan and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington.

SENDING TO THE SENATE

Once the House passes the articles, Pelosi can decide when she sends them to the Senate. Under the current schedule, the Senate is not set to resume full sessions until Jan. 19, which is the day before Biden's inauguration.

Some Democrats suggested Pelosi might wait to send the articles and allow Biden to begin his term with-

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out impeachment hanging over him. But many other Democrats have urged Pelosi to move immediately.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, who will be in charge once Biden is sworn in, suggested in a letter to colleagues Tuesday the chamber might divide its time between confirming Biden's nominees, approving COVID relief and conducting the trial.

If the trial isn't held until Trump is already out of office, it could still have the effect of preventing him from running for president again.

Biden has said it's important to ensure that the "folks who engaged in sedition and threatening the lives, defacing public property, caused great damage — that they be held accountable."

SENATE POLITICS

It's unlikely, for now, that enough Republicans would vote to convict, since two-thirds of the Senate is needed. Yet some Republicans have told Trump to resign, including Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, and few are defending him.

Republican Sen. Ben Sasse has said he would take a look at what the House approves, but stopped short of committing to support it.

Other Republicans have said that impeachment would be divisive. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, long a key ally of the president, has been critical of his behavior in inciting the riots but said impeachment "will do far more harm than good."

Only one Republican voted to convict Trump last year — Utah Sen. Mitt Romney.

WHAT IMPEACHMENT WOULD MEAN

Democrats say they have to move forward, even if the Senate doesn't convict.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders tweeted on Friday that some people might ask why they would try to impeach a president with only a few days left in office.

"The answer: Precedent," he said. "It must be made clear that no president, now or in the future, can lead an insurrection against the U.S. government."

FBI says it warned about prospect of violence ahead of riot

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI warned law enforcement agencies ahead of last week's breach of the U.S. Capitol about the potential for extremist-driven violence, U.S. officials said, contradicting earlier statements that they were caught off guard by the assault by supporters of President Donald Trump.

Nearly a week after the riot, officials said they were combing through mountains of evidence and vowed to aggressively seek out those who perpetrated the brazen attack on the U.S. Capitol. Though most of the charges brought so far have been misdemeanors, acting U.S. Attorney Michael Sherwin said Tuesday the Justice Department was considering bringing sedition charges against some of the rioters, effectively accusing them of attempting to overthrow or defeat the government.

"This is only the beginning," Sherwin said. "We're going to focus on the most significant charges as a deterrent because, regardless of it was just a trespass in the Capitol or if someone planted a pipe bomb, you will be charged and you will be found."

The Justice Department has created a specialized strike force to examine the possibility of sedition charges, which could carry up to 20 years in prison. Officials said they were utilizing some of the same techniques in the riot probe as they use in international counterterrorism investigations, examining the money flow and movement of defendants leading up to the breach. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, called for the rioters to be added to a no-fly list, a tool most commonly associated with terrorism investigations.

The statements by FBI and Justice Department officials on Tuesday were intended as both a defense of federal law enforcement preparations before the deadly riot and as a warning to participants. But they also raised new questions about the coordination across agencies for the Jan. 6 riot, which was sparked by Trump's calls for his supporters to fight Congress' vote confirming President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

In the immediate aftermath of the riot, some law enforcement officials, including the Capitol police

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chief, said they were unaware of serious concerns leading up to Jan. 6 and had prepared only for a free-speech protest.

But on Tuesday, The Washington Post reported on the existence of a Jan. 5 report from the FBI's field office in Norfolk, Virginia, that forecast, in detail, the chances that extremists could commit "war" in Washington the following day. Steven D'Antuono, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's Washington field office, said that once he received the Jan. 5 warning, the information was quickly shared with other law enforcement agencies through the joint terrorism task force.

D'Antuono was among the officials who suggested law enforcement had simply been caught off guard, saying on Friday: "There was no indication that there was anything other than First Amendment protected activity."

He did not explain the discrepancy in his statements, though he suggested Tuesday that the Norfolk warning was based on nonspecific information in terms of individual leads to investigate, characterizing it as a "thread on a message board" that was not attributable to any specific person.

In a statement Tuesday night, the FBI said the report's author had warned that the "FBI might be encroaching on free speech rights" in pursuing further action, and that the document itself did not necessarily associate the comments with a national security threat or crime. It highlighted D'Antuono's remarks at the news conference suggesting that without knowing the identity of the people whose words were cited in the report, there was not much that could be done with the information.

U.S. Capitol Police and other official didn't immediately respond to questions about their own initial assessments of the threat.

A U.S. defense official familiar with the discussions said Tuesday that Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy was not notified about the FBI warning.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said that it is unclear whether any defense or military officials heard about the notification from the FBI, but that statements in recent days from all the leaders indicate they weren't aware that violence of that level was expected at the Capitol.

Defense and National Guard officials, including McCarthy, have said in interviews over the past several days they were told by D.C. that they believed the protests would be similar to the ones on Nov. 14 and Dec. 12. And they said that federal law enforcement authorities said that there was activity on Twitter, but that they weren't expecting the level of violence they ultimately saw last Wednesday.

Even without intelligence from law enforcement, there had been ample warning about pro-Trump demonstrations in Washington. But Capitol Police did not bolster staffing and made no preparations for the possibility that the planned protests could escalate into massive, violent riots, according to several people briefed on the law enforcement response. Officials turned down help offered by the Pentagon three days before the riot.

When backup was finally requested, it took more than two hours for troops to mobilize near the Capitol. By then the mob had raged inside for more than four hours.

Once the mob began to move on the Capitol, a police lieutenant issued an order not to use deadly force, which explains why officers outside the building did not draw their weapons as the crowd closed in. Officers are sometimes ordered to keep their weapons holstered to avoid escalating a situation if superiors believe doing so could lead to a stampede or a shootout.

In this instance, it also left officers with little ability to resist the mob. In one video from the scene, an officer puts up his fists to try to push back a crowd pinning him and his colleagues against a door. The crowd jeers, "You are not American!" and one man tries to prod him with the tip of an American flag.

The rampage through the halls of Congress sent lawmakers of both parties and Trump's own vice president into hiding, as crowds called for Mike Pence's lynching for his role overseeing the vote count. The scene also undermined the hallmark of the republic — the peaceful transition of power. At least five people died, including one Capitol Police officer.

In a video statement released by the Justice Department, acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen said

federal officials would have “no tolerance for any attempts to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power.”

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed to this report.

House urges Pence to help oust Trump; impeachment next

By LISA MASCARO, ZEKE MILLER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. House rushed ahead Tuesday toward impeaching President Donald Trump for the deadly Capitol attack, taking time only to try to persuade his vice president to push him out first. Trump showed no remorse, blaming impeachment itself for the “tremendous anger” in America.

Already scheduled to leave office next week, Trump is on the verge of becoming the only president in history to be twice impeached. His incendiary rhetoric at a rally ahead of the Capitol uprising is now in the impeachment charge against him — to be taken up Wednesday — even as the falsehoods he spread about election fraud are still being championed by some Republicans.

The House on Tuesday night approved a resolution urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to remove Trump with a Cabinet vote, although Pence had already said he would not do so. The resolution, passed 223-205 almost entirely along party lines, urged him to “declare what is obvious to a horrified Nation: That the President is unable to successfully discharge the duties and powers of his office.”

Hours before the vote Pence had said no. In a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, he said it would not be in the best interest of the nation and it was “time to unite our country as we prepare to inaugurate President-elect Joe Biden.”

Meanwhile, five Republican lawmakers, including third-ranking House GOP leader Liz Cheney of Wyoming, announced they would vote to impeach Trump on Wednesday, cleaving the Republican leadership, and the party itself.

“The President of the United States summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack,” said Cheney in a statement. “There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution.”

As lawmakers reconvened at the Capitol for the first time since the bloody siege, they were bracing for more violence ahead of Democrat Biden’s inauguration, Jan. 20.

“All of us have to do some soul searching,” said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, an author of both pieces of legislation, imploring other Republicans to join.

Trump, meanwhile, warned the lawmakers off impeachment and suggested it was the drive to oust him that was dividing the country.

“To continue on this path, I think it’s causing tremendous danger to our country, and it’s causing tremendous anger,” Trump said.

In his first remarks to reporters since last week’s violence, the outgoing president offered no condolences for those dead or injured, only saying, “I want no violence.”

With Pence’s agreement to invoke the 25th Amendment ruled out, the House will move swiftly to impeachment on Wednesday.

Trump faces a single charge — “incitement of insurrection” — in the impeachment resolution after the most serious and deadly domestic incursion at the Capitol in the nation’s history.

Rep. Sylvia Garcia, D-Texas, argued that Trump must go because, as she said in Spanish, he’s “loco” - crazy.

Republican Reps. John Katko of New York, a former federal prosecutor; Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, an Air Force veteran; Fred Upton of Michigan and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington state announced they, too, would vote to impeach. Kinzinger was the lone Republican voting in favor of the resolution calling on Pence to act.

Republican Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio said the “cancel culture” was just trying to cancel the president. He said the Democrats had been trying to reverse the 2016 election ever since Trump took office and were

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finishing his term the same way.

Though a handful of House Republicans will join the impeachment vote — and leaders are allowing them to vote as they wish — it's far from clear there would then be the two-thirds vote needed to convict from the narrowly divided Senate. Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania did join Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska over the weekend in calling for Trump to "go away as soon as possible."

Unprecedented events, with just over a week remaining in Trump's term, are unfolding in a nation bracing for more unrest. The FBI has warned ominously of potential armed protests by Trump loyalists ahead of Biden's inauguration, and Capitol Police urged lawmakers to be on alert. The inauguration ceremony on the west steps of the Capitol will be off limits to the public.

With new security, lawmakers were required to pass through metal detectors Tuesday night to enter the House chamber, not far from where Capitol police, guns drawn, had barricaded the door against the rioters. Some Republican lawmakers complained about it.

A Capitol police officer died from injuries suffered in the riot, and police shot a woman during the violence. Three other people died in what authorities said were medical emergencies.

Biden has said it's important to ensure that the "folks who engaged in sedition and threatening the lives, defacing public property, caused great damage -- that they be held accountable."

Fending off concerns that an impeachment trial would bog down Biden's first days in office, the president-elect is encouraging senators to divide their time between taking up his priorities of confirming his nominees and approving COVID relief while also conducting the trial.

As Congress resumed, an uneasiness swept the halls. More lawmakers tested positive for COVID-19 after sheltering during the siege. Many lawmakers were voting by proxy rather than come to Washington, a process that was put in place last year to limit the health risks of travel.

One of Trump's closest allies in Congress, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy was among those echoing the president, saying "impeachment at this time would have the opposite effect of bringing our country together."

The impeachment bill from Reps. David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Ted Lieu of California, Raskin of Maryland and Jerrold Nadler of New York draws from Trump's own false statements about his election defeat to Biden.

Judges across the country, including some nominated by Trump, have repeatedly dismissed cases challenging the election results, and former Attorney General William Barr, a Trump ally, has said there was no sign of widespread fraud.

Like the resolution to invoke the 25th Amendment, the impeachment legislation also details Trump's pressure on state officials in Georgia to "find" him more votes, as well as his White House rally ahead of the Capitol siege, in which he encouraged thousands of supporters last Wednesday to "fight like hell" and march to the building.

The mob overpowered police, broke through security lines and windows and rampaged through the Capitol, forcing lawmakers to scatter as they were finalizing Biden's victory over Trump in the Electoral College.

While some have questioned impeaching the president so close to the end of his term, there is precedent. In 1876, during the Ulysses Grant administration, War Secretary William Belknap was impeached by the House the day he resigned, and the Senate convened a trial months later. He was acquitted.

Trump was impeached by the House in 2019 over dealings with Ukraine and acquitted in 2020 by the Senate.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Jill Colvin, Ellen Knickmeyer and Bill Barrow contributed to this report.

No. 3 House GOP leader backs Trump impeachment as tide grows

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican opposition to impeaching President Donald Trump began crumbling

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at the party's upper echelons on Tuesday as the No. 3 House GOP leader said she would vote to impeach Trump.

"There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution," Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., said in a statement that, while not unexpected, shook Congress as lawmakers prepared for a Wednesday House vote. With Democrats commanding that chamber, a vote impeaching Trump for an unprecedented second time seemed certain.

More ominously for a president clinging to his final week in office, The New York Times reported that influential Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell thinks Trump committed an impeachable offense and is glad Democrats are moving against him.

Citing unidentified people familiar with the influential Kentucky Republican's thinking, the Times reported McConnell believes moving against Trump will help the GOP forge a future independent of the divisive, chaotic president.

McConnell thinks Trump's behavior before last week's assault on the Capitol by fuming Trump supporters cost Republicans their Senate majority in two Georgia runoff elections, the newspaper reported. That's a sentiment shared by many Republicans about Trump, who rather than focusing on bolstering Georgia's two sitting GOP senators spent the last weeks of their campaign reciting his false narrative that his own reelection was ruined by Democratic election fraud.

McConnell is said to be angry at the president over the insurrection at the Capitol and the twin defeats in Georgia that cost the party its Senate majority, according to a Republican granted anonymity to discuss the situation.

Cheney, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, has run afoul of Trump and far-right Republicans over the years on issues like wearing a facemask and withdrawing troops from Syria. She's respected by mainstream conservatives and is one of the GOP's few House female stars.

"Good for her for honoring her oath of office," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told reporters when asked about Cheney's decision. "Would that more Republicans would honor their oaths of office."

Lawmakers' oath includes a vow to defend the Constitution "against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

Reps. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., an Air Force veteran, and John Katko, R-N.Y., a former federal prosecutor, became the first rank-and-file GOP lawmakers to say they would vote to impeach Trump. Later joining the GOP faction were Reps. Fred Upton of Michigan and Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington.

The House will vote on an impeachment article charging Trump with incitement of insurrection over his goading of a pro-Trump crowd that poured past police lines into the Capitol last Wednesday, disrupting lawmakers' ceremonial counting of the electoral votes that sealed Trump's defeat, leaving five dead and widespread damage.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the President of the United States broke his oath of office and incited this insurrection," Kinzinger said in a statement about Trump, whom he's repeatedly criticized over the years.

In a statement, Upton said: "Congress must hold President Trump to account and send a clear message that our country cannot and will not tolerate any effort by any President to impede the peaceful transfer of power from one President to the next."

"To allow the president of the United States to incite this attack without consequence is a direct threat to the future of our democracy," Katko said in a statement.

Herrera Beutler released a statement saying, "The president's offenses, in my reading of the Constitution, were impeachable based on the indisputable evidence we already have."

In remarks to his supporters outside the White House before they streamed to the Capitol, Trump told them "this is the time for strength," adding, "We got to get rid of the weak Congress people," describing them as "the Liz Cheney's of the world."

Republicans have said they expected perhaps 10 House GOP lawmakers to break ranks and vote with Democrats to impeach Trump, and a clear majority of Republicans seem likely to stand by him.

But Trump may not have helped himself Tuesday. In his first public appearance since the attack on

the Capitol, he took no responsibility for his role in egging on his supporters and added falsely, "People thought that what I said was totally appropriate."

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has told his colleagues that he believes impeaching Trump would be wrong but has not ruled out censuring him or taking other steps. House GOP leaders say they won't press their colleagues on how they will vote Wednesday.

In its story, the Times did not say how McConnell would vote in a Senate trial to convict Trump. Such a finding would usually result in a president's removal from office, but in this case it seems unlikely a trial could be held and concluded before Jan. 20, when Democrat Joe Biden will be inaugurated to replace him.

McConnell has been the engine that has driven Trump's Supreme Court appointees and scores of other federal judicial nominees through the chamber. While seldom criticizing Trump, he often resorts to silence when pressed by reporters on some of Trump's more outrageous statements and their relationship has never seemed warm.

One White House official said McConnell and Trump last spoke in in mid-December.

Associated Press writers Zeke Miller and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Asian stocks mixed after Wall St rebounds from uncertainty

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets were mixed Wednesday after Wall Street rebounded, shrugging off uncertainty about a possible new attempt to impeach President Donald Trump over last week's attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Tokyo, Australia and South Korea advanced while Shanghai was off by 0.1%. Hong Kong swung between gains and losses.

On Wall Street, the benchmark S&P 500 index gained less than 0.1%, recovering from the previous day's decline.

Analysts suggested investors focused on President-elect Joe Biden's economic stimulus plans after he takes office next week. Democrats in Congress are discussing possibly impeaching Trump for encouraging supporters who attacked the Capitol, but the president has taken few official actions since then.

"Hopes are pinned on the incoming Biden administration, leveraging Democrat Senate majority, to emphatically tackle COVID," said Mizuho Bank in a report.

The Shanghai Composite Index declined to 3,604.92 while the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo advanced 0.6% to 28,325.95. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong was down less than 0.1% at 28,267.11.

The Kospi in Seoul added 0.8% to 3,152.03 and the S&P-ASX 200 in Sydney was up less than 0.1% at 6,681.60.

New Zealand declined while Southeast Asian markets advanced.

Investor hopes have been boosted by the rollout of coronavirus vaccines. Markets have risen despite a spike in case numbers in the United States and some other countries.

In the United States, those hopes have been encouraged by the shift in control of the Senate from Republicans to Biden's Democratic Party. That might reduce the likelihood of political opposition if Biden introduces a more ambitious stimulus plan. He has said he will release details Thursday.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose to 3,801.19. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.2% to 31,068.69. The Nasdaq composite added 0.3% to 13,072.43.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude rose 61 cents to \$53.82 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 96 cents on Tuesday to \$53.21. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 72 cents to \$57.30 per barrel in London. It gained 92 cents the previous session to \$56.58.

The dollar declined to 103.59 yen from Tuesday's 103.83. The euro rose to \$1.2215 from \$1.2201.

Fury at the shaken Capitol over the attack, security, virus

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By CALVIN WOODWARD and ALAN FRAM Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — This time the fury enveloping the Capitol comes not from an insurgent mob but from within.

The anger on display is searing — Democrat against Republican; Republican against Republican; legislators of both parties against the catastrophic security failure that left top leaders of the government vulnerable to last week's violence as well as to the coronavirus in their ranks.

The rage is being stoked even hotter by the passions aroused by Democrats' fresh drive to impeach President Donald Trump.

This is a "powder keg" moment, one Democrat said. It's certainly a historic one.

The House is moving toward making Trump the first president to be impeached twice as part of an extraordinary effort to remove him from office before Democrat Joe Biden's inauguration a week from Wednesday. The charge to be brought against him: "incitement of insurrection."

Once again the phrase of the founders, "high crimes and misdemeanors," has been turned against Trump, who was acquitted by the Senate in his first impeachment trial. And tempers are flaring in congressional hallways and offices still cleaning up from the trashing by the attackers.

Shaken members, long accustomed to protective bubbles, inquired whether they can expense their own bulletproof vests to taxpayers (yes they can). Democrats assailed a collection of always-Trumpers — Republicans who pressed the president's false accusations of a fraudulent election even after the mob, motivated by the same lies, had finally been cleared away.

Democratic Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, among others, called for the expulsion or censure of Republican members who argued Trump's case for overturning the will of the voters, if those lawmakers refuse to resign. Democrats were primarily after Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and a selection of House lawmakers who had also tried to throw up obstacles to Biden's election certification.

"Failing to hold those responsible for the insurrection accountable would be a profound injustice and give a green light to future authoritarians," Casey said.

Said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland: "They have a full-blown independent reality, totally cut apart from the world of facts, and that is the groundwork for fascism. When you add racism, anti-Semitism, conspiracy theory and magical thinking, that is an absolute powder keg in terms of an assault on democracy."

There was Republican to Republican finger-pointing, too. Much of it was aimed at House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California for not showing enough leadership, according to some former lawmakers as well as congressional GOP aides who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Some House Republicans are upset that McCarthy, one of Trump's staunchest defenders in Washington, defended him too forcefully and for too long, making it harder to dissociate themselves from Trump after the Capitol siege.

In contrast, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky explicitly criticized Trump's drive to overturn Biden's election, saying it would "damage our republic forever." He did so even as the mob breached the Capitol and lunged toward the chambers against outnumbered police.

McCarthy acknowledged outrage among his Republican colleagues over the attack in a letter to them Monday declaring "I share your anger and your pain" and making sure they knew the mob's threat also came close to him.

"Zip ties were found on staff desks in my office," he wrote. "Windows were smashed in. Property was stolen. Those images will never leave us."

As if nerves weren't raw enough over the actions of Trump and his diehard loyalists, three Democrats who sheltered with Republican House members when they were spirited to a secure room disclosed they had since tested positive for COVID-19. Some of the Republicans in that room over those hours had refused to wear masks.

Indeed, one of the newly infected, Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, said "several Republicans not only cruelly refused to wear a mask but recklessly mocked colleagues and staff who offered them one."

Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman of New Jersey and Brad Schneider of Illinois were the others who an-

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nounced positive tests after their time in the room as everyone waited to hear whether more cases were coming.

Democrats were livid.

"In the midst of a deadly assault on our United States Capitol, a number of our Republican colleagues laughed off rules designed to keep not just their colleagues safe, but to protect the lives of the teams of workers keeping things going, law enforcement, and staff throughout the Capitol," said Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich.

On Tuesday, the House sergeant at arms office issued a statement saying all members and others going into the chamber must be screened for prohibited items, including firearms, and anyone failing to wear a mask on the House floor will be removed. The House was also voting to impose fines on lawmakers without face coverings.

The screening requirement comes as at least one lawmaker, freshman Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., has talked openly about carrying her firearm around town and onto the Capitol grounds, which has infuriated gun-control Democrats.

The new metal detectors outside the House chamber also galled some Republicans, some of whom uttered obscenities or ignored the devices, claiming they were impeding them from voting.

At a virtual meeting of the House rules committee, Democrats implored Republicans to stop peddling Trump's myths of a stolen election. Trump's accusations have been refuted for weeks by judges and election officials but motivated the mob and are still believed by legions of Trump supporters.

"When does service to Donald Trump end?" demanded Democratic Rep. Joe Morelle of New York. "It should be an easy one to answer."

"When the people speak, it's over," he went on. Otherwise, "we have nothing. There is no America."

There were some signs that the top Republican in the House was backing off his unwavering show of loyalty to Trump.

McCarthy had joined most House Republicans in December in supporting a lawsuit to block Biden's election, and again last week in two votes against certifying Biden's win. The lawsuit and both votes failed. He has so far avoided lambasting Trump publicly. But in a private conference call Monday with GOP colleagues, he expressed an openness to censuring Trump.

McCarthy "amplified the president's disinformation about widescale election fraud," former Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., who often clashed with Trump, said in an interview last week. "That has been irresponsible. Mitch doesn't fall in that category."

"McCarthy is all in with Trump," said Paul Cook, who retired in January as a GOP congressman from California and had differences with him over the years. "I think sometimes you have the greater good of the country, it's not always the party."

To Cook, it all comes down to the oath of office. "You take an oath, a lot of people kind of forget the words to that," he said.

In their oath of office, lawmakers vow to defend the Constitution "against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

FBI says it warned about prospect of violence ahead of riot

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI warned law enforcement agencies ahead of last week's breach of the U.S. Capitol about the potential for extremist-driven violence, U.S. officials said on Tuesday, contradicting earlier statements that they were caught off guard by the assault by supporters of President Donald Trump.

Nearly a week after the riot, officials said they were combing through mountains of evidence and vowed to aggressively seek out those who perpetrated the brazen attack on the U.S. Capitol. Though most of the charges brought so far have been misdemeanors, acting U.S. Attorney Michael Sherwin said the Justice Department was considering bringing sedition charges against some of the rioters, effectively accusing them of attempting to overthrow or defeat the government.

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"This is only the beginning," Sherwin said. "We're going to focus on the most significant charges as a deterrent because, regardless of it was just a trespass in the Capitol or if someone planted a pipe bomb, you will be charged and you will be found."

The Justice Department has created a specialized strike force to examine the possibility of sedition charges, which could carry up to 20 years in prison. Officials said they were utilizing some of the same techniques in the riot probe as they use in international counterterrorism investigations, examining the money flow and movement of defendants leading up to the breach. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, called for the rioters to be added to a no-fly list, a tool most commonly associated with terrorism investigations.

The statements by FBI and Justice Department officials on Tuesday were intended as both a defense of federal law enforcement preparations before the deadly riot and as a warning to participants. But they also raised new questions about the coordination across agencies for the Jan. 6 riot, which was sparked by Trump's calls for his supporters to fight Congress' vote confirming President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

In the immediate aftermath of the riot, some law enforcement officials, including the Capitol police chief, said they were unaware of serious concerns leading up to Jan. 6 and had prepared only for a free-speech protest.

But on Tuesday, The Washington Post reported on the existence of a Jan. 5 report from the FBI's field office in Norfolk, Virginia, that forecast, in detail, the chances that extremists could commit "war" in Washington the following day. Steven D'Antuono, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's Washington field office, said that once he received the Jan. 5 warning, the information was quickly shared with other law enforcement agencies through the joint terrorism task force.

D'Antuono was among the officials who suggested law enforcement had simply been caught off guard, saying on Friday: "There was no indication that there was anything other than First Amendment protected activity."

He did not explain the discrepancy in his statements, though he suggested Tuesday that the Norfolk warning was based on nonspecific information in terms of individual leads to investigate, characterizing it as a "thread on a message board" that was not attributable to any specific person.

In a statement Tuesday night, the FBI said the report's author had warned that the "FBI might be encroaching on free speech rights" in pursuing further action, and that the document itself did not necessarily associate the comments with a national security threat or crime. It highlighted D'Antuono's remarks at the news conference suggesting that without knowing the identity of the people whose words were cited in the report, there was not much that could be done with the information.

U.S. Capitol Police and other officials didn't immediately respond to questions about their own initial assessments of the threat.

A U.S. defense official familiar with the discussions said Tuesday that Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy was not notified about the FBI warning.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said that it is unclear whether any defense or military officials heard about the notification from the FBI, but that statements in recent days from all the leaders indicate they weren't aware that violence of that level was expected at the Capitol.

Defense and National Guard officials, including McCarthy, have said in interviews over the past several days they were told by D.C. that they believed the protests would be similar to the ones on Nov. 14 and Dec. 12. And they said that federal law enforcement authorities said that there was activity on Twitter, but that they weren't expecting the level of violence they ultimately saw last Wednesday.

Even without intelligence from law enforcement, there had been ample warning about pro-Trump demonstrations in Washington. But Capitol Police did not bolster staffing and made no preparations for the possibility that the planned protests could escalate into massive, violent riots, according to several people briefed on the law enforcement response. Officials turned down help offered by the Pentagon three days before the riot.

When backup was finally requested, it took more than two hours for troops to mobilize near the Capitol. By then the mob had raged inside for more than four hours.

Once the mob began to move on the Capitol, a police lieutenant issued an order not to use deadly force, which explains why officers outside the building did not draw their weapons as the crowd closed in. Officers are sometimes ordered to keep their weapons holstered to avoid escalating a situation if superiors believe doing so could lead to a stampede or a shootout.

In this instance, it also left officers with little ability to resist the mob. In one video from the scene, an officer puts up his fists to try to push back a crowd pinning him and his colleagues against a door. The crowd jeers, "You are not American!" and one man tries to prod him with the tip of an American flag.

The rampage through the halls of Congress sent lawmakers of both parties and Trump's own vice president into hiding, as crowds called for Mike Pence's lynching for his role overseeing the vote count. The scene also undermined the hallmark of the republic — the peaceful transition of power. At least five people died, including one Capitol Police officer.

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor in Washington contributed to this report.

Top military leaders remind troops of limits of free speech

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid worry about renewed violence on Inauguration Day, the military's top leaders issued a written reminder to all service members Tuesday that the deadly insurrection at the Capitol last week was an anti-democratic, criminal act, and that the right to free speech gives no one the right to commit violence.

A memo signed by all members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also reminded military members that Joe Biden was duly elected as the next president and will be sworn in to office on Jan. 20.

The memo was unusual in that the military leadership, including Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, felt compelled to remind service members that it is wrong to disrupt the constitutional process. The language went further than statements by the civilian leader of the Pentagon, Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, by describing the assault as an act of sedition and an insurrection. Miller has called it "reprehensible and contrary to the tenets of the United States Constitution."

It comes as law enforcement agencies attempt to determine the full extent of criminal activity at the Capitol and to discover the extent of participation by current or past military members.

It has already been established that some military veterans participated in the riots at the Capitol, but the extent of any active-duty involvement has not been established. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq war veteran, on Monday wrote to the Defense Department requesting that its criminal investigative organizations cooperate with the FBI and the U.S. Capitol Police in investigating whether current and retired members of the armed forces were part of a "seditious conspiracy" against the government.

The Joint Chiefs memo did not allude directly to the question of military involvement.

"We witnessed actions inside the Capitol building that were inconsistent with the rule of law," the memo said. "The rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not give anyone the right to resort to violence, sedition and insurrection.

"As service members, we must embody the values and ideals of the nation. We support and defend the Constitution. Any act to disrupt the Constitutional process is not only against our traditions, values and oath; it is against the law."

Gen. Robert Abrams, who as commander of U.S. forces in South Korea is one of the Army's most senior generals but is not a member of the Joint Chiefs, wrote on Twitter that no military member should misunderstand what happened Jan. 6.

"There is no ambiguity of what occurred at the Capitol — that was an attempted insurrection," he wrote. "If you are serving in uniform and think it was something else, I would encourage (you) to sit down and read the constitution that you swore an oath to support and defend. No gray area there either. No room

on our team if you are not willing to defend the constitution against all enemies, foreign AND domestic.”

Ahead of next week’s inauguration and President Donald Trump’s departure from office, the National Guard is gearing up to provide support to law enforcement agencies. There is no plan to use active-duty forces in security operations.

Some Uber, Lyft drivers sue over California ballot measure

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Drivers for app-based ride-hailing and delivery services filed a lawsuit Tuesday to overturn a California ballot initiative that makes them independent contractors instead of employees eligible for benefits and job protections.

The lawsuit filed with the California Supreme Court said Proposition 22 is unconstitutional because it limits the power of the Legislature to grant workers the right to organize and excludes drivers from being eligible for workers’ compensation.

The measure, which was passed in November with 58% support, was the most expensive in state history with Uber, Lyft and other services pouring \$200 million in support of it. Labor unions, who joined drivers in the lawsuit, spent about \$20 million to challenge it.

“Prop. 22 doesn’t just fail our state rideshare drivers, it fails the basic test of following our state constitution,” said Bob Schoonover of the Service Employees International Union. “The law as written by Uber and Lyft denies drivers rights under the law in California and makes it nearly impossible for lawmakers to fix these problems.”

Drivers bringing the lawsuit have several hurdles to clear, but their arguments are compelling, said Marybeth Moylan, associate dean of McGeorge Law School in Sacramento.

The first challenge is getting the California Supreme Court to take the case instead of kicking it to lower courts to weigh the facts, which could delay the case for years. To do so, the high court would have to find the arguments are legal, not factual, and there is urgency to decide the issue, Moylan said.

The second challenge is that courts have generally granted broad deference to voters to pass such initiatives.

“Generally speaking, courts in California don’t like to overturn the will of the people,” Moylan said. “But the petitioners’ claim is that the people did not really have the power to do what they did. There are instances where the California courts have come in and said ... it’s nice that this is what the people wanted to do, but our constitution doesn’t permit the people to do this.”

The lawsuit is the latest round in the high-stakes fight between labor and the titans of the gig economy, all based in San Francisco.

Proposition 22 was written by Uber and Lyft and supported by DoorDash, Postmates and Instacart to challenge the landmark labor law AB5 passed by Democrats in 2019. The law expanded a California Supreme Court ruling that limited businesses from classifying certain workers as independent contractors.

The measure granted the delivery services an exemption from the law that would have required providing drivers with protections like minimum wage, overtime, health insurance and reimbursement for expenses.

Under the measure, drivers remain independent contractors exempt from mandates such as sick leave and workers’ comp but would receive “alternative benefits,” including a guaranteed minimum wage and subsidies for health insurance if they average 25 hours of work a week.

Uber and Lyft did not comment hours after being contacted, but a group that supported the ballot initiative issued a statement criticizing the lawsuit as an effort to overturn the vote.

“Voters across the political spectrum spoke loud and clear, passing Prop. 22 in a landslide,” Jim Pyatt, an Uber driver in Modesto, said in the statement. “Meritless lawsuits that seek to undermine the clear democratic will of the people do not stand up to scrutiny in the courts.”

The lawsuit claims the measure interferes with state lawmakers’ authority to establish and enforce a workers’ comp system, which would require a constitutional amendment.

“They’re making this argument that this should have been a constitutional amendment, not a statutory

amendment," Moylan said. "I think that argument probably has some legs."

She said the outcome of that could turn on whether the statute actually changed the workers' comp provisions or did something less.

Another claim in the lawsuit alleges the measure violates a rule limiting ballot measures to a single subject. Moylan said courts have generally interpreted that broadly and have not found violations based on that claim.

"I think it's an intellectually meritorious argument," she said. "I don't think it's a winner."

Michigan plans to charge ex-Gov. Snyder in Flint water probe

By ED WHITE, DAVID EGGERT and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

FLINT, Mich. (AP) — Former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, his health director and other ex-officials have been told they're being charged after a new investigation of the Flint water scandal, which devastated the majority Black city with lead-contaminated water and was blamed for a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease, The Associated Press has learned.

Two people with knowledge of the planned prosecution told the AP on Tuesday that the attorney general's office has informed defense lawyers about indictments in Flint and told them to expect initial court appearances soon. They spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The AP could not determine the nature of the charges against Snyder, former health department director Nick Lyon and others who were in his administration, including Rich Baird, a friend who was the governor's key troubleshooter while in office.

Courtney Covington Watkins, a spokeswoman for the attorney general's office, said only that investigators were "working diligently" and "will share more as soon as we're in a position to do so."

Snyder, a Republican who has been out of office for two years, was governor when state-appointed managers in Flint switched the city's water to the Flint River in 2014 as a cost-saving step while a pipeline was being built to Lake Huron. The water, however, was not treated to reduce corrosion — a disastrous decision affirmed by state regulators that caused lead to leach from old pipes and spoil the distribution system used by nearly 100,000 residents.

Snyder's attorney, Brian Lennon, released a blistering statement Tuesday, saying a criminal prosecution would be "outrageous." He said state prosecutors have refused to "share information about these charges with us."

"Rather than following the evidence to find the truth, the Office of Special Counsel appears to be targeting former Gov. Snyder in a political escapade," Lennon said.

Snyder apologized for the catastrophe during his 2016 State of the State speech and said government at all levels had failed Flint.

LeeAnne Walters, a mother of four who is credited with exposing the lead contamination, said she wants details about the charges.

"The very fact that people are being held accountable is an amazing feat," Walters said. "But when people's lives have been lost and children have been severely hurt, it doesn't seem like enough."

The disaster made Flint a nationwide symbol of governmental mismanagement, with residents lining up for bottled water and parents fearing that their children had suffered permanent harm. Lead can damage the brain and nervous system and cause learning and behavior problems. The crisis was highlighted as an example of environmental injustice and racism.

At the same time, bacteria in the water was blamed for an outbreak of Legionnaires'. Legionella bacteria can emerge through misting and cooling systems, triggering a severe form of pneumonia, especially in people with weakened immune systems. Authorities counted at least 90 cases in Genesee County, including 12 deaths.

The outbreak was announced by Snyder and Lyon in January 2016, although Lyon conceded that he knew that cases were being reported many months earlier.

In 2018, Lyon was ordered to stand trial on involuntary manslaughter charges after a special prosecutor accused him of failing to timely inform the public about the outbreak. His attorneys argued there wasn't enough solid information to share earlier.

By June 2019, the entire Flint water investigation was turned upside down after more than three years and millions of dollars. Prosecutors working under a new attorney general, Dana Nessel, dismissed the case against Lyon as well as charges against seven more people and said the probe would start anew. They said all available evidence was not pursued by the previous team of prosecutors.

The decision didn't affect seven people who had already pleaded no contest to misdemeanors. They cooperated with investigators and their records were eventually scrubbed clean.

Lyon's attorney said he was turned down when he asked prosecutors for a copy of new charges. The new case "would be a travesty of justice," Chip Chamberlain said.

Testimony at court hearings had raised questions about when Snyder knew about the Legionnaires' outbreak. His urban affairs adviser, Harvey Hollins, told a judge that the governor was informed on Christmas Eve 2015. But Snyder had told reporters three weeks later, in January 2016, that he had just learned about it.

Defense attorney Randy Levine said he was informed Monday that Baird, a Flint native, would face charges. Another lawyer, Jamie White, said former Flint public works chief Howard Croft is being charged.

"When the Flint water crisis hit, he wasn't assigned by Gov. Snyder to go to Flint, but rather he raised his hand and volunteered," Levine said of Baird.

A resident, Edna Sabucco, 61, said she still uses water filters, although the lead service line at her home of 40-plus years has been replaced, along with more than 9,700 others in Flint.

"He swept things under the rug, in my opinion, and to me that makes him just as guilty as everybody else because he should have come out singing like a canary," Sabucco said of Snyder.

Separately, the state, Flint, a hospital and an engineering firm have agreed to a \$641 million settlement with residents over the water crisis, with \$600 million coming from Michigan. A judge is considering whether to grant preliminary approval.

White reported from Detroit. Eggert reported from Lansing. John Flesher in Traverse City contributed to this story.

Follow Ed White at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>

As pandemic worsens, most US states resist restrictions

By JULIE WATSON and TERRY TANG Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — As the U.S. goes through the most lethal phase of the coronavirus outbreak yet, governors and local officials in hard-hit parts of the country are showing little willingness to impose any new restrictions on businesses to stop the spread.

And unlike in 2020, when the debate over lockdowns often split along party lines, both Democratic and Republican leaders are signaling their opposition to forced closings and other measures.

Some have expressed fear of compounding the heavy economic damage inflicted by the outbreak. Some see little patience among their constituents for more restrictions 10 months into the crisis. And some seem to be focused more on the rollout of the vaccines that could eventually vanquish the threat.

The most notable change of tune came from New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, who imposed a tough shutdown last spring as the state became the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak.

"We simply cannot stay closed until the vaccine hits critical mass. The cost is too high. We will have nothing left to open," Cuomo said this week as confirmed infections in the state climbed to an average of 16,000 a day and deaths reached about 170 per day.

Theaters remain closed and there is no indoor dining in New York City, but Cuomo said Tuesday that if a system of rapid virus tests could be developed, it could allow those things to return safely.

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In Arizona, where the pandemic is raging, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has been steadfast in his opposition to a statewide mask mandate or the closing of bars, gyms and restaurant dining despite repeated calls from hospital leaders to take such steps. And high school officials voted Tuesday to allow winter sports, reversing a decision made four days earlier to cancel the season.

"If we're really all in this together, then we have to appreciate that for many families 'lockdown' doesn't spell inconvenience; it spells catastrophe," Ducey said.

Governors in other hot spots, including Texas, have expressed similar sentiments, while other states are loosening restrictions even as the U.S. death toll closes in on 380,000 and cases top 22.7 million. Deaths nationwide are running at more than 3,200 a day on average.

Minnesota allowed in-person dining to resume this week, Michigan is set to do the same, and some bars and restaurants in the Kansas City area are extending their hours. Nevada, meanwhile, is extending restrictions on restaurants that were set to expire Friday.

In Kansas, the state's largest school district with 47,000 students plans to resume in-person learning.

In Idaho, where many lawmakers refuse to wear masks in the statehouse, a federal judge on Tuesday said he won't order stricter coronavirus precautions while a lawsuit moves forward from two legislators concerned about being exposed.

Even in states with strict measures in place, such as California, people are flouting the rules. On Monday, as intensive care units in Southern California found themselves jammed with patients, people packed beaches in San Diego to see this week's high surf, many standing less than 6 feet (1.8 meters) apart with no masks.

Other Americans have ignored the rules as well. U.S. tourists flocked to Mexico's Caribbean coast over Christmas and New Year's, while thousands of University of Alabama football fans crowded into bars Monday night to celebrate the school's national championship.

More than 9.3 million Americans have received their first shot of the vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a slow rollout for a campaign that will have to inoculate perhaps 85% percent of the population, or close to 300 million people, to conquer the outbreak.

On Tuesday, the Trump administration announced plans to speed things up by releasing practically twice as much vaccine, instead of holding large quantities in reserve to make sure that people received the required second dose on time. The practice of holding back doses was spurred by fear of production delays, but officials said they are now confident the supply will be there.

President-elect Joe Biden had previously promised to release the large quantities in reserve after he takes office on Jan. 20. After getting his second dose on Monday, Biden said he has confidence his COVID-19 medical team can hit ambitious vaccination rate targets. Biden said he will release details of his pandemic plan Thursday.

The Trump administration also asked states to immediately start vaccinating other groups lower down the priority scale, including the estimated 54 million Americans 65 and older, as well as younger people with certain health problems. Several states had already begun offering shots to senior citizens over the past few days.

But experts warn that life is unlikely to get back to normal any time soon. Vaccinating enough Americans to stop the virus could take well into the second half of 2021, by some estimates.

"We're at a really critical point right now," said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, head of epidemiology at the University of California, San Francisco. "On the one hand, it is clear with vaccines that we have light at the end of the tunnel, but it is also pretty clear it's going to be a pretty long tunnel."

California is an outlier, with a strict lockdown in most of the state that has limited restaurants to takeout and delivery and shuttered hair salons and gyms.

California's COVID-19 death toll reached 30,000 on Monday. Hospitals in Los Angeles are so swamped that patients on gurneys are being treated in gift shops and parking lots. Officials started urging people to wear masks even at home if they go outside regularly and live with someone elderly or otherwise at high risk.

Anger over the restrictions has led to a recall movement against Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom that

has nearly gathered the 1.5 million signatures needed to put his career to a vote.

Some Californians are escaping by heading to neighboring Arizona, where they can eat and drink at bars and restaurants.

Bartender Raul Amaya, who works at Carly's Bistro in Phoenix, said he is grateful for the business since it keeps him employed. Everyone, he said, needs a break.

"I think every time there has been a closure in different states, a lot more influx of different people from different states has come in," he said. "The only reason I've noticed it is they want a drink and we have to ask for ID from everybody. So, I was like 'Oh, this is a lot of California or Nevada IDs.'"

Watson reported from San Diego. Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Zeke Miller in Washington; Jennifer Peltz in New York City and Marina Villeneuve in Albany, New York; Christopher Weber and John Antczak in Los Angeles; Don Thompson in Sacramento, California; and Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, contributed to this report.

US will require all arriving passengers to get COVID-19 test

By MIKE STOBBE and DAVID KOENIG undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Anyone flying to the U.S. will soon need to show proof of a negative test for COVID-19, health officials announced Tuesday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requirement expands on a similar one announced late last month for passengers coming from the United Kingdom. The new order takes effect in two weeks.

COVID is already widespread in the U.S., with more than 22 million cases reported to date, including more than 375,000 deaths. The new measures are designed to try to prevent travelers from bringing in newer forms of the virus that scientists say can spread more easily.

The CDC order applies to U.S. citizens as well as foreign travelers. The agency said it delayed the effective date until Jan. 26 to give airlines and travelers time to comply.

International travel to the U.S. has already been decimated by pandemic restrictions put in place last March that banned most foreigners from Europe and other areas. Travel by foreigners to the U.S. and by Americans to international destinations in December was down 76% compared to a year earlier, according to trade group Airlines for America.

The new restrictions require air passengers to get a COVID-19 test within three days of their flight to the U.S., and to provide written proof of the test result to the airline. Travelers can also provide documentation that they had the infection in the past and recovered.

Airlines are ordered to stop passengers from boarding if they don't have proof of a negative test.

"Testing does not eliminate all risk," CDC Director Robert R. Redfield said in a statement. "But when combined with a period of staying at home and everyday precautions like wearing masks and social distancing, it can make travel safer, healthier, and more responsible by reducing spread on planes, in airports, and at destinations."

The CDC order is "a reasonable approach" to reducing the risk of new variants from abroad entering the U.S., said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's school of public health.

It's likely that the recently identified version of the virus from the United Kingdom is "probably in every state or most states. This is going to do nothing for that," Jha said. So far, 10 states have reported 72 cases of the variant.

But the new order may stop or diminish spread of other new versions of the virus, like one recently identified in South Africa.

"I can imagine other countries are going to impose (preflight testing) on us," he added.

Airlines have been lobbying for preflight testing to replace broad travel restrictions between the U.S. and the rest of the world. In some cases, they have arranged for passengers to avoid quarantines after arrival by getting tested before their flight.

Testing "is key to unlocking international borders and safely reopening global travel," said Nicole Carriere, a spokeswoman for United Airlines, one of three major U.S. carriers that flies to Europe and Asia.

Others say the CDC order is unlikely to cause an immediate spike in international travel.

"People are being encouraged by their public health authorities to not travel, even domestically," said Henry Hartevedt, a travel analyst for Atmosphere Research Group.

He doesn't expect air travel to pick up until the summer when more people have been vaccinated.

Koenig reported from Dallas

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Justices say women must obtain abortion pill in person

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ordered Tuesday that women must visit a doctor's office, hospital or clinic in person to obtain an abortion pill during the COVID-19 pandemic, though similar rules for other drugs have been suspended during the public health emergency.

Eight days before President Donald Trump leaves office, the justices granted a Trump administration appeal to be able to enforce a longstanding rule on getting the abortion pill, mifepristone. The pill need not be taken in the presence of medical professionals.

The court split 6-3, with the liberal justices in dissent. The new administration could put the in-person requirement on hold after Joe Biden takes office on Jan. 20.

A federal judge had suspended the rule since July because of the coronavirus, in response to a lawsuit from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other groups.

U.S. District Judge Theodore Chuang affirmed the suspension of the rule in December, saying public health risks for patients had increased as COVID-19 cases soared.

The Food and Drug Administration approved mifepristone to be used in combination with a second drug, misoprostol, to end an early pregnancy or manage a miscarriage.

The administration has suspended similar in-person visits for other drugs, including opioids in some cases, but refused to relax the rules for getting the abortion pill.

In October, the Supreme Court allowed women to continue getting the abortion pill by mail but deferred any substantive ruling. Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas said they would have granted the administration's request then.

At the time, there were only eight justices on the court, as Justice Amy Coney Barrett had been nominated, but not yet confirmed. Barrett took the seat of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died in September.

US shifts to speed COVID shots as cases and deaths rise

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing a slower-than-hoped coronavirus vaccine rollout, the Trump administration abruptly shifted gears Tuesday to speed the delivery of shots to more people. The move came as cases and deaths surged to alarming new highs.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar announced a series of major changes to increase supply of vaccines, extend eligibility to more seniors and provide more locations for people to get shots. Administration officials describing the new policies conveyed a notable sense of urgency.

One change will have some teeth to it. Azar said going forward the federal government will base each state's allocation of vaccines partly on how successful states have been in administering those already provided.

"If you are not using vaccines that you have the right to, then we should be rebalancing to states that are using that vaccine," Azar said at news conference.

That won't happen overnight, not until officials try to sort out whether lags in reporting could be the reason for what appears to be subpar performance. Currently, the government allocates vaccines based

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on state population.

Azar also said the government will stop holding back the required second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, practically doubling supply. Both those shots require two doses to achieve optimum protection.

Additionally, Washington is urging states to immediately start vaccinating other groups lower down the priority scale, including people age 65 and older and younger people with certain health problems.

The move to increase the supply of vaccines better aligns the outgoing administration with the new Biden-Harris team. On Friday, President-elect Joe Biden said he will rapidly release most available vaccine doses to protect more people. He said he supported immediately releasing vaccines that health authorities were holding back out of caution, to guarantee they would be available for people needing their second dose.

"This next phase reflects the urgency of the situation," said Azar. "Every vaccine dose sitting in a warehouse rather than going into an arm could mean one more death that could have been avoided."

Initially the government had been holding back second doses as a safety precaution against potential shortfalls in production. Now, officials say they are confident the needed supply will be there. And people needing a second dose will have priority.

"This is not a supply issue at this moment in time," Vice President Mike Pence told governors on a White House call. A recording was provided to The Associated Press.

Azar also gave states the green light to designate more places where people can get shots. Those locations can include tens of thousands of pharmacies, federally supported community health centers that serve low-income communities, and mass vaccination sites already being set up in some states.

The flurry of changes raised questions for some local officials, still trying to get vaccination campaigns into full swing.

As of Monday morning, the government had distributed about 27.7 million doses to states, U.S. territories and major cities. But only about 9.3 million people had received their first shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's online tracker. That means only about 34% of the available vaccines had been administered.

Initially, the shots were going to health care workers and nursing home residents. Those 75 and older were next in line. But problems arose even in vaccinating that limited pool of people. Some hospital and nursing home workers have been hesitant to get the vaccine. Scheduling issues created delays in getting shots to nursing homes.

Some states, including Arizona, have or are planning to open up mass vaccination centers, aiming to inoculate thousands of people a day in a single location. In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis opened up vaccinations to people 65 and older. In other states, local health authorities have started asking residents 65 and older to register, in anticipation the vaccination campaign would be expanded.

Although Azar said the shift in strategy was a natural evolution of the Trump administration's efforts, as recently as Friday he had raised questions about whether Biden's call to accelerate supplies was prudent.

On Tuesday, he also sought to deflect blame to the states for the slow uptake of vaccines. Azar said some states are being "overly prescriptive and trying to micromanage every single dose of vaccine," leading to bottlenecks.

Azar also criticized what he called "the hospitalization of vaccine distribution," saying "we have too much vaccine sitting in freezers in hospitals."

State and local officials are sure to point out that it was the federal government that recommended putting health care workers at the front of the vaccination line.

The Trump administration directed a crash effort to develop, manufacture and deliver vaccines, hoping to avoid a repeat of earlier debacles with coronavirus testing. Dubbed "Operation Warp Speed," it has produced two highly effective vaccines, with more on the way.

Each state has its own plan for who should be vaccinated, based on CDC recommendations that gave first priority to health care workers and nursing home residents. Some critics say the administration's planning should have extended into helping states administer the shots after they were delivered. Congress has recently approved more than \$8 billion for that.

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The slow pace of the vaccine rollout has frustrated many Americans at a time when the coronavirus death toll has continued to rise. More than 376,000 people in the U.S. have died, according to the Johns Hopkins database.

Azar said the pace of vaccinations has picked up, on track to reach 1 million daily within a couple of weeks. But the American Hospital Association estimates 1.8 million vaccinations a day are needed, seven days a week, to achieve widespread immunity by the middle of this year. Biden has set a goal of 100 million shots administered in his first 100 days.

Local public health officials were surprised by Tuesday's announcement and scrambling to figure out how to implement the changes, said Adriane Casalotti of NACCHO, the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

"All levels of the governmental public health system really need to be on the same page. Surprises don't benefit anyone," she said.

Letting more groups in line "all of a sudden makes a lot more people potentially eligible and certainly interested and we need to have the systems in place to get them the vaccine," Casalotti added.

But administration officials pressed their case urgently.

"We think right now getting the vaccine into (more) individuals, now, could really make a huge difference in the hospitalizations that you would see in your jurisdictions say four to six weeks from now," CDC Director Robert Redfield told governors on the call, adding it was his strong recommendation.

Biden, who has been highly critical of the Trump administration's pandemic response, is expected to give a speech Thursday outlining his plans. He's looking for a turnaround in his first 100 days.

Azar said they'll brief the Biden transition team on the changes, but didn't seek their blessing.

AP writers Alan Suderman in Richmond, Virginia; Candice Choi in New York; Carole Feldman in Washington; Lauran Neergaard in Alexandria, Virginia; and Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island; contributed.

EXPLAINER: Who's been charged in the deadly Capitol siege?

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

Prosecutors have brought dozens of cases after the deadly attack at the U.S. Capitol, and they promise more charges are to come as investigators work to identify members of the pro-Trump mob.

Investigators are combing through thousands of tips, photos, videos and social media accounts to collect evidence against the attackers who overran the Capitol to stop the certification of Democrat Joe Biden as the next president.

Officials predict hundreds of criminal cases will ultimately be filed and said they are considering sedition charges against some of the rioters.

Some questions and answers about the investigation into the Capitol breach:

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CHARGED?

The top federal prosecutor for the District of Columbia said Tuesday that 70 people have been charged so far. About 20 federal cases have been made public, and 40 others have been filed in D.C. Superior Court.

The people charged in Superior Court are mainly accused of things like curfew violations and gun crimes. Those being tried in federal court, where prosecutors can generally secure longer sentences, are charged with offenses such as violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds, assaulting a federal law enforcement officer and threatening House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

On Tuesday, federal agents arrested the son of a New York City judge, who was seen inside the Capitol wearing a fur costume and a police vest authorities say he stole during the mayhem. Aaron Mostofsky faces charges including theft of government property.

Federal authorities on Sunday arrested two men who were photographed with plastic restraints inside the Capitol. Investigators said they used social media and livestream videos to identify Eric Munchel of Tennessee as the masked person seen in photos carrying plastic hand restraints in the Senate chamber.

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Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Larry Rendall Brock Jr. of Texas was photographed on the Senate floor carrying zip-tie handcuffs and wearing a military-style helmet and vest, authorities said. He confirmed to The New Yorker that he was the man in the photographs and claimed he found the handcuffs on the floor. "I wish I had not picked those up," he said.

WHY HAVEN'T MORE PEOPLE BEEN CHARGED?

The recent arrests are "just the tip of the iceberg," said Steven D'Antuono, assistant director of the FBI's Washington field office.

Authorities have opened about 170 investigations into people who potentially committed a crime, said Michael Sherwin, acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia. The number of charges will likely grow to into the hundreds, he said.

The vast amount of evidence and the number of people involved mean it will take months for investigators to sort through everything, Sherwin said. Federal agents are scouring more than 100,000 pieces of digital media they have received from the public, D'Antuono said.

Sherwin vowed that authorities are in it for the "long haul."

"Even if you've left D.C., agents from our local field offices will be knocking on your door if we find out you were part of the criminal activity at the Capitol," D'Antuono said.

U.S. attorneys across the country have also said people could face charges in their home states if they traveled to Washington and took part in the assault.

COULD THERE BE MORE SERIOUS CHARGES?

Prosecutors are looking at "significant felony cases tied to sedition and conspiracy," Sherwin said. He has organized a group of national security and public corruption prosecutors whose sole focus is to bring that type of charge for the "most heinous acts that occurred in the Capitol."

After protests across the U.S. over police brutality in the summer, then-Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen told prosecutors in September that they should consider using the sedition charge against violent demonstrators. Rosen, who took over the top Justice Department job when Attorney General William Barr stepped down last month, said the charge does not require proof of a plot to overthrow the U.S. government and gave the hypothetical example of a group that "has conspired to take a federal courthouse or other federal property by force."

The FBI has also opened a murder probe into the death of Capitol police officer Brian D. Sicknick, who was hit in the head with a fire extinguisher, according to law enforcement officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly.

COULD TRUMP BE CHARGED?

Trump urged the crowd to march on the Capitol, even promising to go with them, though he didn't. The president told his supporters to "fight" to stop the "steal" of the election, while his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, called for "trial by combat."

The legal bar for charging the president or any other speakers at the rally with inciting violence is high. Experts say it might be tough to prove in a normal prosecution that the president intended for violence to happen on Capitol Hill.

However, Trump faces a charge of "incitement of insurrection" in an impeachment resolution to be debated by the House on Wednesday as part of an extraordinary effort to remove Trump in the final days of his presidency.

COULD ANY OFFICERS FACE CHARGES?

At least two Capitol police officers have been suspended — one who took a selfie with the attackers and another who put on a Make America Great Again hat. At least a dozen more are under internal investigation for their behavior during the uprising, according to lawmakers.

The Capitol officer who shot Ashli Babbitt, a Trump supporter who was trying to climb through a broken window into the speaker's lobby, has been placed on administrative leave per agency policy, and the shooting is under investigation by Capitol police and the Metropolitan Police Department.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press Writer Michael Balsamo contributed to this report from

Washington.

Tech giants banished Trump. Now things get complicated

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

As the world adjusts to a Twitter without @realdonaldtrump, the next big question is: "Now what?"

Major tech platforms, long accused of giving President Donald Trump special treatment not allotted to regular users, have shown him the door in the wake of his incitement of violence by supporters at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. He's gone from Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat — even Shopify.

But in many ways, booting the president was the easy part.

Will companies now hold other world leaders to the same standard? Will they wade further into deciding what is and isn't allowed on their platforms, potentially alienating large swaths of their user base? Will all this lead to further online splintering, pushing those flirting with extreme views to fringe sites and secret chat groups?

Although they've long sought to remain neutral, Facebook, Twitter and other social platforms are slowly waking up to the active role they and their algorithms have played in shaping a modern world filled with polarized, angry groups and huge factions falling for bogus conspiracies and misinformation about science, politics and medicine.

"What we're seeing is a shift from the platforms from a stance of free-speech absolutism, towards an understanding of speech moderation as a matter of public health," said civic media professor Ethan Zuckerman of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

None of this can be fixed soon, if ever. Certainly not by blocking a president with just a few days left in his term.

But there are blueprints for future action. Remember "Plandemic?" That was the slickly-produced, 26-minute, misinformation-ridden video promoting COVID-19 conspiracies that emerged seemingly out of nowhere and racked up millions of views in a matter of days. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube scrambled to take it down — too late. But they were ready for the sequel, which failed to attract even a fraction of the attention of the first.

"Sharing disinformation about COVID is a danger because it makes it harder for us to fight the disease," Zuckerman said. "Similarly, sharing disinformation about voting is an attack on our democracy."

Unsurprisingly, it's been easier for tech giants to act decisively on matters of public health than on politics. Corporate bans of the U.S. president and his supporters have led to loud, if generally unfounded, cries of censorship as well as charges of left-wing bias. It's even attracted criticism from European leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel — not exactly a friend of Trump's.

Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said freedom of opinion is a fundamental right of "elementary significance."

"This fundamental right can be intervened in, but according to the law and within the framework defined by legislators — not according to a decision by the management of social media platforms," he told reporters in Berlin. "Seen from this angle, the chancellor considers it problematic that the accounts of the U.S. president have now been permanently blocked."

From that German perspective, it should be the government, and not private companies like Facebook and Twitter, who decides what counts as dangerous speech on social platforms. That approach might be feasible in Europe, but it's much more complicated in the U.S., where the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of expression from government interference, although not from corporate policy on privately owned communication platforms.

Governments, of course, remain free to regulate tech companies, another area of ferment. Over the past year, Trump, other Republicans and some Democrats have called for revoking a fundamental 1996 legal provision known as Section 230. That protects social platforms, which can host trillions of messages, from being sued into oblivion by anyone who feels wronged by something someone else has posted. But so far there's been more heat than light on the issue.

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Still, few are happy with the often sluggish, after-the-fact, three-strikes takedowns and suspensions that have characterized Twitter and Facebook for years. Particularly in the light of the Capitol insurrection, the deadly Charlottesville rally in 2017 and live-streamed mass shootings.

Sarita Schoenebeck, University of Michigan professor who focuses on online harassment, said it might be time for platforms to reevaluate how they approach problematic material on their sites.

"For years, platforms have evaluated what kinds of content are appropriate or not by evaluating the content in isolation, without considering the broader social and cultural context that it takes place in," she said. "We need to revisit this approach. We should rely on a combination of democratic principles, community governance and platform rules to shape behavior."

Jared Schroeder, an expert in social media and the First Amendment at Southern Methodist University, thinks the Trump bans will encourage his base of followers to move towards other social platforms where they can organize and communicate with fewer — if any — restrictions.

"It's likely the bans will fuel the us-against-them narrative — and it's also likely other forums will get a boost in traffic, as we saw after the 2020 election," he said. "The bans have taken away the best tools for organizing people and for Trump to speak to the largest audiences, but these are by no means the only tools."

VIRUS TODAY: Little appetite for lockdowns as deaths soar

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— State leaders are sounding a different tune in 2021 on decisions over imposing restrictions on businesses during the deadliest period for the pandemic. Governors from both parties are resisting lockdowns amid fears that their battered economies can't endure much more.

— The vaccine rollout is gaining new steam. More states are expanding the line for the COVID-19 shots, and the Trump administration took a step toward increasing supply and adding new age groups.

— American tourists are still flocking to beaches in Mexico and the Caribbean despite the resurgence of the virus and soaring death toll. The Mexican state that's home to Cancun received nearly 1 million tourists at the close of 2020 and start of the new year. Nearly half of them are from the U.S.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging 248,000 new cases per day, and about 3,200 deaths. The death toll in the U.S. since the start of the pandemic now stands at more than 377,000.

QUOTABLE: "You come here and it's a sigh of relief from all the turmoil of the COVID." —Latron Evans, a firefighter from Mississippi as he enjoyed a beach vacation in Mexico.

ICYMI: Officials in the Florida Keys have enlisted Ernest Hemingway lookalikes to urge people to wear masks. They have released a mask video that was filmed outside a bar where the author drank during his time on the island in the 1930s.

ON THE HORIZON: Congressional officials are keeping an eye on a possible outbreak in the capitol stemming from the violence last week.

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

Trump takes no responsibility for riot, visits Texas

By JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

ALAMO, Texas (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday took no responsibility for his part in fomenting a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol last week, despite his comments encouraging supporters to march on the Capitol and praise for them while they were still carrying out the assault.

"People thought that what I said was totally appropriate," Trump said.

He made the comments during his first appearance in public since the Capitol siege, which came as

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lawmakers were tallying Electoral College votes affirming President-elect Joe Biden's victory. Trump arrived in Texas on Tuesday to trumpet his campaign against illegal immigration in an attempt to burnish his legacy with eight days remaining in his term, as lawmakers in Congress appeared set to impeach him this week for the second time.

In Alamo, Texas, a city in the Rio Grande Valley near the U.S.-Mexican border — the site of the 450th mile of the border wall his administration is building, Trump brushed off Democratic calls on his Cabinet to declare him unfit from office and remove him from power using the 25th Amendment.

"The 25th Amendment is of zero risk to me, but will come back to haunt Joe Biden and the Biden administration," Trump said. "As the expression goes, be careful of what you wish for."

The rampage through the halls of Congress sent lawmakers of both parties and Trump's own vice president into hiding, as crowds called for Mike Pence's lynching for his role overseeing the vote count. The scene also undermined the hallmark of the republic — the peaceful transition of power. At least five people died, including one Capitol Police officer.

"It's time for peace and for calm," Trump said Tuesday, less than a week after egging on the mob that descended on the Capitol. He added, "Respect for law enforcement is the foundation of the MAGA agenda," referencing his campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

In the days leading up to the Jan. 6 certification vote, Trump encouraged his supporters to descend on Washington, D.C., promising a "wild" rally in support of his baseless claims of election fraud, despite his own administration's findings to the contrary. Speaking for more than an hour to a crowd on the Ellipse, Trump encouraged supporters to "fight like hell" and suggested that Republican lawmakers would need "more courage not to step up" and overturn the will of voters to grant him another term in office. He also suggested he would join them in marching on the Capitol.

As Trump wrapped up, thousands of his supporters were already heading to the Capitol, where lawmakers convened to count the electoral votes. As rioters were still in the building and lawmakers sheltered in secure locations, Trump, at the urging of aides who were shocked by the violence, released a video seemingly excusing the events, saying of the rioters: "We love you. You're very special. Go home."

Speaking Tuesday, Trump said the "real problem" was not his rhetoric, but the rhetoric that Democrats used to describe Black Lives Matter protests and violence in Seattle and Portland this summer.

"Everybody to the 't' thought it was totally appropriate," Trump said of his own comments.

Trump angrily lashed out at lawmakers' push for his second impeachment this week, claiming, "It's causing tremendous anger and division and pain far greater than most people will ever understand, which is very dangerous for the USA, especially at this very tender time."

Alamo is named after the San Antonio mission where a small group of Texan independence-fighters fended off Mexican forces during a 13-day siege. Most of them died, but the mission became a symbol of resistance for Texans, who eventually defeated the Mexican army.

Trump's visit there — no doubt a symbol of the president's defiance — comes as he spends the final days of his presidency isolated, aggrieved and staring down the prospect of a second impeachment.

While Trump was traveling, Pence assured the nation's governors that outgoing administration is working "diligently" with President-elect Joe Biden's team. He thanked the governors for their leadership on the coronavirus and promised them a "seamless transition."

Trump aides have been urging the president to spend his remaining days in office highlighting what they see as the chief accomplishments of his presidency: a massive tax cut, his efforts to roll back federal regulations and the transformation of federal courts with the appointment of conservative judges. But Trump has been consumed by baseless allegations of voter fraud and conspiracies.

In Texas, he delivered remarks highlighting his administration's efforts to curb illegal immigration and the progress made on his signature 2016 campaign promise: building a "big, beautiful wall" across the length of the southern border — an imposing structure made of concrete and reinforced steel. But over time, Trump demanded modifications that have been largely rejected: He wanted it painted black to burn the hands of those who touched it; he wanted it adorned with deadly spikes; he even wanted to surround it

with an alligator-filled moat. While he promised that it would be funded by Mexico, U.S. taxpayers ended up footing the bill.

In the end, his administration has overseen the construction of roughly 450 miles of border wall construction — likely reaching 475 miles by Inauguration Day. The vast majority of that wall replaces smaller barriers that had already existed, though the new wall is considerably more difficult to bypass.

Over the last four years, Trump and his administration have taken extreme — and often unlawful — action to try to curb both illegal and legal immigration. Their efforts were aided in his final year by the coronavirus pandemic, which ground international travel to a halt. But the number of people stopped trying to cross the southern border illegally has been creeping back up in recent months. Figures from December show nearly 74,000 encounters at the southwest border, up 3% from November and up 81% from a year earlier.

A few dozen Trump supporters rallied hours before his visit to the Rio Grande Valley near the Harlingen, Texas, airport, where he was scheduled to land. They planned to stage a caravan of vehicles flying flags that support the president and far-right causes like the QAnon conspiracy theory.

Trump warned that a reversal of his policies by Biden would bring about a “tidal wave of illegal immigration.” He added, “To terminate those policies is knowingly to put America in really serious danger.”

Biden has said he’d halt construction of the border wall and take executive action where possible to reverse some of Trump’s restrictions on legal immigration and asylum seekers. But Biden and his aides have acknowledged the possibility of a new crisis at the border if they act too quickly, and Biden has said it could take six months for his administration to secure funding and put in place the necessary infrastructure to loosen Trump-era restrictions.

Beyond touting the wall, Trump rapidly listed his massive changes on the border aimed at discouraging asylum. He cited his “Remain in Mexico” policy, under which more than 65,000 asylum-seekers have been forced to wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court since January 2019, and agreements struck with Central American countries for them to offer asylum to people seeking protection in the United States.

He credited his wall for a drop in illegal border crossings from a 13-year high in 2019, but the Government Accountability Office has found the administration lacks measures to correlate drops in illegal crossings to wall construction.

Trump said, falsely, that he inherited “open borders” from his predecessor, Barack Obama. He leaves office with about the same number of Border Patrol agents than when he began, despite a pledge to add 5,000, and the monthly number of migrants stopped at the border exceeds totals during much of Obama’s tenure.

___ Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Harlingen, Texas; Ben Fox and Alexandra Jaffe in Washington; Alan Suderman in Richmond, Virginia; and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

Officer with knee to George Floyd’s neck to be tried alone

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A former Minneapolis police officer who held his knee to George Floyd’s neck for minutes will be tried separately from the three other former officers accused in his death, according to an order filed Tuesday that cites limited courtroom space due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Derek Chauvin will stand trial alone in March while the other three former officers will be tried together in the summer. In his order, Judge Peter Cahill cited the limitations of physical space during the coronavirus pandemic, saying it is “impossible to comply with COVID-19 physical restrictions” given how many lawyers and support personnel the four defendants say would be present.

Prosecutors disagreed with the judge’s decision. A defense attorney for former officer Thomas Lane said he believed a separate trial would be better for his client, while the other defense attorneys either declined to comment or did not return messages.

Legal observers say the change benefits Chauvin’s co-defendants, who will get a preview of what the state’s witnesses will say and more time to prepare. They’ll also blame Chauvin, who won’t be on trial

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with them to push back.

Last week, prosecutors asked Cahill to postpone the March 8 trial to June 7 to reduce public health risks associated with COVID-19. In his Monday order, which was filed Tuesday, the judge wrote that while the pandemic situation may be greatly improved by June, "the Court is not so optimistic given news reports detailing problems with the vaccine rollout."

Cahill's order included an email from Hennepin County Chief Judge Toddrick Barnette, who requested that the trials be separated in a way Cahill deemed fair, after he learned that each defendant planned to have co-counsel or legal support in court. Barnette wrote that he looked at the courtroom's configuration and concluded social distancing couldn't be enforced in that space with so many people. Barnette wrote he believed the courtroom could handle up to three defendants at once.

Floyd, a Black man, died May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck while he was handcuffed face down on the street. Police were investigating whether Floyd used a counterfeit bill at a nearby store. In a video widely seen on social media, Floyd could be heard pleading with officers for air, saying he couldn't breathe.

Floyd's death sparked protests in Minneapolis and elsewhere and renewed calls for an end to police brutality and racial inequities.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in Floyd's death. Former officers Lane, Tou Thao and J. Alexander Kueng are each charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter.

Defense attorneys had argued last year that the officers should be tried separately, but prosecutors argued against it.

Attorney General Keith Ellison, whose office is prosecuting the case, said Tuesday that he disagrees with Cahill's decision to separate the trials and to hold Chauvin's in March.

"The evidence against each defendant is similar and multiple trials may retraumatize eyewitnesses and family members and unnecessarily burden the State and the Court while also running the risk of prejudicing subsequent jury pools," Ellison said in a statement. "It is also clear that COVID-19 will still be a serious threat to public health in 8 weeks' time. ... Nevertheless, we are fully prepared and look forward to presenting our case to a jury whenever the Court deems fit."

Lane's attorney, Earl Gray, said he thinks it's better for his client to have a trial separate from Chauvin.

"In a joint trial, there's always a spillover effect no matter what. You know a jury is supposed to consider each client separately, but that's hard for anyone to do — common sense tells you that," Gray said.

Attorneys for Kueng and Chauvin had no comment. Thao's attorney did not return a message seeking comment.

Mike Brandt, a criminal defense lawyer who is not connected to the case, said the decision will benefit Chauvin's co-defendants because they'll get a preview of the state's witnesses and they can hone their strategies. They will also have trial transcripts, which can be "powerful" if a witness changes his or her story during the second trial.

In addition, he said, all three officers can point fingers at Chauvin, who won't be in the same trial to defend himself.

If Chauvin is acquitted, Brandt said, the other three officers can still be tried on the aiding and abetting counts, but the case would become more difficult. Brandt said it's hard for prosecutors to prove a case against those who may be seen as less culpable if they can't convict the alleged main actor.

Brandt also said it's unlikely the three officers would testify against Chauvin during his trial because they have a Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Even if prosecutors were to offer them immunity, the officers could still face federal criminal charges for violating Floyd's civil rights — and immunity offered by the state wouldn't apply in federal court.

Brandt said that while prosecutors likely want the other officers to testify against Chauvin, it's highly unlikely they'd offer immunity in this case.

"I expect it to be all or nothing. I don't think they are going to make deals for anyone because of the

high profile nature of it," he said. "If this was a gang banger murder, would they be making deals with the less culpable ones? You bet. But these are police officers."

Thao, Kueng and Lane are scheduled to stand trial Aug. 23.

Associated Press writer Gretchen Ehke in Milwaukee contributed to this report.

Pandemic has imperiled plans to retrieve Titanic's radio

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Fallout from the coronavirus pandemic is threatening a company's plans to retrieve and exhibit the radio that had broadcast distress calls from the sinking Titanic, according to a court filing made by the firm.

The company, RMS Titanic Inc., said Monday that its revenues plummeted after coronavirus restrictions closed its exhibits of Titanic artifacts, causing the firm to seek funding through its parent company. Some of the exhibitions, which are scattered across the country, are still closed, while others that have reopened are seeing limited attendance.

RMS Titanic Inc. recently missed a deadline with a federal admiralty court in Virginia to submit a funding plan for the radio expedition. The company left open the possibility that it may no longer seek the court's approval for the undertaking if a plan isn't submitted in the coming weeks.

The company's update, filed with a U.S. District Court in Norfolk, was made in the midst of an ongoing court battle with the United States over whether the expedition is legal.

Lawyers for the U.S. government have argued that the mission is barred under federal law and an international agreement with Britain. The attorneys say the company must seek the government's permission to remove the radio because the sunken vessel is a recognized memorial to the roughly 1,500 people who died.

The luxury ocean liner was traveling from England to New York in 1912 when it struck an iceberg and sank. It was discovered in 1985 about 2.4 miles (3.8 kilometers) below the surface of the North Atlantic.

RMS Titanic Inc. owns the salvage rights and oversees a collection of items recovered from the wreck as the court-recognized steward of the artifacts. They include silverware, china and gold coins as well as the Titanic's whistles and a piece of its hull.

Exhibiting the radio will help sustain the ship's legacy while honoring passengers and crew, the company has argued. Known in 1912 as a Marconi wireless telegraph machine, the radio sent distress calls to nearby ships that helped save 700 people in lifeboats.

The U.S. government's effort to stop the expedition is pending in the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond. But the company's funding woes appear to pose a more immediate threat.

"The pandemic and resulting governmental restrictions forced the company to temporarily close its exhibitions to the public, effectively shutting off its primary source of revenue for six months," RMS Titanic Inc. wrote in Monday's filing.

The Atlanta-based company said only a few of its exhibits, including one in Las Vegas and another in Orlando, have reopened. They're operating at diminished capacity and revenues "remain very low."

The company said it received more than \$700,000 through the Paycheck Protection Program. And it expects to get \$3 million in funding through its parent company, Premier Acquisition Holdings, LLC.

A federal admiralty judge in Norfolk had approved the planned expedition in May. But the approval was conditioned on the firm submitting a plan detailing costs and funding for the operation and conservation of the recovered equipment.

RMS Titanic said in Monday's filing that it's still trying to finalize that plan despite missing a Jan. 10 deadline. It said the plan "will depend on a complicated, multi-faceted commercial transaction between RMST, an international production company, and deep-sea salvage experts."

The company said it hopes to submit a plan by Jan. 29. But if it's unable to, the firm said it would withdraw its original motion seeking the court's permission to retrieve the radio.

Mexico sees holiday bump in tourism amid pandemic surge

By EMILIO ESPEJEL and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

TULUM, Mexico (AP) — The friends from Jackson, Mississippi, relaxed on lounge chairs dug into a white sand beach and romped in the turquoise Caribbean waters, grateful for a break from the pandemic winter in the United States.

They were among tens of thousands of American tourists who descended on Mexico's glittering Caribbean beaches at the close of 2020 and start of this year. Quintana Roo state, the country's tourism crown jewel, home to Cancun, the Riviera Maya and Tulum, received 961,000 tourists during that stretch — nearly half from the U.S. — down only 25% from the previous year.

"You come here and it's a sigh of relief from all the turmoil of the COVID," said Latron Evans, a 40-year-old Jackson firefighter.

But concern is spreading that the winter holiday success could be fleeting, because it came as COVID-19 infections in both Mexico and the United States, the main source of the foreign tourists, were reaching new heights — and as a new, more easily spread variant was beginning to emerge in the U.S. If a sharp rise in infections forces a new shutdown of the tourism sector, the effects would be devastating.

Tourism accounts for 87% of Quintana Roo's gross domestic product, said state Tourism Secretary Marisol Vanegas Pérez. The state lost some 90,000 tourism jobs — only 10,000 of which have come back — and countless others that depend on tourism.

Flights from the U.S. dried up last spring as the pandemic took hold but have risen steadily since then. In December, Quintana Roo was averaging 460 air arrivals and departures per day compared to a pre-pandemic average of 500, Vanegas said.

The increase in American tourists helped compensate for the Europeans, whose numbers remain sharply down. More U.S. tourists came to Quintana Roo during this pandemic-stricken holiday season than a year earlier, when the world was just beginning to learn of the coronavirus. They accounted for 9 out of 10 foreign tourists, Vanegas said.

And they are staying longer, with some seemingly waiting out the pandemic at the beach, she said.

Officials strive to "create a tourist bubble that generates confidence in everything a tourist does," Vanegas said, describing how the visitors move from the airport to a van to a hotel, and then to tours of sun-splashed archaeological sites certified by state health authorities.

"Where there could be risk is when they leave that bubble," she said.

For example, the throbbing crowd that packed shoulder-to-shoulder — many not wearing masks — in downtown streets and clubs to ring in the New Year in Playa del Carmen, the lively beach town between Cancun and Tulum.

Indoor venues also pose a risk: Restaurants, theaters, salons and other businesses are permitted to operate at 60% capacity, and indoor gyms at 50%. Hotels can book at 70% capacity.

Evans, the Mississippi firefighter, said he was impressed by the health measures everywhere he went. "They're taking temperatures when you enter the building and giving you hand sanitizer every place you go," he said.

His friend, Gearald Green, a 32-year-old music producer from Jackson, where nearly everyone in his immediate circle of friends has been infected, said the climate and outdoor-focused beach living inspired confidence.

"I don't have to try an extra amount to keep social distance because it's the beach, it's water and when you come out it's not like a lot of people on top of one another," he said.

Vanegas said the state health department aggressively traces any reported infections. Still, there are worrisome signs. The positivity rate on COVID-19 tests in the state is nearly 50% and the weekly number of COVID-19 deaths quadrupled from the week before Christmas to the week after, according to federal government data.

Health experts fear the increase in travel through the holiday season will likely lead to spikes in places

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that previously seemed to have it under control.

"In the most popular tourist destinations, you're going to have epidemic activity increase again in a big way," said Dr. Mauricio Rodríguez of the medical school at Mexico's National Autonomous University, citing beach destinations like Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, Quintana Roo and the Riviera Maya.

The southern state of Oaxaca, which draws tourists to its colonial capital as well as its laid-back Pacific beaches, had half the number of tourists this holiday season as a year earlier. State Tourism Secretary Juan Carlos Rivera said that wasn't bad considering the pandemic.

"We are going to enter in ... an economic recession in terms of tourism in the coming months, not only in Oaxaca, in the whole country," Rivera said.

If infections increase sharply, pressure will build to close beaches again like last spring, spurring massive layoffs.

When the pandemic arrived in Mexico, big hotels started laying off workers with what they called "solidarity breaks." Workers were told it was temporary, that they'd be hired back in a month and most were let go without the benefits they deserved.

There was little debate over the health risks of promoting tourism versus the economic impact of losing all those jobs, said Alejandro Palafox-Muñoz, a professor of tourism at the University of Quintana Roo. The people who lost those jobs had no choice but to go out and look for new work to feed their families, he said.

Saily Camacho, 25, had worked at a beach club on the island of Cozumel for two years, as a hostess, selling tours and at the cash register. Barely two weeks after the first recorded COVID-19 infection in Mexico, she was out of a job.

Camacho earned commissions from selling tours and could make \$110 on a good day. After she was laid off, she lived off her savings for a month, thinking that she'd be hired back. She put finishing her college degree on hold.

Her mother and two siblings lost their tourism sector jobs too. Her mother — and many others — tried to sustain themselves by selling food from their homes via social networks.

Her mother, a hotel chambermaid, finally started a new hotel job this month. After a long search, Camacho was hired as a cashier at a supermarket where it takes her almost two weeks to earn what she made on a good day at the beach club.

"Before, I was working to save for my future, to buy a house, a car," Camacho said. "And now, honestly, I only work to get by, for food, for expenses."

She still has concerns about the coronavirus, but admitted that she was buoyed by seeing tourists return. "To see tourists, truly, was something exciting, because it's the sustenance for the island," she said.

Sherman reported from Mexico City. AP writer María Verza in Mexico City contributed to this report.

Early warning signs emerge for GOP after US Capitol riots

By MARC LEVY, THOMAS BEAUMONT and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Since last week's deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, about 225 Republicans logged in to the election office in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to change their party registration. Ethan Demme was one of them.

"Ever since they started denying the election result, I kind of knew it was heading this way," said Demme, the county's former Republican Party chairman who has opposed President Donald Trump and is now an independent. "If they kept going, I knew there's no way I can keep going. But if you've been a Republican all your life, it's hard to jump out of a big boat and into a little boat."

Officials are seeing similar scenes unfold elsewhere.

In Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, 192 people have changed their party registration since the Jan. 6 riot. Only 13 switched to the GOP — the other 179 changed to Democrat, independent or a third party, according to Bethany Salzarulo, the director of the bureau of elections.

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In Linn County, Iowa, home to Cedar Rapids, more than four dozen voters dropped their Republican Party affiliations in the 48 hours after the Capitol attack. They mostly switched to no party, elections commissioner Joel Miller said, though a small number took the highly unusual step of cancelling their registrations altogether.

The party switching pales in comparison to the more than 74 million people who voted for Trump in November. And it's unclear whether they're united in their motivations. Some may be rejecting politics altogether while others may be leaving a Republican Party they fear will be less loyal to Trump.

But they offer an early sign of the volatility ahead for the GOP as the party braces for political fallout of the riots that Trump incited.

"I do think there's a palpable shift, from knee-jerk defense of the president to 'wow, that was a bridge too far,'" said Kirk Adams, the former Republican speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives.

Adams said he knew several people, including once-solid Trump supporters, who are switching their registrations. He said it may be weeks or months before the full impact of the insurrection is clear.

"Minds are being changed," he said. "But you can't go overnight from 'I think the president's right and the election is being stolen' to 'I guess he was wrong about everything.'"

Party registration doesn't always preview how voters will actually cast their ballots, especially when the next major national elections are nearly two years away. But party leaders across the country are expressing concern that the riots could have a lasting impact.

The GOP cannot afford any slippage in its ranks after an election that, even with record-breaking Republican turnout, saw them lose control of both the presidency and the U.S. Senate.

"Increasingly I've looked at my party in this state and our numbers are dwindling," said Gary Eichelberger, a commissioner in suburban Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. "If we narrow the base of the party, we are going to lose this county."

Republicans in Washington are approaching the moment with caution, denouncing the insurrection and providing scant defense of Trump. But so far, few have joined Democratic calls for the president's impeachment and immediate removal.

Just two Senate Republicans, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Patrick Toomey of Pennsylvania, have called on Trump to resign.

Multiple GOP officials said there was some unease about the party's direction at the RNC winter meeting on Amelia Island, Florida, which took place a few days after the attack. Serious conversations are underway at the committee to conduct a comprehensive look at the 2020 election results to determine what the party did wrong and how to better appeal to voters, according to Henry Barbour, a RNC member from Mississippi.

But Trump still has a pull on swaths of the GOP base.

A Quinnipiac Poll released on Monday found roughly three-quarters of Republicans believe Trump's false statements that there was widespread voter fraud in November's election, which is what triggered the attack on the Capitol after Trump urged a crowd of supporters to go to Congress as it was set to certify the victory of President-elect Joe Biden.

Overall 7 in 10 Republicans approved of Trump's performance as president, compared to 89% in Quinnipiac's December poll.

"When you love President Trump, you love President Trump," said Michele Fiore, an RNC committee-woman from Nevada. "With all of our hearts, we support him. We know he did not create the chaos that happened in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6."

Rae Chornenky, who stepped down as chair of the Maricopa County Republican Party in Arizona shortly after the election amid a power struggle with those in the state party claiming widespread election fraud, said she thinks the president still has a hammerlock on the party's grass roots.

"They just believe it was a stolen election, and they're not going to back off that position," Chornenky said. "He'll be the driving force" of the GOP for years to come, Chornenky predicted of Trump.

The 2022 midterm elections may provide a test of that. Former Rep. Ryan Costello is strongly considering a run for Pennsylvania's open Senate seat as a Republican. A longtime Trump critic, he sees the time

as ripe for an explicitly anti-Trump GOP candidate.

"We need people willing to lose races, lose political campaigns, over this," Costello said. "We need campaigns about the cleansing of the party. Sometimes it's not possible to dance around landmines. Sometimes, you've just got to jump in there."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa, and Riccardi from Denver. Associated Press writers Summer Ballentine in Columbia, Missouri; Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Hannah Fingerhut in Washington; Ryan J. Foley in Iowa City, Iowa; Steve Peoples in New York; and Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

Perfect Alabama finishes No. 1 in AP Top 25 for 12th time

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Alabama finished the season No. 1 in the AP Top 25 for the 12th time, extending its record by completing the program's first perfect season since 2009.

The Crimson Tide were a unanimous No. 1 in the final poll, getting 61 first-place votes, after beating Ohio State 52-24 in the College Football Playoff championship game Monday night.

Alabama was the preseason No. 3, but when it started playing this strange season amid a pandemic in late September it moved up to No. 2. The Tide jumped to No. 1 in early November and finished as major college football's only undefeated team.

"We set this as a goal, to potentially be the greatest team to ever play," Tide quarterback Mac Jones said. "I think we made a valid statement in winning the national championship tonight."

The Buckeyes were second, followed by Clemson at No. 3. Texas A&M was fourth, finally passing Notre Dame for the Aggies' best finish in the AP poll since they won the national title in 1939. The Fighting Irish made the playoff but slipped to No. 5 after losing to Alabama in the semifinals.

For the Crimson Tide, it is the sixth national title under coach Nick Saban in the last 12 seasons. No other team has won more than two during that time. With 12 AP titles overall — Paul "Bear" Bryant was coach for five and Gene Stallings for one — Alabama has four more than Notre Dame, in second place with eight.

Big 12 champion Oklahoma finished No. 6, Georgia seventh and Cincinnati was eighth.

The Tide, Aggies and Bulldogs give the Southeastern Conference three teams in the top seven. The SEC finished 7-2 in the bowls, counting Alabama's national championship victory.

Iowa State was No. 9, its best final ranking and only the third time the Cyclones have finished the season ranked. Northwestern finished 10th, the Wildcats' best final showing since they went to the Rose Bowl in 1995 and were eighth in the last poll.

The Big 12 finished with a perfect record in five bowl games. Oklahoma and Iowa State were joined by No. 19 Texas and No. 20 Oklahoma State in the final rankings from that conference.

The ACC's postseason was a dud at 0-6. Clemson, Notre Dame, No. 18 North Carolina and No. 22 Miami gave the ACC four ranked teams.

The odd season in a pandemic put a spotlight on teams outside the Power Five conferences as never before, and the final poll treated the upstarts well.

Cincinnati, the American Athletic Conference champ, was one of eight non-Power Five teams to land in the Top 25.

Independent BYU finished No. 11, the Cougars' best final ranking since they finished the 1995 season fifth.

Sun Belt rivals Coastal Carolina and Louisiana-Lafayette were Nos. 14 and 15, respectively. That conference had never finished with two ranked teams. Liberty, another independent, was 17th.

Rounding out the bottom of the poll were No. 23 Ball State, the Mid-American Conference champ, No. 24 San Jose State, the champ of the Mountain West, and No. 25 Buffalo, another MAC school.

Follow Ralph D. Russo at <https://twitter.com/ralphDrussoAP> and listen at <https://westwoodonepodcasts>.

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More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-top-25-college-football-poll> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

This story has been updated to correct the number of national titles for Alabama to 12, not. 11.

EU regulator is considering Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine

LONDON (AP) — The European Medicines Agency said Tuesday that AstraZeneca and Oxford University have submitted an application for their COVID-19 vaccine to be licensed across the European Union.

The EU regulator said it received a request for the vaccine to be greenlighted under an expedited process and that it could be approved by Jan. 29 “provided that the data submitted on the quality, safety and efficacy of the vaccine are sufficiently robust and complete.”

The EMA, the drugs agency for the 27-nation EU, has already approved two other coronavirus vaccines, one made by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany’s BioNTech and another made by U.S. biotechnology company Moderna. Switzerland approved the Moderna vaccine on Tuesday and plans to immunize about 4% of its population using that and the Pfizer-BioNTech shot.

Britain gave its approval to the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine last month and has been using it. India approved it this month.

As part of its strategy to obtain as many different COVID-19 vaccines as possible for Europeans, the EU said it had concluded early talks with French biotech company Valneva to secure up to 60 million doses of vaccine.

Valneva previously signed a deal with Britain to provide tens of millions of doses of its shot, which is developed using similar technology to that used to make flu vaccines. The EU has sealed six vaccine contracts for up to 2 billion doses, many more than are necessary to cover its population of approximately 450 million.

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

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

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

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says it won’t consider approving the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine until data are available from late state research testing the shot in about 30,000 people.

The World Health Organization is also examining a request from AstraZeneca and Oxford for an emergency use listing for its vaccine.

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

Lorne Cook in Brussels, and Jamey Keaten in Geneva, contributed to this report.

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Analysis: Trump abdicating in the job he fought to retain

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's days in office are numbered. But he's already stopped doing much of his job.

In the last three weeks, a bomb went off in a major city and the president said nothing about it. The coronavirus surged to horrifying new levels of illness and death in the U.S. without Trump acknowledging the awful milestones. A violent mob incited by the president's own words chanted for Mike Pence's lynching at the U.S. Capitol and Trump made no effort to reach out to his vice president.

Trump only belatedly ordered flags flown at half-staff to honor an officer who gave his life defending the Capitol, and couldn't be bothered to describe the officer's actions. On Tuesday, he denied any responsibility for fomenting the insurrection at the Capitol and said his remarks to supporters who stormed the building in events that took the lives of five people, including a Capitol Police officer, were "totally appropriate."

The transgressions, big and small — of norms, of leadership, of basic decency — cast a pall over his final days in office, and, in the view of even close advisers speaking privately, have indelibly stained his legacy. A half-dozen current administration officials expressed dismay at the president's actions in recent weeks, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they are still working for Trump.

"Even after losing the election, President Trump had the opportunity to leave the White House with his head held high, celebrating achievements like the COVID-19 vaccine, progress in the Middle East, and the vibrant pre-pandemic economy fueled by tax reform," said GOP operative Michael Steel, a onetime aide to former House Speaker John Boehner.

"Instead, he chose to wallow in delusion and grievance, and — as a result — the defining images of his presidency will be a bloody, murderous mob looting the cathedral of our democracy, the United States Capitol," Steel said.

As the violence raged at the Capitol last Wednesday, Trump only reluctantly put out a pair of tweets appealing for calm at the insistence of aides, as well as a video seemingly excusing the events that included this Trump message to the rioters: "We love you. You're very special.". He followed it up with a presidential video on Thursday decrying the violence, apparently hoping to ward off potential legal exposure and efforts to remove him from office.

Now, as the FBI warns of armed protests across the nation and in Washington in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, Trump has said nothing in recent days to tamp down passions or ensure his supporters do not again resort to violence.

At the same time, Trump has continued to spread lies about election fraud, about his political opponent and about members of his own party. After the Nov. 3 vote, he retreated into a bunker of his own delusion, unable or unwilling to concede defeat, and dragged millions with him.

Two months later, aides are still struggling to convince Trump to make an effort to showcase and salvage his achievements in office, with limited success.

He agreed to travel to Texas on Tuesday to view the U.S.-Mexico border wall one final time in office. But he has yet to sign off on a proposal from aides for him to deliver remarks in his final week in office highlighting the development of coronavirus vaccines and his efforts to boost military funding.

It remains unlikely that Trump will deliver a farewell speech before leaving office, a tradition for departing presidents.

Trump's actions have cost him his megaphone, as social media companies suspended him from their platforms citing his provocative rhetoric. But Trump has made little effort to get his voice back, avoiding television interviews and interactions with reporters.

Instead, Trump has been stewing inside the White House, alternating between his private dining room

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off the Oval Office and the mansion's residence level, never far from a television set. Without Twitter or Facebook, he's used his phone to call an ever-shrinking circle of aides and allies to claim the role of the aggrieved.

Since the holidays, Trump has dictated that his daily public schedule — virtually devoid of any public events — include a bizarre affirmation that he is indeed on the job. "President Trump will work from early in the morning until late in the evening. He will make many calls and have many meetings."

The guidance has become a punchline in the White House, and close aides say it belies the truth: Trump effectively ceased acting like the president after the election, with his inability to focus on almost anything other than his defeat growing more pronounced as the weeks have passed.

Trump has not had an intelligence briefing on his schedule in months — though aides say he has sat for them sporadically. As the coronavirus has killed more than 375,000 Americans in the last year, he has done little publicly or privately to try to manage the raging pandemic. And weeks after one of the largest infiltrations of U.S. government computer networks was pinned on Russia, Trump's main response was to suggest it could have been China.

As Trump obsesses over his election loss and many of his defenders fade away, it has largely fallen to his dwindling cadre of White House aides to defend his record over the past four years and offer assurances the president is still on the job.

"President Trump has rolled back government regulations, built the strongest, most inclusive economy in history, brought much-needed agency accountability, is bringing our troops home, developed a safe, effective vaccine in record time, and changed the way domestic and international deal-making is done so that the results actually help hardworking Americans," said Trump spokesman Judd Deere. "This important work continues along with rebuilding our economy and fulfilling the promises he made that has led to a safer, stronger, more secure America."

Trump himself has made little effort lately to make that argument.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Zeke Miller has covered the White House for The Associated Press since 2017.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

The power of words in crisis: Who hits mark, and who misses?

By MICHAEL TACKETT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In moments of crisis, of war and terror, of loss and mourning, American leaders have sought to utter words to match the moment in hope that the power of oratory can bring order to chaos and despair.

Lincoln at Gettysburg. Franklin Roosevelt during the Depression and World War II. Reagan after the Challenger disaster. Bill Clinton after the Oklahoma City bombing. George W. Bush with a bullhorn at Ground Zero in 2001 and Barack Obama after the slaughter of congregants at a South Carolina church.

Each time, the speakers, Republican and Democrat, extemporaneously or with a script, managed to sound notes that brought at least a temporary sense of national unity and purpose.

"I really think there is something at the very core of our humanity that only words can satisfy," said Wayne Fields, author of "Union of Words: A History of Presidential Eloquence," and a professor at Washington University in St. Louis. "Almost as much as our need to be touched in the most desperate of circumstances is our need to be spoken to. Public despair in particular has to be literally addressed, I think, if it is to be overcome, must be articulated and then transcended."

In the aftermath of a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a cathedral of democracy, President Donald Trump did not meet that prescription. He scaled the walls of false equivalency and descended into the canyons of conspiracy.

He stirred the riotous mob with his "fight like hell" speech before his supporters marched to the Capitol, then delivered a tepid appeal for nonviolence, telling his supporters he loved them. This came well after

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the man voters chose to succeed him, President-elect Joe Biden, had summoned outrage, empathy and a sense of a path forward.

Trump has never been much for the big speech. Those he has given, like his Oval Office address about the pandemic in March, contained more than one large error. His preferred medium was Twitter, where his 280-characters-at-a-time rhetoric was a study in hortatory rather than oratory. And by Friday, Twitter had shut down his account permanently.

The oratory of crisis typically consists of either a formal statement or an extemporaneous speech. Bush's initial speech after 9/11 was not particularly well received. But his appearance in the rubble of the World Trade Center bombing was considered one of his finest moments, in which he found just the right words when speaking to rescue workers who said, "I can't hear you."

Using a bullhorn, Bush responded: "I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon."

Other presidents have made more direct appeals for healing. Ronald Reagan, poised to deliver a State of the Union address, had to pivot to address the national tragedy of the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, and the loss of its crew of seven, including the teacher Christa McAuliffe.

"I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen," Reagan said. "It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them."

Clinton was known for his feel-your-pain persona, on display after the Oklahoma City bombing. "You have lost too much, but you have not lost everything," he said. "And you have certainly not lost America, for we will stand with you for as many tomorrows as it takes."

After the killing of congregants at Mother Emanuel church in Charleston, South Carolina, Obama sang the hymn "Amazing Grace" and also challenged the nation. "At some point," he said, "we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries. It doesn't happen in other places with this kind of frequency. And it is in our power to do something about it."

Unlike Trump, Biden was unsparring in his remarks after the insurrection at the Capitol about where blame lay. "They weren't protesters," Biden said. "Don't dare call them protesters. They were a riotous mob, insurrectionists, domestic terrorists. It's that basic. It's that simple."

But Biden also promised a better day ahead, saying that the rioters did not represent the "true America."

"Oratory in such times, just by being composed at a time when things are falling apart, reassures and opens a door for positive responses and for hope," Fields said. "Ironically, in being spoken to we can be reassured that we are being heard, that the fears and emotions we have been too distressed to compose, can be articulated, can be expressed."

Most times, presidents themselves don't write the words that are most remembered, but their speechwriters know their voice and sentiments. Obama and Clinton heavily edited their speeches; Lincoln wrote many of his own. The most memorable words from Trump's inaugural address were about the need to end an "American carnage" that existed mostly in his own mind.

Soon, Biden's words will be the ones the nation examines. He has a mixed history with oratory. His first presidential campaign ended largely because he appropriated language from a British politician, Neil Kinnock, a literary theft that today seems almost benign. But Biden even then, in 1987, was also known for his ability to use words, albeit sometimes too many of them.

The president-elect is fond of both lofty rhetoric spoken with an eye to history and the common language of the union hall. He will need to summon both in the days ahead, navigating the fractious end to the Trump presidency and imploring the nation to turn the page.

The word crisis has its origins in the Greek language. Loosely translated, it means the stage of a disease where one lives or dies. It can be overused in the modern context, but few would argue the American democracy is not facing one. The challenge for crisis oratory is to not underplay the severity of the problem or foster a new sense of panic.

The most effective oratory has, at its core, a sense of authenticity, which plays to Biden's strength.

"Words matter. Words can explain, inspire, console, and heal. In the past, presidents have tried to do these things, with various degrees of success," said John J. Pitney, a professor of politics at Claremont McKenna College, adding: "Trump is unique in that he has made things much worse."

On Tuesday, as he was leaving for an event to boast about wall construction at the Mexican border, Trump had another chance to soothe the public. He chose instead to focus on blaming others.

"This impeachment is causing tremendous anger, as you're doing it, and it's really a terrible thing that they're doing," Trump said. "For Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, to continue on this path. I think it's causing tremendous danger to our country, and it's causing tremendous anger. I want no violence. Thank you."

Michael Tackett, deputy Washington bureau chief for The Associated Press, has been covering politics and government since 1986. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/tackettDC>

Volkswagen triples electric car sales ahead of climate rules

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Europe's push into electric cars is gathering speed — despite the pandemic. Automaker Volkswagen tripled sales of battery-only cars in 2020 as its new electric compact ID.3 came on the market ahead of tough new European Union limits on auto emissions. And Germany, long a laggard in adopting electric vehicles, saw more people buy electrics in December than opted for previously dominant diesel vehicles.

Those are early signs of what will likely be an upcoming year of increasing market share for electric cars as EU regulations drive their adoption, despite the recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic that has caused the overall car market to shrink.

Volkswagen said Tuesday its namesake brand sold 134,000 battery-powered cars last year, up from 45,000 in 2019.

Including hybrids, which combine an internal combustion engine and an electric motor, sales of electrified cars reached 212,000, up from 82,000 in 2019.

Volkswagen's announcement comes as the auto industry association in Germany reports that one in four cars sold in the country in December had an electric motor, uptake that was supported by incentives as part of the government stimulus package during the COVID-19 recession.

Battery and hybrid cars took 26.6% of sales that month, running ahead of diesel cars, which had 26.2%. That is also a token of diesel's steep decline after Volkswagen's 2015 scandal involving diesel cars rigged to cheat on emissions tests.

Electric cars have so far been a small but rapidly growing slice of the European market. According to the European Automobile Manufacturers Association, in the July-September quarter of 2020 9.9% of cars sold were chargeable vehicles, up from 3.0% a year earlier. The association publishes full-year statistics on Feb. 4.

Automakers in the EU must sell more zero-emission cars in order to meet tougher fleet average limits on emissions of carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas blamed for climate change. Those limits came fully into effect on Jan. 1. Failure to achieve a fleet average of less than 95 grams of carbon dioxide per kilometer driven can mean heavy fines.

Sales have been driven by government incentives, and by an increasing number of new models that — like the ID.3 — were designed purely as electric cars, rather than being converted from internal combustion models. Electric-only design can mean more interior space as a selling point. The compact ID.3 isn't coming to the U.S. market, where Volkswagen will offer the electric ID.4 sport-utility vehicle made on the same mechanical base.

Demand has been held back by lack of places to charge electric cars, including for people who live in apartment buildings and can't install a charging box at home. Germany's auto association, the VDA, said

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there's only one publicly available charging station for every 17 electric cars.

California-based Tesla has been a major factor in the electric upswing with its Model 3 and its proprietary network of fast-charging stations.

The government in China, the world's largest auto market, is also pressing carmakers to lower emissions.

The uptake of electric vehicles has been slower in the United States, where regulatory pressure has been weaker and where gasoline costs as little as \$2 per gallon, depending on the region. That compares to 1.30 euros per liter of gas, or \$6 per gallon in Germany, much of which is taxes.

Read all AP stories about climate change issues at <https://apnews.com/hub/Climate>.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 13, the 13th day of 2021. There are 352 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 13, 1982, an Air Florida 737 crashed into Washington, D.C.'s 14th Street Bridge and fell into the Potomac River while trying to take off during a snowstorm, killing a total of 78 people, including four motorists on the bridge; four passengers and a flight attendant survived.

On this date:

In 1733, James Oglethorpe and some 120 English colonists arrived at Charleston, South Carolina, while en route to settle in present-day Georgia.

In 1794, President George Washington approved a measure adding two stars and two stripes to the American flag, following the admission of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union. (The number of stripes was later reduced to the original 13.)

In 1898, Emile Zola's famous defense of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, "J'accuse," (zhah-KOOZ') was published in Paris.

In 1941, a new law went into effect granting Puerto Ricans U.S. birthright citizenship. Novelist and poet James Joyce died in Zurich, Switzerland, less than a month before his 59th birthday.

In 1964, Roman Catholic Bishop Karol Wojtyla (voy-TEE'-wah) (the future Pope John Paul II) was appointed Archbishop of Krakow, Poland, by Pope Paul VI.

In 1967, the Rolling Stones' double-A sided single "Let's Spend the Night Together" and "Ruby Tuesday" was released in the United Kingdom by Decca Records. (It was released the following day in the United States on the London label.)

In 1992, Japan apologized for forcing tens of thousands of Korean women to serve as sex slaves for its soldiers during World War II, citing newly uncovered documents that showed the Japanese army had had a role in abducting the so-called "comfort women."

In 2001, an earthquake estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey at magnitude 7.7 struck El Salvador; more than 840 people were killed.

In 2005, Major League Baseball adopted a tougher steroid-testing program that would suspend first-time offenders for 10 days and randomly test players year-round.

In 2010, Haitians piled bodies along the devastated streets of their capital a day after a powerful earthquake, while in Washington, President Barack Obama pledged an all-out rescue and relief effort. R&B singer Teddy Pendergrass died in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, at age 59.

In 2012, the Italian luxury liner Costa Concordia ran aground off the Tuscan island of Giglio and flipped onto its side; 32 people were killed.

In 2018, a false alarm that warned of a ballistic missile headed for Hawaii sent the islands into a panic, with people abandoning cars on a highway and preparing to flee their homes; officials apologized and said the alert was sent when someone hit the wrong button during a shift change.

Ten years ago: Vice President Joe Biden became the first top U.S. official to visit Iraq since the country

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approved a new Cabinet; Biden emphasized to Iraqi leaders that the U.S. wanted nothing more than for Iraq to be free and democratic. A funeral was held in Tucson, Arizona, for 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, the youngest victim of a mass shooting that also claimed five other lives and critically wounded Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

Five years ago: Less than a day after 10 U.S. Navy sailors were detained in Iran when their boats drifted into Iranian waters, they and their vessels were back safely with the American fleet. Defense Secretary Ash Carter laid out broad plans to defeat Islamic State militants and retake the group's key power centers in Iraq and Syria. The Al Jazeera America cable news network said it was shutting down two and a half years after its launch. Three winning tickets split a world-record \$1.6 billion Powerball jackpot.

One year ago: Anger swelled in Iran over the accidental shootdown of a Ukrainian jetliner and the government's effort to conceal its role; videos appeared to show security forces firing live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protests. New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker dropped out of the Democratic presidential race after failing to qualify for a December debate. At a royal family summit in eastern England, Queen Elizabeth II brokered a deal to secure the future of the monarchy; it would allow Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, to live part-time in Canada. The Houston Astros fired manager AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow after the pair had been suspended by Major League Baseball for a sign-stealing scheme. "Joker" led the way with 11 Oscar nominations. Joe Burrow threw five touchdown passes and ran for another score, leading top-ranked LSU to a 42-25 win over No. 3 Clemson to capture the national championship.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Frances Sternhagen is 91. TV personality Nick Clooney is 87. Comedian Charlie Brill is 83. Actor Billy Gray is 83. Actor Richard Moll is 78. Rock musician Trevor Rabin is 67. Rhythm-and-blues musician Fred White is 66. Rock musician James Lomenzo (Megadeth) is 62. Actor Kevin Anderson is 61. Actor Julia Louis-Dreyfus is 60. Rock singer Graham "Suggs" McPherson (Madness) is 60. Country singer Trace Adkins is 59. Actor Penelope Ann Miller is 57. Actor Patrick Dempsey is 55. Actor Suzanne Cryer is 54. Actor Traci Bingham is 53. Actor Keith Coogan is 51. TV producer-writer Shonda Rhimes is 51. Actor Nicole Eggert is 49. Actor Ross McCall is 45. Actor Michael Pena is 45. Actor Orlando Bloom is 44. Meteorologist Ginger Zee (TV: "Good Morning America") is 40. Actor Ruth Wilson is 39. Actor Julian Morris is 38. Actor Beau Mirchoff is 32. Actor Liam Hemsworth is 31. NHL center Connor McDavid is 24.