

Groton Daily Independent

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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.



Football classifications approved, appeals heard

By Dana Hess
For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — After months of study, the South Dakota High School Activities Association Board of Directors approved a football classification system at its meeting on Wednesday. It also heard five classification appeals from member schools.

The seven classification system would include in 11AAA the eight schools with the highest male average daily membership and O’Gorman High School which always petitions to play in a higher classification.

The next 11 schools by male average daily membership would make up the 11AA classification. The next 14 schools would be in 11A and the remaining schools with an average daily membership down to 56.001 would be in 11B.

The top third of teams under 56.0 ADM would be in 9AA; the next third would be 9A and the bottom third would be 9B.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand creates the football schedules. Asked for his opinion of the classification system, Krogstrand said, “At the end of the day, it’s functional.” Noting that a variety of other systems were proposed, he added, “This is the last man standing.”

Football classification systems must maintain safety by having schools of like size play each other.

“We’re comfortable with the enrollment differentials,” said SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos. “We’re comfortable with those ratios across the board.”

After approving the classification system, the board heard five appeals. The Arlington/Lake Preston cooperative sought to remain in nine-man football after being classified as having enough male students to play 11-man football.

The cooperative sought to disallow the count of two Apostolic Lutheran students who aren’t allowed to participate in sports and a student who has health concerns and severe disabilities.

Krogstrand explained that the board has allowed religious exemptions in the past. The appeal was approved on a vote of 7-1.

The board rejected an appeal from Scotland/Menno, a new football cooperative which sought to be classified in nine-man football rather than going up to 11-man.

“We did sell it as nine-man football,” according to Menno Superintendent Tom Rice, explaining the way the cooperative was presented to school board members.

The cooperative sought a reduction in its 58.042 ADM by discounting two special needs students listed in the Scotland rolls but schooled in Sioux Falls and one student who didn’t come to school.

Krogstrand said it’s not uncommon for bigger schools and reservation schools to have truant students. He said the cooperative would have the option to stay in nine-man but forego postseason play.

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Rice said in a case like that, he'd have to ask, "Why the heck are we playing?"

A motion to approve the appeal died for a lack of a second and was rejected.

The board unanimously approved an appeal from Bon Homme which had four students counted as juniors who would not have any eligibility to play football next year.

Without the four students, the ADM for Bon Homme would be 53, allowing them to play nine-man football.

Facilities, rather than student numbers was the basis for an appeal from the Dakota Hills football cooperative that includes Wilmot, Waubay and Summit.

Summit Superintendent Mike Schmidt said the cooperative would prefer to play nine-man football rather than move up to 11-man because the 80-yard field at Wilmot is built for nine-man football.

"Our biggest concern is the facility," Schmidt said. Citing the pandemic, Schmidt said, "We were just thinking this was a little bit of an emergency."

Wilmot Superintendent Larry Hulscher said preliminary estimates are more than \$10,000 to move lights and fencing to increase the size of the football field. He explained that home games are split in the cooperative with two in Wilmot and two in Waubay. Summit does not have a football field.

SDHSAA board chairman Craig Cassens of Faulkton said all the home games could be played in Waubay.

"It would not be a popular decision," Cassens said. "I understand that."

Board member Jerry Rasmussen of Dakota Valley noted that the season was still six months away and asked if the work in Wilmot could be finished in time.

"I believe that we could probably get it done this summer," Hulscher said, noting that more time would allow the district to look at the bigger picture and perhaps relocate the field.

The appeal was denied when no one on the board made a motion for approval.

The Hamlin School District asked to remain in Class 9AA football as more than 50 percent of the school's enrollment do not participate in athletic programs because of their religious beliefs. The appeal was approved on a 7-1 vote.

Here's what the four 11-man classes will look like...

Class 11AAA (nine teams) – Sioux Falls Jefferson, Sioux Falls Lincoln, Sioux Falls Roosevelt, Sioux Falls Washington, Rapid City Stevens, Rapid City Central, Brandon Valley, Harrisburg, and O'Gorman (petition up)

Class 11AA (11 teams) – Brookings, Yankton, Mitchell, Douglas, Pierre, Sturgis, Huron, Spearfish, Tea Area, Aberdeen Central, and Watertown

Class 11A (14 teams) – Belle Fourche, West Central, Vermillion, Lennox, Sioux Falls Christian, Dakota Valley, Madison, Milbank, Canton, Chamberlain, Tri-Valley, Custer, Dell Rapids, and Sisseton

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Class 11B (29 teams) – Beresford, Hot Springs, Lead-Deadwood, Flandreau, Elk Point-Jefferson, Redfield, Winner, Wagner, Sioux Valley, Mobridge-Pollock, Rapid City Christian, Baltic, Hill City, Groton Area, Parker, Bennett County, Deuel, Webster Area, Aberdeen Roncalli, Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan, McCook Central/Montrose, Miller/Highmore-Harrold, Clark/Willow Lake, Tripp-Delmont/Armour/AC/DC, Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central, Dakota Hills, Scotland/Menno, St. Thomas More (petitioned up), and Mt. Vernon/Plankinton (petitioned up)

The 9-man classifications are expected to be released in the next week or so, but by a rough count, they'll have around 61 teams. As mentioned by multiple sources to this point, if 9-man football, which currently has three classes in South Dakota, stays below 64 teams for two consecutive classification cycles, the number of 9-man classes will move from three to two.

Regardless of all the debate about reducing the number of high school football classes in South Dakota, it could be forced into a change as early as 2024, or unless additional changes to policy are made. The current classification cycle is for just one-year, but the next cycle is planned for a two-year window.

Special thanks to Brian Haenchen of The Argus Leader for assisting in the confirmation of these classifications.

SD Health Department Announces Beginning Stages of Priority Group 1D for Next Week

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Health is announcing that starting on Monday, January 18, 2021, the Department of Health and its health partners across the state will start vaccinating a prioritized population group, within Group 1D, of the state's vaccination plan. This first prioritized population group will be those 80 and over, as well as high-risk individuals and will be expanded to other groups within 1D as vaccines become available. The modification comes amidst the federal government's plan to release vaccines to states to speed up vaccinations nationwide.

"Given the progress we've seen in groups A through C, we are confident that with an increase in vaccine allocations, we can move into a limited population of group 1D. We will begin with those 80 and over and high-risk individuals, and from this starting point, adjust accordingly as allocation permits," said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. "We want to reassure those who've already received their first dose, and those in groups A through C who are already in the queue, that their second-dose will be available."

In addition to the release of COVID-19 vaccines, Operation Warp Speed announced it is changing how it will allocate such vaccines to states. Federal officials will increase weekly allocation to states based on the size of a state's 65+ population and take into consideration how quickly each state is administering the vaccine to the general public. Currently, South Dakota has been receiving an average of 11,000 doses a week and has administered over 47,950 doses.

"Given our strong partnerships with stakeholders, and the non-stop efforts of our healthcare systems, the Department of Health is proud to say that South Dakota remains among the top states in the country in vaccination efforts-- Shots in arms, that's our goal, " added Malsam-Rysdon.



Groton Team places fifth at Mobridge
Kevin Nehls and Chris Kassube of Groton Area placed fifth at the Mobridge Fishing Tournament held recently. (Photo from Mobridge Fishing Tournament Facebook Page)



Pipe Work Being Done

Work has resumed as the site of the new water tower. The underground piping system that will go from the tower to the new building was put together. Once it is ready and the hole is dug, the whole piping system will be placed in the ground. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

LATC Fall Presidents List

WATERTOWN, SD... Michael Cartney, Lake Area Technical College President, announces the current President's List. The President's List is a list of outstanding students who, through their initiative and ability, have indicated a seriousness of purpose in their educational program. The President's List is limited to full-time students who have achieved a semester grade point average of 3.5 to 4.0. Students with a 4.0 have been noted by an *.

Alicia Gauer*, Clark Gibbs and Hannah Lewandowski of Groton; and Cole Johnson, Bristol.

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#325 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

This was what's coming to be an average sort of day—no records, so that's something. There were 217,000 new cases reported, which increases our total by 0.9%, boosting it, as predicted, over 23 million. We've settled into enough of a pattern that I feel like a projection is not wildly out of order: If nothing happens to change the trajectory (and I am sincerely hoping something like that happens), we could be over 46 million in late March. Here's the usual:

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

We have 131,326 people hospitalized with Covid-19 today. The overall week-on-week trend is increasing, but we've been sort of in the same place for several days. I can pretend to hope this is leveling off and by next week shows it in the numbers.

There were 3735 deaths reported today—not our worst day, but far, far from our best, even in recent weeks. We have now lost 384,434 Americans to this disease, 1.0% more than yesterday. Doubling time here is just about the same as for new cases, which means, again assuming nothing happens to change things, that we could be over three-quarters of a million in late March.

The Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccine looks to be ready to apply for emergency use authorization (EUA) by the end of the month; some reports say January 21 is the date the submission will go in. This is a 45,000-person phase 3 trial, and the company says it is in the "final stages" of analyzing their data. I've heard they're seeing around 85% efficacy, which is very strong. There is a simultaneous two-dose trial underway, but I do not believe these data are ready to go yet.

This is a DNA vaccine which uses a modified (nonreplicating) adenovirus to deliver the DNA into the host. This is the same platform the company has used previously to design an Ebola vaccine which has been in production already. It is likely the EUA could occur in mid-February, and the company expects to have close to 10 million doses available by the end of February with more available as production ramps up in March and April and a goal of nearly one billion doses by year's end. This is a one-dose vaccine, so it's going to go further; and it doesn't have such exacting storage requirements, so it will be far easier to distribute than the two currently authorized for use. This is good news; more vaccines are better.

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Moderna is seeking teenaged volunteers for its clinical trials. Children from 12 to 18 years of age are needed. If you live near a trial site, please consider whether your children would be suited to such a trial. For what it's worth, I consider the risk to be minimal; of course, you will want to remember I am not some expert, just a person who's read a lot. I know there is a trial site in Minnesota, and there will be others throughout the country. The best website I've found for tracking down a trial that might want your help is at the following link (be aware it includes trials for other treatments and vaccines as well): <https://www.coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org>.

I had a question yesterday about taking this vaccine in conjunction with flu vaccine, which experts are recommending for this year too—and, no, it's not too late in the season for a flu shot to make sense. The current recommendation is to space out these two vaccinations by at least a few days; but the reason for this is not that taking them together is dangerous, only so that we have a better idea, should you have a reaction, which vaccine you're reacting to. Doctors are saying, however, that there's no real risk to taking them both at the same time. So feel free, if you don't want to come back in a few days or a few weeks, to just get both at once if you can.

I've seen some information on whether you can still transmit virus after you're fully vaccinated. Things are still a bit up in the air, but there is some evidence you will not shed virus, at least not in as large numbers as before. There is some follow-up work being done; volunteers are being checked for the virus as we go along. If virus is found, it can be tested to see whether it's replicating or not. We don't know how large an infectious dose is, so there will still be some unknowns, which means we're a ways off from answers on this. There's also some work proceeding on other vaccines: The AstraZeneca vaccine has volunteers testing themselves for virus. So far, it appears this vaccine partially protects against viral shedding, but the protection is not complete. And, just to review, this new variant from the UK, B.1.1.7, appears to be covered by the current vaccines. You can be sure any vaccine approved for authorization going forward will also have attention paid to these new variants which are showing up.

Additionally, if you're recently recovered from Covid-19, it is recommended you wait at least three months for the Covid-19 vaccine and at least 10 days after you are symptom-free for the flu vaccine. If you are immunocompromised or at risk for severe illness, it might be smart to wait longer in between so you are sure you are not contagious when you go in.

People who've had the flu should still go in for a flu shot in the same season. This is because flu vaccine covers several strains. If you've been infected by one of these, you are still susceptible to the others. The last thing any of us wants is two or more bouts of the flu in the same winter.

So far, it's been pretty rare to be co-infected with influenza and Covid-19 at the same time, but you really don't want this to happen to you. Chances are, if it does, you're at much higher risk for severe disease from either or both. Hospital stays tend to run longer in these cases, and death rates appear to be about twice as high—nothing you want to mess with.

There is a report of a death following vaccination. We do not yet know what it means. A physician in Florida died from a rare blood disorder called acute immune thrombocytopenia 16 days after being vaccinated. Thrombocytes are also called platelets, and they're integral to proper blood clotting; thrombocytopenia is a deficiency of platelets, which can lead to spontaneous hemorrhaging. The condition develops when your immune system attacks your platelets or the bone marrow cells that produce them.

Apparently this guy noticed petechiae (very small, flat, dark red spots on the skin, usually in clusters, which occur when tiny blood vessels called capillaries break, leaking blood at that spot), and he sought medical advice, discovering his platelet count was near zero—sure sign of bad trouble. After several days, he had a hemorrhagic stroke (caused by bleeding in the brain) and died.

His wife who is understandably distraught is putting out on social media that this vaccine killed him and warning people about it. I give people a lot of slack when they're grieving, so I'm not here to judge that. Due to laws about privacy, his doctors aren't able to discuss the case in public. Authorities say they're investigating. That makes it difficult to evaluate what we're hearing.

A number of viral diseases, including Covid-19, can cause this disorder, as can quite a list of drugs. Measles vaccine has been suspected as a cause, but there appears to be disagreement about whether

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it actually is. At this time, we can't say whether the condition in this case is linked to this vaccine. It is at least possible, but it's too early to say. People develop health conditions all the time, and some of those are going to coincidentally show up after vaccination that are completely independent of the vaccine. So maybe he would have developed this when he did anyhow. Because it is more frequently seen in older people than he and in women, it seems likely there was a recent trigger which could have been the vaccine; but we just can't say yet.

What happens now as the investigation of this death continues is that it gets logged as a possible "adverse event" and they'll likely be watching for more cases; also, now that it's logged, physicians will be looking for it and prepared to respond very quickly to any other case that pops up. This could matter because there are therapies available, and I understand they need to be applied fairly promptly.

If this case should turn out to be linked causally to this vaccine, then we pay attention to the incidence of such a severe effect. Fact is vaccines carry some risk; so does this infection. Unless this suddenly becomes a more common thing, which doesn't seem likely, I still like my chances with the vaccine way better than I like them with this virus.

Conclusion: It bears watching, but does not change my mind about whether I will be vaccinated.

Alexis Frost Cazimero is an event planner and hair stylist whose business dried up with the pandemic. Left scrambling to feed her four children, she took to driving around the county with her children piled into the car to various food distribution centers. She would gather as much as she could, then come back to her neighborhood with enough to share, taking what her family needed and handing the rest out to neighbors.

When her mom's house sold, Cazimero, along with her mother and her brother, rented a large commercial space and turning it into a co-op for other businesses and individuals who'd lost their incomes. They set up stalls selling clothing, handicrafts, and home goods. And she set up a more formal food distribution center, funding it with the income from the co-op.

Even in the midst of her own need, Cazimero sees this as a call to service. She told the New York Times, "It makes you think just really what you need and what you don't need. It's been a wonderful blessing in disguise." Here's someone who's looking for ways to make her corner of the world a better place, which is the most any of us can do. Good for her.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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Jan. 13 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: +452 (104,195 total) Positivity Rate: 8.2%

Total Tests: 5481 (810,847 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1917 (385,382 total)

Hospitalized: +35 (5978 total) 253 currently hospitalized (+13)

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: +19 (1604 total)

40s=1, 50s=1, 60s=3, 70s=5, 80+=9

Female: 6, Male: 13

Counties: Charles Mix-1, Codington-1, Day-1, Dewey-1, Lawrence-2, Meade-2, Minnehaha-5, Pennington-5.

Recovered: +422 (97,829 total)

Active Cases: +11 (4762)

Percent Recovered: 93.9%

Vaccinations: +1238 (47952)

Vaccinations Completed: +533 (7998)

Brown County Vaccinations: +63 (1948) 20 (+1) completed

Beadle (38) +7 positive, +7 recovered (80 active cases)

Brookings (31) +23 positive, +19 recovered (231 active cases)

Brown (68): +23 positive, +23 recovered (264 active cases)

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

Clay (12): +7 positive, +4 recovered (76 active cases)

Codington (73): +18 positive, +19 recovered (189 active cases)

Davison (53): +24 positive, +6 recovered (112 active cases)

Day (22): +6 positive, +0 recovered (29 active cases)

Edmunds (4): +7 positive, +8 recovered (50 active cases)

Faulk (13): +1 positive, +1 recovered (4 active cases)

Grant (35): +6 positive, +0 recovered (34 active cases)

Hanson (3): +1 positive, +0 recovered (13 active cases)

Hughes (29): +9 positive, +9 recovered (85 active cases)

Lawrence (33): +15 positive, +8 recovered (98

active cases)

Lincoln (68): +28 positive, +35 recovered (323 active cases)

Marshall (5): +2 positive, +3 recovered (10 active cases)

McCook (22): +2 positive, +0 recovered (28 active cases)

McPherson (3): +9 positive, +1 recovery (22 active case)

Minnehaha (290): +89 positive, +86 recovered (1104 active cases)

Pennington (149): +43 positive, +57 recovered (568 active cases)

Potter (3): +3 positive, +4 recovered (26 active cases)

Roberts (32): +7 positive, +11 recovered (73 active cases)

Spink (24): +3 positive, +0 recovered (30 active cases)

Walworth (14): +1 positive, +3 recovered (47 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 13:

- 4.2% rolling 14-day positivity
- 227 new positives
- 6,812 susceptible test encounters
- 72 currently hospitalized (+2)
- 1,749 active cases (-14)
- 1,357 total deaths (+2)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	433	400	791	11	Moderate	17.24%
Beadle	2563	2445	5344	38	Substantial	10.69%
Bennett	370	348	1093	8	Moderate	4.44%
Bon Homme	1499	1448	1920	23	Substantial	15.52%
Brookings	3237	2975	10434	31	Substantial	13.38%
Brown	4705	4373	11374	68	Substantial	22.59%
Brule	655	621	1715	7	Moderate	26.09%
Buffalo	415	403	855	10	Minimal	19.05%
Butte	929	877	2913	20	Substantial	16.13%
Campbell	117	108	224	4	Minimal	25.00%
Charles Mix	1171	1095	3611	14	Substantial	12.05%
Clark	324	312	886	2	Moderate	2.22%
Clay	1698	1610	4722	12	Substantial	16.74%
Codington	3632	3370	8778	73	Substantial	19.61%
Corson	454	440	910	11	Moderate	19.35%
Custer	697	673	2476	9	Substantial	12.79%
Davison	2832	2667	5871	53	Substantial	15.84%
Day	571	520	1590	22	Substantial	17.65%
Deuel	444	400	1028	7	Substantial	9.09%
Dewey	1353	1268	3620	15	Substantial	21.25%
Douglas	397	373	843	9	Substantial	31.58%
Edmunds	425	370	903	5	Substantial	9.09%
Fall River	474	444	2348	13	Substantial	9.41%
Faulk	317	300	625	13	Moderate	14.29%
Grant	857	788	1984	35	Substantial	21.05%
Gregory	493	457	1124	26	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	237	223	484	9	Moderate	10.00%
Hamlin	640	566	1575	37	Substantial	10.75%
Hand	319	306	720	4	Minimal	8.33%
Hanson	324	308	630	3	Moderate	23.81%
Harding	89	88	160	1	Minimal	0.00%
Hughes	2097	1983	5841	29	Substantial	4.11%
Hutchinson	723	674	2101	20	Substantial	13.21%

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Hyde	134	130	373	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	267	251	871	12	Minimal	33.33%
Jerauld	265	241	512	16	Minimal	15.79%
Jones	71	68	190	0	Minimal	10.00%
Kingsbury	580	530	1462	13	Substantial	9.33%
Lake	1078	1013	2875	16	Substantial	29.13%
Lawrence	2672	2541	7796	33	Substantial	11.54%
Lincoln	7142	6751	18087	68	Substantial	19.74%
Lyman	557	516	1749	9	Moderate	16.67%
Marshall	272	257	1042	5	Moderate	4.00%
McCook	709	659	1458	22	Substantial	29.31%
McPherson	211	184	510	3	Moderate	2.94%
Meade	2378	2230	6927	26	Substantial	21.02%
Mellette	228	222	671	2	Minimal	10.34%
Miner	245	213	513	7	Moderate	10.00%
Minnehaha	26117	24723	70176	290	Substantial	16.17%
Moody	565	523	1614	14	Substantial	22.73%
Oglala Lakota	1989	1872	6312	37	Substantial	16.17%
Pennington	11881	11166	35276	149	Substantial	21.05%
Perkins	307	274	705	11	Substantial	16.67%
Potter	332	303	741	3	Moderate	8.57%
Roberts	1070	965	3833	32	Substantial	20.27%
Sanborn	318	300	623	3	Moderate	35.71%
Spink	726	672	1919	24	Substantial	10.20%
Stanley	297	279	802	2	Substantial	6.52%
Sully	123	108	254	3	Moderate	10.00%
Todd	1186	1143	3914	19	Substantial	8.42%
Tripp	643	617	1362	14	Substantial	12.12%
Turner	1009	913	2434	49	Substantial	23.53%
Union	1739	1579	5584	30	Substantial	14.38%
Walworth	666	605	1670	14	Substantial	23.00%
Yankton	2601	2467	8453	27	Substantial	12.68%
Ziebach	326	281	832	8	Moderate	14.29%
Unassigned	0	0	2071	0		

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South Dakota

Total Doses Administered

47,952

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

39,954

Manufacturers

Number of Doses

Doses

Number of Recipients

Total Confirmed Cases

93,580

Total Probable Cases

10,615

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

10.5%

Total Persons Tested

387,299

Total Tests

816,328

Ever Hospitalized

5,978

Deaths Among Cases

1,604

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

346%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

104%

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	3964	0
10-19 years	11517	0
20-29 years	18903	4
30-39 years	17190	14
40-49 years	14894	31
50-59 years	14742	85
60-69 years	11870	201
70-79 years	6295	350
80+ years	4820	919

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	54492	767
Male	49703	837

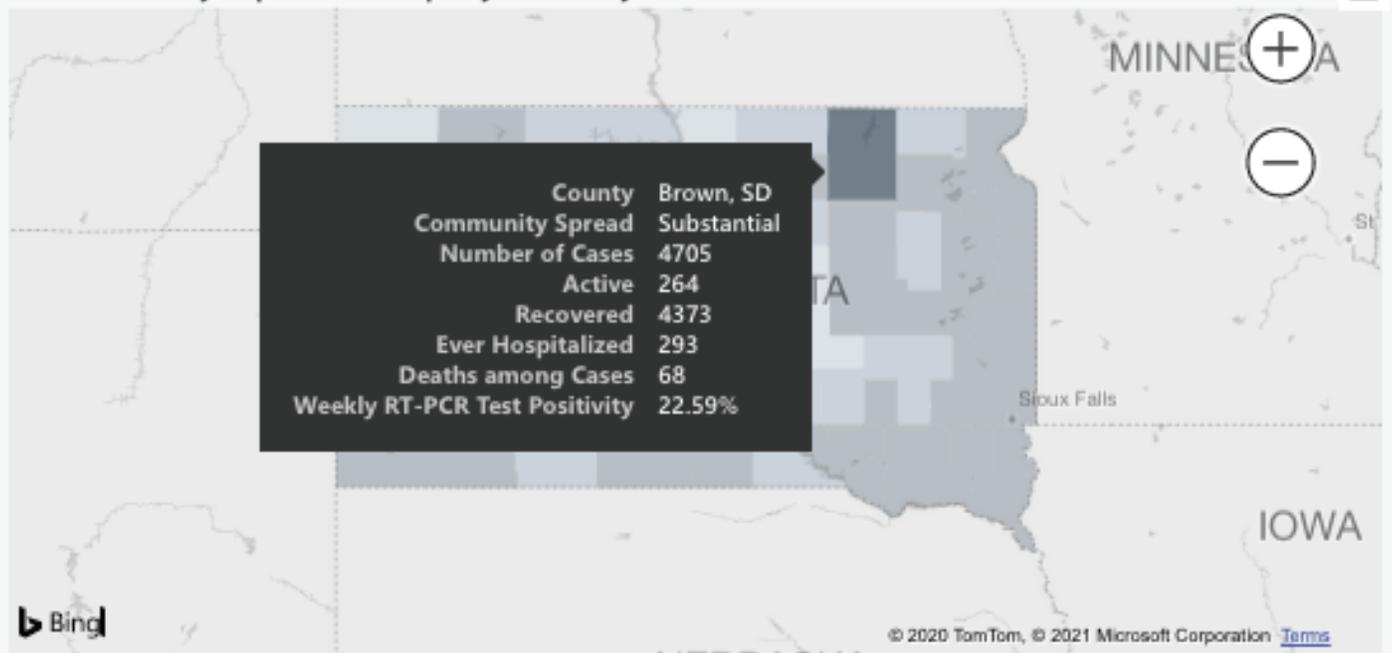
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Day County

New Confirmed Cases

2

New Probable Cases

4

Active Cases

29

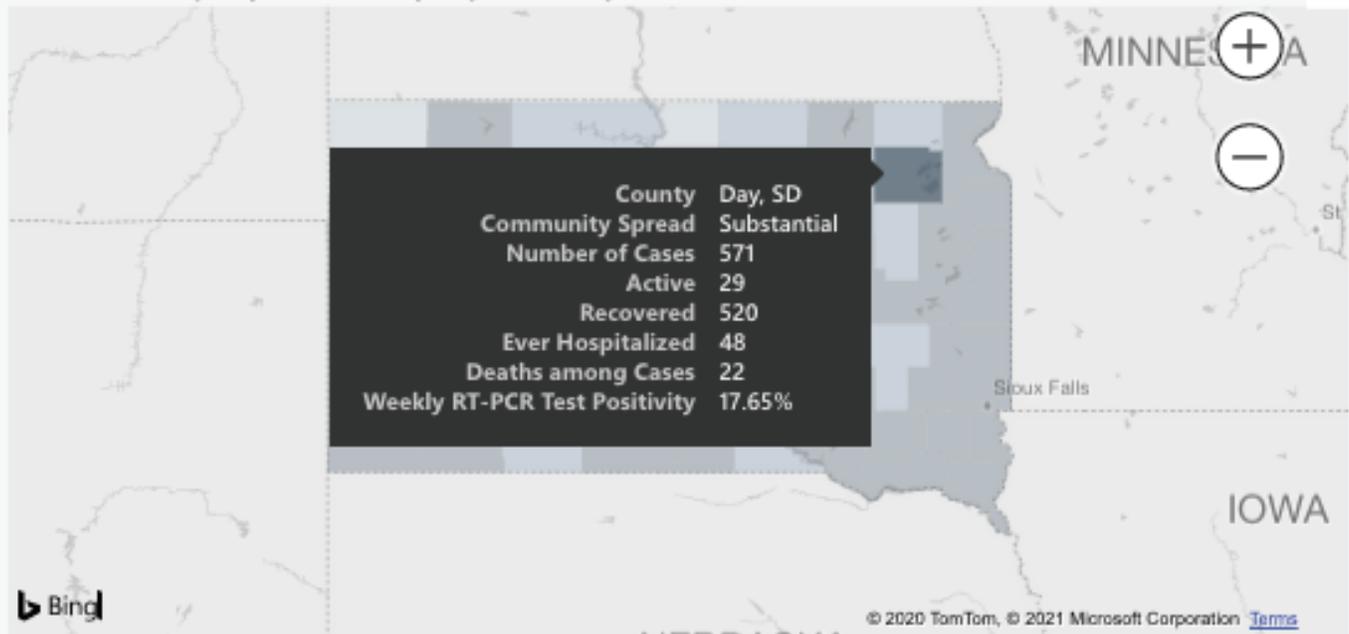
Recovered Cases

520

Currently Hospitalized

253

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed Cases

472

Total Probable Cases

99

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

14.3%

Total Persons Tested

2,161

Total Tests

6,218

Ever Hospitalized

48

Deaths Among Cases

22

% Progress (November Goal: 44233 Tests)

402%

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

346%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

104%

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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

47,952

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

39,954

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	22,930
Pfizer	25,022

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	22,930
Pfizer - 1 dose	9,026
Pfizer - Series Complete	7,998

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	82	82	0	82
Beadle	823	439	192	631
Bennett*	51	47	2	49
Bon Homme*	404	390	7	397
Brookings	1214	806	204	1,010
Brown	1948	1,908	20	1,928
Brule*	208	204	2	206
Buffalo*	3	3	0	3
Butte	147	143	2	145
Campbell	146	120	13	133
Charles Mix*	303	297	3	300
Clark	131	119	6	125
Clay	701	643	29	672
Codington*	1539	1,179	180	1,359
Corson*	14	12	1	13
Custer*	287	257	15	272
Davison	1376	1,316	30	1,346
Day*	288	272	8	280
Deuel	171	143	14	157
Dewey*	63	61	1	62
Douglas*	193	191	1	192
Edmunds	128	126	1	127
Fall River*	237	231	3	234
Faulk	37	35	1	36
Grant*	385	369	8	377
Gregory*	234	228	3	231
Haakon*	81	81	0	81

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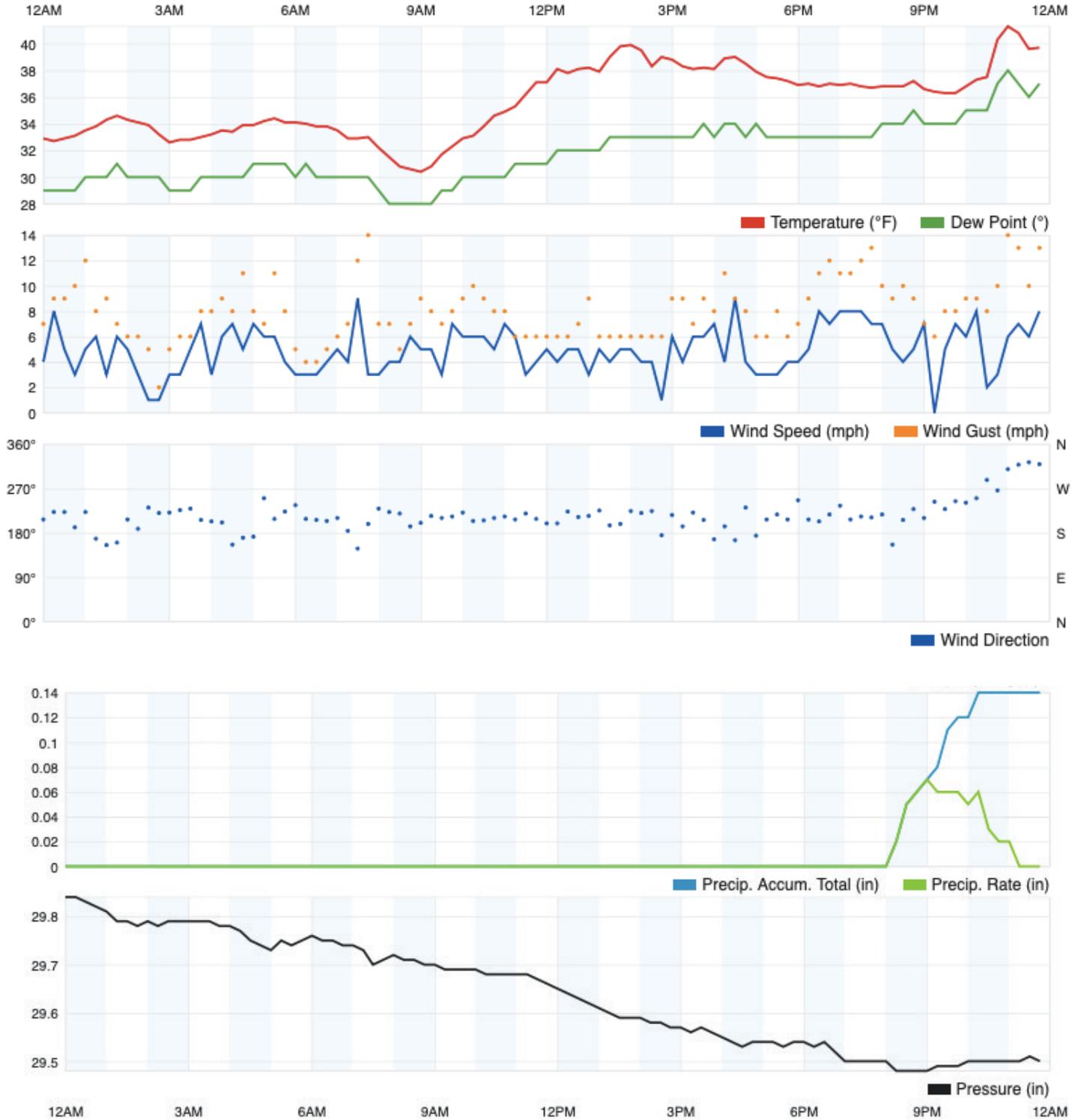
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Hamlin	226	178	24	202
Hand	182	164	9	173
Hanson	62	56	3	59
Harding	2	2	0	2
Hughes*	902	874	14	888
Hutchinson*	549	515	17	532
Hyde*	95	95	0	95
Jackson*	38	38	0	38
Jerauld	74	60	7	67
Jones*	48	44	2	46
Kingsbury	295	219	38	257
Lake	556	254	151	405
Lawrence	538	510	14	524
Lincoln	6156	2,802	1,677	4,479
Lyman*	59	57	1	58
Marshall*	198	192	3	195
McCook	300	190	55	245
McPherson	19	19	0	19
Meade*	645	469	88	557
Mellette*	4	4	0	4
Miner	88	66	11	77
Minnehaha	15304	7,650	3,827	11,477
Moody*	218	184	17	201
Oglala Lakota*	17	9	4	13
Pennington*	4852	3,174	839	4,013
Perkins*	38	38	0	38
Potter	115	111	2	113
Roberts*	360	350	5	355
Sanborn	96	88	4	92
Spink	412	394	9	403
Stanley*	128	122	3	125
Sully	30	24	3	27
Todd*	23	19	2	21
Tripp*	237	235	1	236
Turner	586	468	59	527
Union	208	180	14	194
Walworth*	305	143	81	224
Yankton	1407	1,379	14	1,393
Ziebach*	11	11	0	11
Other	1375	867	254	1,121

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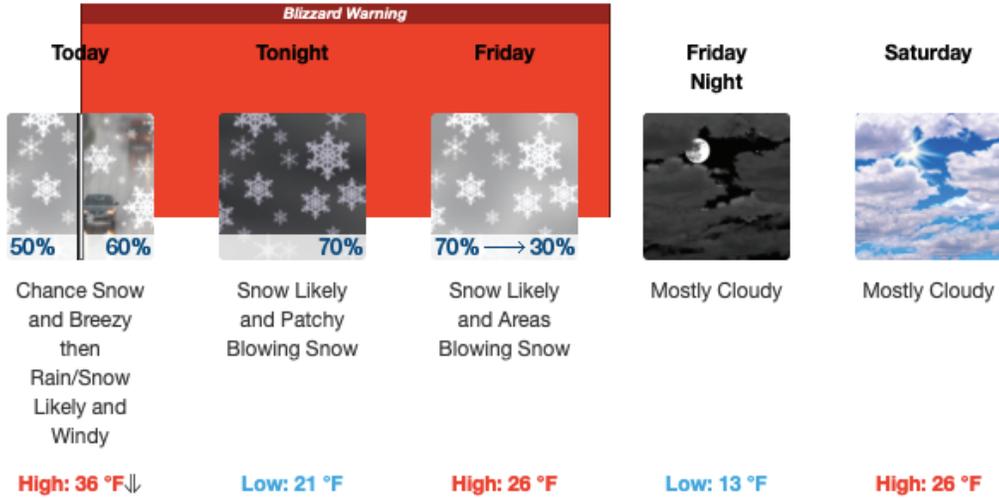
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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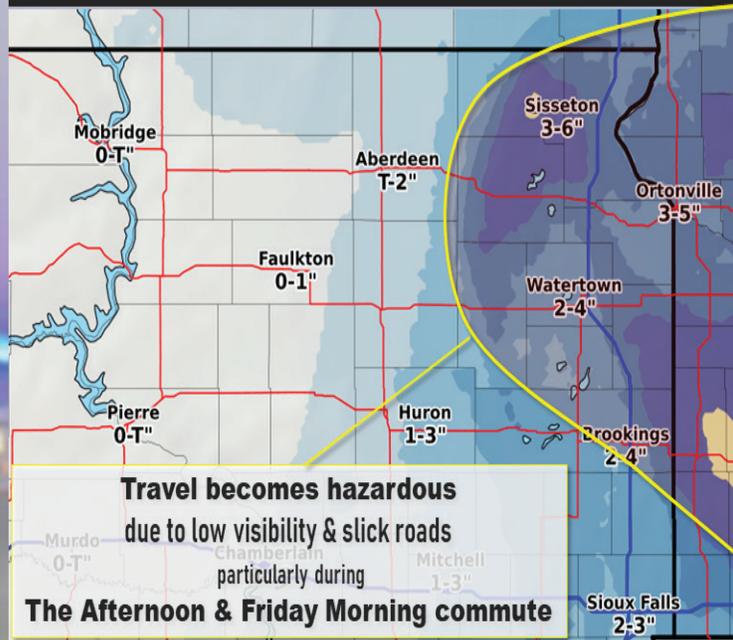
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Blizzard Conditions This Afternoon Into Friday

- Winds Continue Across The Dakotas Today & Friday. Gusts To 60mph
- Snow Mostly Confined To Sisseton Hills and Western Minnesota
- No "Blowable" Snow Now, So Falling Snow Will Be Required To Reduce Visibility...
- ...and the Western Extreme of Snowfall is a Little Uncertain, Just Be Aware If You Plan To Travel Through This Area!

Expected Snow Totals



Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 1/14/2021 5:27 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Precipitation is moving into eastern South Dakota and will transition over from rain to snow through the day. Strong winds and snow will make for slick road conditions and reduced visibility, making for difficult travel conditions across the Sisseton hills into western Minnesota, particularly for the afternoon and Friday morning commutes.

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Today in Weather History

January 14, 1916: Record cold continued on this date in weather history in 1916 across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. Aberdeen, Kennebec, Mobridge, Timber Lake, Watertown, and Wheaton all set record lows. The record lows were 24 degrees below zero at Kennebec, 28 degrees below zero at Wheaton, 31 degrees below zero at Timber Lake, 35 degrees below zero at Mobridge, 36 degrees below zero at Aberdeen, and 38 degrees below zero at Watertown.

1882: A cold winter storm that started on 1/1 and ended on this day brought lots of snow to the lowlands. 15 inches of snow fell at San Bernardino. 3 feet of snow fell in Campo over four days and produced 8 foot drifts in spots. Two to five inches fell in outlying San Diego, including four inches along Poway Grade, 3 inches at El Cajon and one inch in Poway. 5 inches fell in Riverside. Light snow fell in Del Mar. Snowflakes fell, but did not stick at San Diego Lindbergh Field. Birds and livestock were killed, telegraph lines were knocked down and citrus crops were damaged.

1972: In Loma, Montana, the temperature soared from 54 degrees below zero to 49 degrees above zero on January 14-15, 1972. The 103 degree change is the greatest ever recorded in the world for a 24 hour period.

2009: In Washington State, freezing fog and freezing drizzle enveloped much the Inland Northwest during the period of 13-23 January 2009. The area most affected by this was the high plateau region along Highway 2 between Wenatchee and Spokane. Below are some of the pictures taken at the NWS Spokane office showing the accumulation of rime on various objects.

1863 - The greatest snowstorm of record for Cincinnati OH commenced, and a day later twenty inches of snow covered the ground. That total has remained far above the modern day record for Cincinnati of eleven inches of snow in one storm. (David Ludlum)

1882 - Southern California's greatest snow occurred on this date. Fifteen inches blanketed San Bernardino, and even San Diego reported a trace of snow. (David Ludlum)

1979 - Chicago, IL, was in the midst of their second heaviest snow of record as, in thirty hours, the city was buried under 20.7 inches of snow. The twenty-nine inch snow cover following the storm was an all-time record for Chicago. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Arctic cold invaded the north central U.S. By evening blustery northwest winds and temperatures near zero at Grand Forks ND were producing wind chill readings of 50 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful Pacific storm produced rain and high winds in the western U.S. In Nevada, a wind gust to 90 mph at Reno was an all-time record for that location, and wind gusts reached 106 mph southwest of Reno. A wind gust to 94 mph was recorded at nearby Windy Hill. Rainfall totals in Oregon ranged up to six inches at Wilson River. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A winter storm spread snow and sleet and freezing rain from the Middle Mississippi Valley to the northeastern U.S. Freezing rain in West Virginia caused fifteen traffic accidents in just a few minutes west of Charleston. Tennessee was deluged with up to 7.5 inches of rain. Two inches of rain near Clarksville TN left water in the streets as high as car doors.

1990 - A winter storm in the southwestern U.S. blanketed the mountains of southwest Utah with 18 to 24 inches of snow, while sunshine and strong southerly winds helped temperatures warm into the 60s in the Central Plains Region. Five cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including North Platte NE with a reading of 63 degrees. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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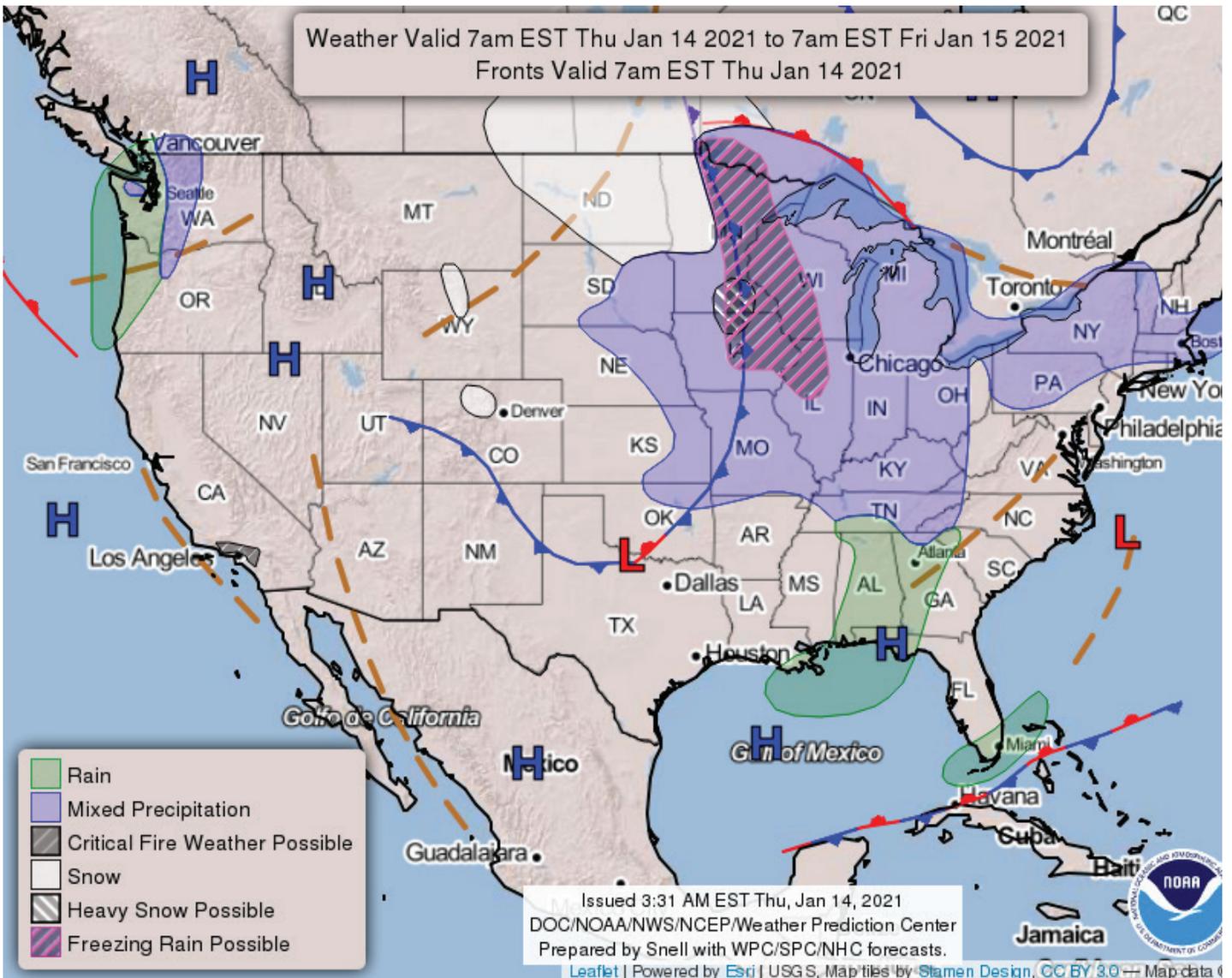
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 11:00 PM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 9:00 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 7:36 AM

Precip: 0.14

Today's Info

Record High: 50° in 1901
Record Low: -36 in 1916
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.23
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.23
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:16 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10 a.m.



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FACING FEAR

Fear comes from many different sources. It can come from a person or a place. Sometimes it erupts when everything seems calm and serene. Often it seems to grip us when we know we are in the center of God's will doing God's work and trusting that we are doing it in His way. All of us have those moments of being jolted by uncertainty and our sense of security shattered.

Our fears are no different from David's. Psalm 6 begins with a statement that suggests that he is trying to deflect God's wrath. "Oh Lord," he cries, "Do not rebuke me in your anger!" Does this suggest that he is afraid of being punished for some sin he has committed? Or might he fear God's judgment for something he did in the past while he was separated from God? Could he be afraid to ask for healing as he was going through a time of sickness?

He admits to "being weak," his "bones being troubled" and his soul being "greatly troubled." He really needed help – like we do - from time to time. But notice what he did: he did not focus on his pain and problems, he focused on the mercy of God!

"Have mercy on me!" he cried desperately! He needed God's help! And in his fear and distress – whether it was his sickness or sin from his past that still haunted him – he had full confidence in God's mercy and knew that He would hear him, help him, and heal him.

When we are overwhelmed by the issues of life or death, only our faith in God's mercy and power can restore within us a sense of God's presence and peace and restore our trust.

Prayer: Increase our faith, Father, and assure us that You will protect us in every situation. Calm our hearts, quiet our minds, and restore our peace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. Psalm 6:2

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-11-19-20-25

(one, eleven, nineteen, twenty, twenty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$82,000

Lotto America

08-21-24-29-32, Star Ball: 2, ASB: 2

(eight, twenty-one, twenty-four, twenty-nine, thirty-two; Star Ball: two; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.5 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$750 million

Powerball

04-19-23-25-49, Powerball: 14, Power Play: 2

(four, nineteen, twenty-three, twenty-five, forty-nine; Powerball: fourteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$550 million

South Dakota Chief Justice wants pay raises for judges

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Chief Justice Steven R. Jensen used his first State of the Judiciary address on Wednesday to argue for higher pay for judges in the state's court system.

Jensen took over the helm this month after former Chief Justice David Gilbertson retired from a 20-year tenure at the top. Jensen's speech focused on promoting court system employees who have continued to perform difficult work, even amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Most of the work of our courts in South Dakota is done without spectators, fanfare or notice," Jensen said.

He told lawmakers that the court system has struggled to recruit attorneys to transition to judges because the pay is among the worst in the nation. He also raised concerns about security in courtrooms, saying that courts across the state rely on a "reactive, rather than proactive" approach to security.

Jensen said the court system is undergoing a review of security protocols. He also requested lawmakers to give him the budget to hire someone to oversee security.

Lawmakers push flexibility amid pandemic as many forgo masks

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Wednesday finalized rules aimed at pushing the session forward amid the pandemic, but acknowledged that their plans to meet in Pierre could be upended by the virus.

As the session reached its second day, the state Capitol was marked by close-quartered conversations, many lawmakers without masks and concerns about what a virus outbreak would mean for the process of forming the state's laws and budget.

Lawmakers nationwide have struggled to control the virus among their ranks, with members of the U.S. Congress reporting virus infections after the U.S. Capitol attack put them in close quarters with colleagues who refused to wear masks.

In Pierre, one of the Legislature's first tasks was amending rules to allow for flexibility during the pandemic. Committees of lawmakers debated protocols on suspending meetings if outbreaks spread quickly,

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when to allow members to participate remotely and requirements on wearing face coverings.

"This is going to be a day-to-day, this is going to be rolling with the punches," said House Speaker Spencer Gosch, a Republican from Glenham.

Proposed House rules don't mention masks. Instead, posted signs encourage them on the House floor, though many Republican lawmakers did not heed that admonition. Gosch said state statutes make it difficult to enforce rules on legislators wearing masks.

But the Senate has taken stronger steps to push wearing masks, with legislative leaders proposing rules that say they are "expected" for lawmakers in Senate chambers and required for everyone else. Both chambers are expected to vote on their respective proposed rules in the coming days.

Senate Pro Tem Lee Schoenbeck said he told his fellow Republicans, "we've just got to be kind for two months," to encourage them to take virus precautions.

Schoenbeck, a Republican from Watertown, acknowledged the risk of holding an in-person session, saying, "If one of my friends in the Senate ends up on a vent, we're going home."

The state has seen its average number of virus cases reported each day level off over the last two weeks at about 400 cases a day, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. The Department of Health on Wednesday reported 452 new cases, as well as 19 deaths from the virus. The new virus deaths brought the overall death toll to 1,604 people.

Schoenbeck also said that an outbreak among legislative staff, who do the grind work of writing bills, taking minutes and organizing the day-to-day work of lawmakers, could threaten to cripple the session.

Other Republicans remained less concerned about the virus or wearing masks, saying that the virus had already hit enough people that it was likely infections would spread slowly.

Reps. Arch Beal and Rebecca Reimer, both Republicans, chatted on the House floor while their masks sat unused on their side-by-side desks. Both espoused taking vitamins to ward off serious illness from the virus and said they would wear masks when around others who wore them.

"I feel that if I'm going to get it, I'm going to get it," Beal said. "I'm not going to play games with masks."

But Democrats, who hold just 11 seats in the statehouse, charged that Republicans were not doing enough to accommodate for the virus and that the conditions at the Capitol violate recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They were unsuccessful in a push for rules that would allow lawmakers to participate remotely if a doctor recommended it.

"We're forcing people who represent their constituents to work in an unsafe environment and that's wrong," said Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat. "Frankly, we haven't taken it seriously here in the South Dakota Capitol."

Third murder charge filed in South Dakota slayings

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A New York man already charged with a double murder in a South Dakota city last August is now charged with a third homicide in that state.

A Pennington County grand jury has indicted Arnson Absolu on a first-degree murder charge in the death of 22-year-old Dakota Zaiser. His body was found in some woods near Rapid City about a month after two people were found shot to death in a park in that city on Aug. 24.

Charles Red Willow, a 26-year-old from Rapid City, and Ashley Nagy, a 29-year-old from Greeley, Colorado, were found dead from multiple bullet wounds inside a car at the park.

Police had suspected the person who killed the two also killed Zaiser.

Absolu, 36, was arrested in New York in September. He is in custody in the Bronx with his next court date set for Jan. 25, KOTA-TV reported.

Detectives said they believed Zaiser was hanging out with Absolu and may have been in the area during the shooting at Thomson Park. They wanted to speak with Zaiser since he may have witnessed and had information about the park shooting.

Police believe Zaiser was killed hours or days after the double homicide. Police spokesman Brendyn Medina has said all three killings may be related to drugs.

Man wanted in homicide arrested after pursuit

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A man wanted in connection with a homicide has been arrested in Sioux Falls following a high speed pursuit.

The Minnehaha County Fugitive Task Force located the man driving in Sioux Falls Tuesday afternoon, but he refused attempts by officers to pull him over, according to police.

A pursuit began and the task force officers asked Sioux Falls police to take over the chase.

The pursuit eventually ended in Sioux Falls and the suspect was taken into custody. Police did not identify the man or the victim in the homicide.

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.

A day to remember: London nursing home greets virus vaccine

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — In 1948, John Peake won a silver medal at the Olympic Games in London. In 2021, also in London, he struck what many would consider gold, receiving his first dose of a coronavirus vaccine.

Amid growing concerns over rising COVID outbreaks at nursing homes in Britain, the 96-year-old was one of the 45 residents at Wimbledon Beaumont Care Community in southwest London to receive the vaccine Wednesday developed by the University of Oxford and British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca.

"I'm glad to have it and I appreciate the fact that it has come to this place early," he told The Associated Press after receiving his jab.

Peake was the youngest member of the 1948 British field hockey team that lost 4-0 to India in the final at Wembley Stadium in the first Olympics after World War II.

"I think I'm lucky to have lasted as long as I have," he said.

Yet Peake, who is one of the oldest surviving Olympians, was not even the oldest to get the shot at the nursing home. That honor went to 102-year-old Joan Potts, who though in a wheelchair and clearly fragile, still had eyes that expressed wonder in the world.

Britain in many ways is leading the vaccination drive around the world. It was the first country to approve and use the vaccine designed by U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. It was the first to approve the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. It has also approved a third, by Moderna, but that is not expected to arrive until the spring.

Already, around 2.5 million people in Britain have received their first jabs. To get vaccine shots to as many people as quickly as possible, Britain is taking a different path than other nations. Instead of giving people their second vaccine shot within three or four weeks, they will get it within 12 weeks.

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The first groups in line are those 80 and over, health care workers, nursing home residents and their caregivers. The British government had aimed for all nursing home residents to have their first jab by the end of the month but doctors are now being urged to go faster, given a recent rise in new infections in nursing homes.

Dr. Jane Allen, who has looked after Wimbledon residents for nearly four decades, was on hand to deliver the jabs.

"I'm certainly glad it's arrived at last, because perhaps it gives the residents a bit more freedom, they've had a very difficult year," said Allen, who along with her partners were in a rush to vaccinate the nearly 200 nursing home residents over a single day.

Two paramedics arrived with a shiny red bag containing the treasured vaccine doses. Allen visored up and, assisted by nurse Fernando Castillo, ran through the necessary questions: Are you feeling well? What about any allergies? Do you want to take this vaccine against the coronavirus?

As they waited to get their shots, the residents offered glimpses into their personalities and pasts, displaying empathy, humor and resilience.

For some it was a big relief, including gregarious 86-year-old Gwen Nurse, who has just "felt very lonely" over these long months of the pandemic.

"I'm an old lady and it doesn't matter so much about me, but it does about younger people," she said.

For others, it was a more prosaic affair.

"I've been jabbed many times," said Ian Hurley, 80, a former policeman who helped create the Crimestoppers phone line and never misses a chance to show off his edgy sense of humor.

"Whatever the case is, I might just walk out of here and cross the road and get run over," he said.

Some, like Hurley, just rolled up their sleeve and got on with it. For others, it was a more laborious process, requiring reassurance from the doctor. Retired executive secretary Pamela Rahman, 84, was dressed up in her Sunday best, only to find that she was not wearing the easiest clothing for a vaccine shot.

Getting a vaccine shot doesn't mean that the nursing home residents can go about their lives as they previously did. For starters, it takes 21 days for a measure of immunity to emerge. But it does help lift the fear that they could contract the virus blamed for the deaths of some 85,000 people in the U.K., the vast majority of them over 65.

And how should one end such a memorable day? With a party, of course.

"Our care home was always full of laughter and joy," said Gayane Selimyan, general manager of the nursing home owned by Barchester Healthcare. "We are very happy and excited and we are going to have a vaccination party today to celebrate."

Follow AP coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at:

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

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Australia to kill pigeon that crossed Pacific from Oregon

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A racing pigeon has survived an extraordinary 13,000-kilometer (8,000-mile) Pacific Ocean crossing from the United States to find a new home in Australia. Now authorities consider the bird a quarantine risk and plan to kill it.

Kevin Celli-Bird said Thursday he discovered the exhausted bird that arrived in his Melbourne backyard on Dec. 26 had disappeared from a race in the U.S. state of Oregon on Oct. 29.

Experts suspect the pigeon that Celli-Bird has named Joe, after the U.S. president-elect, hitched a ride on a cargo ship to cross the Pacific.

Joe's feat has attracted the attention of the Australian media but also of the notoriously strict Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

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Celli-Bird said quarantine authorities called him on Thursday to ask him to catch the bird.

"They say if it is from America, then they're concerned about bird diseases," he said. "They wanted to know if I could help them out. I said, 'To be honest, I can't catch it. I can get within 500 mil (millimeters or 20 inches) of it and then it moves.'"

He said quarantine authorities were now considering contracting a professional bird catcher.

The Agriculture Department, which is responsible for biosecurity, said the pigeon was "not permitted to remain in Australia" because it "could compromise Australia's food security and our wild bird populations."

"It poses a direct biosecurity risk to Australian bird life and our poultry industry," a department statement said.

In 2015, the government threatened to euthanize two Yorkshire terriers, Pistol and Boo, after they were smuggled into the country by Hollywood star Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard.

Faced with a 50-hour deadline to leave Australia, the dogs made it out in a chartered jet.

Pigeons are an unusual sight in Celli-Bird's backyard in suburban Officer, where Australian native doves are far more common.

"It rocked up at our place on Boxing Day. I've got a fountain in the backyard and it was having a drink and a wash. He was pretty emaciated so I crushed up a dry biscuit and left it out there for him," Celli-Bird said.

"Next day, he rocked back up at our water feature, so I wandered out to have a look at him because he was fairly weak and he didn't seem that afraid of me and I saw he had a blue band on his leg. Obviously he belongs to someone, so I managed to catch him," he added.

Celli-Bird, who says he has no interest in birds "apart from my last name," said he could no longer catch the pigeon with his bare hands since it had regained its strength.

He said the Oklahoma-based American Racing Pigeon Union had confirmed that Joe was registered to an owner in Montgomery, Alabama.

Celli-Bird said he had attempted to contact the owner, but had so far been unable to get through.

The bird spends every day in the backyard, sometimes sitting side-by-side with a native dove on a pergola. Celli-Bird has been feeding it pigeon food from within days of its arrival.

"I think that he just decided that since I've given him some food and he's got a spot to drink, that's home," he said.

Australian National Pigeon Association secretary Brad Turner said he had heard of cases of Chinese racing pigeons reaching the Australian west coast aboard cargo ships, a far shorter voyage.

Turner said there were genuine fears pigeons from the United States could carry exotic diseases and he agreed Joe should be destroyed.

"While it sounds harsh to the normal person -- they'd hear that and go: 'this is cruel,' and everything else -- I'd think you'd find that A.Q.I.S. and those sort of people would give their wholehearted support for the idea," Turner said, referring to the quarantine service.

It is claimed that the greatest long-distance flight recorded by a pigeon is one that started at Arras in France and ended in Saigon, Vietnam, back in 1931, according to pigeonpedia.com. The distance was 11,600 kilometers (7,200 miles) and took 24 days.

There are some known instances of long-distance flights but whether these are one-offs performed by the marathon runners of the pigeon world or they are feats that could be achieved by the average pigeon is not known.

'Not worth my life': Ugandans vote in tense election

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Ugandans were voting Thursday in a presidential election tainted by widespread violence that some fear could escalate as security forces try to stop supporters of leading opposition challenger Bobi Wine from monitoring polling stations. Internet access has been cut off.

Long lines of voters snaked into the distance in the capital, Kampala. "This is a miracle," mechanic Steven Kaderere said. "This shows me that Ugandans this time are determined to vote for the leader they want."

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I have never seen this before.”

But delays were seen in the delivery of polling materials in some places, including where Wine voted. After he arrived to the cheers of a crowd and cast his ballot, he made the sign of the cross, then raised his fist and smiled.

“Everybody was scared, they thought I would not cast my vote. Here I am coming from the polling station,” Wine told local broadcaster NTV Uganda. “I want to assure Ugandans that we can and indeed will win. Whether or not (the electoral commission chief) declares that, that is his business.”

Results are expected within 48 hours of polls closing at 4 p.m. More than 17 million people are registered voters in this East African country of 45 million people. A candidate must win more than 50% to avoid a runoff vote.

Longtime President Yoweri Museveni, an authoritarian who has wielded power since 1986, seeks a sixth term against a strong challenge from Wine, a popular young singer-turned-opposition lawmaker. Nine other challengers are trying to unseat Museveni.

Wine, whose real name is Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, has seen many associates jailed or go into hiding as security forces crack down on opposition supporters they fear could mount a street uprising leading to regime change. Wine insists he is running a nonviolent campaign.

Wine, of the National Unity Platform party, has said he does not believe the election is free and fair. He has urged supporters to linger near polling stations to protect their votes. But the electoral commission, which the opposition sees as weak, has said voters must return home after casting ballots.

Internet access was cut Wednesday night. “No matter what they do, the world is watching,” Wine tweeted.

Problems were reported with some biometric machines to verify voters. “Our kit failed to start because mismatching passwords,” said Derrick Lutakoma, the presiding officer at one polling station.

“This election has already been rigged,” another opposition candidate, Patrick Oboi Amuriat, told local broadcaster NTV as polls opened, adding that “we will not accept the outcome of this election.”

The government’s decision this week to shut down access to social media in retaliation over Facebook’s removal of Museveni-linked Ugandan accounts accused of inauthentic behavior was meant “to limit the eyes on the election and, therefore, hide something,” said Crispin Kaheru, an independent election observer.

The 76-year-old Museveni’s support has traditionally been concentrated in rural areas where many credit him with restoring a sense of peace and security that was lost during the regimes of dictators including Idi Amin.

Security forces have deployed heavily in the area that encompasses Kampala, where the opposition has strong support partly because of rampant unemployment even among college graduates.

“Museveni is putting all the deployments in urban areas where the opposition has an advantage,” said Gerald Bareebe, an assistant professor of political science at Canada’s York University. “If you ask many Ugandans now, they say the ballot paper is not worth my life.”

Some young people said they would vote despite the apparent risks.

“This government has ruled us badly. They have really squeezed us,” said Allan Sserwadda, a car washer. “They have ruled us for years and they say they have ideas. But they are not the only ones who have ideas.”

Asked if the heavy military deployment fazed him, he smiled and said: “If we are to die, let us die. Now there is no difference between being alive and being dead. Bullets can find you anywhere. They can find you at home. They can find you on the veranda.”

At least 54 people were killed in Uganda in November as security forces put down riots provoked by the arrest of Wine for allegedly violating campaign regulations aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

Wine has captured the imagination of many in Uganda, and elsewhere in Africa, with his bold calls for the retirement of Museveni, whom he sees as a part of a corrupt old guard.

Museveni has dismissed the 38-year-old Wine as “an agent of foreign interests” who cannot be trusted with power. Wine has been arrested many times on various charges but has never been convicted.

Museveni, who decades ago criticized African leaders over not leaving power, now seeks more time in office after lawmakers jettisoned the last constitutional obstacle — age limits — on a possible life presidency.

“I grew up when he was president. Even my children have been born when he is president,” taxi driver

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Mark Wasswa said as voting began. "We also want to see another person now."

The rise of Wine as a national leader without ties to the regime has raised the stakes within the ruling National Resistance Movement party.

"(Ruling) party members and supporters ought to know that this is a watershed election to shape, determine and install a Museveni successor," government spokesman Ofwono Opondo recently wrote in the Sunday Vision newspaper.

The African Union and East African bloc have deployed election observer missions but the European Union said "an offer to deploy a small team of electoral experts was not taken up. The role of local observers will be even more important than before."

The EU, U.N. and others have warned Uganda's security forces against using excessive force.

Ugandan elections are often marred by allegations of fraud and alleged abuses by the security forces. The country has never witnessed a peaceful handover of power since independence from Britain in 1962.

WHO team arrives in Wuhan to investigate pandemic origins

By SAM McNEIL and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — A global team of researchers arrived Thursday in the Chinese city where the coronavirus pandemic was first detected to conduct a politically sensitive investigation into its origins amid uncertainty about whether Beijing might try to prevent embarrassing discoveries.

The group sent to Wuhan by the World Health Organization was approved by President Xi Jinping's government after months of diplomatic wrangling that prompted an unusual public complaint by the head of WHO.

Scientists suspect the virus that has killed more than 1.9 million people since late 2019 jumped to humans from bats or other animals, most likely in China's southwest. The ruling Communist Party, stung by complaints it allowed the disease to spread, says the virus came from abroad, possibly on imported seafood, but international scientists reject that.

Fifteen team members were to arrive in Wuhan on Thursday, but two tested positive for coronavirus antibodies before leaving Singapore and were being retested there, WHO said in a statement on Twitter.

The rest of the team arrived at the Wuhan airport and walked through a makeshift clear plastic tunnel into the airport. The researchers, who wore face masks, were greeted by airport staff in full protective gear, including masks, goggles and full body suits.

They will undergo a two-week quarantine as well as a throat swab test and an antibody test for COVID-19, according to CGTN, the English-language channel of state broadcaster CCTV. They are to start working with Chinese experts via video conference while in quarantine.

The team includes virus and other experts from the United States, Australia, Germany, Japan, Britain, Russia, the Netherlands, Qatar and Vietnam.

A government spokesman said this week they will "exchange views" with Chinese scientists but gave no indication whether they would be allowed to gather evidence.

China rejected demands for an international investigation after the Trump administration blamed Beijing for the virus's spread, which plunged the global economy into its deepest slump since the 1930s.

After Australia called in April for an independent inquiry, Beijing retaliated by blocking imports of Australian beef, wine and other goods.

One possibility is that a wildlife poacher might have passed the virus to traders who carried it to Wuhan, one of the WHO team members, zoologist Peter Daszak of the U.S. group EcoHealth Alliance, told The Associated Press in November.

A single visit by scientists is unlikely to confirm the virus's origins; pinning down an outbreak's animal reservoir is typically an exhaustive endeavor that takes years of research including taking animal samples, genetic analysis and epidemiological studies.

"The government should be very transparent and collaborative," said Shin-Ru Shih, director at the Research Center for Emerging Viral Infections at Taiwan's Chang Gung University.

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The Chinese government has tried to stir confusion about the virus's origin. It has promoted theories, with little evidence, that the outbreak might have started with imports of tainted seafood, a notion rejected by international scientists and agencies.

"The WHO will need to conduct similar investigations in other places," an official of the National Health Commission, Mi Feng, said Wednesday.

Some members of the WHO team were en route to China a week ago but had to turn back after Beijing announced they hadn't received valid visas.

That might have been a "bureaucratic bungle," but the incident "raises the question if the Chinese authorities were trying to interfere," said Adam Kamradt-Scott, a health expert at the University of Sydney.

A possible focus for investigators is the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the city where the outbreak first emerged. One of China's top virus research labs, it built an archive of genetic information about bat coronaviruses after the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

According to WHO's published agenda for its origins research, there are no plans to assess whether there might have been an accidental release of the coronavirus at the Wuhan lab, as some American politicians, including President Donald Trump, have claimed.

A "scientific audit" of Institute records and safety measures would be a "routine activity," said Mark Woolhouse, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh. He said that depends on how willing Chinese authorities are to share information.

"There's a big element of trust here," Woolhouse said.

An AP investigation found the government imposed controls on research into the outbreak and bars scientists from speaking to reporters.

The coronavirus's exact origin may never be traced because viruses change quickly, Woolhouse said.

A year after the virus was first detected in Wuhan, the city is now bustling, with few signs that it was once the epicenter of the outbreak in China. But some residents say they're still eager to learn about its origin.

"We locals care about this very much. We are curious where the pandemic came from and what the situation was. We live here so we are keen to know," said Qin Qiong, owner of a chain of restaurants serving hot and sour noodles. She said she trusts in science to solve the question.

Although it may be challenging to find precisely the same COVID-19 virus in animals as in humans, discovering closely related viruses might help explain how the disease first jumped from animals and clarify what preventive measures are needed to avoid future epidemics.

Scientists should focus instead on making a "comprehensive picture" of the virus to help respond to future outbreaks, Woolhouse said.

"Now is not the time to blame anyone," Shih said. "We shouldn't say, it's your fault."

Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan.

Brussels police arrest 116 at protest over Black man's death

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Police in Belgium made 116 arrests after a demonstration in Brussels over the death of a young Black man who collapsed while in police custody turned violent.

Police said most of violence took place after a largely peaceful demonstration Wednesday of about 500 protesters — some holding Black Lives Matter signs — ended in downtown Brussels.

"A group of demonstrators (50-100 people) remained on the spot and caused various incidents and degradations," police said, adding that several police officers were injured in the clashes.

According to a police statement, protesters threw projectiles, set fires, damaged street furniture and police vehicles. They also smashed a window and a door at a police station. In all, 116 people were arrested, including 30 minors, and one protester was tended to by ambulance services, police said.

"Justice must bring to court those who have vandalized and have injured five policemen, including a policewoman who is hospitalized," federal police captain Marc De Mesmaeker told broadcaster RTBF on

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Thursday. "This must be done with care, just as the other aspect of the event, the tragic death of Ibrahima, must be treated with care."

Belgian prosecutors have requested that an investigative judge be appointed following the death of a 23-year-old Black man identified by authorities only as I.B. The prosecutor's office said he was arrested on Jan. 9 after he allegedly tried to run away from police who were checking people gathered in the city center despite COVID-19 restrictions on social gatherings. He was taken to a police station where he fainted, and then transferred to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead, the office said.

The prosecutor's office said Belgium's Comité P, an independent body overseeing police services, is investigating and a coroner has been appointed to perform an autopsy as well as toxicology tests. Belgian media reported the man had started to record the police with his phone on Saturday when officers decided to carry out an ID check on him.

The prosecutor's office said it has seized video surveillance images, both from the police station and at the scene of the man's arrest.

Follow all AP stories on racial equality issues and police brutality at <https://apnews.com/Racialinjustice>.

Expecting trouble, DC locks down a week before inauguration

By ASHRAF KHALIL and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All through downtown Washington, the primary sound for several blocks was the beeping of forklifts unloading more fencing.

There were no cars or scooters and seemingly no tourists Wednesday, just the occasional jogger and multiple construction crews at work. The U.S. Capitol that proved such a soft target last week was visible only through lines of tall, black fence.

Two blocks from the White House, a group of uniformed National Guard troops emerged from a tour bus and headed into a hotel as a state of lockdown descended on Washington that will last through the Jan. 20 inauguration.

"Clearly we are in uncharted waters," said Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser.

Last week's "violent insurrection" at the Capitol by supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump has "impacted the way we are approaching working with our federal partners in planning for the 59th inauguration," Bowser said Wednesday.

The FBI has warned that armed protests by violent Trump supporters were being planned in all 50 state capitals as well as in Washington for the days leading up to the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

Between the pandemic and the security threat, Bowser is flat-out asking people not to come to the District of Columbia for the inauguration. And at Bowser's request, a National Special Security Event declaration was moved up to Jan. 13, a distinction which she said "puts in place an entirely different command and control structure" for security.

The NSSE status is normal for a presidential inauguration and other major events like an international summit or the Super Bowl. But it's rare to start the lockdown so far in advance of the event.

Police vehicles sealed off a huge swath of downtown D.C. Wednesday, causing immediate traffic snarls. Starting Wednesday, Bowser said, anyone inside the inauguration perimeter might be stopped and questioned. Starting Friday, all parking garages in the downtown restricted zone will be sealed through the inauguration.

Bowser is also being pushed to deny lodging options to potentially violent protesters. The local Black Lives Matter affiliate and Shutdown DC issued a joint statement Wednesday urging all downtown hotels to voluntarily close and pay their staffs. In addition to the threat of violence, the activist groups say Trump supporters are a threat to the health of hotel staff for their general refusal to wear facemasks amid the pandemic. Several downtown hotels, including one which had become a favorite hangout of the militant Proud Boy faction, chose to avoid trouble by closing last week.

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"Closing hotels completely for these six nights is the only way to guarantee the safety of hotel workers, neighbors, vulnerable and unhoused residents, incoming administration officials, members of Congress, and our democracy," the statement said. "If hotels do not willingly close, we ask Mayor Bowser to extend today's emergency order and close all hotels in the city."

On Wednesday, Airbnb announced it was cancelling all reservations in the Washington metro area. Bowser said she had been in regular contact with Airbnb officials since last week, but did not specifically request this step.

"We are aware of reports emerging yesterday afternoon regarding armed militias and known hate groups that are attempting to travel and disrupt the Inauguration," a company statement said. "We are continuing our work to ensure hate group members are not part of the Airbnb community."

On the ground, much of the most visible security will come in the form of more than 15,000 National Guardsmen from multiple states, some of them armed.

According to officials, the number of Guardsmen who will actually be carrying guns will be limited. Some Guard members nearer the Capitol will have long guns, and others will have their sidearms.

It is likely that those closer to the crowds or on fence lines won't be armed, but those up closer to the building may be. National Guard members operate under strict rules of engagement on the use of force. But generally speaking, troops can use lethal force to protect the lives of others and themselves.

Officials also said that while 15,000 Guard members have been activated, more may be called. D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee estimated Wednesday that more than 20,000 National Guardsmen would be active in the District of Columbia on Inauguration Day.

Officials are continuing to review requests from law enforcement, and some believe several thousand more could be brought in. Defense and military officials have been calling governors and adjutants general to ask if they might have people they could send, if requested.

So far, officials said state leaders have said that protecting their own capitols will be their top priority, but they still have some Guard members they will be able to send, if needed.

Somber Tunisia marks 10 years since revolution in lockdown

By BOUAZZA BEN BOUAZZA Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Tunisia on Thursday commemorates the 10th anniversary since the flight into exile of iron-fisted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, pushed from power in a popular revolt that foreshadowed strife and civil war in the region, known as the Arab Spring.

But there will be no festive celebrations marking the revolution in this North African nation, which was ordered into lockdown to contain the coronavirus.

The tree-lined Avenue Bourguiba, the main artery in the capital city of Tunis, which became a center of the uprising, may well be deserted if citizens respect orders to stay home. Demonstrations and gatherings are banned for four days starting Thursday, although there was no guarantee the rules would be respected.

"After the political lockdown, it's the turn of the health lockdown," said one shopkeeper, Ahmed Hassen, who said smilingly that the situation looks like "the revenge of Ben Ali."

Ben Ali ruled for 23 years over a system that instilled fear in many Tunisians, deprived of a free press, free speech and other liberties. He fled to Saudi Arabia on Jan. 14, 2011, amid a snowballing rebellion marked by violence, rampant pillaging and incessant calls to "get out."

Ben Ali died in 2019 in exile.

The revolution was unwittingly sparked by a desperate act of a 26-year-old fruit seller, Mohammed Bouazizi, who set himself ablaze on Dec. 17, 2010, to protest police humiliation in a town in the neglected interior of the nation, Sidi Bouzid. His death unleashed simmering discontent and mass demonstrations against poverty, joblessness and repression. That in turn ricocheted beyond Tunisia, triggering what is known as the Arab Spring uprisings with crackdowns and civil wars in the region.

In Tunisia, joy and revenge marked the start of the post-Ben Ali era, with protesters tearing down the omnipresent posters of Ben Ali and invading the luxurious home of the president's brother-in-law, Bel-

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hassen Trabelsi. The Tunis train station was burned down, tear gas flooded Avenue Bourguiba and other neighborhoods of the capital and helicopter gunships flew low over the city. More than 300 people were killed. Nevertheless, the chaos was contained.

A budding democracy grew out of the aftermath of the Ben Ali era, but a pall of disenchantment hangs over the country, marked by extremist attacks, political infighting, a troubled economy and promises unfulfilled, including development of the interior.

Despite guaranteed rights, numerous democratic elections, protests flourish, especially in the central and southern regions where the jobless rate among youth reaches 30% and the poverty level is above 20%. According to the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights, more than 1,000 demonstrations were counted in November alone. Months of sit-ins paralyzed oil and phosphate production, a key resource, for months, putting holes of billions of dollars in the budget.

Tunisians have held numerous democratic elections, for mayor, parliament and president, notably putting a constitutional law professor, Kais Saied, into the presidential palace in 2019.

The Tunisia of today "joins advanced countries" as far as democracy is concerned, said Najib Chebbi, founder of the Progressist Democratic Party, the main political opposition under Ben Ali.

"The Tunisian people have political rights, but are still waiting for their demands for dignity and work to be fulfilled," he said, alluding to the revolutionary slogan of demonstrators crying out, "freedom, jobs and dignity."

Analyst Slaheddine Jourchi said that what has been accomplished in the decades since the revolution "is far from answering the population's demands, especially expectations of youth — the backbone of the revolution."

"The revolution needs a deep evaluation," he said.

For Chebbi, the opposition leader of the past, "Tunisia sits on a volcano and risks going off the rails."

Lebanon begins all-day curfew as virus spins out of control

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese authorities began enforcing an 11-day nationwide shutdown and round the clock curfew Thursday, hoping to limit the spread of coronavirus infections spinning out of control after the holiday period.

For the first time, residents were required to request a one-hour permit to be allowed to leave the house for "emergencies," including going to the bakery, pharmacist, doctor, hospital or airport.

Authorities came under pressure to take a tougher approach after the country's hospitals ran out of beds with daily infections reaching an all-time high of 5,440 cases last week in the country of nearly 6 million people.

The dramatic surge in infections began in late December. As most governments around the world tightened lockdowns, Lebanon relaxed health measures over the holidays, allowing restaurants and nightclubs to reopen with barely any restrictions in place. An estimated 80,000 expats flowed back into the country to celebrate Christmas and New Years with loved ones, many of them expats who skipped visiting in the summer due to the devastating Aug. 4 explosion at Beirut port.

"The holiday season should have been the time for lockdown. The season of crowds, shopping and parties," said Hanna Azar, owner of a money transfer and telephones shop. "They opened it to allow dollars into the country and now they want to close, especially in this economic crisis. People don't have money to eat."

Even before the coronavirus, Lebanon was going through an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that has seen its national currency and bank sector collapse and locked depositors out of the savings. Hospitals, long considered among the best in the Middle East, struggled to pay staff, keep equipment running and secure necessary medical supplies as dollars grew scarce.

Amid the surge, many hospitals have now reached maximum capacity for coronavirus patients. Some have halted elective surgeries as they run out of beds, oxygen tanks and ventilators.

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Furthermore, the country has been without a government since the old one resigned in the wake of the catastrophic Aug. 4 explosion at Beirut port, which put a further strain on hospitals, inundating them with injured. At least three hospitals were destroyed.

The massive explosion caused by the detonation of a stockpile of poorly stored ammonium nitrate ravaged the city, killing over 200 people and injuring thousands.

On Thursday, police manned checkpoints around the country, checking motorists' permits to be on the road and creating traffic jams in some cases. The curfew is the strictest since the start of the pandemic. For the first time, even supermarkets were told to close their doors and open for delivery only. That decision triggered three days of chaotic panic buying as worried citizens emptied shelves at supermarkets and grocery stores.

Lebanon had only just announced a nationwide lockdown last week. But many, including the health minister and officials on a government committee, considered it to be too lenient because it exempted many sectors. In some areas of the country, it was business as usual, leading to more calls for a complete shutdown and curfew.

'At 6 p.m., life stops': Europe uses curfews to fight virus

By JOHN LEICESTER and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — As the wan winter sun sets over France's Champagne region, the countdown clock kicks in. Laborers stop pruning the vines as the light fades at about 4:30 p.m., leaving them 90 minutes to come in from the cold, change out of their work clothes, hop in their cars and zoom home before a 6 p.m. coronavirus curfew.

Forget about any after-work socializing with friends, after-school clubs for children or doing any evening shopping beyond quick trips for essentials. Police on patrol demand valid reasons from people seen out and about. For those without them, the threat of mounting fines for curfew-breakers is increasingly making life outside of the weekends all work and no play.

"At 6 p.m., life stops," says Champagne producer Alexandre Prat.

Trying to fend off the need for a third nationwide lockdown that would further dent Europe's second-largest economy and put more jobs in danger, France is instead opting for creeping curfews. Big chunks of eastern France, including most of its regions that border Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, face 6 p.m.-to-6 a.m. restrictions on movement.

The rest of France could quickly follow suit, losing two extra hours of liberty that have been just enough for residents to maintain bare-bones social lives.

Until a couple of weeks ago, the nightly curfew didn't kick in until 8 p.m. in Prat's region, the Marne. Customers still stopped to buy bottles of his family's bubbly wines on their way home, he said. But when the cut-off time was advanced to 6 p.m. to slow viral infections, the drinkers disappeared.

"Now we have no one," Prat said.

The village where retiree Jerome Brunault lives alone in the Burgundy wine region is also in one of the 6 p.m. curfew zones. The 67-year-old says his solitude weighs more heavily without the opportunity for early evening drinks, nibbles and chats with friends, the so-called "apero" get-togethers so beloved by the French that were hurried but still feasible when curfew started two hours later.

"With the 6 p.m. curfew, we cannot go to see friends for a drink anymore," Brunault said. "I now spend my days not talking to anyone except for the baker and some people by phone."

Imposing a 6 p.m. curfew nationwide is among options the French government is considering in response to rising infections and the spread of a particularly contagious virus variant that has swept across Britain, where new infections and virus deaths have soared.

Prime Minister Jean Castex could announce a curfew extension Thursday evening, as well as other restrictions, to fight the virus in a country that has seen over 69,000 confirmed virus deaths.

An earlier curfew combats virus transmission "precisely because it serves to limit social interactions that people can have at the end of the day, for example in private homes," French government spokesman

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Gabriel Attal says.

Overnight curfews have become the norm in swaths of Europe but the 6 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew in 25 regions of eastern France is the most restrictive anywhere in the European Union's 27 nations. Others countries' curfews all start later and often finish earlier.

The curfew in Italy runs from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., as does the Friday night to Sunday morning curfew in Latvia. Regions of Belgium that speak French have a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew while in Belgium's Dutch-speaking region, the hours are midnight to 5 a.m.

People out between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. in Hungary must be able to show police written proof from their employers that they are either working or commuting.

There are no curfews in Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Sweden, Poland or the Netherlands, although the Dutch government is thinking about whether imposing a curfew would slow new COVID-19 cases.

In France, critics of the 6 p.m. curfew say the earlier time actually crams people together more after work, when they pile onto public transportation, clog roads and shop for groceries in a narrow rush-hour window before they must be home.

Women's rugby coach Felicie Guinot says negotiating rush-hour traffic in Marseille has become a nightmare. The city in southern France is among the places where the more contagious virus variant has started to flare.

"It's a scramble so everyone can be home by 6 p.m.," Guinot said.

In historic Besançon, the fortified city that was the hometown of "Les Misérables" author Victor Hugo, music store owner Jean-Charles Valley says the 6 p.m. deadline means people no longer drop by after work to play with the guitars and other instruments that he sells. Instead, they rush home.

"People are completely demoralized," Valley said.

In Dijon, the French city known for its pungent mustard, working mother of two Celine Bourdin says her life has narrowed to "dropping kids at school and going to work, then going back home, helping kids with homework and preparing dinner."

But even that cycle is better than a repeat of France's lockdown at the start of the pandemic, when schools also closed, Bourdin says.

"If my children don't go to school, it means I cannot work anymore," she said. "It was terribly difficult to be all stuck almost 24 hours a day in the house."

Leicester reported from Le Pecq, France. AP journalists across Europe contributed.

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

Leaders like UK's Johnson who wooed Trump face tricky reset

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said a lot of nice things about Donald Trump over the years, from expressing admiration for the U.S. president to suggesting he might be worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize.

But after a mob of Trump supporters invaded the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, Johnson has changed his tune.

Trump, he said, had encouraged the violent insurrection, had disputed the result of a "free and fair election," and was "completely wrong."

It was a dramatic pivot for someone who has often been compared to Trump and refrained for years from openly criticizing him. Other world leaders also have faced dilemmas in dealing with the volatile and unpredictable president who trashed international agreements and institutions with abandon. But Johnson's critics say his years of flattering — and, some say, imitating — Trump have harmed Britain's international authority and poisoned its political culture.

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Leslie Vinjamuri, director of the U.S. and the Americas program at the Chatham House think tank, said the issue of how to deal with Trump has been “the biggest question in Western diplomacy for the past four years.”

“And I would say that the U.K. was on the wrong side of it,” she said.

Johnson is not the only Western leader who sought to befriend, persuade or placate Trump. French President Emmanuel Macron had an early bromance with the U.S. president, inviting Trump to Paris in 2017 for a Bastille Day military parade and dinner at the Eiffel Tower. Johnson’s predecessor, Theresa May, visited the White House just days after Trump’s inauguration and was photographed holding the president’s hand.

Both relationships soon turned sour, but Johnson was more successful in keeping on the good side of a president who praised him, ungrammatically, as “Britain Trump.”

“The dirty open secret of Europe during the Trump era was that everyone thought he was a menace,” said Brian Klaas, associate professor of global politics at University College London. “It’s just that Boris thought he was a menace who could potentially serve his own interests.”

Johnson supporters argue that he had no choice but to woo the leader of the U.K.’s most important ally — especially as Britain left the European Union and sought a key trade deal with Washington.

Johnson did try to change Trump’s course, attempting unsuccessfully to coax him back into the Iran nuclear deal. He also initially resisted U.S. pressure to ban the Chinese technology company Huawei from Britain’s 5G telecommunications network — although he eventually caved in. Meanwhile, the coveted U.K.-U.S. trade deal has yet to emerge.

Critics say Johnson took his courting of Trump too far, and got little in return.

Emily Thornberry, a senior lawmaker for the opposition Labour Party, said the Conservative government’s indulgent attitude to Trump had been “humiliating and unnecessary.”

“We did everything that we could in order to charm him,” she told The Associated Press. “There was no charming this man. ... He was a bully and the way to deal with bullies is to stand up to them.

“It was wrong in principle. It didn’t forward our interests in any way, and it gave some sort of credibility to Donald Trump that he didn’t deserve,” she said.

Like Trump, Johnson has engaged in populist stunts, exaggerated promises and, at times, racist and inflammatory language. But on most big policy issues, Johnson is closer to President-elect Joe Biden than to Trump. Johnson, leader of Britain’s Conservative party, believes in international alliances such as NATO and thinks the fight against climate change should be a government a priority.

Some U.K. politicians and officials are concerned that the government’s relationship with Trump, who was impeached Wednesday by the U.S. House of Representatives for a historic second time, could hurt it with Biden’s new administration.

Biden mistrusts Johnson, who once insulted President Barack Obama by saying the “half-Kenyan” leader had an ancestral dislike of Britain. Biden criticized Johnson in the fall when the British leader threatened to breach an international Brexit treaty that he himself had signed.

Kim Darroch, who lost his job as U.K. ambassador in Washington after his candid confidential comments about Trump were leaked in 2019, wrote in the Financial Times that “there will be a price to pay, somewhere down the track, for our obsequiousness to Mr. Biden’s predecessor.”

The change in American leadership is also awkward for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch ally who didn’t even mention Trump’s name when he condemned the “disgraceful” Capitol riot.

Netanyahu’s reluctance to criticize his good friend was not surprising. In the past four years, Trump has showered Netanyahu with diplomatic gifts, from recognizing the contested city of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital to delivering a series of diplomatic agreements between Israel and Arab countries.

But Netanyahu may also have been wary of criticizing tactics that he himself uses against his enemies. Like Trump, Netanyahu frequently rails against the media and belittles opponents with language seen as racist or incendiary. On trial for corruption charges, Netanyahu also lashes out at the country’s democratic institutions.

Netanyahu arrived at the opening of his trial last year with an entourage of lawmakers and Cabinet ministers, who stood behind him as he accused the media, police, prosecutors and judiciary of conspiring

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to oust him in a coup. More recently, Netanyahu has remained silent as supporters have been accused in attacks on anti-Netanyahu demonstrators.

Israel's figurehead president, Reuven Rivlin, implored citizens to learn lessons from the U.S. turmoil and remember that democracy "is not to be taken for granted."

"The right to vote, the voice of the citizen exercising their democratic rights, alongside the strength of the judiciary and maintaining the rule of law, must be principles shared by us all," he said.

In Britain, there are also warnings that authoritarianism and "post-truth" provocation have seeped into the country's political bloodstream.

Neil O'Brien, a Conservative lawmaker who debunks anti-science posts online, said Britons would be wrong to see events in the Capitol as a uniquely American crisis.

He said Britain, too, has conspiracy theorists who have clashed with police at demonstrations against coronavirus lockdowns — and politicians who "flirt with them to gain clicks and exploit their energy."

O'Brien wrote that the mayhem in Washington "happened not just because of one man, but because people in positions of power made short-termist decisions to feed the beast, and play along."

"Don't think it couldn't happen here," he said.

Associated Press writer Josef Federman in Jerusalem contributed.

Trump impeached after Capitol riot in historic second charge

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ALAN FRAM Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House for a historic second time, charged with "incitement of insurrection" over the deadly mob siege of the U.S. Capitol in a swift and stunning collapse of his final days in office.

With the Capitol secured by armed National Guard troops inside and out, the House voted 232-197 on Wednesday to impeach Trump. The proceedings moved at lightning speed, with lawmakers voting just one week after violent pro-Trump loyalists stormed the Capitol, egged on by the president's calls for them to "fight like hell" against the election results.

Ten Republicans fled Trump, joining Democrats who said he needed to be held accountable and warned ominously of a "clear and present danger" if Congress should leave him unchecked before Democrat Joe Biden's inauguration Jan. 20.

Trump is the only U.S. president to be twice impeached. It was the most bipartisan presidential impeachment in modern times, more so than against Bill Clinton in 1998.

The Capitol insurrection stunned and angered lawmakers, who were sent scrambling for safety as the mob descended, and it revealed the fragility of the nation's history of peaceful transfers of power. The riot also forced a reckoning among some Republicans, who have stood by Trump throughout his presidency and largely allowed him to spread false attacks against the integrity of the 2020 election.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi invoked Abraham Lincoln and the Bible, imploring lawmakers to uphold their oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies, foreign "and domestic."

She said of Trump: "He must go, he is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love."

Holed up at the White House, watching the proceedings on TV, Trump later released a video statement in which he made no mention at all of the impeachment but appealed to his supporters to refrain from any further violence or disruption of Biden's inauguration.

"Like all of you, I was shocked and deeply saddened by the calamity at the Capitol last week," he said, his first condemnation of the attack. He appealed for unity "to move forward" and said, "Mob violence goes against everything I believe in and everything our movement stands for. ... No true supporter of mine could ever disrespect law enforcement."

Trump was first impeached by the House in 2019 over his dealings with Ukraine, but the Senate voted in 2020 acquit. He is the first president to be impeached twice. None has been convicted by the Senate, but Republicans said Wednesday that could change in the rapidly shifting political environment as office-

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holders, donors, big business and others peel away from the defeated president.

Biden said in a statement after the vote that it was his hope the Senate leadership "will find a way to deal with their Constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

The soonest Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell would start an impeachment trial is next Tuesday, the day before Trump is already set to leave the White House, McConnell's office said. The legislation is also intended to prevent Trump from ever running again.

McConnell believes Trump committed impeachable offenses and considers the Democrats' impeachment drive an opportunity to reduce the divisive, chaotic president's hold on the GOP, a Republican strategist told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

McConnell told major donors over the weekend that he was through with Trump, said the strategist, who demanded anonymity to describe McConnell's conversations.

In a note to colleagues Wednesday, McConnell said he had "not made a final decision on how I will vote."

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

Even Trump ally Kevin McCarthy, the House Republican leader, shifted his position and said Wednesday the president bears responsibility for the horrifying day at the Capitol.

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

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. The riot delayed the tally of Electoral College votes that was the last step in finalizing Biden's victory.

Ten Republican lawmakers, including third-ranking House GOP leader Liz Cheney of Wyoming, voted to impeach Trump, cleaving the Republican leadership, and the party itself.

Cheney, whose father is the former Republican vice president, said of Trump's actions summoning the mob that "there has never been a greater betrayal by a President" of his office.

Trump was said to be livid with perceived disloyalty from McConnell and Cheney.

With the team around Trump hollowed out and his Twitter account silenced by the social media company, the president was deeply frustrated that he could not hit back, according to White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who weren't authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

From the White House, Trump leaned on Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina to push Republican senators to resist, while chief of staff Mark Meadows called some of his former colleagues on Capitol Hill.

The president's sturdy popularity with the GOP lawmakers' constituents still had some sway, and most House Republicans voted not to impeach.

Security was exceptionally tight at the Capitol, with tall fences around the complex. Metal-detector screenings were required for lawmakers entering the House chamber, where a week earlier lawmakers huddled inside as police, guns drawn, barricaded the door from rioters.

"We are debating this historic measure at a crime scene," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

During the debate, some Republicans repeated the falsehoods spread by Trump about the election and argued that the president has been treated unfairly by Democrats from the day he took office.

Other Republicans argued the impeachment was a rushed sham and complained about a double standard applied to his supporters but not to the liberal left. Some simply appealed for the nation to move on.

Rep. Tom McClintock of California said, "Every movement has a lunatic fringe."

Yet Democratic Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo. and others recounted the harrowing day as rioters pounded on the chamber door trying to break in. Some called it a "coup" attempt.

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., contended that Trump was "capable of starting a civil war."

Conviction and removal of Trump would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate, which will be evenly

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divided. 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."

Fending off concerns that an impeachment trial would bog down his first days in office, Biden 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.

The House had first tried to persuade Vice President Mike Pence and the Cabinet to invoke their authority under the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office. Pence declined to do so, but the House passed the resolution anyway.

The impeachment bill also details Trump's pressure on state officials in Georgia to "find" him more votes.

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 Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

McConnell open to convicting Trump in impeachment trial

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell pointedly did not rule out that he might eventually vote to convict the now twice-impeached President Donald Trump, but he also blocked a quick Senate impeachment trial.

Minutes after the House voted 232-197 on Wednesday to impeach Trump, McConnell said in a letter to his GOP colleagues that he's not determined whether Trump should be convicted in the Senate's upcoming proceedings. The House impeachment articles charge that Trump incited insurrection by exhorting supporters who violently attacked the Capitol last week, resulting in five deaths and a disruption of Congress.

"I have not made a final decision on how I will vote and I intend to listen to the legal arguments when they are presented to the Senate," McConnell wrote.

McConnell's openness was a stark contrast to the support, or at times silence, he's shown during much of Trump's presidency, and to the opposition he expressed rapidly when the House impeached Trump 13 months ago. McConnell will be Washington's most powerful Republican once Democratic President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated, and McConnell's increasingly chilly view of Trump could make it easier for other GOP lawmakers to turn against him.

McConnell's burgeoning alienation from Trump, plus the 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach him, underscored how the GOP's long, reflexive support and condoning of Trump's actions was eroding.

McConnell also issued a statement saying Congress and the government should spend the next week "completely focused on facilitating a safe inauguration and an orderly transfer of power" to Biden. He suggested Trump's Senate trial would begin no earlier than Jan. 19 — in effect rejecting a drive by the chamber's Democrats to begin the proceedings immediately so Trump could be ousted from office.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said that unless McConnell reverses himself and agrees to quickly start the trial, it would begin after Jan. 19. That's a day before Biden is inaugurated as president and about the time Democrats take over majority control of the Senate. The timetable essentially means McConnell is dropping the trial into Democrats' laps.

"Make no mistake, there will be an impeachment trial in the United States Senate," Schumer said. He added, "If the president is convicted, there will be a vote on barring him from running again."

The Constitution requires a two-thirds majority to convict a president, meaning at least 17 Republicans would need to join all 50 Democrats to oust Trump. If Trump were convicted, it would take only a simple

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majority of the Senate to prohibit Trump, who's mentioned running again in 2024, from holding federal office again.

Earlier Wednesday, a GOP strategist said McConnell has told people he thinks Trump perpetrated impeachable offenses. McConnell also saw House Democrats' drive to impeach Trump as an opportune moment to distance the GOP from the tumultuous, divisive outgoing president, according to the strategist, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

McConnell's views were first reported by The New York Times.

McConnell spoke to major Republican donors last weekend to assess their thinking about Trump and was told that they believed Trump had clearly crossed a line, the strategist said. McConnell told them he was finished with Trump, according to the consultant.

The Democratic-led House approved an impeachment article accusing Trump of inciting insurrection, an unprecedented second impeachment of his clamorous presidency. Trump exhorted a throng of his followers to march on the Capitol last Wednesday, where they disrupted Congress' formal certification of Biden's win in a deadly riot that produced widespread damage.

McConnell is looking out for his party's long-term future, but moving toward a political divorce from Trump could mean that congressional Republicans will face challenges in GOP primaries.

It is unclear how many Republicans would vote to convict Trump in a Senate trial, but it appears plausible that several would.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, on Wednesday told Alaska's News Source, an Anchorage news outlet, that Trump "has committed an impeachable offense." She stopped short of saying if she'd vote to convict him.

Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., has said he would "definitely consider" House impeachment articles.

Complicating GOP thinking about Trump's second impeachment is that Republicans will be defending 20 of the 34 Senate seats up for election in 2022. Thanks to Democratic victories this month in two Georgia runoffs, Democrats are about to take control of the chamber by 50-50, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris casting tie-breaking votes.

Speaking out against impeachment Wednesday was Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. A once-bitter Trump foe, Graham became one of his closest allies during his presidency, then lambasted him over last week's Capitol invasion but has since spent time with Trump.

Impeaching Trump now would "do great damage to the institutions of government and could invite further violence," Graham said in a statement. He said Trump's millions of backers "should not be demonized because of the despicable actions of a seditious mob," but he did not specifically defend Trump's actions last week.

"If there was a time for America's political leaders to bend a knee and ask for God's counsel and guidance, it is now. The most important thing for leaders to do in times of crisis is to make things better, not worse," Graham said.

When the Senate voted against removing Trump in February after the House impeached him for pressuring Ukraine to provide political dirt on Biden, Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, was the only Republican who cast a vote to oust him.

Trump has falsely insisted that November's presidential election was stolen from him by fraud. Those allegations have been rejected by state officials of both parties, state and federal courts and members of his own administration.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: What's next after House impeachment vote

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has been impeached by the House days before leaving office, becoming the first American president to be impeached twice.

The previous three impeachments — those of Presidents Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and Trump — took

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months before a final vote, including investigations in the House and hearings. This time it only took a week after Trump encouraged a crowd of his supporters who attacked the U.S. Capitol.

Democrats and 10 Republicans voted to impeach Trump on one charge: incitement of insurrection.

Outgoing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said the Senate will not begin a trial until next Tuesday, at the very earliest, which is the day before Democrat Joe Biden is sworn in as president. It's unclear, for now, exactly how that trial will proceed and if any Senate Republicans will vote to convict Trump.

Even though the trial won't happen until Trump is already out of office, it could still have the effect of preventing him from running for president again.

A look at next steps:

SENDING TO THE SENATE

Once the House votes to impeach, the speaker of the House can send the article or articles over to the Senate immediately — or she can wait a while. Speaker Nancy Pelosi hasn't yet said when she will send them, but many Democrats in her caucus have urged her to do so immediately.

Pelosi has already appointed nine impeachment managers to argue the case against Trump in a Senate trial, a sign that she will send them sooner rather than later.

Once the articles are sent over — that is usually done with an official walk from the House to the Senate — then the majority leader of the Senate must start the process of having a trial.

THE SENATE SCHEDULE

The Senate is not scheduled to be in session until Jan. 19, which could be McConnell's last day as Senate leader. Once Vice President Kamala Harris is sworn in, making her the president of the Senate, and Georgia's two Democratic senators are also sworn in, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer will take charge and determine how the trial will proceed.

McConnell said he will not bring the Senate back on an emergency basis to start the trial, so the earliest it could begin would be Tuesday. That means the trial is certain to take place after Trump has already left office.

McConnell noted that the three previous Senate trials lasted "83 days, 37 days, and 21 days respectively."

ALL EYES ON MCCONNELL

McConnell believes that Trump committed impeachable offenses and considers the Democrats' impeachment drive an opportunity to reduce the divisive, chaotic president's hold on the GOP, a Republican strategist told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

And McConnell told major donors over the weekend that he was through with Trump, said the strategist, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe McConnell's conversations. His wife, former Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, resigned from Trump's Cabinet soon after the riots.

But despite sending signals, McConnell has been characteristically quiet in public. In a note to colleagues Wednesday released by his office, McConnell said he had "not made a final decision on how I will vote."

SENATE POLITICS

If McConnell voted to convict, other Republicans would surely follow. But no GOP senators have said how they will vote, and two-thirds of the Senate is needed.

Still, 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 of Nebraska 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."

Utah Sen. Mitt Romney was the only Republican to vote to convict Trump in last year's impeachment trial, after the House impeached Trump over his dealings with the president of Ukraine.

In the House, 10 Republicans joined Democrats in voting to impeach Trump, including Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the third-ranking Republican. Every single House Republican voted against Trump's first im-

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peachment in 2019.

TRUMP'S FUTURE

If the Senate were to convict, lawmakers could then take a separate vote on whether to disqualify Trump from holding future office.

Schumer said Wednesday: "Make no mistake, there will be an impeachment trial in the United States Senate; there will be a vote on convicting the president for high crimes and misdemeanors; and if the president is convicted, there will be a vote on barring him from running again."

In the case of federal judges who were impeached and removed from office, the Senate has taken a second vote after conviction to determine whether to bar the person from ever holding federal office again.

Only a majority of senators would be needed to ban him from future office, unlike the two-thirds needed to convict.

DIFFERENT CHARGES, DIFFERENT IMPEACHMENT

This impeachment trial is likely to differ from the last one in many ways.

The House charges in 2019 on Trump's dealings with the president of Ukraine, whom he urged to investigate Biden, came after a lengthy investigation and testimony from multiple government officials. While Democrats unanimously criticized the conduct and charged Trump with abuse of power, the charges wove together a complicated web of evidence.

This time, Democrats felt there was little need for an investigation — the invasion of the Capitol played out on live television, and most members of Congress were in the building as it happened.

Trump's speech beforehand, in which he told his supporters to "fight like hell" against the election results, was also televised as Congress prepared to officially count the votes.

House Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff, who led the last House impeachment team, said the insurrection at the Capitol was an "impeachable offense committed in broad daylight, in which the whole country was a witness."

He said the lightning-fast impeachment "was required by the exigency of the circumstances, and also made possible by the very nature of the crime."

THE ARTICLE

The four-page article of impeachment says that Trump "gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government."

It was introduced by Democratic Reps. David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Ted Lieu of California and Jamie Raskin of Maryland, all of whom have been tapped to serve as impeachment managers in the Senate trial.

The article says Trump's behavior is consistent with his 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.

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.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaró, Alan Fram and Jessica Gresko contributed to this report from Washington.

Capitol investigators try to sort real tips from noise

By STEFANIE DAZIO and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Potential threats and leads are pouring in to law enforcement agencies nationwide after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The challenge is now figuring out what's real and what's just noise.

Investigators are combing through a mountain of online posts, street surveillance and other intelligence, including information that suggests mobs could try to storm the Capitol again and threats to kill some members of Congress.

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Security is being tightened from coast to coast. Thousands of National Guard troops are guarding the Capitol ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. Governors and lawmakers are stepping up protections at statehouses after an FBI bulletin this week warned of threats to legislative sessions and other inaugural ceremonies.

A primary concern is the safety of members of Congress, particularly when they are traveling through airports, according to two U.S. officials briefed on the matter.

The FBI and other federal authorities use their substantial resources to prepare. But smaller local police departments lack the staff to hunt down every tip. They must rely heavily on state and federal assessments to inform their work, and that information sometimes slips through the cracks — which apparently happened last week.

A day before the deadly attack on the Capitol, the FBI sent an intelligence bulletin warning of potential violence to other agencies, including the Capitol Police. But officials either did not receive it or ignored it — and instead prepared for a free-speech protest, not a riot. It took nearly two hours for reinforcements to arrive to help disperse the mob. Five people died, including a Capitol officer.

"There are some grammar schools that are better protected than the Capitol," said Brian Higgins, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and the former chief of a northern New Jersey police force.

Since last week, the FBI has opened 170 case files and received more than 100,000 pieces of digital media. The threats have ranged in specificity and complexity, according to officials briefed on them, making it difficult for authorities to determine which could be credible.

Combing through intelligence isn't the same as shoe-leather detective work. Large departments like New York and Los Angeles have dedicated intelligence units — the NYPD even disseminated its own bulletin ahead of the riot. But smaller police forces rely on joint terrorism task forces and so-called fusion centers that were set up around the country after the 2001 attacks to improve communication between agencies.

Norton, Kansas, Police Chief Gerald Cullumber leads a seven-member department in the northwestern part of the state. He said he relies on larger agencies like the Kansas Highway Patrol because his agency is too small to do its own intelligence work. But Cullumber said he stays up to date on the latest information and briefs his officers.

"It doesn't mean that we rest on our laurels," he said. "It doesn't mean that we ignore things."

Once they receive intelligence reports, it's up to local agencies to plan and take action to keep their communities safe, said Rich Stanek, the former sheriff of Hennepin County in Minnesota who now works in consulting and started the Public Safety Strategies Group.

"If I was the sheriff today, I would be taking it very seriously," he said. "If they told me Jan. 17 is the date, yeah, I think it's reasonable to plan for one week ahead and one week behind."

Mike Koval, who retired in 2019 as the police chief in Madison, Wisconsin, said his state's two fusion centers have technology and resources that go far beyond those of a single local police department.

Staying on top of all the potential intelligence on the internet is like "going to a water fountain to get a drink of water, and it's coming out with the strength of a fire hydrant and it will take your jaw off," Koval said.

Meanwhile, elected officials nationwide, including President Donald Trump, have started to urge calm amid the threats. Trump egged on the riots during a speech at the Washington Monument, beseeching his loyalists to go to the Capitol as Congress was certifying Biden's victory. He took no responsibility for the riot.

"In light of reports of more demonstrations, I urge that there must be NO violence, NO lawbreaking and NO vandalism of any kind," Trump said in a statement Wednesday. "That is not what I stand for, and it is not what America stands for. I call on ALL Americans to help ease tensions and calm tempers."

Experts say explicit or implicit bias likely helped downplay last week's threat because the protesters were white, and that must change, said Eric K. Ward, a senior fellow with the Southern Poverty Law Center and an expert on authoritarian movements and hate groups.

That could be why Capitol police were so unprepared, compared with the much more aggressive law

enforcement response to last summer's protests following the death of George Floyd and other Black men killed by law enforcement.

Dazio reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press writers Amy Forliti and Doug Glass in Minneapolis, Michael R. Sisak in New York and Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

Enduring 2nd impeachment, Trump stands largely silent, alone

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — His place in the history books rewritten, President Donald Trump endured his second impeachment largely alone and silent.

For more than four years, Trump has dominated the national discourse like no one before him. Yet when his legacy was set in stone on Wednesday, he was stunningly left on the sidelines.

Trump now stands with no equal, the only president to be charged twice with a high crime or misdemeanor, a new coda for a term defined by a deepening of the nation's divides, his failures during the worst pandemic in a century and his refusal to accept defeat at the ballot box.

Trump kept out of sight in a nearly empty White House as impeachment proceedings played out at the heavily fortified U.S. Capitol. There, the damage from last week's riots provided a visible reminder of the insurrection that the president was accused of inciting.

Abandoned by some in his own party, Trump could do nothing but watch history unfold on television. The suspension of his Twitter account deprived Trump of his most potent means to keep Republicans in line, giving a sense that Trump had been defanged and, for the first time, his hold on his adopted party was in question.

He was finally heard from hours after the vote, in a subdued video that condemned the insurrection at the Capitol and warned his supporters from engaging in any further violence. It was a message that was largely missing one week earlier, when rioters marching in Trump's name descended on the Capitol to try to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's victory.

"I want to be very clear: I unequivocally condemn the violence that we saw last week," said Trump. He added that "no true supporter" of his "could ever endorse political violence."

But that message, partially motivated to warn off legal exposure for sparking the riot, ran contrary to what Trump has said throughout his term, including when he urged his supporters to "fight" for him last week. Trump said not a word about his impeachment in the video, though he complained about the ban on his social media.

With only a week left in Trump's term, there were no bellicose messages from the White House fighting the proceedings on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and no organized legal response. Some congressional Republicans did defend the president during House debate in impeachment, their words carrying across the same space violated by rioters one week earlier during a siege of the citadel of democracy that left five dead.

In the end, 10 Republicans voted to impeach.

It was a marked change from Trump's first impeachment. That December 2019 vote in the House, which made Trump only the third president ever impeached, played out along partisan lines. The charges then were that he had used the powers of the office to pressure Ukraine to investigate a political foe, Joe Biden, now the president-elect.

At that time, the White House was criticized for failing to create the kind of robust "war room" that President Bill Clinton mobilized during his own impeachment fight. Nonetheless, Trump allies did mount their own pushback campaign. There were lawyers, White House messaging meetings, and a media blitz run by allies on conservative television, radio and websites.

Trump was acquitted in 2020 by the GOP-controlled Senate and his approval ratings were undamaged. But this time, as some members of his own party recoiled and accused him of committing impeachable offenses, Trump was isolated and quiet. A presidency centered on the bombastic declaration "I alone can

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fix it" seemed to be ending with a whimper.

The third-ranking Republican in the House, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, said there had "never been a greater betrayal" by a president. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told colleagues in a letter that he had not decided how he would vote in an impeachment trial.

For the first time, Trump's future seemed in doubt, and what was once unthinkable — that enough Republican senators would defy him and vote to remove him from office — seemed at least possible, if unlikely.

But there was no effort from the White House to line up votes in the president's defense.

The team around Trump is hollowed out, with the White House counsel's office not drawing up a legal defense plan and the legislative affairs team largely abandoned. Trump leaned on Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., to push Republican senators to oppose removal. Graham's spokesman said the senator was making the calls of his own volition.

Trump and his allies believed that the president's sturdy popularity with the lawmakers' GOP constituents would deter them from voting against him.

The president was livid with perceived disloyalty from McConnell and Cheney and has been deeply frustrated that he could not hit back with his Twitter account, which has kept Republicans in line for years. Trump watched much of the day's proceedings on TV from the White House residence and his private dining area off the Oval Office.

A short time before he was impeached, Trump was in the White House East Room presenting the National Medal of Arts to singers Toby Keith and Ricky Skaggs as well as former Associated Press photographer Nick Ut.

His paramount concern, beyond his legacy, was what a second impeachment could do to his immediate political and financial future, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing. They were not authorized to speak discuss private conversations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The loss of his Twitter account and fundraising lists could complicate Trump's efforts to remain a GOP kingmaker and potentially run again in 2024. Moreover, Trump seethed at the blows being dealt to his business, including the withdrawal of a PGA tournament from one of his golf courses and the decision by New York City to cease dealings with his company.

There's the possibility that if the Senate were to convict him, he also could be barred from seeking election again, dashing any hopes of another presidential campaign.

A White House spokesman did not respond to questions about whether anyone in the building was trying to defend Trump, who was now the subject of half of the presidential impeachments in the nation's history.

One campaign adviser, Jason Miller, argued Democrats' efforts will serve to galvanize the Republican base behind Trump and end up harming Biden. He blamed the Democrats' swift pace for the silence, saying there wasn't "time for mounting a traditional response operation." But he pledged that "the real battle will be the Senate where there'll be a more traditional pushback effort."

The reminders of the Capitol siege were everywhere as the House moved toward the impeachment roll call.

Some of the Capitol's doors were broken and windows were shattered. A barricade had gone up around outside the building and there were new checkpoints. Hundreds of members of the National Guard patrolled the hallways, even sleeping on the marble floors of the same rotunda that once housed Abraham Lincoln's casket.

And now the Capitol is the site of more history, adding to the chapter that features Clinton, impeached 21 years ago for lying under oath about sex with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, and Andrew Johnson, impeached 151 years ago for defying Congress on Reconstruction. Another entry is for Richard Nixon, who avoided impeachment by resigning during the Watergate investigation.

But Trump, the only one impeached twice, will once more be alone.

Lemire reported from New York.

Vaccines and masks: Biden plan aims to break pandemic cycle

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — A coronavirus action plan being unveiled by President-elect Joe Biden centers on a mass vaccination campaign and closer coordination among all levels of government.

The Biden plan comes as a divided nation remains caught in the grip of the pandemic's most dangerous wave yet. So far, more than 380,000 Americans have died.

Biden hopes his multidimensional strategy, expected to be detailed in a Thursday evening speech, will put the country on the path to recovery by the end of his first 100 days. "It's going to be hard," Biden said Monday after he got his second vaccine shot. "It's not going to be easy. But we can get it done."

A more disciplined focus on vaccination is the new and widely anticipated game-changing element, but that's far from the whole story. Biden is asking Americans to override their sense of pandemic fatigue and recommit to wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and avoiding indoor gatherings, particularly larger ones. That's still the surest way to brake the COVID-19 wave, with more than 4,400 deaths reported just on Tuesday.

Biden has also talked about asking Congress to pump more money to states, to help their efforts to contain the pandemic and replenish depleted coffers that pay for basic services. And Democratic lawmakers are eager to push for \$2,000 economic stimulus payments to Americans.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said the Biden COVID-19 package will be the first order of business this year.

But Biden's biggest challenge is to "win the hearts and minds of the American people to follow his lead," said Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert and emergency physician.

With the backing of Congress and the expertise of private and government scientists, the Trump administration has delivered two highly effective vaccines and more are on the way. Yet a month after the first shots were given, the nation's vaccination campaign is off to a slow start with about 10.3 million people getting the first of two shots, although more than 29 million doses have been delivered.

Biden aims to speed that up by delivering more vaccine and working closely with states and local communities to get shots into the arms of more people. The Trump administration provided the vaccine to states and set guidelines for who should get priority for shots, but largely left it up to state and local officials to organize their vaccination campaigns.

"This is going to entail coordination at all levels, as well as resources," said Dr. Nadine Gracia, executive vice president of the nonpartisan Trust for America's Health. "There is a commitment the (incoming) administration has articulated to address the needs of communities."

Biden has set a goal of administering 100 million shots in his first 100 days. The pace of vaccination is approaching 1 million shots a day, but it needs to be nearly double that to reach his mark.

President Donald Trump repeatedly asserted the coronavirus would go away on its own. Early on, he said it would disappear with warmer weather, and later he said after the election. But Biden sees the pandemic on the level of an existential threat. "That's my No. 1 concern, to get the virus under control," he said last week.

At the pinnacle of power, Trump's leadership during the pandemic has been erratic. He did back "Operation Warp Speed" to quickly develop vaccines and treatments, but he also picked fights with leading government scientists like Dr. Anthony Fauci and his own appointees at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Biden has pledged to take his lead from science, and has named Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, as his top medical adviser. He has tapped businessman Jeff Zients, who has a reputation for successfully tackling complex missions, to coordinate the government's coronavirus response. He's also selected Yale medicine professor Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, to head an effort to ensure equity and fairness for racial and ethnic minorities in access to vaccines and treatments.

But he'll need more than top-resume talent, experts say. It's still unclear how the new administration will address the issue of vaccine hesitancy, the doubts and suspicions that keep many people from getting a shot. Polls show it's particularly a problem among Black Americans. "It's important to acknowledge the

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reasons why it exists and work to earn trust and build vaccine confidence in communities," said Gracia. Next Wednesday, when Biden will be sworn in as president, marks the one-year anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States.

Alonso-Zaldivar reported from Washington.

NY Democrat's ties to Maduro may help Biden unlock stalemate

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — It was the aftermath of a failed coup against Hugo Chávez and Rep. Gregory Meeks was lounging at the Kennedy compound on Cape Cod with a young lawmaker from Venezuela with a bushy moustache named Nicolás Maduro.

Photographs of the 2002 encounter show the men standing shoulder to shoulder, having bonded over their shared love of baseball and tales of their respective odds-defying upbringings — Maduro on the streets of Caracas, where leftist radicals like himself were gunned down, and Meeks in a public housing project in Harlem the son of a struggling boxer and teacher.

The exchange would be little more than an anecdote but for Maduro's ascent to Venezuela's presidency in 2013 and Meeks' own improbable climb through the ruthless politics of Washington to become this month the first-ever Black chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Now, two decades on, the New York Democrat says he's ready — if asked — to confront Maduro, who he remembers from that era as a good listener and committed to social justice.

"There will be no softballs or reminiscing about the good old days," Meeks said in an interview with The Associated Press this week. "We'd have some real hard talks about what has taken place and what must take place to undo some of the authoritarian things that have happened since he's become president."

To talk to Maduro or not: That's the vexing question facing the incoming Biden administration as it re-evaluates a U.S. policy that has rallied exile hardliners in Miami but done little to cleave Maduro's grip on power or ease the suffering of regular Venezuelans.

Aides to Biden say the president-elect has limited options for pressuring Maduro and there are no plans to lift crippling oil sanctions or an indictment against Maduro for drug trafficking.

But analysts expect Biden to dial down the almost-daily vitriol aimed at Maduro and threats of a "military option" that characterized Trump's foreign policy, where Venezuela occupied a privileged space. Instead, he has vowed to emphasize a multilateral approach with the goal of holding free and fair elections as soon as possible.

Enter Meeks, who attended Chávez's 2013 funeral on behalf of the Obama administration and whose long engagement with Latin America make him ideally positioned to open room for diplomacy. Even though he doesn't speak Spanish, his reputation as a straight shooter has earned him respect across the region's ideological divide.

Among those with whom he has struck an unlikely alliance is former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, a law-and-order conservative who worked to improve the lot of Afro-Colombians as part of free trade talks more than a decade ago that Meeks backed in defiance of his party. The relationship with Uribe — lionized by Venezuela's opposition and demonized by Latin America's left — may come in handy as he seeks to build momentum for politically fraught engagement with Maduro.

"Maduro doesn't trust his own shadow. But he might trust Gregory Meeks," said former Rep. Bill Delahunt, who traveled with Meeks to Chávez's funeral and then twice more to Caracas in a previously unreported mission to improve bilateral relations. "If anyone can move things forward it'll be Meeks. I have no doubt that he will be an invaluable asset to the Biden administration."

Meeks said he is not holding himself out as a peacemaker. But he said he is willing to speak to Maduro's government if allies in Latin America, the European Union and the Biden administration see value in such an approach.

He said his first trip as chairman since succeeding fellow New Yorker Eliot Engel will be to Haiti and Colombia, including a visit to the border with Venezuela where thousands of migrants cross every day

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looking for food and medical care.

"I want folks to know that Latin America won't be an afterthought," Meeks said.

More controversially, he is open to involving Maduro stalwarts Cuba and Russia in any negotiations that emerge -- assuming U.S. allies agree.

"That's a possibility," he said, adding that the Trump administration's designation this week of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism will complicate any outreach. "That's how you resolve an issue of significance. You get buy-in from a number of different people so that it gives the people of Venezuela confidence in the election process."

A recent State Department cable defending the Trump administration's hardline policy warns that Russia is working closely with Maduro's military and finance officials to undermine hemispheric security. The cable, a copy of which was provided to AP by a congressional staffer on the condition of anonymity to share diplomatic communications, argues for more aggressive support for pro-democracy efforts inside Venezuela to complement U.S. sanctions.

"Russia has used its relationship with the regime to symbolically and very publicly defy the United States," according to the Sept. 9 cable, which is labeled "sensitive but unclassified." It was sent to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo by James Story, the ambassador at the helm of the Venezuela Affairs Unit in Colombia.

"If left to fester, Venezuela will prove itself to be a very worrisome burr in the side of American foreign policy in the region and prove to be very costly to U.S. national interests," the cable concludes.

A spokesman for Biden's transition team declined to comment.

Meeks' nearly 20-year relationship with Maduro began when both founded what was known as the Boston Group. The informal network of U.S. and Venezuelan lawmakers from across the political spectrum — Democrats, Republicans, socialists and capitalists — came together in Washington and Cape Cod to repair bilateral relations after the brief coup against Chávez that the U.S. was quick to recognize.

The group has largely disbanded, with Meeks the only American member still in Congress. But the relationships built two decades ago have proven resilient. For example, a Republican staffer who participated in the same four-day legislative exchange in Cape Code with Meeks and Maduro led a backchannel effort that in 2018 secured the release of Joshua Holt, a Utah man held for two years in Caracas jail on what were widely seen as trumped-up weapons charges.

More recently, former lawmaker Pedro Díaz-Blum, the Boston Group's coordinator in Venezuela, has brought together dozens of pro-Maduro and opposition economists to prepare a joint study on how to reactivate the country's devastated oil industry. They have also discussed ways to direct humanitarian aid to the country through multilateral agencies.

After the U.S. presidential election, Díaz-Blum traveled to Washington and saw Meeks. Prior to the trip, which he said he organized on his own, he also met with Maduro, who reiterated his willingness for dialogue with the U.S.

"I was a member of the Boston Group as a lawmaker and I went multiple times to the U.S.," Maduro said Tuesday in an address to Venezuela's congress, which is controlled by the governing socialist party following elections boycotted by the opposition as unfair. "I respect and admire a lot the United States, its people and its culture."

After several failed negotiation attempts mediated by the Vatican and Norway, dialogue has become a buzzword for weakness and appeasement among many in the opposition. Not for nothing, the Trump administration has said the only thing to negotiate with Maduro are the terms of his exit.

Meeks said he rejects that logic. Recently even a close Trump ally, Richard Grenell, the former acting U.S. director of national intelligence, met in Mexico City with Jorge Rodríguez, a top Maduro aide who is now president of the pro-government national assembly, which the U.S. doesn't recognize.

"The Trump policy was predicated on Florida politics — not getting something done," Meeks said.

Still, he said, he has no illusions about Maduro. Following Chávez's funeral, Meeks said he quietly returned twice to Caracas in a previously unreported effort to pave the way for an exchange of ambassadors, which has not happened since 2010. In one of those trips, he urged Maduro to release opposition activist

Leopoldo Lopez, then in jail for leading anti-government protests.

The reconciliation effort failed and Meeks said he walked away from that experience frustrated. Any future overture would require pre-set conditions, he said.

"You can't just take his word for it," Meeks said of Maduro. "He's proven to me that either he was not willing to follow through or something in their politics prevented him from doing so."

Joshua Goodman on Twitter: @APJoshGoodman

Ex-Michigan governor faces 2 charges in Flint water scandal

By DAVID EGGERT and ED WHITE Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Two years after leaving office, former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder is facing charges of willful neglect of duty in the Flint water crisis as prosecutors revisit how the city's water system was contaminated with lead during one of worst manmade environmental disasters in U.S. history.

Two misdemeanors popped up in an online court file Wednesday night after Attorney General Dana Nessel and her prosecutors announced a Thursday news conference to discuss their findings. Former officials who worked in Snyder's administration are also expected to be charged and appear in court Thursday.

"We believe there is no evidence to support any criminal charges against Gov. Snyder," defense attorney Brian Lennon said, adding that prosecutors still hadn't provided him with any details.

The charges against Snyder carry up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine upon conviction. No governor or former governor in Michigan's 184-year history had been charged with crimes related to their time in that office, according to the state archivist.

Snyder, a Republican, was governor from 2011 through 2018. The former computer executive pitched himself as a problem-solving "nerd" who eschewed partisan politics and favored online dashboards to show performance in government. Flint turned out to be the worst chapter of his two terms due to a series of catastrophic decisions that will affect residents for years.

The date of Snyder's alleged crimes in Flint is listed as April 25, 2014, when a Snyder-appointed emergency manager who was running the struggling, majority Black city carried out a money-saving decision to use the Flint River for water while a pipeline from Lake Huron was under construction.

The corrosive water, however, was not treated properly and released lead from old plumbing into homes.

Despite desperate pleas from residents holding jugs of discolored, skunky water, the Snyder administration took no significant action until a doctor reported elevated lead levels in children about 18 months later.

"I'm sorry and I will fix it," Snyder promised during his 2016 State of the State speech.

Authorities also counted at least 90 cases of Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County, including 12 deaths. Some experts found there was not enough chlorine in Flint's water-treatment system to control legionella bacteria, which can trigger a severe form of pneumonia when spread through misting and cooling systems.

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.

The criminal investigation has lasted five years under two teams of prosecutors. Todd Flood, who got misdemeanor convictions from seven people, was ousted in 2019 after the election of Nessel, a Democrat. Fadwa Hammoud subsequently dropped charges in eight pending cases and said the investigation would start over. She said the first team had failed to collect all available evidence.

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 said she hopes to decide by Jan. 21 whether to grant preliminary approval. Other lawsuits, including one against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, are pending.

White reported from Detroit.

AP source: Harden headed to Nets in blockbuster 4-team deal

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By BRIAN MAHONEY and KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

James Harden is heading to Brooklyn, joining old teammate Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving to give the Nets a potent trio featuring some of the NBA's highest scorers.

The Nets agreed to acquire the three-time scoring champion from the Houston Rockets on Wednesday in a move Harden has sought for weeks, a person with knowledge of the situation said.

Harden is the centerpiece of a four-team deal that also involves Indiana and Cleveland, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade call with the NBA — which signs off on all deals — had not been completed.

Once it is, the Nets will be able to trot out a lineup of three players capable of scoring 25 or more points on any night in a collection of firepower to rival any Big Three in recent years.

"It's an amazing move for Brooklyn. Obviously, they got better — way better," said two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo of Milwaukee.

The Nets are loading up for a title run with three of the highest-paid players in the league. All are under contract through 2022-23, with Harden and Durant both set to earn more than \$40 million in each of the next two seasons.

In the meantime, the Nets were short-handed for their game against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden, where coach Steve Nash declined to discuss Harden but did confirm that the players the Nets were trading were not in the building during their 116-109 victory.

Off to a 7-6 start in his rookie season as coach, now the former point guard and two-time NBA MVP will have to mold an offense that keeps the ball moving with three players worthy of having it in their hands.

"It's a simple game but it becomes complicated when you put different personalities and players on the floor," Nash said. "Our group's done a really good job being unselfish this year and trying to move the ball and work together, so I've been proud of that."

The blockbuster deal provides a needed boost amid a period of drama for both franchises. It was struck less than 24 hours after Harden seemed to deliver a farewell address of sorts following the Rockets' loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday night, and just before Irving was set to miss a fifth straight game during a personal absence from the Nets.

At least four draft picks and additional pick swaps are also part of the deal, the person said. Other key players: Victor Oladipo goes from Indiana to Houston, and Caris LeVert goes from Brooklyn to Indiana, the person said. The Cavaliers will get Jarrett Allen and Taurean Prince from the Nets in the deal, a person familiar with the trade told the AP.

Harden, who has cycled through Chris Paul and Russell Westbrook as teammates in recent seasons, didn't think much of the roster the Rockets had around him this season.

"We're just not good enough. ... I love this city. I literally have done everything that I can," Harden said Tuesday night. "I mean, this situation is crazy. It's something that I don't think can be fixed."

It couldn't, and now he's gone.

Brooklyn expects Harden to leave all that behind him and that his transition to the Nets will be smooth. He should be much happier in Brooklyn, having teamed with Durant in Oklahoma City when they were younger and remaining close still.

"It was fun," Durant said of their time together, declining to say much more with the trade still not completed.

It was obvious the end for Harden in Houston was nearing Wednesday, when the Rockets told him they didn't want him at practice after his inflammatory comments about the team.

"We felt it was best for James and best for the group for him not to come to practice," first-year coach Stephen Silas said. About two hours later, ESPN and The Athletic first reported that Harden was being moved.

The disgruntled superstar, who was unable to get the Rockets past the Western Conference finals, had remained quiet through months of reports that he was unhappy in Houston. Silas called the drama surrounding Harden an "all-around messed up situation."

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The Nets were ready to swoop in, after a shaky defense during the early season proved their best chance to beat teams might be to outscore them.

They can certainly do that now. Durant is averaging 29.4 points in his first season back from surgery to repair a ruptured Achilles tendon, and Irving was scoring 27.1 per game before leaving the team last week. Harden, who appears to be out of shape after joining the Rockets after training camp began, is averaging 24.8 points this season after three straight seasons above 30, culminating in MVP honors in 2018.

The Rockets are 3-6 and only Minnesota has a worse record in the Western Conference. The team is clearly in disarray, and new arrival John Wall called the situation "rocky."

Harden won each of the last three scoring titles by notable margins — 2.3 points over Anthony Davis in 2017-18, 8.1 points over Paul George in 2018-19 and 3.8 points over Bradley Beal last season. His average so far this season ranked 18th in the NBA, well off his usual pace.

It could pick back up again in Brooklyn, where Nash's assistant running the offense is Mike D'Antoni, Harden's coach during his best seasons in Houston.

D'Antoni didn't return after last season and it quickly became clear Harden wanted out, too. He was a no-show when camp opened and was later fined \$50,000 for conduct detrimental to the league after attending an indoor event without a mask in violation of the NBA's health and safety protocols.

AP Basketball Writer Tim Reynolds and Sports Writers Tom Withers and Noah Trister contributed to this report.

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

Biden forgoing Amtrak trip to Washington over security fears

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE AND ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden will no longer be taking an Amtrak train to Washington for his inauguration because of security concerns, a person briefed on the decision told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The president-elect's decision reflects growing worries over potential threats in the Capitol and across the U.S. in the lead-up to Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration.

Security in Washington has ramped up considerably in preparation for the inauguration after the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol last week by supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump, and the FBI warned over the weekend of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington, D.C., in the days leading up to the event.

The person briefed on Biden's decision spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters. The news was first reported by CNN.

The move to forgo the 90-minute train ride from his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware, to Washington was likely not easy for the president-elect. Biden's preference for riding the train during his 36-year Senate career was such a central part of his public persona that he rode Amtrak home on his final day as vice president, and he used a train tour through Ohio and Pennsylvania during the presidential campaign as part of an effort to appeal to blue-collar workers.

Biden became known for riding the train starting from his very earliest days in the Senate, when he made a point to return home nearly every night to help raise his young sons after his wife and young daughter died in a car accident in 1972. His embrace of Amtrak — and the friends he made among the train conductors and staff as a regular — was featured in a short film that aired during the Democratic National Convention last August.

The train ride is not the only security-related development surrounding the inauguration.

On Wednesday, Biden received a briefing from FBI officials, the Secret Service and his national security team about the potential for additional violence in the coming days.

"In the week since the attack on Congress by a mob that included domestic terrorists and violent extrem-

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ists, the nation has continued to learn more about the threat to our democracy and about the potential for additional violence in the coming days, both in the National Capital Region and in cities across the country," according to a statement from the Biden transition team. "This is a challenge that the President-elect and his team take incredibly seriously."

Across Washington, but particularly around the Capitol, the National Mall and some nearby federal buildings, security has increased considerably, with nonscalable walls and metal gates erected, streets closed and a new contingent of National Guard troops camped out at the Capitol.

EXPLAINER: What's next after House impeachment vote

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has been impeached by the House days before leaving office, becoming the first American president to be impeached twice.

The previous three impeachments — those of Presidents Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and Trump — took months before a final vote, including investigations in the House and hearings. This time it only took a week after Trump encouraged a crowd of his supporters who attacked the U.S. Capitol.

Democrats and 10 Republicans voted to impeach Trump on one charge: incitement of insurrection.

Outgoing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said the Senate will not begin a trial until next Tuesday, at the very earliest, which is the day before Democrat Joe Biden is sworn in as president. It's unclear, for now, exactly how that trial will proceed and if any Senate Republicans will vote to convict Trump.

Even though the trial won't happen until Trump is already out of office, it could still have the effect of preventing him from running for president again.

A look at next steps:

SENDING TO THE SENATE

Once the House votes to impeach, the speaker of the House can send the article or articles over to the Senate immediately — or she can wait a while. Speaker Nancy Pelosi hasn't yet said when she will send them, but many Democrats in her caucus have urged her to do so immediately.

Pelosi has already appointed nine impeachment managers to argue the case against Trump in a Senate trial, a sign that she will send them sooner rather than later.

Once the articles are sent over — that is usually done with an official walk from the House to the Senate — then the majority leader of the Senate must start the process of having a trial.

THE SENATE SCHEDULE

The Senate is not scheduled to be in session until Jan. 19, which could be McConnell's last day as Senate leader. Once Vice President Kamala Harris is sworn in, making her the president of the Senate, and Georgia's two Democratic senators are also sworn in, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer will take charge and determine how the trial will proceed.

McConnell said he will not bring the Senate back on an emergency basis to start the trial, so the earliest it could begin would be Tuesday. That means the trial is certain to take place after Trump has already left office.

McConnell noted that the three previous Senate trials lasted "83 days, 37 days, and 21 days respectively."

ALL EYES ON MCCONNELL

McConnell believes that Trump committed impeachable offenses and considers the Democrats' impeachment drive an opportunity to reduce the divisive, chaotic president's hold on the GOP, a Republican strategist told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

And McConnell told major donors over the weekend that he was through with Trump, said the strategist, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe McConnell's conversations. His wife, former Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, resigned from Trump's Cabinet soon after the riots.

But despite sending signals, McConnell has been characteristically quiet in public. In a note to colleagues Wednesday released by his office, McConnell said he had "not made a final decision on how I will vote."

SENATE POLITICS

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If McConnell voted to convict, other Republicans would surely follow. But no GOP senators have said how they will vote, and two-thirds of the Senate is needed.

Still, 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 of Nebraska 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."

Utah Sen. Mitt Romney was the only Republican to vote to convict Trump in last year's impeachment trial, after the House impeached Trump over his dealings with the president of Ukraine.

In the House, 10 Republicans joined Democrats in voting to impeach Trump, including Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the third-ranking Republican. Every single House Republican voted against Trump's first impeachment in 2019.

TRUMP'S FUTURE

If the Senate were to convict, lawmakers could then take a separate vote on whether to disqualify Trump from holding future office.

Schumer said Wednesday: "Make no mistake, there will be an impeachment trial in the United States Senate; there will be a vote on convicting the president for high crimes and misdemeanors; and if the president is convicted, there will be a vote on barring him from running again."

In the case of federal judges who were impeached and removed from office, the Senate has taken a second vote after conviction to determine whether to bar the person from ever holding federal office again.

Only a majority of senators would be needed to ban him from future office, unlike the two-thirds needed to convict.

DIFFERENT CHARGES, DIFFERENT IMPEACHMENT

This impeachment trial is likely to differ from the last one in many ways.

The House charges in 2019 on Trump's dealings with the president of Ukraine, whom he urged to investigate Biden, came after a lengthy investigation and testimony from multiple government officials. While Democrats unanimously criticized the conduct and charged Trump with abuse of power, the charges wove together a complicated web of evidence.

This time, Democrats felt there was little need for an investigation — the invasion of the Capitol played out on live television, and most members of Congress were in the building as it happened.

Trump's speech beforehand, in which he told his supporters to "fight like hell" against the election results, was also televised as Congress prepared to officially count the votes.

House Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff, who led the last House impeachment team, said the insurrection at the Capitol was an "impeachable offense committed in broad daylight, in which the whole country was a witness."

He said the lightning-fast impeachment "was required by the exigency of the circumstances, and also made possible by the very nature of the crime."

THE ARTICLE

The four-page article of impeachment says that Trump "gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government."

It was introduced by Democratic Reps. David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Ted Lieu of California and Jamie Raskin of Maryland, all of whom have been tapped to serve as impeachment managers in the Senate trial.

The article says Trump's behavior is consistent with his 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.

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.

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro, Alan Fram and Jessica Gresko contributed to this report from Washington.

Calls to reopen classrooms grow as teachers get vaccinated

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST, TERRY TANG and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

State leaders around the U.S. are increasingly pushing for schools to reopen this winter — pressuring them, even — as teachers begin to gain access to the vaccine against the raging pandemic.

Ohio's governor offered to give vaccinations to teachers at the start of February, provided their school districts agree to resume at least some in-person instruction by March 1. In Arizona, where teachers began receiving shots this week, the governor warned schools that he expects students back in the classroom despite objections from top education officials and the highest COVID-19 diagnosis rate in the nation over the past week.

"We will not be funding empty seats or allowing schools to remain in a perpetual state of closure," said Republican Gov. Doug Ducey. "Children still need to learn, even in a pandemic."

Leaders of Arizona's major hospitals disagreed with the governor's position, noting at a news conference Wednesday that the state is teetering on the brink of having to ration life-saving care.

"We understand that learning and bringing our children together is very important," said Dr. Michael White of Valleywise Health. "But at this time with uncontrolled spread of the virus, we need to do things that we know will reduce the chance that the virus will spread and that is not gathering with people we don't live with."

The U.S. recorded an all-time, one-day high of 4,327 deaths on Tuesday, according to Johns Hopkins University. The nation's overall death toll from COVID-19 has topped 380,000, closing in fast on the number of Americans killed in World War II. Confirmed infections have reached about 23 million.

President-elect Joe Biden initially pledged to reopen a majority of the nation's schools in his first 100 days but recently revised the goal to most of the country's K-8 schools. He has said teachers should be eligible for vaccinations as soon as possible after those who are at highest risk.

Some states aren't waiting, but the process can be scattershot.

Meika Mark, a ninth-grade English teacher in Orange County, New York, got vaccinated Tuesday at a hospital, using a link a friend texted her.

"It's just word of mouth: 'Here's a link and hopefully you get a slot,'" said Mark, who contracted the virus in March and spent the rest of the school year teaching remotely. "I know of a woman who had her husband sit in front of a computer literally all day and just click the refresh button until an appointment came up."

Mark, 34, is now doing some in-person teaching and is grateful for the added layer of protection.

High school band director Michael Crookston was among the first teachers to get a vaccination in Utah, which is among the earliest states to give priority to educators. Crookston has been in the classroom since the new school year began, despite having diabetes, which puts him at greater risk from the coronavirus.

"It's been a thing I've been looking forward to, a little bit like Christmas," said Crookston, who teaches at Davis High School, north of Salt Lake City, where he used a parent's donation to buy 12 air filters for his band room. Students also wear face masks and use covers on their instruments.

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox has said he wants to vaccinate all teachers by the end of February.

Salt Lake City has been hit hard by the virus and was the only district in Utah to stay all-remote this school year. That has angered some GOP leaders, who have threatened to deny the city's teachers the \$1,500 bonuses promised to the state's educators.

An estimated 10.3 million Americans have received their first shot of the vaccine, or about 3% of the U.S. population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That is an increase of about 1 million from the day before, indicating the vaccination drive is picking up speed after a slow start.

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But the U.S. is still well short of the hundreds of millions who experts say will need to be inoculated to vanquish the outbreak.

A report released Wednesday by the CDC adds to the evidence suggesting that children aren't the main drivers of community transmission. It found that increases in reported cases among adults were not preceded by increases among children and teens. Young adults, it appears, may contribute more to the spread than children do.

Chicago began a phased-in reopening of its schools this week, with about 6,000 pre-kindergarten and special education students expected to return to classrooms and other grades set to follow in the coming weeks. Illinois teachers are not eligible for vaccines yet, but Chicago officials are providing virus tests on school grounds for staff.

Chicago teachers who were punished for refusing to show up for classes over COVID-19 concerns demonstrated Wednesday outside the school board president's home. Roughly 150 employees were initially docked pay and locked out of the school system, meaning they can't teach remotely either. District officials said late Wednesday the number dropped to 100 as employees returned to work or had a valid excuse.

"I don't believe it's safe to reopen the schools. I don't believe it's safe for my family, I live with an elderly mom. I don't believe it is safe for the city's children or their families," said Kirstin Roberts, a pre-kindergarten teacher.

New York State expanded vaccine eligibility to teachers this week. But in New York City, the nation's largest school district, with 1.1 million students, Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday that middle and high schools will remain closed indefinitely.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed a \$2 billion plan to pay for testing, protective equipment and other safety enhancements to reopen the lowest grades as soon as Feb. 16.

But educators said it is too soon to know when California's 600,000 teachers can expect to be vaccinated. Jeff Freitas, president of the California Federation of Teachers, said vaccinations have to come first, then schools can talk about reopening.

"We cannot put our own lives, the lives of our students, and our communities at risk during what is clearly an escalating crisis in our state," the union leader said.

California's rollout of vaccines has been slower than anticipated, with the first phase, involving health care workers and nursing home residents, still underway.

On Wednesday, Chiefs of Change, a bipartisan group of school administrators, called on state and federal officials to make teachers and other school employees immediately eligible for vaccinations and provide more resources to conduct testing and contact tracing in school districts.

"Those individuals are very uncomfortable and they're very scared about coming back into school, no matter how safe we make it," said Robert Runcie, superintendent of public schools in Broward County, Florida.

Associated Press writers Carolyn Thompson in Buffalo, New York; Sophia Tareen in Chicago; and Jocelyn Gecker in San Francisco contributed to this report.

US to block cotton from China region targeted in crackdown

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government announced Wednesday that it will halt imports of cotton and tomatoes from the Uighur region of China in its most sweeping action yet to pressure the Communist Party over its campaign against ethnic minorities.

Officials said Customs and Border Protection will use its authority to block products suspected of being produced with forced labor to keep out cotton, tomatoes and related products from the Xinjiang region of northwest China.

Xinjiang is a major global supplier of cotton, so the order could have significant effects on international commerce. The Trump administration has already blocked imports from individual companies linked to forced labor in the region, and the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Communist Party officials with prominent

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roles in the campaign.

The order will put economic pressure not just on China but major global retailers who unwittingly or otherwise import goods produced by people under conditions that are akin to modern-day slavery.

"Any global apparel brand that is not either out of Xinjiang already, or plotting a very swift exit, is courting legal and reputational disaster," said Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium, a labor rights monitoring organization. "The days when any major apparel brand can safely profit from Xinjiang cotton are over."

The consortium estimates the U.S. ban affects about 20% of the global cotton supply.

Some in the private sector have argued against a region-wide order, saying it can penalize legitimate producers and because it can be hard to ensure tainted raw materials do not enter the supply chain. That is especially true with Chinese cotton that is used to make clothing for export in other countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.

The U.S. imported about \$9 billion worth of cotton goods from China overall last year, according to Brenda Smith, the executive assistant commissioner at Customs and Border Protection's Office of Trade. That does not include products from third countries.

Only about \$10 million in tomato products entered the U.S. from China last year, Smith said.

In December, the U.S. blocked goods from a company that controls about a third of cotton production in the Uighur region and about 6% of all cotton globally. Under that order, CBP has stopped 43 shipments from entering the U.S., worth more than \$2 million in all, Smith said.

"The ultimate goal is that China abandons these horrific practices," Ken Cuccinelli, the acting deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, said in a conference call with reporters to announce the latest measure.

China has imprisoned more than 1 million people, including Uighurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups, in a vast network of concentration camps. People have been subjected to torture, sterilization and political indoctrination in addition to forced labor as part of an assimilation campaign in a region whose inhabitants are ethnically and culturally distinct from the Han Chinese majority.

Uighur forced labor has been linked by reporting from The Associated Press to various products imported to the U.S., including clothing and electronic goods such as cameras and computer monitors. Smith and Mark Morgan, the acting CBP commissioner, credited the media and nongovernmental organizations with supplying information that resulted in efforts to block the imports.

China denies allegations of rights abuses and forced labor, saying it aims only to promote economic and social development in the region and stamp out radicalism. It also rejects criticism of what it considers its internal affairs.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, asked about the issue at a news conference Wednesday, said people in Xinjiang voluntarily sign contracts and are paid. "The so-called forced labor is nothing but a lie fabricated by certain institutions and individuals in Western countries," he said.

The U.S. action is the latest, and most sweeping, attempt to pressure China to end the campaign. Canada and the British government both recently said they too would take steps to stop goods tainted by forced labor from entering their countries.

Customs and Border Protection has in the past targeted entire product lines and regions with import bans, including issuing an order against cotton from Turkmenistan in 2018 and gold from artisanal mines in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2019.

Ex.-Michigan Gov. Snyder charged in Flint water crisis

By DAVID EGGERT and ED WHITE Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder was charged Wednesday with willful neglect of duty after an investigation of ruinous decisions that left Flint with lead-contaminated water and a regional outbreak of Legionnaires' disease.

The charges, revealed in an online court record, are misdemeanors punishable by up to a year in jail

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and a \$1,000 fine.

The charges are groundbreaking: No governor or former governor in Michigan's 184-year history had been charged with crimes related to their time in that office, according to the state archivist.

"We believe there is no evidence to support any criminal charges against Gov. Snyder," defense attorney Brian Lennon said Wednesday night, adding that state prosecutors still hadn't provided him with any details.

Lennon said Tuesday that a criminal case would be "outrageous." Snyder and others were scheduled to appear in court Thursday, followed by a news conference by Attorney General Dana Nessel and prosecutors.

Besides Snyder, a Republican who was governor from 2011 through 2018, charges are expected against other people, including former officials who served as his state health director and as a senior adviser.

The alleged offense date is April 25, 2014, when a Snyder-appointed emergency manager who was running the struggling, majority Black city carried out a money-saving decision to use the Flint River for water while a regional pipeline from Lake Huron was under construction.

The corrosive water, however, was not treated properly and released lead from old plumbing into homes in one of the worst manmade environmental disasters in U.S. history.

Despite desperate pleas from residents holding jugs of discolored, skunky water, the Snyder administration took no significant action until a doctor reported elevated lead levels in children about 18 months later.

"I'm sorry and I will fix it," Snyder promised during his 2016 State of the State speech.

Authorities counted at least 90 cases of Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County, including 12 deaths. Some experts found there was not enough chlorine in the water-treatment system to control legionella bacteria, which can trigger a severe form of pneumonia when spread through misting and cooling systems.

The disaster made Flint a national symbol of government dereliction, with residents forced to line up for bottled water and parents fearing 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.

More than 9,700 lead service lines at homes have been replaced. Flint's water, which now comes from a Detroit regional agency, gets good marks, although many distrustful residents still use filters.

The criminal investigation has lasted five years under two teams of prosecutors. Todd Flood, who got misdemeanor convictions from seven people, was ousted in 2019 after the election of Nessel, a Democrat. Fadwa Hammoud subsequently dropped charges in eight pending cases and said the investigation would start over. She said the first team had failed to collect all available evidence.

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 said she hopes to decide by Jan. 21 whether to grant preliminary approval. Other lawsuits, including one against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, are pending.

White reported from Detroit.

Katie Couric, Mayim Bialik to be 'Jeopardy!' guest hosts

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Katie Couric, Mayim Bialik, Aaron Rodgers and journalist Bill Whitaker are among the future guest hosts who will fill in for the late Alex Trebek on "Jeopardy!"

The show announced Wednesday that Couric, the journalist and former "Today" show host, will become the first woman ever to host the show.

Trebek, the face of the show for 36 years, died from pancreatic cancer Nov. 8, and the final shows he recorded aired last week. The show has opted to use a series of interim guest hosts rather than immediately find permanent replacements.

Ken Jennings, considered the show's greatest champion, is currently serving as the first guest host. Once his run is done, executive producer Mike Richards will fill in for two weeks while the newly announced guests prepare for their stints.

Rodgers, the superstar quarterback currently leading the Green Bay Packers through the NFL playoffs,

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is a former "Celebrity Jeopardy!" champion, and Bialik, former star of CBS' "The Big Bang Theory" and current star of Fox's "Call Me Kat," is a neuroscientist, making them fitting choices to serve up clues for contestants for the brainy quiz show.

Rodgers, the Pro Bowler and two-time NFL MVP, had already leaked the news of his hosting earlier this week.

"I apologize to 'Jeopardy!' if they wanted to announce it, I just got so excited," Rodgers said Tuesday. "The show has been so special to me over the years."

Whitaker, a "60 Minutes" correspondent, will also be a guest host.

The show will make a donation to the guest hosts' charity of choice that matches the total dollar amount won by contestants during their run.

This story has been updated to correct spelling of Bill Whitaker's last name.

Trump impeached after Capitol riot in historic second charge

By LISA MASCARO, MARY CLARE JALONICK, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ALAN FRAM Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House for a historic second time Wednesday, charged with "incitement of insurrection" over the deadly mob siege of the Capitol in a swift and stunning collapse of his final days in office.

With the Capitol secured by armed National Guard troops inside and out, the House voted 232-197 to impeach Trump. The proceedings moved at lightning speed, with lawmakers voting just one week after violent pro-Trump loyalists stormed the U.S. Capitol, egged on by the president's calls for them to "fight like hell" against the election results.

Ten Republicans fled Trump, joining Democrats who said he needed to be held accountable and warned ominously of a "clear and present danger" if Congress should leave him unchecked before Democrat Joe Biden's inauguration Jan. 20.

Trump is the only U.S. president to be twice impeached. It was the most bipartisan presidential impeachment in modern times, more so than against Bill Clinton in 1998.

The Capitol insurrection stunned and angered lawmakers, who were sent scrambling for safety as the mob descended, and it revealed the fragility of the nation's history of peaceful transfers of power. The riot also forced a reckoning among some Republicans, who have stood by Trump throughout his presidency and largely allowed him to spread false attacks against the integrity of the 2020 election.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi invoked Abraham Lincoln and the Bible, imploring lawmakers to uphold their oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies, foreign "and domestic."

She said of Trump: "He must go, he is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love."

Holed up at the White House, watching the proceedings on TV, Trump later released a video statement in which he made no mention at all of the impeachment but appealed to his supporters to refrain from any further violence or disruption of Biden's inauguration.

"Like all of you, I was shocked and deeply saddened by the calamity at the Capitol last week," he said, his first condemnation of the attack. He appealed for unity "to move forward" and said, "Mob violence goes against everything I believe in and everything our movement stands for. ... No true supporter of mine could ever disrespect law enforcement."

Trump was first impeached by the House in 2019 over his dealings with Ukraine, but the Senate voted in 2020 acquit. He is the first president to be impeached twice. None has been convicted by the Senate, but Republicans said Wednesday that could change in the rapidly shifting political environment as officeholders, donors, big business and others peel away from the defeated president.

Biden said in a statement after the vote that it was his hope the Senate leadership "will find a way to deal with their Constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

The soonest Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell would start an impeachment trial is next Tuesday,

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the day before Trump is already set to leave the White House, McConnell's office said. The legislation is also intended to prevent Trump from ever running again.

McConnell believes Trump committed impeachable offenses and considers the Democrats' impeachment drive an opportunity to reduce the divisive, chaotic president's hold on the GOP, a Republican strategist told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

McConnell told major donors over the weekend that he was through with Trump, said the strategist, who demanded anonymity to describe McConnell's conversations.

In a note to colleagues Wednesday, McConnell said he had "not made a final decision on how I will vote."

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

Even Trump ally Kevin McCarthy, the House Republican leader, shifted his position and said Wednesday the president bears responsibility for the horrifying day at the Capitol.

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

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. The riot delayed the tally of Electoral College votes that was the last step in finalizing Biden's victory.

Ten Republican lawmakers, including third-ranking House GOP leader Liz Cheney of Wyoming, voted to impeach Trump, cleaving the Republican leadership, and the party itself.

Cheney, whose father is the former Republican vice president, said of Trump's actions summoning the mob that "there has never been a greater betrayal by a President" of his office.

Trump was said to be livid with perceived disloyalty from McConnell and Cheney.

With the team around Trump hollowed out and his Twitter account silenced by the social media company, the president was deeply frustrated that he could not hit back, according to White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who weren't authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

From the White House, Trump leaned on Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina to push Republican senators to resist, while chief of staff Mark Meadows called some of his former colleagues on Capitol Hill.

The president's sturdy popularity with the GOP lawmakers' constituents still had some sway, and most House Republicans voted not to impeach.

Security was exceptionally tight at the Capitol, with tall fences around the complex. Metal-detector screenings were required for lawmakers entering the House chamber, where a week earlier lawmakers huddled inside as police, guns drawn, barricaded the door from rioters.

"We are debating this historic measure at a crime scene," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

During the debate, some Republicans repeated the falsehoods spread by Trump about the election and argued that the president has been treated unfairly by Democrats from the day he took office.

Other Republicans argued the impeachment was a rushed sham and complained about a double standard applied to his supporters but not to the liberal left. Some simply appealed for the nation to move on.

Rep. Tom McClintock of California said, "Every movement has a lunatic fringe."

Yet Democratic Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo. and others recounted the harrowing day as rioters pounded on the chamber door trying to break in. Some called it a "coup" attempt.

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., contended that Trump was "capable of starting a civil war."

Conviction and removal of Trump would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate, which will be evenly divided. 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."

Fending off concerns that an impeachment trial would bog down his first days in office, Biden 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 chal-

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lenging the election results, and former Attorney General William Barr, a Trump ally, has said there was no sign of widespread fraud.

The House had first tried to persuade Vice President Mike Pence and the Cabinet to invoke their authority under the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office. Pence declined to do so, but the House passed the resolution anyway.

The impeachment bill also details Trump's pressure on state officials in Georgia to "find" him more votes.

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 Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Flint families welcome water crisis charges, seek healing

By KAT STAFFORD, MIKE HOUSEHOLDER and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

FLINT, Mich. (AP) — Flint mother Ariana Hawk struggled to find words. Bittersweet came to mind, as did frustrated.

"I literally could have cried," said Hawk, sitting in her car after learning Tuesday that former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and others in his administration were expected to be charged in a water crisis blamed with causing learning disabilities in scores of children and other medical problems among adults in the majority Black city about 60 miles (95 kilometers) northwest of Detroit.

Late Wednesday, Snyder was charged with two counts of willful neglect of duty.

Hawk's son, Sincere Smith, was 2 years old when she noticed something wasn't right with the family's tap water. Sometimes the water they drank and used for cooking and bathing was discolored. More concerning was when it gushed out brown.

It wasn't just her home, but all across the former manufacturing hub that for decades had turned out some of the best cars and trucks produced by U.S. automakers.

Residents had been complaining about the discolored discharge as early as 2014 after the financially strapped city — while under state oversight — switched from water pumped from Detroit to the Flint River to save money.

State and some city officials insisted the water was safe to use — until a group of doctors in September 2015 urged Flint to change its water source after finding high levels of lead in children's blood.

The water, it turned out, had not been treated to reduce corrosion — causing the toxic metal to leach from old pipes and spoil the distribution system used by nearly 100,000 residents. The water also was blamed for a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in the Flint area.

In the Hawk household, rashes had started to spread over her son's body. He became inconsolable when she bathed him. The boy's pediatrician pointed to the city's water as the cause.

Sincere would become the face of the Flint water crisis when a photo of him was selected in 2016 for the cover of Time magazine.

Seven years after the water was first switched, Snyder, his health director and other ex-officials have been told they're being charged in a crisis that has been highlighted as an example of environmental injustice and racism. Two people with knowledge of the planned prosecution told The Associated Press 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.

Prosecutors have scheduled a news conference for Thursday.

Flint has since returned to water from Detroit's system and has replaced more than 9,700 lead service lines, but scars remain — some visible, others psychological.

For Sincere, now 7, and his siblings, water from taps can elicit fear similar to the boogeyman or dark closets.

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While visiting their grandmother's home in Florida, Sincere was hesitant about the water, Hawk told The Associated Press.

"I told him 'It's not Flint. Y'all can drink it,'" Hawk said. "But they've been normalized to drinking bottled water because they can't drink our water. Flint kids are traumatized."

Snyder, who left office in 2018, was not initially charged, though others were. But a new probe was started in 2019, with all charges dropped against eight people. Prosecutors working under a new state attorney general said all available evidence was not pursued by the previous team of prosecutors.

"They poisoned the whole city," Roy Fields Sr. said of officials elected and appointed to make sure residents were safe.

Fields' adult daughter suffered a miscarriage. He later developed rashes, boils and a skin abscess.

"At first, we thought all we had to do was boil the water and be OK," Fields, 62, said Wednesday. "We cooked with it, drank it and when we heard about the problems with it, we stopped in 2014, but it was too late."

He wants someone brought to justice.

"They talk about jail time," Fields said. "But that does no good. Let them come back in here and work to help educate and do what they can to make this community whole. I was hostile. I had to forgive them in order to move forward."

The news of charges "is a salve, but it isn't the end of the story," said Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician who helped call attention to childhood health risks from Flint's water.

"Without justice, it's impossible to heal the scars of the crisis," Hanna-Attisha said Wednesday in a statement. "Healing wounds and restoring trust will take decades and long-term resources."

Leon Abdullah El-Alamin said he would like to see Snyder charged with a felony. El-Alamin's son, now 7, has suffered hair loss and skin rashes due to the contaminated water. He said Snyder "needs to do some kind of time."

"Again, I don't know what the charges are going to be and so forth. But I know if it's just a smack on the wrist, then you just failed this community," El-Alamin said.

Hawk is skeptical that charges will lead to accountability. Even if there are convictions, who will repair the emotional trauma?

"I don't want to give up on the young people who don't have a voice," she said. "And Sincere, I want him to know that he did something good, that he was brave putting his story out there. I don't want him to feel like a victim. I tell him now that when he gets older to say, 'Yeah, I'm the little boy that was on Time magazine that opened the eyes to America to what was happening in the city of Flint.'"

Stafford, an investigative reporter on AP's Race and Ethnicity team, reported from Detroit. Williams reported from West Bloomfield, Michigan. Associated Press writer Ed White in Detroit also contributed.

Follow Stafford on Twitter at http://twitter.com/kat__stafford

Census decision deals blow to Trump efforts on House seats

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

President Donald Trump's effort to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from being counted in the process for divvying up congressional seats was dealt another blow Wednesday when the Census Bureau's director indefinitely halted an effort to gather data on the citizenship status of every U.S. resident.

Bureau workers laboring to comply with the Trump order were instructed to "'stand down' and discontinue their data reviews," Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham said in a memo.

A review indicated problems with the data that would require additional work, Dillingham said.

Dillingham's memo came after the Office of Inspector General reported Tuesday that bureau workers were under significant pressure from two Trump political appointees, Nathaniel Cogley and Benjamin Overholt, to figure out who is in the U.S. illegally, using federal and state administrative records. Bureau statisticians

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worried that any citizenship figures they were forced to produce would be incomplete, misinterpreted and tarnish the statistical agency's reputation, the inspector general said in a memo.

Dillingham had set a Friday deadline for bureau statisticians to provide him a technical report on the effort, the inspector general's memo said, though Dillingham said in a response that the request had come from another bureau official.

Trump two years ago ordered the Census Bureau to use administrative records to figure out who is in the country illegally after the Supreme Court blocked his administration's effort to put a citizenship question on the 2020 census questionnaire. Information about citizenship status could be used to implement another Trump order seeking to exclude people in the country illegally from the count used for divvying up congressional seats and Electoral College votes, as well as the annual distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending, among the states.

An influential GOP adviser had advocated excluding them from the apportionment process in order to favor Republicans and non-Hispanic whites. Trump's unprecedented order on apportionment was challenged in more than a half-dozen lawsuits across the U.S., but the Supreme Court ruled last month that any challenge was premature.

The ability to implement Trump's apportionment order is in jeopardy since the processing of the data is not scheduled to be done until early March because irregularities discovered during the numbers-crunching phase of the 2020 census need to be fixed, Trump administration attorneys said Monday.

That revised deadline dealt another blow to the apportionment order because it is weeks after Trump leaves office and President-elect Joe Biden is sworn in Jan. 20. Biden has said he opposes the effort, and Dale Ho, director of the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, which had challenged the apportionment order, urged Biden on Wednesday to rescind it when he takes office.

"President Trump tried and failed throughout his entire presidency to weaponize the census for his attacks on immigrant communities," Ho said. "It appears he has failed yet again."

After the release of the inspector general's memo, a coalition of civil rights groups called for Dillingham's resignation, saying he was undermining the statistical agency's standards for data quality to comply with Trump's order, which was "motivated by partisan objectives."

"We do not lightly come to the conclusion that he should resign," leaders of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, Asian Americans Advancing Justice and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said in a statement on Wednesday, before the director announced the halt to the citizenship effort. "Dillingham's order to divert precious staff time away from producing the apportionment count and into producing data on citizens and noncitizens for political, partisan purposes is a betrayal of the mission of the Bureau."

Census Bureau directors have five-year terms and Dillingham's tenure isn't done until the end of the year. The appointments of Cogley and Overholt last year were highly criticized by statisticians, academics and Democratic lawmakers, who worried they would politicize the once-a-decade census.

Whistleblowers told the Office of Inspector General that the Census Bureau has not set rules for categorizing the citizenship status of U.S. residents. Bureau statisticians also do not fully understand the data since portions came from outside the bureau and they are worried incomplete data could be misinterpreted, they said.

"One senior Bureau employee went as far to say that this work is statistically indefensible," the inspector general's memo said.

In his response, Dillingham said there was no pressure placed on bureau workers to comply with the presidential order.

"Presently, the Census Bureau's highest priority is to successfully complete 2020 Census data processing in order to produce a complete and accurate count for the nation," Dillingham said.

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

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Enduring 2nd impeachment, Trump stands largely silent, alone

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — His place in the history books rewritten, President Donald Trump endured his second impeachment largely alone and silent.

For more than four years, Trump has dominated the national discourse like no one before him. Yet when his legacy was set in stone on Wednesday, he was stunningly left on the sidelines.

Trump now stands with no equal, the only president to be charged twice with a high crime or misdemeanor, a new coda for a term defined by a deepening of the nation's divides, his failures during the worst pandemic in a century and his refusal to accept defeat at the ballot box.

Trump kept out of sight in a nearly empty White House as impeachment proceedings played out at the heavily fortified U.S. Capitol. There, the damage from last week's riots provided a visible reminder of the insurrection that the president was accused of inciting.

Abandoned by some in his own party, Trump could do nothing but watch history unfold on television. The suspension of his Twitter account deprived Trump of his most potent means to keep Republicans in line, giving a sense that Trump had been defanged and, for the first time, his hold on his adopted party was in question.

He was finally heard from hours after the vote, in a subdued video that condemned the insurrection at the Capitol and warned his supporters from engaging in any further violence. It was a message that was largely missing one week earlier, when rioters marching in Trump's name descended on the Capitol to try to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's victory.

"I want to be very clear: I unequivocally condemn the violence that we saw last week," said Trump. He added that "no true supporter" of his "could ever endorse political violence."

But that message, partially motivated to warn off legal exposure for sparking the riot, ran contrary to what Trump has said throughout his term, including when he urged his supporters to "fight" for him last week. Trump said not a word about his impeachment in the video, though he complained about the ban on his social media.

With only a week left in Trump's term, there were no bellicose messages from the White House fighting the proceedings on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and no organized legal response. Some congressional Republicans did defend the president during House debate in impeachment, their words carrying across the same space violated by rioters one week earlier during a siege of the citadel of democracy that left five dead.

In the end, 10 Republicans voted to impeach.

It was a marked change from Trump's first impeachment. That December 2019 vote in the House, which made Trump only the third president ever impeached, played out along partisan lines. The charges then were that he had used the powers of the office to pressure Ukraine to investigate a political foe, Joe Biden, now the president-elect.

At that time, the White House was criticized for failing to create the kind of robust "war room" that President Bill Clinton mobilized during his own impeachment fight. Nonetheless, Trump allies did mount their own pushback campaign. There were lawyers, White House messaging meetings, and a media blitz run by allies on conservative television, radio and websites.

Trump was acquitted in 2020 by the GOP-controlled Senate and his approval ratings were undamaged. But this time, as some members of his own party recoiled and accused him of committing impeachable offenses, Trump was isolated and quiet. A presidency centered on the bombastic declaration "I alone can fix it" seemed to be ending with a whimper.

The third-ranking Republican in the House, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, said there had "never been a greater betrayal" by a president. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told colleagues in a letter that he had not decided how he would vote in an impeachment trial.

For the first time, Trump's future seemed in doubt, and what was once unthinkable — that enough Republican senators would defy him and vote to remove him from office — seemed at least possible, if unlikely.

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But there was no effort from the White House to line up votes in the president's defense.

The team around Trump is hollowed out, with the White House counsel's office not drawing up a legal defense plan and the legislative affairs team largely abandoned. Trump leaned on Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., to push Republican senators to oppose removal. Graham's spokesman said the senator was making the calls of his own volition.

Trump and his allies believed that the president's sturdy popularity with the lawmakers' GOP constituents would deter them from voting against him.

The president was livid with perceived disloyalty from McConnell and Cheney and has been deeply frustrated that he could not hit back with his Twitter account, which has kept Republicans in line for years. Trump watched much of the day's proceedings on TV from the White House residence and his private dining area off the Oval Office.

A short time before he was impeached, Trump was in the White House East Room presenting the National Medal of Arts to singers Toby Keith and Ricky Skaggs as well as former Associated Press photographer Nick Ut.

His paramount concern, beyond his legacy, was what a second impeachment could do to his immediate political and financial future, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing. They were not authorized to speak discuss private conversations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The loss of his Twitter account and fundraising lists could complicate Trump's efforts to remain a GOP kingmaker and potentially run again in 2024. Moreover, Trump seethed at the blows being dealt to his business, including the withdrawal of a PGA tournament from one of his golf courses and the decision by New York City to cease dealings with his company.

There's the possibility that if the Senate were to convict him, he also could be barred from seeking election again, dashing any hopes of another presidential campaign.

A White House spokesman did not respond to questions about whether anyone in the building was trying to defend Trump, who was now the subject of half of the presidential impeachments in the nation's history.

One campaign adviser, Jason Miller, argued Democrats' efforts will serve to galvanize the Republican base behind Trump and end up harming Biden. He blamed the Democrats' swift pace for the silence, saying there wasn't "time for mounting a traditional response operation." But he pledged that "the real battle will be the Senate where there'll be a more traditional pushback effort."

The reminders of the Capitol siege were everywhere as the House moved toward the impeachment roll call.

Some of the Capitol's doors were broken and windows were shattered. A barricade had gone up around outside the building and there were new checkpoints. Hundreds of members of the National Guard patrolled the hallways, even sleeping on the marble floors of the same rotunda that once housed Abraham Lincoln's casket.

And now the Capitol is the site of more history, adding to the chapter that features Clinton, impeached 21 years ago for lying under oath about sex with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, and Andrew Johnson, impeached 151 years ago for defying Congress on Reconstruction. Another entry is for Richard Nixon, who avoided impeachment by resigning during the Watergate investigation.

But Trump, the only one impeached twice, will once more be alone.

Lemire reported from New York.

This story has been corrected to reflect that Trump was acquitted by the Senate in 2020, not 2019.

Led by Cheney, 10 House Republicans back Trump impeachment

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ten Republicans — including Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House GOP leader — voted to impeach President Donald Trump Wednesday over the deadly insurrection at the Capitol.

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The GOP votes were in sharp contrast to the unanimous support for Trump among House Republicans when he was impeached by Democrats in December 2019.

Cheney, whose decision to buck Trump sparked an immediate backlash within the GOP, was the only member of her party's leadership to support impeachment, which was opposed by 197 Republicans.

"There has never been a greater betrayal by a president of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution," said Cheney, whose father, Dick Cheney, served as vice president under George W. Bush. The younger Cheney has been more critical of Trump than other GOP leaders, but her announcement hours before Wednesday's vote nonetheless shook Congress.

Trump "summoned" the mob that attacked the Capitol, "assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack," Cheney said, adding, "Everything that followed was his doing." Trump could have immediately intervened to stop his supporters from rioting but did not, she noted. The riot resulted in five deaths, including that of a Capitol police officer.

Nine other House Republicans also supported impeachment: Reps. John Katko of New York; Adam Kinzinger of Illinois; Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio; Fred Upton and Peter Meijer of Michigan; Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse of Washington state; Tom Rice of South Carolina; and David Valadao of California.

Rice's vote may have been the most surprising. His coastal district strongly backed Trump in the election and he voted last week to object to certification of electoral votes in Arizona and Pennsylvania. "I have backed this president through thick and thin for four years. I've campaigned for him and voted for him twice. But this utter failure is inexcusable," Rice said in a statement after the vote.

While he's not sure if Trump's Jan. 6 speech amounted to incitement of a riot, "any reasonable person could see the potential for violence," Rice said. "It is only by the grace of God and the blood of the Capitol Police that the death toll was not much, much higher."

Rice said he was disappointed that Trump has failed to show remorse over the riot or address the nation to ask for calm. After the impeachment vote, Trump released a video calling on his supporters to remain peaceful amid concerns about additional violence in the days before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration.

Katko, a former federal prosecutor who represents the Syracuse area, said allowing Trump "to incite this attack without consequence" would be "a direct threat to the future of our democracy."

"By deliberately promoting baseless theories suggesting the election was somehow stolen, the president created a combustible environment of misinformation, disenfranchisement and division," Katko said. Trump's refusal to call off the riot put "countless lives in danger," he said.

Upton, a former chairman of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee who is in his 18th term representing the Kalamazoo area, said he would have preferred a bipartisan, formal censure rather than impeachment. But he said Trump's refusal to take responsibility for the riot left him no choice.

Trump claimed Tuesday that his remarks at a rally just before the riot were "totally appropriate," an assertion that Upton said "sends exactly the wrong signal to those of us who support the very core of our democratic principles and took a solemn oath to the Constitution."

"The Congress must hold President Trump to account and send a clear message that our country cannot and will not tolerate any effort ... to impede the peaceful transfer of power," he said.

Kinzinger, an Air Force veteran who has emerged as a leading Trump critic, said he had no doubt that Trump "broke his oath of office and incited this insurrection." Trump "used his position in the executive" branch to attack the legislative branch, said Kinzinger, who is in his sixth term representing northern Illinois.

Herrera Beutler, in her sixth term representing southwestern Washington, said that while many lawmakers fear Trump, "truth sets us free from fear. My vote to impeach a sitting president is not a fear-based decision," she said. "I am not choosing a side. I'm choosing truth."

Newhouse said the Democratic-led articles of impeachment were flawed, but he would not use process as an excuse to vote no. "There is no excuse for President Trump's actions," said Newhouse, in his fifth term representing central Washington.

Meijer, a freshman who represents the Grand Rapids area, said Trump betrayed his oath of office and "bears responsibility for inciting the insurrection we suffered last week." Like other Republicans, he said

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he supported impeachment with a heavy heart.

Trump's fate is now up the Republican-controlled Senate, which acquitted him last year without hearing witnesses in a trial. This time, however, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is said to be angry at Trump, not only over the Capitol insurrection but also the twin defeats in Georgia the day before that cost the GOP its Senate majority, according to a Republican granted anonymity to discuss the situation.

McConnell said Wednesday he has not made a final decision on how he will vote in a Senate trial, which may not be concluded before Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration.

At least two GOP senators — Alaska's Lisa Murkowski and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania — have said they support impeachment or have called on Trump to resign. Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., has said he will consider impeachment.

Only one Republican senator, Mitt Romney of Utah, voted to convict Trump last year.

McConnell open to convicting Trump in impeachment trial

By ALAN FRAM and ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell pointedly did not rule out Wednesday that he might eventually vote to convict the now twice-impeached President Donald Trump, but he also blocked a quick Senate impeachment trial.

Minutes after the House voted 232-197 to impeach Trump, McConnell said in a letter to his GOP colleagues that he's not determined whether Trump should be convicted in the Senate's upcoming proceedings. The House impeachment articles charge that Trump incited insurrection by exhorting supporters who violently attacked the Capitol last week, resulting in five deaths and a disruption of Congress.

"I have not made a final decision on how I will vote and I intend to listen to the legal arguments when they are presented to the Senate," McConnell wrote.

McConnell's openness was a stark contrast to the support, or at times silence, he's shown during much of Trump's presidency, and to the opposition he expressed rapidly when the House impeached Trump 13 months ago. McConnell will be Washington's most powerful Republican once Democratic President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated, and McConnell's increasingly chilly view of Trump could make it easier for other GOP lawmakers to turn against him.

McConnell's burgeoning alienation from Trump, plus the 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach him, underscored how the GOP's long, reflexive support and condoning of Trump's actions was eroding.

McConnell also issued a statement saying Congress and the government should spend the next week "completely focused on facilitating a safe inauguration and an orderly transfer of power" to Biden. He suggested Trump's Senate trial would begin no earlier than Jan. 19 — in effect rejecting a drive by the chamber's Democrats to begin the proceedings immediately so Trump could be ousted from office.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said that unless McConnell reverses himself and agrees to quickly start the trial, it would begin after Jan. 19. That's a day before Biden is inaugurated as president and about the time Democrats take over majority control of the Senate. The timetable essentially means McConnell is dropping the trial into Democrats' laps.

"Make no mistake, there will be an impeachment trial in the United States Senate," Schumer said. He added, "If the president is convicted, there will be a vote on barring him from running again."

The Constitution requires a two-thirds majority to convict a president, meaning at least 17 Republicans would need to join all 50 Democrats to oust Trump. If Trump were convicted, it would take only a simple majority of the Senate to prohibit Trump, who's mentioned running again in 2024, from holding federal office again.

Earlier Wednesday, a GOP strategist said McConnell has told people he thinks Trump perpetrated impeachable offenses. McConnell also saw House Democrats' drive to impeach Trump as an opportune moment to distance the GOP from the tumultuous, divisive outgoing president, according to the strategist, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

McConnell's views were first reported by The New York Times.

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McConnell spoke to major Republican donors last weekend to assess their thinking about Trump and was told that they believed Trump had clearly crossed a line, the strategist said. McConnell told them he was finished with Trump, according to the consultant.

The Democratic-led House approved an impeachment article accusing Trump of inciting insurrection, an unprecedented second impeachment of his clamorous presidency. Trump exhorted a throng of his followers to march on the Capitol last Wednesday, where they disrupted Congress' formal certification of Biden's win in a deadly riot that produced widespread damage.

McConnell is looking out for his party's long-term future, but moving toward a political divorce from Trump could mean that congressional Republicans will face challenges in GOP primaries.

It is unclear how many Republicans would vote to convict Trump in a Senate trial, but it appears plausible that several would.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, on Wednesday told Alaska's News Source, an Anchorage news outlet, that Trump "has committed an impeachable offense." She stopped short of saying if she'd vote to convict him.

Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., has said he would "definitely consider" House impeachment articles.

Complicating GOP thinking about Trump's second impeachment is that Republicans will be defending 20 of the 34 Senate seats up for election in 2022. Thanks to Democratic victories this month in two Georgia runoffs, Democrats are about to take control of the chamber by 50-50, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris casting tie-breaking votes.

Speaking out against impeachment Wednesday was Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. A once-bitter Trump foe, Graham became one of his closest allies during his presidency, then lambasted him over last week's Capitol invasion but has since spent time with Trump.

Impeaching Trump now would "do great damage to the institutions of government and could invite further violence," Graham said in a statement. He said Trump's millions of backers "should not be demonized because of the despicable actions of a seditious mob," but he did not specifically defend Trump's actions last week.

"If there was a time for America's political leaders to bend a knee and ask for God's counsel and guidance, it is now. The most important thing for leaders to do in times of crisis is to make things better, not worse," Graham said.

When the Senate voted against removing Trump in February after the House impeached him for pressuring Ukraine to provide political dirt on Biden, Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, was the only Republican who cast a vote to oust him.

Trump has falsely insisted that November's presidential election was stolen from him by fraud. Those allegations have been rejected by state officials of both parties, state and federal courts and members of his own administration.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Mix of extremists who stormed Capitol isn't retreating

By REBECCA BOONE, GILLIAN FLACCUS and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — As rioters laid siege to the U.S. Capitol, the seat of American democracy became a melting pot of extremist groups: militia members, white supremacists, paramilitary organizations, anti-maskers and fanatical supporters of President Donald Trump, standing shoulder to shoulder in rage.

Experts say it was the culmination of years of increasing radicalization and partisanship, combined with a growing fascination with paramilitary groups and a global pandemic. And they warn that the armed insurrection that left five people dead and shook the country could be just the beginning.

"We look at it like a conveyor belt of radicalization," said Devin Burghart, executive director of the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights. "Once they step on that conveyor belt, they're inundated with propaganda that moves them along that path until they're willing to take up arms."

Photographs and video of the Capitol siege showed people wearing attire with symbols associated with the anti-government Three Percenters movement and the Oath Keepers, a loosely organized group of

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right-wing extremists.

Many of those who stormed the Capitol were wearing clothes or holding signs adorned with symbols of the QAnon conspiracy theory, which centers on the baseless belief that Trump is waging a secret campaign against the "deep state" and a cabal of sex-trafficking cannibals. One of the intruders was wearing a "Camp Auschwitz" sweatshirt, a reference to the Nazi death camp.

Those who monitor online chatter say the threat of more violence by far-right fringe groups hasn't abated, though it has been tougher to track since the social media platform Parler, a haven for right-wing extremists, was booted off the internet.

"We're certainly not out of the woods yet. I'm afraid that we're going to have to be prepared for some worst-case scenarios for a while," said Amy Cooter, a senior lecturer in sociology at Vanderbilt University who studies U.S. militia groups.

The FBI is warning of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration next Wednesday. Cooter believes smaller gatherings at state capitals are a greater threat than a large, centrally organized event in Washington, given the heightened security there.

How many extremists are out there is unclear. Individual fringe groups tend to be small, with the largest claiming hundreds of members, but countless others have been swept up in the fury of late.

To understand the mix of extremists in the Capitol melee, it helps to look at history.

Much of the modern militia movement was a reaction to the push for tougher gun control laws in the 1990s. An 11-day standoff that left three people dead on Idaho's Ruby Ridge in 1992 galvanized the movement, as did the disaster in Waco, Texas, the following year, when 76 people died in a fire after a 51-day standoff at the Branch Davidian cult compound.

A decade later, Cliven Bundy and his sons Ryan and Ammon Bundy engaged in armed standoffs with the federal government, first in a fight over grazing rights on federal land in Nevada in 2014, then in a 40-day occupation of a national wildlife refuge in Oregon in 2016. Those standoffs drew the sympathies of some Western ranchers and farmers who feared they were losing the ability to prosper financially.

Meanwhile, America's white supremacy movement -- as old as the country itself and energized by the civil rights movement of the 1960s -- used every opportunity to stoke racism and increase recruitment. Within the last two decades, nationalists and white supremacists were especially successful in leveraging anti-immigration sentiment and the backlash over Barack Obama's election as the nation's first black president in 2008.

Some who follow such movements say the coronavirus pandemic provided the perfect recruitment opportunity.

Militias helped distribute surplus farm produce to the unemployed. Neo-Nazis pushed conspiracy claims that the government was trying to limit "herd immunity." An anti-government group launched by Ammon Bundy last spring called People's Rights held an Easter church service in defiance of a lockdown order in Idaho.

"That was the moment that sent a message nationwide that it was OK to take an insurrectionist posture toward COVID guidelines -- and from that moment you saw this take hold across the country," said Burghart, whose organization published an October report on the People's Rights network.

While previously those upset about COVID-19 rules would complain online, suddenly individuals were defying authorities by opening their gyms or refusing to wear masks in very confrontational ways. For these individuals, social media accelerated a radicalization process that normally takes years into just a few months, fueled by the powerlessness many felt amid COVID-19 shutdowns.

"You had all of these kind of small interventions to try to fight against any kind of common-sense health restrictions," Burghart said. "And in that moment you saw, simultaneously, militia activists getting involved in the COVID struggle and COVID insurrectionists taking up the militia posture and wanting to get involved with militia groups."

The danger could intensify. The Capitol insurrection both further normalized the idea of violent government overthrow and allowed extremist groups to network with a broader population, said Lindsay Schubiner,

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an expert in extremism with the Western States Center.

As those groups continue to train and expand -- many already offer instruction in weapons, first aid, food storage and ham radios -- the risk of "lone wolf" actions also increases, she said, with members taking matters into their own hands when they feel their group has not gone far enough.

Stewart Rhodes, an Army veteran who founded the Oath Keepers in 2009, had been saying for weeks around the election that his group was preparing for a civil war and was ready to take orders from Trump. The group recruits current and former law enforcement officers and military personnel.

During a Nov. 10 appearance on far-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones' Infowars show, Rhodes said he had "good men on the ground already" in the Washington area who were "armed, prepared to go in if the president calls us up."

"In case they attempt to remove the president illegally, we will step in and stop it," he said.

Users on militia forums cheered on the Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol and hailed them as patriots, according to a review of social media posts by the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism. Many saw the attack as a call to arms.

Authorities have arrested more than 100 people on charges linked to the Capitol siege, but court documents don't publicly identify any of them as members of a militia-style group, according to an Associated Press review of records.

Less than a week after the riot, several armed men in tactical gear with "Texas Militia" labels on their combat fatigues gathered at the Texas state Capitol as lawmakers returned to work for a new legislative session. Texas GOP chairman Allen West posed with the group for a photo and shared the picture on the party's Twitter account.

The gathering at the Texas statehouse in Austin came the same day President Trump flew to the southern border in Alamo, Texas, where he took no responsibility for his part in fomenting the violent insurrection in Washington, D.C. "People thought that what I said was totally appropriate," Trump said.

Stopping extremist groups may be impossible, but pushing those groups further to the political margins is possible, Schubiner said.

"Everyone who believes in inclusive democracy and does not believe in political violence needs to come out and say so strongly, and then back that up with actions," she said.

This story has been corrected to show that the "Texas Militia" group gathered at the Statehouse in Austin while Trump was at the Texas border. Flaccus reported from Portland, Oregon and Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press writer Paul Weber in Austin, Texas contributed to this report.

Defiance of virus dining bans grows as restaurants flounder

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

BORING, Ore. (AP) — A line formed out the door during the lunch rush at the Carver Hangar, a family-owned restaurant and sports bar, and waitresses zipped in and out of the kitchen trying to keep up with orders as customers backed up in the lobby.

Indoor dining has been banned in much of Oregon for nearly two months, but the eatery 20 miles southeast of Portland was doing a booming business — and an illegal one. The restaurant's owners, Bryan and Liz Mitchell, fully reopened Jan. 1 in defiance of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 indoor dining ban in their county despite the risk of heavy fines and surging coronavirus cases.

"We're not going to back down because our employees still need to eat, they still need that income," said Bryan Mitchell, as customers ate at tables spaced 6 feet apart. "The statement that we're making is, 'Every life is essential. You have the right to survive. Nobody should tell you what you can and cannot do to provide for your family.'"

Health officials in Oregon and other states with bans say they are necessary because people can't wear masks when they eat, are in close proximity in smaller and often poorly ventilated spaces, and are prone to talk more loudly in a crowded dining room — all known contributors to viral spread. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists indoor dining as a "particularly high-risk" activity.

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But even as coronavirus deaths soar, a growing number of restaurants in states across the country are reopening in defiance of strict COVID-19 rules that have shut them down for indoor dining for weeks, or even months. Restaurants can serve people outside or offer carry-out, but winter weather has crippled revenues from patio dining.

In Oregon, an organized effort to get businesses to reopen for indoor service starting Jan. 1 has been championed by several mayors, who formed a group to raise legal defense funds in anticipation of a court fight. Similar revolts in Michigan, Pennsylvania, California and Washington state have also gained traction, with the rule-breakers saying their industry has been unfairly singled out while other businesses, like big box stores and airlines, continue operating.

The states with the strictest dining rules are led by Democratic governors and the protests have consequently attracted the support of right-wing groups that, in some cases, have stationed armed individuals at business entrances and organized protests on behalf of owners.

In Oregon, protesters targeted the house of an inspector and the department's top administrator after the state fined a local gym chain, Capitol Racquet Sports Inc., \$90,000. On Tuesday, it added another \$126,749 in fines because four locations were still open.

Brown, who currently prohibits indoor dining in 26 of Oregon's 36 counties, called the move to reopen irresponsible and said it could lead to a spike in infections and deaths. She accused local leaders backing the movement of willfully misleading their communities for political reasons.

"We can't waver in our response to the virus now, when the end is finally in sight and resources are on the way. We are better than this," said Brown, who banned indoor dining last spring and then reinstated it with limits over the summer before the latest shutdown.

In addition to fines, Brown has threatened to pull liquor licenses and ban slot machines at restaurants that won't stay closed. State inspectors have assembled a priority list of establishments to visit with the goal of stopping the "vocal minority" of owners before the defiance broadens, said Aaron Corvin, spokesman for the Oregon Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

It's impossible to know how many Oregon restaurants have heeded the call to reopen because many are keeping quiet about it. Stan Pulliam, the mayor of Sandy, Oregon, said he attended meetings all over the state where establishments were encouraged to reopen and said the so-called Open Oregon coalition includes at least 300 small businesses, not all of them restaurants.

Even before the organized effort, restaurants were reopening because they couldn't survive and Pulliam said his goal was to provide a uniform framework to make it safer. He has urged businesses in his town and county to reopen at 25% capacity with a face mask requirement for staff and social distancing.

"These are individuals that are to the end of their rope. Their decision is not to thumb their nose at the governor. It's really a decision to open up or lose everything they've worked for their entire lives," he said. "We're saying, 'Hey, if you're going to open, let's do this right.'"

Restaurant owners who are complying with state closures have watched the movement to reopen with frustration.

"I have a bunch of businesses and bunch of staff who all want to work and I want them to work, but they want to be safe and I want them to be safe — and I want my customers to be safe," said Ezra Caraeff, who owns four bars with food service in Portland and has laid off dozens of employees.

"I have bills to pay, but there's a morality aspect to this."

Some non-compliant businesses have already racked up thousands of dollars in fines from health and safety inspectors. In Washington state, one restaurant has been fined nearly \$145,000 and is challenging a restraining order in court. In Michigan — where a ban on indoor dining was extended Wednesday until at least Feb. 1 — a restaurant industry group sued over the ban and a major Detroit-area restaurateur rallied hundreds of colleagues to reopen last month in violation of state rules before backing down.

In Pennsylvania, the state closed 109 restaurants over violations during a ban on indoor dining that expired Jan. 4 and sued 50 establishments.

Quality Shoppe, a breakfast-and-lunch spot in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, that's been around for over 50 years, was among the restaurants sued. The state is pursuing legal action even though it lifted its ban

on indoor dining last week.

"I don't like breaking rules. That's not normally what I want to do," said owner Crystal Nolt, adding she couldn't afford to close again after an initial three-month shutdown last spring. "I don't want people to die. But at some point people also have to live their life."

At the Mitchells' Oregon restaurant, employees are required to wear masks and the ventilation has been updated with high-quality HEPA filters. Those precautions are enough for customers who've flocked to the small town of Boring — population 7,762 — since the Carver Hangar reopened.

So far, the restaurant has not been fined. A handwritten sign taped to the restaurant's door tells inspectors to return with a warrant.

Associated Press writer Michael Rubinkam in Allentown, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.

Follow Gillian Flaccus on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/gflaccus>

Capitol investigators try to sort real tips from noise

By STEFANIE DAZIO and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Potential threats and leads are pouring in to law enforcement agencies nationwide after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The challenge is now figuring out what's real and what's just noise.

Investigators are combing through a mountain of online posts, street surveillance and other intelligence, including information that suggests mobs could try to storm the Capitol again and threats to kill some members of Congress.

Security is being tightened from coast to coast. Thousands of National Guard troops are guarding the Capitol ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. Governors and lawmakers are stepping up protections at statehouses after an FBI bulletin this week warned of threats to legislative sessions and other inaugural ceremonies.

A primary concern is the safety of members of Congress, particularly when they are traveling through airports, according to two U.S. officials briefed on the matter.

The FBI and other federal authorities use their substantial resources to prepare. But smaller local police departments lack the staff to hunt down every tip. They must rely heavily on state and federal assessments to inform their work, and that information sometimes slips through the cracks — which apparently happened last week.

A day before the deadly attack on the Capitol, the FBI sent an intelligence bulletin warning of potential violence to other agencies, including the Capitol Police. But officials either did not receive it or ignored it — and instead prepared for a free-speech protest, not a riot. It took nearly two hours for reinforcements to arrive to help disperse the mob. Five people died, including a Capitol officer.

"There are some grammar schools that are better protected than the Capitol," said Brian Higgins, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and the former chief of a northern New Jersey police force.

Since last week, the FBI has opened 170 case files and received more than 100,000 pieces of digital media. The threats have ranged in specificity and complexity, according to officials briefed on them, making it difficult for authorities to determine which could be credible.

Combing through intelligence isn't the same as shoe-leather detective work. Large departments like New York and Los Angeles have dedicated intelligence units — the NYPD even disseminated its own bulletin ahead of the riot. But smaller police forces rely on joint terrorism task forces and so-called "fusion centers" that were set up around the country after the 2001 attacks to improve communication between agencies.

Norton, Kansas, Police Chief Gerald Cullumber leads a seven-member department in the northwestern part of the state. He said he relies on larger agencies like the Kansas Highway Patrol because his agency is too small to do its own intelligence work. But Cullumber said he stays up to date on the latest information and briefs his officers.

"It doesn't mean that we rest on our laurels," he said. "It doesn't mean that we ignore things."

Once they receive intelligence reports, it's up to local agencies to plan and take action to keep their communities safe, said Rich Stanek, the former sheriff of Hennepin County in Minnesota who now works in consulting and started the Public Safety Strategies Group.

"If I was the sheriff today, I would be taking it very seriously," he said. "If they told me Jan. 17 is the date, yeah, I think it's reasonable to plan for one week ahead and one week behind."

Mike Koval, who retired in 2019 as the police chief in Madison, Wisconsin, said his state's two fusion centers have technology and resources that go far beyond those of a single local police department.

Staying on top of all the potential intelligence on the internet is like "going to a water fountain to get a drink of water, and it's coming out with the strength of a fire hydrant and it will take your jaw off," Koval said.

Meanwhile, elected officials nationwide, including President Donald Trump, have started to urge calm amid the threats. Trump egged on the riots during a speech at the Washington Monument, beseeching his loyalists to go to the Capitol as Congress was certifying Biden's victory. He took no responsibility for the riot.

"In light of reports of more demonstrations, I urge that there must be NO violence, NO lawbreaking and NO vandalism of any kind," Trump said in a statement Wednesday. "That is not what I stand for, and it is not what America stands for. I call on ALL Americans to help ease tensions and calm tempers."

Experts say explicit or implicit bias likely helped downplay last week's threat because the protesters were white, and that must change, said Eric K. Ward, a senior fellow with the Southern Poverty Law Center and an expert on authoritarian movements and hate groups.

That could be why Capitol police were so unprepared, compared with the much more aggressive law enforcement response to last summer's protests following the death of George Floyd and other Black men killed by law enforcement.

Dazio reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press writers Amy Forliti and Doug Glass in Minneapolis, Michael R. Sisak in New York and Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

Sephora to fight against racial bias with an action plan

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Beauty products retailer Sephora said Wednesday that it will bolster the number of Black-owned brands, scale back on third-party security guards and offer more inclusive marketing as part of a plan to combat racial bias at its stores.

The company revealed its plan as it released findings of a study it commissioned that took an in-depth look at racial bias in the U.S. retail shopping experience.

The study, based on a combination of employee and shopper surveys and academic research, began in the fall of 2019 and ended in late 2020. It found that two in five U.S. retail shoppers have personally experienced unfair treatment on the basis of their race or skin tone. It also found that Black shoppers are more likely than white shoppers to receive unfair treatment based on their skin color.

The issue of racial bias has taken on more importance for companies in the wake of nationwide protests over police brutality last summer after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

As part of the plan, Sephora, a division of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE, plans to double the assortment of Black-owned brands to 16 by the end of the year. It will also prominently feature and advertise Black-owned brands through a dedicated tab on the Sephora website. It also plans to roll out a new greeting system for shoppers across all stores to ensure a more consistent experience.

Among other changes: Sephora will also reduce the presence of third-party security officers at its 500 U.S. stores and use more in-house specialists as a way to minimize shoppers' concerns about policing.

"We know we are in a strong position to influence positive changes in the retail industry and society at large and it's our responsibility to step up," said Jean-Andre Rougeot, president and CEO of Sephora

Americas, in a statement.

VIRUS TODAY: Coronavirus deaths hit another daily high in US

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— Coronavirus deaths in the U.S. hit another one-day high at over 4,300 with the country's attention focused largely on the fallout from the deadly uprising at the Capitol. The nation's overall death toll from COVID-19 has eclipsed 380,000, according to Johns Hopkins University, and is closing in fast on the number of Americans killed in World War II, or about 407,000. Confirmed infections have topped 22.8 million. Arizona and California have been among the hardest-hit states. The country is now in the most lethal phase of the outbreak yet, even as vaccines are being rolled out.

— State leaders around the U.S. are increasingly pushing for schools to reopen this winter — pressuring them, even — as teachers begin to gain access to vaccines against the raging pandemic. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine offered to give vaccinations to teachers at the start of February, provided their school systems agree to resume at least some in-person instruction by March 1. And Arizona's governor warned schools that he expects students back in the classroom despite objections from top education officials and the highest COVID-19 diagnosis rate in the nation over the past week.

— An ongoing study suggests that older American adults are showing resilience and perseverance despite struggles with loneliness and isolation during the pandemic. That's according to the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project, conducted by the social research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. It's part of a longer-term study designed to track the physical and emotional well-being of a group of older Americans over time. Only 9% of older adults reported having "fair or poor overall mental health" during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the study found that general happiness has declined and an increasing number report occasional feelings of depression or isolation.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging about 249,000 new cases per day, and about 3,300 deaths. The death toll in the U.S. since the start of the pandemic now stands at more than 381,000.

QUOTABLE: "I know of a woman who had her husband sit in front of a computer literally all day and just click the refresh button until an appointment came up."

— Meika Mark, a ninth-grade English teacher in Orange County, New York, who got vaccinated Tuesday using a link a friend texted her.

ICYMI: Three House Democrats announced they tested positive for COVID-19, prompting concern that last week's insurrection at the Capitol has also turned into a super-spreader event threatening the health of lawmakers and their staffs. Those who tested positive were among dozens of lawmakers who were whisked to a secure location when a group of insurrectionists who support President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol on Wednesday. It's not certain where and when lawmakers caught the illness, but the Capitol's attending physician notified all House lawmakers of possible virus exposure and urged them to be tested.

ON THE HORIZON: Officials are preparing for the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, which will look different from other presidential inaugurations because of last week's riot at the U.S. Capitol. Security will be extremely tight around the area. The event was already going to be pared down because of COVID-19.

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

Fed survey finds economy slowing in some areas of country

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Federal Reserve survey of U.S. business conditions has found modest economic gains at the start of the year, although some parts of the country saw slowdowns stemming from a renewed surge of COVID-19 cases.

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The Fed report released Wednesday said that the bulk of the Fed's 12 regions reported modest gains in economic activity in recent weeks.

But three districts — New York, Philadelphia and Cleveland — said that activity had weakened. Two districts — St. Louis and Kansas City — said activity was generally unchanged since the last Fed meeting in mid-December.

The Fed said that reports on consumer spending, which drives 70% of economic activity, were mixed. Some districts reported declines in retail sales and demand for hospitality and leisure services as local governments imposed stricter measures in an effort to contain the surge in virus cases.

"Although the prospect of COVID-19 vaccines has bolstered business optimism for 2021 growth, this has been tempered by concern over the recent virus resurgence and the implications for near-term business conditions," the Fed said.

The Fed's report, known as the beige book, will form the basis for discussions when central bank officials hold their next meeting on interest rates Jan. 26-27.

The Fed pushed interest rates down to a record-tying low of zero to 0.25% last March. The expectation is that rates will remain at ultra-low levels through this year and beyond.

The beige book said that the demand for workers was the strongest in manufacturing, construction and transportation, but employers in those industries were reporting difficulties filling job openings.

"These hiring difficulties were exacerbated by the recent resurgence in COVID-19 cases and the resulting workplace disruptions in some districts," the report said.

The leisure and hospitality sectors reported further layoffs due to stricter containment measures in response to a surge in virus cases.

US budget deficit up 60.7% in first 3 months of budget year

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government's deficit in the first three months of the budget year was a record-breaking \$572.9 billion, 60.7% higher than the same period a year ago, as spending to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic surged while revenue declined.

The Treasury Department reported Wednesday that three months into the budget year, the deficit was \$216.3 billion higher than the same October-December period a year ago.

The deficit reflects an 18.3% jump in outlays to \$1.38 trillion, a record for the period, while revenues fell 0.4% to \$803.37 billion. The red ink results from the difference between revenue collections and outlays.

For just the month of December, the deficit totaled a record \$143.6 billion.

The shortfall for the 2020 budget year, which ended Sept. 30, climbed to an all-time high of \$3.1 trillion. Beginning in the spring, Congress passed trillion-dollar-plus spending measures to combat the harm being done to the economy from a pandemic-induced downturn.

The recession, which has seen millions of Americans lose their jobs, has also meant a drop in tax revenues at a time when the demand on government support programs such as unemployment benefits and food stamps has risen.

The report showed that outlays in December were a record \$489.7 billion, while receipts were \$346.1 billion.

The spending figure did not include the \$900 billion relief package Congress finally passed after months of wrangling because it was not signed into law until the end of the month. President Donald Trump delayed signing the bill, which he called a "disgrace," because it included only \$600 in direct payments to individuals.

President-elect Joe Biden has endorsed boosting the direct payments by another \$1,400. He has said that higher amount will be included in another round of relief payments he will ask Congress to approve once he takes office on Jan. 20.

In addition to direct payments, the December relief bill extended two special unemployment benefit programs aimed at cushioning the pandemic's blow. The unemployment benefits have totaled \$80 billion from October through December, up from \$5 billion during the same period in the last budget year.

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The Congressional Budget Office has forecast that this year's deficit will total \$1.8 trillion and the deficit will remain above \$1 trillion each year through 2030. The CBO forecast for this year was made before the December relief package was passed and also does not take into account any extra spending that Congress may pass after Biden takes office.

Nancy Vanden Houten, senior economist at Oxford Economics, forecast that this year's deficit will hit at least \$2.6 trillion, an estimate that assumes the stimulus checks will be boosted to a total of \$2,000.

EXPLAINER: Vaccine push gains steam but many still face wait

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

More Americans are now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccine but they may still face a wait for their first shot even as supplies increase.

Drugstore pharmacists are now doling out the shots in many states, and sports arenas and fairgrounds are planning big clinics. This latest push is focused for now on people deemed most vulnerable to the coronavirus.

The government this week announced it will no longer hold back the required second doses of vaccines, boosting supplies for first shots.

A closer look:

WHEN IS MY TURN?

It all depends on your age, your health and where you work or live. States ultimately determine the order in which people qualify for the vaccine, although the federal government is offering guidance.

First up: Front-line health care workers and nursing home residents, who started receiving shots last month. States are now expanding to other categories to include others deemed at high risk from COVID-19, like people age 75 and older, firefighters and teachers.

This week, federal health officials urged states to speed things up even more and lower the threshold to age 65 and up. Florida and Georgia and Washington, D.C., had already started doing this.

Federal officials also suggested including people under 65 who have certain health problems that make them more vulnerable if they get sick.

The vaccine is likely months away for most younger people. The two vaccines available in the U.S. haven't been authorized for children.

WHERE CAN I GET THE VACCINE?

The options are expanding and vary depending on where you live.

Pharmacies are already doling out vaccines to eligible customers in states like Alaska, California, Florida, New Jersey and Texas. That list will grow and it will include grocers and retailers like Walmart that have pharmacies, aside from just drugstores like CVS or Walgreens.

Football stadiums, major league ballparks and fairgrounds are being turned into vaccination sites around the country so health officials can ramp up shots while allowing people to maintain social distance.

A vaccination site opened Wednesday at New York City's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which was used as a field hospital after the coronavirus pandemic first struck last spring.

Check with your state or local health department for information on open sites near you. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website offers links to state health departments and their vaccination plans.

Some states like Arizona, California and Virginia have allowed counties to determine who is eligible to receive the vaccine next, said Jennifer Tolbert of the non-profit Kaiser Family Foundation.

WILL I NEED AN APPOINTMENT?

Yes. At least initially, sites will require people to sign up ahead of time and verify that they are eligible for a shot.

Appointments can usually be scheduled online and also by phone. But expect some delays in signing up and finding a free slot.

The registration system in Washington, D.C., was quickly overwhelmed after the city opened up vac-

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clines to residents 65 and older on Monday. People reported problems with the website and hours-long waits to register by phone.

WILL I WAIT IN LINE?

You may have to sit in your car or stand in line depending on where you get the vaccine. But appointments are designed to minimize those waits and allow people to maintain a safe social distance while in line.

Georgia pharmacist Jonathan Marquess said Tuesday that he has given out about 1,000 shots so far, and his customers haven't had to wait long. The independent drugstore owner said he's spaced appointments 10 minutes apart to avoid lines and keep people apart.

"Be patient, we will get to you," he said.

HOW WILL THE VACCINATIONS WORK?

The process is fairly simple, like getting a flu shot. People may have to show their identification or verify their eligibility before they get jabbed in the arm. Shots will be recorded in state and local vaccine registries.

Those with a history of severe allergic reactions may be asked to wait 30 minutes after the shot before leaving, while most others will only have to wait 15 minutes. This will be required even for people who use drive-through clinics.

Pharmacists and nurses are trained to handle the rare allergic reactions that can occur, said Kathleen Jaeger, an executive with the National Association of Chain Drug Stores.

"This is not new to the COVID vaccine," she said, noting that some sort of waiting period is recommended for all vaccines.

There are two vaccines available in the U.S. made by Pfizer and Moderna. Both require two doses three or four weeks apart for full coverage. Recipients can expect to receive a card and phone or email reminders to return for their second shot of the same vaccine.

WHAT'S THE COST?

It should be free. The government is paying for the vaccine itself. And you shouldn't be charged a copay or other fee to get it.

The cost for giving the shot will be covered by private and government insurance. If you don't have insurance, providers can tap a government fund to cover costs.

AP Reporter Candice Choi contributed to this report.

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

Amazon seeks to keep right-wing app Parler offline

SEATTLE (AP) — Seattle-based Amazon.com, Inc. has asked a federal judge to deny a request to reinstate the cloud-service account for conservative social media network Parler, claiming Parler shrugged off police violence content on its site before and after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Amazon's lawyers made the claim on Tuesday, a day after Parler on Monday filed a lawsuit against Amazon claiming a breach of contract and antitrust violation after its account was suspended and effectively removed from the internet, The Seattle Times reported.

The lawsuit claims Amazon colluded with Twitter to "kill Parler's business — at the very time it is set to skyrocket," the complaint said.

Amazon's attorneys, Ambika Doran and Alonzo Wickers, said there was no merit to Parler's claims and that the case centered on Parler's "demonstrated unwillingness" to remove content that threatens public safety.

Amazon argued that the lack of content moderation led to a "steady increase" in violent content, a violation of its terms of service.

Amazon said Parler contracted with the company in 2018 and agreed not to host harmful content. Amazon also notified Parler that it retained the right to suspend accounts immediately if they breach Amazon's

terms of service.

Amazon claimed a conspiracy theory, touted by President Donald Trump, that the election was fraudulent and the results needed to be overturned were spread on Parler and contributed to the siege on the Capitol where five people died. Social media companies, including Facebook and Twitter suspended thousands of accounts linked to the events on Jan. 6.

Attorney David Groesbeck, who is representing Parler, had not responded to requests for comment and his website redirects to an "under construction" page.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's call to action distorted in debate

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House impeachment debate on Wednesday heard a distorted account of President Donald Trump's remarks to his supporters a week ago when he exhorted them to "fight like hell" before they swarmed the Capitol.

REP. GUY RESCENTIALER, R-Pa.: "At his rally, President Trump urged attendees to, quote, unquote, peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard. There was no mention of violence, let alone calls to action."

THE FACTS: Trump's speech was a call to action — a call to fight and save the country.

"Our country has had enough," he told those who went on to stage the violent siege of the Capitol.

"We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about. To use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with, we will stop the steal."

Rescenthaler accurately quoted a line from Trump, when the president told supporters "I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."

But throughout his remarks, Trump spoke of the need to "fight," to be angry, to stop President-elect Joe Biden from taking office.

— "We fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

— "We want to go back, and we want to get this right because we're going to have somebody in there that should not be in there and our country will be destroyed, and we're not going to stand for that."

— "Nobody knows what the hell is going on. There's never been anything like this. We will not let them silence your voices. We're not going to let it happen. Not going to let it happen." The crowd repeatedly chanted "Fight for Trump!" "Thank you," Trump said.

He assailed "weak," "pathetic" Republicans who were not standing with him in his push to overturn the election results, and said "there'd be hell all over the country" if Democrats had been robbed of an election win.

"But just remember this," he went on. "You're stronger, you're smarter. You've got more going than anybody, and they try and demean everybody having to do with us, and you're the real people. You're the people that built this nation. You're not the people that tore down our nation."

—"We will not be intimidated into accepting the hoaxes and the lies that we've been forced to believe over the past several weeks."

He told his refuted stories of "ballot harvesting" and thousands of dead people voting.

—"And we got to get rid of the weak congresspeople, the ones that aren't any good, the Liz Cheneys of the world, we got to get rid of them. We got to get rid of them."

He perhaps meant challenging Republicans like Rep. Cheney of Wyoming in primaries, telling the crowd "in a year from now, you're going to start working on Congress." But he did not say exactly what he meant by getting rid of people.

"So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue," he concluded after more than an hour.

He didn't walk, but they did, bearing Trump flags, overwhelming police and occupying the Capitol in an hours-long melee that left five people dead and exposed Trump to the impeachment charge of inciting an insurrection.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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Tom Hanks heads TV special celebrating Biden's inauguration

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tom Hanks will host a 90-minute primetime TV special celebrating the inauguration of Joe Biden as president of the United States, with performances by Justin Timberlake, Jon Bon Jovi, Demi Lovato and Ant Clemons.

"I was left speechless when I was asked to perform!" Lovato wrote on Instagram. Clemons was also effusive: "To say that this is a dream come true, would be an understatement!"

Timberlake said he and Clemons would perform their new song "Better Days," adding: "This song was our way of doing what little we could to encourage everyone to stay hopeful."

The special will be broadcast live on ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC and MSNBC beginning at 8:30 p.m. ET on Jan. 20. It will also be streamed live on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Twitch, Amazon Prime Video, Microsoft Bing, NewsNOW, DirectTV and U-verse.

According to producers, the show "will showcase the American people's resilience, heroism, and unified commitment to coming together as a nation to heal and rebuild."

The inauguration will look different from other presidential inaugurations because of last week's riot at the U.S. Capitol. Security will be extremely tight around the area.

The event was already going to be pared down because of COVID-19; Biden had asked supporters to stay home and watch from afar. In keeping with crowd size restrictions to slow the spread of the virus, traditional activities like the parade and the inaugural balls will be virtual.

Anti-Semitism seen in Capitol insurrection raises alarms

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a mob of supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol last week clamoring to overturn the result of November's presidential election, photographs captured a man in the crowd wearing a shirt emblazoned with "Camp Auschwitz," a reference to the Nazi concentration camp.

Two white nationalists known for racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric livestreamed to their online followers after breaking into the Capitol during the deadly insurrection. And video circulated on social media showed a man harassing an Israeli journalist who was trying to do a live report outside the building.

The presence of anti-Semitic symbols and sentiment at the Capitol riot raised alarms among Jewish Americans and experts who track discrimination and see it as part of an ongoing, disturbing trend. As the threat of further chaos lingers over Washington and state capitals ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, they called for more forceful rejection of the conspiracy- and falsehood-driven worldviews on display among the mob.

The insurrection was "not so much a tipping point" for anti-Semitism but rather "the latest explicit example of how (it) is part of what animates the narratives of extremists in this country," said Oren Segal, vice president of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

"People are going to have to ask themselves, were they clear enough in condemning the hatreds that coalesced on Jan. 6?" he added.

On Tuesday, the Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience at Rutgers University-New Brunswick and the Network Contagion Research Institute released a report that identified at least half a dozen neo-Nazi or white supremacist groups involved in the insurrection.

Anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. hit a four-decade high in 2019, according to the ADL's internal tracking.

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Although some high-profile recent anti-Semitic attacks were not linked to far-right groups — such as the 2019 assault on a New York rabbi's Hanukkah party — several others were, most prominently the deadly 2017 white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Three-quarters of extremist-related murders in the U.S. over the past 10 years were committed by right-wing extremists, Segal said, citing ADL data.

Eric Ward, executive director of the progressive anti-discrimination group Western States Center, linked the far-right conspiracy theory QAnon, adherents of which were at the forefront of the insurrection, to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the infamous 20th-century screed that falsely claimed Jews were colluding to take over the world.

QAnon's unfounded assertion of a shadowy cabal "mirrors exactly the anti-Semitic track, the false narrative, of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion," Ward said. "That is the real danger of the anti-Semitism in this moment." QAnon believers also allege a false conspiracy to harm children, paralleling another anti-Semitic trope, he noted.

"It is no stretch to say there were visible signs of anti-Semitism in the makeup" of the riot, Ward said, "but the real power of anti-Semitism in the events on Wednesday is actually buried within the narrative."

The man photographed wearing the Auschwitz shirt was arrested in Virginia Wednesday. Robert Keith Packer, 56, was arrested in Newport News, charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds, and knowingly entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds without lawful authority.

Despite anti-Semitic elements, at least one Jewish participant was drawn to take part in the assault on the Capitol: Federal agents on Tuesday arrested Aaron Mostofsky, the son of a New York judge, who was part of the crowd that broke in. Mostofsky, who was seen sitting in the building clad in furs and a police vest, told the New York Post he believed the baseless claim that the election was stolen from Trump.

Ward called Mostofsky's involvement a sign of the patchwork nature of the far-right coalition and noted broadly that "authoritarianism and anti-democratic tendencies are not merely the terrain of white people."

David Harris, CEO of the American Jewish Committee, said not everyone who came to the Trump-promoted rally that preceded the assault on Congress was "stoked" by extremist and hate-fueled ideologies.

But he urged those people to ask themselves, "Who am I enabling, however unintentionally, and how do I channel my own protest without being coopted by the lunatic fringe?"

During the rise of Nazism, Harris added, "it was the soft-core group, not the hard-core group, that allowed itself to be coopted."

Segal of ADL agreed: "One of the dangers of anti-Semitism and extremism is it wraps people up," he said, "and takes them into situations that now have serious consequences."

Many Jewish Americans were dismayed by what they saw broadcast from the Capitol halls, such as one rioter strolling through its halls carrying a Confederate flag.

Rabbi Jay Kornsgold of Beth El Synagogue in New Jersey, who serves as treasurer for the Rabbinical Assembly, said his Holocaust-survivor parents taught their children they should do everything possible to make sure discrimination against Jews doesn't return to the fore.

"When you see it in the nation's capital, right in front of your face, it pierces the heart," Kornsgold said.

In the wake of the insurrection, which left five people dead including a Capitol Police officer, two online stores that had permitted the creation and sale of "Camp Auschwitz" shirts removed them from their sites.

Looking ahead, Harris of AJC urged Jewish leaders to do their part in combatting the rise of QAnon.

"It seems to me even as a matter of education, Jewish organizations and Jewish clergy have a responsibility to alert members of the Jewish community to the menace of QAnon and its ilk," he said.

Associated Press writers Ben Finley and Denise Lavoie contributed from Norfolk, Va.

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Rare Tintin comic book art set to sell for millions in Paris

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By THOMAS ADAMSON and OLEG CETINIC Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Not even the coronavirus can get in the way of intrepid Belgian reporter and comic book legend Tintin.

Comic book lovers and tourists alike can catch a socially distanced glimpse of a Tintin drawing by Hergé in Paris before it goes under the hammer Thursday, estimated to sell between 2 and 3 million euros and possibly break the record for the most expensive comic book art in history.

The 1936 work in Chinese ink, gouache and watercolor, was destined as a cover for *The Blue Lotus*, the fifth volume of the Belgian journalist's adventures. But it never sat on any book store shelves because it was rejected for being too expensive to reproduce on a wide scale - a victim of its own rare craftsmanship.

"They had to do a four color process printing, with an additional color. (But the publisher) thought that the comic albums were already expensive. Reproducing this cover art would increase the production costs," said comics expert Eric Leroy at Art Curial auction house by the Champs-Élysées avenue.

As the name "Blue Lotus" suggests, the art work places Tintin in Asia. A huge red dragon appears on a black background by the Belgian reporter's petrified face. It is a prized addition to the universe of Tintin, the subject of recent shows in London and Barcelona, a 2011 Hollywood adaptation, a videogame and an app.

In "Blue Lotus," Tintin travels to China during the 1931 Japanese invasion to investigate and expose - along with his dog Snowy - Japanese spy networks, drug-smuggling rings and other crimes.

But the huge interest in this work has raised a host of questions among French media regarding the work's provenance - whether it was a gift to the son of Tintin's printer or a drawing simply never returned to the artist.

There is no question, however, of its authenticity. On Thursday, Hergé, whose real name was Georges Remi, could break the record for the most expensive piece of comic book art at 2.6 million euros that was previously set by himself.

"We set the previous record for the 'Pages de Garde' in 2014 ..it would be fair for this piece to break this record. Hergé had done only five comic covers using this technique of direct color so it's very rare," Leroy said.

Central African Republic soldiers repel rebels at capital

By JEAN FERNAND KOENA and CARLEY PETESCH Associated Press

BANGUI, Central African Republic (AP) — Security forces in Central African Republic repelled attacks by rebels trying to seize the capital early Wednesday after intense fighting on the city's outskirts, officials said, in a major escalation of violence that has rocked the country since last month.

At least one Rwandan peacekeeper has been killed, and another injured, according to the U.N. mission in the country. At least 30 rebels have been killed, according to Prime Minister Firmin Ngrebada.

The rebels are protesting the re-election on Dec. 27 of President Faustin-Archange Touadera. Following the Jan. 4 announcement of Touadera's victory, the rebel coalition threatened to take the capital. They had also taken towns in other parts of the country before the election.

The army is supported in its battle against the rebels by forces from Rwanda, Russia, France and the United Nations.

The fighting began early Wednesday at the entrance to Bangui, near its PK11 and PK12 areas and in the Bimbo neighborhood, Prime Minister Ngrebada said in a post on Facebook.

"The attackers who came in large numbers to take Bangui have been vigorously pushed back," he said.

Residents described heavy gunfire in various parts of Bangui.

The Minister of Public Security, Gen. Henri Wanzet-Linguissara confirmed the attacks Wednesday.

"Early this morning, the criminals, the rebels and enemies of the people of Central African Republic, the mercenaries and terrorists, including the Central Africans who lead them, they launched the assault in the Begoua sector. But the defense and security forces did not let their guard down," he said.

U.N. forces in Central African Republic, known as MINUSCA, and other allied forces engaged as well, he said.

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"We stood up as one man and we routed them. They are on the run everywhere," he said, asking Bangui's residents to be vigilant and signal the presence of rebels so that they can be tracked.

Abakar Sabone, spokesman for the rebel coalition and head of military operations who had warned of an attack on Bangui earlier this month, accused the government of being behind the chaos. He said Touadera must sign agreements with the rebels.

"We must protect our country, defend the interests of this country," he said. "If it is about war, we have weapons. Touadera has abused the confidence of the people."

The fighting around Bangui comes one week before the Constitutional Court is to rule on the validity of the election results. The opposition had urged the court to order a re-run of the vote because of the insecurity and alleged irregularities.

Former president Francois Bozize has been blamed for inflaming the violence, which erupted after the constitutional court rejected his candidacy in December.

The attackers have used rocket-propelled grenades against both the army and U.N. forces, said Richard Moncrieff from the International Crisis Group, who called the rebels' attacks part of an ongoing coup attempt.

"It seems likely that their intention is to cause trouble and to push the United Nations to defend Bangui, therefore leaving provincial towns vulnerable," he told The Associated Press. Moncrieff said that while the rebels currently did not deploy enough combatants to take the capital, the coming days will be telling.

Bangui has a much larger U.N. contingent than in 2013, when rebels last took the capital and overthrew Bozize, so the capital is likely to remain secure, he said. However, if widespread fighting on the outskirts of the capital continues and increases, "there is a real risk of polarization between different ethnic communities or simply between different political militia," he said.

The fighting is a setback to Touadera's incoming government as it had hoped to rebuild state authority, the army and national police, he said. The rebels have shown they do not intend to cooperate with a peace agreement signed in 2019 and also "have proven their capacity to disrupt life outside the capital very significantly," Moncrieff said.

While it's unlikely immediate talks between the rebels and the government will take place given the violence Wednesday, it will be important for that possibility to remain open, he said.

Negotiations with the political opposition remain key, he added, after they rejected results on the grounds of insecurity that caused few registered people to vote outside the capital.

The U.N. mission in Central African Republic, known as MINUSCA, condemned the attacks on the capital city.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA, Mankeur Ndiaye, said that it holds former president Francois Bozize and his allies responsible for the attacks.

"The mission holds them responsible for the consequences of this violence on the civilian population and stresses that attacks against peacekeepers can be considered as war crimes and prosecuted," he said in a statement.

A judicial investigation has been opened into the role of Bozize, who was in exile until returning to the nation in December 2019, according to the Attorney General at the Bangui Court of Appeal.

Bozize, who took power in a coup in 2003 and ruled until 2013, faces an international arrest warrant for "crimes against humanity and incitement of genocide." He also faces U.N. sanctions for his alleged role in supporting the rebel groups that resisted the Seleka in 2013.

The mineral-rich Central African Republic has faced deadly inter-religious and inter-communal fighting since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power from Bozize after long claiming marginalization. Resistance to Seleka rule eventually led to Muslims being targeted en masse, with some beaten to death, mosques destroyed and tens of thousands forced from the capital in 2014.

Petesch reported from Dakar, Senegal. AP Senior Producer Yesica Fisch in Dakar, Senegal contributed.

Indonesia starts mass COVID vaccinations over vast territory

By EDNA TARIGAN and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian President Joko Widodo received the first shot of a Chinese-made coronavirus vaccine Wednesday after the government authorized it for emergency use and began efforts to vaccinate millions of people across the vast archipelago in one of the world's most populous countries.

Indonesia's vaccination program is the first large-scale use outside of China of the Sinovac Biotech Ltd. vaccine. It poses massive challenges in a country whose thousands of islands stretch across an area about as wide as the continental United States and where transportation and infrastructure are limited in many places. Health officials have also noted it will be difficult to keep the vaccine at the required 36–46 degrees Fahrenheit (about 2-8 degrees Celsius) to maintain its safety and effectiveness.

After President Widodo, top military, police and medical officials also received shots, as did the secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council, the clerical body that last week ruled the vaccine was halal, or acceptable for use under Islamic law.

A health care worker, businesspeople and a social media influencer also got the vaccine to encourage others to follow suit once it is available to them. Officials have said they will prioritize health care workers, civil servants and other at-risk populations, and the two-dose vaccine will be free for all Indonesian citizens.

"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.

While the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been greeted with much fanfare in the West, its relatively high price and requirement for ultra-cold storage mean that other shots, like Chinese, Russian and the Astra-Zeneca vaccines, are more likely to be distributed to much of the developing world, even as experts have said more data needs to be shared about the Chinese and Russian products.

Indonesia plans to vaccinate two-thirds of its population of about 270 million people — or just over 180 million people. That means it needs about 427 million shots, given the estimate that 15% may be wasted, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin 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," Sadikin said on Wednesday.

He noted that given Indonesia's enormous population — the world's fourth largest — its vaccination program is key to worldwide efforts to protect enough people so that the global community reaches herd immunity.

But he cautioned that great obstacles remain.

"We know that the cold-chain distribution is not complete. This is the obstacle," Sadikin said this week. "We are worried."

The rollout comes as Indonesia registered the daily record in COVID-19 infections and fatalities on Wednesday, with 11,278 new cases and 306 new deaths reported in the last 24 hours. The country has recorded more than 858,000 infections and over 24,900 deaths.

Some scientists warn that not enough data has been published about the effectiveness or safety of the Sinovac vaccine — and there is uncertainty over just how protective it is. It has yet to be tested in tens of thousands of people in the kind of rigorous study considered necessary before being licensed for wide use.

Researchers in Brazil last week had pegged the vaccine as 78% effective at protecting against symptomatic illness — but this week, after a closer look at mild cases, they announced data showing overall effectiveness is just over 50%.

"There's no doubt" about the new calculations, said Dr. Denise Garrett of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, who is watching the Brazilian data. "That means if you vaccinate 100 people, 50 will be protected against the virus and 50 won't."

But she called it "meaningful" that those who fall ill despite vaccination should still be less likely to suffer serious symptoms.

Researchers in Turkey and Indonesia had announced the vaccine was more effective, but those stud-

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ies were far too small to be conclusive, and scientists had been watching Brazil's study of approximately 12,500 volunteers in hopes of more clarity. Global health authorities have said any vaccine that is at least 50% effective would be useful.

Besides Indonesia, China and Bolivia have granted conditional use authorization for the Sinovac vaccine. Several other countries have purchase agreements for millions of doses, including the Philippines, Singapore and Ukraine.

Chinese health officials have said that some 9 million vaccine doses have been administered in China, though the number of people who received the Sinovac shot itself has not been disclosed. China has several vaccines in development.

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 that use based on clinical trial data and after the Indonesian Ulema Council declared the vaccine halal.

Associated Press writer Mauricio Savarese contributed to this report from Sao Paulo.

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Colombia struggles to keep social leaders safe

By ASTRID SUÁREZ and MARKO ÁLVAREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Just taking a walk in the streets of Colombia's capital can feel dangerous for Luz Nelly Santana.

The Afro-Colombian community leader sometimes she uses a hat or a turban for disguise. She always wears a bulletproof vest. And she's followed by a bodyguard assigned by the government.

"I get death threats on the phone every month," Santana said, "and once a man entered my office and said he was going to kill me."

Santana, who runs an organization that helps community leaders fleeing violence to settle in Bogota, is one of more than 3,700 activists given some sort of protection from Colombia's government.

The country is widely seen as one of the world's most dangerous places to be a community leader or advocate for human rights or environmental issues. Last year 120 community leaders were murdered in Colombia according to the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Human Rights, up from 107 a year earlier.

Decades of bloody civil conflict involving government forces, leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries linked to landowners and powerful drug trafficking groups have created an atmosphere in which many factions feel little hesitation at trying to kill or intimidate those who oppose them.

Activists are often targeted for denouncing or being seen to interfere with drug trafficking or illegal logging or mining, or for trying to protect communities confronting armed gangs.

Santana survived a 1994 massacre in which active guerrillas attacked a street party organized by another leftist faction that was trying to abandon arms and embrace above-ground politics. She and her daughter huddled at home as 35 people were being killed outside, and decided to flee to the capital where she has lived ever since.

Colombia's Attorney General's Office says most of the attacks in recent years on community leaders have come from drug trafficking groups like the Gulf Clan and elements of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia that broke off from the guerrilla group after it demobilized following a 2016 peace deal with Colombia's government.

Officials also say that a smaller rebel group, the National Liberation Army, has been involved in attacking social leaders.

Camilo Gonzalez Posso, president of the Institute for Peace and Development think tank, said much of the violence stems from groups fighting to control drug routes and businesses, such as illegal mines, abandoned by the former rebels after the peace agreement.

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"We thought that our situation would improve with the peace deal, but it hasn't turned out that way" said Clemencia Carabalí, an activist in the southwestern province of Cauca who helps mobilize victims of Colombia's conflicts to seek reparations. "Many times I can't even leave my house, and I have to avoid moving around at certain times and going to some places" she said.

Others have taken more extreme measures. Luis Ernesto Olave, from the western province of Choco, said he had to leave Colombia several times after receiving death threats from the National Liberation Army. Now 46, he's spent half of his life promoting human rights and fighting against illegal mining and corruption in his province.

"We have noticed that when community leaders are threatened they go silent, as well as their organizations, and that interrupts the creation of new groups" said Sirley Muñoz a spokeswoman for Somos Defensores — "We are Defenders" — an organization that tracks threats against activists.

On Dec. 5, indigenous leader Miguel Tapi was killed in the district of Bahia Solano on Colombia's Pacific coast. Following the murder, more than 800 members of his community fled their village.

Colombian officials have said that protecting social leaders is a "national priority" and the government has strengthened a unit to prosecute crimes against them, devoting more resources for bodyguards and bulletproof vehicles.

But critics say these plans have failed to reduce the violence. The U.N. high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, recently urged the government to increase protection for activists in rural areas.

Many keep working despite the threats, though sometimes from afar.

Darwin Cuero, from the town of Tumaco on Colombia's Pacific coast, fled to Bogota after two of his brothers were murdered and he received threats. The Cuero family were well-known activists in Tumaco who had backed the 2016 peace deal.

Darwin said he will continue to work with victims' organizations to seek justice.

"While I am alive and breathing, I will continue to do what I can to bring attention to the rights of victims" Cuero said. "The Colombian state has not been able to guarantee their right to life."

Irish PM sorry for 'profound wrong' of unwed mothers homes

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Ireland's prime minister issued a formal state apology Wednesday to the thousands of unmarried women and their children who endured pain, shame and stigma at church-run institutions, saying his government was determined to start righting the country's wrongs.

Prime Minister Micheal Martin's apology came a day after the final report of an inquiry said 9,000 children died in 18 mother-and-baby homes — which housed women and girls who became pregnant outside marriage — during the 20th century. The inquiry was part of a process of reckoning in overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Ireland, where church-run institutions were often tied to a history of abuse.

Martin said Ireland must acknowledge the scandal as part of its national history and "show our deep remorse." He apologized on behalf of his government for the "profound and generational wrong" visited upon mothers and their babies who ended up in the institutions.

"They should not have been there," he said in Ireland's parliament. "The state failed you, mothers and children in these homes."

Martin said it was deeply distressing that authorities at the time knew about the very high mortality rate at the homes but did not appear to have intervened. The report said 15% of all children in the homes died from disease and infections like stomach flu, almost double the nationwide infant mortality rate.

Martin added: "We must learn the lesson that institutionalization creates power structures and abuses of power, and must never again be an option for our country in any circumstance."

Church-run homes in Ireland housed orphans, unmarried pregnant women and their babies for most of the 20th century. The mothers were abandoned by their families and hidden away out of shame, and many of the children were separated from their mothers for adoption.

The institutions came under intense scrutiny after historian Catherine Corless in 2014 tracked down the

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death certificates for nearly 800 children who died at a mother-and-baby home in western Ireland — but could only find a burial record for one child.

Investigators later found a mass grave containing remains of babies and young children in an underground sewage structure on the grounds of the home, which was run by an order of Catholic nuns and closed in 1961.

The commission of inquiry said about 56,000 unmarried mothers and about 57,000 children had lived in the homes it investigated. Most were admitted in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 14, the 14th day of 2021. There are 351 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 14, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and French General Charles de Gaulle opened a wartime conference in Casablanca.

On this date:

In 1784, the United States ratified the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War; Britain followed suit in April 1784.

In 1858, Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, and his wife, Empress Eugenie, escaped an assassination attempt led by Italian revolutionary Felice (fay-LEE'-chay) Orsini, who was later captured and executed.

In 1914, Ford Motor Co. greatly improved its assembly-line operation by employing an endless chain to pull each chassis along at its Highland Park, Michigan, plant.

In 1963, George C. Wallace was sworn in as governor of Alabama with the pledge, "Segregation forever!" — a view Wallace later repudiated.

In 1964, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy, in a brief televised address, thanked Americans for their condolences and messages of support following the assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, nearly two months earlier.

In 1968, the Green Bay Packers of the NFL defeated the AFL's Oakland Raiders, 33-14, in the second AFL-NFL World Championship game (now referred to as Super Bowl II).

In 1970, Diana Ross and the Supremes performed their last concert together, at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas.

In 1972, the situation comedy "Sanford and Son," starring Redd Foxx and Demond Wilson, premiered on NBC-TV.

In 1975, the House Internal Security Committee (formerly the House Un-American Activities Committee) was disbanded.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed an accord to stop aiming missiles at any nation; the leaders joined Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk in signing an accord to dismantle the nuclear arsenal of Ukraine.

In 2010, President Barack Obama and the U.S. moved to take charge in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, dispatching thousands of troops along with tons of aid.

In 2013, Lance Armstrong ended a decade of denial by confessing to Oprah Winfrey during a videotaped interview that he'd used performance-enhancing drugs to win the Tour de France.

Ten years ago: In an unprecedented popular uprising, Tunisian protesters enraged over soaring unemployment and corruption drove President Zine El Abdine Ben Ali (ZEEN ehl AH'-bih-deen behn-ah-LEE') from power after 23 years of iron-fisted rule. A funeral was held for U.S. District Judge John Roll, who was among six people killed in the Tucson, Arizona, shooting rampage that wounded Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. The national Republican Party ousted chairman Michael Steele and chose Wisconsin party chief Reince Priebus (ryns PREE'-bus) to lead in the run-up to the 2012 presidential race.

Five years ago: During a Republican presidential debate in North Charleston, South Carolina, Donald

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Trump and Ted Cruz clashed over the Texas senator's eligibility to serve as commander in chief and the businessman's "New York values." Chicago city attorneys released a grainy 2013 surveillance video showing the fatal shooting of a 17-year-old Black carjacking suspect by a white police officer. Attackers set off suicide bombs and exchanged gunfire outside a Starbucks cafe in Indonesia's capital Jakarta in a brazen assault that left seven people dead. Actor Alan Rickman, 69, died in London. Rene Angelil, 73, singer Celine Dion's husband and manager, died at his suburban Las Vegas home.

One year ago: As House Democrats prepared to send articles of impeachment to the Senate for the trial of President Donald Trump, they released a trove of documents obtained from a close associate of Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, including a handwritten note that mentioned asking Ukraine's president to investigate "the Biden case." Iran said authorities had made arrests for the accidental shootdown of a Ukrainian passenger plane by an Iranian missile. "Jeopardy" viewers saw veteran Ken Jennings beat James Holzhauer and Brad Rutter to capture the \$1 million prize in the fourth night of the show's "Greatest of All Time" tournament.

Today's Birthdays: Blues singer Clarence Carter is 85. Singer Jack Jones is 83. Actor Faye Dunaway is 80. Actor Holland Taylor is 78. Actor Carl Weathers is 73. Singer-producer T-Bone Burnett is 73. Movie writer-director Lawrence Kasdan is 72. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Maureen Dowd is 69. Rock singer Geoff Tate (Queensryche) is 62. Movie writer-director Steven Soderbergh is 58. Actor Mark Addy is 57. Former Fox News Channel anchorman Shepard Smith is 57. Actor/producer Dan Schneider is 57. Rapper Slick Rick is 56. Actor Emily Watson is 54. Actor-comedian Tom Rhodes is 54. Rock musician Zakk Wylde is 54. Rapper-actor LL Cool J is 53. Actor Jason Bateman is 52. Rock singer-musician Dave Grohl (Foo Fighters) is 52. Actor Kevin Durand is 47. Actor Jordan Ladd is 46. Actor Ward Horton is 45. Actor Emayatzy Corinealdi is 41. Retro-soul singer-songwriter Marc Broussard is 39. Rock singer-musician Caleb Followill (Kings of Leon) is 39. Actor Zach Gilford is 39. Actor Jake Choi is 36. Actor Jonathan Osser is 32. Actor-singer Grant Gustin is 31. Singer/guitarist Molly Tuttle is 28.