

Groton Daily Independent

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Game scores from last night

Varsity: Groton Area 59, Roncalli 52
JV: Roncalli 29, Groton Area 23 (OT)
C Game: Groton Area 35, Roncalli 16



Upcoming Schedule

Friday, Jan. 15

5 p.m.: Girls Basketball at Roncalli with C game followed by JV and Varsity

Saturday, Jan. 16

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

Monday, Jan. 18

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

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Portions of I-29 and I-90 to Reopen at 6:30 a.m. CST; I-29 North to North Dakota Border to Reopen at 7:30 a.m. CST

PIERRE, S.D. -- The South Dakota Departments of Transportation and Public Safety say Interstate 29 from Sioux Falls to the Iowa border and Interstate 90 from Sioux Falls to the Minnesota border will reopen at 6:30 a.m. CST this morning (Friday).

Interstate 29 from Sioux Falls north to the North Dakota border will reopen at 7:30 a.m. CST. Interstate 90 remains closed into Minnesota at this time as well.

Officials advise motorists that driving conditions remain difficult throughout much of the state. Roadways, especially across the eastern part of the state, are ice covered, snow-packed and slippery.

Travelers today are asked to use extreme caution, take your time, reduce speed, avoid distractions, wear your seatbelt (all occupants), do not use cruise control, be prepared for changing conditions and allow extra space between you and the car in front of you. Be especially cautious around bridge ends and overpasses.

SDDOT snowplows crews are out working and motorists are reminded plows travel at 25 mph or less and to stay eight car lengths behind the plow to allow ample stopping time on icy roadways. Never pass in a snow cloud and remember, they are clearing the road in front of you.

Visit <https://sd511.org>, download the app (SDDOT 511) or call 5-1-1 to check the latest road conditions and travel advisories before heading out. Sign up for My511SD for closure notifications by text message or email.

If you must travel, the departments of Transportation and Public Safety recommend travelers also take the following steps.

- Wear your seatbelt
- Travel during the day
- Drive with your headlights on (not daytime running lights) so you can be seen by other motorists from the front and rear
- Don't use cruise control on icy or snow-covered roads
- Use highly traveled roads and highways
- Keep family and friends informed of your travel schedule and route
- Call 511 or visit safetravelusa.com for road conditions
- Keep a winter weather survival kit in your car. The kit should include blankets, warm clothing, water, energy bars, a flashlight, a distress flag, a shovel and matches
- Travel with a charged cell phone, but don't rely on it to get you out of a bad situation
- Change travel plans as weather conditions warrant
- If you do get stranded:
 - Stay in your vehicle
 - Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes an hour to stay warm
 - When the engine is running, open a window slightly to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Periodically clearing snow from the exhaust pipe will also help prevent carbon monoxide buildup
 - When it's dark outside, turn on the interior light so rescuers can see you
 - Put up a distress flag, or spread a large colored cloth on the ground to attract attention from rescuers

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Groton Area School District

Active COVID-19 Cases

Updated January 13, 2021; 3:46 PM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's January Column – Caregiver Support Program Expands

Caregivers play an important role in the health and well-being of veterans, and their undertakings are often a 24/7 job. We want caregivers for our heroes to know there are improved services and programs to assist them.

Caregivers can be spouses, partners, adult children, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in-laws, grandchildren, friends, or neighbors. These caregivers are often forced to put their lives on hold to manage their veterans' healthcare needs, and if you asked them, they would tell you that taking care of their hero is one of the greatest honors they have been given.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). While the specifics can be somewhat complicated, more people who provide critical care to veterans can be eligible for financial and other support through the VA.

The expansion of PCAFC includes eligible veterans that have a single or combined VA service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher, regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness, or disease. This is a notable change to the definition of serious injury from past regulations and addresses the complexity and expense of keeping veterans at home with their families who provide personalized care.

The expansion of PCAFC will occur in two phases. The first phase has begun and will include eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty in the active, military, naval, or air service on or before May 7, 1975. Phase two will go into effect in approximately two years and will include eligible veterans of all eras.

Additionally, the new program changes the stipend payment system, defines new procedures for revocation and discharge, and improves communication between the VA and the caregivers.

All veteran caregivers are encouraged to visit with their local county or tribal veterans service officer about these changes afforded by the PCAFC.

Caregivers can also contact their respective VA Medical Center (Sioux Falls 605-336-3230 – ext. 5080), or (Hot Springs – 605-347-7000 – ext. 17071), or visit: <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers/>.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

#326 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

It was a pretty rough day. We're back over 250,000 new cases today at 254,300 on the day. That brings our total, just one day after passing 23 million, to 23,364,500, 1.1% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations are hanging in there at 130,391, our sixth consecutive day without setting a record. We don't usually go that long. This doesn't mean things are great.

About one-third of residents of Los Angeles County have been infected so far in this pandemic, and the New Year's surge hasn't fully arrived yet, although we should be there by the weekend. Hospitalizations do appear to be leveling off in California, and that's a good thing because it appears only around 1000 ICU beds remain available in this state with 40 million residents. Louisiana is the latest state to see huge surges in infections and hospitalizations in the last week. Arizona reports record hospitalizations and ICU numbers. Pennsylvania has hospitalizations nearly double the spring peak.

We had our second-worst day yet for deaths with 4254 of them. The total is now 388,688, 1.1% more than yesterday and on track to surpass 400,000 by Monday or so. The latest CDC ensemble forecast puts the number of Americans projected to die from Covid-19 over the next three weeks at 92,000. That's well over 4000 per day, so there are likely to be a whole lot more days like today.

The CDC has released early mortality estimates for the first two quarters of 2020; the remainder of the year will take quite some time yet before estimates are ready. The age-adjusted all-cause mortality rate in the US for the first quarter of 2020 was 769 per 100,000 population and in the second quarter was 840 per 100,000. Compare with the second quarter of 2019 which was at 702 per 100,000. If you remember all of the conversations we've had about excess deaths at one time or another (most recently in Update #315 posted just a couple of weeks ago on January 3 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4314331798583193>), you will recall that we knew we were having far more than "usual" number of deaths and that not all, but many of those are attributable to this virus.

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) estimates the death rate for Covid-19 in the second quarter at 109 per 100,000; compare that to 166 per 100,000 for heart disease and 139 for cancer, which makes Covid-19 the third-leading cause of death for the quarter, coinciding nicely with that spring surge we saw. CDC statisticians told CNN last week that they expect this virus will finish the year in that position as the third-leading cause of death for the year. Pretty tragic.

There is some analysis for the entire year, although it should be noted that figures from more recent months will likely see some revision as records are finalized; not all 2020 death certificates have even been reported to NCHS yet. Nonetheless, in the period from March 15 to December 26, deaths nationwide were 18 percent above normal; that's around 400,000 people. Now these are deaths from all causes, and so there is a lot packed into these figures which will take some time to sort out. It appears deaths from some causes are increased because of overwhelmed hospitals, of people who didn't go in for treatment due to fear of infection, and of people who didn't see physicians for regular care because of the pandemic. We expect a great many more future deaths from things like missed cancer screenings; those will be harder to tease out from the data in upcoming years. Deaths from some other causes are reduced as people traveled less, stayed home more, and drove less; but there have been three peaks in excess deaths since the pandemic began, and those peaks coincide with the three peaks in Covid-19 deaths we've seen so far. There are excess deaths in all states, ranging from two percent (Hawaii) to 66 percent (New York City). Hard to interpret this too many ways.

And something else we should not lose sight of is what is happening in communities of color. In Los Angeles County, death rates among Latino people grew eight-fold in a two-month period—from 3.5 deaths per day per 100,000 to 28 deaths per day per 100,000. It's worse for Black residents whose death rates have increased from less than 1 per day per 100,000 to 15 per day per 100,000. Los Angeles County is the center of some of the worst trouble we have at present, but the direction, if not the magnitude, of these trends holds across the country. I cannot find the comparable statistics for Native communities, but from the reports I am seeing, those would be equally shocking. Whatever the population as a whole is suffering, these marginalized communities are suffering many, many times worse, and this is not really

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being addressed at present.

We've talked about ivermectin from time to time, most recently in my Update #303 posted December 22 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4281566265193080>. At that time, the latest information I had from the NIH was from August. Well, those good folks have updated their stance on the drug to say, in a very up-to-the-minute sort of way, pretty much what they've been saying all along.

In brief, ivermectin is an FDA-approved anthelmintic (treatment for parasitic worms) which also enjoys wide veterinary use because, as it turns out, pets and livestock suffer from worms somewhat more frequently than humans in the US. The drug also inhibits replication of the coronavirus in cell cultures in the lab, but the blood concentrations of ivermectin needed to achieve those results would require taking doses as much as 100 times larger than those approved for use in humans at this time. No one thinks the FDA's going to go for something like that without some serious studies first. The drug also, according to the NIH statement, "demonstrates potential anti-inflammatory properties in some in vitro [laboratory] studies, properties which has been postulated to be beneficial in the treatment of COVID-19," but not in actual people. They go on to say, "Results from adequately powered, well-designed, and well-conducted clinical trials are needed to provide more specific evidence-based guidance on the role of ivermectin for the treatment of COVID-19." In short, so much for that until they see some studies.

Epidemiologists are seeing an interesting side-effect of the pandemic: record lows in seasonal bacterial and viral infections: respiratory syncytial virus (colds and more severe illness in some), influenza, norovirus ("stomach flu"), metapneumovirus (colds and more severe illness in some), parainfluenza virus (colds), common coronaviruses (colds). What's going on? Probably largely the social distancing and mask-wearing we're doing are vastly reducing transmissions of these other pathogens too. Those measures work better on old familiar viruses than they do on shiny new ones like SARS-CoV-2 because most of us have seen them before and have some level of immunologic memory, even if we're not completely protected. Thing is, without our annual exposure, we might all be more susceptible when this pandemic is over and we go back to our old ways; some experts think we might be in for a big surge in those viruses in the relatively near future, although no one can say for sure. Also, there's been an unprecedented demand for flu vaccine this winter, so that is likely playing a role as well. And there's another interesting phenomenon called viral interference whereby infection with any virus activates release of interferon, an element in our innate (nonspecific) immune response which blocks infection with other viruses. So people who've been infected, with or without symptoms, by SARS-CoV-2 may be getting an interferon boost in dealing with all these other seasonal viruses. Viral interference may also be a factor in why children are skating by for the most part without suffering from Covid-19 themselves: One respiratory virus which has not stopped circulating in children is rhinovirus, and that may be offering them some protection. Unfortunately, according to one expert, "[Rhinovirus has] been wiped out in adults" this winter. We'll see what the future holds, but I'm going to say I'll take the occasional cold with a lot less complaining after this.

Another member of Congress has tested positive for Covid-19 in the wake of the lockdown at the US Capitol building last week. Members were in rooms which were far from spacious, and some of them refused to mask up, even in those close quarters; They spent a few hours together in those conditions. This was an expected result.

Regarding this new, more highly transmissible variant of the coronavirus which surfaced in the UK a few weeks ago, B.1.1.7, it was believed children would be as likely as adults to get and to transmit it; but there has been detailed contact-tracing done by Public Health England which shows this is not true. Along with everyone else, children are more likely to transmit this variant, but they're still a whole lot less likely to spread it than adults—same sort of picture as with the older variants, only stepped up a notch for everyone. Muge Cevik, infectious disease expert at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, told the New York Times, "There was a lot of speculation at the beginning suggesting that children spread this variant more. That's really not the case." These days, we find ourselves needing to be grateful when the news isn't great, but is not as bad as we'd expected either.

I am hearing a lot about vaccine hesitance among health care workers. News reports put the proportion of nursing home employees who refuse vaccination at anywhere from 60 percent to two-thirds and indicate the numbers are similar in hospitals. I don't entirely know what's operating there; however I do

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know that many of the lower-paid employees in these institutions are people of color who have excellent historical reasons not to trust new-fangled interventions, having been subjected to abhorrent medical experimentation in the not-that-long-ago past. Additionally, many of them are mistrustful of their employers, also with good reason; I've heard story after story of employees who got Covid-19 and were denied paid time-off to recover, accused of carelessness for getting sick, and even fired for missing work. One such told the New York Times, "We are left behind in the dust—no one sticks up for us." These folks have no particular reason to see their employers as interested in their welfare, so it's not a shock that appeals to their health are falling on deaf ears.

Some of them also mistrust the government's role in the vaccines' development, citing what they perceive as government failures to control the pandemic in the first place. Another employee said, "I don't want to hear what the government has to say about it—we don't trust them anyway." It is also true that we've made no coordinated national effort to offer credible education about these vaccines, their safety profiles, and their effectiveness in preventing disease; this is a significant failing.

At the same time, it is dangerous for so many of these employees to remain unvaccinated, dangerous to them and to the people they serve. Employers are now offering incentives like cash, additional time off, and gift cards. And some are considering requiring vaccination as a condition of employment. There has been guidance from the EEOC that requiring employees to be vaccinated is permissible. This is a most difficult problem, and honestly, many of these institutions would have trouble replacing these traditionally low-paid and little-regarded employees. I suspect incentives would be more effective in the long run, and I would at least like to see a massive educational effort before anyone starts firing folks.

I was reminded today of an important role each of us can play in vaccine safety. When you receive a Covid-19 vaccine, you have the opportunity to participate in a CDC reporting program that provides the means for an ongoing study of vaccine safety; it is these efforts that make vaccines safer by tracking adverse events as they occur. You can sign up for the V-safe program at <https://vsafe.cdc.gov>. You can begin up to six weeks after you received the vaccine, which means nearly everyone in the US who's been vaccinated is still in that window. Once you've signed up, supplying your mobile phone number, you will receive periodic notifications via text, reminding you to fill out a short health report. This is easy, and it's a way to do a public service that costs you nothing but a few minutes now and then. I offer this with a big thanks to my former student who mentioned the program to me this morning.

I saw something today that provides an important perspective for the put-upon feelings all of us have suffered from time to time during this pandemic. We start feeling pitiful—like we're missing important things. Don't get me wrong: We are. But there is another way to think about the things we've missed, for example, our recent holidays spent without the usual scrum of family around, and it has, not so surprisingly, to do with thinking about someone else instead of yourself. Here it is, in the form of a reader letter to the Washington Post's "Ask Amy" column. (Note: I don't usually include links to my sources because they would make these Updates difficult to read, but since I am lifting whole paragraphs here, I am going to do so in this case. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../14e7906a-4d56-11eb...>)

"I want to give your readers a different perspective on how rough the holiday season has been.

"I am married to a police officer. We do not have children. A lot of years I am alone on Christmas or attend family events by myself because he is working or sleeping to prepare for his shift.

"And you know what? It's okay! I plan movies to watch, light some candles and buy food I love to indulge in.

"Several years ago, my mom was in the hospital on Christmas and those doctors, nurses and support staff were there, too.

"Firefighters, hotel workers and road crews do not get to celebrate with their families, either.

"For us, this is not the 'new normal,' it's just normal.

"Hopefully next year will be normal for those of you going through this 'new normal,' but remember next year that your normal is not everyone's reality."

Think about that.

And stay healthy. We'll talk again.

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Jan. 14th 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: +319 (104,512 total) Positivity Rate: 6.1%

Total Tests: 5252 (821,580 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1917 (385,382 total)

Hospitalized: +20 (5998 total) 247 currently hospitalized (-6)

Avera St. Luke's: 9 (+3) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 3 (-2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 1 (+1) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 1 (+1) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +10 (1614 total)

40s=1, 60s=3, 70s=4, 80+=2

Female: 4, Male: 6

Counties: Brookings-1, Brown-2, Clark-1, Custer-1, Day-1, Jackson-1, Oglala Lakota-1, Pennington-2,..

Recovered: +341 (98,170 total)

Active Cases: -34 (4728)

Percent Recovered: 93.9%

Vaccinations: +3408 (5360)

Vaccinations Completed: +1607 (9605)

Brown County Vaccinations: +168 (2116) 21 (+1) completed

Beadle (38) +2 positive, +3 recovered (79 active cases)

Brookings (32) +17 positive, +13 recovered (234 active cases)

Brown (70): +18 positive, +17 recovered (263 active cases)

Clark (3): +0 positive, +3 recovered (6 active cases)

Clay (12): +3 positive, +4 recovered (75 active cases)

Codington (73): +9 positive, +16 recovered (182 active cases)

Davison (53): +2 positive, +4 recovered (110 active cases)

Day (23): +3 positive, +3 recovered (28 active cases)

Edmunds (5): +3 positive, +2 recovered (51 active cases)

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

Grant (35): +2 positive, +0 recovered (36 active cases)

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

Hughes (29): +3 positive, +3 recovered (85 active cases)

Lawrence (33): +3 positive, +9 recovered (92 active cases)

Lincoln (68): +20 positive, +30 recovered (313 active cases)

Marshall (5): +2 positive, +0 recovered (12 active cases)

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

McPherson (3): +4 positive, +3 recovery (23 active case)

Minnehaha (290): +72 positive, +79 recovered (1097 active cases)

Pennington (158): +50 positive, +41 recovered (568 active cases)

Potter (3): +3 positive, +0 recovered (29 active cases)

Roberts (32): +2 positive, +4 recovered (71 active cases)

Spink (24): +2 positive, +4 recovered (28 active cases)

Walworth (14): +3 positive, +2 recovered (48 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 14:

- 4.1% rolling 14-day positivity
- 248 new positives
- 8,280 susceptible test encounters
- 78 currently hospitalized (+6)
- 1,764 active cases (-14)
- 1,365 total deaths (+8)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	433	401	797	11	Moderate	17.24%
Beadle	2565	2448	5357	38	Substantial	10.69%
Bennett	370	349	1091	8	Moderate	4.44%
Bon Homme	1499	1448	1920	23	Substantial	15.52%
Brookings	3254	2988	10474	32	Substantial	13.38%
Brown	4723	4390	11416	70	Substantial	22.59%
Brule	658	622	1723	7	Moderate	26.09%
Buffalo	415	403	857	10	Minimal	19.05%
Butte	931	881	2921	20	Substantial	16.13%
Campbell	116	108	229	4	Minimal	25.00%
Charles Mix	1173	1099	3622	14	Substantial	12.05%
Clark	324	315	887	3	Moderate	2.22%
Clay	1701	1614	4727	12	Substantial	16.74%
Codington	3641	3386	8801	73	Substantial	19.61%
Corson	456	440	912	11	Moderate	19.35%
Custer	699	676	2481	10	Substantial	12.79%
Davison	2834	2671	5883	53	Substantial	15.84%
Day	574	523	1594	23	Substantial	17.65%
Deuel	444	401	1030	7	Substantial	9.09%
Dewey	1355	1289	3588	15	Substantial	21.25%
Douglas	396	374	843	9	Substantial	31.58%
Edmunds	428	372	906	5	Substantial	9.09%
Fall River	477	448	2354	13	Substantial	9.41%
Faulk	318	301	625	13	Moderate	14.29%
Grant	859	788	1989	35	Substantial	21.05%
Gregory	493	457	1132	26	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	239	224	487	9	Moderate	10.00%
Hamlin	644	568	1575	37	Substantial	10.75%
Hand	320	307	719	4	Minimal	8.33%
Hanson	324	308	634	3	Moderate	23.81%
Harding	89	88	161	1	Minimal	0.00%
Hughes	2100	1986	5867	29	Substantial	4.11%
Hutchinson	728	675	2100	20	Substantial	13.21%

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Hyde	134	130	374	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	267	250	870	13	Minimal	33.33%
Jerauld	265	241	514	16	Minimal	15.79%
Jones	72	69	185	0	Minimal	10.00%
Kingsbury	581	534	1464	13	Substantial	9.33%
Lake	1080	1015	2884	16	Substantial	29.13%
Lawrence	2675	2550	7815	33	Substantial	11.54%
Lincoln	7162	6781	18124	68	Substantial	19.74%
Lyman	560	518	1751	9	Moderate	16.67%
Marshall	274	257	1045	5	Moderate	4.00%
McCook	709	659	1460	22	Substantial	29.31%
McPherson	215	187	509	3	Moderate	2.94%
Meade	2385	2240	6948	26	Substantial	21.02%
Mellette	230	222	672	2	Minimal	10.34%
Miner	249	216	517	7	Moderate	10.00%
Minnehaha	26189	24802	70344	290	Substantial	16.17%
Moody	570	523	1618	14	Substantial	22.73%
Oglala Lakota	1994	1873	6315	38	Substantial	16.17%
Pennington	11931	11207	35320	151	Substantial	21.05%
Perkins	307	275	706	11	Substantial	16.67%
Potter	335	303	746	3	Moderate	8.57%
Roberts	1072	969	3842	32	Substantial	20.27%
Sanborn	318	301	623	3	Moderate	35.71%
Spink	728	676	1916	24	Substantial	10.20%
Stanley	297	280	807	2	Substantial	6.52%
Sully	125	109	253	3	Moderate	10.00%
Todd	1186	1145	3917	19	Substantial	8.42%
Tripp	644	617	1366	14	Substantial	12.12%
Turner	1012	914	2434	49	Substantial	23.53%
Union	1763	1584	5595	30	Substantial	14.38%
Walworth	669	607	1678	14	Substantial	23.00%
Yankton	2607	2478	8464	27	Substantial	12.68%
Ziebach	327	290	813	8	Moderate	14.29%
Unassigned	0	0	2069	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	3980	0
10-19 years	11556	0
20-29 years	18944	4
30-39 years	17231	14
40-49 years	14944	32
50-59 years	14774	85
60-69 years	11917	204
70-79 years	6328	354
80+ years	4838	921

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	54643	771
Male	49869	843

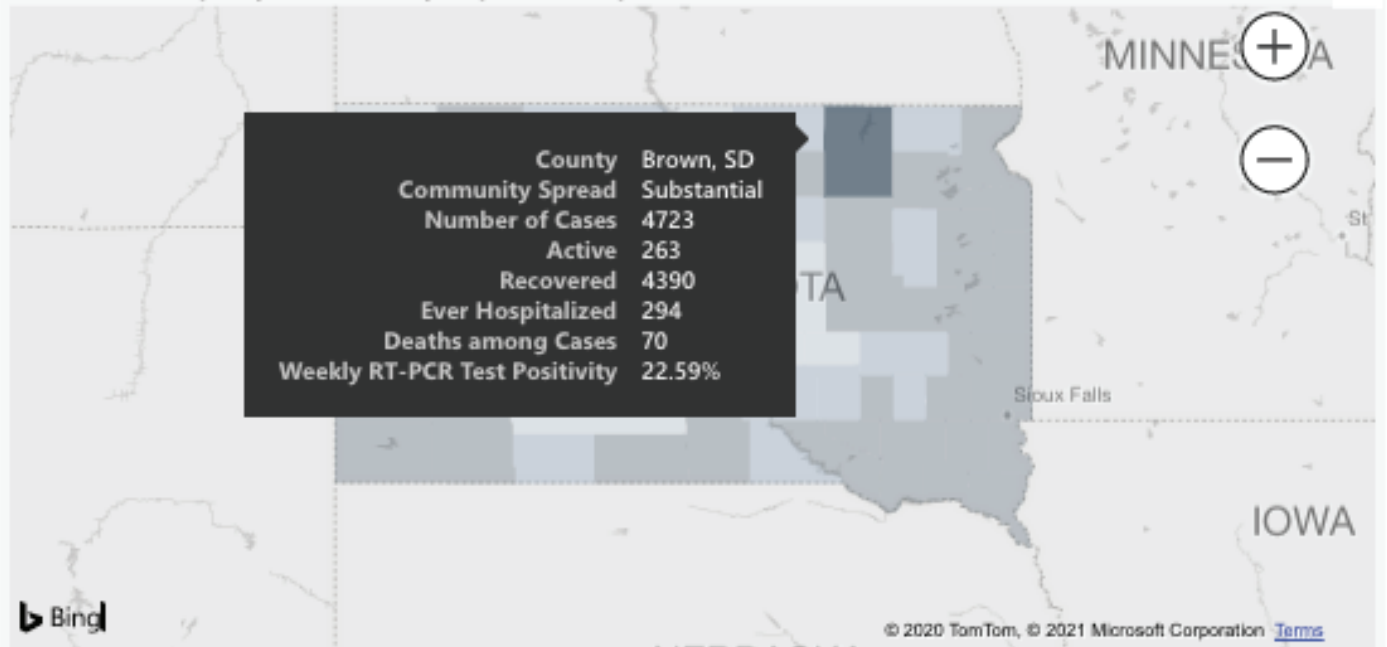
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



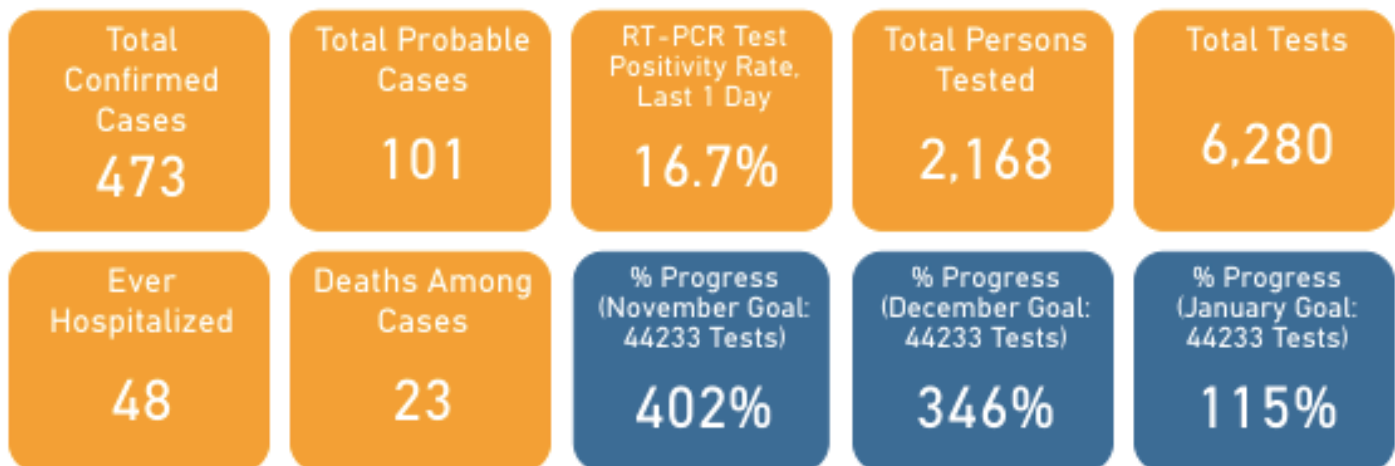
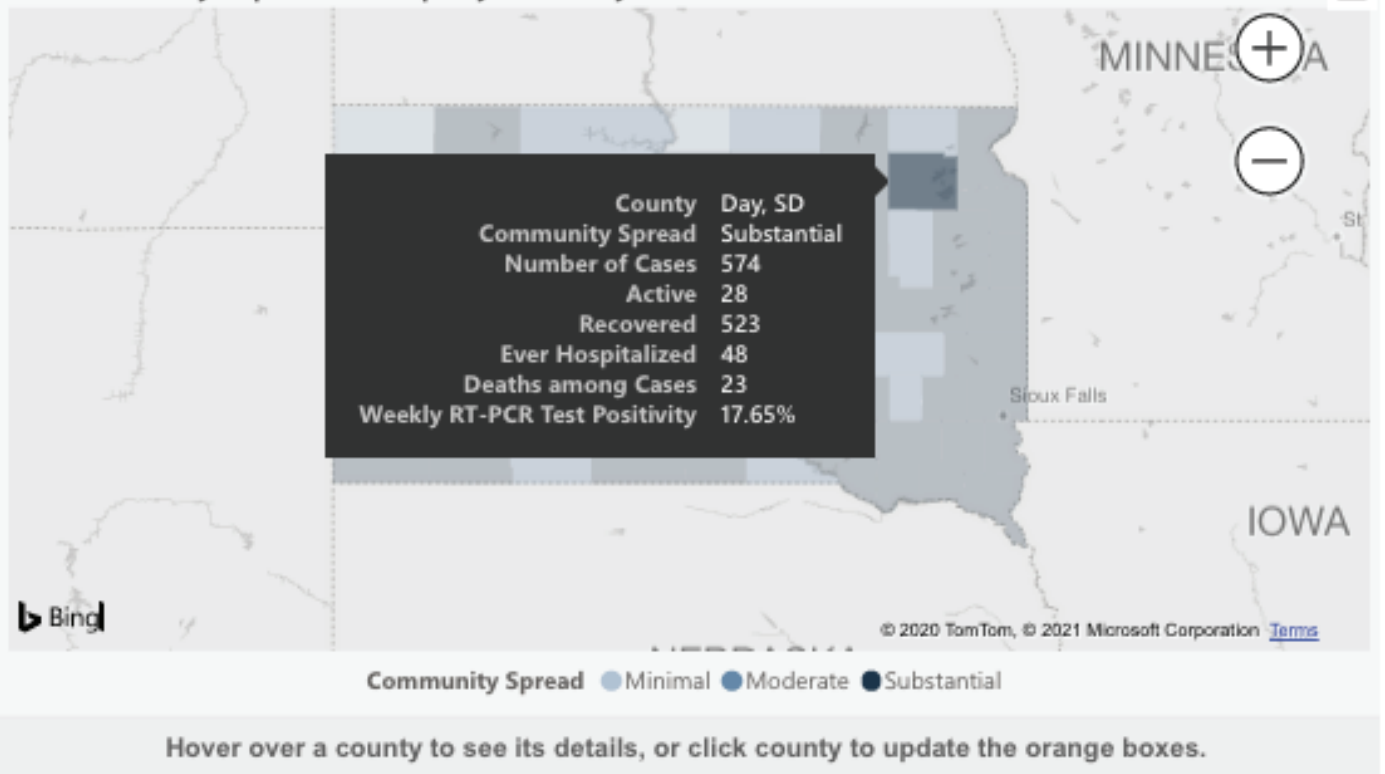
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

51,360

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

41,755

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	24,011
Pfizer	27,349

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	24,011
Pfizer - 1 dose	8,139
Pfizer - Series Complete	1,505

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	83	83	0	83
Beadle	853	469	192	661
Bennett*	51	47	2	49
Bon Homme*	419	405	7	412
Brookings	1261	829	216	1,045
Brown	2116	2,074	21	2,095
Brule*	215	211	2	213
Buffalo*	3	3	0	3
Butte	165	161	2	163
Campbell	151	125	13	138
Charles Mix*	305	299	3	302
Clark	130	118	6	124
Clay	733	663	35	698
Codington*	1559	1,193	183	1,376
Corson*	14	12	1	13
Custer*	305	275	15	290
Davison	1393	1,317	38	1,355
Day*	290	272	9	281
Deuel	173	145	14	159
Dewey*	63	61	1	62
Douglas*	194	190	2	192
Edmunds	158	156	1	157
Fall River*	242	236	3	239
Faulk	40	38	1	39
Grant*	386	370	8	378
Gregory*	236	228	4	232
Haakon*	81	81	0	81

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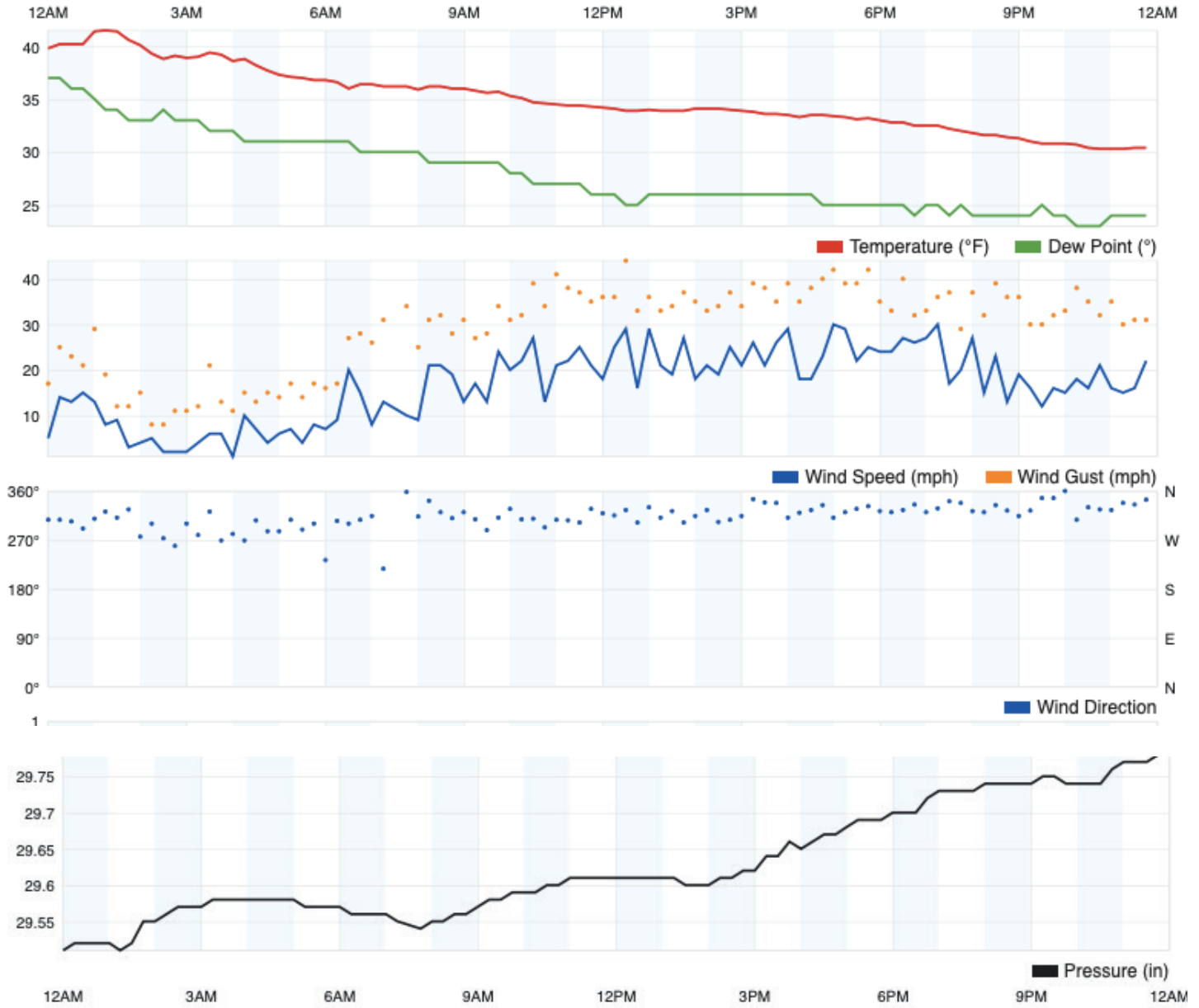
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Hamlin	230	180	25	205
Hand	184	166	9	175
Hanson	65	57	4	61
Harding	3	3	0	3
Hughes*	909	881	14	895
Hutchinson*	559	513	23	536
Hyde*	95	95	0	95
Jackson*	40	40	0	40
Jerauld	75	61	7	68
Jones*	49	45	2	47
Kingsbury	302	224	39	263
Lake	566	254	156	410
Lawrence	606	578	14	592
Lincoln	6712	2,510	2,101	4,611
Lyman*	63	61	1	62
Marshall*	200	194	3	197
McCook	307	185	61	246
McPherson	19	19	0	19
Meade*	680	502	89	591
Mellette*	4	4	0	4
Miner	92	66	13	79
Minnehaha	16674	6,972	4,851	11,823
Moody*	225	181	22	203
Oglala Lakota*	18	10	4	14
Pennington*	5150	3,468	841	4,309
Perkins*	38	38	0	38
Potter	119	115	2	117
Roberts*	472	460	6	466
Sanborn	101	91	5	96
Spink	472	454	9	463
Stanley*	129	123	3	126
Sully	30	24	3	27
Todd*	23	19	2	21
Tripp*	243	241	1	242
Turner	622	446	88	534
Union	241	209	16	225
Walworth*	308	146	81	227
Yankton	1587	1,553	17	1,570
Ziebach*	12	12	0	12
Other	1517	889	314	1,203

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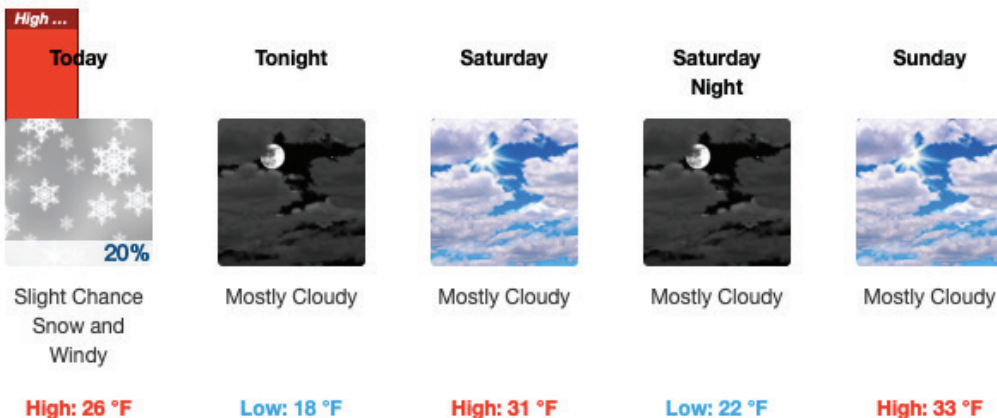
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Windy This Morning
Blizzard Conditions Continue For
Eastern SD & Western MN

Mid-Morning
Upper 20s
Windy! Snow Continues For Eastern South Dakota & Western Minnesota With Lingering Blizzard Conditions

Mid-Day
Upper 20s – Low 30s
Winds Decreasing in Intensity, Snow Decreasing in Coverage. Blizzard Conditions May Begin to Let Up

Late Afternoon
Upper 20s
Cloudy and Breezy



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

latest forecast: www.weather.gov/abr

Graphic Created
1/15/2021 3:19 AM

Strong winds continue, and snow across eastern South Dakota is leading to areas of reduced visibility. Conditions will remain about the same through the mid-morning hours, but mid to late morning and into the afternoon, winds will decrease in intensity somewhat, and snow coverage will become less, leading to better visibility.

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Today in Weather History

January 15, 1982: Snowfall amounts of one to four inches and powerful northwest winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to 60 mph caused blizzard conditions with widespread drifting across much of South Dakota and Minnesota from the early morning of the 15th to mid-afternoon on the 16th. Wind chills were lowered to 50 to 80 degrees below zero and visibilities were near zero across most of the area. One death was attributed to exposure. There were numerous weather related accidents. Some of the major accidents included; a truck blown off Interstate 90 near Murdo injuring the driver; a truck blown off Highway 281 and turned upside down in a ditch, and a truck slamming into a bridge on Interstate 90 near Murdo. The extreme cold killed numerous fruit trees at a nursery in Watertown.

January 15, 1985: Heavy snow fell in central and south central South Dakota from early evening of the 15th to around noon on the 16th with areas around Pierre receiving up to 18 inches. Generally 5 to 10 inches fell with numerous minor traffic accidents reported. Interstate 90 had a no travel advisory in a 95-mile stretch from Kimball to Murdo until the afternoon of the 16th due to low visibility and heavy drifting. Also, many schools and businesses were closed. Some snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Kennebec, 6 inches at Murdo, and 10 inches at Pierre.

January 15, 2009: The Arctic high pressure area settled in on the morning of the 15th bringing the coldest temperatures to the region in many years. The combination of a fresh and deep snow pack, clear skies, and light winds allowed temperatures to fall to record levels at many locations on the 15th. Daytime highs remained well below zero across the area. This was one of the coldest days that most areas experienced since the early 1970s. The records were broken by 1 to as much as 7 degrees.

1852: In 1852, the long, cold winter froze the Susquehanna River in Maryland to a depth of 2 to 3 feet, preventing all ferry service. Railroad officials overcame this perplexing situation by laying tracks across the ice, with trestles for inclines at either bank. During the several weeks from January 15 to February 29, approximately 1,300 cars with a total weight of 10,000 tons were hauled across the river from Havre de Grace, Maryland to Perryville, Maryland.

1932 - Up to two inches of snow whitened the Los Angeles basin of California. The Los Angeles Civic Center reported an inch of snow, and even the beaches of Santa Monica were whitened with snow, in what proved to be a record snowstorm for Los Angeles. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1952 - A six day snowstorm was in progress in the western U.S. The storm produced 44 inches of snow at Marlette Lake NV, 52 inches at Sun Valley ID, and 149 inches at Tahoe CA, establishing single storm records for each of those three states. In addition, 24 hour snowfall totals of 22 inches at the University of Nevada, and 26 inches at Arco ID, established records for those two states. The streamliner, 'City of San Francisco' was snowbound in the Sierra Nevada Range, near Donner Summit. (David Ludlum)

1967: The Green Bay Packers beat the Kansas City Chiefs, 35-10, in Super Bowl I at the Memorial Coliseum in Los Angeles. From the weather station at the USC campus in downtown LA, the high temperature was 79 degrees and the low was 51. There was a light west wind.

1972: In Flint, Michigan, daytime temperature rose to only -3 degrees. This is the second coldest maximum temperature recorded in the city of Flint since 1921. Detroit's high temperature was zero.

1987 - A powerful storm over the Southern Plateau and the Southern Rockies produced 24 inches of snow at Colorado Springs CO, including 22 inches in 24 hours, a January record. High winds in the southwestern U.S. gusted to 65 mph in the Yosemite Valley of California. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A small storm over the Atlantic Ocean produced heavy snow along the coast of North Carolina. The five inch total at Wilmington NC was their third highest for any storm in January in 117 years of records. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm in the northwestern U.S. produced up to 14 inches of snow in the Cascade Mountain Range. Light snow in the north central U.S. was just enough to push the snowfall total for January at Fargo ND past their previous all-time monthly record of 30.7 inches.

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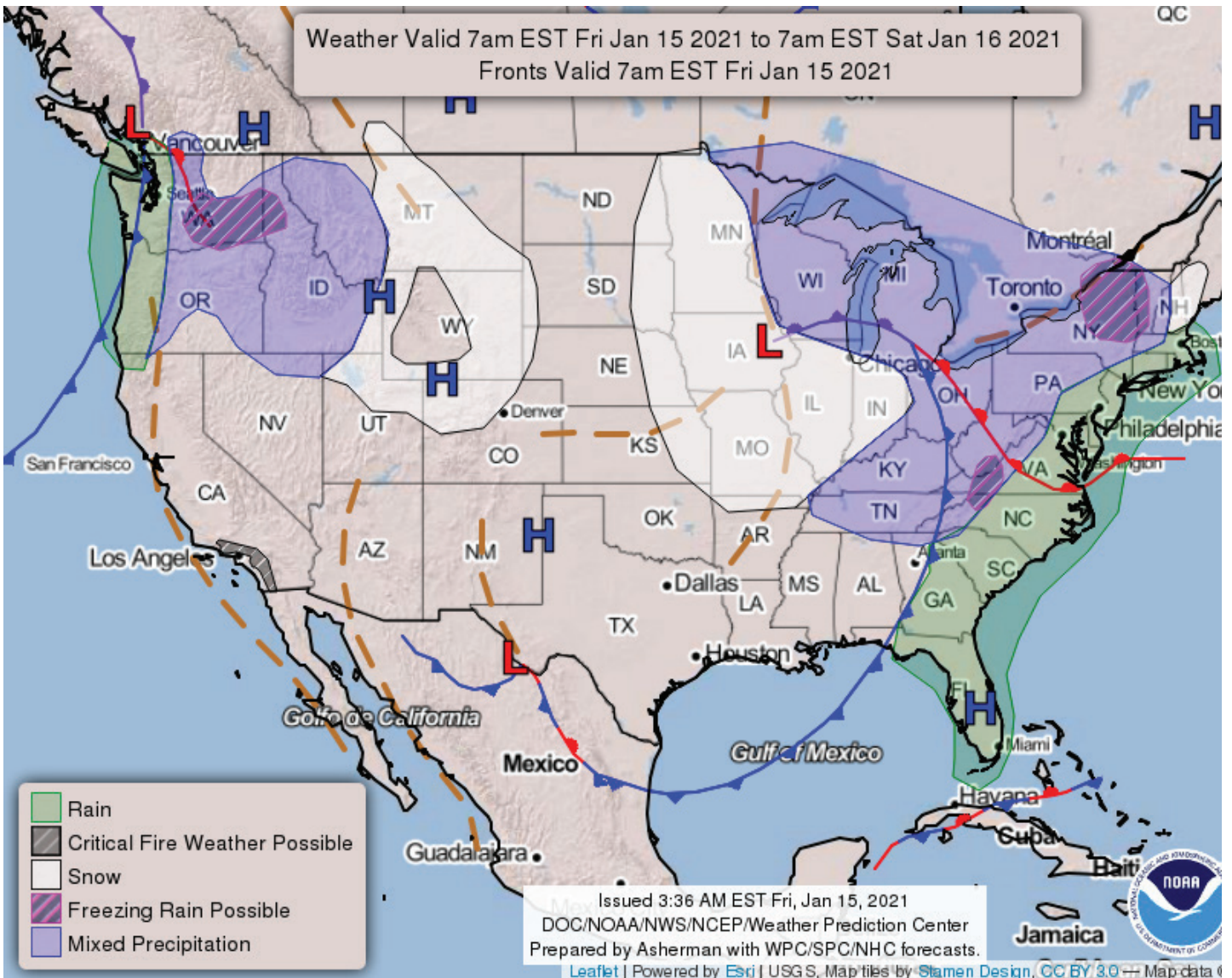
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41.5 °F
Low Temp: 30.3 °F
Wind: 44 mph

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 48° in 1931, 1942
Record Low: -42 in 2009
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.24
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.24
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:17 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09 a.m.



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THE ANSWER TO INSULTS

No one is or ever has been immune from being hurt or harmed by arrows of anger that come from those we thought were our friends. Sometimes the statements that shame and slam us even come from members of our own family. And, unfortunately, some of us may even be guilty of doing to others what they have done to us and caused them pain and sleepless nights as we seek revenge. We all know the feelings of pain and panic that come from "word wounds," and the problems they have caused us.

David faced the same issues. He spoke of those who persecuted him and wanted to tear him to pieces as a lion destroys its prey. They raged and did wickedness, brought iniquity and spoke falsehoods, and caused him trouble. Those powerful words leave very little to the imagination. He was not reporting any second-hand observations or stories that others told him of things they had experienced. People were out to get him, and he knew it.

And he responded to them in a way that sets the Christian standard for revenge. He turned the matter over to God! He began by affirming his relationship to God by declaring, "I come to you for protection, O Lord my God. Save me from my persecutors."

He knew exactly where to go, what to say, and what to do to solve his problem and heal his wounded heart: He went to His Lord knowing that only He could save him from the harm that others would do to him if they could.

We must do as David did. We must call upon the Lord to be our Defense and Defender in times of need.

Prayer: Lord, we claim the promises of Your Word, knowing that You will guide us and guard us forever against the harm and hurt of others. But we must believe! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Scripture For Today: I come to you for protection, O Lord my God. Save me from my persecutors - rescue me! Psalm 7:1

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News from the  Associated Press

Winter storm creating blizzard conditions, closing roads

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A slow-moving winter storm with gusty winds is whipping up blizzard conditions and causing hazardous travel in southwestern Minnesota and northeastern South Dakota.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for the region until 6 p.m. Friday. Winds of 30 mph and gusting as high as 60 mph were creating whiteout conditions on area roadways.

Forecasters are expecting up to 10 inches (25 centimeters) of snow along the Interstate 90 and I-35 corridors, including Fairmont, Austin, Rochester and Faribault in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation reported numerous road closures because of whiteout conditions, including westbound I-90 west of Blue Earth overnight.

The Minnesota State Patrol was responding to dozens of crashes and spinouts due to the storm.

The Minnesota Department of Health closed COVID-19 testing facilities Friday in Mankato, Albert Lea, Morris, Hutchinson and Worthington because of the weather.

THIS MONTH: South Dakota Families, Educators Find the Positive in Education by Celebrating School Choice Week

PIERRE, D.C., Jan. 15, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- In the midst of a school year like no other, South Dakota families and educators are gearing up to safely spotlight education options during School Choice Week 2021. South Dakotans are hosting 63 virtual or at-home celebrations during the Week.

Taking place annually since 2011, School Choice Week is America's largest celebration of educational choice. While typically the Week is packed with large, in-person events, school choice advocates have adapted to this year's health and safety protocols, opting for drive through scavenger hunts, virtual information sessions and showcases, online contests, drive-in movie screenings, and more.

Across the country, more than two dozen iconic U.S. landmarks and notable buildings will light up in special colors to mark the Week.

Additionally, Governor Kristi Noem issued an official proclamation recognizing Jan. 24-30 as South Dakota School Choice Week.

"The disruptions of this past year have underlined the need for school choice. Now is the time to build up more affordable, effective education choices in South Dakota," said Andrew Campanella, president of National School Choice Week. "This School Choice Week, let's talk about how we can better serve South Dakota kids from kindergarten to graduation."

In South Dakota, there are a variety of educational options available including: traditional public schools with flexible open enrollment, private schools, and homeschooling. South Dakota families with income below certain thresholds may qualify for a state-run scholarship program.

South Dakota families will be raising awareness about these choices at their virtual celebrations, which make up some of the more than 33,000 planned nationwide to spotlight K-12 education options.

To download a guide to South Dakota school choice, use the Schools Near Me tool to search for schools in your area, or see celebration photos and proclamation updates, visit schoolchoiceweek.com/south-dakota.

National School Choice Week is an independent public awareness effort; the Week is nonpartisan, non-political, and not related to any legislative advocacy campaign.

Select local celebrants are available to discuss their plans with reporters upon request. For information on celebrations planned near you, reach out to us with information about your coverage area at pressoffice@schoolchoiceweek.com.

National School Choice Week shines a spotlight on effective education options for children and is the world's largest celebration of opportunity in K-12 education. The Week is a not-for-profit effort that focuses equally on traditional public, charter, magnet, online, private, and home education options. Every January,

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participants plan tens of thousands of events and activities to raise awareness about school choice across all 50 states. Year-round, National School Choice Week develops resources and guides to assist families searching for schools or learning environments for their children.

View original content: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/this-month-south-dakota-families-educators-find-the-positive-in-education-by-celebrating-school-choice-week-301209109.html>

SOURCE National School Choice Week

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Chamberlain 62, Potter County 46

Groton Area 59, Aberdeen Roncalli 52

Hill City 66, Lead-Deadwood 53

Hot Springs 53, Edgemont 34

Lyman 65, Colome 30

Parkston 70, Wagner 60

Platte-Geddes 60, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 36

Rapid City Central 72, Sturgis Brown 48

Scotland 53, Avon 49

St. Thomas More 50, Custer 27

Sully Buttes 73, Miller 49

West River Tournament=

Upton-Sundance, Wyo. 73, Newell 29

Wall 52, Moorcroft, Wyo. 39

First Round=

Faith 60, New Underwood 26

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 62, Mitchell Christian 44

Burke 51, Colome 47

Hill City 57, Lead-Deadwood 20

Kimball/White Lake 52, Gregory 42

Mitchell 46, Pierre 36

Parkston 55, Wagner 40

Scotland 47, Avon 43

Sioux Falls Christian 50, Tea Area 49

Winner 67, Corsica/Stickney 52

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

Tribal chairman says time to 'mend' relationship with state

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Native Americans and the South Dakota government should seek out ways to cooperate following a year in which Gov. Kristi Noem and tribal leaders clashed over coronavirus measures, the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux said Thursday in the annual State of the Tribes address.

Chairman Mike Faith struck a positive tone in the speech to lawmakers, emphasizing areas where they can find common ground, including law enforcement, addiction treatment and the common experience of deaths amid the pandemic.

"It's time to mend fences, time to go forward positively with people," Faith said.

State government and the nine federally recognized tribes have an uneasy relationship that was exacer-

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bated in 2020 when several tribes set up coronavirus checkpoints at reservation borders to keep out unnecessary visitors. Noem threatened to sue to have them taken down, although she didn't follow through.

The leaders of the two tribes who sparred with the Republican governor over the checkpoints, the Oglala Lakota and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes, did not attend the address. Neither did Noem.

Three of the nine tribes were represented during the ceremony, which filled the House chamber with the sound of a pulsating drum and Lakota flag song. Tribal leaders and some lawmakers wore beadwork around their necks to represent their tribes.

The address at the beginning of the legislative session is delivered every year by one of the elected tribal leaders and is intended to promote cooperation and spell out legislative priorities from a tribal leader's perspective. Faith used the opportunity to seek support for a proposal to establish schools that would teach Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota language and culture, called Oceti Sakowin schools.

He said the schools would be important to students' self-identity and help foster a revival of Oceti Sakowin — or Sioux — culture.

"Our custom, traditions, our song and dance, it's coming back strong," Faith said.

But he also acknowledged that the pandemic threatens the culture, as tribal elders have been particularly vulnerable to the virus. The Standing Rock Sioux have prioritized Native-language speakers, people who lead ceremonies and clergy for COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Department of Health says Native Americans are disproportionately affected by the virus, making up 13% of deaths statewide while representing just 9% of the population.

Rep. Tamara St. John, a Republican who is a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, praised the tone of Faith's address as a step towards fostering partnerships to tackle issues such as drug addiction and economic development. She also said she was excited that the Oceti Sakowin school proposal was back at the legislature after failing in the House last year.

Sen. Rounds calls impeachment 'moot' for 'tarnished' Trump

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Sen. Mike Rounds on Thursday said he believes the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump is moot, signaling that he wanted the Senate to drop the trial after Democrat Joe Biden's inauguration.

Rounds, a Republican from South Dakota, told The Associated Press that Trump "tarnished his place in history" by misleading his supporters and encouraging the mob that stormed the Capitol. But Rounds argued the purpose of impeachment is to remove a president, and since Trump will soon leave office, the impeachment trial may not be allowed by the Constitution.

Rounds called a vote to convict Trump "hypothetical," saying he would rather see the Senate focus on confirming members of Biden's cabinet.

"I think if the question is moot, I don't see a reason to convict," he said.

Prior to Congress' meeting last week to count electoral votes, Rounds said he had not made up his mind on whether to object. He did not join those who objected, saying they provided no evidence of widespread election fraud.

"For the president to continue to tell people — good, honest hard-working Americans — that their votes didn't count and they were stolen, that's wrong," he said.

Rounds said he hopes Trump's political career is over.

Summit League basketball tournaments to be held without fans

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Summit League men's and women's basketball tournaments will be held without fans and moved to a smaller venue in Sioux Falls because of the COVID-19 concerns, conference commissioner Tom Douple said Thursday.

The tournament is scheduled March 6-9. It has been originally slated for the Denny Sanford Premier Center, which seats about 12,000, and now will be held at the 3,250-seat Sanford Pentagon.

"It is with deep disappointment, yet an equally deep amount of conviction that we came to this conclu-

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sion because the health, safety, and welfare of our student-athletes, coaches, administrators, fans, and the Sioux Falls community remain our highest priorities," Douple said.

This will be the 13th consecutive year the Summit League basketball tournaments will be held in Sioux Falls

State moves to next group targeted for COVID-19 vaccine

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota is moving on to vaccinating its next group of people for the coronavirus — those 80 years of age and older and those in congregate living setting.

The state Department of Health says the vaccinations beginning next week of the 1D subgroup start with those 80 or older and high-risk individuals with two or more underlying health conditions.

The state will then move to the rest of those in 1D in the coming weeks, including residents of congregate living settings, licensed independent living facilities and group homes, teachers and school staff and funeral home workers, the Argus Leader reported.

The federal government plans to increase the weekly vaccine allocation to states based on the size of a state's 65 and older population and to take into account how quickly each state is administering the vaccine to the general public.

The state has received roughly 11,000 doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines the last few weeks, health officials said.

"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," said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, state secretary of health.

As of Wednesday, nearly 40,000 people have received at least one dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines in South Dakota and almost 8,000 have received both doses.

South Dakota health officials confirmed 319 new positive COVID-19 tests and 10 new deaths due to the coronavirus, increasing the number of cases to 104,512 and number of fatalities to 1,614 since the start of the pandemic.

The update released Thursday showed 247 hospitalizations, a decrease of six in the last day. Of those patients, 56 are being treated in intensive care units.

Lawsuit: Community college program was human trafficking

By DAVID PITT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Eleven students from Brazil and Chile have filed a federal lawsuit accusing a northwest Iowa community college, a recruitment company, a pet food manufacturer and a packaging company of human trafficking and involuntary servitude.

The lawsuit filed Monday in the Northern District of Iowa says Western Iowa Tech Community College and J&L Staffing, both in Sioux City, lured the students to Iowa in 2019 under a work- and study- based visa exchange program only to push them into factory jobs that had no educational value and were unrelated to the field of study.

The lawsuit says the students were paid significantly less than U.S. employees and some of their money was deducted from their paychecks to fund kickbacks to the college and staffing agency. Two of the students are from Chile and nine are from Brazil.

Civil rights lawyer Roxanne Conlin said her clients remained in Iowa after the program ended and that the lawsuit seeks to require the college to make good on its promise to provide them with an education.

"It appears to us the documents are very clear what promises were made. It's also clear that they never had any kind of a program to teach these students robotics or the culinary arts. They worked at a pet food manufacturing company on the line," she said. "You cannot coerce or persuade people to go to work by making false promises and that's what they did here."

The jobs were at a Royal Canin pet food plant in North Sioux City, South Dakota, and Tur-Pak foods, a Sioux City company that packs and assembles food products.

Missouri-based Royal Canin said in an email response Thursday that it's aware of the lawsuit but does

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not comment on pending litigation.

Conlin filed the lawsuit under the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act; the Fair Labor Standards Act; and the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. She also claims violations of the Iowa Wage Payment Collections Act.

She's asking the court to prohibit the college and companies from any further participation in the work-and-study J-1 visa program, and to award the students monetary damages, provide them with the educational opportunities promised and compensate them for the past and future mental and emotional harm and anguish.

J&L Staffing and Tur-Pak Foods did not respond to messages seeking comment.

The students were enrolled in classes at the community college but segregated from the general student population, only taking classes with other Brazilians and Chileans in the J-1 visa program, the lawsuit alleges. It says college officials dictated when and where the students could work and under what conditions.

"Defendants collectively required plaintiffs to work under conditions that constituted involuntary servitude," the lawsuit alleges. "Defendants took advantage of the natural isolation that occurred because plaintiffs were immigrants with limited English abilities."

A spokeswoman for the community college denied the allegations.

"Western Iowa Tech Community College vehemently denies the claims brought forth in the lawsuit," said Andrea Rohlena, the college's director of marketing. "These accusations are completely untrue, sensational, and offensive. We look forward to defending the college and its employees in district court and welcome the opportunity refute these malicious allegations."

It is the second lawsuit to be filed against the community college, the recruiter and the companies. The first was filed in November on behalf of eight students from Chile who alleged they were brought to Iowa "into debt bondage at a Sioux City, Iowa, area food packaging plant and dog food factory by offering them a degree with free tuition, room, and board."

The community college began its J-1 program in early 2019 when 60 students were brought to Iowa in July and August of that year. By November that year, it was under investigation by the U.S. State Department after an anonymous complaint was filed. In January 2020, the college issued a statement saying it had learned students in the program were unhappy and blamed a "failure to clarify expectations" and "a breakdown in communication" for some of the problems.

The community college discontinued the program in March 2020 citing the coronavirus pandemic. The college said it bought airline tickets for the students to return home. Conlin said many chose to remain in the United States.

China builds new quarantine center as virus cases rise

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A city in northern China is building a 3,000-unit quarantine facility to deal with an anticipated overflow of patients as COVID-19 cases rise ahead of the annual Lunar New Year travel rush.

State media on Friday showed crews leveling earth, pouring concrete and assembling prefabricated rooms in farmland in an outlying part of Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital of Hebei province, which has seen the bulk of the new cases.

That recalled scenes from early last year, when China rapidly built field hospitals and turned gymnasiums into isolation centers to cope with a then-spiraling outbreak in Wuhan, where the virus was first detected in late 2019.

The spike in northern China comes as a World Health Organization team prepares to collect data on the origin of the pandemic in Wuhan, which lies to the south. The international team, most of which arrived Thursday, must undergo two weeks of quarantine before it can begin field visits.

Two of the 15 members were held up in Singapore over their health status. One, a British national, was approved for travel Friday after testing negative for the coronavirus, while the second, a Sudanese citizen from Qatar, again tested positive, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

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China has largely contained domestic spread of the virus, but the recent spike has raised concern due to the proximity to the capital, Beijing, and the impending rush of people planning to travel large distances to rejoin their families for the Lunar New Year, the country's most important traditional festival.

The National Health Commission said Friday that 1,001 patients were under care for the disease, 26 in serious condition. It said 144 new cases were recorded over the past 24 hours. Hebei accounted for 90 of the new cases, while Heilongjiang province farther north reported 43.

Local transmissions also occurred in the southern Guangxi region and the northern province of Shaanxi, illustrating the virus's ability to move through the vast country of 1.4 billion people despite quarantines, travel restrictions and electronic monitoring.

To date, China has reported 87,988 confirmed cases with 4,635 deaths.

Shijiazhuang has been placed under virtual lockdown, along with the Hebei cities of Xingtai and Langfang, parts of Beijing and other cities in the northeast. That has cut off travel routes, while more than 20 million people have been told to stay home for the coming days.

China is pushing ahead with inoculations using Chinese-developed vaccines, with more than 9 million people already vaccinated and plans for 50 million to have shots by the middle of next month.

About 4,000 doses are delivered daily to the Chaoyang Planning Art Museum, one of more than 240 sites across Beijing where the first of two doses was being given Friday to high-risk groups, including medical, delivery and transportation workers.

The vaccine, produced by a Beijing subsidiary of state-owned Sinopharm, is the first approved for general use in China.

"Being vaccinated is not only to protect myself but also to protect people around me," Ding Jianguang, a social worker who received her first shot earlier this month, told foreign journalists on a government-organized visit to the site.

Former World Health Organization official Keiji Fukuda, who is not part of the team in Wuhan, cautioned against expectations of any breakthroughs from the visit, saying that it may take years before any firm conclusions can be made on the virus's origin.

"China is going to want to come out avoiding blame, perhaps shifting the narrative. They want to come across as being competent and transparent," he told The Associated Press in a video interview from Hong Kong.

For its part, WHO wants to project the image that it is "taking, exerting leadership, taking and doing things in a timely way," he said.

Scientists suspect the virus that has killed more than 1.9 million people globally since late 2019 jumped to humans from bats or other animals, possibly in southwest China.

China approved the World Health Organization visit only after months of diplomatic wrangling that prompted an unusual public complaint by the head of WHO.

The delay, along with the ruling Communist Party's tight control of information and promotion of theories the pandemic began elsewhere, added to speculation that China is seeking to prevent discoveries that chisel away at its self-proclaimed status as a leader in the battle against the virus.

In Wuhan, street life appeared little different from other Chinese cities where the virus has been largely brought under control. Senior citizens gathered to drink and dance in a riverside park Friday, and residents had praise overall for the government's response to the crisis.

In other countries, "people go out arbitrarily, and they hang out and gather together, so it's especially easy for them to be infected," Xiang Nan said. "I hope they can stay home, and reduce traveling. ... Don't let the pandemic spread further anymore."

Associated Press journalists Sam McNeil and Ng Han Guan in Wuhan, China, and video producer Olivia Zhang in Beijing contributed to this report.

At least 34 dead as Indonesia quake topples homes, buildings

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By NINIEK KARMINI and YUSUF WAHIL Associated Press

MAMUJU, Indonesia (AP) — A strong, shallow earthquake shook Indonesia's Sulawesi island just after midnight Friday, toppling homes and buildings, triggering landslides and killing at least 34 people.

More than 600 people were injured during the magnitude 6.2 quake, which sent people fleeing their homes in the darkness. Authorities were still collecting information about the full scale of casualties and damage in the affected areas.

There were reports of many people trapped in the rubble of collapsed homes and buildings.

In a video released by the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, a girl stuck in the wreckage of a house cried out for help and said she heard the sound of other family members also trapped. "Please help me, it hurts," the girl told rescuers, who replied that they desperately wanted to help her.

The rescuers said an excavator was needed to save the girl and others trapped in collapsed buildings. Other images showed a severed bridge and damaged and flattened houses. TV stations reported the earthquake damaged part of a hospital and patients were moved to an emergency tent outside.

Another video showed a father crying, asking for help to save his children buried under their toppled house. "They are trapped inside, please help," he cried.

Thousands of displaced people were evacuated to temporary shelters.

The quake was centered 36 kilometers (22 miles) south of West Sulawesi province's Mamuju district, at a depth of 18 kilometers (11 miles), the U.S. Geological Survey said.

The Indonesian disaster agency said the death toll climbed to 34 as rescuers in Mamuju retrieved 26 bodies trapped in the rubble of collapsed homes and buildings.

The agency said in a statement that eight people were killed and 637 others were injured in Mamuju's neighboring district of Majene.

It said at least 300 houses and a health clinic were damaged and about 15,000 people were being housed in temporary shelters in the district. Power and phones were down in many areas.

West Sulawesi Administration Secretary Muhammad Idris told TVOne that the governor's office building was among those that collapsed in Mamuju, the provincial capital, and many people there remain trapped.

Rescuer Saidar Rahmanjaya said a lack of heavy equipment was hampering the operation to clear the rubble from collapsed houses and buildings. He said his team was working to save 20 people trapped in eight buildings, including in the governor's office, a hospital and hotels.

"We are racing against time to rescue them," Rahmanjaya said.

Relatives wailed as they watched rescuers pull a body of a loved one from a damaged home in devastated Mamuju. It was placed in an orange body bag and taken away for burial.

"Oh my God, why did we have to go through this?" cried Rina, who uses one name. "I can't save my dear sister ... forgive me, sister, forgive us, God!"

President Joko Widodo said in a televised address that he had ordered his social minister and the chiefs of the military, police and disaster agency to carry out emergency response measures and search and rescue operations as quickly as possible.

"I, on behalf of the Government and all Indonesian people, would like to express my deep condolences to families of the victims," Widodo said.

The National Search and Rescue Agency's chief, Bagus Puruhito, said rescuers from the cities of Palu, Makassar, Balikpapan and Jakarta were being deployed to help in Mamuju and Majene.

Two ships were heading to the affected areas from Makassar and Balikpapan carrying rescuers and search and rescue equipment, while a Hercules plane carrying supplies was on its way from Jakarta.

Puruhito is already leading more than 4,100 rescue personnel in a separate massive search operation for victims of the crash of a Sriwijaya Air jet into the Java Sea last Saturday.

Among the dead in Majene were three people killed when their homes were flattened by the quake while they were sleeping, said Sirajuddin, the district's disaster agency chief.

Sirajuddin, who goes by one name, said although the inland earthquake did not have the potential to cause a tsunami, people along coastal areas ran to higher ground in fear one might occur.

Landslides were set off in three locations and blocked a main road connecting Mamuju to the Majene district, said Raditya Jati, the disaster agency's spokesperson.

On Thursday, a magnitude 5.9 undersea quake hit the same region, damaging several homes but causing no apparent casualties.

Indonesia's meteorology, climatology and geophysical agency, known by its Indonesian acronym BMKG, warned of the dangers of aftershocks and the potential for a tsunami. Its chairwoman urged people in coastal areas to move to higher ground as a precaution.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of 260 million people, is frequently struck by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis because of its location on the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

In 2018, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake in Palu on Sulawesi island set off a tsunami and caused soil to collapse in a phenomenon called liquefaction. More than 4,000 people died, many of the victims buried when whole neighborhoods were swallowed in the falling ground.

A powerful Indian Ocean quake and tsunami in 2004 killed 230,000 people in a dozen countries, most of them in Indonesia.

Karmini reported from Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Latest: Nepal seeks early supply of vaccines from India

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW DELHI — The government of Nepal has asked India for early provision of coronavirus vaccines even as New Delhi indicates that it may be some time before it starts meeting demands from abroad.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali made the request during the sixth meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Commission.

Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Brazil are among several countries looking to secure vaccine supplies from India, which has given clearance for the emergency use for the vaccine developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and another developed by the Indian company Bharat Biotech.

The spokesman for India's External Affairs Ministry, Anurag Srivastava, said Thursday that it was too soon to comment on the country's ability to provide vaccines to other countries.

"We are still assessing production schedules and delivery, and we will take decisions in this regard in due course. This may take some time," he said.

On Saturday, India is launching an immunization program aimed at vaccinating 300 million people — healthcare workers, frontline workers including police, and those considered vulnerable due to their age or other diseases — by August 2021.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— Desperate effort to bring oxygen supplies to the Brazilian rainforest's biggest city
— City in northern China builds 3,000-unit quarantine facility to handle anticipated overflow of COVID-19 patients

— Dismal vaccination rates in four southern U.S. states worry health experts
— U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has unveiled \$1.9 trillion plan for tackling the coronavirus pandemic. Called the "American Rescue Plan," the legislative proposal would meet Biden's goal of administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration, and advance his objective of reopening most schools by the spring.

— While much of Europe is increasingly locked down, Spain insists it can stay open and still beat the virus. Spanish authorities insist the more contagious coronavirus variant causing havoc in Britain and elsewhere is not to blame for a sharp resurgence of cases.

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

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navirus-vaccine and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

BERLIN — Germany's president has called on white-collar workers to refrain from going to the office, if possible, to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in a televised speech Friday that "less is more, particularly in these days."

He was flanked by the heads of Germany's trade union federation and the main employers' association.

Steinmeier said he was particularly concerned about the increased contagiousness of a variant of the virus first detected in Britain and now seen in continental Europe.

Chancellor Angela Merkel plans to hold talks with the governors of Germany's 16 states on Tuesday to discuss further measures to tackle the pandemic.

BERLIN — Germany has passed the mark of 2 million confirmed COVID infections since the start of the pandemic.

The country's disease control agency said Friday that there were 22,368 newly confirmed cases over the past 24-hour period, taking the total to 2,000,958.

The Robert Koch Institute said there have been 44,994 deaths linked to the coronavirus, an increase of 1,113 in a day.

German news agency dpa reported that newspapers carried significantly more death notices during the period until October 2020 than in the previous year.

The Saechsische Zeitung daily, which covers the eastern state of Saxony now badly affected by the outbreak, had three instead of the usual two obituary pages.

BRUSSELS — Belgium is strengthening its rules for travelers entering the country by train or bus in a bid to limit the spread of a more contagious variant of the coronavirus first detected in Britain.

In a statement Friday, Belgium's Interior ministry said travelers arriving from a country outside the European Union or the Schengen space with a high contamination rate will now be submitted to the same rules as those coming by boat or plane.

The ministry said the measures are precautionary.

According to virologist Marc Van Ranst, who spoke to local broadcaster VRT on Friday, about 100 cases of people infected by new variants of the virus have been registered so far in Belgium. He said that figure could probably be multiplied by 100 for the true number.

More than 20,000 people have died of COVID-19-related causes in Belgium, a country with 11.5 million inhabitants. Health authorities said Friday that there were 17,966 additional deaths in the country in 2020 compared with the previous year.

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's education minister says authorities will start reopening schools in phases from Jan. 18 despite a steady increase in deaths and infections from the coronavirus.

Schools were closed in November when data showed that the country's positivity rate had jumped to about 7 percent.

The rate has since come down to 5.9 percent, which is still high, according to experts.

Education minister Shafqat Mahmood said Friday officials decided to reopen schools in phases because the government doesn't want to stop the learning process for children.

His remarks at a televised press conference came hours after Pakistan reported 2,417 new cases and 45 more deaths .

Pakistan has reported 514,338 infections and 10,863 deaths since the pandemic began in February.

BEIJING — China says it is now treating more than 1,000 people for COVID-19 as numbers of cases

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continue to surge in the country's north.

The National Health Commission said Friday that 1,001 patients are under care for the disease, 26 of them in serious condition. It says 144 total new cases were recorded in the previous 24 hours.

The province of Hebei, just outside Beijing, accounted for 90 of the new cases, while Heilongjiang province farther north reported 43 new cases.

While there have been no reports of hospital bed shortages, Hebei has begun constructing a new quarantine center outside the provincial capital of Shijiazhuang in case it is needed.

Shijiazhuang and the cities of Xingtai and Langfang are under virtual lockdown, confining more than 20 million people to their homes.

WILMINGTON, Del. — President-elect Joe Biden says he knows his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan "does not come cheaply" but he says America can't afford to fail to pass the plan.

Biden said Thursday night that by investing now "boldly, smartly and with unwavering focus on American workers and families," the plan will strengthen the economy, address inequity and set America on a more sustainable financial course.

Biden's plan faces an uncertain future. Democrats have narrow margins in both chambers of Congress and the legislation would be paid for with borrowed money, adding to trillions in debt the government has already incurred to fight the pandemic.

WILMINGTON, Del. — U.S. President-elect Joe Biden says his priority is effectively combatting the twin crises of a pandemic and the sinking economy.

Biden said during a speech Thursday night that "we have to act now" to help the "millions of Americans, through no fault of their own," who have lost "the dignity and respect that comes with a job and a paycheck."

He discussed the framework of his \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan," which includes \$1,400 checks for most Americans and would extend a temporary boost in unemployment benefits and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September.

The proposal also includes plans to speed up the vaccine rollout and provide financial help to individuals, states and local governments and businesses struggling with the prolonged economic fallout.

Russia withdraws from Open Skies Treaty after US departure

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia said Friday it will withdraw from an international treaty allowing observation flights over military facilities following the U.S. exit from the pact.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the U.S. withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty last year "significantly upended the balance of interests of signatory states," adding that Moscow's proposals to keep the treaty alive after the U.S. exit have been cold-shouldered by Washington's allies.

The treaty was intended to build trust between Russia and the West by allowing the accord's more than three dozen signatories to conduct reconnaissance flights over each other's territories to collect information about military forces and activities.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that Moscow is now launching the relevant procedural moves to withdraw from the pact.

U.S. President Donald Trump declared Washington's intention to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty in May, arguing that Russian violations made it untenable for the United States to remain a party. The U.S. completed its withdrawal from the pact in November.

Russia denied breaching the treaty, which came into force in 2002. The European Union has urged the U.S. to reconsider and called on Russia to stay in the pact.

Moscow has argued that the U.S. withdrawal will erode global security by making it more difficult for governments to interpret the intentions of other nations, particularly amid Russia-West tensions after the Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014.

US executes Virginia gang killer despite COVID-19 infection

By MICHAEL TARM and DENISE LAVOIE AP Legal Affairs Writers

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — The U.S. government executed a drug trafficker Thursday for slaying seven people in a burst of violence in Virginia's capital in 1992, with some witnesses in the death-chamber building applauding as the 52-year-old was pronounced dead.

Corey Johnson's execution went ahead after his lawyers scrambled to stop it on grounds that the lethal injection of pentobarbital would cause him excruciating pain due to lung damage from his coronavirus infection last month.

He was the 12th inmate executed at the prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, since the Trump administration restarted federal executions following a 17-year hiatus. The last during the presidency of ardent death-penalty advocate Donald Trump was set for Friday.

Johnson, who his lawyers said was severely mentally disabled, was pronounced dead at 11:34 p.m.

When asked if he had any last words, Johnson appeared distracted, focusing on a room to his left designated for members of his family. Still glancing around, he responded, "No. I'm OK."

Seconds later, he said softly while gazing intently at same room, "Love you."

After the execution, his lawyers released Johnson's last statement. In it, he said the pizza and strawberry shake he ate and drank before the execution "were wonderful" but he didn't get the jelly-filled doughnuts he wanted. He added: "This should be fixed."

And he apologized.

"I want to say that I am sorry for my crimes," he said. "I wanted to say that to the families who were victimized by my actions." He also said he wanted his victims' names to be remembered.

As the lethal drug began flowing through IVs into his arms strapped to a cross-shaped gurney, Johnson lifted his his wrist and waved to someone in the room for his family. A low murmur emanated from the room in which someone seemed to be praying and offering words of reassurance to Johnson.

For two minutes, Johnson continued to try to speak. But suddenly, his eyelids drew down hard and his mouth fell agape. He moved only slightly after that. It took a little more than 20 minutes for him to die.

Reporters could not see into into the witness rooms reserved for his family and for relatives of his victims. But it was clear the clapping came from the latter as an official pronounced Johnson dead. Someone also could be heard whistling.

Johnson's execution and Friday's scheduled execution of Dustin Higgs are the last before next week's inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who opposes the federal death penalty and has signaled he'll end its use. Both inmates contracted COVID-19 and won temporary stays of execution this week for that reason, only for higher courts to vacate those stays.

Lawyers have previously argued the pentobarbital injections cause flash pulmonary edema, where fluid rapidly fills the lungs, sparking sensations akin to drowning. The new claim was that fluid would rush into the inmates' COVID-damaged lungs immediately while they were still conscious.

But during Thursday's execution, there weren't outward signs Johnson ever experienced pain — though some medical experts say pentobarbital can have a paralyzing effect that masks pain inmates might be feeling as they die. Government experts dispute that.

Johnson was implicated with playing a role in one of the worst bursts of gang violence Richmond had ever seen, with 11 people killed in a 45-day period. He and two other members of the Newtowne gang were sentenced to death under a federal law that targets large-scale drug traffickers.

Johnson's lawyers described a traumatic childhood in which he was physically abused by his drug-addicted mother and her boyfriends, abandoned at age 13, then shuffled between residential and institutional facilities until he aged out of the foster care system. They cited numerous childhood IQ tests discovered after he was sentenced that place him in the mentally disabled category. They say he could only read and write at an elementary school level.

In a statement, Johnson's lawyers, Donald Salzman and Ronald Tabak, said the government executed a person "with an intellectual disability, in stark violation of the Constitution and federal law" and vehemently

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denied he had the mental capacity to be a so-called drug kingpin.

"We wish also to say that the fact Corey Johnson should never have been executed cannot diminish the pain and loss experienced by the families of the victims in this case," the statement said. "We wish them peace and healing."

Government filings spelled Johnson's name "Cory," but his lawyers say he spells it "Corey."

Richard Benedict, who was Johnson's special education teacher at a New York school for emotionally troubled kids, said Johnson was hyperactive, anxious and reading and writing at a second- or third-grade level when he was 16 and 17.

Prosecutors, however, said Johnson had not shown that he was mentally disabled.

"While rejecting that he has intellectual disabilities that preclude his death sentences, courts have repeatedly and correctly concluded that Johnson's seven murders were planned to advance his drug trafficking and were not impulsive acts by someone incapable of making calculated judgments, and are therefore eligible for the death penalty," prosecutors argued in court documents.

C.T. Woody Jr., the lead homicide detective on the case, said that during his interrogations of Johnson, he denied any involvement in the killings and said police were trying to frame him because of lies people were telling about him.

"It did not seem to me that he had any kind of mental problems at all except his viciousness and no respect for human life — none whatsoever," Woody said.

Former Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Vick Jr., one of the prosecutors in the case, said the violence committed by Johnson and his fellow gang members was unmatched at the time. One of the gang's victims was stabbed 85 times and another was shot 16 times. Johnson was convicted of being the shooter in a triple slaying, and participating in four other capital murders, including shooting a rival drug dealer 15 times.

Lavoie reported from Richmond, Va. Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo in Washington and News Researchers Rhonda Shafner and Jennifer Farrar contributed to this report.

Amid cacophony since Capitol siege, key officer stays silent

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

In the week since a mob laid siege to the U.S. Capitol, the House has impeached President Donald Trump. Dozens of people have been arrested nationwide over participation in the riots. Politicians and business leaders are loudly condemning the violence. Twitter and other social media sites have banned Trump and thousands of other accounts.

Yet amid all the noise, a Capitol Police officer hailed as a hero for confronting the insurrectionists and leading them away from Senate chambers has remained silent.

Officer Eugene Goodman isn't saying whether he thinks he saved the Senate, as many of the millions who've viewed the video believe. In fact, Goodman isn't saying anything at all publicly — not to reporters, not on social media. And he's asked the force's union, bosses, family and friends to help him maintain his privacy and not publicly discuss the events of Jan. 6.

But the video speaks volumes.

Goodman, a Black man facing an overwhelmingly white mob, is the only officer seen for a full minute of the footage, shot by reporter Igor Bobic of HuffPost. Goodman stands in front of the rioters, walks backward until he reaches a collapsible baton lying on the floor, and picks it up. "Back up ... back it up!" he yells, keeping his eyes on the mob. He turns and runs upstairs, waving the baton, as the group follows.

Goodman calls "second floor" into his radio, then takes a brief glance and half a step to his left at the top of the stairs. Two chairs sit on either side of an entrance to the U.S. Senate chamber, just a few steps away. Dozens of rioters are right in front of him, no other officers to be seen.

Goodman shoves one of the rioters and walks to the right, away from the chamber. The mob follows, and Goodman leads them to a room where other officers wait.

The time on the video is 2:14 p.m. The Senate stopped its proceedings to begin clearing the chamber

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at 2:15 p.m.

Five died in the riots, including one of Goodman's fellow officers. Legislative offices were trashed, gallows were built outside, and a video showed a woman shot dead while journalists, Congress members and staff hid.

The images of Goodman spread via social media and news sites, a foil to the bloody and messy scenes elsewhere at the Capitol. People called him brave, impressive, effective. They dissected the video, guessing about his strategy and decision-making.

But not all the commentary has been kind. Backing up and running away is weak, some said. It was a staged photo op, others alleged.

Goodman has been silent. He didn't respond to text messages and phone calls The Associated Press left at potential numbers for him. The head of the Capitol Police union said only that Goodman didn't want to talk to reporters. Spokeswoman Eva Malecki said the Capitol Police isn't giving interviews or discussing Goodman's actions.

Public records shed a little light on Goodman. He served in the Army as an infantryman for more than four years, leaving with the rank of sergeant in December 2006 after a year in Iraq. He has worked for the Capitol Police since at least mid-2009.

But that's about it. Goodman's friends, family, buddies he would have known from the military, members of Congress and force colleagues all begged off interviews about him. They say he wants to maintain his privacy.

Online and in much of the public eye, Goodman is a hero. Plenty of people, famous and not, suggested he has earned the Medal of Honor. A Republican and two Democrats in the U.S. House introduced a bill Thursday to give him the Congressional Gold Medal.

"If not for the quick, decisive, and heroic actions from Officer Goodman, the tragedy of last week's insurrection could have multiplied in magnitude to levels never before seen in American history," said Democratic U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri.

But the representatives didn't respond to messages asking if they met with Goodman. In a tweet promoting the bill, they show not a formal photo of Goodman in uniform, but an image of him facing the mob — his eyes wide open, mask down below his nose, baton behind him.

AP news researcher Randy Herschaft contributed.

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>.

Capitol rioters included highly trained ex-military and cops

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JAKE BLEIBERG and JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump's supporters massed outside the Capitol last week and sang the national anthem, a line of men wearing olive-drab helmets and body armor trudged purposefully up the marble stairs in a single-file line, each man holding the jacket collar of the one ahead.

The formation, known as "Ranger File," is standard operating procedure for a combat team that is "stacking up" to breach a building — instantly recognizable to any U.S. soldier or Marine who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was a chilling sign that many at the vanguard of the mob that stormed the seat of American democracy either had military training or were trained by those who did.

An Associated Press review of public records, social media posts and videos shows at least 21 current or former members of the U.S. military or law enforcement have been identified as being at or near the Capitol riot, with more than a dozen others under investigation but not yet named. In many cases, those who stormed the Capitol appeared to employ tactics, body armor and technology such as two-way radio headsets that were similar to those of the very police they were confronting.

Experts in homegrown extremism have warned for years about efforts by far-right militants and white-supremacist groups to radicalize and recruit people with military and law enforcement training, and they

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say the Jan. 6 insurrection that left five people dead saw some of their worst fears realized.

"ISIS and al-Qaida would drool over having someone with the training and experience of a U.S. military officer," said Michael German, a former FBI agent and fellow with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. "These people have training and capabilities that far exceed what any foreign terrorist group can do. Foreign terrorist groups don't have any members who have badges."

Among the most prominent to emerge is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel and decorated combat veteran from Texas who was arrested after he was photographed wearing a helmet and body armor on the floor of the Senate, holding a pair of zip-tie handcuffs.

Another Air Force veteran from San Diego was shot and killed by a Capitol Police officer as she tried to leap through a barricade near the House chamber. A retired Navy SEAL, among the most elite special warfare operators in the military, posted a Facebook video about traveling from his Ohio home to the rally and seemingly approving of the invasion of "our building, our house."

Two police officers from a small Virginia town, both of them former infantrymen, were arrested by the FBI after posting a selfie of themselves inside the Capitol, one flashing his middle finger at the camera.

Also under scrutiny is an active-duty psychological warfare captain from North Carolina who organized three busloads of people who headed to Washington for the "Save America" rally in support the president's false claim that the November election was stolen from him.

While the Pentagon declined to provide an estimate for how many other active-duty military personnel are under investigation, the military's top leaders were concerned enough ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration that they issued a highly unusual warning to all service members this week that the right to free speech gives no one the right to commit violence.

The chief of the U.S. Capitol Police was forced to resign following the breach and several officers have been suspended pending the outcome of investigations into their conduct, including one who posed for a selfie with a rioter and another who was seen wearing one of the Trump's red "Make America Great Again" caps.

The AP's review of hundreds of videos and photos from the insurrectionist riot shows scores of people mixed in the crowd who were wearing military-style gear, including helmets, body armor, rucksacks and two-way radios. Dozens carried canisters of bear spray, baseball bats, hockey sticks and pro-Trump flags attached to stout poles later used to bash police officers.

A close examination of the group marching up the steps to help breach the Capitol shows they wore military-style patches that read "MILITIA" and "OATHKEEPER." Others were wearing patches and insignias representing far-right militant groups, including the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters and various self-styled state militias.

The Oath Keepers, which claims to count thousands of current and former law enforcement officials and military veterans as members, have become fixtures at protests and counter-protests across the country, often heavily armed with semi-automatic carbines and tactical shotguns.

Stewart Rhodes, an Army veteran who founded the Oath Keepers in 2009 as a reaction to the presidency of Barack Obama, had been saying for weeks before the Capitol riot that his group was preparing for a civil war and was "armed, prepared to go in if the president calls us up."

Adam Newbold, the retired Navy SEAL from Lisbon, Ohio, whose more than two-decade military career includes multiple combat awards for valor, said in a Jan. 5 Facebook video, "We are just very prepared, very capable and very skilled patriots ready for a fight."

He later posted a since-deleted follow-up video after the riot saying he was "proud" of the assault.

Newbold, 45, did not respond to multiple messages from the AP but in an interview with the Task & Purpose website he denied ever going inside the Capitol. He added that because of the fallout from the videos he has resigned from a program that helps prepare potential SEAL applicants.

Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Larry Rendall Brock Jr. of Texas was released to home confinement Thursday after a prosecutor alleged the former fighter pilot had zip-tie handcuffs on the Senate floor because he planned to take hostages.

"He means to kidnap, restrain, perhaps try, perhaps execute members of the U.S. government," Assis-

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tant U.S. Attorney Jay Weimer said. "His prior experience and training make him all the more dangerous."

Army commanders at Fort Bragg in North Carolina are investigating the possible involvement of Capt. Emily Rainey, the 30-year-old psychological operations officer and Afghanistan war veteran who told the AP she traveled with 100 others to Washington to "stand against election fraud." She insisted she acted within Army regulations and that no one in her group entered the Capitol or broke the law.

"I was a private citizen and doing everything right and within my rights," Rainey said.

More than 110 people have been arrested on charges related to the Capitol riot so far, ranging from curfew violations to serious federal felonies related to theft and weapons possession.

Brian Harrell, who served as the assistant secretary for infrastructure protection at the Department of Homeland Security until last year, said it is "obviously problematic" when "extremist bad actors" have military and law enforcement backgrounds.

"Many have specialized training, some have seen combat, and nearly all have been fed disinformation and propaganda from illegitimate sources," Harrell said. "They are fueled by conspiracy theories, feel as if something is being stolen from them, and they are not interested in debate. This is a powder keg cocktail waiting to blow."

The FBI is warning of the potential for more bloodshed. In an internal bulletin issued Sunday, the bureau warned of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington, D.C., in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, police departments in such major cities as New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Houston and Philadelphia announced they were investigating whether members of their agencies participated in the Capitol riot. The Philadelphia area's transit authority is also investigating whether seven of its police officers who attended Trump's rally in Washington broke any laws.

A Texas sheriff announced last week that he had reported one of his lieutenants to the FBI after she posted photos of herself on social media with a crowd outside the Capitol. Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said Lt. Roxanne Mathai, a 46-year-old jailer, had the right to attend the rally but he's investigating whether she may have broken the law.

One of the posts Mathai shared was a photo that appeared to be taken Jan. 6 from among the mass of Trump supporters outside the Capitol, captioned: "Not gonna lie. ... aside from my kids, this was, indeed, the best day of my life. And it's not over yet."

A lawyer for Mathai, a mother and longtime San Antonio resident, said she attended the Trump rally but never entered the Capitol.

In Houston, Police Chief Art Acevedo said an 18-year veteran of the department suspected of joining the mob that breached the Capitol was placed on leave and will face a disciplinary hearing.

"There is no excuse for criminal activity, especially from a police officer," Acevedo said. "I can't tell you the anger I feel at the thought of a police officer, and other police officers, thinking they get to storm the Capitol."

Bleiberg reported from Dallas and LaPorta from in Delray Beach, Florida. Robert Burns and Mike Balsamo in Washington; Jim Mustian, Michael R. Sisak and Thalia Beaty in New York; Michael Kunzelman in College Park, Maryland; Juan A. Lozano in Houston; Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia; Martha Bellisle in Seattle; and Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles contributed.

Follow Associated Press Investigative Reporter Michael Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck>; Jake Bleiberg at <http://twitter.com/JZBleiberg>; and James LaPorta at <http://twitter.com/JimLaPorta>

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org

Fake US leg band gets pigeon a reprieve in Australia

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A pigeon that Australia declared a biosecurity risk has received a reprieve

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after a U.S. bird organization declared its identifying leg band was fake.

The band suggested the bird found in a Melbourne backyard on Dec. 26 was a racing pigeon that had left the U.S. state of Oregon, 13,000 kilometers (8,000 miles) away, two months earlier.

On that basis, Australian authorities on Thursday said they considered the bird a disease risk and planned to kill it.

But Deone Roberts, sport development manager for the Oklahoma-based American Racing Pigeon Union, said on Friday the band was fake.

The band number belongs to a blue bar pigeon in the United States which is not the bird pictured in Australia, she said.

"The bird band in Australia is counterfeit and not traceable," Roberts said. "They do not need to kill him."

Australia's Agriculture Department, which is responsible for biosecurity, agreed that the pigeon dubbed Joe, after U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, was wearing a "fraudulent copy" leg band.

"Following an investigation, the department has concluded that Joe the Pigeon is highly likely to be Australian and does not present a biosecurity risk," it said in a statement.

The department said it will take no further action.

Acting Australian Prime Minister Michael McCormack had earlier said there would be no mercy if the pigeon was from the United States.

"If Joe has come in a way that has not met our strict biosecurity measures, then bad luck Joe, either fly home or face the consequences," McCormack said.

Martin Foley, health minister for Victoria state where Joe is living, had called for the federal government to spare the bird even if it posed a disease risk.

"I would urge the Commonwealth's quarantine officials to show a little bit of compassion," Foley said.

Andy Meddick, a Victorian lawmaker for the minor Animal Justice Party, called for a "pigeon pardon for Joe."

"Should the federal government allow Joe to live, I am happy to seek assurances that he is not a flight risk," Meddick said.

Melbourne resident Kevin Celli-Bird, who found the emaciated bird in his backyard, was surprised by the change of nationality but pleased that the bird he named Joe would not be destroyed.

"I thought this is just a feel-good story and now you guys want to put this pigeon away and I thought it's not on, you know, you can't do that, there has got to be other options," Celli-Bird said of the threat to euthanize.

Celli-Bird had contacted the American Racing Pigeon Union to find the bird's owner based on the number on the leg band. The bands have both a number and a symbol, but Celli-Bird didn't remember the symbol and said he can no longer catch the bird since it has recovered from its initial weakness.

The bird with the genuine leg band had disappeared from a 560-kilometer (350-mile) race in Oregon on Oct. 29, Crooked River Challenge owner Lucas Cramer said.

That bird did not have a racing record that would make it valuable enough to steal its identity, he said.

"That bird didn't finish the race series, it didn't make any money and so its worthless, really," Cramer said.

He said it was possible a pigeon could cross the Pacific on a ship from Oregon to Australia.

"In reality, it could potentially happen, but this isn't the same pigeon. It's not even a racing pigeon," Cramer said.

The bird spends every day in the backyard, sometimes with a native dove on a pergola.

"I might have to change him to Aussie Joe, but he's just the same pigeon," Celli-Bird said.

Lars Scott, a carer at Pigeon Rescue Melbourne, a bird welfare group, said pigeons with American leg bands were not uncommon around the city. A number of Melbourne breeders bought them online and used them for their own record keeping, Scott said.

Australian quarantine authorities are notoriously strict. 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.

Rare conviction of South Sudan soldiers for rape raises hope

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

YEI, South Sudan (AP) — First, the soldiers stole their belongings. Then they took their food. On their third and final visit, the woman said, the soldiers raped her and her daughter-in-law until they were unable to walk.

What sets these assaults in South Sudan apart from many other rapes by soldiers in the troubled country is this: The women brought the men to court and won.

Ten years after South Sudan gained its independence and two years after its own deadly civil war ended, large-scale fighting has subsided but clashes continue between communities and between the government and groups that did not sign the peace deal — and the use of rape as a weapon remains rampant. Justice is exceedingly rare, but the September conviction has raised hopes that such crimes will increasingly be prosecuted.

"I was traumatized," the older of the two women, a 48-year-old mother of eight, told The Associated Press in Yei, a town in the southern state of Central Equatoria where she now lives. The AP does not typically identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they grant permission, and the woman said she continues to fear for her safety and is too afraid, for instance, to return to her home village of Adio.

She said she has found some solace in seeing her two attackers convicted and sent to prison after she reported the rape in May to South Sudan's army chief when he visited her village. A new army chief of staff, responding to growing frustration with such crimes, sent military judges from the capital, Juba, to oversee the case and those of 10 other women and girls who also came forward.

In the end, 26 soldiers were convicted, some for rape but others for offenses including looting. It was the first time soldiers had been convicted of rape since the 2016 rampage at the Terrain Hotel, where five international aid workers were gang-raped and a local journalist was killed.

The army hopes the trial will be a warning to its troops.

"We apologize, we won't let it happen again, and we'll arrest people who do it," said Michael Machar Malual, head of civilian-military relations for the army in Central Equatoria state. A government spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

The woman hopes the verdict will encourage more survivors to speak up in a country where sexual assault is a scourge.

Some 65% of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced sexual or other physical violence, the United Nations children's agency said in 2019.

Between July and September, the U.N. reported an 88% increase in conflict-related sexual violence from the previous quarter even as overall violence dropped. It said there were more than 260 "violent incidents" in total during the period, but it did not specify how many involved sexual violence.

The villages around Yei have been hit hard as fighting continues between government forces and the National Salvation Front, which did not sign the peace deal.

Civilians say they are caught in the middle, with women often accused by soldiers of supporting the rebels — and assaulted — especially if their husbands aren't around.

In February, three women and a 14-year-old girl were raped by soldiers about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Yei, according to a report by the independent body charged with overseeing the implementation of the peace deal. One woman was gang-raped while held at gunpoint, the report said.

When the AP visited Yei in December, civilians and soldiers said the situation was improving and there had been fewer reports of sexual violence since the trial. The once-bustling town and nearby villages are slowly returning to life after the war.

Yet some residents said they feel as unsafe as ever. A group of women walking home from the market said they hide their food in the bushes, worried that hungry soldiers will steal it from their homes. An economic crisis in South Sudan fueled by a drop in oil prices and the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic

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means soldiers haven't been paid in months — and experts are warning of famine.

Rights groups have hailed the recent case as important — but only a first step — and are pushing the government for more accountability.

"This should be a lesson for those with power, especially those with guns, to know that they are not above the law," said Riya William Yuyada, executive director of Crown the Woman South Sudan, an advocacy group that has pressed the government for accountability.

A hybrid court is meant to be established as part of the peace deal to try people accused of committing wartime atrocities, but implementation is slow. Nyagoah Tut Pur, a researcher with Human Rights Watch, noted that those convicted of such crimes are often lower-level officers, and senior leaders should be held responsible. She added that accountability must also include compensation and services for survivors.

Some women brutalized by soldiers have taken matters into their own hands.

In 2017, Mary Poni said she watched soldiers decapitate her father and gang-rape three of her sisters until they died, before she was assaulted herself. She has written a book about her experience in the hope that it will be a small step toward reconciliation in her country.

"I want the civilian population to be confident in the army, and the army to be able to protect our women and girls," Poni said. "Women are living in silent fear, not able to open up about things they went through."

Associated Press writer Maura Ajak in Juba, South Sudan, contributed to this report

AP Interview: Netanyahu challenger pledges change with Biden

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's top challenger in upcoming elections is promising a tough line toward Iran and the Palestinians, yet expressed confidence he has the tools to avoid what appears to be a collision course with the incoming Biden administration.

In an interview, Gideon Saar voiced harsh criticism of Netanyahu, accusing the prime minister of turning the ruling Likud party into a "cult of personality" as he faces a corruption trial. While welcoming President Donald Trump's affinity for Israel, he acknowledged that Netanyahu's close ties with the divisive U.S. president had alienated many Democrats and vowed to restore traditional bipartisan support for Israel.

"I think I am in a better position than the prime minister to have an effective and true dialogue with President-elect (Joe) Biden and his administration," he told The Associated Press.

That could be critical given the deep differences between Israel and Biden, who plans to return to the Iranian nuclear deal and adopt a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Saar, who defected from Netanyahu's ruling Likud party last month, shares the prime minister's hard-line nationalistic ideology. He is a strong proponent of West Bank settlements, rejects the idea of a construction freeze and favors the eventual annexation of the settlements. He said he would never agree to an independent Palestinian state that includes the removal of settlements.

"I oppose a Palestinian state in the heart of our homeland," he said. "I think it will not bring peace and it will undermine stability and security in the region."

These positions will put him at odds with Biden, who — like many of his predecessors — opposes settlement construction and favors a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. Saar seems to be counting on his reputation as a bridge builder to massage the inevitable disagreements likely to arise.

His demeanor and style are starkly different from Netanyahu's. While Netanyahu is a firebrand orator, Saar, a lawyer by training, speaks methodically, often pausing to find the right word. Where Netanyahu has gained a reputation for an extravagant lifestyle, Saar conducted Thursday's interview in the book-lined living room of his high-rise apartment in an upscale Tel Aviv neighborhood. With four children living at home, he lamented the challenges, including Zoom lessons, of raising a blended family during the pandemic.

Saar, 54, entered Israeli politics in 1999 as Cabinet secretary during Netanyahu's first term. He held key senior Cabinet posts after Netanyahu returned to power in 2009.

But as with many other fast-rising Likud figures, he eventually had a falling out with Netanyahu. Saar took

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a break from politics in 2014 to spend time with his new wife, TV anchor Geula Even, and their children. He returned in 2019 but never seemed to repair his ties with Netanyahu. Later that year, Netanyahu trounced him in a party leadership vote, confining Saar to the backbenches.

Since bolting Likud and launching his "New Hope" party last month, Saar has made no secret that their battle is personal. In his inaugural speech, he accused Netanyahu of creating a "cult of personality" — a term he repeated Thursday to describe those who blindly support Netanyahu's claims that his corruption trial is a conspiracy.

Saar said a key moment for him came last May, when Netanyahu arrived at the courthouse for the opening of his trial joined by a group of Likud ministers and lawmakers. The group stood silently behind Netanyahu as he accused the media and justice system of trying to topple him.

"A cult of personality is when the most important thing in order to be advanced in a political system is to flatter and serve the personal interests of its leader," Saar said. He said that while Netanyahu has the right to fight the charges against him, his claims of a grand conspiracy are "absolute nonsense."

Netanyahu's tactics have drawn comparisons to Trump, who showered his Israeli counterpart with diplomatic gifts, ranging from the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital to brokering normalization agreements between Israel and four Arab countries.

Saar said he had great respect for Trump's contributions to Israel and did not want to wade into U.S. politics. But in an apparent reference to the pro-Trump mob that stormed the Capitol, he said: "I cannot identify with talk that delegitimized the democratic electoral process and its results."

Saar is among the legions of critics who believe that Israel is being dragged into its fourth election in just two years due to Netanyahu's legal troubles and divisive personality. It is widely believed that Netanyahu is seeking a coalition of allies willing to grant him immunity from prosecution.

Saar, emerging as Netanyahu's biggest challenger in the March 23 election, appears poised to prevent that. Opinion polls project New Hope will become the second-largest party in parliament, smaller than Likud but with enough seats to prevent Netanyahu from assembling a majority.

That has made Saar the unofficial leader of a diverse group of "anyone but Bibi" parties that refuse to serve under Netanyahu, who is widely known by his nickname. Netanyahu says his opponents are motivated by sour grapes and little more than shared animosity toward him.

Saar believes he can find enough common ground to form an alternative coalition. In a reflection of his political savvy and ability to work with rivals, he coordinated a surprise late-night parliamentary maneuver last month that caused the coalition to collapse.

Saar described himself as pragmatic. He said, for example, he welcomed Netanyahu's agreement to shelve a plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank as part of last year's agreement establishing diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates. He said he would respect that pledge if elected.

If elected, Saar's first big test with the Biden administration is likely to be the Iranian nuclear issue.

In 2015, Netanyahu famously delivered a speech to Congress to lobby against the Iran deal as then-President Barack Obama was wrapping it up. Netanyahu was a driving force in Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal, one of Obama's signature achievements. His confrontation with Obama remains a sore point with many Democrats.

Saar said he respected Netanyahu's campaign, but that times have changed and a new approach will be needed to make sure the nuclear deal is not revived in its original form. He said he would seek a mutually respectful dialogue to ensure that Iran never develops a nuclear bomb.

"I will have to deal with the political reality of 2021," he said. "I will do it much better than anyone else."

Spain rejects virus confinement as most of Europe stays home

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — While most of Europe kicked off 2021 with earlier curfews or stay-at-home orders, authorities in Spain insist the new coronavirus variant causing havoc elsewhere is not to blame for a sharp resurgence of cases and that the country can avoid a full lockdown even as its hospitals fill up.

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The government has been tirelessly fending off drastic home confinement like the one that paralyzed the economy for nearly three months in the spring of 2020, the last time Spain could claim victory over the stubborn rising curve of cases.

Infection rates ebbed in October but never completely flattened the surge from summer. Cases started climbing again before the end of the year. In the past month, 14-day rates more than doubled, from 188 cases per 100,000 residents on Dec. 10 to 522 per 100,000 on Thursday.

Nearly 39,000 new cases were reported Wednesday and over 35,000 on Thursday, some of the highest daily increases to date.

The surge is again threatening intensive care unit capacity and burdening exhausted medical workers. Some facilities have already suspended elective surgery, and the eastern city of Valencia has reopened a makeshift hospital used last year.

Unlike Portugal, which is going on a month-long lockdown Friday and doubling fines for those who don't wear masks, officials in Spain insist it will be enough to take short, highly localized measures that restrict social gatherings without affecting the whole economy.

"We know what we have to do and we are doing it," Health Minister Salvador Illa told a news conference Wednesday, ruling out a national home confinement order and advocating for "measures that were a success during the second wave."

Fernando Simón, the government's top virus expert, has blamed the recent increase in cases on Christmas and New Year's celebrations. "The new variant, even if it has an impact, it will be a marginal one, at least in our country," he said this week.

But many independent experts disagree and say Spain has no capacity to conduct the widespread sequencing of samples to detect how the new variants have spread, and that 88 confirmed and nearly 200 suspected cases that officials say have largely been imported from the U.K. are underestimating the real impact.

Dr. Rafael Bengoa, former director of Healthcare Systems at the World Health Organization, told The Associated Press the government should immediately enact "a strict but short" four-week confinement.

"Trying to do as little as possible so as not to affect the economy or for political reasons doesn't get us where we need to be," said Bengoa, who also oversaw a deep reform in the Basque regional health system.

The situation in Spain contrasts starkly with other European countries that have also shown similar sharp leaps in cases, increasingly more of them blamed on the more contagious variant first detected in the U.K.

The Netherlands, which has been locked down for a month, has seen the pace of infections starting to drop. But with 2% to 5% of new COVID-19 cases from the new variant, the country is from Friday requiring air passengers from the U.K., Ireland and South Africa to provide not only a negative PCR test taken a maximum of 72 hours before departure but also a rapid antigen test result from immediately before takeoff.

France, where a recent study of 100,000 positive tests yielded about 1% of infections with the variant, is imposing curfews as early as 6 p.m., and Health Minister Olivier Veran has not ruled out a stay-at-home order if the situation worsens.

Existing lockdowns or the prospect of mandatory confinement have not been questioned or turned into a political issue in other European countries.

Ireland instituted a complete lockdown after widespread infections were found to be tied to the new variant. Italy has a color-coded system that activates a strict lockdown at its highest — or red — level, although no areas are currently at that stage.

In the U.K., scientific evidence of the new variant has silenced some critics of restrictions and spurred Prime Minister Boris Johnson to impose measures that are strict but slightly milder than the nation's first lockdown. People have been ordered to stay home except for limited essential trips and exercise, and schools have been closed except for some exceptions.

In Germany, where the 7-day rolling average of daily new cases has recently shot up to 26 per 100,000 people, many high-ranking officials are arguing that the existing strict confinement order needs to be toughened and extended beyond its current end-of-January expiration.

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Nordic countries have rejected full-on mandatory lockdowns, instead instituting tight limitations on gatherings and certain activities. Residents have been asked to follow specific recommendations to limit the spread of the virus.

In Sweden, the issue is both legal and political, as no law exists that would allow the government to restrict the population's mobility. While urging residents to refrain from going to the gym or the library, Swedish Prime Stefan Lofven said last month, "we don't believe in a total lockdown," before adding, "We are following our strategy."

Policymakers in Spain seem to be on a similar approach, although it remains to be seen if the results will prove them wrong. On Thursday, they insisted that vaccinations will soon reach "cruising speed."

But Bengoa, the former WHO expert, said vaccinations won't fix the problem immediately.

"Trying to live with the virus and with these data for months is to live with very high mortality and with the possibility that new variants are created," he said, adding that the new variant of the virus widely identified in the U.K. could make the original version start to seem like "a good one."

Dr. Salvador Macip, a researcher with the University of Leicester and the Open University of Catalonia, says the combination of spiraling infections and the uncertainty over the new variants should be enough for a more restrictive approach, but that pandemic fatigue is making such decisions more difficult for countries like Spain, with polarized politics.

"People are fed up with making sacrifices that take us nowhere because they see that they will have to repeat them," Macip said.

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Associated Press writers across Europe contributed.

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Poet Amanda Gorman, 22, will read at Biden inaugural

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — At age 22, poet Amanda Gorman, chosen to read at the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, already has a history of writing for official occasions.

"I have kind of stumbled upon this genre. It's been something I find a lot of emotional reward in, writing something I can make people feel touched by, even if it's just for a night," says Gorman. The Los Angeles resident has written for everything from a July 4 celebration featuring the Boston Pops Orchestra to the inauguration at Harvard University, her alma mater, of school president Larry Bacow.

When she reads next Wednesday, she will be continuing a tradition — for Democratic presidents — that includes such celebrated poets as Robert Frost and Maya Angelou. The latter's "On the Pulse of Morning," written for the 1993 inauguration of President Bill Clinton, went on to sell more than 1 million copies when published in book form. Recent readers include poets Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco, both of whom Gorman has been in touch with.

"The three of us are together in mind, body and spirit," she says.

Gorman is the youngest inaugural poet in memory, and she has made news before. In 2014, she was named the first Youth Poet Laureate of Los Angeles, and three years later she became the country's first National Youth Poet Laureate. She has appeared on MTV; written a tribute to Black athletes for Nike; published her first book, "The One for Whom Food Is Not Enough," as a teenager, and has a two-book deal with Viking Children's Books. The first work, the picture book "Change Sings," comes out later this year.

Gorman says she was contacted late last month by the Biden inaugural committee. She has known numerous public figures, including former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and former first lady Michelle Obama, but says she will be meeting the Bidens for the first time. The Bidens, apparently, have

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been aware of her: Gorman says the inaugural officials told her she had been recommended by the incoming first lady, Jill Biden.

She is calling her inaugural poem "The Hill We Climb" while otherwise declining to preview any lines. Gorman says she was not given specific instructions on what to write, but was encouraged to emphasize unity and hope over "denigrating anyone" or declaring "ding, dong, the witch is dead" over the departure of President Donald Trump.

The siege last week of the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters seeking to overturn the election was a challenge for keeping a positive tone, but also an inspiration. Gorman says that she has been given 5 minutes to read, and before what she described during an interview as "the Confederate insurrection" of Jan. 6 she had only written about 3 1-2 minutes worth.

The final length runs to about 6 minutes.

"That day gave me a second wave of energy to finish the poem," says Gorman, adding that she will not refer directly to Jan. 6, but will "touch" upon it. She said last week's events did not upend the poem she had been working on because they didn't surprise her.

"The poem isn't blind," she says. "It isn't turning your back to the evidence of discord and division."

In other writings, Gorman has honored her ancestors, acknowledged and reveled in her own vulnerability ("Glorious in my fragmentation," she has written) and confronted social issues. Her poem "In This Place (An American Lyric)," written for the 2017 inaugural reading of U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, condemns the racist march in Charlottesville, Virginia ("tiki torches string a ring of flame") and holds up her art form as a force for democracy:

Tyrants fear the poet.

Now that we know it

we can't blow it.

We owe it

to show it

not slow it

Gorman has rare status as a poet, and has dreams of other ceremonies. She would love to read at the 2028 Olympics, scheduled to be held in Los Angeles, and in 2037 wouldn't mind finding herself in an even more special position at the presidential inauguration — as the new chief executive.

"I'm going to tell Biden that I'll be back," she said with a laugh.

Impeachment complicates the early days of Biden's presidency

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden already faces the daunting task of steering a newly announced \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill through a closely divided Congress as the pandemic and its economic fallout grow.

Now Biden will have to do it with President Donald Trump's impeachment trial beginning potentially as soon as his first day in office.

The confluence of events amounts to one of the most politically and logistically complicated openings to a new administration in modern history, requiring Biden to try to move the country into a post-Trump

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era even as senators debate Trump's most divisive acts.

"It's going to be incredibly challenging," said former Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor, a Democrat. "There's only so much bandwidth in the Congress."

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who will have a significant role to play in ushering Biden's agenda through the Senate as chair of the Budget Committee, underscored how much is on Democrats' plate during Biden's first few months in office.

"We don't have the time to spend an enormous amount of time on impeachment, and then we're going to go to Biden's nominees and then we have to deal with legislation," the independent senator said. "We're going to have to move simultaneously in a whole bunch of areas."

Biden has so far stayed largely out of public deliberations over Trump's impeachment for inciting a riot. After the House vote, Biden was forceful in denouncing the violent attack on the Capitol that precipitated the impeachment charge, but he also said he'd work as president to ensure Americans "stand together as a nation" — and called on the Senate to "find a way to deal with their constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

His hands-off approach to the matter is in keeping with his stance throughout the campaign and into his transition, even as Trump's ever-growing controversies have overwhelmed the news cycle.

Biden took his time in endorsing the first impeachment of Trump in 2019, only expressing support for the move weeks after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi launched the formal effort. Decades before, when Richard Nixon was impeached, Biden cautioned his Senate colleagues to consider the weight of the moment and give Nixon a fair trial.

Democrats on Capitol Hill say they largely want to see Biden continue his even-keeled approach and focus on his agenda, rather than on impeachment, once he enters office.

"President-elect Biden has a big job. So let him do his job — and let the Senate do their work," said California Rep. Barbara Lee, a Democrat.

But once the proceedings start, it's certain to be tougher for Biden to completely avoid them, with the trial dominating the news cycle and forcing his former opponent back into the spotlight, even as Biden tries to stay focused on the coronavirus pandemic.

And there's the prospect they could further exacerbate the already fraught atmosphere on Capitol Hill, politicizing Biden's agenda and making it tougher for him to get support from winnable Republican senators.

"Trump's most fervent supporters are going to have an opportunity to attack Democrats, not for their programs and not for their ideas, but as the evil caricature that they have come to portray them," said Jeffrey Engel, director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. "People who were potentially gettable as votes for some of Biden's legislative agenda are going to be much more hesitant to go along with Democratic plans while Democrats are openly being vilified."

Biden was known as a dealmaker in the Senate and has long relationships with many Republican senators after his 36-year career there. He's also been in touch with leadership of both parties during the transition. But as Virginia Sen. Mark Warner points out, there's the risk that impeachment poisons the well for Biden with those senators who don't know him well.

"At least half the Republican caucus has never served with Joe Biden," said Warner, a Democrat. "His ability to navigate with those new members, if their first impression is driven by what could end up being decided on partisan lines, that's going to make his job more difficult."

For now, Biden is staying focused on his agenda.

On Thursday, in announcing his COVID-19 relief package, he emphasized that he hopes to work with lawmakers from both parties and expressed optimism that despite the \$1.9 trillion price tag, "we're ready to get this done."

"I know what I just described does not come cheaply, but we simply can't afford not to do what I'm proposing," Biden said.

And Democrats on Capitol Hill are barreling ahead as well, refusing to accept the prospect that impeachment will deter them from their legislative goals.

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"What the Senate is going to have to do is show the world that it can walk and chew gum at the same time," Sanders said.

Biden unveils \$1.9T plan to stem COVID-19 and steady economy

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden has unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan to end "a crisis of deep human suffering" by speeding up vaccines and pumping out financial help to those struggling with the pandemic's prolonged economic fallout.

Called the "American Rescue Plan," the legislative proposal would meet Biden's goal of administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration, and advance his objective of reopening most schools by the spring. On a parallel track, it delivers another round of aid to stabilize the economy while the public health effort seeks the upper hand on the pandemic.

"We not only have an economic imperative to act now — I believe we have a moral obligation," Biden said in a nationwide address Thursday. At the same time, he acknowledged that his plan "does not come cheaply."

Biden proposed \$1,400 checks for most Americans, which on top of \$600 provided in the most recent COVID-19 bill would bring the total to the \$2,000 that Biden has called for. It would also extend a temporary boost in unemployment benefits and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September.

And it shoehorns in long-term Democratic policy aims such as increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, expanding paid leave for workers, and increasing tax credits for families with children. The last item would make it easier for women to go back to work, which in turn would help the economy recover.

The political outlook for the legislation remained unclear. In a joint statement, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer praised Biden for including liberal priorities, saying they would move quickly to pass it after Biden takes office next Wednesday. But Democrats have narrow margins in both chambers of Congress, and Republicans will push back on issues that range from increasing the minimum wage to providing more money for states, while demanding inclusion of their priorities, such as liability protection for businesses.

"Remember that a bipartisan \$900 billion #COVID19 relief bill became law just 18 days ago," tweeted Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. But Biden says that was only a down payment, and he promised more major legislation next month, focused on rebuilding the economy.

"The crisis of deep human suffering is in plain sight, and there's not time to waste," Biden said. "We have to act and we have to act now."

Still, he sought to manage expectations. "We're better equipped to do this than any nation in the world," he said. "But even with all these small steps, it's going to take time."

His relief bill would be paid for with borrowed money, adding to trillions in debt the government has already incurred to confront the pandemic. Aides said Biden will make the case that the additional spending and borrowing is necessary to prevent the economy from sliding into an even deeper hole. Interest rates are low, making debt more manageable.

Biden has long held that economic recovery is inextricably linked with controlling the coronavirus.

That squares with the judgment of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the most powerful business lobbying group and traditionally an adversary of Democrats. "We must defeat COVID before we can restore our economy and that requires turbocharging our vaccination efforts," the Chamber said in a statement Thursday night that welcomed Biden's plan but stopped short of endorsing it.

The plan comes as a divided nation is in the grip of the pandemic's most dangerous wave yet. So far, more than 385,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the U.S. And government numbers out Thursday reported a jump in weekly unemployment claims, to 965,000, a sign that rising infections are forcing businesses to cut back and lay off workers.

Under Biden's multipronged strategy, about \$400 billion would go directly to combating the pandemic, while the rest is focused on economic relief and aid to states and localities.

About \$20 billion would be allocated for a more disciplined focus on vaccination, on top of some \$8 bil-

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lion already approved by Congress. Biden has called for setting up mass vaccination centers and sending mobile units to hard-to-reach areas.

With the backing of Congress and the expertise of private and government scientists, the Trump administration 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 11 million people getting the first of two shots, although more than 30 million doses have been delivered.

Biden called the vaccine rollout "a dismal failure so far" and said he would provide more details about his vaccination campaign on Friday.

The plan also provides \$50 billion to expand testing, which is seen as key to reopening most schools by the end of the new administration's first 100 days. About \$130 billion would be allocated to help schools reopen without risking further contagion.

The plan would fund the hiring of 100,000 public health workers, to focus on encouraging people to get vaccinated and on tracing the contacts of those infected with the coronavirus.

There's also a proposal to boost investment in genetic sequencing, to help track new virus strains including the more contagious variants identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Throughout the plan, there's a focus on ensuring that minority communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic are not shortchanged on vaccines and treatments, aides said.

With the new proposals comes a call to redouble efforts on the basics.

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. It's still the surest way to slow the COVID-19 wave, with more than 4,400 deaths reported just on Tuesday.

Biden's biggest challenge will be 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.

The pace of vaccination in the U.S. is approaching 1 million shots a day, but 1.8 million a day would be needed to reach widespread or "herd" immunity by the summer, according to a recent estimate by the American Hospital Association. Wen says the pace should be even higher — closer to 3 million a day.

Biden believes the key to speeding that up lies not only in delivering more vaccine but also in 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.

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.

"We will have to move heaven and earth to get more people vaccinated," Biden said.

Next Wednesday, when Biden is sworn in as president, marks the anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Fate of Biden agenda rests with Schumer in 50-50 Senate

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chuck Schumer is used to drinking from a firehose. But the incoming Senate majority leader has never taken on such a torrent of challenges, with the opening days of both the Biden administration and Democratic control of the Senate coming at the very moment an impeachment trial gets underway.

A 38-year veteran of Congress who first came to the Senate during President Bill Clinton's impeachment, Schumer is a 70-year-old bundle of energy with one overriding mandate: Help Joe Biden become a successful president. To do so, he'll have to leverage the narrowest possible majority — a 50-50 Senate with the incoming vice president, Kamala Harris, delivering the tiebreaking vote.

It's a tough assignment. It's far easier, though often unsatisfying, to be a minority leader equipped with

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the tools of obstruction than it is to be a majority leader armed mostly with persuasion. But the goodwill Schumer enjoys with key members, and his careful management of the party's constituencies, could help ease the way.

"Chuck Schumer has done a remarkable job as our caucus leader the last four years holding our caucus together," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., as he entered the Senate chamber during last Wednesday's Electoral College count, speaking just before a mob of violent supporters of President Donald Trump assaulted the Capitol and the situation turned dire.

Then Schumer appeared. "What did I just give a quote about? Our capable majority leader!" Coons said. "Again!" a jubilant Schumer exclaimed. "More adjectives! More adjectives!"

Less than an hour later, Schumer was in peril, under the protection of a Capitol Police officer with a sub-machine gun standing between him and GOP leader Mitch McConnell as the mob breached the building.

The ransacking of the Capitol has brought impeachment to the Senate's door again and set Republicans on their heels. And it's put a spotlight on whether the polarized, diminished chamber can process Biden's agenda.

Take the installation of Biden's Cabinet. The Senate has traditionally tried to confirm a batch of the most important nominees on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, and the days thereafter. But to do so requires the cooperation of the entire Senate.

Democrats slow-walked many of Trump's Cabinet picks four years ago after a crushing election loss, but there's a palpable sense that Republicans may be more cooperative now, at least when confirming national security nominees and picks like Janet Yellen to run the Treasury Department.

Schumer seeks — and is used to operating in — the spotlight, whether he's helping run the unwieldy, increasingly divided Senate, micromanaging his beloved Democratic caucus or crisscrossing New York.

Any of these is a full-time job. And they don't always point him in the same direction. For instance, Biden is preaching bipartisanship, and Schumer wants to help, but tensions are inevitable with ardent progressives such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, an ambitious Bronx Democrat whom Schumer allies are watching closely as he runs for a fifth term in 2022.

Schumer was a force in Biden's decision to "go big" on Thursday with a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief and economic stimulus bill that was bigger than earlier Biden drafts. Progressives hailed the measure.

Meanwhile, the prospect of an impeachment trial in the opening days of Biden's term adds a huge degree of uncertainty. Senate rules are unforgiving, but Schumer and McConnell are hoping to establish a dual-track process to confirm nominations even as the trial unfolds.

McConnell and Schumer have a tortured, tense relationship after years of bruising political battles and fights over Supreme Court nominees. They rarely talk spontaneously and have no hesitation in slinging barbs that earlier generations of leaders managed to avoid.

But Biden and McConnell are long-standing friends, and the Kentucky Republican — pondering a "guilty" vote in Trump's second impeachment trial and still absorbing the disastrous Senate losses in Georgia — appears inclined to help Biden as best he can.

The events of the past week, as damaging and unsettling as they were for the country, seem likely to assist Biden and Schumer. What is more, Democratic control of the chamber comes with filibuster-proof treatment of Biden's nominees, with only a simple majority needed, though Republicans could easily force delays.

McConnell and his Republican caucus want to "reasonably cooperate on the national security nominations," said Hazen Marshall, a former McConnell policy aide. "His view has traditionally been that presidents deserve their staff, unless their staff are crazy or criminals." But GOP senators are sure to drag their feet on less urgent Cabinet posts given the experience under Trump, when even former Sen. Dan Coats, R-Ind., had to endure delays.

But with the economy slipping and the public appalled by the melee in Washington, GOP resistance to Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package or his slate of Cabinet picks may not be as resolute.

"There's a lot to do, but Democrats are on the right side of all of it," said former Schumer strategist and

confidant Matt House. "These are good problems to have."

Amid the dizzying pace, Schumer also tends to New York. A Brooklyn native, Schumer makes a visit to each of the state's 62 counties every year. And his spur-of-the-moment visits to local events like high school graduations and, more recently, unannounced drop-ins on community Zoom calls are the stuff of legend.

Last Thursday, little more than 24 hours after the Capitol riot, Schumer hopped on a call with a community board in Sunnyside, Queens. He spent the opening minutes thanking board members. "You guys and gals do a great job — I know what it's like," Schumer said, according to the Sunnyside Post. "When things go bad you hear about it; when things are great you hear nothing."

And after Trump's impeachment Wednesday, Schumer heaped praise on local New York media members in a call with publishers and broadcasters thanking him for steering stimulus dollars to struggling news outlets, according to an account by the Syracuse Post Standard. But he had to jump.

"Pelosi has called me and Biden, so I won't be able to be on for too long," Schumer said.

In coronavirus vaccine drive, Deep South falls behind

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The coronavirus vaccines have been rolled out unevenly across the U.S., but four states in the Deep South have had particularly dismal inoculation rates that have alarmed health experts and frustrated residents.

In Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina, less than 2% of the population had received its first dose of a vaccine at the start of the week, according to data from the states and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As in other parts of the country, states in the South face a number of challenges: limited vaccine supplies, health care workers who refuse to get inoculated and bureaucratic systems that are not equipped to schedule the huge number of appointments being sought.

But other states have still managed — at their best — to get the vaccines into the arms of more than 5% of their populations.

Though it's not clear why the Deep South is falling behind, public health researchers note that it has typically lagged in funding public health and addressing disparities in care for its big rural population.

"When you combine a large percentage of rural residents who tend to be the hard-to-reach populations and have lower numbers of providers with trying to build a vaccine infrastructure on the fly, that's just a recipe for a not-so-great response," said Sarah McCool, a professor in public health at Georgia State University.

In Georgia, the state's rural health system has been decimated in recent years, with nine hospital closures since 2008, including two last year. Local health departments have become the primary vaccine providers in some locations, as officials work to add sites where doses can be administered.

"If we're the only game in town, this process is going to take a long time," Lawton Davis, director of a large public health district that includes Savannah, said at a news conference on Monday.

Alabama and Mississippi have also been hit hard by rural hospital closures. Seven hospitals have shut down in Alabama since 2009 and six in Mississippi since 2005, according to researchers at the University of North Carolina's Sheps Center. Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi ranked in the bottom five of U.S. states in their access to health care, according to a 2020 report from a not-for-profit foundation connected to insurance giant UnitedHealth.

But overall, experts say it's too early in the vaccine rollout to draw conclusions about the region's shortcomings, and they can't easily be attributed to a particular factor or trend.

"We're sort of building this plane as we're flying, and there are going to be missteps along the way," said Amber Schmidtke, a microbiologist who has been following vaccine dissemination in the South.

Officials in the individual states have cited a number of challenges, but also acknowledged shortcomings.

"We have too many vaccines distributed that are not in arms yet," said Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves, who noted that some hospitals in the state are not using their vaccine doses. He said that practice "has to stop."

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Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp cited a similar challenge and warned providers holding on to vaccines that the state would take their unused doses even if that required “firing up” his pickup truck and doing it himself.

But in South Carolina, hospital officials say it is the state that has moved too slowly to expand access to the vaccinations, leaving them with unused doses. The state recently did offer the vaccine to those 70 and older.

Mississippi’s Reeves said one of the biggest weaknesses in the state’s vaccination system is the federal partnership with CVS and Walgreens to administer vaccinations in long-term care facilities. The pharmacy chains have been slow in hiring enough people to do the work in Mississippi, the governor said.

CVS Health said in a statement that it has “the appropriate resources to finish the job” at long-term care facilities. Walgreens did not respond to an email.

During an online forum hosted by Jackson State University in Mississippi on Thursday, U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, who is Black, noted the reluctance of many African Americans to be vaccinated. He cited a general mistrust of medical systems stemming back to a now-defunct government study that started in the 1930s and left Black men untreated for syphilis for decades.

So far, only 15% of COVID-19 vaccinations in Mississippi have gone to Black people, who make up about 38% of the population, state health officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said during the forum.

Officials in all four states also said some health care workers — among the first groups eligible for a vaccine — are choosing not to get inoculated. And some stressed that states were dealing with limited supplies and high demand and implored people to be patient.

“Yes, the phone lines will be busy. Yes, the websites will certainly crash,” Kemp said Tuesday. “There are simply vastly more Georgians that want the vaccine than can get it today.”

Mississippi officials said the state’s website and telephone hotline were overwhelmed after the governor announced Tuesday that vaccinations were available to people 65 or older or people who have underlying medical conditions.

Liz Cleveland, a 67-year-old retired state employee who lives in Jackson, waited hours on the website using her cellphone, computer and tablet only to encounter unknown errors.

“It’s like gambling. You may hit or you may bust,” Cleveland said.

About 2 a.m. Wednesday, she was finally able to book appointments for herself and her husband next week in Hattiesburg, which is 90 miles (145 kilometers) away. Mississippi officials said Thursday that they will open an additional drive-thru site for vaccinations soon in the state’s largest county.

Alabama officials also have been inundated with requests for appointments since announcing the state will begin vaccinations for people over 75 next week. A state hotline received more than a million calls the first day it was open.

Celia O’Kelley of Tuscaloosa said she couldn’t get through to anyone to get an appointment for her 95-year-old mother.

“I am scared because Tuscaloosa is a hot spot,” she said.

Associated Press writers Kim Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama; Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi; and Michelle Liu in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

Amazon city scrambles to provide oxygen to COVID-19 patients

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Hospital staff and relatives of COVID-19 patients rushed to provide facilities with oxygen tanks just flown into the Amazon rainforest’s biggest city as doctors chose which patients would breathe amid dwindling stocks and an effort to airlift some of them to other states.

As heavy rain poured down Thursday in Manaus, Rafael Pereira carried a small tank containing five cubic meters of oxygen for his mother-in-law at the 28 de Agosto hospital. He didn’t want to be interviewed because of his stress, but he looked relieved when the tank — which he said would aid her breathing for an additional two hours — was taken inside.

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Health workers at the Hospital Universitario Getulio Vargas took empty cylinders to its oxygen provider in the hopes there would be some to retrieve. Usually, the provider picks up the cylinders and brings newly refilled ones.

Despairing patients in overloaded hospitals waited as oxygen arrived to save some, but came too late for others. At least one of the cemeteries of Manaus, a city of 2.2 million people, had mourners lining up to enter and bury their dead. Brazilian artists, soccer clubs and politicians used their platforms to cry for help.

Brazil's health minister, Eduardo Pazuello, said Thursday that a second plane with medical supplies — including oxygen — would arrive Friday, and four others later. The local government's oxygen provider, multinational White Martins, said in a statement that it was considering diverting some of its supply from neighboring Venezuela. It wasn't immediately clear whether this would be sufficient to address the spiraling crisis.

"Yes, there is a collapse in the health care system in Manaus. The line for beds is growing by a lot — we have 480 people waiting now," Pazuello said in a broadcast on social media. "We are starting to remove patients with less serious (conditions) to reduce the impact."

Hospitals in Manaus admitted few new COVID-19 patients Thursday, suggesting many will suffer from the disease at home, and some may die.

The strain prompted Amazonas state's government to say it would transport 235 patients who depend on oxygen but aren't in intensive care units to five other states and the federal capital, Brasilia.

"I want to thank those governors who are giving us their hand in a human gesture," Amazonas Gov. Wilson Lima said at a news conference Thursday.

"All of the world looks at us when there is a problem as the Earth's lungs," he said, alluding to a common description of the Amazon. "Now we are asking for help. Our people need this oxygen."

Governors and mayors throughout the country offered help amid a flood of social media videos in which distraught relatives of COVID-19 patients in Manaus begged for people to buy them oxygen.

Federal prosecutors in the city, however, asked a local judge to pressure President Jair Bolsonaro's administration to step up its support. The prosecutors said later in the day that the main air force plane in the region for oxygen supply transportation "needs repair, which brought a halt to the emergency influx."

The air force said in an emailed statement to The Associated Press that it was deploying two planes to transport patients, starting Friday. The health ministry didn't respond to a request for comment about transportation plans.

The U.S Embassy in Brasilia confirmed it had received a request from the federal government to support the initiative, without providing details.

Local authorities recently called on the federal government to reinforce Manaus' stock of oxygen. The city's 14-day death toll is approaching the peak of last year's first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, according to official data.

In that first peak, Manaus consumed a maximum 30,000 cubic meters (about 1 million cubic feet) of oxygen per day, and now the need has more than doubled to nearly 70,000 cubic meters, according to White Martins.

"Due to the strong impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the consumption of oxygen in the city increased exponentially over the last few days in comparison with a volume that was already extremely high," White Martins said in an emailed statement to AP. "Demand is much higher than anything predictable and ... continues to grow significantly."

The company added that Manaus' remote location presents challenging logistics, requiring additional stocks to be transported by boat and by plane..

The governor also decreed more health restrictions, including the suspension of public transportation and establishing a curfew between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The new measures challenged protesters who on Thursday carried Brazilian flags through the streets. Lima, once seen as an ally of Bolsonaro, has faced criticism from supporters of the conservative president for imposing new restrictions aimed at stemming the virus' recent surge.

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Bolsonaro has downplayed risks of the disease, saying the economic fallout of the pandemic will kill more than the virus. His son Eduardo, a lawmaker who chairs the international relations committee in Brazil's lower house, was one of the many conservatives who egged on their supporters in December to challenge social distancing and disobey stay at home orders.

Park of the Tribes, a community of more than 2,500 Indigenous people on the outskirts of Manaus, went more than two months without any resident showing COVID-19 symptoms. In the past week, 29 people have tested positive for the coronavirus, said Vanda Ortega, a volunteer nurse in the community. Two went to urgent care units, but no one yet has required hospitalization.

"We're really very worried," said Ortega, who belongs to the Witoto ethnicity. "It's chaos here in Manaus. There isn't oxygen for anyone."

Associated Press writer Mauricio Savarese reported this story in Sao Paulo and AP writer David Biller reported from Rio de Janeiro. AP photographer Edmar Barros contributed to this report from Manaus.

Expanded vaccine rollout in US spawns a new set of problems

By JANIE HAR, JENNIFER PELTZ and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

The rapid expansion of COVID-19 vaccinations to senior citizens across the U.S. has led to bottlenecks, system crashes and hard feelings in many states because of overwhelming demand for the shots.

Mississippi's Health Department stopped taking new appointments the same day it began accepting them because of a "monumental surge" in requests. People had to wait hours to book vaccinations through a state website or a toll-free number Tuesday and Wednesday, and many were booted off the site because of technical problems and had to start over.

In California, counties begged for more coronavirus vaccine to reach millions of their senior citizens. Hospitals in South Carolina ran out of appointment slots within hours. Phone lines were jammed in Georgia.

"It's chaos," said New York City resident Joan Jeffri, 76, who had to deal with broken hospital web links and unanswered phone calls before her daughter helped her secure an appointment. "If they want to vaccinate 80% of the population, good luck, if this is the system. We'll be here in five years."

Up until the past few days, health care workers and nursing home patients had been given priority in most places around the U.S. But amid frustration over the slow rollout, states have thrown open the line to many of the nation's 54 million senior citizens with the blessing of President Donald Trump's administration, though the minimum age varies from place to place, at 65, 70 or higher.

On Thursday, New Jersey expanded vaccinations to people between 16 and 65 with certain medical conditions — including up to 2 million smokers, who are more prone to health complications.

The U.S., meanwhile, recorded 3,848 deaths on Wednesday, down from an all-time high of 4,327 the day before, according to Johns Hopkins University. The nation's overall death toll from COVID-19 has topped 385,000.

President-elect Joe Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan Thursday that includes speeding up vaccinations. Called the "American Rescue Plan," the legislative proposal would meet Biden's goal of administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration.

More than 11.1 million Americans, or over 3% of the U.S. population, have gotten their first shot of the vaccine, a gain of about 800,000 from the day before, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. The goal of inoculating anywhere between 70% and 85% of the population to achieve herd immunity and conquer the outbreak is still many months away.

Hard-hit Los Angeles County, the nation's most populous county with 10 million residents, said it couldn't immediately provide shots to the elderly because it had inoculated only about a quarter of its 800,000 health care workers.

"We're not done with our health care workers, and we actually don't have enough vaccine right now to be able to get done more quickly," Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said. "We haven't heard back from the state about vaccine availability and how it would be distributed."

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Santa Clara County health officials said the county of 2 million people had only enough vaccine to inoculate people 75 and older, not the 65-and-older crowd.

"It's almost like a beauty contest. And this should not be a beauty contest," County Supervisor Cindy Chavez said. "This is about life and death."

In Mississippi, officials said new appointments will probably have to wait until a hoped-for shipment of vaccine in mid-February.

In South Carolina, Kershaw Health in Camden implored people not to call its hospitals or doctors to schedule vaccination appointments after receiving more than 1,000 requests in two days. State health authorities said their hot line got 5,000 calls on Wednesday.

Francis Clark said she tried repeatedly to schedule an appointment for her 81-year-old mother, who lives alone outside Florence, South Carolina, and doesn't have internet access. But the local hospital had no openings on Wednesday, Clark said, and the other vaccination sites are too far away.

"My mom can't drive to Charleston," Clark said. "She's too old."

Allison Salerno, an audio producer from Athens, Georgia, said she spent the better part of a day calling her state's health department to get a vaccine appointment for her 89-year-old mother.

"I started calling at 8:30 a.m. and on the 67th call I was finally put on hold," Salerno said. "I had already pre-registered her two weeks before online, but I never received a confirmation."

After Salerno had spent 65 minutes on hold, someone finally came on the line and gave her mother a Saturday appointment.

"My mother has not been out since the beginning of the pandemic," Salerno said. "She's a very healthy woman and she wants to go to the grocery store, she wants to get her hair done."

Meanwhile, some states, like Minnesota, are waiting before throwing open the doors.

"As we learn more, we will work to make sure everyone who is eligible for a vaccine knows how, where, and when they can get their shots," the state Health Department said in an email. "Everyone's opportunity to get vaccinated will come; it will just take some time."

Arizona, which had the nation's highest COVID-19 diagnosis rate over the past week, will start signing up people 65 and older next week. It also plans to open a vaccination site at Phoenix Municipal Stadium in addition to the one dispensing thousands of shots daily at the home of the NFL's Arizona Cardinals.

To step up the pace of vaccinations, South Carolina made a rule change allowing medical students, retired nurses and other certain professionals to administer the shots.

California lawmakers are increasing the pressure on Gov. Gavin Newsom to likewise expand authorization for who can give injections to include nursing students, retired medical workers, firefighters and National Guard members with medical training.

Newsom said the state's priority is to deliver vaccines "as quickly as possible to those who face the gravest consequences." He urged patience for those not yet eligible, saying: "Your turn is coming."

Jeffri, the New Yorker, spent several days trying to book a vaccination and once actually received a slot, only to get a follow-up text saying they didn't have the doses. Finally, with some online sleuthing from her daughter, the retired arts-administration professor got an appointment for her first shot — two weeks from now.

"It's a relief," said Jeffri, who wrote to Gov. Andrew Cuomo about her ordeal. "But I'm not sure I trust it until it's done."

Biden unveils \$1.9T plan to stem COVID-19 and steady economy

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan Thursday to end "a crisis of deep human suffering" by speeding up vaccines and pumping out financial help to those struggling with the pandemic's prolonged economic fallout.

Called the "American Rescue Plan," the legislative proposal would meet Biden's goal of administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration, and advance his objective of reopening most

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schools by the spring. On a parallel track, it delivers another round of aid to stabilize the economy while the public health effort seeks the upper hand on the pandemic.

"We not only have an economic imperative to act now — I believe we have a moral obligation," Biden said in a nationwide address. At the same time, he acknowledged that his plan "does not come cheaply."

Biden proposed \$1,400 checks for most Americans, which on top of \$600 provided in the most recent COVID-19 bill would bring the total to the \$2,000 that Biden has called for. It would also extend a temporary boost in unemployment benefits and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September.

And it shoehorns in long-term Democratic policy aims such as increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, expanding paid leave for workers, and increasing tax credits for families with children. The last item would make it easier for women to go back to work, which in turn would help the economy recover.

The political outlook for the legislation remained unclear. In a joint statement, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer praised Biden for including liberal priorities, saying they would move quickly to pass it after Biden takes office next Wednesday. But Democrats have narrow margins in both chambers of Congress, and Republicans will push back on issues that range from increasing the minimum wage to providing more money for states, while demanding inclusion of their priorities, such as liability protection for businesses.

"Remember that a bipartisan \$900 billion #COVID19 relief bill became law just 18 days ago," tweeted Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. But Biden says that was only a down payment, and he promised more major legislation next month, focused on rebuilding the economy.

"The crisis of deep human suffering is in plain sight, and there's not time to waste," Biden said. "We have to act and we have to act now."

Still, he sought to manage expectations. "We're better equipped to do this than any nation in the world," he said. "But even with all these small steps, it's going to take time."

His relief bill would be paid for with borrowed money, adding to trillions in debt the government has already incurred to confront the pandemic. Aides said Biden will make the case that the additional spending and borrowing is necessary to prevent the economy from sliding into an even deeper hole. Interest rates are low, making debt more manageable.

Biden has long held that economic recovery is inextricably linked with controlling the coronavirus.

That squares with the judgment of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the most powerful business lobbying group and traditionally an adversary of Democrats. "We must defeat COVID before we can restore our economy and that requires turbocharging our vaccination efforts," the Chamber said in a statement Thursday night that welcomed Biden's plan but stopped short of endorsing it.

The plan comes as a divided nation is in the grip of the pandemic's most dangerous wave yet. So far, more than 385,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the U.S. And government numbers out Thursday reported a jump in weekly unemployment claims, to 965,000, a sign that rising infections are forcing businesses to cut back and lay off workers.

Under Biden's multipronged strategy, about \$400 billion would go directly to combating the pandemic, while the rest is focused on economic relief and aid to states and localities.

About \$20 billion would be allocated for a more disciplined focus on vaccination, on top of some \$8 billion already approved by Congress. Biden has called for setting up mass vaccination centers and sending mobile units to hard-to-reach areas.

With the backing of Congress and the expertise of private and government scientists, the Trump administration 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 11 million people getting the first of two shots, although more than 30 million doses have been delivered.

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reopen without risking further contagion.

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There's also a proposal to boost investment in genetic sequencing, to help track new virus strains including the more contagious variants identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Throughout the plan, there's a focus on ensuring that minority communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic are not shortchanged on vaccines and treatments, aides said.

With the new proposals comes a call to redouble efforts on the basics.

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. It's still the surest way to slow the COVID-19 wave, with more than 4,400 deaths reported just on Tuesday.

Biden's biggest challenge will be 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.

The pace of vaccination in the U.S. is approaching 1 million shots a day, but 1.8 million a day would be needed to reach widespread or "herd" immunity by the summer, according to a recent estimate by the American Hospital Association. Wen says the pace should be even higher — closer to 3 million a day.

Biden believes the key to speeding that up lies not only in delivering more vaccine but also in 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.

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.

"We will have to move heaven and earth to get more people vaccinated," Biden said.

Next Wednesday, when Biden is sworn in as president, marks the anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Joanne Rogers, widow of TV's famed Mister Rogers, dies at 92

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Joanne Rogers, an accomplished concert pianist who celebrated and protected the legacy of her husband, the beloved children's TV host Mister Rogers, has died in Pittsburgh. She was 92.

Rogers died Thursday, according to the Fred Rogers Center. No cause of death was given. The center called her "a joyful and tender-hearted spirit, whose heart and wisdom have guided our work in service of Fred's enduring legacy."

Joanne and Fred Rogers were married for more than 50 years, spanning the launch and end of the low-key, low-tech "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," which presented Fred Rogers as one adult in a busy world who always had time to listen to children. His pull as America's favorite neighbor never seemed to wane before his death in 2003.

"I can't think of a time when we've needed him so much," Joanne Rogers told The Associated Press in 2018. "I think his work is just as timely now as it was when it came out, frankly."

An ordained Presbyterian minister, Fred Rogers produced the pioneering show at Pittsburgh public television station WQED beginning in 1966, going national two years later. He composed his own songs for the show.

It offered a soft haven for kids, in sharp contrast to the louder, more animated competition. The final episode of what his widow called "a comfortable lap" aired in August 2001.

PBS stations around the country still air "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" and some can be found on the PBS Kids video app. There are DVD collections on Amazon and episodes stream on Amazon Prime.

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The city of Pittsburgh, where the show was produced, tweeted that Joanne Rogers was one of Pittsburgh's "greatest neighbors." It said the couple "forever changed our city." Other tributes came from such varied fans as tennis star Billie Jean King to designer Kenneth Cole.

Fred Rogers' effect on popular culture was profound: Eddie Murphy parodied him on "Saturday Night Live" in the 1980s and one of Rogers' trademark zip-up sweaters hangs in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. He's had a category dedicated to him on "Jeopardy."

2018, the 50th anniversary of when Rogers first appeared on TV screens, prompted a PBS special, a new postage stamp, the feature-length documentary "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" and, a year later, the Tom Hanks-led biopic "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood."

Born Sara Joanne Byrd in 1928, Joanne Rogers met her future husband at Rollins College in Florida. After Fred Rogers' death, she helped develop the Fred Rogers Center Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at St. Vincent College in his hometown of Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

"Joanne and Fred were Pennsylvania treasures committed to improving our communities and the lives of our children. We will never forget their legacy of kindness," Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said in a statement. She is survived by two sons, James Byrd Rogers and John Rogers.

Associated Press reporter Michael Rubinkam contributed to this report from Pennsylvania.

FBI tracking 'extensive' online chatter about armed protests

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI is tracking an "extensive amount of concerning online chatter," including calls for armed protests leading up to next week's presidential inauguration, Director Chris Wray said Thursday.

Wray, in his first public appearance since the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, said in a security briefing for Vice President Mike Pence that the FBI remains concerned about the potential for violence at protests and rallies in Washington and in state capitols around the country.

Those events could bring armed individuals near government buildings and elected officials, Wray warned, while also noting, "One of the real challenges in this space is trying to distinguish what's aspirational versus what's intentional."

Wray said the FBI was receiving a "significant" amount of information that it was pushing out to other law enforcement agencies ahead of the inauguration. Information-sharing is critical before any significant public event like the inauguration, but the issue is receiving particular scrutiny because of signs law enforcement was unprepared for the violent, deadly surge at the Capitol by loyalists of President Donald Trump.

Federal officials have warned local law enforcement agencies that the riot at the Capitol is likely to inspire others with violent intentions.

"We're looking at individuals who may have an eye towards repeating that same kind of violence that we saw last week," Wray said, adding that since January 6, the FBI has identified over 200 suspects.

"We know who you are. If you're out there, an FBI agent is coming to find you," he added.

States nationwide have already been stepping up security in preparation for possible armed protests and violence this weekend, particularly at statehouses amid legislative sessions and inaugural ceremonies. Officials are reassessing their security plans for high-risk targets and police in major cities are preparing to be put on tactical alert if necessary. An FBI bulletin earlier this week warned of potential armed protests in all 50 states.

To monitor threats, share intelligence and decide how to allocate resources, the FBI during the inauguration will operate a round-the-clock command post at headquarters and at each of its 56 field offices, Wray said.

"Our posture is aggressive, and it's going to stay that way through the inauguration," he said.

Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen attended a separate briefing Thursday at the FBI's Strategic Information and Operations Center, where he was briefed on specifics of the inauguration security plan and

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met with FBI leaders for an update on the investigations.

Separately, Pence returned to the Capitol on Thursday for the first time since the attempted insurrection forced security to whisk him to a secure location after rioters interrupted his work overseeing the congressional count of Electoral College votes.

The vice president visited with guard troops keeping watch outside the Capitol, telling them he's familiar with the National Guard because he used to be a governor.

"Thank you for stepping forward for your country," Pence said. He told the troops they would be get to witness the transfer of power and thanked them for their service.

"It's been my great honor to serve as your vice president," Pence added, before ending with another round of thanks and wishing the troops a "safe inauguration and a swearing-in of a new president and vice president."

In response, the guardsmen yelled, "Hooah."

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville, Michael Balsamo and Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Impeachment complicates the early days of Biden's presidency

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden already faces the daunting task of steering a newly announced \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill through a closely divided Congress as the pandemic and its economic fallout grow.

Now Biden will have to do it with President Donald Trump's impeachment trial beginning potentially as soon as his first day in office.

The confluence of events amounts to one of the most politically and logistically complicated openings to a new administration in modern history, requiring Biden to try to move the country into a post-Trump era even as senators debate Trump's most divisive acts.

"It's going to be incredibly challenging," said former Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor, a Democrat. "There's only so much bandwidth in the Congress."

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who will have a significant role to play in ushering Biden's agenda through the Senate as chair of the Budget Committee, underscored how much is on Democrats' plate during Biden's first few months in office.

"We don't have the time to spend an enormous amount of time on impeachment, and then we're going to go to Biden's nominees and then we have to deal with legislation," the independent senator said. "We're going to have to move simultaneously in a whole bunch of areas."

Biden has so far stayed largely out of public deliberations over Trump's impeachment for inciting a riot. After the House vote, Biden was forceful in denouncing the violent attack on the Capitol that precipitated the impeachment charge, but he also said he'd work as president to ensure Americans "stand together as a nation" — and called on the Senate to "find a way to deal with their constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

His hands-off approach to the matter is in keeping with his stance throughout the campaign and into his transition, even as Trump's ever-growing controversies have overwhelmed the news cycle.

Biden took his time in endorsing the first impeachment of Trump in 2019, only expressing support for the move weeks after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi launched the formal effort. Decades before, when Richard Nixon was impeached, Biden cautioned his Senate colleagues to consider the weight of the moment and give Nixon a fair trial.

Democrats on Capitol Hill say they largely want to see Biden continue his even-keeled approach and focus on his agenda, rather than on impeachment, once he enters office.

"President-elect Biden has a big job. So let him do his job — and let the Senate do their work," said

California Rep. Barbara Lee, a Democrat.

But once the proceedings start, it's certain to be tougher for Biden to completely avoid them, with the trial dominating the news cycle and forcing his former opponent back into the spotlight, even as Biden tries to stay focused on the coronavirus pandemic.

And there's the prospect they could further exacerbate the already fraught atmosphere on Capitol Hill, politicizing Biden's agenda and making it tougher for him to get support from winnable Republican senators.

"Trump's most fervent supporters are going to have an opportunity to attack Democrats, not for their programs and not for their ideas, but as the evil caricature that they have come to portray them," said Jeffrey Engel, director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. "People who were potentially gettable as votes for some of Biden's legislative agenda are going to be much more hesitant to go along with Democratic plans while Democrats are openly being vilified."

Biden was known as a dealmaker in the Senate and has long relationships with many Republican senators after his 36-year career there. He's also been in touch with leadership of both parties during the transition. But as Virginia Sen. Mark Warner points out, there's the risk that impeachment poisons the well for Biden with those senators who don't know him well.

"At least half the Republican caucus has never served with Joe Biden," said Warner, a Democrat. "His ability to navigate with those new members, if their first impression is driven by what could end up being decided on partisan lines, that's going to make his job more difficult."

For now, Biden is staying focused on his agenda.

On Thursday, in announcing his COVID-19 relief package, he emphasized that he hopes to work with lawmakers from both parties and expressed optimism that despite the \$1.9 trillion price tag, "we're ready to get this done."

"I know what I just described does not come cheaply, but we simply can't afford not to do what I'm proposing," Biden said.

And Democrats on Capitol Hill are barreling ahead as well, refusing to accept the prospect that impeachment will deter them from their legislative goals.

"What the Senate is going to have to do is show the world that it can walk and chew gum at the same time," Sanders said.

Oxygen shortage in Amazon city forces mass patient transfer

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Dozens of COVID-19 patients in the Amazon rainforest's biggest city will be flown out of state as the local health system collapses, authorities announced Thursday as dwindling stocks of oxygen tanks meant some people were starting to die breathless at home.

Doctors in Manaus, a city of 2 million people, were choosing which patients to treat, and at least one of the city's cemeteries asked mourners to line up to enter and bury their dead. Patients in overloaded hospitals waited in despair throughout the day as oxygen cylinders arrived to save some, but came too late for others.

The strains prompted Amazonas state's government to say it would transport 235 patients who depend on oxygen but aren't in intensive-care units to five other states and the federal capital, Brasilia.

"I want to thank those governors who are giving us their hand in a human gesture," Amazonas Gov. Wilson Lima said at a news conference on Thursday.

"All of the world looks at us when there is a problem as the Earth's lungs," he said, alluding to a common description of the Amazon. "Now we are asking for help. Our people need this oxygen."

Many other governors and mayors elsewhere in the country offered help later amid a flood of social media videos in which distraught relatives of COVID-19 patients in Manaus asked followers to buy oxygen for them.

Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão said on Twitter that the country's air force had taken more than eight tons of hospital items including oxygen cylinders, beds and tents to Manaus.

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Federal prosecutors in the city, however, asked a local judge to put pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro's administration to step up its support. The prosecutors said later in the day that the main air force plane in the region for oxygen supply transportation "needs repair, which brought a halt to the emergency influx."

Neither air force nor the federal health ministry answered a request for comment from The Associated Press.

The U.S Embassy in Brasilia confirmed it had received a request from local authorities to give support to the initiative, without providing details.

Manaus authorities recently called on the federal government to reinforce their dwindling stock of oxygen needed to keep COVID-19 patients breathing. The city's 14-day death toll is approaching the peak of last year's first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, according to official data.

In that first peak, Manaus consumed a maximum 30,000 cubic meters (about 1 million cubic feet) of oxygen per day, and now the need has more than doubled to nearly 70,000 cubic meters, according to White Martins, the multinational company that provides oxygen to Manaus' public hospitals. At his news conference, the governor blamed White Martins for the shortfall in supply.

"Due to the strong impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the consumption of oxygen in the city increased exponentially over the last few days in comparison with a volume that was already extremely high," White Martins said in an emailed statement to AP. "Demand is much higher than anything predictable and ... continues to grow significantly."

The company added that Manaus' remote location presents challenging logistics, requiring additional stocks to be transported by boat and by plane. It also said it is considering bringing supplies from neighboring Venezuela to ease the difficulties in Manaus.

The governor also decreed more health restrictions, including the suspension of public transportation and establishing a curfew between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The new measures challenged protesters who Thursday morning carried Brazilian flags through the streets. Lima, once seen as an ally of Bolsonaro, has faced criticism from supporters of the conservative president for imposing new restrictions aimed at stemming the virus' recent surge.

Bolsonaro has downplayed risks of the disease, saying the economic fallout of the pandemic will kill more than the virus. His son Eduardo, a lawmaker that heads the international relations committee in Brazil's lower house, was one of the many conservatives that egged on their supporters in December to challenge social distancing and disobey stay at home orders.

Park of the Tribes, a community of more than 2,500 Indigenous people on Manaus' outskirts, went more than two months without any resident showing COVID-19 symptoms. In the past week, 29 people have tested positive, said Vanda Ortega, a volunteer nurse in the community. Two went to urgent care units, but no one yet has required hospitalization.

"We're really very worried," said Ortega, who belongs to the Witoto ethnicity. "It's chaos here in Manaus. There isn't oxygen for anyone."

The surge of cases follows two months of more frequent gatherings, first during November local elections with large rallies and long lines of voters, followed by year-end festivities.

The city of Manaus declared a state of emergency on Jan. 5. The decree enables the municipal government to temporarily contract personnel, services and material without public tenders. A separate decree suspends authorization for events and revokes those already granted, while a third establishes telecommuting for nonessential municipal employees through March.

A paper published this week indicated that a new strain of the coronavirus had been circulating in Manaus as of mid-December. The paper said that raised concerns about greater transmissibility or potential for reinfection, although such possibilities remain unproven.

A positive COVID-19 test doesn't reveal which variant of the virus the patient has, but it is likely that the new strain has been partially responsible for driving Manaus' second wave, according to Pedro Hallal, an epidemiologist who coordinates the Federal University of Pelotas' testing program, by far Brazil's most comprehensive.

"If it was circulating in mid-December, now it's probably circulating much more," Hallal said by phone. "So I do think at least part of the new infections are due to the new strain. We don't have the definite

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data on it, but it's very likely."

Associated Press writer Mauricio Savarese reported this story in Sao Paulo and AP writer David Biller reported from Rio de Janeiro.

Urban Hire: Meyer returns to sidelines with NFL's Jaguars

By MARK LONG AP Pro Football Writer

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Urban Meyer has won everywhere he's coached. Small colleges. Big-time programs. He's been a difference maker at each stop during his storied career.

He's ready to try something new: the NFL.

Meyer agreed to become head coach of the Jacksonville Jaguars on Thursday, leaving the broadcast booth and returning to the sidelines after a two-year absence that followed another health scare.

The 56-year-old Meyer was team owner Shad Khan's top target for weeks, maybe even months, and the deal was signed shortly after their third and final meeting in seven days. They met last Friday on Khan's yacht in Miami, again Wednesday and once more at the facility Thursday.

Hiring the longtime college coach with three national championships signifies a new direction for a franchise that has lost 105 of 144 games since Khan took over in 2012.

"This is a great day for Jacksonville and Jaguars fans everywhere," Khan said in a statement. "Urban Meyer is who we want and need, a leader, winner and champion who demands excellence and produces results.

"While Urban already enjoys a legacy in the game of football that few will ever match, his passion for the opportunity in front of him here in Jacksonville is powerful and unmistakable."

Meyer went 187-32 — a staggering winning percentage of 85.3 — in stops at Bowling Green (2001-02), Utah (2003-04), Florida (2005-10) and Ohio State (2012-18). He ranks seventh all time in collegiate winning percentage, trailing only Notre Dame legends Knute Rockne and Frank Leahy among coaches at major programs.

But some doubts remain about Meyer's ability to make a smooth transition to the NFL, where motivational tactics tend to be moot and losing multiple games every year is a given. Meyer never lost more than five times in any season as a college head coach; he went 83-9 at Ohio State.

Still, Meyer has been eyeing an NFL move for months. He researched the league with help from former players and friends, started assembling a potential staff and learned how the front office works. Meyer and Khan have been friends for years, building a relationship while both were living in Big Ten country.

"I've analyzed this decision from every angle — the time is right in Jacksonville," Meyer said in a statement. "And the time is right for me to return to coaching. I'm excited about the future of this organization and our long-term prospect for success."

Jacksonville was the most attractive opening. The Jaguars have 11 picks in the 2021 draft, including five in the top 65, and are nearly \$100 million under the projected salary cap. Adding to the appeal: Khan, a billionaire businessman, has shown a penchant for patience and a willingness to spend big.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence is a lock to land in Jacksonville with the top pick and will be the centerpiece of the team's latest rebuild.

Meyer replaces Doug Marrone, who was fired after losing the final 15 games in 2020. Marrone went 25-44 in four-plus seasons with the Jaguars, including 2-1 in the 2017 postseason. Marrone failed repeatedly to fill the team's long-standing hole at quarterback, and Khan kept him and general manager Dave Caldwell around a year longer than many expected to make them clean up a fractured locker room and a stressed salary cap.

Khan also interviewed Kansas City offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, Atlanta defensive coordinator Raheem Morris, San Francisco defensive coordinator Robert Saleh and Tennessee offensive coordinator Arthur Smith.

The general belief was the job was Meyer's if he wanted it. He clearly did, with some stipulations.

He will have the leeway to put his touch on every aspect of the organization, the kind of overhaul Jack-

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sonville hasn't seen in nearly three decades of existence. Khan is switching to a coach-centric model that could give Meyer final say in personnel. Meyer and the next general manager will report to Khan, who wants to be more involved in the most significant roster decisions.

There's little doubt, though, that Meyer will be calling the shots.

Meyer's health remains a concern, though. He stepped down at Ohio State in 2018 mostly because of a congenital arachnoid cyst in his brain, which required surgery in 2014 and bothered him throughout his final season with the Buckeyes. He also resigned at Florida for health reasons in December 2009 only to change his mind the following day and instead take a leave of absence.

He returned to coach in 2010 and then walked away again at the end of the season, a move that eventually angered many Florida faithful because he took the job at Ohio State less than a year later.

Meyer spent the last two years in an analyst role for Fox Sports, appearing weekly on the network's college football pregame show.

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Trump impeachment trial to focus on his attacks on election

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's historic second impeachment could go to trial as soon as Inauguration Day, with U.S. senators serving not only as jurors but as shaken personal witnesses and victims of the deadly siege of the Capitol by a mob of his supporters.

Trump is the only president to be twice impeached, and the first to be prosecuted as he leaves the White House, an ever-more-extraordinary end to the defeated president's tenure.

In pursuing conviction, House impeachment managers said Thursday they will be making the case that Trump's incendiary rhetoric hours before the bloody attack on the Capitol was not isolated, but rather part of an escalating campaign to overturn the November election results. It culminated, they will argue, in the Republican president's rally cry to "fight like hell" as Congress was tallying the Electoral College votes to confirm he'd lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

The trial could begin shortly after Biden takes the oath of office next Wednesday, but some Democrats are pushing for a later trial to give him time to set up his administration and work on other priorities. No date has been set. Already National Guard troops flood the city and protect the Capitol amid warnings of more violence ahead of the inaugural. It's a far different picture, due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the threats of violence, from the traditional pomp and peaceful transfer of power.

Whenever it starts, the impeachment trial will force a further reckoning for the Republican Party and the senators who largely stood by Trump throughout his presidency and allowed him to spread false attacks against the 2020 election. Last week's assault angered lawmakers, stunned the nation and flashed unsettling imagery around the globe, the most serious breach of the Capitol since the War of 1812, and the worst by home-grown intruders.

"The only path to any reunification of this broken and divided country is by shining a light on the truth," said Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-Pa., who will serve as an impeachment manager.

"That's what the trial in the Senate will be about," she told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Trump was impeached Wednesday by the House on a single charge, incitement of insurrection, in lightning-quick proceedings just a week after the siege. Ten Republicans joined all Democrats in the 232-197 vote to impeach.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is open to considering impeachment, having told associates he is done with Trump, but he has not signaled how he would vote. McConnell continues to hold great sway in his party, even though convening the trial next week could be among his last acts as majority leader as Democrats prepare to take control of the Senate.

No president has ever been convicted in the Senate, and it would take a two-thirds vote against Trump, an extremely high hurdle. Two new senators from Georgia, both Democrats, are to be sworn in, leaving

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the chamber divided 50-50. That will tip the majority to the Democrats once Kamala Harris takes office. The vice president is the tie breaker.

But conviction of Trump is not out of the realm of possibility, especially as corporations and wealthy political donors distance themselves from his brand of politics and the Republicans who stood by his attempt to overturn the election.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, said Thursday, "Such unlawful actions cannot go without consequence." She said in a statement that the House responded "appropriately" with impeachment and she will consider the trial arguments.

At least four Republican senators have publicly expressed concerns about Trump's actions, but others have signaled their preference to move on. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., issued a statement saying he opposes impeachment against a president who has left office. Trump ally Lindsey Graham of South Carolina is building support for an alternative of launching a commission to investigate the siege.

Ahead of opening arguments, Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell of California, another impeachment manager, suggested senators will be asked to focus on their own experiences the day of the attack.

"You don't have to tell anyone who was in the building twice what it was like to be terrorized," Swalwell said.

The riot delayed the tally of Electoral College votes that was the last step in finalizing Biden's victory as lawmakers fled for shelter and police, guns drawn, barricaded the doors to the House chamber.

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

Under Senate procedure, the trial is to start soon after the House delivers the article of impeachment. The soonest the calendar has senators back in session is Tuesday.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has not said when she will take the crucial next step to transmit the impeachment article to the Senate. After Trump's first impeachment, in 2019, she withheld the articles for some time to set the stage for the Senate action.

Biden has said the Senate should be able this time to split its work, starting the trial and working on his priorities, including swift confirmation of his Cabinet nominees.

On Inauguration Day, the Senate typically confirms some of the new president's Cabinet, particularly national security officials. Biden's choice of Avril Haines as director of national intelligence will have a hearing Friday by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"We are working with Republicans to try to find a path forward," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer's office.

Biden ally Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said the tension among Democrats is over moving ahead quickly on impeachment or focusing on the president-elect's other priorities. "We are balancing," he said on CNN.

Holed up at the White House, watching the impeachment proceedings on TV, Trump released a video statement late Wednesday in which he appealed to his supporters to refrain from any further violence or disruption of Biden's inauguration.

"Mob violence goes against everything I believe in and everything our movement stands for," Trump said.

He was first impeached by the House in 2019 over his dealings with Ukraine, but the Senate voted in 2020 to acquit.

In making a case for the "high crimes and misdemeanors" demanded in the Constitution, the four-page impeachment resolution relies on Trump's own language spreading falsehoods about the election. It also seeks to prevent him from ever holding public office again.

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.

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.

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Associated Press writers Kevin Freking, Andrew Taylor, Alan Fram, Zeke Miller and Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.

National Guard troops flooding in as Washington locks down

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, which 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.

The number of National Guard troops coming to Washington to assist with security has so far grown to about 21,000, Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told Vice President Mike Pence at a briefing Thursday. And officials have said the number could grow as law enforcement agencies review the ongoing threats.

"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 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. on 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 asking D.C. residents to avoid the downtown area entirely, and the city announced that 13 Metro stations inside the security perimeter will shut down for several days.

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 during 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.

"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 canceling 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

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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 the National Guard troops, some of them armed. Pentagon officials approved requests to have some of them carry either long guns or handguns, particularly those assigned near the Capitol building. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss security details.

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.

D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee estimated Wednesday that more than 20,000 National Guard members would be active in the city on Inauguration Day. But officials said Thursday that law enforcement had requested many more, and the number approved by the Pentagon is now 21,000.

As of Thursday, there were roughly 7,000 already in the city, with thousands more en route. The length of their missions may vary, but Defense Department officials were authorized to deploy the Guard for up to 30 days for the inauguration and surrounding protests.

U.S. defense officials say state leaders have made it clear that their priority is to protect their own capitals, which are on alert against violent protests or attacks, but they also have given assurances that they will have enough troops to send some support to the U.S. Capitol.

NY attorney general sues NYPD over Floyd protest response

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York’s attorney general sued the New York Police Department on Thursday, calling the rough treatment of protesters against racial injustice last spring part of a longstanding pattern of abuse that stemmed from inadequate training, supervision and discipline.

Attorney General Letitia James’ lawsuit includes dozens of examples of alleged misconduct during the spring demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd’s police killing, including the use of pepper spray and batons on protesters, trapping demonstrators with a technique called kettling and arresting medics and legal observers.

“We found a pattern of deeply concerning and unlawful practices that the NYPD utilized in response to these largely peaceful protests,” James said at a news conference announcing the lawsuit.

James, a Democrat, was tasked by Gov. Andrew Cuomo with investigating whether NYPD officers used excessive force to quell unrest and enforce Mayor Bill de Blasio’s nightly curfew. She issued a preliminary report in July that cited a “clear breakdown of trust between police and the public.”

James is seeking reforms including the appointment of a federal monitor to oversee the NYPD’s policing tactics at future protests and a court order declaring that the policies and practices the department used during the protests were unlawful.

The lawsuit in federal court named the city, de Blasio, police Commissioner Dermot Shea and Chief of Department Terence Monahan as defendants. James criticized de Blasio for saying the use of kettling was justified and Shea for saying that the NYPD “had a plan which was executed nearly flawlessly” when officers aggressively cracked down on protesters on June 4 in the Bronx.

In June, at the height of the protests, de Blasio was accused of misleading the city when he told reporters that he personally saw “no use of force around peaceful protests,” even after officers had been caught on video moving on demonstrators without provocation and bashing them with batons.

De Blasio said he met with James on Wednesday and that they share the goal of pushing for major police reforms, such as implementing recommendations in previous reports on the NYPD’s protest response. De Blasio, also a Democrat, said however that he did not agree a lawsuit was the solution.

“A court process and the added bureaucracy of a federal monitor will not speed up this work,” de Blasio said. “There is no time to waste and we will continue to press forward.”

John Miller, the NYPD’s deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism, said the department is committed to reform but that James’ lawsuit “doesn’t seem to meet the standard for a federal monitor, and it doesn’t seem to illustrate a pattern and practice” as required.

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The head of the city's largest police union blamed a "failure of New York City's leadership" for sending officers "to police unprecedented protests and violent riots with no plan, no strategy and no support."

"They should be forced to answer for the resulting chaos, instead of pointing fingers at cops on the streets and ignoring the criminals who attacked us with bricks and firebombs," Police Benevolent Association President Pat Lynch said.

James' lawsuit is the second major legal action to stem from the NYPD's handling of the protests.

In October, the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society sued the city on behalf of protesters who say they were assaulted and abused by police.

Andrew Smith, a Black man who was seen on video getting pepper sprayed in the face by a white officer who'd tore down his facemask, said that officer "showed the world the inadequate training, the violent racist culture of the NYPD when he attacked me when my hands were high up in the air."

A civil rights organization and a city watchdog agency have also criticized the department's actions.

Human Rights Watch issued a report in November on the Bronx crackdown and the city's inspector general issued a report in December that found that the NYPD was caught off guard by the size of the protests and resorted to aggressive tactics that stoked tensions and stifled free speech.

Mark Winston Griffith, a spokesperson for the advocacy group Communities United for Police Reform applauded the lawsuit, saying: "NYPD violence against protesters is a long-standing problem and it's a credit to Attorney General James that she's using the power of her office to challenge the systemic lack of accountability for this violence."

In a joint statement, the NYCLU and Legal Aid Society said: "We hope this will be the beginning of a serious reckoning over police violence and militarized use of force against protesters, especially people of color, and a check on the impunity many officers have come to see as their right."

On Twitter, follow Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak.

VIRUS TODAY: Unemployment claims in US rise to 965,000

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— The number of people seeking unemployment aid soared last week to 965,000, the most since late August, offering evidence that the resurgent virus has caused a spike in layoffs. The Labor Department issued the latest figures for jobless claims, which remain at levels never seen until the virus struck in March. Before the pandemic, weekly applications typically numbered around 225,000. Last spring, after nationwide shutdowns took effect, applications for jobless benefits spiked to nearly 7 million — 10 times the previous record high.

— President-elect Joe Biden's coronavirus action plan aims to bring new urgency to the nation's vaccination campaign coupled with another round of economic relief. The Biden plan being unveiled Thursday comes as a divided nation remains caught in the grip of the pandemic's deadliest wave yet. More than 385,000 people have died in the U.S. Biden hopes his strategy puts the country on the path to recovery by the end of his administration's first 100 days.

— The rapid expansion of COVID-19 vaccinations to senior citizens has led to bottlenecks, system crashes and hard feelings in many states because of overwhelming demand for the shots. Until the past few days, health care workers and nursing home patients had been given priority in most of the U.S. But amid frustration over the slow rollout, states have thrown open the line to many of the nation's senior citizens with the blessing of the Trump administration. The minimum age varies from place to place — 65, 70 or higher.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging about 246,000 new cases and more than 3,300 deaths each day. The nation's death toll since the start of the pandemic now stands at more than 385,000.

QUOTABLE: "I've been in a house since March. I'm 81 years old. There's a few things on my bucket list I'd like to accomplish yet." — Gary Dohman of California after his son made an appointment for him to

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get the COVID-19 vaccine at Disneyland.

ICYMI: President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago club's failure to enforce Palm Beach County's mask ordinance at its New Year's Eve bash resulted in a warning but no fine or other punishment. The county sent a letter to the club's manager on Wednesday telling him that future violations of the ordinance could result in fines of up to \$15,000 for each violation. Video of the party shows that few of the 500 guests wore masks. The club did not respond to a call seeking comment.

ON THE HORIZON: California aims to administer 1.5 million COVID-19 vaccines by Friday. Counties sought more doses after the state made up to 4 million more people eligible to be inoculated, including those 65 and older.

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

For first time in 5 years, US gas mileage down, emissions up

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — A new government report says gas mileage for new vehicles dropped and pollution increased in model year 2019 for the first time in five years.

The mileage decrease comes as Americans continue to buy SUVs and trucks, and shift away from more efficient vehicles.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the changes show that few automakers could meet what it called unrealistic emissions and mileage standards set by the Obama administration through the 2020 model year.

But environmental groups say that automakers used loopholes and stopped marketing fuel-efficient cars and electric vehicles knowing that the Trump administration was about to roll back mileage and pollution standards.

The EPA report released Wednesday says gas mileage fell 0.2 miles per gallon for model year 2019, while greenhouse gas emissions rose by 3 grams per mile traveled, compared with 2018 figures. Mileage fell and pollution increased for the first time since 2014.

Mileage dropped to 24.9 miles per gallon while greenhouse gas emissions rose to 356 grams per mile, the report said.

To comply with the Obama-era standards, which the Trump administration rolled back starting with the 2021 model year, 11 of 14 major automakers had to rely on credits from previous years or those purchased from companies with more zero emissions vehicles, the EPA said.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in a prepared statement Wednesday that the agency has set realistic standards "that will reduce emissions as well as vehicle costs and maintain consumer choice going forward."

But environmental groups said the falling mileage and rising pollution are the outgrowth of Trump's rollbacks.

"Even before President Trump slammed on the brakes when he rolled back mileage-and-emissions standards, the EPA report shows, the auto companies had failed to cut pollution and improve fuel efficiency," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign at the Center for Biological Diversity.

Jeff Alson, a former EPA engineer, said mileage worsened because consumers are moving toward bigger SUVs and trucks. But the Obama-era standards forced the industry to make those vehicles more efficient.

"If we hadn't had the Obama standards ... then these numbers would all be much worse," Alson said. "We would be going backward every year, not just this year."

In calendar year 2019, SUVs and trucks accounted for nearly 72% of U.S. new vehicle sales. That rose to almost 76% in 2020, according to Autodata Corp. In 2012, trucks and SUVs were only 49% of sales.

Generally, cars are more efficient than trucks and SUVs because they sit lower and are more aerodynamic. But automakers say U.S. consumers like higher-sitting SUVs and trucks, especially when gasoline prices remain low.

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Of the 14 major automakers, only Tesla, Honda and Subaru met emissions standards for the 2019 model year, the EPA report stated. Detroit automakers Fiat Chrysler, Ford and General Motors emitted the most pollution, largely because they sell more full-size pickup trucks and SUVs than other manufacturers.

Environmental groups are hoping that President-elect Joe Biden will push for stronger mileage requirements and pollution limits after he takes office Jan. 20. Biden has said fighting climate change, which is caused by burning fossil fuels, is a top priority.

They say strong measures are needed to fight global warming. "Given the urgency of the climate crisis, we cannot allow this to continue," said Luke Tonachel, director of clean vehicles for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "The Biden administration will need to move quickly to reimpose meaningful tailpipe pollution standards and put us on the road to 100% pollution-free vehicles."

This story was first published on Jan. 6, 2021. It was updated on Jan. 14, 2021, to correct the second paragraph to show that new vehicle gas mileage for 2019 decreased rather than increased.

'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, are living under 6 p.m.-to-6 a.m. restrictions on movement. At 12 hours, the curfew is the longest anywhere in the European Union's 27 nations.

Starting Saturday, the rest of France will follow suit. The prime minister announced Thursday an extension of the 6 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew to cover the whole country, including zones where the nightly deadline for getting home hadn't started until 8 p.m.

French shops will have to close at 6 p.m. Outdoor activities will stop, with the exception of quick walks for pets. Workers will need employers' notes to commute or move around for work after curfew.

Those who have lived with the longer curfew for the past couple of weeks say it's often bad for business and for what remained of their anemic social lives during the pandemic.

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 zones already shutting down at 6 p.m. 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."

By extending the 6 p.m. curfew nationwide, for at least 15 days, the government aims to limit infections in the country that has seen over 69,000 known virus deaths. It also wants to slow the spread of a particularly contagious virus variant that has swept across neighboring Britain, where new infections and

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virus deaths have soared.

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 Gabriel Attal says.

Curfews elsewhere in Europe 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>

Trump administration slashes imperiled spotted owls' habitat

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The Trump administration said Wednesday that it would slash millions of acres of protected habitat designated for the imperiled northern spotted owl in Oregon, Washington state and Northern California, much of it in prime timber locations in Oregon's coastal ranges.

Environmentalists immediately decried the move and accused the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under President Donald Trump of taking a parting shot at protections designed to help restore the species in favor of the timber industry. The tiny owl is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and was rejected for an upgrade to endangered status last year by the federal agency despite losing nearly 4% of its population annually.

"This revision guts protected habitat for the northern spotted owl by more than a third. It's Trump's latest parting gift to the timber industry and another blow to a species that needs all the protections it can get

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to fully recover," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Timber groups applauded the decision, which won't take effect for 60 days. More thinning and management of protected forests is necessary to prevent wildfires, which devastated 560 square miles (1,450 square kilometers) of spotted owl habitat last fall, said Travis Joseph, president of the American Forest Resources Council. Of that, about 300 square miles (777 square kilometers) is no longer considered viable for the birds.

Loss of the ability to log in areas protected for the spotted owl has devastated rural communities, he said. The 3.4 million acres (1.4 million hectares) removed from federal protections Wednesday includes all of Oregon's so-called O&C lands, which are big timber territory. The more than 2 million acres (809,000 hectares) are spread in a checkerboard pattern over 18 counties in western Oregon.

"This rule rights a wrong imposed on rural communities and businesses and gives us a chance to restore balance to federal forest management and species conservation in the Pacific Northwest," Joseph said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service agreed in a settlement with the timber industry to reevaluate the spotted owls' protected territory following a 2018 U.S. Supreme Court decision involving a different federally protected species.

The Trump administration has moved to roll back protections for waterways and wetlands, narrow protections for wildlife facing extinction and open more public land to oil and gas drilling.

But for decades, the federal government has been trying to save the northern spotted owl, a native bird that sparked an intense battle over logging across Washington, Oregon and California.

The dark-eyed owl prefers to nest in old-growth forests and received federal protections in 1990, a listing that dramatically redrew the economic landscape for the Pacific Northwest timber industry and launched a decadeslong battle between environmentalists and loggers. Old-growth Douglas firs, many 100 to 200 years old, that are preferred by the owl are also of great value to loggers.

After the owl was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, earning it a Time magazine cover, U.S. officials halted logging on millions of acres of old-growth forests on federal lands to protect the bird's habitat. But the population kept declining, and it faces another threat: competition from the barred owl.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has since said the northern spotted owl warrants being moved up to the more robust "endangered" status because of continued population declines. But the agency refused to do so last year, saying other species took higher priority.

That decision is facing a legal challenge led by the Center for Biological Diversity.

This story was first published on Jan. 13, 2021. It was updated on Jan. 14, 2021, to correct the amount of owl habitat devastated by Oregon wildfires last fall. About 560 square miles (1,450 square kilometers) of potential owl habitat burned, not 300 acres, and 300 square miles (777 square kilometers) is no longer considered viable for the birds.

RIP: Mars digger bites the dust after 2 years on red planet

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA declared the Mars digger dead Thursday after failing to burrow deep into the red planet to take its temperature.

Scientists in Germany spent two years trying to get their heat probe, dubbed the mole, to drill into the Martian crust. But the 16-inch-long (40-centimeter) device that is part of NASA's InSight lander couldn't gain enough friction in the red dirt. It was supposed to bury 16 feet (5 meters) into Mars, but only drilled down a couple of feet (about a half meter).

Following one last unsuccessful attempt to hammer itself down over the weekend with 500 strokes, the team called it quits.

"We've given it everything we've got, but Mars and our heroic mole remain incompatible," said the German Space Agency's Tilman Spohn, the lead scientist for the experiment.

The effort will benefit future excavation efforts at Mars, he added in a statement. Astronauts one day

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may need to dig into Mars, according to NASA, in search of frozen water for drinking or making fuel, or signs of past microscopic life.

The mole's design was based on Martian soil examined by previous spacecraft. That turned out nothing like the clumpy dirt encountered this time.

InSight's French seismometer, meanwhile, has recorded nearly 500 Marsquakes, while the lander's weather station is providing daily reports. On Tuesday, the high was 17 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 8 degrees Celsius) and the low was minus 56 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 49 degrees Celsius) at Mars' Elysium Planitia, an equatorial plain.

The lander recently was granted a two-year extension for scientific work, now lasting until the end of 2022.

InSight landed on Mars in November 2018. It will be joined by NASA's newest rover, Perseverance, which will attempt a touchdown on Feb. 18. The Curiosity rover has been roaming Mars since 2012.

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.

Watchdog: DOJ bungled 'zero tolerance' immigration policy

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Department leaders under President Donald Trump knew their 2018 "zero tolerance" border policy would result in family separations but pressed on with prosecutions even as other agencies became overwhelmed with migrants, a government watchdog report released Thursday has found.

The report from the inspector general for the Justice Department found that leadership failed to prepare to implement the policy or manage the fallout, which resulted in more than 3,000 family separations during "zero tolerance" and caused lasting emotional damage to children who were taken from their parents at the border. The policy was widely condemned by world leaders, religious groups and lawmakers in the U.S. as cruel.

Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, along with other top leaders in the Trump administration, were bent on curbing immigration. The "zero tolerance" policy was one of several increasingly restrictive policies aimed at discouraging migrants from coming to the Southern border. Trump's administration also vastly reduced the number of refugees allowed into the U.S. and all but halted asylum at the border, through a combination of executive orders and regulation changes.

President-elect Joe Biden has said Trump's restrictive immigration policies are harmful, but it's not clear yet what he will do when he gets in office to alter the system. About 5,500 children have been separated from their parents since Trump took office, and many of those parents were deported without their children. Advocates for the families have called on Biden to allow those families to reunite in the United States.

The American Civil Liberties Union sued to stop the separations and a federal judge ordered the families to be reunited, but some are still not. Attorney Lee Gelernt, who has been working for years on the issue, said the practice was "immoral and illegal."

"At a minimum, Justice Department lawyers should have known the latter," Gelernt said. "This new report shows just how far the Trump administration was willing to go to destroy these families. Just when you think the Trump administration can't sink any lower, it does."

The "zero tolerance" policy meant that any adult caught crossing the border illegally would be prosecuted for illegal entry. Because children cannot be jailed with their family members, families were separated and children were taken into custody by Health and Human Services, which manages unaccompanied children at the border. The policy was a colossal mess; there was no system created to reunite children with their families. The watchdog report found that it led to a \$227 million funding shortfall.

According to the report, department leaders underestimated how difficult it would be to carry out the policy in the field and did not inform local prosecutors and others that children would be separated. They also failed to understand that children would be separated longer than a few hours, and when that was

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discovered, they pressed on.

The policy began April 6, 2018, under an executive order that was issued without warning to other federal agencies that would have to manage the policy, including the U.S. Marshals Service and Health and Human Services. It was halted June 20, 2018.

The watchdog report found that judges, advocacy groups and even federal prosecutors raised concerns over the policy. But Sessions and others wrongly believed that arrests at the border would not result in prolonged separation and ignored the difficulty in reuniting families.

Notes from a conference call Sessions had with U.S. attorneys from border districts record the former attorney general saying in part: "We need to take away children; if you care about kids, don't bring them in."

Justice leadership looked at a smaller version of the policy enacted in 2017 in West Texas, but ignored some of the same concerns raised by judges and prosecutors at that time. Top leaders were focused solely on increased illegal activity and didn't seek information that would have shown concerns over the family separations that would result.

The report follows other scathing investigations of the policy, adding to evidence that Trump administration officials knew a zero-tolerance policy would result in family separations and inflict trauma on immigrant parents and children.

A watchdog report from the Department of Health and Human Services found that children separated at the border, many already distressed by their life in their home countries or by their journey, showed more fear, feelings of abandonment and post-traumatic stress symptoms than children who were not separated. The chaotic reunification process only added to their ordeal.

In a November 2017 email, a top Health and Human Services official wrote that there was a shortage of "beds for babies" as an apparent result of separations in and around El Paso, Texas, that occurred months before the national policy began. Other emails suggest the Department of Homeland Security did not tell HHS officials about the pilot program, even as government facilities for minors run by HHS saw an uptick in children who had been taken from their parents. The emails were released by congressional Democrats in an October 2020 report.

Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Houston and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this report.

At virus tipping point, Lebanon imposes all-day curfew

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — It was a choice between containing a spiraling virus outbreak and resuscitating a dying economy in a country that has been in steady financial and economic meltdown over the past year. Authorities in Lebanon chose the latter.

Now, virus patients struggling to breathe wait outside hospitals — hoping for a bed or even a chair to open up. Ordinary people share contact lists of oxygen suppliers on social media as the the critical gas becomes scarce, and the sound of ambulances ferrying the ill echoes through Beirut. Around 500 of Lebanon's 14,000 doctors have left the crisis-ridden country in recent months, according to the Order of Physicians, putting a further strain on existing hospital staff.

On Thursday, Lebanese authorities swung the other way: They began enforcing an 11-day nationwide shutdown and round-the-clock curfew, hoping to blunt the spread of coronavirus infections spinning out of control after the holiday period.

The curfew is the strictest measure Lebanon has taken since the start of the pandemic.

Previous shutdowns had laxer rules and were poorly enforced. Now, residents cannot leave their homes, except for a defined set of reasons, including going to the bakery, pharmacy, doctor's office, hospital or airport — and for the first time they must request a permit before doing these things. Even supermarkets can only open for delivery.

While Lebanon still somehow managed to keep cases to an average of fewer than 100 per day until

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August, it now leads the Arab world in number of cases per million people. Today, the number of daily COVID-19 deaths is more than 13 times what it was in July. On Jan. 9, over 5,400 infections were reported, a record for the small country.

On Thursday, Lebanon registered a new daily record of 41 deaths, bringing the overall number of recorded cases to nearly 237,200 and 1,781 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.

While its neighbors begin vaccinating their populations — including Israel whose campaign promises to be among the world's speediest — Lebanon has yet to secure a first batch of shots. Once a leader in the health sector among Middle Eastern countries, Lebanon has been stymied in its effort to get vaccines by repeated bureaucratic delays partly due to the fact that it has a caretaker government.

Parliament is expected to meet Friday to vote on a draft law to allow importing the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, with the first deliveries expected to arrive next month.

"This is the result of deliberate decisions made by irresponsible and immoral politicians," said Sami Hanna, a 42-year-old businessman who was waiting for his turn to enter a pharmacy earlier this week, looking for pain relievers, anti-depressants and blood pressure medicine for his elderly parents.

"This is how we spend our days now, begging," he said, adding that his next mission was to look for bread, which was out of stock because of panic-buying before the curfew set in. "It is too little too late."

The surge in coronavirus cases began in late August, a few weeks after the massive explosion at the Beirut port that destroyed parts of the capital, including several hospitals with virus patients.

The explosion was caused by a fire that detonated nearly three tons of poorly stored ammonium nitrate that had been sitting in a port warehouse for years — the kind of mismanagement that is typical of a corrupt political class that fails to provide even basic services for its people.

The virus surged in the chaos of inundated hospitals, funerals and protests that followed.

Further complicating efforts to rein in the virus, politicians have been unable to agree on a new government since the old one resigned in the wake of the port explosion, effectively ensuring the country's continued unraveling.

But in December, as most governments around the world tightened lockdowns, Lebanon went the other way, allowing restaurants and nightclubs to reopen with barely any restrictions in place. An estimated 80,000 expats flowed to the country to celebrate Christmas and New Year with loved ones — many of them Lebanese who skipped visiting in the summer because of the devastation wrought by the explosion.

"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."

Many hospitals have now reached maximum capacity for coronavirus patients. Some have run out of beds, oxygen tanks and ventilators. Others have halted elective surgeries.

Last week, Lebanon imposed a 25-day nationwide lockdown and a nighttime curfew to limit the spread of the virus, but many sectors were exempted and enforcement was lax, as in the past. Many businesses, including hair salons, welcomed customers behind shuttered storefronts. In some areas of north and south Lebanon, it was business as usual.

With hospitals on the brink of collapse, the government then ordered an 11-day nationwide curfew starting Thursday, triggering three days of mayhem as crowds of shoppers emptied shelves in supermarkets and bakeries.

On Thursday, police manned checkpoints around the country, checking motorists' permission to be on the road.

Halim Shebaya, a political analyst, said the government still has no clear strategy and cautioned that it would be difficult to bring the numbers down this late in the game.

"The main issue now is the absence of trust in the government and authorities and managing a pandemic necessitates the presence of public trust in measures taken by the authorities," he said.

Still, Rabih Torbay, who heads Project HOPE, an international global health and humanitarian organization, said time is of essence and urged authorities to take any step that might help curb infections.

"Every day that goes by the country is sliding further into the abyss," he said.

Associated Press journalists Fadi Tawil and Bilal Hussein contributed reporting.

Years of white supremacy threats culminated in Capitol riots

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and NOREEN NASIR Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Amid the American flags and Trump 2020 posters at the U.S. Capitol during last week's insurrection were far more sinister symbols: A man walking the halls of Congress carrying a Confederate flag. Banners proclaiming white supremacy and anti-government extremism. A makeshift noose and gallows ominously erected outside.

In many ways this hate-filled display was the culmination of many others over the past few years, including the deadly 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that gathered extremist factions from across the country under a single banner.

"These displays of white supremacy are not new," said Lecia Brooks, chief of staff of the Southern Poverty Law Center. "Now it's just reached a fever pitch."

Extremist groups, including the pro-Trump, far-right, anti-government Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, a loose anti-government network that's part of the militia movement, were among those descending on the halls of power on Jan. 6.

The hateful imagery included an anti-Semitic "Camp Auschwitz" sweatshirt created years ago by white supremacists, who sold them on the now-defunct website Aryanwear, said Aryeh Tuchman, associate director for the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

Also among the rioters were members of Groyper Army, a loose network of white nationalists, the white supremacist New Jersey European Heritage Association, and the far-right extremist Proud Boys, along with other known white supremacists, Tuchman said. While not all the anti-government groups were explicitly white supremacist, Tuchman said many support white supremacist beliefs.

"Anyone who flies a Confederate flag, even if they claim it's about heritage and not hate, we need to understand that it is a symbol of white supremacy," Tuchman said.

Brooks said it was also important to note the demographics of the riotous crowd, which was overwhelmingly white. Within that context, even more traditional symbols of American patriotism, like the American flag, or political preference, like Trump 2020 signs, served to give the symbols of hate a pass.

"You can wrap yourself in the American flag and call yourself a patriot and say you're acting on behalf of the country, that you're serving to protect the country. ... But what America were you standing up for?" she asked.

"One that continues to support and advance white supremacy? Or one that welcomes and embraces a multiracial, inclusive democracy? That's the difference."

The proliferation of white supremacist symbolism has a long history, with two clear peaks in the civil rights efforts following Reconstruction and during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Brooks said. Now, as the U.S. reckons with systemic racism following the police killing of George Floyd, she said Confederate symbols have been displayed more prominently, including at smaller-scale white supremacist rallies and by counterprotesters carrying Confederate flags at Black Lives Matter gatherings across the country.

"This is a response, and it's not a new response," Brooks said. "Every time there is progress in asserting civil rights, there's a backlash. Confederate iconography is a means to reassert white supremacy when it is thought to be threatened."

Confederate flags and white supremacist symbols were also present at the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville that turned deadly after a car mowed into counterprotesters. The rally, which left one counterprotester dead, brought several neo-Nazi, white supremacist and related groups together, much like the Capitol insurrection, Brooks said.

"This merging of groups you see in Charlottesville and that you saw at the Capitol last week doesn't usually happen," she said. "But they're desperate. They are convinced that they're this grave minority that

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is being threatened and needs to stick together and rally under the moniker of hatred.”

Karen Cox, a historian of the American South and Confederate symbols, said the phenomenon echoes the so-called “Lost Cause” mythology, the pseudo-historical ideology that the cause of the Confederacy during the Civil War was just and heroic — an assertion that lives on in the hearts of many who tote the Confederate flag today.

She said for many extremists, including those present at the Capitol insurrection, President Donald Trump’s election loss has become a new “Lost Cause” of sorts.

“This is their new ‘Lost Cause’ and a continuation of the original ‘Lost Cause,’” she said. “They’ve lost, but they hold onto that (Confederate) flag to show that they still feel justified.”

“Same thing here. ‘We lost this election, but our cause was just.’ And as long as they still hold onto this ‘Lost Cause,’ these symbols aren’t going away.”

“We are 150 years after the Civil War and people are still waving that flag,” Cox added. “This has been here for so long, it’s going to take a long time to go away — if it can.”

As rioters besieged Capitol Hill, demonstrations flared at statehouses across the country. An internal FBI bulletin has warned of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington D.C., in the days leading up to President-elect Joe Biden’s inauguration.

Brooks said she worries the rampage at the Capitol and proliferation of white supremacist symbols will encourage similar actions at state capitals.

“The insurrection last week helped embolden and radicalize people in such a way that it’s going to be even more threatening,” she said. “This risk of an insurrection like this happening again is hanging over us.”

Democratic Congressman Jamie Raskin of Maryland was inside the Capitol building as the violent mob made its way inside. Raskin, who is Jewish, chairs the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in Congress and has sat through multiple hearings about the dangers of violent white supremacy. He said he was shocked by the “open manifestations of pro-racist and pro-Nazi ideology.”

“This massive attack on the Capitol and invasion of the Congress would be shocking and criminal enough even if these people had no racist or anti-Semitic intent at all,” he said. “But when you add in the elements of violent white extremism, you can see how profoundly dangerous this is to the future of our country.”

Tuchman said he is encouraged by the disgust many Americans have expressed and hopes it will make such symbols less publicly acceptable. But he said these images hold a power that may continue to menace the nation’s democracy.

“Images can encapsulate the beliefs of extremist movements,” he said. “They can popularize them. ... Symbols can be the entryway into extremism and radicalization.”

Fernando and Nasir are members of the Associated Press’ Race and Ethnicity team. Follow Fernando on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/christinetfern>. Follow Nasir on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/noreensnasir>.

Hot again: 2020 sets yet another global temperature record

By SETH BÖRENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Earth’s rising fever hit or neared record hot temperature levels in 2020, global weather groups reported Thursday.

While NASA and a couple of other measurement groups said 2020 passed or essentially tied 2016 as the hottest year on record, more agencies, including the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, said last year came in a close second or third. The differences in rankings mostly turned on how scientists accounted for data gaps in the Arctic, which is warming faster than the rest of the globe.

“It’s like the film ‘Groundhog Day.’ Another year, same story — record global warmth,” said Pennsylvania State University climate scientist Michael Mann, who wasn’t part of the measurement teams. “As we continue to generate carbon pollution, we expect the planet to warm up. And that’s precisely what we’re seeing.”

Scientists said all you had to do was look outside: “We saw the heat waves. We saw the fires. We saw the (melting) Arctic,” said NASA top climate scientist Gavin Schmidt. “We’re expecting it to get hotter and

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that's exactly what happened."

NOAA said 2020 averaged 58.77 degrees (14.88 degrees Celsius), a few hundredths of a degree behind 2016. NASA saw 2020 as warmer than 2016 but so close they are essentially tied. The European Copernicus group also called it an essential tie for hottest year, with 2016 warmer by an insignificant fraction. Japan's weather agency put 2020 as warmer than 2016, but a separate calculation by Japanese scientists put 2020 as a close third behind 2016 and 2019. The World Meteorological Organization, the British weather agency and Berkeley Earth's monitoring team had 2016 ahead.

First or second rankings really don't matter, "but the key thing to take away is that the long-term trends in temperature are very very clearly up and up and up," said Schmidt, who heads NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies that tracks temperatures. "We're in a position where we're pushing the climate system out of the bounds that it's been in for tens of thousands of years, if not millions of years."

All the monitoring agencies agree the six warmest years on record have been the six years since 2015. The 10 warmest have all occurred since 2005, and scientists say that warming's driven by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

Temperatures the last six or seven years "really hint at an acceleration in the rise of global temperatures," said Russ Vose, analysis branch chief at NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. While temperature increases have clearly accelerated since the 1980s, it's too early to discern a second and more recent acceleration, Schmidt said.

Last year's exceptional heat "is yet another stark reminder of the relentless pace of climate change, which is destroying lives and livelihoods across our planet," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said in a statement. "Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century."

The United States, which had its fifth warmest year, smashed the record for the number of weather disasters that cost at least \$1 billion with 22 of them in 2020, including hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes and a Midwest derecho. The old record of 16 was set in 2011 and 2017. This was the sixth consecutive year with 10 or more billion-dollar climate disasters, with figures adjusted for inflation.

Earth has now warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times and is adding another 0.2 degrees Celsius (0.36 Fahrenheit) a decade.

That means the planet is nearing an international warming threshold set in Paris in 2015, Vose and Schmidt said. Nations of the world set a goal of preventing at least 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming, with a tougher secondary goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

"We cannot avoid 1.5 C above pre-industrial now -- it is just too late to turn things around," University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Jason Furtado, who wasn't on any of the measurement teams, said in an email. "I also fear that the 2 C threshold is slipping away from us too unless changes become much more immediate in the US and other nations."

Earth has warmed 1.6 degrees (0.9 degrees Celsius) since 1942, when President-elect Joe Biden was born, and 1.2 degrees (0.6 degrees Celsius) since 1994, when pop star Justin Bieber was born, according to NOAA data.

The main reason the agencies have varying numbers is because there are relatively few temperature gauges in the Arctic. NOAA and the British weather agency take a conservative approach in extrapolating for the missing data, while NASA factors that the Arctic is warming much faster than the rest of the globe, hitting 100 degrees (38 Celsius) in the Russian Arctic last June, said NASA's Schmidt.

The pandemic may have added ever so slightly to last year's warming, enough to edge 2020 past 2016 in NASA's calculations, Schmidt said.

Around the globe, people were driving less — and that reduced short-term aerosol pollution which acts as a cooling agent by reflecting heat. Schmidt said fewer cooling aerosols could be responsible for .09 to .18 degrees (.05 to .1 degrees Celsius) warming for the year.

NOAA's Vose and Schmidt expect 2021 to be among the top five hottest years but probably not a record breaker because of natural temporary cooling in parts of the Pacific called La Nina.

NOAA and NASA measurements go back to 1880, while the United Kingdom Met Office has readings

back to 1850.

Follow AP's climate coverage at <https://www.apnews.com/Climate>

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter: @borenbears

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.

Unclear who presides at Trump trial if he's out of office

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Constitution says the chief justice is to preside at the impeachment trial of a president. But what about an ex-president?

Like so much else about the Constitution, the answer is subject to interpretation.

If President Donald Trump's trial begins after Jan. 20, it's not clear whether Chief Justice John Roberts would make his way to the Senate chamber as he did last year for Trump's first trial.

Impeachment scholars, law professors and political scientists offer differing views.

The choices appear to be Roberts, Kamala Harris, who by then will be vice president, or Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who will be the Senate's president pro tem once the Democrats gain control of the Senate.

The issue is "unsettled, completely without precedent, and unspecific in existing Senate rules and precedents," Princeton University political scientist Keith Whittington wrote in an email.

One reason that the Constitution specifies the chief justice to run the president's trial is that the person who otherwise presides over the Senate is the vice president — the very person who would assume the presidency if the chief executive is convicted. That's a bit unseemly.

But if the stakes are changed and the sitting vice president no longer stands to get the top job, why not have Harris, who by then will have taken over for Mike Pence, preside?

Whittington said he thinks that could happen, "as with the impeachment of any officer other than the president." But he said he "can imagine that the Senate might go the other way and treat a former president the same as a sitting president."

University of Texas law professor Steven Vladeck said the chief justice is the better choice. The House on Wednesday impeached the president, not the former president, Vladeck wrote on Twitter.

"Indeed, if Trump resigned (or his term ended) mid-trial, it would be more than a little odd for the Chief Justice to give way to the Vice President. The question should be whether the impeached officer was President at the time of impeachment. Here, he was, so Roberts presides," Vladeck wrote.

Another factor in favor of Roberts is that "a trial of a President (even a former President) is a momentous event and having the Chief Justice preside seems more congruent with, or more fitting of, the occasion," Georgia State University law professor Neil Kinkopf wrote in an email.

If it's not Roberts or Harris, who may wish to avoid the appearance of a conflict that presiding over Trump's trial might inflame, the next choice would be Leahy, the senior Democrat in the Senate, Norm Eisen said on CNN. Eisen was a legal adviser to Democrats during Trump's first impeachment.

US unemployment claims jump to 965,000 as virus takes toll

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of people seeking unemployment aid soared last week to 965,000, the most since late August and a sign that the resurgent virus has likely escalated layoffs.

The latest figures for jobless claims, issued Thursday by the Labor Department, remain at levels never seen until the virus struck. Before the pandemic, weekly applications typically numbered around 225,000. They spiked to nearly 7 million last spring, after nationwide shutdowns took effect. Applications declined

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over the summer but have been stuck above 700,000 since September.

The high pace of layoffs coincides with an economy that has faltered as consumers have avoided traveling, shopping and eating out in the face of soaring viral caseloads. More than 4,300 deaths were reported Tuesday, another record high. Shutdowns of restaurants, bars and other venues where people gather in California, New York and other states have likely forced up layoffs.

Some states and cities are resisting shutdowns, partly out of fear of the economic consequences but raising the risk of further infections. Minnesota allowed in-person dining to resume this week. Michigan is poised to do the same. Some bars and restaurants in Kansas City are extending their hours.

Economists say that once coronavirus vaccines are more widely distributed, a broader recovery should take hold in the second half of the year. The incoming Biden administration, along with a now fully Democratic-led House and Senate, is also expected to push more rescue aid and spending measures that could accelerate growth.

Yet many analysts also worry that with millions of Americans still unemployed and as many as one in six small companies going out of business, people who have been hurt most by the downturn won't likely benefit from a recovery anytime soon.

"While prospects for the economy later in 2021 are upbeat, the labor market recovery has taken a step backward," said Nancy Vanden Houten, an economist at Oxford Economics, "and we expect claims to remain elevated, with the risk that they rise from last week's levels."

Last week's applications for aid might have been elevated in part because state employment offices had been closed over the holidays, requiring some jobless people to wait until last week to apply. The addition of a \$300-a-week federal unemployment benefit, as part of a rescue aid package enacted late last month, may have also encouraged more people to apply, Vanden Houten said.

Many people in the arts and entertainment fields have lost most or all of their incomes as the coronavirus has shut down performance venues. They include Shelby Lewis, a classical trumpet player in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who hasn't performed since early March, when he played Bach with a Kansas City musical chamber.

Lewis, 48, is receiving \$400 in weekly unemployment aid, including the new \$300 federal benefit, and his wife is still working. He appreciates the federal aid, which freelance musicians like him haven't been eligible for in the past.

Fearful, though, that many classical music groups will permanently close, Lewis is shifting his career back to photography and design, which he did for a decade before becoming a full-time musician.

"I think there is generally going to be a decline for small regional orchestras," he said.

In addition to last week's first-time applications for unemployment aid, the government said Thursday that 5.3 million Americans are continuing to receive state jobless benefits, up from 5.1 million in the previous week. It suggests that fewer people who are out of work are finding jobs.

About 11.6 million people received jobless aid from two federal programs in the week that ended Dec. 26, the latest period for which data is available. One of those programs provides extended benefits to people who have exhausted their state aid. The other supplies benefits to self-employed and contract workers.

Those two programs had expired near the end of December. They were belatedly renewed, through mid-March, in the \$900 billion rescue aid package that Congress approved and President Donald Trump signed into law. That legislation also included \$600 relief checks for most adults and a supplemental unemployment benefit payment of \$300 a week. Congressional Democrats favor boosting the checks to \$2,000 and extending federal aid beyond March, as does President-elect Joe Biden.

The U.S. job market's weakness was made painfully clear in the December employment report that the government issued last week. Employers shed jobs for the first time since April as the pandemic tightened its grip on consumers and businesses.

The figures also depicted a sharply uneven job market: The losses last month were concentrated among restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues — places that provide in-person services that some governments have restricted or that consumers are avoiding. Educational services, mostly colleges and

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universities, also cut workers in December. So did film and music studios.

Most other large industries, though, reported job gains. Many economists had expected last spring that job losses would spread to more industries. Though all sectors of the economy initially laid off workers, most of them have avoided deep job cuts. Manufacturing, construction, and professional services like engineering and architecture, for example, all added jobs in December.

At the same time, many companies seem reluctant to sharply ramp up hiring. A government report Tuesday showed that employers advertised fewer open jobs in November than in October. The decline, while small, was widespread across most industries. Even now, the nation has nearly 10 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic sent the economy into a deep recession nearly a year ago, having recovered just 56% of the jobs lost in the spring.

Those job losses have fallen disproportionately on women, who are more likely to work in the affected industries. They are also more likely to have quit jobs to stay home and care for children, many of whom are engaged in online schooling.

AP Business Writer Alexandra Olson contributed to this report from New York.

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. And later Wednesday, he asked allies if he had gone too far with the video, wondering if it might upset some of his supporters. Four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing discussed Trump's private conversations on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to do so publicly.

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 de-

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mocracy 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.

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.

He also has turned on his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, who touted election conspiracy theories and whom many in the president's orbit believe shoulders some of the blame for both impeachments. Trump had grown irritated at Giuliani's lavish spending, which included a request to be paid \$20,000 a day, and told aides to stop paying him.

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.

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

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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.

German lockdown loopholes criticized as deaths hit new high

Germany has too many loopholes in its coronavirus lockdown rules, the head of the country's disease control agency said as figures published Thursday showed the highest number of daily deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The Robert Koch Institute said 1,244 deaths from COVID-19 were confirmed in one day up to Thursday, taking the total number to 43,881. There were also 25,164 newly confirmed cases, putting Germany's total known infections close to 2 million.

Lothar Wieler, president of the institute, said data indicated people in Germany are traveling more than during the first phase of the pandemic in spring, contributing to the virus' spread.

German authorities have imposed restrictions on social contacts, largely closed schools and limited travel for those in areas with high infection rates, but the rules aren't uniformly enforced across the country's 16 states.

"To me, these measures we're now taking aren't a complete lockdown," said Wieler. "There are still too many exceptions and they aren't being strictly implemented."

Officials are considering tougher restrictions to curb the continued rise in infections.

The 7-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 23.36 per 100,000 people on Dec. 30 to 26.03 per 100,000 people on Jan. 13.

Wieler pointed to the sharp spike in infections recently seen in Ireland as an example of how quickly the outbreak can escalate again if rules are relaxed, especially given the new seemingly more contagious variant of the virus circulating there and in neighboring Britain.

All infections with the variants so far confirmed in Germany involved people who had traveled outside the country, said Wieler.

"We need to be very careful, especially of the British mutation of this virus," Ralph Brinkhaus, the parliamentary leader of Merkel's bloc, told broadcaster n-tv. "So we don't yet know what further measures will be necessary in coming weeks."

To ease the strain on working families having to look after school-age children and discourage them from using emergency care facilities, parliament passed a bill Thursday doubling the amount of paid parental leave to 40 days for 2021. Public health insurances will pay out up to 112.88 euros (\$137) a day to parents if they stay home to care for children under 12 who couldn't go to school because of the pandemic.

Follow AP coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at:

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 15, the 15th day of 2021. There are 350 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 15, 2020, Chinese officials said they couldn't rule out the possibility that a new coronavirus in central China could spread between humans, though they said the risk of transmission appeared to be low.

On this date:

In 1862, the U.S. Senate confirmed President Abraham Lincoln's choice of Edwin M. Stanton to be the new Secretary of War, replacing Simon Cameron.

In 1865, as the Civil War neared its end, Union forces captured Fort Fisher near Wilmington, North Carolina, depriving the Confederates of their last major seaport.

In 1892, the original rules of basketball, devised by James Naismith, were published for the first time in Springfield, Massachusetts, where the game originated.

In 1929, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta.

In 1942, Jawaharlal Nehru (jah-WAH'-hahr-lahl NAY'-roo) was named to succeed Mohandas K. Gandhi as head of India's Congress Party.

In 1943, work was completed on the Pentagon, the headquarters of the U.S. Department of War (now Defense).

In 1973, President Richard M. Nixon announced the suspension of all U.S. offensive action in North Vietnam, citing progress in peace negotiations.

In 1974, the situation comedy "Happy Days" premiered on ABC-TV.

In 1976, Sara Jane Moore was sentenced to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford in San Francisco. (Moore was released on the last day of 2007.)

In 1993, a historic disarmament ceremony ended in Paris with the last of 125 countries signing a treaty banning chemical weapons.

In 2009, US Airways Capt. Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger ditched his Airbus 320 in the Hudson River after a flock of birds disabled both engines; all 155 people aboard survived.

In 2014, a highly critical and bipartisan Senate report declared that the deadly Sept. 2012 assault on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, could have been prevented; the report spread blame among the State Department, the military and U.S. intelligence.

Ten years ago: Several international envoys — but crucially none from the world powers — got a look inside an Iranian nuclear site at the invitation of the Tehran government before a new round of talks on Iran's disputed atomic activities. Miss Nebraska Teresa Scanlan won the Miss America pageant in Las Vegas. Actor Susannah York, 72, died in London.

Five years ago: Al-Qaida fighters attacked a hotel and cafe in Burkina Faso's capital, killing 30 people. A search began for two Marine helicopters carrying 12 crew members that collided off the Hawaiian island of Oahu during a nighttime training mission; there were no survivors. A federal judge rejected Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's bid for a new trial and ordered him to pay victims of the deadly attack more than \$101 million in restitution. Actor Dan Haggerty, 74, died in Burbank, California.

One year ago: House Democratic leaders carried the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump across the U.S. Capitol in a formal procession to the Senate. The United States and China reached a trade deal easing tensions between the world's two biggest economies. Russian President Vladimir Putin engineered a surprise shake-up of Russia's leadership while proposing changes to the country's constitution that could keep him in power well past the end of his term in 2024. (Putin ordered the amendments made to the constitution in July 2020 after a week-long vote; critics said the reported 78% approval of the changes had been falsified.) Two U.S. government agencies reported that the decade that had just ended was by far the hottest ever measured on earth.

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Today's Birthdays: Actor Margaret O'Brien is 83. Actor Andrea Martin is 74. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Randy White is 68. Actor-director Mario Van Peebles is 64. Rock musician Adam Jones (Tool) is 56. Actor James Nesbitt is 56. Actor Chad Lowe is 53. Alt-country singer Will Oldham (aka Bonnie Prince Billy) is 51. Actor Regina King is 50. Actor Dorian Missick is 45. Actor Eddie Cahill is 43. NFL quarterback Drew Brees is 42. Rapper/reggaeton artist Pitbull is 40. Actor Victor Rasuk is 36. Actor Jessy Schram is 35. Electronic dance musician Skrillex is 33. Actor/singer Dove Cameron is 25. Singer-songwriter Grace VanderWaal (TV: "America's Got Talent") is 17.