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Girls Game scores from last night

Varsity: Roncalli 43, Groton Area 16

JV: Roncalli 24, Groton Area 15

C Game: Roncalli 23, Groton Area 15



MS All State Band

Post from Dez Yeigh's Facebook Page

HUGE Congratulations to Gretchen Dinger (8th Grade) and Carlee Johnson (6th Grade) for being accepted into the 2021 MS All State Band!! These wonderful girls were accepted into the top honor band, and Gretchen finishes as a 3 year member!! I'm so sad this event is canceled, but we will make sure they are honored for their hard work!! I'm so incredibly proud of both of you

Upcoming Schedule

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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No. 2 Northern State Downs Minnesota Crookston at Home

Aberdeen, S.D. – Still early in the season, the No. 2 Northern State University men's basketball team worked out some kinks in their Friday victory over Minnesota Crookston. The Wolves remain unscathed on the year, opening the home slate with a win.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 86, UMC 67

Records: NSU 4-0 (3-0 NSIC), UMC 1-4 (0-3 NSIC)

Attendance: 804

HOW IT HAPPENED

- Crookston held a lead through a majority of the first half, however once the Wolves tied things up at the seven minute mark they did not look back
- NSU out-scored UMC 17-10 in the remainder of the half and 45-33 to close out the game
- The Wolves were efficient overall, shooting 53.8% from the floor, however struggled from the 3-point line at times going 8-of-24 in the game
- Northern combined for a season high 54 points in the paint and 22 points off turnovers, adding 18 points off the bench, 15 fast break points, and seven second chance scores
- They tallied 28 rebounds, a season high 22 assists, six blocks, and six steals
- Minnesota Crookston shot over 46.0% from both the field and beyond the arc in the first, however the Wolves defense answered in the second holding the Golden Eagles to percentages of 36.7 from the floor and 33.3 from the 3-point line
- Three Wolves scored in double figures, with 13 seeing the court
- Both Parker Fox and Andrew Kallman tallied season highs in scoring, while Roko Dominovic dished out a career high six assists
- Augustin Reede led the team off the bench with eight points, knocking down two from beyond the arc and adding four rebounds

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Parker Fox: 29 points, 7 rebounds, 4 blocks, 70.6 FG%
- Andrew Kallman: 15 points, 7 assists, 3 steals, 54.5 FG%
- Mason Stark: 11 points, 4 rebounds

PHILLIPS' TAKE

"I thought offensively we were pretty consistent throughout, we put up good shooting numbers and passed the ball well. I thought Gus came in and gave us a nice spark in the first half in particular. And again Bergan his stat line might not always jump out at you, but boy his passing changes things. I've got a couple of things I want to address with [the players] and do better, particularly on the defensive end."

UP NEXT

The Wolves and Golden Eagles will be back at it this afternoon. Tip-off is set for 4 p.m. from Wachs Arena. Live video, stat, and audio links are available on the men's basketball schedule on nsuwolves.com.

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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

Updated January 15, 2021; 2:27 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	2	0	0	1	3

Department of Health on Federal COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation & Phase I

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon, released the following statement highlighting expansion of statewide vaccine efforts starting next week and addressing federal COVID-19 vaccine allocation:

“South Dakota will do what we always do—work with what we have, while helping as many as we can. While we await any increase in federal allocation numbers, we will continue Phase I as planned. Starting next week, our healthcare systems will start vaccinating a limited number of residents who are 80 and over in age, high risk patients in oncology treatment, on dialysis and post-transplant, and high-risk congregate setting residents. Shots in arms is our goal.”

Earlier this week, the Department of Health and Human Services announced expected increases in dose allocations to states. Currently COVID-19 vaccine allocation from the federal government are based on a state’s population. South Dakota has been receiving an average of 11,000 doses a week and has to date administered over 51,300 doses.

Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Shih Tzus 14, Jackelopes 13, Chipmunks 7, Cheetahs 6

Men’s High Games: Brad Waage 222, Roger Spanier 205, Doug Jorgensen 182

Women’s High Games: Darci Spanier 189, Karen Spanier 175, Brenda Waage 162

Men’s High Series: Brad Waage 573, Roger Spanier 538, Doug Jorgensen 502

Women’s High Series: Darci Spanier 487, Brenda Waage 427, Karen Spanier 425

#327 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're down a bit all around. Just 224,100 new cases were reported today. That brings us up to 23,588,600, a 1.0% increase from yesterday. I'd say we'll hit 24 million on Sunday unless weekend reporting is particularly depressed, in which case Monday's a pretty sure thing. Hospitalizations also declined slightly to 128,947. That's a week without setting a record.

New cases continue at unprecedented levels, even when we're not actually setting records. What's going on? A couple of things: First, the effects of holiday travel are still hitting us. Their effect on new cases ripples for quite a while as people who traveled or gathered infect others who are now reporting in sick. Secondly, in these coldest months of the year, we're really living indoors, and we're not leaving the windows open; and that's a problem. Third, people are tired of the whole thing and just letting up on precautions, and then they're getting sick. Remember a few days ago when we discussed the fact that a good half of cases are acquired from someone who doesn't have any symptoms. It's not good enough to stay away from sick people. Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, told CNN, "If you go to a party with five or more people, almost certainly there's going to be somebody with Covid-19 at that party." Well, then.

We're still not clear on what effect that new more-transmissible variant is going to have because we haven't done much genomic surveillance for it. We're not even 100 percent sure it is super-transmissible, although all indications are worrisome. I've seen projections this variant could become the dominant one in the US by the end of March, and if that happens, it would be because it is, indeed, super-transmissible. This would put us in a world of hurt.

Deaths are up to 392,149, which is 0.9% more than yesterday. We'll be at 400,000 before Inauguration Day. There were 3461 deaths reported today, off the record by a fair amount, but far, far above any earlier peak.

Nevada had a record number of deaths yesterday. Ten of the 14 hospitals in the Las Vegas area are at or over 90% capacity and rising. State-wide test positivity rates are running north of 20%, which means real trouble is afoot; clearly there is a lot of community spread which is going undetected. That's how things get worse. The we-don't-think-we'll-get-vaccinated crowd runs to about one-third of Nevadans, another big issue.

Moderna announced yesterday that people who participated in their early-stage clinical trials are being offered a booster dose six to 12 months after their second dose as the company studies dosing and duration of immunity. They are also offering the boosters to those who received lower doses in the trials. One of the things early-stage trials try to establish is just what the dose should be, so there will be participants who received lower doses than the one that was eventually selected as most effective going forward. The folks who received these lower doses will get the opportunity to top up their protection, which seems only fair after they took all the risks early-on.

The company may also study boosters in some of the 30,000 phase 3 participants "if accumulating antibody persistence data indicate that this is warranted." Spokesperson, Colleen Hussy, said, "We anticipate that an additional dose could further boost the levels of neutralizing antibodies, should such a boost be required, and that this is expected to be an advantage of mRNA vaccines." Remember that neutralizing antibodies are the ones which are particularly effective in blocking virus from infecting host cells, so they're important.

The thinking is still that protection should last at least a year, according to a CNBC interview with CEO Stephane Bancel. He also mentioned the company is prepared to adjust the vaccine in the future if there are indications of potential immune escapes by new variants. This is the sort of thing that is done annually with influenza vaccines, but will very likely be needed less often once we have some sort of handle on this virus; it just doesn't mutate that fast. Because the mRNA platform is so agile, these modifications can be quite quickly made as needed, a feature that makes it easier to deal with than influenza.

I'm hearing a lot about people having a Covid-19 test and then deciding to do or not do certain things based on the results. They get a negative test and decide to go visit Grandpa this weekend or spend

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a week with friends at a cabin or skip the masks at an event. That's not a great plan. The thing is that negative test could be wrong; in fact, it frequently is. Here are the problems:

The first issue is inaccurate tests. We've discussed the rapid antigen tests several times; they're notorious for missing some fair proportion of cases, giving so-called false negatives, which means the test is negative even though the person is actually infected. This is a particular problem when there isn't much virus to detect. They work much better when there's a lot of virus, which is also when you're most contagious, so that's something.

The best test we have, the RT-PCR, is both slower and better, but also gives false negatives. This can happen when the swab doesn't pick traces of virus deep in your nasopharynx, either because it's moved too far into the respiratory system to collect or the swab wasn't inserted far enough. It can also happen early in infection before enough virus has reproduced to be detectable. Even though this test is good at detecting minute amounts of virus, it is pretty much always negative early in infection and still about 38 percent negative at the time symptoms set in, falling to around 20 percent three days later. That means our best test misses cases, more than a few.

If you've been exposed and get a negative result, it wouldn't hurt to have another test in a few days and quarantine while you're waiting. If you don't get tested, the guidance says you should quarantine for 10 days if you're not having symptoms.

In addition to false negative tests, there is always the possibility you were exposed after the test. If you get a PCR test before going to see Grandpa, there will be ample opportunities to be exposed in the days after that test while you wait for results and on the trip itself. Travel is highly correlated with acquisition of this virus.

All of this means you can't ditch the masks and stop the distancing and hang out indoors with people, even if you've been tested, not yet. It's fair to decide the level of risk you're comfortable with, but it's not fair to decide the level of risk you're comfortable imposing on someone else—or all of us. Your choices affect far more than just you and Grandpa.

Here's an odd thing: There has been a significant increase in nearsightedness in young children in China. According to a study of results from in-school vision screenings in Feicheng, China, in children of 6, 7, and 8 years of age, the incidence of nearsightedness was higher in 2020 than in any of the past four years with the greatest increase in 6-year-olds. In that group, the prevalence increased from 5.7 percent in 2019 to 21.5 percent in 2020 while doubling in 7-year-olds and increasing 1.4 times in 8-year-olds.

The study was published yesterday in the Journal of the American Medical Association – Ophthalmology. I have not been able to access it, so I am relying on a summary here; but those are pretty startling numbers. The researchers speculate that these changes are linked to stay-at-home orders with a decrease in outdoor activities and an increase in screen time, further postulating that the stay-at-home occurred during some very critical period for vision development.

I read an interesting piece from people who work on The Covid Tracking Project about recovered patients statistics for this infection. Bottom line is that these data are completely worthless. Among the problems is the fact that not every state even reports the numbers of recovered individuals, and included in those who do not are some with large populations like California and Florida. That means this data point for the country is missing coverage for a good-sized chunk of the population.

The larger problem—and the main reason some states do not report this statistic—is that there is no standard definition for “recovered.” In no case does any definition we're employing say people are all better now and don't feel sick any more, for example, the long-haulers we've talked about would be listed as recovered. People left on kidney dialysis or with myocardial damage or brain damage would be listed as recovered too. Pretty much anyone who's been discharged from the hospital is listed as recovered, as has anyone who's still alive some predetermined number of days after a diagnosis is made. The CDC recommends using what it calls a symptom-based strategy, but most health departments simply do not have the time to follow up with people to discuss their symptoms. They're barely keeping their heads above water now, and contact tracing has become sort of a quaint notion these days. When attempts are made to contact patients to interview them about their symptoms, there has been great difficulty reaching them, so most of the time, if you manage not to die for somewhere between 14 and 30 days after

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your case is identified and you are not hospitalized, you're probably going to go on the "recovered" list, however you're feeling. There's probably not ever going to be an opportunity to gather these data after the fact either; the opportunity was sort of just lost. So if your state publishes the category of "recovered cases" in its statistics, just skip right over it. It really doesn't convey information at all.

There's been a crisis for biodiversity brewing for a long time; species are disappearing at a fairly rapid clip with one million of them facing extinction right now. This is generally a big problem for the world, because there is a complex web of relationships between species that is upset when one or more species declines or disappears, because some of these organisms are or later become useful in one way or another if we haven't managed to knock them off before that happens, and because the world isn't ours to maraud through, destroying as we go.

But now and then a new species shows up, one we didn't know exists; and that is sort of a nice thing in a time when so much is being lost. This happened again and was announced just the other day. The new species is a bat, and the only place it lives is in a system of caves at the top of the Nimba mountains in West Africa. Its name is *Myotis nimbaensis*, and it is fairly startling in appearance.

The wings of bats are a sort of modified "hand" with elongated fingers forming the "veins" between which webbing stretches to form the wing. In this bat, those fingers are orange. So is the fur, which unlike many bat species, is fluffy like a kitten's. The rest of the wing is black, so we have this orange and black creature. It looks like it should have been the mascot for Halloween; after all, it's a bat, and the coloring is perfect. For some reason, I was unreasonably happy to learn there is not only a new species, but it's a Halloween bat, and I thought you might like to know this too.

Be well. We'll be in touch.

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Jan. 15th 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: +425 (104,937 total) Positivity Rate: 8.1%

Total Tests: 5272 (821,580 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1336 (389,508 total)

Hospitalized: +25 (6023 total) 227 currently hospitalized (-20)

Avera St. Luke's: 7 (-2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 3 (-0) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 1 (+0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 1 (+0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +15 (1629 total)

50s=1, 60s=2, 70s=6, 80+=6

Female: 9, Male: 6

Counties: Brown-2, Campbell-1, Clark-1, Davison-1, Dewey-2, Hamlin-1, Hughes-1, Hutchinson-1, Minnehaha-1, Moody-1, Pennington-1, Union-2.

Recovered: +406 (98,576 total)

Active Cases: +4 (4732)

Percent Recovered: 93.9%

Vaccinations: +2415 (53775)

Vaccinations Completed: +113 (9718)

Brown County Vaccinations: +115 (2231) 22 (+1) completed

Beadle (38) +4 positive, +6 recovered (77 active cases)

Brookings (32) +14 positive, +14 recovered (234 active cases)

Brown (72): +18 positive, +18 recovered (261 active cases)

Clark (4): +0 positive, +1 recovered (4 active cases)

Clay (12): +10 positive, +6 recovered (79 active cases)

Codington (73): +11 positive, +14 recovered (179 active cases)

Davison (54): +10 positive, +12 recovered (107 active cases)

Day (23): +5 positive, +1 recovered (32 active cases)

Edmunds (5): +8 positive, +5 recovered (54 active cases)

Faulk (13): +2 positive, +1 recovered (5 active cases)

Grant (35): +1 positive, +2 recovered (35 active cases)

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

Hughes (30): +12 positive, +7 recovered (89 ac-

tive cases)

Lawrence (33): +17 positive, +11 recovered (928 active cases)

Lincoln (68): +28 positive, +28 recovered (313 active cases)

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

McCook (22): +1 positive, +2 recovered (27 active cases)

McPherson (3): +2 positive, +1 recovery (24 active case)

Minnehaha (291): +99 positive, +104 recovered (1091 active cases)

Pennington (152): +51 positive, +55 recovered (568 active cases)

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

Roberts (32): +0 positive, +8 recovered (63 active cases)

Spink (24): +7 positive, +3 recovered (32 active cases)

Walworth (14): +4 positive, +6 recovered (46 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 15:

- 4.1% rolling 14-day positivity
- 233 new positives
- 6,102 susceptible test encounters
- 88 currently hospitalized (+10)
- 1,675 active cases (-89)
- 1,373 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	435	403	799	11	Moderate	17.24%
Beadle	2569	2454	5365	38	Substantial	10.69%
Bennett	370	352	1095	8	Moderate	4.44%
Bon Homme	1500	1453	1926	23	Substantial	15.52%
Brookings	3268	3002	10521	32	Substantial	13.38%
Brown	4741	4408	11473	72	Substantial	22.59%
Brule	663	627	1728	7	Moderate	26.09%
Buffalo	415	402	855	11	Minimal	19.05%
Butte	933	882	2934	20	Substantial	16.13%
Campbell	116	108	228	4	Minimal	25.00%
Charles Mix	1175	1100	3628	14	Substantial	12.05%
Clark	324	316	888	4	Moderate	2.22%
Clay	1711	1620	4742	12	Substantial	16.74%
Codington	3652	3400	8839	73	Substantial	19.61%
Corson	457	440	914	11	Moderate	19.35%
Custer	706	678	2490	10	Substantial	12.79%
Davison	2844	2683	5896	54	Substantial	15.84%
Day	579	524	1592	23	Substantial	17.65%
Deuel	447	403	1033	7	Substantial	9.09%
Dewey	1354	1289	3587	17	Substantial	21.25%
Douglas	401	374	844	9	Substantial	31.58%
Edmunds	436	377	907	5	Substantial	9.09%
Fall River	477	450	2361	13	Substantial	9.41%
Faulk	320	302	626	13	Moderate	14.29%
Grant	860	790	1994	35	Substantial	21.05%
Gregory	493	459	1136	26	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	239	224	493	9	Moderate	10.00%
Hamlin	648	570	1583	38	Substantial	10.75%
Hand	320	307	720	4	Minimal	8.33%
Hanson	324	308	635	3	Moderate	23.81%
Harding	89	88	162	1	Minimal	0.00%
Hughes	2112	1993	5888	30	Substantial	4.11%
Hutchinson	729	677	2111	21	Substantial	13.21%

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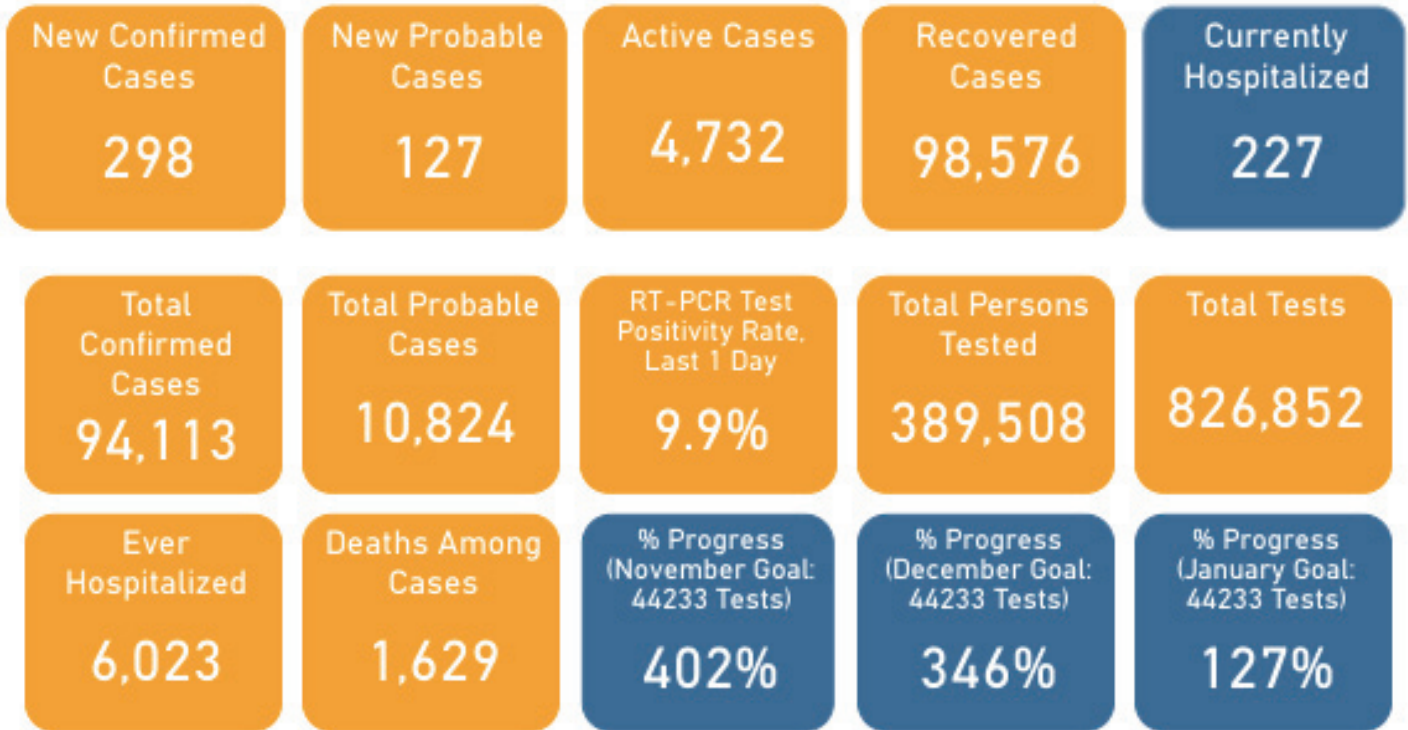
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Hyde	134	130	375	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	267	250	872	13	Minimal	33.33%
Jerauld	265	242	516	16	Minimal	15.79%
Jones	74	69	185	0	Minimal	10.00%
Kingsbury	583	537	1469	13	Substantial	9.33%
Lake	1090	1019	2895	16	Substantial	29.13%
Lawrence	2692	2561	7838	33	Substantial	11.54%
Lincoln	7190	6809	18166	68	Substantial	19.74%
Lyman	564	521	1759	9	Moderate	16.67%
Marshall	275	259	1050	5	Moderate	4.00%
McCook	709	661	1461	22	Substantial	29.31%
McPherson	217	188	511	3	Moderate	2.94%
Meade	2390	2243	6967	26	Substantial	21.02%
Mellette	231	223	679	2	Minimal	10.34%
Miner	251	216	517	7	Moderate	10.00%
Minnehaha	26288	24906	70549	291	Substantial	16.17%
Moody	581	525	1617	15	Substantial	22.73%
Oglala Lakota	1999	1879	6324	38	Substantial	16.17%
Pennington	11982	11262	35489	152	Substantial	21.05%
Perkins	310	276	707	11	Substantial	16.67%
Potter	336	306	749	3	Moderate	8.57%
Roberts	1072	977	3841	32	Substantial	20.27%
Sanborn	321	302	621	3	Moderate	35.71%
Spink	735	679	1918	24	Substantial	10.20%
Stanley	298	281	810	2	Substantial	6.52%
Sully	127	110	256	3	Moderate	10.00%
Todd	1186	1150	3923	19	Substantial	8.42%
Tripp	645	619	1370	14	Substantial	12.12%
Turner	1019	917	2436	49	Substantial	23.53%
Union	1784	1601	5636	32	Substantial	14.38%
Walworth	673	613	1678	14	Substantial	23.00%
Yankton	2613	2489	8513	27	Substantial	12.68%
Ziebach	329	293	812	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	4001	0
10-19 years	11611	0
20-29 years	19017	4
30-39 years	17294	14
40-49 years	14994	32
50-59 years	14820	86
60-69 years	11971	206
70-79 years	6361	360
80+ years	4868	927

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	54857	780
Male	50080	849

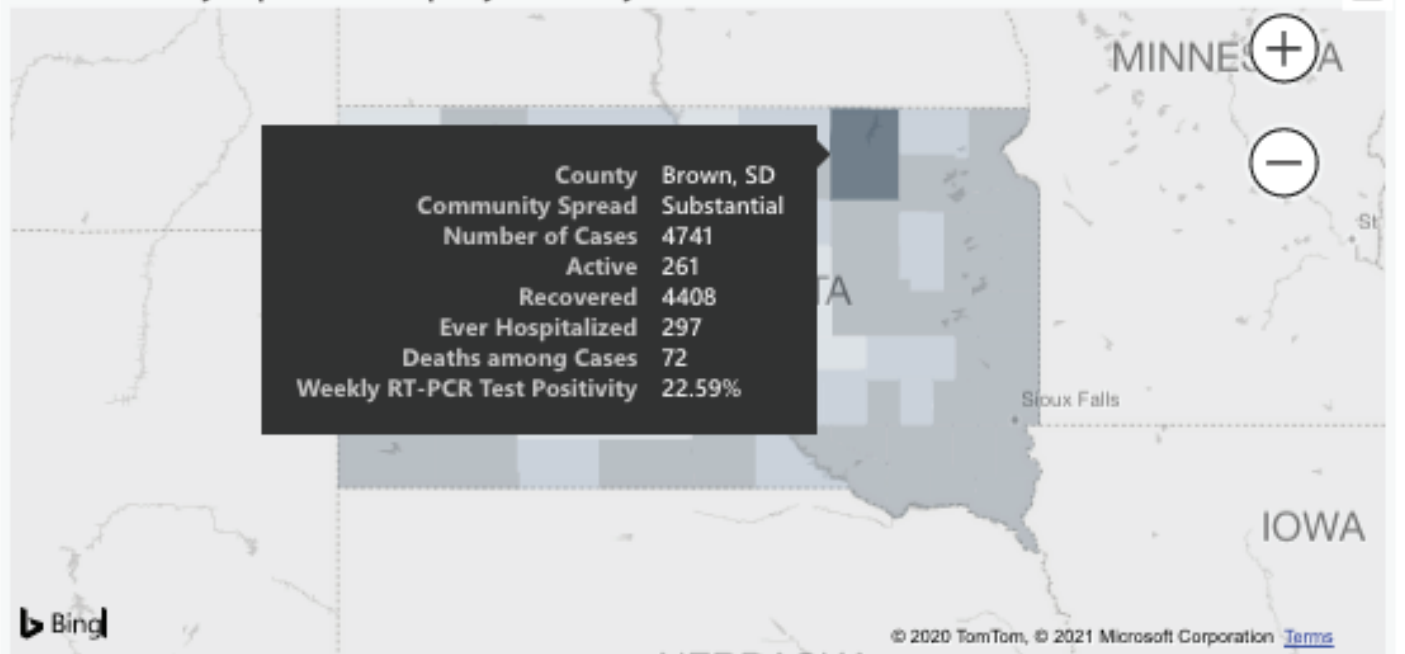
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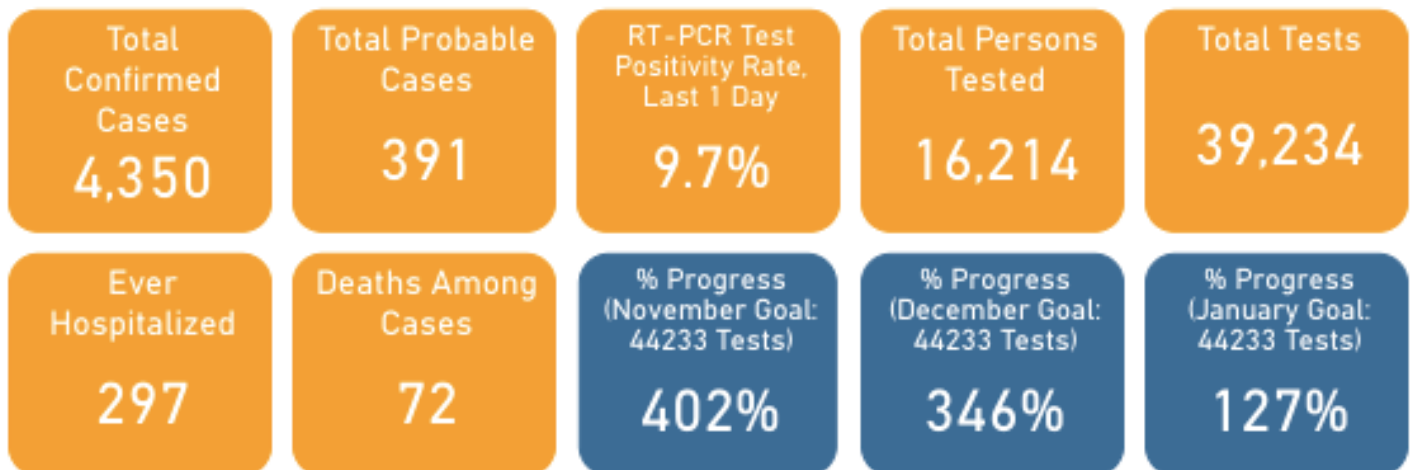
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



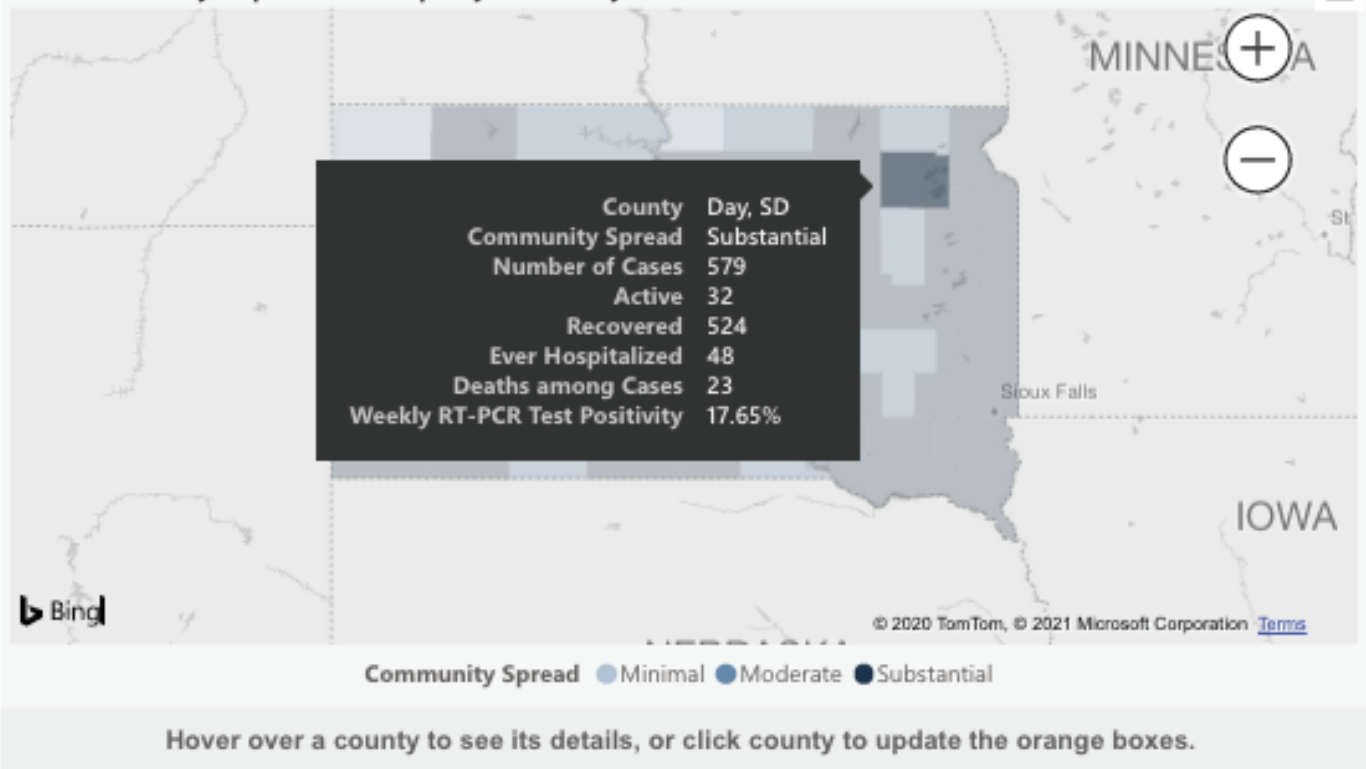
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

53,775

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

44,057

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	25,778
Pfizer	27,997

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	25,778
Pfizer - 1 dose	8,561
Pfizer - Series Complete	9,718

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	84	84	0	84
Beadle	1008	624	192	816
Bennett*	51	47	2	49
Bon Homme*	437	423	7	430
Brookings	1361	927	217	1,144
Brown	2231	2,187	22	2,209
Brule*	228	224	2	226
Buffalo*	3	3	0	3
Butte	182	178	2	180
Campbell	202	176	13	189
Charles Mix*	307	301	3	304
Clark	133	121	6	127
Clay	738	666	36	702
Codington*	1564	1,196	184	1,380
Corson*	16	14	1	15
Custer*	320	290	15	305
Davison	1417	1,341	38	1,379
Day*	314	296	9	305
Deuel	185	157	14	171
Dewey*	86	84	1	85
Douglas*	195	191	2	193
Edmunds	165	161	2	163
Fall River*	320	314	3	317
Faulk	158	156	1	157
Grant*	390	374	8	382
Gregory*	237	229	4	233
Haakon*	88	88	0	88

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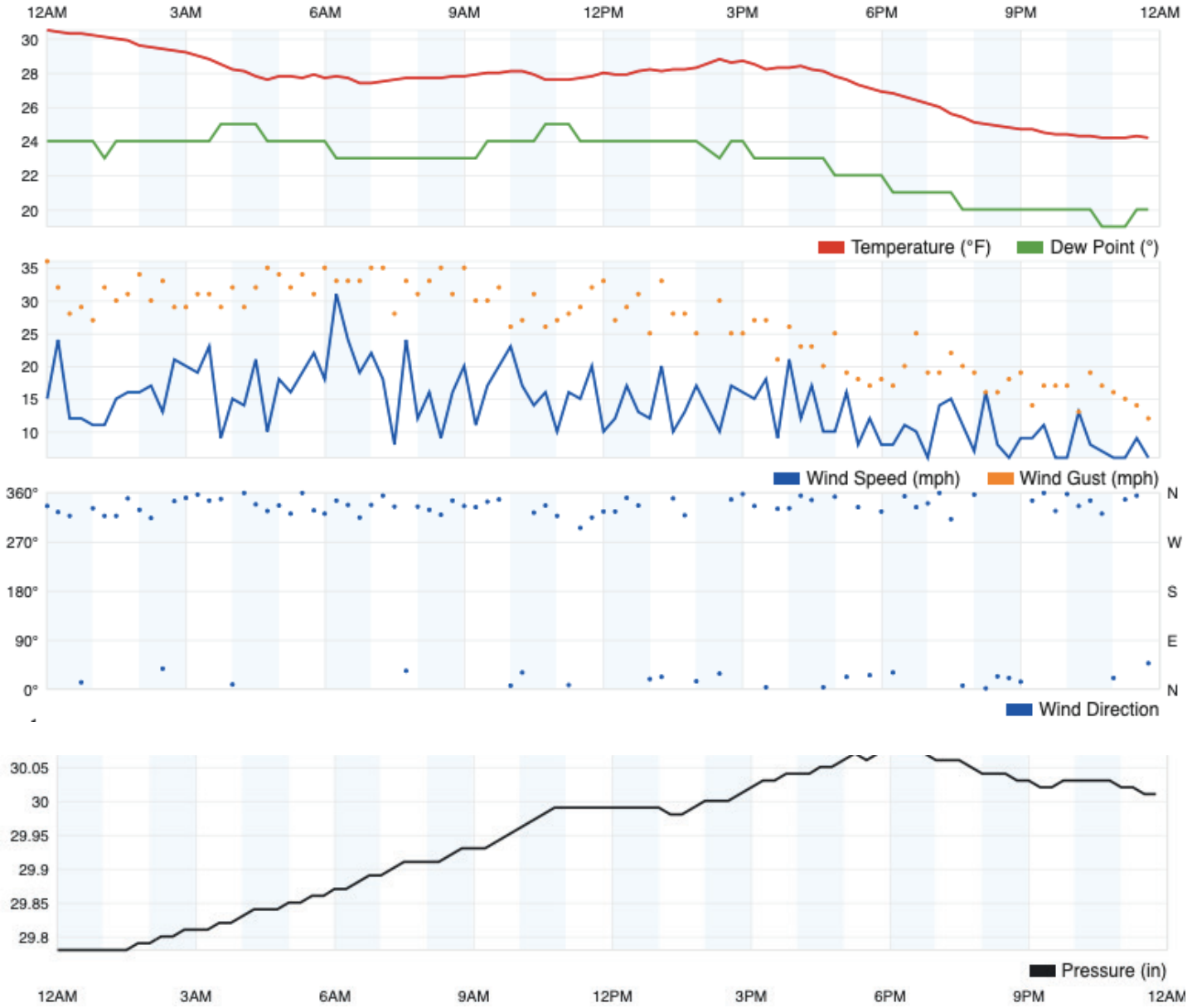
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Hamlin	236	186	25	211
Hand	191	173	9	182
Hanson	65	57	4	61
Harding	3	3	0	3
Hughes*	937	905	16	921
Hutchinson*	568	518	25	543
Hyde*	98	98	0	98
Jackson*	47	47	0	47
Jerauld	76	62	7	69
Jones*	79	75	2	77
Kingsbury	322	244	39	283
Lake	653	339	157	496
Lawrence	651	623	14	637
Lincoln	6844	2,594	2,125	4,719
Lyman*	65	63	1	64
Marshall*	224	218	3	221
McCook	352	230	61	291
McPherson	20	20	0	20
Meade*	729	551	89	640
Mellette*	4	4	0	4
Miner	119	91	14	105
Minnehaha	17098	7,264	4,917	12,181
Moody*	231	185	23	208
Oglala Lakota*	21	13	4	17
Pennington*	5504	3,820	842	4,662
Perkins*	51	51	0	51
Potter	123	119	2	121
Roberts*	542	530	6	536
Sanborn	108	98	5	103
Spink	485	467	9	476
Stanley*	132	126	3	129
Sully	30	24	3	27
Todd*	27	23	2	25
Tripp*	266	264	1	265
Turner	641	459	91	550
Union	244	212	16	228
Walworth*	325	163	81	244
Yankton	1644	1,610	17	1,627
Ziebach*	15	15	0	15
Other	1585	943	321	1,264

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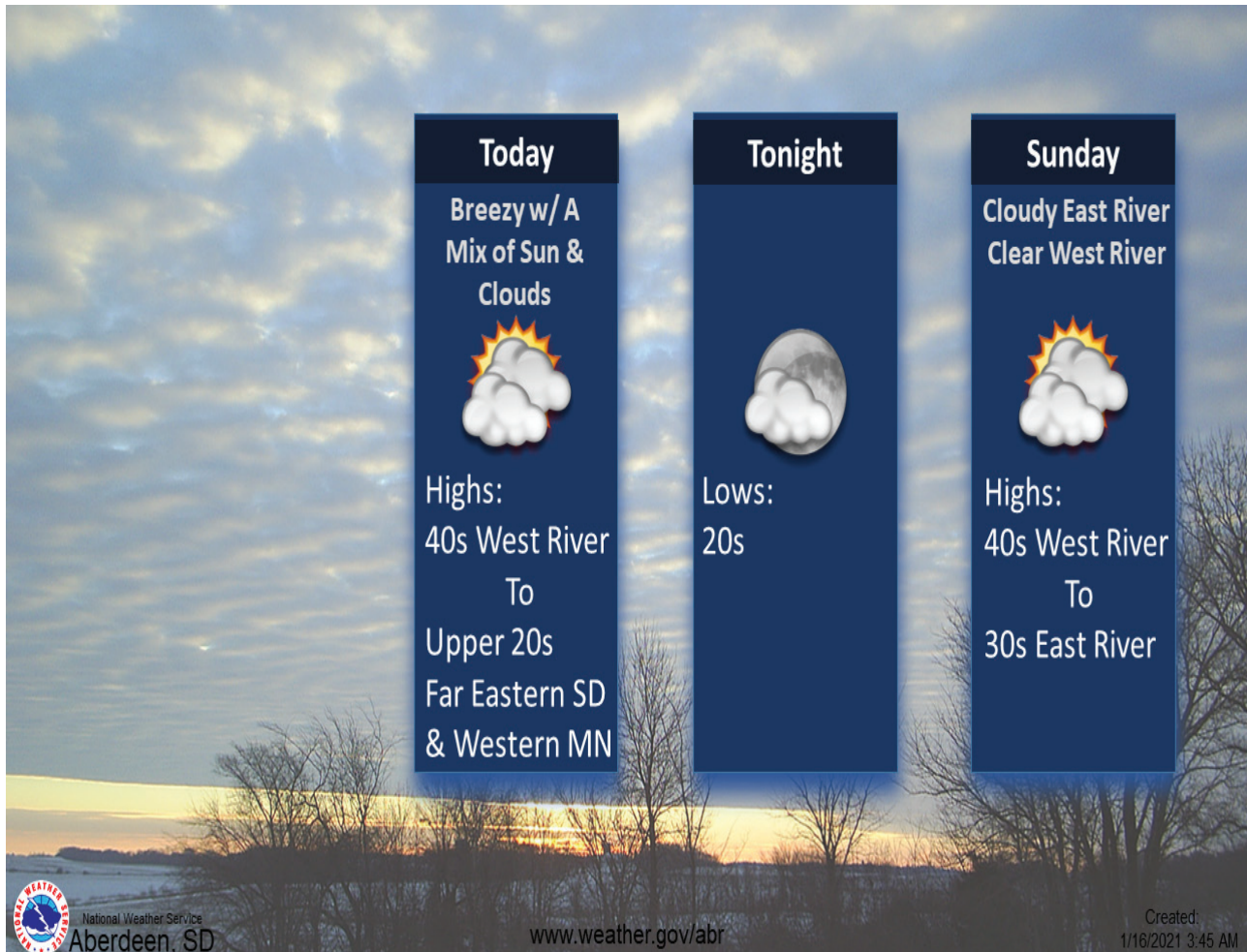
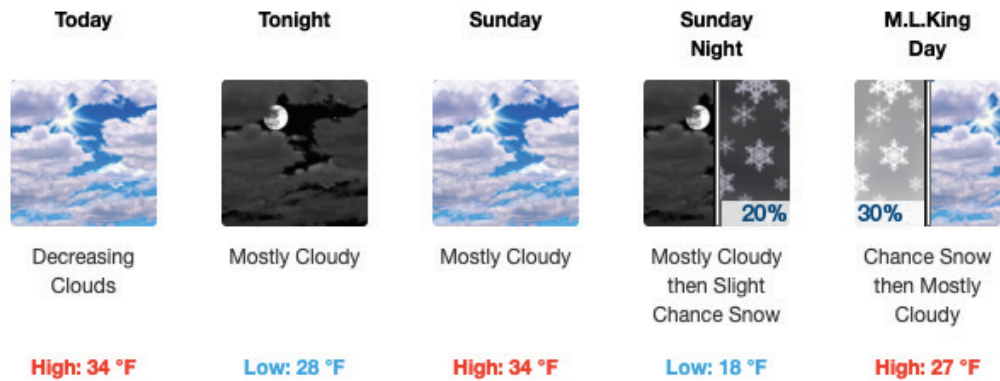
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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The area will see a mix of sun and clouds today, thicker for far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, maybe an isolated shower west river. Clouds may break up some this evening and overnight but will return east river for Sunday. Temperatures are still above average however. We are looking at some light snow for the region early next week.

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Today in Weather History

January 16, 1967: In Minnesota, a fast moving blizzard brought winds in excess of 75 mph. The snowfall was light to moderate with extensive blowing and drifting snow. Visibility was near zero for an extended period of time. Temperatures fell rapidly during the storm and by the morning of the 18th, many records low were set. Many vehicles went into the ditch. Thousands of motorists and school children found shelter wherever they could as travel came to a standstill. A Wheaton man froze to death. In South Dakota, rain followed by a sudden drop in temperatures of nearly 30 degrees in 2 hours resulted in widespread freezing rain and significant icing on roads and trees. Strong winds of 35 to 45 mph with gusts to 75 mph along with the ice halted most travel. The wind and icing also caused the toppling of a 270 foot radio tower near Aberdeen.

January 16, 1997: An intense Arctic High brought widespread blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 70 below to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. One to 3 inches of snow fell on top of the already deep snowpack of 2 to 5 feet. The blizzard winds brought another round of widespread heavy drifting, blocking area roads and highways. Also, many area schools were closed once again to add to their large number of days missed for the winter season. Fortunately, this blizzard as compared to previous blizzards was short-lived and the people were better prepared.

January 16, 2014: A strong area of surface high pressure building into the region behind an Arctic cold front brought high winds to central and north central South Dakota during the early morning hours of the 16th. Some of the strongest wind gusts include; 69 mph near Whitlocks Bay; 68 mph near Bullhead; 67 mph near Trail City; 66 mph in Foster Bay; 65 mph near Mellette and in Presho; 64 mph near Harrold and in Murdo; and 63 mph in Pierre, Reliance, and Miranda. The strong winds diminished during the late afternoon hours of the 16th. A clipper system passing across the region brought light snowfall and very strong northwest winds gusting in excess of 70 mph at times resulting in blizzard conditions. The highest wind gusts include; 76 mph at the Brown County Landfill; 69 mph in Aberdeen and Cravens Corner; 52 mph near Webster; and 52 mph in Sisseton. Blizzard conditions ended during the late afternoon hours. A no travel advisory was issued in Grant, Codington, Hamlin, and Spink Counties due to poor visibilities. The blizzard led to the cancellation of several area activities and schools and nearly impossible travel conditions.

1990: Heavy snow fell across Prince Williams Sound and the Susitna Valley of southern Alaska. Valdez was buried under 64.9 inches of snow in less than 2 days including a record 47.5 inches in 24 hours. The heavy snow blocked roads, closed schools and sunk 6 vessels in the Valdez harbor under the weight of the heavy snow.

1831 - A great snowstorm raged from Georgia to Maine. Snowfall totals greater than 30 inches were reported from Pennsylvania across southern New England. (David Ludlum)

1964 - Fort Worth, TX, received 7.5 inches of snow, and Dallas reported a foot of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A winter storm produced a total of 61 inches of snow at Rye CO, and wind gusts to 100 mph in Utah. The storm then spread heavy snow from the Texas panhandle to Indiana. Tulia TX received 16 inches of snow, and up to 14 inches was reported in western Oklahoma. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A small storm in the western U.S. produced a foot of snow and wind gusts to 70 mph in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada. Showers and thunderstorms produced 2.28 inches of rain at Brownsville TX, their third highest total for any day in January. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong chinook winds plagued much of the state of Wyoming. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Cody, and wind gusts to 100 mph were reported in eastern and northwestern Wyoming. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy snow fell across the Prince Williams Sound area and the Susitna Valley of southern Alaska. Valdez was buried under 64.9 inches of snow in less than two days, including a record 47.5 inches in 24 hours. Up to 44 inches of snow was reported in the Susitna Valley. The heavy snow blocked roads, closed schools, and sank half a dozen vessels in the harbor. (Storm Data)

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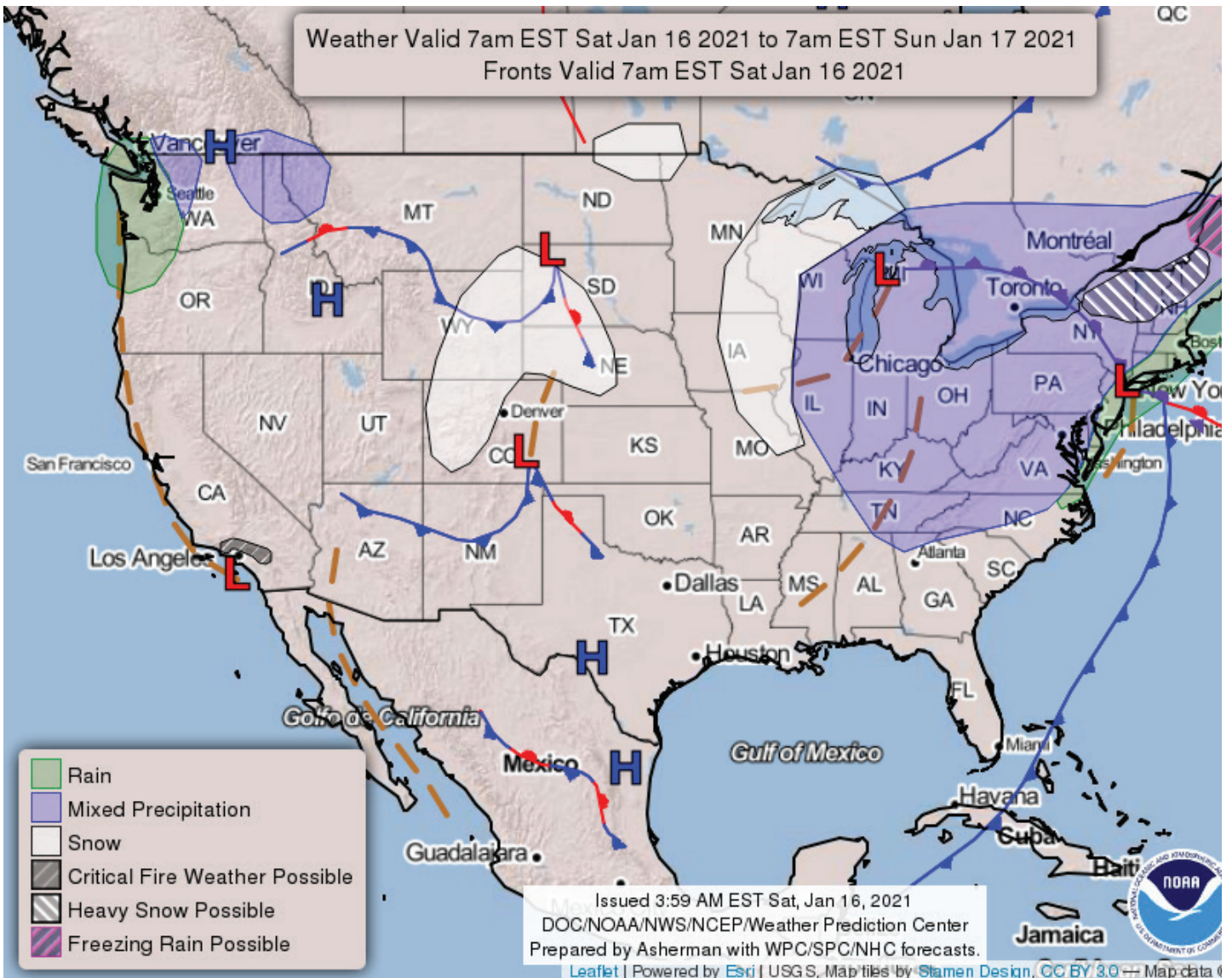
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 30 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 24 °F at 11:56 PM
Wind: 440 mph at 6:35 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 49° in 1942
Record Low: -30 in 2005
Average High: 22°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.26
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.26
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:19 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08 a.m.



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HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS

Justin came home from school with a note from his teacher. After handing it to his father, he stood quietly as his Dad read it out loud. "Mr. Brady, Justin started a fight during recess today and was sent to the principal's office. Please discuss this matter with him and decide what punishment he should receive."

After reading the note, his father looked him in the eyes and said, "Justin, I'm really disappointed in you. I never thought you would do something like that!"

"Dad," cried Justin, "it wasn't my fault. It was Danny's. He hit me first. Cross my heart and hope to die if I am not telling the truth!"

No one enjoys being judged for wrongdoing. We all want to believe that we live a life that reflects clean hands, a pure heart, and a mind free of evil thoughts. But if we were to be questioned and asked if we lived up to those character traits, not many of us would "cross our hearts and hope to die" if challenged.

David knew that his hands were not clean, nor his heart pure or his mind free of evil thoughts. So, he appealed to the mercy and grace of God and cried out to Him and said, "Declare me righteous, O Lord, for I am innocent, O Most High."

That wonderful declaration of David was finally and fully answered in Christ. When he called for the righteousness of God to declare him innocent, he knew that it was in God's nature to forgive him for his sins and deliver him from his sinful behaviors. He'll do it for us, too!

Prayer: How grateful we are, Father, for Your love that saves us, Your grace that forgives us, Your spirit that cleanses us, and Your Word that guides us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord judges the nations. Declare me righteous, O Lord, for I am innocent, O Most High! Psalm 7:8

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News from the Associated Press

Johnson: Intensity of threats increased since Capitol breach

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson says general threats against personal safety are part of being a politician. But, Johnson says since the riot at the U.S. Capitol last week the degree of anger and specificity of the threats have increased.

Johnson says in some cases he and his staff have turned over information to law enforcement to investigate.

The Republican congressman says the threats won't deter him from attending President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration next week. Johnson and Sen. John Thune will attend the ceremony.

Staff for Sen. Mike Rounds say he's unlikely to attend the event because of "logistical challenges," which they did not explain.

Johnson tells the Argus Leader that the Capitol campus will likely be "one of the safest places on the planet" Jan. 20.

"We're most at risk when we're not prepared," Johnson said. "In that way, it's often the unexpected that catches us unaware and catches us in a vulnerable position."

He said officials and law enforcement weren't ready when rioters breached the Capitol Jan. 6 to stop the formal confirmation of Electoral College votes. The violence took the lives of five people.

Johnson said he was thankful for the Federal Air Marshal Service for providing security during travel and for the police department in Mitchell where he and his family reside. The local police department has gone above and beyond to keep his home and family safe, he said.

New suit brought in Missouri River flooding

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (AP) — The federal government faces a second lawsuit over flooding along the Missouri River after it was ordered last month to pay some landowners for damages.

R. Dan Boulware, of the Polsinelli law firm, filed the new class-action lawsuit on behalf of 60 plaintiffs who experienced damages during flooding in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2014, The St. Joseph News-Press reports.

"This is the sequel," said Boulware, who successfully argued in the earlier case that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers knowingly flooded some farmland when it made changes to protect endangered species.

Steve Milne of Holt County, Missouri, is one of the plaintiffs in the new class-action suit. Six hundred acres (242.81 hectares) of his land has seen flooding during the years that qualify. Like many farmers, Milne has insurance, but recurring flooding causes the premiums to go up.

"We're gonna pay more for the insurance and receive less help," Milne said.

Boulware currently is waiting for the class-action lawsuit to be certified. If that occurs there could be additional plaintiffs added to the case. He estimates that the current claim of damages exceeds \$50 million.

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 77, Potter County 63

Bennett County 39, Colome 36

Burke 64, Gregory 59

Corsica/Stickney 76, Kimball/White Lake 62

Jones County 58, Philip 50

Platte-Geddes 72, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 31

Sioux Falls Christian 69, Mitchell 59

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Sioux Falls O’Gorman 64, Huron 27
Wagner 73, Menno 40
West River Tournament=
Moorcroft, Wyo. 59, Edgemont 50
New Underwood 44, Newell 35
Upton, Wyo. 63, Faith 51
Wall 48, Hot Springs 28
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Ponca, Neb., ppd.
Omaha Nation, Neb. vs. Marty Indian, ppd.
Sioux Valley vs. McCook Central/Montrose, ppd.
Tri-Valley vs. Beresford, ppd.
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
New Underwood 64, Timber Lake 37
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 53, Huron 46
Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 45, Leola/Frederick 32
Wagner 63, Menno 52
West River Tournament=
Faith 54, Bison 28
Hot Springs 38, Edgemont 29
Rapid City Christian 71, Moorcroft, Wyo. 48
Upton, Wyo. 53, Newell 39
Wall 51, Custer 40
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Ponca, Neb., ppd.
Langford vs. Britton-Hecla, ppd.
Omaha Nation, Neb. vs. Marty Indian, ppd.
Tri-State, N.D. vs. Waubay/Summit, ppd.
Tri-Valley vs. Beresford, ppd.
West Central vs. St. Thomas More, ccd.

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

Rapid City homeless encampment provides sense of community

By ARIELLE ZIONTS Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — For nearly three months, Camp Mniluzahan has been providing shelter, warm meals and a sense of community for Rapid City’s homeless population.

“We’re just relatives taking care of relatives,” volunteer Sunny Red Bear said during a tour of the camp. “It is amazing to see the people create a sense of community here, sisterhood and brotherhood, it’s just like a family.”

Many of the camp residents became homeless after going through something traumatic and losing love for themselves and from others, said volunteer Hermus Bettelyoun.

“We’re just trying to give that back to them, and show that love and compassion, and giving them some place (to live), and showing that people do care,” he said.

After an impromptu creation on forested tribal land just west of Rapid City, the volunteer and Lakota-led camp has become highly organized with large and warm army tents, a food pantry and mess hall, meal train and transportation systems, and a downtown location for people to drop off or mail in donations from across the county.

The camp does not have structured leadership, strict admission policies, and steps that residents must

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take to continue receiving services like some nonprofits do. The goal is to keep people alive and safe, treat residents with dignity and avoid criminalization, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The camp centers around Lakota values, communal decision making and mutual aid. Volunteers serve as advocates, offering assistance for homeless people who want it, but not forcing anything on them.

"We're not a charity," said volunteer Mark Tilsen. "We're not an outside Christian group who's trying to convert these folks and get them on the path to sobriety. If people want to sober up, that's cool, and if people come as they are, we still do our best to care for them and accept them."

Volunteers are familiar with social services in town and have referred residents to them if they want to work on sobriety, obtaining permanent housing or other goals, said Red Bear, who also serves as director of racial equity at NDN Collective.

"Advocates do not force anything upon anyone but they just say, here's my arsenal of resources, take what you need, let me know how I can help you," she said. "We hold a safe, welcoming space for them to figure out what it is they want."

The camp houses between 50 and 86 people a night, said Bettelyoun. It has a core group of volunteers with others helping more sporadically, and hundreds of people from across the country that offer support by donating money and gear.

The camp has also received several grants, including one from NDN Collective, that will ensure it stays open throughout the winter, Tilsen said.

While the camp is led by Lakota people, it accepts volunteers and residents of all backgrounds, Red Bear stressed. It only serves adults but hopes to expand to youth and families in the future and to eventually build tiny homes.

Creek Patrol members first attempted to create Camp Mniluzahan on Rapid City-owned land near the intersection of Lacrosse and Centre streets on Oct. 16. Camp supporters and police took down four tipis, which officers said were illegally erected.

Police arrested six people, including Tilsen, Bettelyoun and Middlelent, who refused to leave. The group is charged with violating three Rapid City codes and breaking either one or two state laws.

Camp Mniluzahan was established Oct. 18 with permission from the leaders of the Oglala, Rosebud and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes, which own the land. The 93 acres is located above Jackson Boulevard and south of the National Guard's training grounds, just outside Rapid City limits and within Pennington County.

The land was part of the 1,200-acre Rapid City Indian Boarding School property that was owned and operated by the Department of the Interior from 1898-1933. It's one of two old boarding school parcels that the DOI entrusted to the tribes in 2017.

Volunteers view Camp Mniluzahan as part of the Land Back movement that seeks to return land to Indigenous people.

"You can't joke around and say Black Hills, *tóksa* (see you later) because we got a little piece of it back," Tilsen said. "The very fact that one of the things that we're doing with our land is to take care of our most vulnerable population kind of shows you the priority and trajectory of that movement."

Creek Patrol volunteers started the camp because there are gaps in housing options for homeless people in Rapid City, the volunteers said. They said they work with and refer people to the existing resources and have nothing against them.

Some people just feel more welcomed and accepted at the camp, Tilsen said. Others like that they don't need to provide personal documentation to the camp, that their privacy is protected, Bettelyoun added.

"It's needed. What we're doing, no one else is doing this," Tilsen said. "If the city allowed a tent ordinance where we just drop off buddy heaters and propane tanks and just check in on people, that would be another option. If there was some kind of voucher system set up to get people off the streets, at least just for the coldest months, that would be awesome. There's all of these things that could have been done by the city, by the state and other individuals that wasn't being done."

Safe Beds at the county-run Care Campus provides a free place for intoxicated people to obtain short-term shelter. It has 30 floor mats for men in one room and 16 in another for women. People can check

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in once every 24 hours.

People can't store items at Safe Beds, which closes for cleaning about an hour or two each morning. Sober people are sometimes accepted into Safe Beds during very cold weather to avoid deaths, said Helene Duhamel, spokeswoman with the Pennington County Sheriff's Office.

"It's literally a stop-gap measure, it's a warming station but it's not a community," Tilsen said of Safe Beds.

People who are intoxicated and struggling with addiction are welcome to live and store their items at Camp Mniluzahan. They are not allowed to bring drugs or alcohol into the camp.

The Cornerstone Mission is open to men who are dedicated to becoming sober, gaining employment and finding permanent housing. Those who live there must pay a small daily fee or take work assignments with the mission. The mission has a shelter open to women, children and female parolees that focuses on similar goals.

There are sober people who don't qualify for the Cornerstone programs, and there are times when both Safe Beds and the Cornerstone facilities are full, the volunteers stressed.

"Very rarely do we encounter a circumstance in which someone wouldn't qualify for assistance from the Mission or the Care Campus," countered Brendyn Medina, spokesman for the Rapid City Police Department. "Our officers are empowered with discretion to find creative solutions if we can't immediately identify a safe resource to find a person help if they need it," such as driving them to a family member or friend's house.

Camp Mniluzahan being away from downtown means people are farther away from resources but away from the dangers of traffic and liquor stores, Bettelyoun said.

Some people who arrived at camp with addictions have become sober, he said. Some have taken on roles as volunteers, Middletent said, while others have returned to their family members.

"One of the greatest accomplishments is seeing them connect with their families," Bettelyoun said.

"It's real peaceful, it's so beautiful, all you hear is the wind," Bettelyoun said of the camp. "You hear laughter and joking. It's something that really warms you up."

The camp's entrance is along National Guard Road, a steep dirt road next to the training grounds and behind a residential community off Canyon Lake Drive.

The entrance is flanked by the flags of the Oglala, Rosebud and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes as well as the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. There are also NDN Collective and Land Back flags.

A sign warns people against trespassing, says that masks are required, and provides a phone number for people who want permission to enter.

A short dirt road leads to the camp, situated in a clearing surrounded by trees. Most of the residents remained inside living quarters during the Tuesday visit but some were walking around or inside the mess hall. Volunteers, including some older teenagers or young adults, were spread out around camp.

The camp has a large storage container, port-a-potties and dumpsters that are emptied twice a week, multiple fire pits, an inipi (sweat lodge) and a large shed that serves as a pantry for donated food.

The camp began with four tipis, which are still on site, but now has seven large army tents that are warmer and can hold more people. The tents are surrounded by hay stacks and built on elevated wooden platforms that provide insulation and are heated with wood stoves.

The mess hall is a long army tent where people gather to cook, eat a meal, obtain first-aid and personal protective supplies, and watch movies on a projector in the evenings. Stoves and the thick tent fabric kept the cold and wind out of the shelter on Tuesday.

Power and electricity are provided through generators and solar panels.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe is planning on donating a drum and funds to build a water well and shower house, said Bettelyoun. In the meantime, long-term residents are brought into town for showers.

Residents can use food from the pantry to cook their own meals but most days there are hot meals cooked by community members, Red Bear said. Volunteers also use donated money to pick up hot meals from restaurants.

According to its meal train page, the camp has 346 people on an email list representing people who either donated money or are interested in signing up to cook meals. So far \$14,504 has been raised for food.

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Supplies — including masks, blankets, toiletries, generators, warm-weather clothing and rainwater catchers — are bought with money raised from online donors or profits from sales of Camp Mniluzahan/Creek Patrol clothing and gear. The camp also has an Amazon Wishlist, where donors can directly purchase items the camp needs.

Those Amazon deliveries, any other packages and local item donations are dropped off at Hippie Haven, a store in downtown Rapid City. Donations arrive nearly every day and camp volunteers pick them up several times a week, said store manager Chesca Cedillo.

"There's a lot of homeless people here in Rapid City so (we are willing to do) anything we can do to help on our end to provide any sort of help, so people can get their basic human needs met," she said.

"People have been donating from all over the country," Cedillo said. "I think it's just because people want to help. It's a vital coalition effort to provide food, shelter and protection for a lot of our relatives who don't have housing."

Camp residents are brought to and from town by volunteers driving two large vans from NDN Collective.

"We go out every single night looking for folks ... the whole goal is so that nobody freezes to death out there and everybody makes it through the winter," Tilsen said. But "we don't make anybody come here," he stressed.

Vans end up acting as a "free taxi cab service," bringing people to the camp, Care Campus, motels or to their relatives, he said.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-11-12-38-43, Mega Ball: 15, Megaplier: 4

(three, eleven, twelve, thirty-eight, forty-three; Mega Ball: fifteen; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$750 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$640 million

Grass fire consumes 20K acres in southwestern North Dakota

LEMMON, S.D. (AP) — A grass fire in far southwestern North Dakota has consumed 20,000 acres, forcing farmers and ranchers to evacuate and leaving two firefighters hurt.

The Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported that firefighters responded to the fire about 10 miles northwest of Lemmon in Adams County late Thursday afternoon. Nearly 20 departments from North and South Dakota responded and battled the blaze in 30 to 40 mph winds. The area was under a winter weather advisory and has seen dry conditions with no snow.

Several farms and ranches were evacuated due to smoke. Two firefighters were hurt and taken to a medical center for treatment.

Firefighters had stopped about 80% of the blaze from spreading as of Friday afternoon. No occupied residences have been lost although a ranch headquarters sustained heavy damage, Lemmon Fire Department spokesman Shane Penfield said.

This story has been updated to correct area of fire to southwestern North Dakota.

FCS schedules nearly set with season starting in February

By ERIC OLSON AP College Football Writer

One college football season just ended, and another one starts in just over a month.

All but a few teams in the Football Championship Subdivision shut down in the fall because of the CO-

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VID-19 pandemic and will play a spring season culminating with the NCAA playoffs in April and May.

As has been the case across the sports landscape for months, nothing is set in stone and more than 20 FCS programs — including all eight in the Ivy League — are not playing spring football at all.

Defending national champion North Dakota State — which beat Central Arkansas in October in its lone fall game — is supposed to play five weeks from Sunday against Youngstown State. At least that what it says on the Bison's football website.

But the Missouri Valley Football Conference, the league the Bison play in, was thrown for a loop when Indiana State announced this week it would opt out. The Sycamores didn't cite concerns about the virus. Instead, they said they want to avoid the physical toll of playing next fall so soon after the spring season.

So for NDSU, that game against Youngstown State might or might not happen Feb. 21. The Bison should know in a week or so.

"We are doing a complete redraw of the schedule," Valley associate commissioner Mike Kern wrote in an email Friday.

The Ivy League has scrapped football until the fall. A look at the rest of the FCS conferences:

Big Sky: Nine teams will play a six-game conference schedule with start date to be announced. Montana, Montana State and Portland State intend to play a shorter non-conference schedule. Sacramento State has opted out.

Big South: Five teams will play a four-game conference schedule starting March 13, and each will be allowed to play up to four nonconference games. Campbell and North Alabama each played four games in the fall and will opt out, as will Hampton, which did not play in the fall.

Colonial Athletic: Eleven teams will play a six-game conference schedules starting March 13. Each team also can play two nonconference games. Towson opted out.

MEAC: Seven teams will play a four-game conference schedule starting Feb. 20. Each team also can play two nonconference games. Bethune-Cookman and Florida A&M opted out.

Missouri Valley: Ten teams will play eight-game conference schedules starting Feb. 19. Indiana State opted out.

Northeast: Seven teams will play a four-game conference schedule starting March 5 with championship game April 16 or 17. Saint Francis opted out.

Ohio Valley: Eight teams will play a seven-game conference schedule starting Feb. 21. Each team can play one nonconference game Feb. 13 or 14. Eastern Kentucky opted out after it played nine games in the fall.

Patriot League: Six teams will play a four-game conference schedule starting March 13 with championship game between division winners April 17. Georgetown opted out.

Pioneer: The schedule is being redrawn after Dayton opted out this week. Originally, nine teams were to play a six-game conference schedule starting March 13.

Southern: Nine teams will play an eight-game conference schedule starting Feb. 20. Chattanooga, Mercer, The Citadel and Western Carolina played between one and four games in the fall.

Southland: Seven teams will play a six-game conference schedule starting Feb. 20. Abilene Christian, Central Arkansas, Houston Baptist and Stephen F. Austin played in the fall and opted out.

Southwestern: Ten teams will play a six-game conference schedule starting Feb. 27. Each team also can play one nonconference game.

The NCAA playoffs are April 18-May 15, with 16 teams instead of the usual 24. Eleven teams will automatically qualify as conference champions. The remaining five will be at-large selections.

Schools that played in the fall and also in the spring will have all their results considered in the selection process.

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

Noem blames Capitol insurrection on lack of civics education

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

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PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Friday blamed an inadequate education in American civics as “the root cause” of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, while making no mention of President Donald Trump’s role in the attack that sent Congress into hiding.

The Republican governor is a close ally of the president, campaigned for him across the country and supported his efforts to contest the results of the presidential election. Since Trump’s supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol last week, Noem has tried to deflect blame from the president while calling for an end to political violence.

“We have an opportunity to address the root cause of this problem: we must reform young Americans’ civic education,” Noem said in the column released Friday.

The governor declined an interview request Friday from The Associated Press, after avoiding two opportunities earlier in the week to take questions from reporters.

Her spokesman, Ian Fury, pointed to a recent op-ed in the conservative online magazine The Federalist in which she responded to Republicans blaming Trump for the attacks by saying, “If that’s all we get out of this, our future will be no different than our past.”

In her column, Noem called the storming of the Capitol appalling and “horrible to watch.” But she did not address Trump’s false allegations for weeks that the election had been stolen nor his rhetoric at a rally in Washington right before his supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol, leaving five people dead. The House voted this week to impeach Trump for a second time, on a charge of incitement of insurrection, and a trial awaits in the Senate.

Noem said the goal of the curriculum was to teach students that the United States “is the most unique nation in the history of the world.”

Despite recently saying that she is not interested in running for president in 2024, Noem has made moves that signal possible interest in trying to assume Trump’s role as the head of the GOP. She had a prime speaking spot at the Republican National Convention and this month spoke at the party’s winter meeting, which was considered a gathering of presidential hopefuls.

Federal judge orders IHS to release report on abusive doctor

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A federal judge has ordered Indian Health Services to release a report investigating how one of its doctors was able to sexually abuse boys on Indian reservations in South Dakota and Montana.

Stanley Patrick Weber, the former pediatrician, was sentenced last year to five consecutive life sentences for sexual abuse he committed on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation from 1999 and 2011. Weber was also convicted of similar crimes against boys on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana.

Indian Health Services commissioned a report on how the agency failed to protect Indigenous children from the doctor, but declined requests to release the report under the Freedom of Information Act, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Indian Health Services said it would not provide the report because it’s a “confidential medical quality assurance record.” But Gabriel Gorenstein, a magistrate judge for the Southern District of New York, rejected that argument and ordered the report be released.

Gorenstein wrote in his order that “the entire report is entirely and exclusively about criminal conduct unrelated to medical care and the failures of the agency in detecting and preventing that criminal conduct.”

“South Dakota School Choice Week” Proclaimed; Governor Kristi Noem Joins Nation’s Leaders in Shining a Light on K-12 Education

PIERRE, S.D., Jan. 15, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Jan. 24 through Jan. 30 will officially be South Dakota School Choice Week, thanks to a recent proclamation from Gov. Kristi Noem. This is just the second time in ten years that South Dakota School Choice Week has been officially proclaimed by the state’s governor.

Gov. Noem joins more than a dozen other governors and hundreds of local leaders around the country

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who have issued proclamations for National School Choice Week, which raises awareness about school options and opportunity in K-12 education.

National School Choice Week has turned virtual this year due to the pandemic, and South Dakota families, schools, and organizations will be participating with more than 60 virtual or at-home celebrations. The Week's activities aim to celebrate the school choices available to families and spark timely conversations about how parents can find the best educational fit for their children.

Nationwide, more than 33,000 independently planned activities will safely raise awareness about opportunity in education. Schools of every type – traditional public, public magnet, public charter, private, online, and homeschool – will join in the celebration.

"School Choice Week, in South Dakota and across the country, is about spotlighting the kids, parents, and educators who are impacted every day by school choices," said Andrew Campanella, president of National School Choice Week. "It is inspiring to see South Dakota families speaking up for the choices they appreciate and the choices they wish they had."

National School Choice Week shines a spotlight on effective K-12 education options for children. As a not-for-profit effort, the Week focuses equally on traditional public, charter, magnet, online, private, and home education options. Every January, participants plan tens of thousands of events and activities — such as school fairs, open houses, and student showcases — 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. The effort is nonpolitical and nonpartisan and does not advocate for legislation.

For more information, visit schoolchoiceweek.com/south-Dakota.

View original content: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/south-dakota-school-choice-week-proclaimed-governor-kristi-noem-joins-nations-leaders-in-shining-a-light-on-k-12-education-301209061.html>
SOURCE National School Choice Week

Teen charged in fatal New Year's Day wrong-way crash

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A Bismarck teen accused of driving the wrong way on a Bismarck expressway and killing a South Dakota woman New Year's Day is facing four felony charges.

Kenyon Eagle, 18, had a blood alcohol content of nearly three times the legal limit to drive when his pickup collided head-on with the victim's car about 2 a.m., according to the North Dakota Highway Patrol. Tiffany Shaving, 24, of Cherry Creek, died at the scene of the crash.

Eagle made a left turn in Mandan and went the wrong way in frosty and foggy conditions in the west-bound lanes of the expressway, the patrol said.

Two passengers in Shaving's her car were seriously injured and required surgery, the Bismarck Tribune reported. Eagle was also taken to a hospital for treatment of his injuries.

He made a virtual initial court appearance Thursday. He's charged with reckless endangerment, criminal vehicular homicide and two counts of criminal vehicular injury.

His defense attorney did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Will Trump's mishandling of records leave a hole in history?

By DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The public won't see President Donald Trump's White House records for years, but there's growing concern the collection won't be complete, leaving a hole in the history of one of America's most tumultuous presidencies.

Trump has been cavalier about the law requiring that records be preserved. He has a habit of ripping up documents before tossing them out, forcing White House records workers to spend hours taping them back together.

"They told him to stop doing it. He didn't want to stop," said Solomon Lartey, a former White House records analyst. He said the first document he taped back together was a letter from Sen. Chuck Schumer,

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D-N.Y., about a government shutdown.

The president also confiscated an interpreter's notes after Trump had a chat with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Trump scolded his White House counsel for taking notes at a meeting during the Russia investigation by former special counsel Robert Mueller. Top executive branch officials had to be reminded more than once not to conduct official business on private email or text messaging systems and to preserve it if they did.

And now, Trump's baseless claim of widespread voter fraud, which postponed for weeks an acknowledgment of President-elect Joe Biden's victory, is delaying the transfer of documents to the National Archives and Records Administration, further heightening concern about the integrity of the records.

"Historians are likely to suffer from far more holes than has been the norm," said Richard Immerman at the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. In the Trump White House, "not only has record-keeping not been a priority, but we have multiple examples of it seeking to conceal or destroy that record."

Lack of a complete record might also hinder any ongoing investigations of Trump, from his impeachment trial and other prospective federal inquiries to investigations in the state of New York.

But even with requests by lawmakers and lawsuits by government transparency groups, there is an acknowledgment that noncompliance with the Presidential Records Act carries little consequence for Trump.

In tossing out one suit last year, U.S. Circuit Judge David Tatel wrote that courts cannot "micromanage the president's day-to-day compliance."

The Presidential Records Act states that a president cannot destroy records until he seeks the advice of the national archivist and notifies Congress. But the law doesn't require him to heed the archivist's advice. It doesn't prevent the president from going ahead and destroying records.

Most presidential records today are electronic. Records experts estimate that automatic backup computer systems capture a vast majority of the records, but cannot capture records that a White House chooses not to create or log into those systems.

THE MOVE

Moving a president's trail of paper and electronic records is a laborious task. President Barack Obama left about 30 million pages of paper documents and some 250 terabytes of electronic records, including the equivalent of about 1.5 billion pages of emails.

The records of past presidents are important because they can help a current president craft new policies and prevent mistakes from being repeated.

"Presidential records tell our nation's story from a unique perspective and are essential to an incoming administration in making informed decisions," said Lee White, director of the National Coalition for History. "They are equally vital to historians."

When Trump lost the November election, records staffers were in position to transfer electronic records, pack up the paper ones and move them to the National Archives by Jan. 20, as required by law. But Trump's reluctance to concede has meant they will miss the deadline.

"Necessary funding from the (White House) Office of Management and Budget was delayed for many weeks after the election, which has caused delays in arranging for the transfer of the Trump presidential records into the National Archives' custody," the National Archives said in a statement to The Associated Press. "Even though the transfer of these records will not be completed until after Jan. 20, the National Archives will assume legal custody of them on Jan. 20 in accordance with the Presidential Records Act."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment about preserving Trump's records.

One person familiar with the transition said guidance typically emailed to executive branch employees explaining how to turn in equipment and pack up their offices was sent out in December, but quickly rescinded because Trump insisted on contesting the election.

With little guidance, some staffers in the White House started quietly calling records workers to find out what to do.

Departing employees are instructed to create a list of folders in each box and make a spreadsheet to give the National Archives a way to track and retrieve the information for the incoming Biden team. The process gets more complex with classified material.

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The Biden administration can request to see Trump records immediately, but the law says the public must wait five years before submitting Freedom of Information Act requests. Even then, Trump — like other presidents before him — is invoking specific restrictions to public access of his records for up to 12 years. Six restrictions outlined in the law include national security, confidential business information, confidential communications between the president and his advisers or among his advisers and personal information.

RECORD-KEEPING PRACTICES

Around Trump's first impeachment and on other sensitive issues, some normal workflow practices were bypassed, a second person familiar with the process said. Apparently worried about leaks, higher-ups and White House lawyers became more involved in deciding which materials were catalogued and scanned into White House computer networks where they are automatically saved, this person said.

The individuals, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss inner workings at the White House, said that if uncatalogued materials ended up in an office safe, for instance, they would at least be temporarily preserved. But if they were never catalogued in the first place, staffers would not know they existed, making such materials untraceable.

White House staff quickly learned about Trump's disregard for documents as they witnessed him tearing them up and discarding them.

"My director came up to me and said, 'You have to tape these together,'" said Lartey, the former records analyst.

Lartey said someone in the White House chief of staff's office told the president that the documents were considered presidential records and needed to be preserved by law. Lartey said about 10 records staffers ended up on Scotch tape duty at different times, starting with Trump's first days in the White House through at least mid-2018.

Trump's staff also engaged in questionable practices by using private emails and messaging apps. Former White House counsel Don McGahn in February 2017 sent a memo that instructed employees not to use nonofficial text messaging apps or private email accounts. If they did, he said, they had to take screenshots of the material and copy it into official email accounts, which are preserved. He sent the memo back out in September 2017.

"It's an open question to me about how serious or conscientious any of those people have been about moving them over," said Tom Blanton, who directs the National Security Archive at George Washington University, which was founded in 1985 to combat government secrecy.

Trump was criticized for confiscating the notes of an interpreter who was with him in 2017 when the president talked with Putin in Hamburg, Germany. Lawmakers tried unsuccessfully to obtain the notes of another interpreter who was with Trump in 2018 when he met with Putin in Helsinki, Finland. It's unclear whether the two presidents talked about Russia's interference in the 2016 election. Many people suspected the subject did come up because at a news conference afterward, Trump said he believed Putin when Putin denied Russian interference despite U.S. intelligence agencies finding the opposite.

Several weeks ago, the National Security Archive, two historical associations and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington sued to prevent the Trump White House from destroying any electronic communications or records sent or received on nonofficial accounts, such as personal email or WhatsApp.

They also alleged that the White House has already likely destroyed presidential materials.

The court refused to issue a temporary restraining order after government lawyers told the judge that they had instructed the White House to notify all employees to preserve all electronic communications in their original format until the suit was settled.

"I believe we will find that there's going to be a huge hole in the historical record of this president because I think there's probably been serious noncompliance of the Presidential Records Act," said Anne Weismann, one of the lawyers representing the groups in their suit. "I don't think President Trump cares about his record and what it says. I think he probably cares, though, about what it might say about his criminal culpability."

Trump faces several legal challenges when he leaves the White House. There are two New York state inquiries into whether he misled tax authorities, banks or business partners. Also, two women alleging he

sexually assaulted them are suing him.

DESTROYING OR SAVING HISTORY

Presidential records were considered a president's personal property until the Watergate scandal under President Richard Nixon prompted Congress in 1978 to pass the Presidential Records Act over worry that Nixon would destroy White House tape recordings that led to his resignation.

After that, presidential records were no longer considered personal property but the property of the American people — if they are preserved. Lawmakers have introduced legislation to require audits of White House record-keeping and compliance with the law.

"The American public should not have to wait until a president has left office to learn of problems with that president's record-keeping practices," Weismann said.

Biden fills out State Department team with Obama veterans

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden on Saturday filled out his State Department team with a group of former career diplomats and veterans of the Obama administration, signaling his desire to return to a more traditional foreign policy after four years of uncertainty and unpredictability under President Donald Trump.

Biden will nominate Wendy Sherman as deputy secretary of state and Victoria Nuland as undersecretary of state for political affairs — the second- and third-highest ranking posts, respectively. They were among the 11 officials announced to serve under the incoming secretary of state, Antony Blinken.

The team "embodies my core belief that America is strongest when it works with our allies," Biden said in a statement. He said he was confident "they will use their diplomatic experience and skill to restore America's global and moral leadership. America is back."

Among the others are:

—longtime Biden Senate aide Brian McKeon, to be deputy secretary of state for management. That deputy position has been vacant for some time and McKeon and Sherman are expected to share duties as the department's No. 3 official.

—former senior diplomats Bonnie Jenkins and Uzra Zeya, to be under secretary of state for arms control and undersecretary of state of democracy and human rights, respectively.

—Derek Chollet, a familiar Democratic foreign policy hand, to be State Department counselor.

—former U.N. official Salman Ahmed, who also served as head of strategic planning in the Obama National Security Council, as director of policy planning.

—Suzy George, who was a senior aide to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, will be Blinken's chief of staff.

—Ned Price, a former Obama NSC staffer and career CIA official who resigned in protest in the early days of the Trump administration, will serve as the public face of the department, taking on the role of spokesman.

—Jalina Porter, communications director for Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., who is leaving Congress to work in the White House, will be Price's deputy.

Price and Porter intend to return to the practice of holding daily State Department press briefings, officials said. Those briefings had been eliminated under the Trump administration.

Jeffrey Prescott, a former national security aide when Biden was vice president, is Biden's pick to be deputy ambassador to the United Nations. He would serve under U.N. envoy-designate Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Five of the 11 are either people of color or LGBTQ. Although most are not household names, all are advocates of multilateralism and many are familiar in Washington and overseas foreign policy circles. Their selections are a reflection of Biden's intent to turn away from Trump's transactional and often unilateral "America First" approach to international relations.

Sherman led the Obama administration's negotiations leading to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, from which Trump withdrew, and had engaged in talks over ballistic missiles with North Korea during President

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Bill Clinton's second term. Nuland served as assistant secretary of state for European Affairs during the Ukraine crisis..

Sherman, McKeon, Nuland, Jenkins and Zeya will require Senate confirmation to their posts while the others will not.

AP Exclusive: Selena Gomez: Big Tech 'cashing in from evil'

By AMANDA LEE MYERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hours after an angry mob of Trump supporters took control of the U.S. Capitol in a violent insurrection, Selena Gomez laid much of the blame at the feet of Big Tech.

"Today is the result of allowing people with hate in their hearts to use platforms that should be used to bring people together and allow people to build community," tweeted the singer/actor. "Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, Mark Zuckerberg, Sheryl Sandberg, Jack Dorsey, Sundar Pichai, Susan Wojcicki — you have all failed the American people today, and I hope you're going to fix things moving forward."

It's just the latest effort by the 28-year-old Gomez to draw attention to the danger of internet companies critics say have profited from misinformation and hate on their platforms. Gomez has been calling out Big Tech for months — publicly on the very platforms she's fighting and privately in conversations with Silicon Valley's big hitters.

In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Gomez said she's frustrated by what she views as the companies' lackluster response and that they have to "stop doing the bare minimum."

"It isn't about me versus you, one political party versus another. This is about truth versus lies and Facebook, Instagram and big tech companies have to stop allowing lies to just flow and pretend to be the truth," Gomez said in a phone interview from New York. "Facebook continues to allow dangerous lies about vaccines and COVID and the U.S. election, and neo-Nazi groups are selling racist products via Instagram.

"Enough is enough," she said.

Facebook and Twitter representatives declined to comment. Google didn't respond to an AP request for comment.

Gomez is among a growing number of celebrities using their platforms to call out social media, including Sacha Baron Cohen, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Kerry Washington, and Kim Kardashian West.

Gomez became passionate about the issue in 2017 when a 12-year-old commented on one of her Instagram posts: "Go kill yourself."

"That was my tipping point," she said. "I couldn't handle what I was seeing."

Social media experts have argued that companies like Facebook and Twitter played a direct role in the Capitol insurrection both by allowing plans for the uprising to be made on their platforms and through algorithms that allow dangerous conspiracy theories to take flight. That's even though executives, such as Facebook's Sandberg, have insisted that planning for the riots largely took place on other, smaller platforms.

"The operational planning was happening in spaces that Selena, for example, was identifying to Sheryl Sandberg in advance saying, 'You know, we need to do something about white supremacist extremism online and their ability to just form a group on Facebook and happily talk away to each other, plan what they're going to do next,'" said Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, which has helped educate Gomez about online misinformation.

In emails shared exclusively with the AP, Gomez told Sandberg in September that "a search for a militia group 'Three Percenters' results in dozens of pages, groups and videos focused on people hoping and preparing for civil war, and there are dozens of groups titled 'white lives matter' that are full of hate and lies that might lead to people being hurt or, even worse, killed."

That's even though Facebook banned U.S.-based militia groups from its service in August.

In the same email, Gomez also points to several ads with lies about election fraud being allowed to remain on Facebook and Instagram and questions why that was being allowed.

"I can't believe you can't check ads before you take money, and if you can't you shouldn't be profiting from it," she wrote. "You're not just doing nothing. You're cashing in from evil."

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In an email response to Gomez, Sandberg defends Facebook's efforts to remove harmful content, saying the platform has removed millions of posts for hate speech, and bans ads that are divisive, inflammatory, or discourage people from voting. She didn't directly address the advertising examples Gomez pointed to.

"It's beating around the bush and saying what people want to hear," Gomez said about her interactions with Sandberg and Google, among others. "I think at this point we've all learned that words don't match up unless the action is going to happen."

Following the violence at the U.S. Capitol, tech companies made some of their biggest changes to date.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other platforms banned President Donald Trump, drawing criticism from some including the American Civil Liberties Union that it was censorship, and praise from others who say the president abused his platform by encouraging violence.

In a thread defending Twitter's Trump ban, CEO Jack Dorsey said "offline harm as a result of online speech is demonstrably real, and what drives our policy and enforcement above all."

In addition to banning Trump, Facebook has been removing video and photos from Capitol rioters. The company also added text on posts questioning the election, confirming that Joe Biden has been lawfully elected, and saying it was taking enforcement action against militarized social movements like QAnon.

While the changes are positive, they're "just a drop in the bucket," said Jeff Orlowski, director of Netflix's "The Social Dilemma," a popular 2020 film that showed how Silicon Valley's pursuit of profit could pose an existential threat to U.S. democracy.

Voices like Gomez's can be a huge help to get the message across, considering her hundreds of millions of followers, Orlowski said.

"Think of the advertising revenue from every Selena Gomez post. Think of the advertising revenue from every Donald Trump post, the advertising revenue from every post from The Rock or whoever," he said. "Those people are literally generating millions of dollars for these companies ... The top 20 people on Instagram have probably the most influence over Mark and Sheryl compared to anybody else until finally Congress as a whole gets enough momentum and energy to put some legislation together."

Orlowski and Ahmed both said they're looking to Biden's administration for reforms, including a measure that would hold social media companies accountable for the posts they allow, an effort that has gained momentum and drawn bipartisan support.

"The question no longer is 'Is there going to be change,'" Ahmed said. "The question is, 'What kind of change are we going to get?'"

Meanwhile, Gomez vows to keep fighting as long as she has a pedestal.

"While I have this, I'm going to do good things with it," she said. "I think that's my purpose."

Associated Press writer Barbara Ortutay contributed to this report from Oakland, California.

Journalists prepare for protests where they could be targets

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — While monitoring online chatter about protests at state capitols in advance of next week's presidential inauguration, the Seattle Times came across a chilling description for journalists: soft targets.

The phrase drove home the importance of safety precautions being put in place by news organizations across the country this weekend, including those planned by Times managing editor Ray Rivera and his colleagues.

"This is scary territory," Rivera said. "I don't want to overstate this, but there is always the concern. It's hard to know how much of this is rhetoric or bombast, but it's easy for me to think that some person is going to take those messages seriously and do something."

At Capitols across the country, National Guard troops are being called up, fences built, windows boarded up and employees warned to stay away. No one wants to see repeats of the siege at the U.S. Capitol last week, and no one wants to be caught flat-footed.

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Video of journalists being roughed up is fresh in mind, along with graffiti scrawled on the Capitol saying "Murder the media."

Reporters at the Minneapolis Star Tribune went through a harrowing summer of covering civil unrest following the death of George Floyd, with some shot by rubber bullets, tear-gassed or detained by police. The current situation is different, said Suki Dardarian, the Star Tribune's vice president and managing editor.

"The protest this summer was targeted at the system," she said. "The risk to us was as bystanders. There were a few people who didn't like us, but it wasn't an anti-media situation. In this case, people are inflamed not just against the government but the media."

A "Storm the Capitol" rally in St. Paul, Minnesota last week shifted to the residence of Gov. Tim Walz, who said state troopers had to hustle his 14-year-old son to safety.

Gas masks and bullet-proof vests are being provided to Star Tribune journalists assigned to cover upcoming rallies, and they will be watched by security hired by the newspaper. The experience of last summer helps in planning; without it, Dardarian said she didn't know whether the vests would have been ordered.

"It did help us think more clearly and more strategically about what we needed to do, and to take it seriously," she said.

While demonstrations are not expected everywhere, The Associated Press is prepared to cover Capitols in all 50 states, said Brian Carovillano, the organization's vice president and managing editor.

"We're not commenting on specific security precautions, other than to say the safety of our journalists is our No. 1 priority," he said. "We're drawing on the expertise of a lot of people who have a lot of experience covering difficult and sometimes scary situations."

Most organizations stress the importance of teamwork, so journalists who are working are accompanied by someone responsible for looking around them for potential danger. Plans include escape routes and regular check-ins with editors.

"If you go out to these demonstrations alone, that's a bad decision," said Connor Radnovich of the Statesman Journal in Salem, Oregon.

Radnovich will cover demonstrations at Oregon's statehouse, bringing a significant advantage to the job. His hobby is self-defense, and he's been trained to recognize the signs that someone is about to get violent.

In many war zones, journalists make sure they are clearly identified as press so they are not mistaken for enemy combatants. It's a trickier call at demonstrations where some participants consider the press itself the enemy.

Tim Lambert, news director at WITF-FM in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, said that instead of wearing a lanyard or outward identifier, his reporter will carry a press pass in a pocket that can be easily reached. In Pennsylvania, where Joe Biden's narrow win essentially gave him the presidency, state employees at the Capitol are advised to take next Tuesday and Wednesday off.

The public radio station has bought skateboard helmets, gas masks, eye protectors, knee pads, first aid kits and water bottles for its reporters.

"We didn't go as far as protective plates or bullet-proof vests," Lambert said. "We will revisit that if things go south."

A six-foot fence has been installed around the State Capitol in Lansing, Michigan. The state has been a hotbed of activity by anti-government extremists, and six men unhappy with coronavirus restrictions put in place by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer were charged in a plot to kidnap her.

The Michigan Press Association has arranged for a safe spot within sight of the Capitol if reporters need to retreat to cover any unrest from indoors, spokeswoman Lisa McGraw said.

The AP learned firsthand at the U.S. Capitol of the dangers. Some of the company's equipment was stolen and vandalized, and photographer John Minchillo was roughed up by demonstrators before being pulled to safety. Minchillo went back to work, and photographer Scott Applewhite stayed on duty in the House chamber despite being told to evacuate.

"It's the AP's mission to be there and bear witness when others can't be there," Carovillano said. "That's basically our whole reason for existence."

For the most part, news organizations don't have trouble finding people for dangerous assignments. It's

the job of managers to assess the risks.

John Hiner, vice president of content for MLive, a digital-first operation affiliated with eight newspapers in Michigan, said he's never seen a time with this much hostility toward journalists. Some of his reporters have received death threats.

"Frankly, it's discouraging," Hiner said. "But it does not discourage our commitment to do what we are doing for democracy. If anything, it's heightened our sense that what we do is important.

"I'm proud of my people, but I worry every single day."

Germany: Merkel's party elects pragmatic Laschet as leader

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right party on Saturday chose Armin Laschet, the pragmatic governor of Germany's most populous state, as its new leader — sending a signal of continuity months before an election in which voters will decide who becomes the new chancellor.

Laschet will have to build unity in the Christian Democratic Union, Germany's strongest party, after beating more conservative rival Friedrich Merz. And he will need to plunge straight into an electoral marathon that culminates with the Sept. 26 national vote.

Saturday's vote isn't the final word on who will run as the center-right candidate for chancellor in Germany's Sept. 26 election, but Laschet will either run himself or have a big say in who does. He didn't address his plans at Saturday's party convention.

Laschet, 59, was elected in 2017 as governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state, a traditionally center-left stronghold.

He governs the region in a coalition with the pro-business Free Democrats, the CDU's traditional ally, but would likely be able to work smoothly with a more liberal partner, too. Current polls point to the environmentalist Greens as a likely key to power in the election.

Laschet pointed Saturday to the value of continuity and moderation, and cited the storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump as an example of where polarization can lead.

"Trust is what keeps us going and what has been broken in America," he told delegates before the vote. "By polarizing, sowing discord and distrust, and systematically lying, a president has destroyed stability and trust."

"We must speak clearly but not polarize," Laschet said. "We must be able to integrate, hold society together."

He said that the party needs "the continuity of success" and "we will only win if we remain strong in the middle of society."

Laschet said that "there are many people who, above all, find Angela Merkel good and only after that the CDU." He added that "we need this trust now as a party" and that "we must work for this trust."

Laschet beat Merz, a former rival of Merkel who was making his second attempt in recent years to win the CDU leadership, by 521 votes to 466. A third candidate, prominent lawmaker Norbert Roettgen, was eliminated in a first round of voting.

Merz's sizeable support suggests that a strong contingent would like a sharper conservative profile after the Merkel years. Merkel has led Germany since 2005 but said over two years ago that she wouldn't seek a fifth term as chancellor.

Merkel, 66, has enjoyed enduring popularity with voters as she steered Germany and Europe through a series of crises. But she repeatedly abandoned orthodox conservative policies, for example by accelerating Germany's exit from nuclear energy and ending military conscription.

Her decision in 2015 to allow in large numbers of migrants caused major tensions on the center-right and strengthened the far-right Alternative for Germany party.

Saturday's vote ends a nearly year-long limbo in Germany's strongest party since outgoing leader Annetegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who narrowly beat Merz in 2018 to succeed Merkel as CDU leader but failed to impose her authority, announced her resignation. A vote on her successor was delayed twice because

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of the coronavirus pandemic.

Laschet called for unity after Saturday's vote and said Merz remains "an important personality for us."

"All the questions that will face us after the pandemic need a broad consensus in our party," he said. "And we will need this consensus for all the elections that are ahead of us, too. Everyone will be against us."

Laschet, a miner's son who served as a member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2005, shouldn't expect much of a honeymoon in his new job. In addition to the national election, Germany is holding six state elections this year, the first two in mid-March.

And at some point, he will confer with allies in Bavaria on who runs for chancellor. The CDU is part of the Union bloc along with its sister party, the Bavaria-only Christian Social Union, and the two parties will decide together on the candidate. The Union currently has a healthy poll lead, helped by positive reviews of Merkel's handling of the pandemic.

CSU leader Markus Soeder, the governor of Bavaria, is widely considered a potential candidate after gaining in political stature during the pandemic. Some also consider Health Minister Jens Spahn, who supported Laschet and was elected as one of his deputies, a possible contender.

Polls have shown Soeder's ratings outstripping those of Saturday's CDU candidates. Laschet has garnered mixed reviews in the pandemic, particularly as a vocal advocate of loosening restrictions after last year's first phase.

"It's very good that a year-long discussion process is over," Soeder said. "I am sure that Armin Laschet and I will find a joint, wise and united solution to all other pending questions."

Saturday's result will now be officially endorsed in a postal ballot. That is expected to be a formality but is required by German law.

India starts world's largest COVID-19 vaccination drive

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India started inoculating health workers Saturday in what is likely the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination campaign, joining the ranks of wealthier nations where the effort is already well underway.

India is home to the world's largest vaccine makers and has one of the biggest immunization programs. But there is no playbook for the enormity of the current challenge.

Indian authorities hope to give shots to 300 million people, roughly the population of the U.S and several times more than its existing program that targets 26 million infants. The recipients include 30 million doctors, nurses and other front-line workers, to be followed by 270 million people who are either over 50 years old or have illnesses that make them vulnerable to COVID-19.

For workers who have pulled India's battered healthcare system through the pandemic, the shots offered confidence that life can start returning to normal. Many burst with pride.

"I am excited that I am among the first to get the vaccine," Gita Devi, a nurse, said as she lifted her left sleeve to receive the shot.

"I am happy to get an India-made vaccine and that we do not have to depend on others for it," said Devi, who has treated patients throughout the pandemic in a hospital in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state in India's heartland.

The first dose was administered to a sanitation worker at the All Indian Institute of Medical Sciences in the capital, New Delhi, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi kickstarted the campaign with a nationally televised speech.

"We are launching the world's biggest vaccination drive and it shows the world our capability," Modi said. He implored citizens to keep their guard up and not to believe any "rumors about the safety of the vaccines."

It was not clear whether Modi, 70, had received the vaccine himself like other world leaders to try to demonstrate the shot's safety. His government has said politicians will not be considered priority groups in the first phase of the rollout.

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Health officials haven't specified what percentage of India's nearly 1.4 billion people will be targeted by the campaign. But experts say it will almost certainly be the largest such drive globally.

The sheer scale has its obstacles and some early snags were identified. For instance, there were delays in uploading the details of healthcare workers receiving the shots to a digital platform that India is using to track vaccines, the Health Ministry said.

Shots were given to at least 165,714 people on Saturday, Dr. Manohar Agnani, a Health Ministry official, said at an evening briefing. The ministry had said that it was aiming to vaccinate 100 people in each of the 3,006 centers across the country.

News cameras captured the injections across hundreds of hospitals, underscoring the pent-up hopes that vaccination was the first step in getting past the pandemic that has devastated the lives of so many Indians and bruised the country's economy.

India on Jan. 4 approved emergency use of two vaccines, one developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and another by Indian company Bharat Biotech. Cargo planes flew 16.5 million shots to different Indian cities last week.

But doubts over the effectiveness of the homegrown vaccine is creating hurdles for the ambitious plan.

Health experts worry that the regulatory shortcut taken to approve the Bharat Biotech vaccine without waiting for concrete data that would show its efficacy in preventing illness from the coronavirus could amplify vaccine hesitancy. At least one state health minister has opposed its use.

In New Delhi, doctors at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, one of the largest in the city, demanded they be administered the AstraZeneca vaccine instead of the one developed by Bharat Biotech. A doctors union at the hospital said many of its members were a "bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial" for the homegrown vaccine.

"Right now, we don't have the option to choose between the vaccines," said Dr. Nirmalaya Mohapatra, vice president of the hospital's Resident Doctors Association.

The Health Ministry has bristled at the criticism and says the vaccines are safe, but maintains that health workers will have no choice in deciding which vaccine they will get themselves.

According to Dr. S.P. Kalantri, the director of a rural hospital in Maharashtra, India's worst-hit state, such an approach was worrying because he said the regulatory approval was hasty and not backed by science.

"In a hurry to be populist, the government (is) taking decisions that might not be in the best interest of the common man," Kalantri said.

Against the backdrop of the rising global COVID-19 death toll — it topped 2 million on Friday — the clock is ticking to vaccinate as many people as possible. But the campaign has been uneven.

In wealthy countries including the United States, Britain, Israel, Canada and Germany, millions of citizens have already been given some measure of protection by vaccines developed with revolutionary speed and quickly authorized for use.

But elsewhere, immunization drives have barely gotten off the ground. Many experts are predicting another year of loss and hardship in places like Iran, India, Mexico and Brazil, which together account for about a quarter of the world's COVID-19 deaths.

India is second to the U.S. with more than 10.5 million confirmed cases, and ranks third in the number of deaths, behind the U.S. and Brazil, with over 152,000.

More than 35 million doses of various COVID-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, according to the University of Oxford.

While the majority of the COVID-19 vaccine doses have already been snapped up by wealthy countries, COVAX, a U.N.-backed project to supply shots to developing parts of the world, has found itself short of vaccines, money and logistical help.

As a result, the World Health Organization's chief scientist, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, warned this week that it is highly unlikely that herd immunity — which would require at least 70% of the globe to be vaccinated — will be achieved this year.

"Even if it happens in a couple of pockets, in a few countries, it's not going to protect people across the world," she said.

Associated Press writer Biswajeet Banerjee in Lucknow, India, contributed to this report.

Uganda says president wins 6th term as vote-rigging alleged

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Uganda's electoral commission said Saturday that longtime President Yoweri Museveni has won a sixth five-year term, while top opposition challenger Bobi Wine alleges rigging and officials struggle to explain how polling results were compiled amid an internet blackout.

In a generational clash watched across the African continent with a booming young population and a host of aging leaders, the 38-year-old singer-turned-lawmaker Wine posed arguably Museveni's greatest challenge yet. The self-described "ghetto president" had strong support in urban centers where frustration with unemployment and corruption is high. He has claimed victory.

The electoral commission said Museveni received 58% of ballots and Wine 34%, and voter turnout was 52%. It advised people celebrating to remember COVID-19 precautions, but reaction in the capital, Kampala, was muted. At one point, hundreds of Museveni supporters on motorcycles sped by, honking and chanting. The military remained in the streets. Police checked vehicles at roadblocks.

The top United States diplomat to Africa called the electoral process "fundamentally flawed."

Associated Press journalists who tried to reach Wine's home on the outskirts of Kampala were turned away by police. Wine has said he was alone with his wife and a single security guard.

Thursday's vote followed the East African country's worst pre-election violence since the 76-year-old Museveni took office in 1986. Wine and other opposition candidates were beaten or harassed, and more than 50 people were killed when security forces put down riots in November over Wine's arrest.

This month, Wine petitioned the International Criminal Court over alleged torture and other abuses by security forces and named several officials including Museveni.

Wine on Friday said he has video evidence of vote-rigging and "every legal option is on the table" to challenge the official election results, including peaceful protests. Candidates can challenge election results at the Supreme Court.

Hours later, he tweeted that the military had entered his home compound and "we are in serious trouble," which the military denied. Wine, whose real name is Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, was arrested several times while campaigning but never convicted, and eventually he wore a flak jacket and said he feared for his life. Many on his campaign team are in detention.

Uganda's electoral commission has said Wine should prove his allegations of rigging, and it has deflected questions about how countrywide voting results were transmitted during the internet blackout by saying "we designed our own system."

"We did not receive any orders from above during this election," commission chief Simon Byabakama told reporters Saturday, adding his team was "neither intimidated nor threatened."

While Uganda's president holds on to power, at least nine of his Cabinet ministers, including the vice president, were voted out in parliamentary elections, many losing to candidates from Wine's party, local media reported.

Monitoring of the vote was further complicated by the arrests of independent monitors and the denial of accreditation to most members of the U.S. observer mission, leading the U.S. to call it off. The European Union said its offer to deploy electoral experts "was not taken up."

"Uganda's electoral process has been fundamentally flawed," the top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Tibor Nagy, tweeted, calling for the immediate and full restoration of internet access and warning that "the U.S. response hinges on what the Ugandan government does now."

Museveni, once praised as part of a new generation of African leaders and a longtime U.S. security ally, still has support among some in Uganda for bringing stability. He once criticized African leaders who refused to step aside but has since overseen the removal of term limits and an age limit on the presidency.

He alleged repeatedly that foreign groups are trying to meddle in this election, without providing evidence. He also accused Wine of being "an agent of foreign interests." Wine denies it.

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The head of the African Union observer team, Samuel Azuu Fonkam, told reporters he could not say whether the election was free and fair, noting the "limited" mission which largely focused on Kampala. Asked about Wine's allegations of rigging, he said he could not "speak about things we did not see or observe."

The East African Community observer team noted "disproportionate use of force in some instances" by security forces, the internet shutdown, some late-opening polling stations and isolated cases of failure in biometric kits to verify voters. But it called the vote largely peaceful and said it "demonstrated the level of maturity expected of a democracy."

Uganda's elections are often marred by allegations of fraud and abuses by security forces. The previous election saw sporadic post-election riots.

Semeru volcano on Indonesia's Java island spews hot clouds

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Mount Semeru, the highest volcano on Indonesia's most densely populated island of Java, spewed hot clouds as far away as 4.5 kilometers (nearly 3 miles) on Saturday.

There were no immediate evacuations, but the National Disaster Mitigation Agency warned people who live in the villages on the slopes of the 3,676-meter (12,060-foot)-high mountain to be vigilant in looking for signs of danger.

Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati said that people around the river basin on the slopes of the mountain should beware of high rainfall intensity that can trigger lava floods.

Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center did not raise Semeru's alert status, which already had been at the third-highest level since it began erupting in May. The volcano spewed hot ash for 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) in early December, triggering panic among villagers.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 250 million people, sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Government seismologists monitor more than 120 active volcanoes.

A strong earthquake shook Indonesia's Sulawesi island early Friday, killing at least 46 people.

Donor backlash fuels GOP alarm about Senate fundraising

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are worried that a corporate backlash stirred by the deadly Capitol insurrection could crimp a vital stream of campaign cash, complicating the party's prospects of retaking the Senate in the next election.

The GOP already faces a difficult Senate map in 2022, when 14 Democratic-held seats and 20 Republican ones will be on the ballot. That includes at least two open seats that Republicans will be defending because of the retirements of GOP Sens. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania and Richard Burr of North Carolina.

But some in the party say the problem may be bigger than the map. Eight Republican senators voted to reject Electoral College votes for President-elect Joe Biden, even after the ransacking of the Capitol by a mob of Donald Trump supporters who were exhorted by the president to stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory. Five people died in the mayhem, including a Capitol Police officer.

Recriminations were swift, with more than a dozen corporate giants — including AT&T, Nike, Comcast, Dow, Marriott, Walmart and Verizon — pledging to withhold donations to Republican lawmakers who voted to reject the outcome of the election in Arizona or Pennsylvania. One of those lawmakers, Florida Sen. Rick Scott, is the new chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, a post that makes him the public face of the Senate Republican fundraising efforts.

"That's the crux of the issue: Is this a storm that will blow over, or is ... challenging (Biden's) Electoral College certification a scarlet 'A'?" said Republican donor Dan Eberhart, who has contributed at least \$115,000 to Senate Republican efforts in recent years.

The lost contributions aren't disastrous on their own. Political action committees controlled by corporations and industry groups are limited to giving \$5,000 to a candidate per year, a sliver of the typical fundraising haul for most Senate candidates.

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But two senior Republican strategists involved in Senate races say the cumulative effect of the companies' decisions could have a bigger impact.

Both of the strategists, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal party deliberations, say companies that suspended political giving are also sending a powerful signal to their executives, board members and employees about whom they should donate to. And with Scott at the helm of the NRSC, that could affect the committee's cash flow, they said.

Adding to the worries, other pillars of GOP fundraising — including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Rifle Association and groups tied to the Koch brothers — can no longer be counted on for robust financial support.

The NRA announced Friday that it had filed for bankruptcy after years of profligate spending and insider dealing by top leaders. The Chamber of Commerce, which angered some Republicans when it recently started donating to Democrats, announced this week that it will withhold contributions from some Republicans over their actions. And the Koch network, too, announced it will scrutinize whom it gives to following the insurrection, as first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

"There are some members who by their actions will have forfeited the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce," Neil Bradley, the chamber's chief policy officer, said this week. "Our PAC will continue to support those candidates who demonstrate that type of commitment to governing and democratic norms and our priorities."

More concerning still, one of the most influential Republican megadonors, Sheldon Adelson, died in recent days. That puts more pressure on the NRSC and the leading Senate Republican outside group, Senate Leadership Fund, to cover the difference.

Even before the last week's violence, Republican Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Josh Hawley of Missouri drew widespread ire for leading efforts to challenge Biden's win. Since the assault on the Capitol, both have come under even harsher criticism from editorial boards and influential donors, including calls to resign. Both are seen as likely 2024 White House contenders.

Then there's Scott, a wealthy businessman and former Florida governor. He also voted to object to Biden's win.

"Daily reminder, Senate Republicans have chosen one of the handful of Senators who supported the big lie AFTER death and destruction in the Capitol to be their political leader," tweeted former Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill, a Democrat who was ousted by Hawley. "Rick Scott is in charge of the organization that tries to elect R's."

Scott's new position as NRSC chair is widely viewed as a prelude to a potential 2024 run and one that will bring him into close contact with a national network of the Republican Party's biggest donors.

On Wednesday, Scott released a video message after taking over the NRSC that was heavy on his biography and light on his plan to help Republicans win. That irked some Republicans, who believe Scott took over the NRSC to help build a national donor network for an expected presidential bid, according to three Republican strategists.

"I've won four statewide elections. All the races were close. In the process, I've raised a lot of money and spent a fortune of my own," Scott said in the video. "I can say this with confidence: I will never ask a potential donor to contribute more than I have already given."

In a statement, Chris Hartline, an NRSC spokesperson and aide to the senator, said Scott was the party's "best fundraiser" and the committee had "no interest in engaging with nonsense from D.C. consultants who have no idea what they're talking about."

"Senator Scott has been clear that if folks want higher taxes, more regulation, bigger government and nationalized health care, they should feel free to give to Democrats," Hartline said.

Some say it's too early to tell if the corporate backlash will truly hurt Republicans. They note that with elections just held this is a period when there is typically little fundraising activity. And some are confident that, as Washington comes under unified Democratic control, business groups will find common cause with Republicans once again.

"A lot of this talk is premature and shortsighted," said Scott Reed, a longtime Republican strategist. "A re-regulation crowd is taking over Congress and the White House. This is a decision many will regret by midsummer."

The eight GOP senators who voted to uphold objections to the Electoral College count were Cruz, Hawley, Scott, Cindy Hyde Smith of Mississippi, John Kennedy of Louisiana, Roger Marshall of Kansas, Tommy Tuberville of Alabama and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming.

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Inauguration week prayer event aims to show Christian unity

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a politically divided nation prepares to inaugurate a new president in the wake of a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a group of Christian leaders is hoping to ease tensions through prayer during three days of ecumenical, nonpartisan programming.

Using the slogan and social media tag #PeaceWithJustice, the effort aims to project spiritual unity and counter people's feelings of helplessness with action, during a time of high alert with thousands of troops securing the capital following the Jan. 6 violence, which has led to about 120 arrests so far.

The name of the gathering — held virtually due to the pandemic — is in part a nod to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s observation that "true peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." Details of the initiative were shared with The Associated Press in advance of its launch on the weekend when the country commemorates his birthday.

Leaders of the effort are incorporating the King holiday into their work, asking participants to use their Sunday messages to focus on "redoubling efforts to work together to address systemic racism and restore trust and integrity to our democratic system and institutions."

Jim Wallis, founder of the Christian social justice group Sojourners and a lead organizer of the event, said he hoped to see the faithful "move beyond the emotions of anger and fear" and toward the moral truth of communal reconciliation.

"Prayer is action, in my view," Wallis said.

After Monday's federal holiday, the event continues Tuesday with a multidenominational Zoom prayer service. On Wednesday, when President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated, participants plan a daylong chorus of testimony and other statements on Twitter in the hopes of restoring a sense of harmony to a transition of power that has been marred by violence.

Organizers have dubbed the 12-hour social media push a "thunderclap."

"Defending democracy for all Americans — no exceptions" is imperative for all people of faith, the group says on its website.

Prominent participants include Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church; Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Commissioner Kenneth G. Hodder, National Commander of the Salvation Army; and Barbara Williams-Skinner, co-convenor of the National African American Clergy Network.

Williams-Skinner said she hopes it will become a model for further collaboration by people of faith across denominational boundaries.

"I hope that this is the beginning of a strong ecumenical coalition to fight against the evil of racism and all kinds of systemic injustices going forward, and to connect those to public policies that will come out of this administration and this Congress," she said.

Kim said that while many member churches in his group are planning their own programs during inauguration week, the nonpartisan event appealed to him because "we need, in this moment, something that transcends partisan politics."

He also acknowledged the presence of Christian symbols and overtly Christian identification among some of those who breached the Capitol in a bid to overturn the presidential election for President Donald

Trump, saying that the potential convergence of Christian and nationalist identities “does grieve my heart.”

Looking ahead, he sounded a note of humility.

“In this moment of great division, for whatever parts the church has played,” Kim said, “we ought to repent and in any ways the church can contribute, we ought to pursue.”

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Long road to normalcy: Virtual village connects marathoners

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Organizers of the Boston Marathon — postponed indefinitely because of the coronavirus pandemic — have launched a virtual Athletes’ Village to reproduce at least some of the camaraderie of the real thing.

The Boston Athletic Association says it’s an attempt to keep runners connected as the group works out a date for the 125th running of the planet’s most storied footrace. Last April’s race was canceled and tentatively rescheduled to sometime this autumn, but because of a surge in COVID-19 cases in hard-hit Massachusetts, officials still can’t say when in-person racing for the masses can safely resume.

The virtual village, launched Jan. 5, is a far cry from the bucket-list magic and mystique of the real Athletes’ Village in a schoolyard near the start line in Hopkinton. There, in what’s traditionally been a rite of spring, tens of thousands of runners from around the globe gather giddily beneath tents to hydrate, stretch, meditate, bond and chat before pounding the pavement to Boston.

But the BAA hopes participants will use the village as a digital hub to share training tips, seek out coaching, compete against one another in monthly challenges — and just generally party like Boston Marathoners have done since 1897.

“It’s been great. Runners are so freaking friendly,” said Karen Bruynell, who became one three years ago to shed 150 pounds (68 kilos).

Last year, after the marathon was canceled, the 56-year-old hospital administrator from Weymouth, Massachusetts, covered the 26.2-mile (42.2-kilometer) distance by herself — something thousands of runners did. Along the way, she raised more than \$10,000 for the Boston Fire Department, the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and other charities.

“Joining the virtual village was a no-brainer for me,” Bruynell said. “Being a new runner, I need to learn best practices — warming up, cooling down, good stretches, hydration. Just from reading the questions, I’m learning so much.”

Other World Major marathons, including the TCS New York City Marathon, are also connecting runners virtually. The New York Road Runners, which administers that race, is offering online strength, Zumba, barre and yoga classes to restore a sense of camaraderie among athletes who would normally do those activities in a group setting.

And the BMW Berlin Marathon has “Moodboard,” a social wall where runners can cross-post selfies, memories of past races and anything else that’s on their minds.

Tom Grilk, the BAA’s president and CEO, said the concept behind Boston’s village was simple — provide runners of all abilities “a space for you to achieve your fitness goals and celebrate your accomplishments with a global community.” As of late Friday, more than 42,000 runners and volunteers had joined.

It’s already helping Polish marathoner Janusz Przytocky sharpen his focus and set new running goals.

“The village will give me the motivation I need now,” he wrote in a post.

Another runner, Jochen Tilk of Toronto, shared a map showing a marathon route he created in the shape of a unicorn, the BAA’s logo.

As the pandemic wears on, forcing most marathoners to get their miles in solo, the calculus is any fellowship is better than none at all.

To inspire her fellow runners, marathoner Nell Posmer of Downers Grove, Illinois, shared a painting she

did of the sun rising over a dirt trail in a forest, captioning it: "Go RUN today!"

"The virtual village makes you want to get out the door and run, then log your miles and get a comment or two from others. I crave that," said Posmer, 47. "It's like a little group that encourages you to do even better the next day."

Follow AP New England editor Bill Kole on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/billkole>.

After Trump, Biden aims to reshape the presidency itself

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Joe Biden takes the oath of office Wednesday outside a wounded U.S. Capitol, he will begin reshaping the office of the presidency itself as he sets out to lead a bitterly divided nation struggling with a devastating pandemic and an insurrection meant to stop his ascension to power.

Biden had campaigned as a rebuke to President Donald Trump, a singular figure whose political power was fueled by discord and grievance. The Democrat framed his election as one to "heal the soul" of the nation and repair the presidency, restoring the White House image as a symbol of stability and credibility.

In ways big and small, Biden will look to change the office he will soon inhabit. Incendiary tweets are out, wonky policy briefings are in. Biden, as much an institutionalist as Trump has been a disruptor, will look to change the tone and priorities of the office.

"It really is about restoring some dignity to the office, about picking truth over lies, unity over division," Biden said soon after he launched his campaign. "It's about who we are."

The White House is about 2 miles up Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol, where broken windows, heavy fortifications and hundreds of National Guard members provide a visible reminder of the power of a president's words. Trump's supporters left a Jan. 6 rally by the president near the White House to commit violence in his name at the Capitol, laying siege to the citadel of democracy and underscoring the herculean task Biden faces in trying to heal the nation's searing divisions.

Few presidents have taken on the job having thought more about the mark he wants to make on it than Biden. He has spent more than 40 years in Washington and captured the White House after two previous failed attempts. He frequently praises his former boss, President Barack Obama, as an example of how to lead during crisis.

"Biden's main task is going to be need to be to reestablish the symbol of the White House to the world as a place of integrity and good governance. Because right now everything is in disarray," said Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian and professor at Rice University. "But Biden is uniquely situated to do this, his whole life has been spent in Washington and he spent eight years watching the job up close."

The changes will be sweeping, starting with the president's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed nearly 400,000 American lives. The sharp break from Trump won't just come in federal policy, but in personal conduct.

Trump flouted the virus, his staff largely eschewing masks in the warren of cramped West Wing offices while the president hosted "superspreader" events at the White House and on the road. Biden's team is considering having many staffers work from home; those who do enter the building will wear masks. Biden has already been vaccinated, something Trump, who got the virus last fall, has chosen not to do despite suggestions that it would set an example for the nation.

Biden's approach to the day-to-day responsibilities of the office will also be a break from his predecessor. For one, Twitter won't be a principal source of news.

Trump's trail of tweets has roiled the capital for four years. Across Washington, phones would buzz with alerts anytime the president used his most potent political weapon to attack Democrats and keep Republicans in line.

Biden's tweets tend to be bland news releases and policy details with the occasional "Here's the deal, folks" thrown in for good measure. Allied lawmakers are unlikely to have to pretend not to have seen the latest posting in order to avoid commenting on it.

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Biden has said he wants Americans to view the president as a role model again; no more coarse and demeaning language or racist, divisive rhetoric. His team has promised to restore daily news briefings and the president-elect does not refer to the press as "the enemy of the people." But it remains to be seen whether he will be as accessible as Trump, who until his postelection hibernation, took more questions from reporters than any of his recent predecessors.

While Trump filled out much of his Cabinet and White House staff with relatives, political neophytes and newcomers to government, Biden has turned to seasoned hands, bringing in Obama administration veterans and career officials.

Policy papers will be back in vogue and governing by cable chyron likely out.

Trump was mostly indifferent to the machinations of Congress, at times appearing to be an observer of his own administration. Biden, a longtime senator who will have Democratic control of both houses, is positioned to use the weight of his office to push an ambitious legislative agenda.

His team will be tested, though, by the tumult at home: a virus that is killing more than 4,000 people a day, a sluggish vaccination distribution program, a worsening economy and contention over the upcoming second impeachment trial for Trump.

Biden also has as much work ahead repairing the image of the presidency overseas as he does on American shores.

Trump repositioned the United States in the world, pulling the U.S. out of a number of multilateral trade deals and climate agreements in favor of a more insular foreign policy. His ever-shifting beliefs and moods strained relations with some of the nation's oldest allies, including much of Western Europe.

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, Trump fostered competition, not cooperation, on research and vaccine development. Trump also abandoned the tradition role the president plays in shining a light on human rights abuses around the world.

Biden, who spent years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and had a vast foreign policy portfolio as vice president, has pledged a course correction. He has promised to repair alliances, rejoin the Paris climate treaty and the World Health Organization and said he would shore up U.S. national security by first addressing health, economic and political crises at home.

Offering the White House as a symbol of stability to global capitals won't be easy for Biden as Trump's shadow looms.

"He has a structural problem and needs to make the U.S. seem more reliable. We're diminished in stature and less predictable," said Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations. He noted that even after Biden's win, the European Union bolstered ties to China with a new investment treaty.

"Everyone around the world is hedging, they have no idea if Biden's a one-term president or what could come after him," Haass said. "There is a fear across the world that Trump or Trumpism could return in four years."

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China builds hospital in 5 days after surge in virus cases

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Saturday finished building a 1,500-room hospital for COVID-19 patients to fight a surge in infections the government said are harder to contain and that it blamed on infected people or goods from abroad.

The hospital is one of six with a total of 6,500 rooms being built in Nangong, south of Beijing in Hebei province, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China had largely contained the coronavirus that first was detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 but has suffered a surge of cases since December.

A total of 645 people are being treated in Nangong and the Hebei provincial capital, Shijiazhuang, Xinhua said. A 3,000-room hospital is under construction in Shijiazhuang.

Virus clusters also have been found in Beijing and the provinces of Heilongjiang and Liaoning in the

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northeast and Sichuan in the southwest.

The latest infections spread unusually fast, the National Health Commission said.

"It is harder to handle," a Commission statement said. "Community transmission already has happened when the epidemic is found, so it is difficult to prevent."

The Commission blamed the latest cases on people or goods arriving from abroad. It blamed "abnormal management" and "inadequate protection of workers" involved in imports but gave no details.

"They are all imported from abroad. It was caused by entry personnel or contaminated cold chain imported goods," said the statement.

The Chinese government has suggested the disease might have originated abroad and publicized what it says is the discovery of the virus on imported food, mostly frozen fish, though foreign scientists are skeptical.

Also Saturday, the city government of Beijing said travelers arriving in the Chinese capital from abroad would be required to undergo an additional week of "medical monitoring" after a 14-day quarantine but gave no details.

Nationwide, the Health Commission reported 130 new confirmed cases in the 24 hours through midnight Friday. It said 90 of those were in Hebei.

On Saturday, the Hebei government reported 32 additional cases since midnight, the Shanghai news outlet The Paper reported.

In Shijiazhuang, authorities have finished construction of 1,000 rooms of the planned hospital, state TV said Saturday. Xinhua said all the facilities are due to be completed within a week.

A similar program of rapid hospital construction was launched by the ruling Communist Party at the start of the outbreak last year in Wuhan.

More than 10 million people in Shijiazhuang underwent virus tests by late Friday, Xinhua said, citing a deputy mayor, Meng Xianghong. It said 247 locally transmitted cases were found.

Meanwhile, researchers sent by the World Health Organization were in Wuhan preparing to investigate the origins of the virus. The team, which arrived Thursday, was under a two-week quarantine but was due to talk with Chinese experts by video link.

The team's arrival was held up for months by diplomatic wrangling that prompted a rare public complaint by the head of the WHO.

That delay, and the secretive ruling party's orders to scientists not to talk publicly about the disease, have raised questions about whether Beijing might try to block discoveries that would hurt its self-proclaimed status as a leader in the anti-virus battle.

Sidelining experts, Brazil bungled its immunization plans

By DIANE JEANTET and DEBORA ALVARES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Like many Brazilian public health experts, Dr. Regina Flauzino spent most of 2020 watching with horror as COVID-19 devastated Brazil. When the opportunity to join the government's vaccination effort came, she was thrilled: She would be able to share her decades of on-the-ground experience.

But her excitement quickly faded. Flauzino, an epidemiologist who worked on Brazilian vaccine campaigns for 20 years, became frustrated with what she described as a rushed, chaotic process.

The government has yet to approve a single vaccine, and Health Ministry officials have ignored outside experts' advice. Shortly after the government presented its vaccination plan, more than a quarter of the roughly 140 experts involved demanded their names be excised.

"We weren't listened to," Flauzino told The Associated Press. The plan's creation "was postponed for too long and now it's being done in a rush."

Brazil has suffered more than 200,000 COVID-19 deaths, the second-highest total in the world after the United States, with infections and deaths surging again. Despite a half-century of successful vaccination programs, the federal government is trailing regional and global peers in both approving vaccines and cobbling together an immunization strategy.

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The AP interviewed four expert committee members and four former Health Ministry officials. They criticized the government's unjustifiable delay in formulating a vaccination plan, as well as months spent focused on a single vaccine manufacturer.

They also complained of President Jair Bolsonaro undermining the ministry's effectiveness, pointing to the removal of highly trained professionals from leadership positions, who were replaced with military appointees with little or no public health experience. Experts also blamed the president, a far-right former army captain, for fueling anti-vaccine sentiment in Brazil, compromising the mass immunization effort.

'STILL WAITING'

The government's COVID-19 immunization plan, finally released on Dec. 16, lacked essential details: How many doses would be sent to each state and how would they be refrigerated and delivered? How many professionals would need to be hired and trained — and, above all, how much funding would governors receive to implement the campaign? The plan did not include a start date.

"How is each state going to organize its campaign if it doesn't know how many doses it is going to receive, and the timeline for delivery?" said Dr. Carla Domingues, an epidemiologist who oversaw the logistics of Brazil's 2009 H1N1 vaccine campaign, and worked on more than a dozen other vaccination efforts.

Bolsonaro's press office and the Health Ministry did not respond to AP requests for comment about Brazil's vaccination campaign or why more contracts with vaccine manufacturers were not signed in 2020.

The Health Ministry's National Immunization Program has a long history of success. Created over 40 years ago, it has enabled Brazil to eradicate polio and significantly reduce measles, rubella, tetanus and diphtheria. The effort won recognition from UNICEF for reaching the vast country's most remote corners and has contributed to extending Brazilians' life expectancy from 60 to over 75 years.

The program "is the central axis of all vaccination campaigns in the country," Flauzino said.

That is no small task in a nation of 210 million people, the world's sixth-largest population. The program provides a complex blueprint for vaccination campaigns across more than 5,500 municipalities in 26 states and the federal district.

In a Dec. 1 Zoom meeting, Health Ministry officials presented the experts with a general overview of the COVID-19 vaccination plan. The consultants the AP interviewed said it became abundantly clear the ministry was incapable of providing many crucial details.

Epidemiologist Dr. Ethel Maciel, who was among those who later demanded her name be removed from the plan, said many of the experts' recommendations weren't implemented, including obtaining vaccines from more than one manufacturer. But neither she nor other consultants could voice their concerns.

"They didn't let us talk during this meeting, our microphones remained on mute," Maciel said, adding that officials instructed them to send their comments in writing, and that they would receive a response within a week.

"To this day, we're still waiting," she said.

SYRINGE SHORTAGE

Maciel was also shocked to hear that five months after the ministry signed its first contract to obtain vaccine doses in June — up to 210 million of the AstraZeneca and University of Oxford shot — it still hadn't secured syringes to administer them.

The Health Ministry published its tender for 331 million syringes in mid-December, but received bids for only 8 million by its Dec. 29 deadline. Brazilian syringe manufacturers complained the government's price limit was below market value.

State health secretaries had for months warned the federal government about the need to buy syringes as soon as possible to avoid excessive pricing, but to no avail, said Carlos Lula, chair of the National Council of Health Secretaries.

"It took too long," Lula said. Dozens of other countries are already vaccinating, "and we're falling behind."

Hamstrung, the government told Brazilian syringe makers in December it would requisition 30 million units, to be delivered by the end of January. A call for an additional 30 million followed.

However, in an injunction issued last week, the Supreme Court prohibited the federal government from

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requisitioning syringes from state governments like Sao Paulo that had already purchased them.

"The federal government's negligence cannot penalize the diligence of the state of Sao Paulo, which has been preparing for a long time, with due zeal, to face the current health crisis," Justice Ricardo Lewandowski wrote in the ruling.

The syringe shortfall has left state governors scouring markets for their own supplies. The Health Ministry said this week that state stocks amounted to just 52 million syringes, plus an additional 71 million acquired by Sao Paulo.

For Domingues the confusion is emblematic of the government's poor pandemic planning.

"You'd need at least six months to go through all the bureaucratic procedures and make that purchase," she said.

A FAILURE OF LOGISTICS

The Health Ministry's planning difficulties are all the more glaring considering the background of Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty army general tapped for his expertise in logistics.

The rise of a military man with no experience in public health to the top of the institution in the midst of a pandemic worried experts. "We don't have a minister who understands the health sector," Flauzino said.

Since Pazuello took over in May, more than 30 military personnel have been appointed to key ministry positions, including the head of Anvisa, the agency that approves use of vaccines.

Bolsonaro's contentious relationship with Sao Paulo state Gov. João Doria, a likely rival in next year's presidential race, also played a role in Brazil's vaccination debacle.

While Sao Paulo had zeroed in on Chinese pharmaceutical Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac vaccine with a contract in September for 46 million doses, the Bolsonaro administration delayed signing a contract for months, focusing only on the AstraZeneca shot, ignoring experts and state officials who urged including Sinovac in the national vaccination strategy.

"Neither laboratory has the capacity to supply the entire national territory," said Luiz Henrique Mandetta, health minister during the first months of the COVID-19 health crisis until he was removed by Bolsonaro. "We will need a lot of vaccines."

Then last week, even as Bolsonaro continued scoffing at CoronaVac, the Health Ministry announced it was buying up to 100 million doses of the Chinese-made vaccine.

But with the need to provide two doses of vaccine to some 210 million people, Brazil is still far short.

Pazuello this week visited the Amazon city of Manaus that's suffering a brutal second wave of the virus, with hospitals again pushed beyond capacity. He offered assurance that vaccines would be dispatched to all states within four days of approval by health regulators, which could come as early as Sunday — followed by a 16-month vaccination campaign.

However, Pazuello was still unable to provide a rollout date.

"The vaccine in Brazil will arrive on D Day and H Hour," he said cryptically.

___ Álvares reported from Brasilia.

European powers press Iran to back off latest nuclear move

BERLIN (AP) — Germany, France and Britain pressed Iran on Saturday to back off the latest planned violation of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, saying that Tehran has "no credible civilian use" for uranium metal.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said Thursday Iran had informed it that it had begun installing equipment for the production of uranium metal. It said Tehran maintains its plans to conduct research and development on uranium metal production are part of its "declared aim to design an improved type of fuel."

Uranium metal can also be used for a nuclear bomb, however, and research on its production is specifically prohibited under the nuclear deal — the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — that Tehran signed with Germany, France, Britain, China, Russia and the United States in 2015.

Since the unilateral American withdrawal from the deal in 2018, the other members have been working to preserve the accord. Iran has been using violations of the deal to put pressure on the other signatories

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to provide more incentives to Iran to offset crippling American sanctions re-imposed after the U.S. pullout. A joint statement from the German, French and British foreign ministries said they are "deeply concerned" by the latest Iranian announcement.

"Iran has no credible civilian use for uranium metal," it said. "The production of uranium metal has potentially grave military implications."

"We strongly urge Iran to halt this activity, and return to compliance with its JCPoA commitments without further delay if it is serious about preserving the deal," the statement added.

The ultimate goal of the deal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, something Iran insists it does not want to do.

President-elect Joe Biden, who was vice president when the deal was signed during the Obama administration, has said he hopes to return the U.S. to the deal.

Trump administration carries out 13th and final execution

By MICHAEL TARM and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. (AP) — The Trump administration early Saturday carried out its 13th federal execution since July, an unprecedented run that concluded just five days before the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden — an opponent of the federal death penalty.

Dustin Higgs, convicted of ordering the killings of three women in a Maryland wildlife refuge in 1996, was the third to receive a lethal injection this week at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

President Donald Trump's Justice Department resumed federal executions last year following a 17-year hiatus. No president in more than 120 years had overseen as many federal executions.

Higgs, 48, was pronounced dead at 1:23 a.m. Asked if he had any last words, Higgs was calm but defiant, naming each of the women prosecutors said he ordered killed.

"I'd like to say I am an innocent man. ... I am not responsible for the deaths," he said softly. "I did not order the murders."

He did not apologize for anything he did on the night 25 years ago when the women were shot by another man, who received a life sentence.

As the lethal injection of pentobarbital began to flow into his veins, Higgs looked toward a room reserved for his relatives and lawyers. He waved with his fingers and said, "I love you."

Loud sobs of a woman crying inconsolably began to echo from the witness room reserved for Higgs' family as his eyes rolled back in his head, showing the whites of his eyes. He quickly became still, his pupils visible with his eyelids left partially open.

A sister of Tanji Jackson — one of the murdered women who was 21 when she died — addressed a written statement to Higgs after his execution and mentioning his family.

"They are now going to go through the pain we experienced," she said. "When the day is over, your death will not bring my sister and the other victims back. This is not closure." The statement didn't include the sister's name.

The number of federal death sentences carried out under Trump since 2020 is more than in the previous 56 years combined, reducing the number of prisoners on federal death row by nearly a quarter. It's likely none of the around 50 remaining men will be executed anytime soon, if ever, with Biden signaling he'll end federal executions.

The only woman on death row, Lisa Montgomery, was executed Wednesday for killing a pregnant woman, then cutting the baby out of her womb. She was the first woman executed in nearly 70 years.

Federal executions began as the coronavirus pandemic raged through prisons nationwide. Among those prisoners who got COVID-19 last month were Higgs and former drug trafficker Corey Johnson, who was executed Thursday.

In the early Saturday execution of Higgs, officials inside the execution chamber were more diligent about their keeping masks on after a federal judge expressed concern that officials at Johnson's execution were lax about coronavirus precautions. When a marshal called from a death-chamber phone to ask if there

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were any impediments to proceeding with Higgs' execution, he kept his mask on and shoved the receiver under it.

Not since the waning days of Grover Cleveland's presidency in the late 1800s has the U.S. government executed federal inmates during a presidential transition, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Cleveland's was also the last presidency during which the number of civilians executed federally was in the double digits in one year, 1896.

In an opinion piece in The Washington Post earlier this week, Martin Luther King III, the eldest son of Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, noted that Higgs, a Black man, was scheduled to die Friday — his father's birthday. With last-minute appeals, it was delayed into early Saturday.

"The federal government should not be needlessly taking more Black lives, and to do so on my father's birthday would be shameful," he wrote.

Pressure is already building on Biden to follow through on pledges to end the federal death penalty. The ACLU released a statement after Higgs' execution urging Biden to invoke his presidential powers after he is sworn in.

"He must commute the sentences of people on the federal death row to life without parole, and he must drop death from all pending trials," the ACLU said.

In 2000, a federal jury in Maryland convicted Higgs of murder and kidnapping in the killings of Tamika Black, 19; Mishann Chinn, 23; and Tanji Jackson.

Higgs' lawyers argued it was "arbitrary and inequitable" to execute Higgs while Willis Haynes, the man who fired the shots that killed the women, was spared a death sentence.

In a statement after the execution, Higgs' attorney, Shawn Nolan, said his client had spent decades on death row helping other inmates.

"There was no reason to kill him, particularly during the pandemic and when he, himself, was sick with Covid that he contracted because of these irresponsible, super-spreader executions," Nolan said.

Higgs had a traumatic childhood and lost his mother to cancer when he was 10, Higgs' Dec. 19 petition for clemency petition said.

Higgs was 23 on the evening of Jan. 26, 1996, when he, Haynes and a third man, Victor Gloria, picked up the three women in Washington, D.C., and drove them to Higgs' apartment in Laurel, Maryland, to drink alcohol and listen to music. Before dawn, an argument between Higgs and Jackson prompted her to grab a knife in the kitchen before Haynes persuaded her to drop it.

Gloria said Jackson made threats as she left the apartment with the other women and appeared to write down the license plate number of Higgs' van, angering him. The three men chased after the women in Higgs' van. Haynes persuaded them to get into the vehicle.

Instead of taking them home, Higgs drove them to a secluded spot in the Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge, federal land in Laurel.

"Aware at that point that something was amiss, one of the women asked if they were going to have to 'walk from here' and Higgs responded 'something like that,'" according to court documents.

Higgs handed his pistol to Haynes, who shot all three women outside the van, Gloria testified.

"Gloria turned to ask Higgs what he was doing, but saw Higgs holding the steering wheel and watching the shootings from the rearview mirror," said the 2013 ruling by a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Chinn worked with the children's choir at a church, Jackson worked in the office at a high school and Black was a teacher's aide at National Presbyterian School in Washington, according to The Washington Post.

This story has been corrected to reflect the execution taking place early Saturday.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland.

Trump's presidency not just a blip in US foreign policy

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By DEB RIECHMANN and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's plan to scrap President Donald Trump's vision of "America First" in favor of "diplomacy first" will depend on whether he's able to regain the trust of allies and convince them that Trumpism is just a blip in the annals of U.S. foreign policy.

It could be a hard sell. From Europe to the Middle East and Asia, Trump's brand of transactional diplomacy has alienated friends and foes alike, leaving Biden with a particularly contentious set of national security issues.

Biden, who said last month that "America's back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it," might strive to be the antithesis of Trump on the world stage and reverse some, if not many, of his predecessor's actions. But Trump's imprint on America's place in the world — viewed as good or bad — will not be easily erased.

U.S. allies aren't blind to the large constituency of American voters who continue to support Trump's nationalist tendencies and his belief that the United States should stay out of world conflicts. If Biden's goal is to restore America's place in the world, he'll not only need to gain the trust of foreign allies but also convince voters at home that international diplomacy works better than unilateral tough talk.

Trump has insisted that he's not against multilateralism, only global institutions that are ineffective. He has pulled out of more than half a dozen international agreements, withdrawn from multiple U.N. groups and trash talked allies and partners.

Biden, on the other hand, says global alliances need to be rebuilt to combat climate change, address the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future epidemics and confront the growing threat posed by China. The national security and foreign policy staff that he has named so far are champions of multilateralism.

His choices for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, deputy secretary of state Wendy Sherman, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and foreign aid chief Samantha Power — all veterans of the Obama administration — underscore his intent to return to a foreign policy space that they believe was abandoned by Trump.

"Right now, there's an enormous vacuum," Biden said. "We're going to have to regain the trust and confidence of a world that has begun to find ways to work around us or without us."

Biden intends to rejoin the Paris climate agreement and cooperate again with the World Health Organization. He plans to smooth relations with Europeans and other friends and refrain from blasting fellow members of NATO, and he may return the United States to the Iran nuclear agreement. Still, many Americans will continue to espouse Trump's "America First" agenda, especially with the U.S. economy struggling to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, civil strife in American streets over racism and the absence of civil political discourse.

"Whether people liked it or not, Trump was elected by Americans in 2016," said Fiona Hill, who worked in the Trump White House's National Security Council and now is at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution.

Trump's election in 2016 and the tens of millions of votes he garnered in 2020 reflect a very divided nation, she says.

"We have to accept that the electoral outcome in 2016 was not a fluke," Hill said.

Steven Blockmans, research director at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Belgium, said Europeans should not kid themselves into believing transatlantic relations will return to the way they were before Trump.

"In all but name, the rallying cry of 'America First' is here to stay," he said. "Biden has vowed to prioritize investment in U.S. green energy, child care, education and infrastructure over any new trade deals. He has also called for expanded 'Buy American' provisions in federal procurement, which has long been an irritant in trade relations with the European Union."

Each part of the world holds a different challenge for Biden.

CHINA

Fear of China's quest for world dominance started to mount before Trump came to office. Early on, Trump sided up to China's authoritarian president, Xi Jinping. But after efforts to get more than a first-

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phase trade deal failed, the president turned up the heat on China and repeatedly blamed Beijing for the coronavirus pandemic.

He sanctioned the Chinese, and in speech after speech, top Trump officials warned about China stealing American technology, conducting cyberattacks, taking aggressive actions in the South China Sea, cracking down on democracy in Hong Kong and abusing the Muslim Uighurs in western China.

Increasingly, Republicans and Democrats alike are worried about a rising economic and geopolitical threat from China, and that concern won't end when Trump leaves office.

NORTH KOREA

Resetting U.S. relations with Asia allies is instrumental in confronting not only China but also North Korea.

Trump broke new ground on the nuclear standoff with North Korea with his three face-to-face meetings with North Korea's Kim Jong Un. But Trump's efforts yielded no deal to persuade Kim to give up his nuclear weapons in exchange for sanctions relief and security assurances. In fact, North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear capabilities.

Biden might be forced to deal with North Korea sooner than later as experts say Pyongyang has a history of conducting tests and firing missiles to garner Washington's attention around U.S. presidential elections.

AFGHANISTAN

Nearly 20 years after a U.S.-led international coalition toppled the Taliban government that supported al-Qaida, Afghan civilians are still being killed by the thousands. Afghan security forces, in the lead on the battlefield, continue to tally high casualties. Taliban attacks are up outside the cities, and the Islamic State group has orchestrated bombings in the capital, Kabul, including one in November at Kabul University that killed more than 20 people, mostly students.

The U.S. and the Taliban sat down at the negotiation table in 2018. Those talks, led by Trump envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, eventually led to the U.S.-Taliban deal that was signed in February 2020, providing for the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan.

Set on making good on his campaign promise to withdraw U.S. troops from "endless wars," Trump cut troops from 8,600 to 4,500, then ordered troop levels to fall to 2,500 by Inauguration Day. The United States has pledged to pull all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May 1, just months after Biden takes office, but it's unclear if he will.

MIDDLE EAST

Trump opted to think outside the box when it came to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relations with Arab nations.

The Palestinians rejected the Trump administration's Mideast peace plan, but then Trump coaxed two Arab nations — the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain — to recognize Israel. This was historic because Arab nations had for decades said they wouldn't recognize Israel until the Palestinians' struggle for an independent state was resolved.

Warming ties between Israel and Arab states that share opposition to Iran helped seal the deal. Morocco and Sudan also later recognized Israel.

IRAN

In 2018, Trump pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal, in which world powers agreed to lift sanctions on Tehran if it curbed its nuclear program.

Trump said the deal was one-sided, didn't prevent Iran from eventually getting a nuclear weapon and allowed it to receive billions of dollars in frozen assets that it has been accused of using to bankroll terror proxies destabilizing the Mideast.

Biden says exiting the deal was reckless and complains that Iran now has stockpiled more enriched uranium than is allowed under the deal, which is still in force between Iran and Britain, China, Russia, France and Germany.

Inauguration Day also is move in/out day at the White House

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Moving from house to house is challenging under the best of circumstances, and even with movers as first rate as the housekeepers and other staff who work in the White House.

But the coronavirus pandemic could be a complicating factor as the executive mansion gets ready for a new president and executes the Inauguration Day ritual of moving out one leader and settling in another.

It's typically a precision operation: Both moves are usually carried out in about five hours. The clock would normally start ticking when the outgoing and incoming presidents leave the White House together to head to the Capitol for the swearing-in ceremony. The process would continue during the ceremony and the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House.

"They basically have the moving trucks waiting outside the White House gates," said Matt Costello, a historian at the White House Historical Association. "And as soon as the president and president-elect leave, they wave in the moving trucks, and they'll pack up the outgoing president's things, and then they'll unpack all of the new first family's things."

Biden's wife, Jill, said Friday that she and the president-elect had spent the past two months preparing to move from their home in Wilmington, Delaware, and that they were "packing up our closets this morning."

But things will unfold a bit differently this year.

President Donald Trump, still angry over losing reelection, is skipping the inauguration. He's also leaving town before Biden takes the oath of office, meaning the pair will not be going to the Capitol together. Depending on when Trump heads out, housekeepers and other residence staffers who help move the presidents' belongings could get a welcome head start on the packing and unpacking.

Inauguration planners have scaled back the traditional roster of events this year because of the pandemic, which is now responsible for nearly 400,000 U.S. deaths. A luncheon for the new president at the Capitol has been scrapped, and the hourslong parade down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House will be virtual.

That combination of events in the past has kept the new president and first lady out of the White House long enough for the household staff to finish moving in their clothing, furnishings and other personal items.

The pandemic could affect the moving process in other ways.

Some public health experts have said it's important that the White House take extra precautions to reduce the spread of the largely airborne disease during the busy move.

The White House was the scene of several coronavirus outbreaks that infected dozens of staffers and others, including Trump and his wife, Melania. Biden is at risk because of his age. The 78-year-old is tested regularly for the coronavirus and recently received his final dose of the vaccine.

Linsey Marr, an engineering professor at Virginia Tech with expertise in the airborne transmission of viruses such as the coronavirus, said housekeepers and other staff should make sure to wear face coverings because they will be exerting themselves during the five to six hours it typically takes to wrap up the move.

"There's going to be a lot of people in there moving things in and out," she said. "I'd want to make sure that those people are masked, covering their nose and mouths at all times. They are going to be exerting themselves because they are going to be moving things around."

Marr also suggested that the Bidens wait a few hours after the move is completed to go into the residence.

The White House normally is thoroughly cleaned in between families, said Anita McBride, who as an assistant to President George W. Bush helped coordinate his move out of the mansion in 2009.

"Everything goes through a massive cleaning," she said. Beds are stripped, mattresses replaced, rugs cleaned or replaced and fresh coats of paint applied, as needed.

The White House chief usher, who oversees the housekeeping staff, typically coordinates with someone on the incoming president's team to learn about their preferences so the residence can be made to feel as much like home as possible, with clothes hanging in the closets and favorite foods in the kitchen.

Once the waiting moving trucks are waved through tight security and onto the White House grounds, residence staff members break into groups to carry out specific assignments. Some will handle only Trump's belongings while others will be tasked with putting the contents of Biden's boxes in their designated places.

The chief usher reports to Melania Trump, who toured the White House living quarters in November 2016 when she accompanied Donald Trump to the White House for a post-election meeting with then-

President Barack Obama. President Trump has broken with tradition and has not invited the Bidens to a similar meeting.

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

Diary shows how quest for love landed Navy vet in Iran jail

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michael White's long-anticipated trip to Iran was already a disappointment. The love interest he'd gone to visit had stopped seeing him and he'd idled away hours in his hotel room by himself. Then it got much worse.

On his final day, the car he and his tour guide were in was abruptly cut off by another vehicle with a passenger frantically waving his hands at them. He recalls three men getting out, one with a video camera, forcing him into their car and driving him to an office for questioning. From there, it was on to jail, where orange-tinted water spewed from the sink and shower and prison-issued dirty sandals proved useful in shoving sewer roaches in the bathroom into the toilet.

A handwritten journal he wrote behind bars — a copy of which was provided exclusively to The Associated Press — offers new details about his ordeal in Iran, which ended last June when the State Department secured the Navy veteran's release. In it, he catalogues physical abuse from his jailers and taunts from fellow inmates while held on dubious allegations. He writes tenderly of the woman he visited even while likening himself to a mouse lured into a trap. And he brands himself a "political hostage," held on pretextual charges to secure concessions from the U.S.

Seven months after his release, White is trying to reassemble his life in Mexico, unsure what comes next but eager to share his story.

"I don't want the government of Iran to think that, 'Oh, Mike White's out of here, he's going away, he's going to be quiet,'" he said in a recent interview. "That's not going to happen. Believe me, if only you understood the fear and anger inside of me as a result of what they did."

The peculiar saga began in July 2018 when White flew to Iran to visit a woman he'd met years earlier in a Yahoo chat room and with whom he hoped to rekindle an on-off relationship that included two prior visits to the country. But the bond turned sour on the most recent trip when the woman stopped seeing him and encouraged him to return home earlier than he'd planned.

His 156-page manuscript is told from his own perspective with details that are vivid though sometimes difficult to corroborate. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. But according to the document, the men who arrested him pulled him into their car and drove him, blindfolded and handcuffed, to a building for questioning. His interrogator asked about his relationship with the woman, seeming to know details of her family, and telling White, vaguely, that some in Iran were concerned about his intentions there.

He was taken to what he calls the "intel jail," where he says he was given no food for days, nor blanket or pillow even as the vent blew frigid air. The conditions were compounded, he says, by his cancer diagnosis that had resulted in chemotherapy treatment and hospital stays in the months before he left for Iran.

He was repeatedly interrogated over several months about why he'd come to Iran, as officials suspicious that he may be a spy handed him questionnaires focused on his military background and any intelligence service connections. At one point, he writes, he fabricated a tale about being tasked to gather intelligence by an acquaintance he said was with the National Security Agency, figuring that interrogators wanted to hear something like that before setting him free.

"I was just saying something out of desperation, doing whatever to hopefully get them to just cut me loose," he said in the interview. "It turned out it wasn't really helpful at all."

The truth was more mundane, he says, albeit more difficult to comprehend: He was a "dumb American" pursuing love.

White's decisions were undoubtedly risky: His Iran visits came despite that country's hostile relationship

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with the U.S. He says he and his girlfriend got together in 2014 in Iran's Kish Island, even though retired FBI agent Robert Levinson vanished from there years earlier.

But White, 48, who grew up in Southern California and was honorably discharged from the Navy, says he's long been drawn to Iran's culture and people and had felt safe there, connecting through social media to a network of acquaintances. He'd once thought of law school or entering politics, but at the time of a 2018 trip he hoped would recharge his life, he was working as a Job Corps resident adviser.

He struggles to reconcile his affection for the woman he perceived as his girlfriend — "Her voice melts me with its softness and tenderness. My heart flutters when I see her," he writes — with the suspicion that he was somehow set up during his visit. His Instagram page reflects that ambivalence, with photos posted this year of them together.

"Yet, sadly, I was lured into a trap, like a mouse trap. I was the mouse," he writes. "I followed my heart instead of my head and missed signs."

In jail, he writes, he was once awakened by a guard dumping a bucket of cold water on him. Another time, an interrogator snapped a whip on his toes as he completed a questionnaire. After White tossed water on a surveillance camera to get the guards' attention, they pummeled him in the ribs and threw him to the floor, he writes.

He was relocated to another prison where some inmates tauntingly referred to him as "The Great Satan." One placed a cockroach inside his pants pocket as a prank.

At the suggestion of a prisoner he befriended, he began a handwritten manuscript, writing it under the cover of playing Sudoku to hide it from the guards. He gave the pages to the prisoner who he says was able to smuggle it out through a cousin.

White ultimately faced various charges, including posting private images, collaborating with the U.S. against Iran and disrespecting Iran's supreme leader. He was sentenced to 10 years but calls the charges a pretext to "extort" concessions.

He insists he's not a spy and never posted any inappropriate photos of his girlfriend. He writes in his manuscript that he has indeed made social media posts about Iran but denies having disparaged Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

An unexpected development came last spring as the coronavirus ravaged Iran. White, who was himself infected, was among thousands of prisoners released on medical furlough, permitted to live freely in Tehran in the Swiss Embassy's custody while required to remain in Iran.

The State Department, which has maintained that White was wrongfully detained, arranged for his release in June, flying him back to the U.S. as part of a deal that spared additional prison time for an American-Iranian doctor convicted in the U.S. of sanctions violations.

In August, he visited the White House with other freed hostages and detainees to record a Republican National Convention segment praising the Trump administration. He sat beside President Donald Trump in a three-piece suit in an experience he says made him feel like a celebrity, though he recalls Trump not shaking his hand.

"He was like, well, you know, if the media sees that, they're going to be flipping out of because of the corona(virus) thing," White said.

White isn't sure what comes next. He had contemplated opening a Persian restaurant, but isn't sure he'll do that now. He likens his life to the aftermath of a city-flattening hurricane.

"I'm just picking up the pieces, regrouping and trying to figure out how I'm going to move forward and stuff."

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

Biden: We'll 'manage the hell' out of feds' COVID response

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to boost supplies of coronavirus vaccine

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and set up new vaccination sites to meet his goal of 100 million shots in 100 days. It's part of a broader COVID strategy that also seeks to straighten out snags in testing and ensure minority communities are not left out.

"Some wonder if we are reaching too far," Biden said Friday. "Let me be clear, I'm convinced we can get it done."

The real payoff, Biden said, will come from uniting the nation in a new effort grounded in science.

Biden spoke a day after unveiling a \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan" to confront the virus and provide temporary support for a shaky economy. About \$400 billion of the plan is focused on measures aimed at controlling the virus. Those range from mass vaccination centers to more sophisticated scientific analysis of new strains and squads of local health workers to trace the contacts of infected people.

"You have my word: We will manage the hell out of this operation," Biden declared. He underscored a need for Congress to approve more money and for people to keep following basic precautions, such as wearing masks, avoiding gatherings and frequently washing their hands.

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.

A key challenge for Biden and the nation: Vaccines are in too-short supply.

Biden said he would use the Defense Production Act, a Cold War-era law, to boost vaccine supplies and work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to set up 100 vaccination centers around the country by the end of his first month in office.

"Almost a year later, we're still far from back to normal. The honest truth is this: Things will get worse before they get better," he said Friday, as U.S. deaths climbed closer to 400,000. The global toll has now reached 2 million.

Biden seconded the Trump administration's call earlier this week for states to start vaccinating more seniors, reaching those 65 and older as well as younger people with certain health problems. Until now states have been focused on inoculating health care workers, and some are starting to vaccinate people 75 and older. Relatively few are providing shots to people between 65 and 75.

Another carryover from the Trump administration plan: Biden said he intends to mobilize local pharmacies to administer vaccines.

"Is it achievable?" he asked. "It's a legitimate question to ask. Let me be clear. I'm convinced we can get it done."

In fact, Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert and emergency physician, said the president-elect should aim higher.

"At this point, mass vaccination is our last and best chance to restoring normalcy," she said. "There should be no expenses spared in the vaccine rollout. A hundred million in 100 days needs to be seen as only a start."

Two medical groups, the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the HIV Medicine Group, said Friday evening they "strongly support" the Biden plan. The strategy "will be vital to ending the impacts of COVID-19" in the U.S., the groups said.

As Biden spoke, some governors blasted the Trump administration for what at least one said was "deception" in suggesting earlier this week that a reserve of vaccine doses was ready to ship, augmenting supplies. An administration official said states have still not ordered all of the doses allocated to them, and called it a problem with states' expectations.

Biden committed to better communication with the states, to avoid such surprises. His plan calls for the federal government to fully reimburse states that mobilize their National Guards to help distribute vaccines.

Biden's proposal comes as a divided nation is in the grip of the pandemic's most dangerous wave yet. "We remain in a very dark winter," he said.

The political outlook for the legislation remains unclear, although a powerful business lobbying group, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, welcomed its focus on controlling the pandemic.

"This is not a political issue," Biden said. "This is about saving lives. I know it's become a partisan issue,

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but what a stupid, stupid thing to happen.”

Biden has long held that economic recovery is inextricably tied to control of the coronavirus.

Under Biden’s multipronged strategy, 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.

On Friday, he announced former FDA chief David Kessler as his chief science officer for the vaccine drive. Kessler has been advising Biden as a co-chair of his advisory board on the coronavirus pandemic. A pediatrician and attorney, he has emphasized a need to ease public concerns about the safety of the vaccines.

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 12.3 million doses administered out of more than 31 million delivered, or 39%.

About 10.6 million individuals have received first or second doses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the American Hospital Association estimates that 246 million must be vaccinated to reach widespread or “herd” immunity by the summer. Vaccines currently available require two shots to be fully effective.

Biden has called the vaccine rollout “a dismal failure so far.”

“We need to be getting to more than 3 million vaccinations a day, rapidly,” said Wen.

Biden’s plan also would provide \$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. The Biden administration also plans to launch a public education campaign to overcome doubts about vaccination.

Trump trial pending, McConnell calls it ‘vote of conscience’

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial is likely to start after Joe Biden’s inauguration, and the Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, is telling senators their decision on whether to convict the outgoing president over the Capitol riot will be a “vote of conscience.”

The timing for the trial, the first of a president no longer in office, has not yet been set. But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made it clear Friday that Democrats intend to move swiftly on President-elect Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID aid and economic recovery package to speed up vaccinations and send Americans relief. Biden is set to take the oath of office Wednesday.

Pelosi called the recovery package a “matter of complete urgency.”

The uncertainty of the scheduling, despite the House’s swift impeachment of Trump just a week after the deadly Jan. 6 siege, reflects the fact that Democrats do not want the Senate trial proceedings to dominate the opening days of the Biden administration.

With security on alert over the threat of more potential violence heading into the inauguration, the Senate is also moving quickly to prepare for confirming Biden’s nominee for National Intelligence Director, Avril Haines. A committee hearing is set for the day before the inauguration, signaling a confirmation vote to install her in the position could come swiftly once the new president is in office.

Many Democrats have pushed for an immediate impeachment trial to hold Trump accountable and prevent him from holding future office, and the proceedings could still begin by Inauguration Day. But others have urged a slower pace as the Senate considers Biden’s Cabinet nominees and the newly Democratic-led Congress considers priorities like the coronavirus plan.

Biden’s incoming White House press secretary, Jen Psaki said Friday the Senate can do both.

“The Senate can do its constitutional duty while continuing to conduct the business of the people,” she said.

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Psaki noted that during Trump's first impeachment trial last year, the Senate continued to hold hearings each day. "There is some precedent," she said.

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

When his second trial does begin, House impeachment managers say 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. 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 Biden.

For Republican senators, the trial will be a perhaps final test of their loyalty to the defeated president and his legions of supporters in their states back home, and their own experiences sheltering at the Capitol as a pro-Trump mob ransacked the building and attempted to overturn Biden's election. It will force a further re-evaluation of their relationship with the defeated president, who lost not only the White House but majority control of the Senate.

"These men weren't drunks who got rowdy — they were terrorists attacking this country's constitutionally-mandated transfer of power," said Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., in a statement Friday.

"They failed, but they came dangerously close to starting a bloody constitutional crisis. They must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

McConnell, who has spent the past days talking to senators and donors, is telling them the decision on whether or not to convict Trump is theirs alone — meaning the leadership team will not work to hold senators in line one way or the other.

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.

Pelosi told reporters on Friday that the nine House impeachment managers, who act as the prosecutors for the House, are working on taking the case to trial.

"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.

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

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 with the seating of two new Democratic senators from Georgia.

No president has ever been convicted in the Senate, and it would take a two-thirds vote against Trump, an extremely high hurdle. 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 launching a commission to investigate the siege as an alternative to conviction.

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.

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

NRA declares bankruptcy, plans to incorporate in Texas

By PAUL J. WEBER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The National Rifle Association announced Friday it has filed for bankruptcy protection and will seek to incorporate the nation's most politically influential gun-rights group in Texas instead of New York, where a state lawsuit is trying to put the organization out of business.

The announcement came months after New York Attorney General Letitia James sued the NRA, seeking its dissolution over claims that top executives illegally diverted tens of millions of dollars for lavish personal trips, no-show contracts for associates and other questionable expenditures.

The coronavirus pandemic has also upended the NRA, which last year laid off dozens of employees. The group canceled its national convention and scuttled fundraising. The NRA's bankruptcy filing listed between \$100 million and \$500 million in assets and between \$100 million and \$500 million in liabilities. Still, the NRA claimed in announcing the move that the organization was "in its strongest financial condition in years."

The NRA filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in federal court in Dallas and said it planned to incorporate in Texas, where records show it formed a limited liability corporation, Sea Girt LLC, in November 2020. Sea Girt LLC made a separate bankruptcy filing Friday, listing few assets and fewer than \$100,000 in liabilities.

In its filing, the NRA said its longtime leader, Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, made the decision to file for bankruptcy protection in consultation with a committee of three NRA officials formed in September to oversee its legal strategies. The NRA board voted Jan. 7 to clarify LaPierre's employment agreement, giving him the power to "reorganize or restructure the affairs" of the organization.

"The move will enable long-term, sustainable growth and ensure the NRA's continued success as the nation's leading advocate for constitutional freedom — free from the toxic political environment of New York," the NRA said in a statement.

In an interview, NRA board member Charles Cotton made clear that the bankruptcy filing was motivated by litigation and regulatory scrutiny in what he called "corrupt New York" — not financial concerns.

"We've got to get in a state where we can operate without that kind of undue weaponizing of governmental agencies, and frankly to get all the litigation in a place where we've got an even shake," Cotton told The Associated Press.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, quickly welcomed the news, tweeting: "Welcome to Texas — a state that safeguards the 2nd Amendment." The NRA said it has more than 400,000 members in Texas and plans to hold its annual convention in Houston later this year.

Shortly after the announcement, James said she would not allow the NRA to "evade accountability" or oversight. The Democrat's lawsuit last year highlighted misspending and self-dealing claims that have roiled the NRA and LaPierre in recent years — from hair and makeup for his wife to a \$17 million post-employment contract for himself.

"The NRA's claimed financial status has finally met its moral status: bankrupt," James said.

Adam Skaggs, chief counsel at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, called the bankruptcy filing "a transparent attempt to evade (James') campaign to hold the NRA and its corrupt leaders accountable."

Cotton said the allegations in James' lawsuit will be proven false. He said he expects LaPierre to remain at the helm of the reconstituted NRA, praising his popularity with members and proficiency at raising money for the organization.

"Wayne leaving would be a bigger blow to the organization than was the illness and death of Charlton Heston," Cotton said.

The gun-rights group boasts about 5 million members. Though headquartered in Virginia, the NRA was chartered as a nonprofit in New York in 1871 and is incorporated in the state. Going forward, the NRA said a committee will study opportunities to relocate segments of its operations to Texas and elsewhere.

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Cotton declined to comment when asked if Sea Girt, which shares the name of a New Jersey firing range where the NRA began holding annual competitions in 1892, was formed as a part of a plan to facilitate the bankruptcy filing in Texas.

In recent years, the NRA's relationship with New York has increasingly soured.

In 2018, the organization sued Gov. Andrew Cuomo, claiming a "political vendetta" was behind a state financial watchdog's probe of whether it broke state laws by marketing an insurance program to gun owners. In November, the NRA agreed to pay \$2.5 million and accept a five-year ban on marketing insurance in the state.

In response to James' lawsuit, the NRA countersued with claims her actions were motivated by hostility toward its political advocacy, including comments she made while running for attorney general in 2018 that the NRA is a "terrorist organization."

The NRA's largest creditor, owed \$1.2 million, is the organization's former advertising agency, Ackerman McQueen. The NRA sued the company in 2019, alleging overbilling, and said in Friday's bankruptcy filing that the debt owed is disputed. The lawsuit is pending.

In the New York lawsuit, Ackerman McQueen was accused of aiding lavish spending by LaPierre and other NRA executives by picking up the tab and then sending a lump sum bill to the organization for "out-of-pocket expenses."

"No financial filing can ever shroud the moral bankruptcy of Wayne LaPierre and his wife and their lap dogs on the NRA board," said Bill Powers, an Ackerman McQueen spokesperson and former public affairs director for the NRA.

Court records also show more than \$960,000 owed to Membership Marketing Partners LLC, a firm that lists its headquarters at the same address as the NRA. Another \$200,000 is owed to Speedway Motorsports, the North Carolina-based company that owns and operates NASCAR tracks, according to the records.

Sisak reported from New York. Associated Press reporter Jake Bleiberg in Dallas contributed to this report.

Governors complain over pace of COVID-19 vaccine shipments

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and DAVID CRARY Associated Press

Governors bitterly accused the Trump administration Friday of deceiving the states about the amount of COVID-19 vaccine they can expect to receive as they ramp up vaccinations for senior citizens and others. But the government attributed the anger to confusion and misguided expectations on the part of the states.

Meanwhile, the race between the vaccine and the virus may be about to heat up: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that the new, more infectious variant first seen in Britain will probably become the dominant version in the U.S. by March.

The CDC said the variant is about 50% more contagious than the virus that is causing the bulk of cases in this country.

"We want to sound the alarm," said Dr. Jay Butler, CDC deputy director for infectious diseases.

The clash over the pace of the government's COVID-19 vaccine allotments threatens to escalate tensions between the Trump administration and some states over who is responsible for the relatively slow start to the vaccination drive against the scourge that has killed over 390,000 Americans.

Oregon had announced earlier this week that it would expand vaccine eligibility to roughly 760,000 residents 65 and older, as well as teachers and child care providers, because of what it said were promises that the state's vaccine allotment would be increased.

But Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said those plans are now in disarray because of "deception on a national scale" by the administration.

Via Twitter, Brown said she was told by Gen. Gustavo F. Perna, who leads Operation Warp Speed, that states will not be receiving increased shipments of vaccine from the national stockpile next week "because there is no federal reserve of doses."

As a result of what she called "a cruel joke," Brown said the state will now postpone vaccination of senior

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citizens to Feb. 8, instead of Jan. 23, and initially limit it to people 80 and older.

Late Friday, Oregon health officials said a case of the variant had been diagnose in the Portland area in a patient who had no travel history.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, said he was among several governors deceived by federal officials about availability of a strategic supply of doses.

"This one is so far beyond the pale to be almost unimaginable," he said. "Who's going to be prosecuted for this? What are the states to do when they've been lied to and made all their plans around this?"

Alena Yarmosky, a spokeswoman for Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, said governors were "told explicitly" on Tuesday that they would be provided additional doses. Northam, a Democrat and a doctor, had moved quickly as a result to announce that the state would expand vaccine eligibility.

Now, Northam's administration is trying to determine whether those additional supplies don't exist, Yarmosky said.

"What we're seeing is fully in line with the dysfunction that has characterized the Trump administration's entire response to COVID-19. President-elect (Joe) Biden cannot be sworn in fast enough," she said.

Michael Pratt, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said that states may have been confused in their expectations but that there has been no reduction in doses shipped to them.

Biden alluded to the tensions Friday and pledged to communicate better with states so they know how much vaccine will arrive and when.

"Right now we're hearing that they can't plan because they don't know," he said. "That stops when we're in office."

As of Friday, the government had distributed over 31 million doses to states, U.S. territories and major cities. About 12.3 million doses had been administered, according to online tracking by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There is no evidence that the new variant causes more severe illness or is transmitted differently, and mask wearing and other precautions still work, the CDC said. Scientists have also expressed confidence that the vaccines are still effective against it.

According to CDC, the variant has been detected in 12 states and diagnosed in only 76 reported cases. But it is probably more widespread in the U.S. than the numbers suggest, CDC scientists said.

The two COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in the U.S. -- made by Pfizer and Moderna -- are designed to be given in two doses, three or four weeks apart.

For weeks, Operation Warp Speed had been holding large amounts of vaccine in reserve to ensure that those who got their first dose received their second one on time. The practice was a hedge against possible manufacturing delays. When HHS Secretary Alex Azar announced on Tuesday that he was ending the practice, it was interpreted as essentially doubling the expected supply.

But there was another huge change: He also urged states to open vaccinations to everyone over 65 and younger people with certain health problems, even though most hadn't yet finished dispensing shots to all the health workers first in line.

The result was a scramble by state and local health authorities to figure out exactly how much vaccine they would receive in the coming weeks and how to ramp up shots for a public with higher expectations.

Pratt said doses that were being held in reserve to provide second shots were released last week. It's unclear, however, if they all shipped prior to the Trump administration's announcement early this week that states should open up vaccination to more people. He said states are getting the required second doses they need and the number of first doses is stable.

Pfizer said it is working around the clock to produce millions of doses a day, adding, "We foresee no issues in delivering on the commitments we have made" to supply Operation Warp Speed. Moderna didn't immediately respond to questions about its supplies.

At Mary's Woods, a retirement community in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, residents expressed fear they will have to wait longer for their vaccinations. Several have COVID-19, and others are terrified it could spread to them soon.

"I'm pretty disappointed," said 75-year-old Joan Burns. "We're sequestered and it's difficult to talk to

anybody. I am as anxious as I've ever been, and I know it's escalating. We're just playing the odds right now, really."

Elsewhere around the country, in hard-hit California, where 3,675 people have died from COVID-19 in the past week, officials are rushing to help overwhelmed county coroners. The Office of Emergency Services said it has secured 98 refrigerated trailers to serve as makeshift morgues.

Associated Press writer Gillian Flaccus in Portland, Oregon, contributed to this report.

AP EXCLUSIVE: Maduro ally presses for dialogue with Biden

By SCOTT SMITH and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said Friday he's hopeful the Biden administration will roll back a "cruel" sanctions policy and instead give room for diplomacy that could lead to the reopening of the U.S. Embassy and the release of several jailed American citizens.

Jorge Rodríguez's comments came in his first interview since taking the helm of Venezuela's National Assembly over strong protests from the U.S., European Union and domestic opponents.

Rodríguez, extending an olive branch to the incoming U.S. president, said the ruling socialist party is eager for a new start after four years of endless attacks by the Trump administration that he believes not only exacerbated suffering among Venezuelans and failed to unseat Maduro but also punished U.S. investors who historically have been important in the OPEC nation.

"All points and all issues are on the table," he said, including the future of six Venezuelan-American oil executives arrested on corruption charges and two former Green Berets caught in a failed attempt to overthrow Maduro.

It's unclear if the Biden administration will accept the overture or continue with the hardline policy of regime change it inherits. A lot hinges on its treatment of Juan Guaidó, head of the outgoing congress, whom the Trump administration recognizes as Venezuela's rightful leader.

Past attempts at government dialogue with the opposition have failed to end the country's stalemate and Maduro has tightened his grip on power. In the meantime, there's no end in sight to an economic crisis that has sent millions fleeing and those left behind lacking basic goods, including gasoline, in a country sitting atop the world's largest oil reserves.

Rodríguez refused to endorse calls from his red-shirted supporters to jail Guaidó and instead said he's willing to talk to the 37-year-old former head of the National Assembly.

"This new National Assembly is taking the broadest approach possible toward dialogue," said Rodríguez from the neoclassical legislature in the heart of Caracas.

But he warned that talks would only succeed if Guaidó and his allies seek forgiveness for plotting to overthrow Maduro and for backing foreign government freezes on Venezuelan oil assets that he said have harmed regular Venezuelans amid a pandemic.

"If you resort to amnesia while launching a reconciliation process, you run the risk that these events did not happen," said Rodríguez, a psychiatrist by training. "You run the risk of grave situations reoccurring."

Rodríguez, 55, was among candidates loyal to Maduro who won more than 90% of the seats in a Dec. 6 election boycotted by Guaidó and the major opposition parties. The United States, the European Union and several Latin American neighbors rejected the election as a undemocratic after several parties were barred from running. Turnout was a paltry 31%, the lowest in years.

Nonetheless, Rodríguez rejected criticism that he was leading a rubber-stamp legislature — the final branch of Venezuela's government that had been out of the ruling party's grasp before the recent vote.

As National Assembly president, Rodríguez is second in the line of presidential succession, behind his younger sister, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez. The two are among Maduro's most stalwart civilian supporters, their leftist credentials burnished from an early age when their father, a Socialist League activist, died in 1976 in police custody after having been tortured.

In his first days on the job, Rodríguez approved a special commission to punish those responsible for

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what the government considers crimes against Venezuela, which critics say is a ruse to target opponents. He said they included efforts to block the Maduro government's access to \$2 billion gold held in a London bank and control of U.S.-based Citgo oil refineries, the nation's largest foreign asset.

But he has also made an appeal for dialogue — a doubtful prospect given the failure of past attempts at negotiation, sponsored by Norway and the Vatican, which Rodríguez led on behalf of the Maduro government.

Rodríguez's loyalty to the Bolivarian revolution has come at a cost. In 2018 he was sanctioned by the Trump administration as a key player in Maduro's inner circle.

Rodríguez previously served as vice president to the late President Hugo Chávez among a long list of job titles, including mayor of Caracas, head of the electoral council and minister of communications under Maduro.

As Maduro's unofficial agitator in chief, with a gift for speaking admired by friends and foes alike, he's often just off camera in the president's frequent appearances on state TV. In his new job he's expected to remain at the forefront of bitter relations with the United States as President-elect Joe Biden takes office and charts his own foreign policy.

Analysts say Biden has limited options to undo crippling oil sanctions imposed as part of Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign. But the failure of the hardline policy to unseat the South American leader could leave space for diplomacy.

The U.S. and Venezuela broke ties in 2019 shortly after the White House recognized Guaidó as Venezuela's rightful president., arguing that Maduro's recent reelection had been invalid. Both nations immediately withdrew their diplomats and the hillside U.S. Embassy in Caracas remains closed.

Rodríguez said he hopes to reach an understanding with the U.S., one that benefits not only Venezuelans but U.S. oil companies and American bondholders who've lost billions as a result of a freeze on any business dealings with the Maduro government.

"We want what Venezuela has historically always done with the United States: good business," he said.

But reaching that goal requires buy-in from Biden.

In what may be a sign there's no rush to change course, the president-elect has invited Guaidó's envoy in Washington, Carlos Vecchio, to attend his inauguration, according to the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington. Biden's transition team declined to comment.

"The entire world is waiting out the hours for when the new president assumes the office in the United States," Rodríguez said. "We hope that includes abandoning what's has been so harmful to the people of Venezuela and completely unproductive."

Goodman reported from Miami.

Follow Smith on Twitter: @ScottSmithAP

Follow Goodman on Twitter: @APJoshGoodman

Biden: We'll 'manage the hell' out of feds' COVID response

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden pledged Friday to boost supplies of coronavirus vaccine and set up new vaccination sites to meet his goal of 100 million shots in 100 days. It's part of a broader COVID strategy that also seeks to straighten out snags in testing and ensure minority communities are not left out.

"Some wonder if we are reaching too far," Biden said. "Let me be clear, I'm convinced we can get it done."

The real payoff, Biden said, will come from uniting the nation in a new effort grounded in science.

Biden spoke a day after unveiling a \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan" to confront the virus and provide temporary support for a shaky economy. About \$400 billion of the plan is focused on measures aimed at controlling the virus. Those range from mass vaccination centers to more sophisticated scientific analysis of new strains and squads of local health workers to trace the contacts of infected people.

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"You have my word: We will manage the hell out of this operation," Biden declared. He underscored a need for Congress to approve more money and for people to keep following basic precautions, such as wearing masks, avoiding gatherings and frequently washing their hands.

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.

A key challenge for Biden and the nation: Vaccines are in too-short supply.

Biden said he would use the Defense Production Act, a Cold War-era law, to boost vaccine supplies and work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to set up 100 vaccination centers around the country by the end of his first month in office.

"Almost a year later, we're still far from back to normal. The honest truth is this: Things will get worse before they get better," he said Friday, as U.S. deaths climbed closer to 400,000. The global toll has now reached 2 million.

Biden seconded the Trump administration's call earlier this week for states to start vaccinating more seniors, reaching those 65 and older as well as younger people with certain health problems. Until now states have been focused on inoculating health care workers, and some are starting to vaccinate people 75 and older. Relatively few are providing shots to people between 65 and 75.

Another carryover from the Trump administration plan: Biden said he intends to mobilize local pharmacies to administer vaccines.

"Is it achievable?" he asked. "It's a legitimate question to ask. Let me be clear. I'm convinced we can get it done."

In fact, Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert and emergency physician, said the president-elect should aim higher.

"At this point, mass vaccination is our last and best chance to restoring normalcy," she said. "There should be no expenses spared in the vaccine rollout. A hundred million in 100 days needs to be seen as only a start."

Two medical groups, the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the HIV Medicine Group, said Friday evening they "strongly support" the Biden plan. The strategy "will be vital to ending the impacts of COVID-19" in the U.S., the groups said.

As Biden spoke, some governors blasted the Trump administration for what at least one said was "deception" in suggesting earlier this week that a reserve of vaccine doses was ready to ship, augmenting supplies. An administration official said states have still not ordered all of the doses allocated to them, and called it a problem with states' expectations.

Biden committed to better communication with the states, to avoid such surprises. His plan calls for the federal government to fully reimburse states that mobilize their National Guards to help distribute vaccines.

Biden's proposal comes as a divided nation is in the grip of the pandemic's most dangerous wave yet. "We remain in a very dark winter," he said.

The political outlook for the legislation remains unclear, although a powerful business lobbying group, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, welcomed its focus on controlling the pandemic.

"This is not a political issue," Biden said. "This is about saving lives. I know it's become a partisan issue, but what a stupid, stupid thing to happen."

Biden has long held that economic recovery is inextricably tied to control of the coronavirus.

Under Biden's multipronged strategy, 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.

On Friday, he announced former FDA chief David Kessler as his chief science officer for the vaccine drive. Kessler has been advising Biden as a co-chair of his advisory board on the coronavirus pandemic. A pediatrician and attorney, he has emphasized a need to ease public concerns about the safety of the vaccines.

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 12.3 million doses administered out of more than 31 million delivered, or 39%.

About 10.6 million individuals have received first or second doses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the American Hospital Association estimates that 246 million must be vaccinated to reach widespread or "herd" immunity by the summer. Vaccines currently available require two shots to be fully effective.

Biden has called the vaccine rollout "a dismal failure so far."

"We need to be getting to more than 3 million vaccinations a day, rapidly," said Wen.

Biden's plan also would provide \$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. The Biden administration also plans to launch a public education campaign to overcome doubts about vaccination.

Pence calls VP-elect Kamala Harris to offer congratulations

By JILL COLVIN and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence has called his soon-to-be successor Kamala Harris to offer his congratulations, according to two people familiar with the conversation.

It's the first known contact between the elected members of the outgoing and incoming administrations. President Donald Trump has not reached out to President-elect Joe Biden or invited him to the White House, and has instead spent the weeks since he lost the Nov. 3 election holed up at the White House, trying to undermine the legitimacy of Biden's win with baseless claims of mass voter fraud that culminated in last week's violent storming of the Capitol building.

Pence, who didn't speak with Trump for days after the siege, has become an unexpected — albeit late — defender of Biden's win. The vice president resisted enormous pressure from Trump to try to interfere in Congress' certification of the Electoral College vote count last week — even though he has no such power. And he has announced that he will attend Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration, which Trump is refusing to do — making him just the fourth president in the nation's history to skip the symbolic passing of the torch.

Pence and Harris spoke Thursday afternoon and had a "good call," according to one of the people familiar with the conversation, with Pence congratulating Harris and offering his assistance. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the private exchange.

The call came less than a week before Biden and Harris take office and just over a week after Trump supporters violently stormed the Capitol and tried to halt the peaceful transition of power after he delivered a speech calling on them to "fight." Five people died, including a Capitol Police officer, and Trump got impeached on a charge of incitement of an insurrection.

While Trump has remained largely behind closed doors, without his Twitter bullhorn and fuming since his loss, Pence has been stepping up and fulfilling many of the ceremonial duties of the presidency.

On Thursday, Pence received a briefing at the Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters in Washington from the FBI and other agencies on inauguration security and stopped by to thank White House phone operators, giving them a framed letter of appreciation. Later, he greeted members of the National Guard now protecting the Capitol building from further attack.

This weekend, he will travel to thank the troops — first flying to Lemoore, California, to deliver remarks to sailors, and then to Fort Drum, New York, to speak before 10th Mountain Division soldiers, many of whom recently returned from Afghanistan.

Pence was also the one who coordinated with lawmakers and the D.C. National Guard while the Capitol was under siege and he was in hiding. And last Friday, he called the family of slain Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick, who died from injuries in the attack.

Pence's call to his successor is a continuation of the traditional show of comity between outgoing and

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incoming leaders that Trump has flouted. In 2008, then-Vice President Dick Cheney called Biden to congratulate him the night of his win and invited Biden and his wife, Jill, to tour the vice presidential residence on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory shortly before the 2009 inauguration.

And in November 2016, Biden, Pence and their spouses met for lunch at the Naval Observatory after an earlier meeting at the White House.

"I told Mike, the vice president-elect, that I'm available to him 24/7," Biden said after the get-together. "I plan on being available to Mike as senior staff for him as he moves."

It's unclear whether Pence will do the same for Harris. Pence and his wife will be traveling over the weekend. And much of Washington is under heightened security after last week's violent insurrection at the Capitol, with law enforcement officials warning of more potential for violence surrounding Biden's inauguration.

While Biden said last week that he welcomed Trump's decision to skip his inauguration, he said he would be "honored" to have Pence attend.

"I think it's important," he said, that, as much as possible, "the historical precedents" with respect to the peaceful transfer of power "be maintained."

Extremists exploit a loophole in social moderation: Podcasts

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

Major social platforms have been cracking down on the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories in the leadup to the presidential election, and expanded their efforts in the wake of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot. But Apple and Google, among others, have left open a major loophole for this material: Podcasts.

Podcasts made available by the two Big Tech companies let you tune into the world of the QAnon conspiracy theory, wallow in President Donald Trump's false claims of a stolen election and bask in other extremism. Accounts that have been banned on social media for election misinformation, threatening or bullying, and breaking other rules also still live on as podcasts available on the tech giants' platforms.

Conspiracy theorists have peddled stolen-election fantasies, coronavirus conspiracies and violent rhetoric. One podcaster, RedPill78, called the Capitol siege a "staged event" in a Jan. 11 episode of Red Pill News. The day before the Capitol riot, a more popular podcast, X22 Report, spoke confidently about a Trump second term, explained that Trump would need to "remove" many members of Congress to further his plans, and said "We the people, we are the storm, and we're coming to DC."

Both are available on Apple and Google podcast platforms.

Podcasting "plays a particularly outsized role" in propagating white supremacy, said a 2018 report from the Anti-Defamation League. Many white supremacists, like QAnon adherents, support Trump. Podcasting's an intimate, humanizing mode of communication that lets extremists expound on their ideas for hours at a time, said Oren Segal of ADL's Center on Extremism.

Elsewhere on social media, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have been cracking down on accounts amplifying unfounded QAnon claims that Trump is fighting deep state enemies and cannibals operating a child-sex trafficking ring. A major talk radio company, Cumulus, told its hosts to tone down rhetoric about stolen elections and violent uprisings or risk termination, although it's not clear what impact that dictate has had.

Google-owned YouTube axed "Bannon's War Room," a channel run by Trump loyalist Steve Bannon on Jan. 8 after he spread false election claims and called for the beheading of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious-disease expert. But podcast versions of Bannon's show live on at Apple and Google. Spotify took it down in November, according to one of its hosts.

"Podcasts filled with hatred and incitement to violence should not be treated any differently than any other content," Segal said. "If you're going to take a strong stance against hate and extremism in the platform in any way, it should be all-inclusive."

Apple, Spotify and Google curate lists of top podcasts and recommend them to users. Apple and Spotify are the dominant players in the U.S., with other players far behind, said Dave Zohrob, CEO of the podcast analytics firm Chartable. Despite its name recognition, Google remains a tiny presence.

Spotify said it takes down podcasts that violate its policies against hate speech, copyright violations or

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break any laws, using "algorithmic and human detection measures" to identify violations. Apple's guidelines prohibit content that is illegal or promotes violence, graphic sex or drugs or is "otherwise considered obscene, objectionable, or in poor taste." Apple did not reply to repeated questions about its content guidelines or moderation.

Google declined to explain the discrepancy between what's available on YouTube and what's on Google Podcasts, saying only that its podcast service "indexes audio available on the web" much the way its search engine indexes web pages. The company said it removes podcasts from its platform "in very rare circumstances, largely guided by local law."

X22 Report and Bannon's War Room were No. 20 and No. 32 on Apple's list of top podcasts on Friday. (Experts say that list measures a podcast's momentum rather than total listeners.) X22 Report said in October that it was suspended by YouTube and Spotify and last week by Twitter. It's no longer available on Facebook, either. It is supported by ads for products such as survivalist food, unlicensed food supplements and gold coins, which run before and during the podcasts.

The website for Red Pill News said YouTube banned its videos in October and that a Twitter suspension followed. The podcast is available on Apple and Google, but not Spotify.

Several QAnon proponents affected by the crackdown sued YouTube in October, calling its actions a "massive de-platforming." Among the plaintiffs are X22 Report, RedPill78 and David Hayes, who runs another conspiracy podcast called Praying Medic that's available on Apple and Google, but not Spotify.

Melody Torres, who podcasts at SoulWarrior Uncensored, self-identifies as a longtime QAnon follower and said in a recent episode that her podcast is "just my way of not being censored." She said she was kicked off Twitter in January and booted from Instagram four times last year. She currently has Instagram, Facebook and YouTube accounts; her podcast is available on Apple and Google. Spotify removed the podcast Friday after The Associated Press inquired about it.

X22 Report, RedPill78 and Hayes did not respond to requests for comment sent via their websites. Torres did not reply to a Facebook message.

Podcasts suffer from the same misinformation problem as other platforms, said Shane Creevey, head of editorial for Kinzen, a startup created by former Facebook and Twitter executives that offers a disinformation tracker to companies, including some that host or curate podcasts.

Creevey points out that it's harder to analyze misinformation from video and audio than from text. Podcasts can also run for hours, making them difficult to monitor. And podcasting has additional challenges in that there are no reliable statistics on their audience, unlike a YouTube stream, which shows views, or a tweet or Facebook post, which shows likes and shares, Creevey said.

But some argue that tech-company moderation is opaque and inconsistent, creating a new set of problems. Censorship "goes with the tide against what's popular in any given moment," said Jillian York, an expert at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital-rights group. Right now, she said, "that tide is against the speech of right-wing extremists ... but tomorrow the tide might be against opposition activists."

AP Technology Editor David Hamilton contributed to this article.

Feds back away from claim of assassination plot at Capitol

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Federal prosecutors who initially said there was "strong evidence" the pro-Trump mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol last week aimed to "capture and assassinate elected officials" backed away from the allegation after the head of the investigation cautioned Friday that the probe is still in its early stages and there was no "direct evidence" of such intentions.

The accusation came in a court filing by prosecutors late Thursday in Phoenix in the case against Jacob Chansley, the Arizona man who took part in the insurrection while sporting face paint, no shirt and a furry hat with horns.

"Strong evidence, including Chansley's own words and actions at the Capitol, supports that the intent

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of the Capitol rioters was to capture and assassinate elected officials in the United States Government," a prosecutor wrote in a memo urging the judge to keep Chansley behind bars. But at a hearing for Chansley later in the day in Phoenix, another prosecutor, Todd Allison, struck the line from the memo.

Allison said the statement may very well end up being appropriate at Chansley's trial, but said prosecutors didn't want to mislead the court and don't have to rely on the stricken statement to argue that he should remain in jail. Ultimately, a judge on Friday ordered Chansley to be jailed until his trial.

Earlier on Friday, Michael Sherwin, acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, backed away from the assassination claims, saying they have "no direct evidence at this point of kill, capture teams."

Sherwin said there appears to have been confusion among some prosecutors in part because of the complexity of the investigation and number of people involved. Prosecutors raised a similar prospect Thursday in the case of a former Air Force officer who they alleged carried plastic zip-tie handcuffs because he intended "to take hostages."

The sprawling investigation involves multiple cities and jurisdictions, in part because so many of the rioters simply went home; only 13 were arrested in the moments after the building was cleared.

The FBI has been investigating whether any of the rioters had plotted to kidnap members of Congress and hold them hostage, focusing particularly on the men seen carrying plastic zip-tie handcuffs and pepper spray.

Although the assassination claim from the court filing was stricken by prosecutors, prosecutors didn't back away from the statement that Chansley, when climbing up to the dais where Vice President Mike Pence had been presiding moments earlier, wrote a threatening note to Pence that said: "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming."

Pence and congressional leaders had been ushered out of the chamber by the Secret Service and U.S. Capitol Police shortly before the rioters stormed into the room.

Chansley's attorney, Gerald Williams, said he hasn't seen any images of his client engaging in dangerous conduct while in the Capitol. "He was merely there acting as a protester," Williams said, pointing out that his client has no prior criminal history and agreed to talk to investigators.

Allison said Chansley was proud of his actions on the day of the insurrection and wanted to go to Washington for Biden's inauguration on Wednesday. Allison described Chansley as someone who believes in conspiracy theories and "is not connected to reality."

U.S. Magistrate Judge Deborah Fine, in ordering Chansley jailed until trial, concluded he is at risk of fleeing and obstructing justice in his case and poses a danger to the community. Echoing the words of prosecutors, Fine said it was appropriate to say Chansley was an active participant in a violent insurrection that attempted to overthrow the government.

Fine said Chansley went through barricades, was among the first people to force their way into the Capitol building, disobeyed orders by an officer to leave, refused the officer's request to use Chansley's bullhorn to tell rioters to leave the Senate chamber and wrote the note to the vice president.

"Mr. Chansley's idea of protesting is committing the unlawful acts that we are discussing here," Fine said.

Chansley, who calls himself the "QAnon Shaman" and has long been a fixture at Trump rallies, was arrested Saturday at the FBI field office in Phoenix.

News photos show him at the riot shirtless, with his face painted and wearing a fur hat with horns, carrying a U.S. flag attached to a wooden pole topped with a spear.

QAnon is an apocalyptic and convoluted conspiracy theory spread largely through the internet and promoted by some right-wing extremists.

Chansley told investigators he came to the Capitol "at the request of the president that all 'patriots' come to D.C. on January 6, 2021." An indictment unsealed Tuesday in Washington charges him with civil disorder, obstruction of an official proceeding, disorderly conduct in a restricted building, and demonstrating in a Capitol building. He hasn't entered a plea to the charges.

More than 80 people are facing charges stemming from the violence, including more than 40 people in federal court. Dozens more were arrested for violating a curfew that night.

The federal charges brought so far are primarily for crimes such as illegal entry, but prosecutors have

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said they are weighing more serious charges against at least some of the rioters. Some were highly-trained ex-military and police.

Sherwin said this week that he has organized a group of national security and public corruption prosecutors whose sole focus is to bring sedition charges for the "most heinous acts that occurred in the Capitol."

The Air Force officer, Col. Larry Rendall Brock, Jr., was arrested Sunday in Texas after being photographed on the Senate floor during the deadly riot wearing a helmet and heavy vest and carrying plastic zip-tie handcuffs.

"He means to kidnap, restrain, perhaps try, perhaps execute members of the U.S. government," Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Weimer said, without providing specifics.

Brock's attorney, Brook Antonio II, noted that he has only been charged with misdemeanors. Antonio said there was no direct evidence of Brock breaking doors or windows to get into the Capitol, or doing anything violent once he was inside.

On Thursday, authorities also arrested a man from Utah who filmed the fatal shooting of the Trump supporter inside the Capitol. Police shot Ashli Babbitt, an Air Force veteran, as she was trying to climb through a broken window into the speaker's lobby.

John Sullivan, 26, a self-described journalist who filmed the shooting, told the AP earlier this week that he was only there to document the events at the U.S. Capitol and didn't attend the riot as a Trump supporter.

In one video, Sullivan can be heard cheering on the rioters as they broke through the final barricade before the Capitol and saying, "We did this together. ... We are all a part of history."

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press reporters Jake Bleiberg in Fort Worth, Texas, Sophia Eppolito in Salt Lake City and Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump trial pending, McConnell calls it 'vote of conscience'

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's impeachment trial is likely to start after Joe Biden's inauguration, and the Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, is telling senators their decision on whether to convict the outgoing president over the Capitol riot will be a "vote of conscience."

The timing for the trial, the first of a president no longer in office, has not yet been set. But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made it clear Friday that Democrats intend to move swiftly on President-elect Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID aid and economic recovery package to speed up vaccinations and send Americans relief. Biden is set to take the oath of office Wednesday.

Pelosi called the recovery package a "matter of complete urgency."

The uncertainty of the scheduling, despite the House's swift impeachment of Trump just a week after the deadly Jan. 6 siege, reflects the fact that Democrats do not want the Senate trial proceedings to dominate the opening days of the Biden administration.

With security on alert over the threat of more potential violence heading into the inauguration, the Senate is also moving quickly to prepare for confirming Biden's nominee for National Intelligence Director, Avril Haines. A committee hearing is set for the day before the inauguration, signaling a confirmation vote to install her in the position could come swiftly once the new president is in office.

Many Democrats have pushed for an immediate impeachment trial to hold Trump accountable and prevent him from holding future office, and the proceedings could still begin by Inauguration Day. But others have urged a slower pace as the Senate considers Biden's Cabinet nominees and the newly Democratic-led Congress considers priorities like the coronavirus plan.

Biden's incoming White House press secretary, Jen Psaki said Friday the Senate can do both.

"The Senate can do its constitutional duty while continuing to conduct the business of the people," she said.

Psaki noted that during Trump's first impeachment trial last year, the Senate continued to hold hearings each day. "There is some precedent," she said.

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

When his second trial does begin, House impeachment managers say 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. 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 Biden.

For Republican senators, the trial will be a perhaps final test of their loyalty to the defeated president and his legions of supporters in their states back home, and their own experiences sheltering at the Capitol as a pro-Trump mob ransacked the building and attempted to overturn Biden's election. It will force a further re-evaluation of their relationship with the defeated president, who lost not only the White House but majority control of the Senate.

"These men weren't drunks who got rowdy — they were terrorists attacking this country's constitutionally-mandated transfer of power," said Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., in a statement Friday.

"They failed, but they came dangerously close to starting a bloody constitutional crisis. They must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

McConnell, who has spent the past days talking to senators and donors, is telling them the decision on whether or not to convict Trump is theirs alone — meaning the leadership team will not work to hold senators in line one way or the other.

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.

Pelosi told reporters on Friday that the nine House impeachment managers, who act as the prosecutors for the House, are working on taking the case to trial.

"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.

Trump was impeached Wednesday by the House on the 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, the most bipartisan modern presidential impeachment.

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 with the seating of two new Democratic senators from Georgia.

No president has ever been convicted in the Senate, and it would take a two-thirds vote against Trump, an extremely high hurdle. 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 launching a commission to investigate the siege as an alternative to conviction.

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.

Lemire contributed to this report.

Flint water charges escalate debate over officials' failures

By JOHN FLESHER and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

FLINT, Mich. (AP) — When a former Michigan public health director was charged with involuntary manslaughter in the Flint water crisis, the man who previously held the job says a chilling thought crossed his mind: It could have been me.

"I spent 14 years in that chair," said Jim Haveman, who served under two Republican governors — including Rick Snyder, another target of indictments released Thursday. "I dealt with anthrax outbreaks, measles, hepatitis, Legionella. ... The list is a mile long. We had to make tough decisions all the time."

He contends Snyder, former health chief Nick Lyon and seven others charged with various counts in one of the worst human-made environmental disasters in U.S. history are victims of Monday-morning quarterbacking that makes criminals of government officials guilty of nothing worse than honest mistakes. Prosecutors, however, say this is no ordinary matter of well-meant decisions that backfired.

"Pure and simple, this case is about justice, truth, accountability, poisoned children, lost lives, shattered families that are still not whole, and simply giving a damn about all of humanity," said Kym Worthy, a leader of the team that investigated a catastrophe that has been described as an example of environmental injustice and racism.

Few would dispute that a tangle of miscalculations, neglect and hubris led to pollution of the impoverished, majority-Black city's drinking water with lead. Some experts believe it contributed to a fatal outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. But the charges have escalated a debate over whether state and local officials crossed a line between incompetence and illegality.

Those who support prosecution say conviction and punishment of those most responsible are essential steps toward making the victims whole — even after a \$641 million civil settlement reached last year — and deterring similar misconduct.

To opponents, the charges are vengeful overreach that could do more harm than good, discouraging talented people from working in government and making those already there excessively cautious — just as the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for boldness and creativity.

Underscoring the high stakes is the precedent-setting nature of the case.

Snyder is the first governor in Michigan's 184-year history charged with crimes involving job performance. Ron Sullivan, a Harvard Law School professor, said he knew of no such cases in other states.

Governors have been accused of taking bribes, violating campaign finance laws and personal misconduct. Sullivan helped prosecute a former Missouri governor on an invasion-of-privacy charge involving a sex scandal. But the Michigan matter, he said, is "odd" and he thinks the bar for a conviction will be high.

Snyder, who held office from 2011 through 2018, faces two counts of willful neglect of duty. The indictment says only that he failed to monitor the "performance, condition and administration" of his appointees and protect Flint's nearly 100,000 residents despite knowing the threat.

The Rev. Ezra L. Tillman Jr., pastor at First Trinity Missionary Baptist Church in Flint, said it's disappointing that Snyder was charged only with misdemeanors.

"It gives a mirage that ... finally there is going to be some justice for all these kids' lives that have been destroyed, all these elderly people whose lives have been destroyed," said Tillman, whose church is a distribution site for residents who still need clean water. "It's a joke."

Yet even those charges will be hard to prove, Sullivan said. Prosecutors will have to show intentional wrongdoing, not just sloppy management.

"Negligence, even gross negligence, is not enough," he said.

But Noah Hall, a Wayne State University environmental law professor who took part in a previous investigation of the case and saw evidence including emails between top officials, said: "These were not innocent mistakes."

Flint was under the control of a Snyder-appointed emergency manager when it switched its water source

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from Detroit to the Flint River in 2014 to save money. Lead from aging pipes contaminated tap water because the city followed state regulators' advice not to apply anti-corrosive treatments.

Despite residents' complaints of rashes, hair loss and other ailments, Snyder's administration waited 18 months to acknowledge a problem — after a doctor reported elevated lead levels in children.

Lyon and ex-chief medical executive Dr. Eden Wells are charged with involuntary manslaughter in the 2015 deaths of nine people with Legionnaires'. Authorities said they failed to alert the public about a regional spike in the disease when the water system might have lacked enough chlorine to combat bacteria.

Counts against others include perjury, obstruction of justice and extortion.

Lyon and Wells were among those charged in the previous investigation, which Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel's office disbanded in 2019. She appointed a new team that produced this week's indictments.

During the initial Flint probe, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials — a nonprofit representing public health agencies — warned against "criminalizing our exercise of professional judgment."

The community has a right to know about health threats, the group acknowledged in a court filing. But notifying the public too soon could lead to panic and rumors, it said, causing people to avoid places such as hospitals.

If the prosecution were successful, the group said, health officials "would face enormous pressure to shift their focus away from scientific analysis and toward reducing liability."

Hall said such "slippery slope" arguments ignore the Flint situation's uniqueness. Publicly available documents show Snyder administration officials appeared more concerned with "media responses and public relations" than "public health and carrying out their statutory duties," he said.

Sullivan, the Harvard professor, agreed the case probably wouldn't produce many imitators. Prosecuting a governor or other high-ranking officials for what amounts to poor job performance — even if intentional — is an "extraordinarily aggressive" approach, he said.

It's rare for public officials, let alone industry, to be held accountable for environmental contamination that disproportionately affects low-income and minority communities, said Sara Hughes, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan who studies urban environmental justice issues.

"It just kind of underscores how serious the crisis was," said Hughes, adding that the charges are important to help heal a struggling city whose residents have been through so much.

"It was hard for me to imagine how the community was going to move forward, how they were going to be able to trust government again," she said.

Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan.

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Sara Hughes' first name.

Trump to leave Washington on morning of Biden's inauguration

By JILL COLVIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump will leave Washington next Wednesday morning just before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration to begin his post-presidential life in Florida.

Refusing to abide by tradition and participate in the ceremonial transfer of power, Trump will instead hold his own departure ceremony at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland before his final flight aboard Air Force One.

Officials are considering an elaborate send-off event reminiscent of the receptions he's received during state visits abroad, complete with a red carpet, color guard, military band and even a 21-gun salute, according to a person familiar with the planning who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of a formal announcement.

Trump will become only the fourth president in history to boycott his successor's inauguration. And while he has said he is now committed to a peaceful transition of power — after months of trying to delegitimize Biden's victory with baseless allegations of mass voter fraud and spurring on his supporters who stormed

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the Capitol — he has made clear he has no interest in making a show of it.

He has not invited the Bidens to the White House for the traditional bread-breaking, nor has he spoken with Biden by phone. Vice President Mike Pence has spoken with his successor, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, calling her on Thursday to congratulate her and offer assistance, according to two people familiar with the call. Pence will be attending Biden's inauguration, a move Biden has welcomed.

While Trump spends the final days of his presidency ensconced in the White House, more isolated than ever as he confronts the fallout from the Capitol riot, staffers are already heading out the door. Many have already departed, including those who resigned after the attack, while others have been busy packing up their offices and moving out personal belongings — souvenirs and taxidermy included.

On Thursday, chief of staff Mark Meadows' wife was caught on camera leaving with a dead, stuffed bird. And trade adviser Peter Navarro, who defended the president's effort to overturn the election, was photographed carrying out a giant photo of a meeting between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. (Staff are allowed to purchase the photographs, said White House spokesman Judd Deere.) Also spotted departing the West Wing: a bust of Abraham Lincoln.

Stewart D. McLaurin, the president of the White House Historical Association, said he had reached out to the White House chief usher, who manages the building's artifacts with the White House curator, because of questions raised by the images.

"Be reminded that staff have items of their own that they brought to the White House and can take those items home as they wish. Some items are on loan to staff and offices from other collections and will be returned to those collections," he said in a statement.

Earlier this week, reporters covering the president's departure from the South Lawn spotted staff taking boxes into the residence for packing up the first family's belongings.

And on Friday the packing continued, with moving crates and boxes dotting the floor of the office suite where senior press aides work steps from the Oval Office in the West Wing. Walls in the hallways outside that once featured a rotating gallery of enlarged photographs of the president and first lady framed in gold suddenly were bare, with only the hooks that held the picture frames left hanging.

Moving trucks pulled in and out of the driveway outside.

While some people have been asked to stick around by the incoming administration, the White House has been reduced to a skeleton crew, with more scheduled to depart on Friday. That includes White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany. Come Monday, the press staff will be down to two.

Trump will leave Washington with his future deeply uncertain, two weeks after his supporters sent lawmakers and congressional staffers scrambling for safety as they tried to halt the peaceful transition of power. While Trump was once expected to leave office as the most powerful voice in the Republican Party and the leading contender for its 2024 nomination, he has been shunned by much of the party over his response to the violence, which left five people dead, including a Capitol Police officer.

Trump is expected to be joined in Florida by a handful of aides as he mulls his future.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

States declare emergencies, close capitols ahead of rallies

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Responding to warnings of potentially violent demonstrations, governors across the nation are calling out National Guard troops, declaring states of emergency and closing their capitols to the public ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration next week.

Though details remain murky, demonstrations are expected at state capitols beginning Sunday and leading up to Biden's succession of President Donald Trump on Wednesday. State officials hope to avoid the type of violence that occurred Jan. 6, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol, leaving a Capitol Police officer and four others dead.

The FBI has warned of the potential for violence at all state capitols and has said it is tracking an "ex-

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tensive amount of concerning online chatter, " including calls for armed protests.

Governors across the country are sending thousands of National Guard troops to Washington, D.C., where the National Mall has been closed to the general public as part of an intense security effort. More than a dozen governors also have called out the Guard to protect their own state capitols and aid local law enforcement officers.

"We are prepared for the worst, but we remain hopeful that those who choose to demonstrate at our Capitol do so peacefully, without violence or destruction of property," Michigan State Police Col. Joe Gasper said Friday, as Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced the Guard's role.

Crews installed a six-foot fence around the Michigan Capitol ahead of expected protests, and ground-level windows were boarded up at a nearby building that houses the governor's office. Gasper said an increased state police presence would remain at the statehouse at least through mid-February.

Some windows also were boarded at capitols in Wisconsin and Illinois, both of which activated the National Guard to help with security. Though the Wisconsin Capitol already was closed to the public because of the coronavirus, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' administration told those who had been coming into the Capitol to instead work remotely for the rest of the month.

Law enforcement officials were reducing parking around the capitol building in Madison this weekend and urging people to avoid the area as they braced for potential unrest. There was only one known organized event for the day, an anti-fascist demonstration where free food, drinks and clothes were to be distributed.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom is mobilizing up to 1,000 National Guard members over concerns of civil unrest. State officials on Thursday erected a chain link fence around the Capitol, bolstering other temporary and permanent barriers. The California Highway Patrol is refusing to issue permits for rallies at the Capitol.

"We're treating this very seriously and deploying significant resources to protect public safety, critical infrastructure and First Amendment Rights," Newsom said in a video message. "But let me be clear: There will be no tolerance for violence."

Other governors were encouraging people to stay away from capitol buildings during the coming days. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, closed the Capitol until after Biden's inauguration and activated hundreds of National Guard members. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb, a Republican, said Friday that officials "decided to err on the side of caution" and close the Capitol from Monday through Wednesday.

Citing the possibility of armed protests, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly on Friday began a one-week restriction on public access to the Capitol. Only those who have business with the Legislature or governor's office will be allowed inside, and they will have to provide an email showing they have a meeting or are testifying to a legislative committee.

Kelly and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf closed their Capitol buildings for a couple days next week, coinciding with the presidential inauguration. The Pennsylvania Capitol complex already had been closed to the general public because of the coronavirus pandemic, but the new order advises state employees who work in person to take off Tuesday and Wednesday; Monday is the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

"While we are not aware of any specific threats at this time, we want to act with an abundance of caution to keep employees safe," Wolf's administration said on its website.

Uncertainty heading into the weekend was a common theme among state officials and law enforcement officers. Many were enhancing security based on past demonstrations or general warnings but without specific expectations about how many protesters, if any, would show up outside state capitol buildings in the coming days.

The National Guard is supplementing security at Washington's capitol, where people broke a gate and entered the grounds of the governor's mansion last week. But Washington State Patrol spokesman Chris Loftis said Friday that there are "no known explicit threats" detailing the time, place and action of future demonstrations.

"We cannot be dismissive of the possible dangers but we should not be alarmists either," Loftis said in an email to media. The state patrol "has been directed to meet this discomfiting uncertainty with caution, preparedness, resolve, and calm — certainly, a wise course of action for all."

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Legislatures in several states, including Indiana and Michigan, also were canceling or limiting their work next week.

Oregon's Legislature will convene Tuesday. But the House and Senate have canceled floor sessions and committee hearings, and there will be no in-person meetings. Senate President Peter Courtney, a Democrat from Salem, said the decision was made after consulting with police. Last month, a violent crowd entered the Oregon Capitol, fought with police and damaged the building.

The Republican-led South Carolina House and Senate won't convene in full session next Tuesday or Wednesday, and committees will meet virtually. The Capitol building will be closed from Saturday through Wednesday "out of an abundance of caution," state and local authorities said in a joint statement.

Republican leaders of the Missouri House also canceled session for next week. Though several House members had expressed security concerns following the unrest in the nation's capitol, a written statement from GOP leadership cited a rising number of COVID-19 cases in the Capitol building as a reason for the cancellation.

Governors in Maryland, New Mexico and Utah all declared states of emergency ahead of potential demonstrations. Fencing was installed in a wide radius around the New Mexico Capitol. Utah's order allows authorities to close the Capitol grounds through next Thursday, the day after Biden's inauguration.

"We respect the right of Utah residents to peaceably assemble as guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution," Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican, said in a statement. "But we draw the line at threats to physical safety or to the Utah Capitol building. No violence of any kind will be tolerated."

Associated Press writers Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina; Tom Davies in Indianapolis; David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan; Sophia Eppolito in Salt Lake City; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Mark Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Don Thompson in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Dorothy Schmidt Cole, oldest living Marine, dies at 107

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. (AP) — Dorothy Schmidt Cole, recognized last year as the oldest living U.S. Marine, has died at age 107.

Beth Kluttz, Cole's only child, confirmed Friday that her mother died of a heart attack at Kluttz's home in Kannapolis, North Carolina, on Jan. 7.

The Charlotte Observer reports Cole enlisted as one of the earliest female Marine reservists following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. She had left her Ohio home to head to Pittsburgh, where she hoped to volunteer for the Navy, but because she was only 4 feet, 11 inches tall, she was deemed too short to meet Navy standards.

Undaunted by her rejection, Cole decided to learn how to fly an airplane and persuade the Marine Corps to let her be a pilot.

In July 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Marine Corps Women's Reserve into law, giving women the chance to fill positions left open by men headed to combat. The Corps delayed formation of the branch until February 1943, and Cole enlisted five months later at age 29, becoming one of the earliest volunteers for the branch.

Despite putting in 200 hours in the cockpit of a Piper Cub, Cole completed six weeks of boot camp at Camp Lejeune with the Women's Reserve's First Battalion and wound up "behind a typewriter instead of an airplane."

Cole's husband, Wiley, was in the Navy and served on the aircraft carrier USS Hornet, which sailed in both the Pacific Theater and the Solomon Islands campaign during World War II before it was torpedoed and sunk in October 1942.

Cole moved to San Francisco after the war to be with Wiley. They married and had their only child in 1953. The couple were both hired by the Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley in California before Wiley

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Cole died of a heart attack in 1955.

Kluttz moved from California to North Carolina in 1976 and Cole followed her to the area around 1979.

Case against woman charged in boyfriend's suicide to proceed

BOSTON (AP) — The manslaughter case against a former Boston College student accused of encouraging her boyfriend to take his own life will head toward trial, prosecutors said Friday.

A court this week partially denied the defense's motion to dismiss, finding that Inyoung You's words could have caused Alexander Urtula to kill himself, Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins' office said. The judge did dismiss one of the prosecution's theories, ruling that You's failure to summon help didn't cause his suicide, Rollins' office said.

Prosecutors say You sent Urtula, of Cedar Grove, New Jersey, thousands of messages in the last two months of their relationship, including many urging him to "go kill yourself." Urtula died in Boston on May 20, the day of his Boston College graduation.

The case grimly echoes that of Michelle Carter, who garnered headlines and an HBO film. The young Massachusetts woman was sentenced to 15 months in jail after she was convicted in 2017 of involuntary manslaughter for using text messages and phone calls to encourage her boyfriend, Conrad Roy, to kill himself in 2014.

An attorney for You said the defense is pleased that the court dismissed one of the prosecution's two theories.

"With respect to the single remaining theory, the Court noted that this is an incredibly complex area of law and that unlike in the Carter case Ms. You repeatedly begged her boyfriend not to commit suicide. We think this is a critical fact which will ultimately exonerate Ms. You," Howard Cooper said in a statement.

Stocks fall as economic pain deepens, rally runs out of gas

By STAN CHOE and DAMIAN J. TROISE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street closed out its first losing week in three with another drop on Friday after reports showed the pandemic is deepening the hole for the economy, as Washington prepares to throw it another lifeline.

The S&P 500 fell 27.29, or 0.7%, to 3,768.25, with stocks of companies that most need a healthier economy taking some of the sharpest losses. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 177.26, or 0.6%, to 30,814.26, and the Nasdaq composite dropped 114.14, or 0.9%, to 12,998.50.

Treasury yields also dipped as reports showed shoppers held back on spending during the holidays and are feeling less confident, the latest in a litany of discouraging data on the economy.

Stocks have run out of steam since the S&P 500 set a record high a week ago amid optimism that COVID-19 vaccines and more stimulus from Washington will bring an economic recovery. The S&P 500 fell 1.5% over the week.

Friday offered the first chance for traders to act after President-elect Joe Biden unveiled details of a \$1.9 trillion plan to prop up the economy. He called for \$1,400 cash payments for most Americans, the extension of temporary benefits for laid-off workers and a push to get COVID-19 vaccines to more Americans. It certainly fit with investors' expectation for a big and bold plan, but markets had already rallied powerfully in anticipation of it.

"To some extent, most of this optimism had been priced in, but the huge figures had also invited some contemplation as to whether the necessary bipartisan support will materialize for this huge sum," Jingyi Pan of IG said in a commentary. "The market appears to be playing it safe," she said.

Biden's Democratic allies will have control of the House and Senate, but only by the slimmest of margins in the Senate. That could hinder the chances of the plan's passage.

The urgency for providing such aid is ramping by the day. One report on Friday showed that sales at retailers sank by 0.7% in December, a crucial month for the industry. The reading was much worse than

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the 0.1% growth that economists were expecting, and it was the third straight month of weakness.

Other reports showed that a preliminary reading on consumer sentiment weakened more than economists expected, while inflation at the wholesale level remains low as the worsening pandemic keeps a lid on prices and economic activity. They follow a dismal report from Thursday showing that the pace of layoffs is accelerating across the country.

Falling bank stocks were some of the heaviest weights on the market, even though several of the industry's biggest names reported stronger profits for the end of 2020 than analysts expected. Wells Fargo slumped 7.8%, for example, and Citigroup dropped 6.9%.

While the overall results were good, "bank earnings didn't exactly wow anybody," said J.J. Kinahan, chief strategist with TD Ameritrade.

Bank stocks had run up in prior weeks on expectations that a stronger economy later this year and higher interest rates would mean bigger profits from making loans.

Like banks, stocks of smaller companies also fell more than the rest of the market in a mirror image of recent weeks. Smaller companies are seen as benefiting more from a healthier economy and stimulus from Washington than their bigger rivals, in part because they tend to have smaller financial cushions.

The Russell 2000 index of small-cap stocks lost 32.15, or 1.5%, to 2,123.20.

Even with Friday's drops, ebullience about a brighter economic future because of vaccines is keeping stocks near records and Treasury yields close to their highest levels since last spring. The Russell 2000 remains 7.5% higher for 2021 so far, towering over the S&P 500's 0.3% gain.

A big question for investors is what big stimulus for the economy from Washington would mean for interest rates.

"There are consequences to putting money into the system and the consequence is inflation," Kinahan said.

Treasury yields have been climbing on expectations that the government will borrow a lot more to pay for its stimulus, as well as rising forecasts for economic growth and inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury zoomed above 1% last week for the first time since last spring and briefly topped 1.18% this week.

That is raising worries about how much further interest rates can go before upsetting the stock market. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell helped to calm some of those concerns on Thursday with comments that investors took as leaning toward lower rates for longer.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury dipped to 1.09% from 1.11% late Thursday.

In markets abroad, European stocks slumped, while Asian indexes were mixed.

AP Business Writer Elaine Kurtenbach contributed.

Biden's aid plan could revamp economy, prompt GOP resistance

By JOSH BOAK AP Economics Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — The \$1.9 trillion rescue plan unveiled by President-elect Joe Biden offers the chance to sculpt the U.S. economy toward the Democrats' liking: a \$15 minimum wage, aid to poor families and federal dollars going to public schools.

It's an ambitious effort that would arrive after roughly \$4 trillion has already been devoted to fighting the pandemic. But it could be quickly trimmed by congressional Republicans who are skeptical about raising the minimum wage and increasingly focused on the federal budget deficit that ballooned under President Donald Trump.

"This is an opening bid. There is a sense from Republican staff that \$1.9 trillion is a little rich," said Bill Hoagland, a former Republican aide who is senior vice president of the Bipartisan Policy Center. "But President-elect Biden is an astute student of the Senate and negotiations and I have a feeling that they would expect this to be the top and not everything would be accepted."

Biden stressed in his Thursday speech announcing the plan that low interest rates mean the government should borrow now in hopes of having faster growth and a more stable financial outlook in the future.

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"If we invest now boldly, smartly and with unwavering focus on American workers and families, we will strengthen our economy, reduce inequity and put our nation's long-term finances on the most sustainable course," Biden said.

The question is what elements of the Biden plan can win enough Republican votes to clear the evenly split Senate, where at least 60 votes will be needed. Without Republican buy-in, Biden's proposal could pass with a simple majority under budget reconciliation -- but that's a time-consuming process that would limit what Democrats are able to accomplish.

Florida Sen. Rick Scott, a Republican, attacked the plan Friday as an attempt to pass liberal policies and shuffle money to Democratic states with its \$350 billion in state and local government aid.

"We cannot simply throw massive spending at this with no accountability to the current and future American taxpayer," Scott said in a statement.

The \$15 minimum wage may be among the most controversial provisions. Many business groups and Republicans have historically opposed it.

Matthew Haller, head of government relations for the International Franchise Association, noted that \$15 wages would be relatively high in parts of rural Georgia and West Virginia, both states that will be represented by Democratic senators. But, more importantly, the coronavirus outbreak has crushed sales at restaurants and small retailers that might be forced to close if they face higher labor costs.

"It's the straw that breaks the camel's back," Haller said.

Nor have projections about stable federal budgets proven to be accurate in the past. After reviewing the Biden plan, Marc Goldwein, senior vice president at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, doubted that the additional spending would cause enough growth to shore up the federal government's long-term finances.

"More stimulus and support will improve the economic outlook, and that alone may make it worth it," he said. "But it is very unlikely that the greater borrowing will improve the fiscal outlook."

The Biden plan conforms to the view that the federal government can reduce economic inequality and fuel growth by increasing spending on social services and sending cash directly to households.

It would provide direct payments of \$1,400 per person to eligible households, temporarily expand tax credits for children and childcare, help childcare providers and enhance jobless benefits and food aid. There would be \$400 billion to get the nation vaccinated, including \$130 billion that could help schools safely reopen with smaller classes or better ventilation systems.

The array of spending in the Biden plan would halve the child poverty rate to 6.6%, the lowest level ever based on records going back to 1967, according to estimates from researchers at Columbia University.

"Lifting millions of families out of poverty even for one year can have beneficial long-term consequences for the affected children," said Zach Parolin, one of the researchers at Columbia.

There is also the possibility that the Biden plan could lead to lasting changes in the social safety net. By temporarily making the child tax credit fully refundable, families who don't earn enough money to owe federal income taxes would still qualify for the maximum benefit, which the plan would increase to \$3000 per year per child, more for children under age 6.

"It's a reasonable question why more hasn't been done on this previously," said Melissa Kearney, an economist at the University of Maryland. "Perhaps it took this pandemic to make the economic suffering of poor families - and the moral and economic cost of that - glaringly obvious."

But Biden is only providing the framework for negotiations, rather than a finished product and much of the promised benefits could be diluted. Alec Phillips, an economist with Goldman Sachs, expects there to ultimately be \$1.1 trillion in relief, about 60% of what Biden outlined Thursday.

The challenge is that Senate Democrats would likely need to rely on the reconciliation process to avoid the risk of filibusters from Republicans. Without reconciliation, Biden would need 60 votes.

Reconciliation, which requires a simple majority, has never been used for discretionary spending, a category that would appear to include the state fiscal aid, education grants and public health spending proposed by Biden, Phillips said in an analyst note.

"We do not expect ten Republicans to support a \$1.9 trillion relief package," he said. "While it is possible that congressional Democrats might find a way to do this, it looks more likely that the need to find bipartisan support might constrain the size of the package."

Abbas decrees first Palestinian elections in 15 years

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Friday decreed parliamentary and presidential elections for later this year in what would be the first vote of its kind since 2006, when the Islamic militant group Hamas won a landslide victory.

Elections would pose a major risk for Abbas' Fatah party and also for Hamas, which welcomed the decree. Both have faced protests in recent years over their inability to reconcile with one another, advance Palestinian aspirations for statehood or meet the basic needs of those in the territories they govern.

Fatah and Hamas have been publicly calling for elections for more than a decade but have never been able to mend their rift or agree on a process for holding them, and despite Friday's decree, it remained far from clear whether the voting would actually be held.

Elections could also complicate President-elect Joe Biden's plans to restore aid to the Palestinians and to revive the peace process with Israel.

The 2006 election victory by Hamas, which is considered a terrorist group by Israel and Western countries, led to heavy international pressure being placed on the Palestinian Authority. Clashes between Fatah and Hamas raged for more than a year, culminating in Hamas' 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip, which it still controls despite a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade and three wars with Israel.

Abbas' Palestinian Authority is confined to the occupied West Bank, where it administers major population centers according to agreements with Israel. Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 war, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

The decree sets a timeline in which legislative elections would be held on May 22, followed by presidential elections on July 31 — the first since Abbas was elected to a four-year term in 2005. Elections for the National Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which represents the Palestinian cause internationally, would be held Aug. 31.

Abbas handed the decree to Hanna Nasir, the head of the Central Election Commission.

Hamas welcomed the decree and expressed its "strong eagerness to make this obligation successful."

"We have worked in the past months to surmount all hurdles to reach this day, and we have shown a lot of flexibility," it said in a statement. It also called for dialogue ahead of the vote.

Fatah and Hamas have tried to reconcile on a number of occasions over the years, but every attempt has devolved into bickering and mutual recriminations, leaving the Palestinians divided politically and geographically, and further dashing their hopes for independence.

Mkhaimar Abusada, a political science professor at Gaza's Al-Azhar University, said the decree "points to a certain seriousness by Abbas on the issue of elections, regardless of the problems they could face and the disagreements that are not yet settled."

A poll carried out in December by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that if parliamentary elections were held, Fatah would win 38% of the vote and Hamas would win 34%. Abbas would lose in a presidential election against Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, 43% to 50%, according to the survey. The pollsters interviewed 1,270 Palestinians face to face across the West Bank and Gaza, and reported a margin of error of 3%.

Hamas has spent years building up its own government in Gaza, including by hiring new civil servants to replace those loyal to Abbas. It has also refused to give up its vast arsenal of rockets and other arms, and considers Israel a sworn enemy.

Abbas is opposed to violence and favors negotiations leading to a two-state solution with Israel, a position with wide international support.

It would be virtually impossible for Hamas to assume responsibility over the Palestinian enclaves in the

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West Bank, where Israel maintains overall security control. The Palestinian Authority coordinates with Israel on security, economic and other matters.

Abbas, 85, has led the Palestinian Authority and the PLO since the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004 and has no clear successor.

Associated Press writer Joseph Krauss in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

No charges in Pennsylvania discarded-ballots case

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — No criminal charges will be filed against a former temporary elections worker authorities have said mistakenly discarded nine military ballots ahead of the November presidential election, a federal prosecutor announced Friday.

Officials have previously blamed the decision to toss out the ballots on an unidentified and improperly trained contract worker who had been handling mail-in ballots for the county for two days. The ballots were later retrieved from the trash and were counted with other mailed ballots after the Nov. 3 election.

"After a thorough investigation conducted by the FBI and prosecutors from my office, we have determined that there is insufficient evidence to prove criminal intent on the part of the person who discarded the ballots," Acting U.S. Attorney Bruce Brandler, a career prosecutor, said in a news release.

"Therefore, no criminal charges will be filed and the matter is closed," he said.

President Donald Trump repeatedly brought up the nine ballots as he pressed groundless claims of election fraud, including two mentions during the first presidential debate. Brandler's predecessor, Dave Freed, a Trump nominee who recently stepped down ahead of the change in administrations, has said that seven of the ballots were cast for Trump. The other two had been resealed.

Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, a Democrat whose office oversees voting in Pennsylvania, has previously described the discarded ballots as a "bad error" but not a matter of intentional fraud. The Department of State provided training for Luzerne County election workers in the wake of the September incident.

The unidentified worker was fired.

Ex-foreign correspondent reflects on risks for US reporters

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — In the summer of 2000, I was among a group of foreign correspondents, photographers and video journalists who went to England to attend a hostile environment-first aid training course.

The trainers, all former Royal Marine commandos, taught us how to gingerly probe our way out of a minefield, about booby traps and treating gunshot and shrapnel wounds. Instructors posed as casualties, complete with fake blood squirting from wounds, and assessed whether our slapping on of bandages and tourniquets would have saved lives or led to deaths.

I know the importance of this kind of training and preparation after a quarter-century covering news overseas or managing coverage, including of wars, a coup, terrorist attacks and other violence. I've come under fire several times.

This week, now as a reporter in Oregon, I attended virtual training by the state police on what to do if there's a shooting rampage in the Oregon Capitol. The Legislature's leadership, for the first time, included journalists in the training after several were assaulted by rioters outside the state Capitol in December.

When I drive to cover protests these days, I throw a gas mask into the car. I also think about safety in ways that remind me of my time working in other countries.

Covering protests in America is starting to look a little bit like reporting from an overseas hot spot. Even before rioters got into Congress last week, producing the kinds of images viewers in America are more used to seeing in countries going through civil strife, journalists in state capitals had been approaching their jobs differently. Some use bulletproof vests and helmets, some organizations hire security, and safety is a central part of coverage planning. All of this was unheard of a couple of years ago.

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Thankfully, we are a long way from the kind of conflict coverage that colleagues and I experienced overseas. Alongside an Associated Press photographer and a cameraman working for the BBC, I came under heavy gunfire from Lesotho army troops during an invasion by the South African National Defense Force in 1998. We had to abandon our bullet-riddled car and lay as flat as possible in a ditch for six hours as bullets whined inches from our heads, sounding like lethal bees. We managed to run for our lives after nightfall.

One of my AP colleagues who later came from Nairobi to help cover that invasion, a gregarious American TV producer and cameraman named Myles Tierney, was shot dead less than four months later by a rebel child soldier in Sierra Leone.

While it is still unimaginable that journalists in the U.S. would face such peril, I do increasingly worry about safety. It's not inconceivable that amid heightened tensions journalists could be felled by violence, either with intent or indiscriminately, while trying to do their job and report what they are observing. We're not enemies of the people, as President Donald Trump has often called us. We should not be threatened, called traitors or assaulted. Our work supports democracy by informing the people, the electorate, of events.

"Wherever the people are well informed they can be trusted with their own government," Thomas Jefferson once wrote.

An uninformed electorate, one that believes lies instead of objective reporting, is a recipe for disaster for America's democracy.

I've seen this happen in other nations I've reported from, places where democracy has frayed in part because of misinformation and crackdowns on the press, such as Venezuela under Hugo Chavez or Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega.

Ortega lost the 1990 election and handed over power to the winner. But since he regained power in the 2006 election, his government has been limiting freedoms of the press and the opposition. Some media outlets have been shuttered. A new law gives Ortega the power to classify citizens as "traitors to the homeland" and ban them from running as candidates.

Despite serious concerns, I am confident America won't see its democratic experiment hit the dustbin of history after 245 years. This is a stress test, the most serious one since the Civil War. I believe the democratic system will persevere.

Easing the divisions, however, will be hard to do. What has happened at the Oregon Capitol is a clear example of how those divisions have become sharper and more bitter.

Until last year, protests at the marble-sheathed state Capitol had been relatively mild. There were rallies for action against climate change, against required vaccinations for schoolchildren, and in favor of — and opposition to — gun control.

In one 2019 demonstration, against a planned gas pipeline and marine export terminal, people occupied the governor's office. They sang and listened to speeches into the night until being removed by police and booked for trespassing. A prosecutor declined to file charges.

Then in 2020, Oregon's legislative session imploded, ending early amid a boycott by minority Republicans over a climate change measure. Loggers, truckers and others had protested in favor of the walkout, blaring truck horns as they drove around the statehouse. Proud Boys and other alt-right groups have repeatedly clashed with Black Lives Matter protesters here.

On Dec. 21, a right-wing mob smashed windows, assaulted journalists and pepper-sprayed police. Foreshadowing the storming of the U.S. Capitol 16 days later, some rioters got inside after a Republican lawmaker left the door open for them.

Tensions are increasing. On Wednesday, Gov. Kate Brown activated the Oregon National Guard because of possible continued violence at the Capitol.

The stress test won't end anytime soon.

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

Pfizer temporarily reduces European deliveries of vaccine

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By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer confirmed Friday it will temporarily reduce deliveries to Europe of its COVID-19 vaccine while it upgrades production capacity to 2 billion doses per year.

The EU Commission chief said she'd immediately called Pfizer's CEO. But in an indication the issue might go beyond Europe, Canada's government said it was also affected.

Line Fedders, a spokeswoman for Pfizer Denmark, said that to meet the new 2 billion dose target Pfizer is upscaling production at its plant in Puurs, Belgium, which "presupposes adaptation of facilities and processes at the factory which requires new quality tests and approvals from the authorities."

"As a consequence, fewer doses will be available for European countries at the end of January and the beginning of February," she said.

"This temporary reduction will affect all European countries," she said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Germany's Health Ministry said Friday Pfizer had informed the European Commission, which was responsible for ordering vaccines from the company, that it won't be able to fulfill all of the promised deliveries in the coming three to four weeks.

The ministry said German officials took note of the unexpected announcement by the Commission "with regret" because the company had made binding delivery commitments by mid-February.

"The federal and state governments expect the EU Commission to provide clarity and certainty as soon as possible in negotiations with Pfizer about further deliveries and delivery dates," the statement said.

The Commission sealed the vaccine deals on behalf of all 27 member states, but is not responsible for the timetable and deliveries.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she had "immediately called the CEO of Pfizer."

"He reassured me that all guaranteed doses of the first quarter will be delivered in the first quarter. He is personally on the case on reducing the delay period and to make sure that they will catch up as soon as possible," von der Leyen said.

Earlier Friday Commission health policy spokesman Stefan de Keersmaecker said deliveries are made on the basis of purchase orders and specific contracts that are concluded between the member states and the companies.

"The specificities of these arrangements are laid down in these purchase orders or contracts," he said.

The Commission has secured up to 600 million extra doses of the Pfizer vaccine that's produced in partnership with Germany's BioNTech.

Pfizer's Belgian plant supplies all shots delivered outside the United States, including Canada where procurement minister Anita Anand said Friday that the U.S. drug-maker is temporarily reducing deliveries because of issues with its European production lines. While the company said it still was able to deliver four million doses by the end of March, that is no longer guaranteed, she said.

Canadian officials said the reduction means Canada's vaccine shipments will be cut in half for the next month.

The country has received just 380,000 doses of the vaccine so far and was supposed to get another 400,000 this month, and is expecting almost two million doses in February.

Norwegian authorities also said Friday they had been notified by Pfizer about the reduction that will start next week as the company raises its annual dose target from the current 1.3 billion.

"We had predicted 43,875 vaccine doses from Pfizer in week 3. Now it seems that we get 36,075 doses," said Geir Bukholm, director of infection control at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

"The stock we now have will be able to compensate for a reduction in the planned deliveries for a few weeks ahead if there is a need for this," he said.

In Finland, broadcaster YLE said the delay would cause domestic delivery problems at the end of January and the beginning of February.

Danish officials expressed concern.

"We are in a race with coronavirus and the new more contagious virus variant," Health Minister Magnus Heunicke said. "Therefore, we take the decline in deliveries very seriously."

Henrik Ullum, head of Statens Serum Institut, a government agency that maps the spread of the coronavirus in Denmark, said he expected the development to mean that "in the coming time we can vaccinate fewer than first assumed."

Samuel Petrequin and Raf Casert in Brussels, Frank Jordans in Berlin and Rob Gillies in Toronto contributed.

Transgender athletes look to changing of White House guard

By PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

Transgender athletes are getting an ally in the White House next week as they seek to participate as their identified gender in high school and college sports — although state legislatures, Congress and the courts are all expected to have their say this year, too.

Attorneys on both sides say they expect President-elect Joe Biden's Department of Education will switch sides in two key legal battles — one in Connecticut, the other in Idaho — that could go a long way in determining whether transgender athletes are treated by the sex on their birth certificates or by how they identify.

Debate is also expected in statehouses. Last year, bills to restrict transgender athletes' participation to their gender assigned at birth were brought up in 17 states, although only one, Idaho's, became law.

It may ultimately fall to Congress to clarify once and for all whether Title IX, the civil rights law that guarantees equal opportunities for women and girls in education, protects or bars the participation of transgender females in women's sports, said Elizabeth Sharrow, an associate professor of public policy at the University of Massachusetts.

"I think if they do that, lawmakers at the state level can propose laws, but it doesn't mean those proposals are going to be taken seriously in the legislative bodies they serve in or that if the state passes those laws anyway that they would necessarily be considered legitimate," she said. "The courts will sort that out."

During his campaign, Biden committed to restoring transgender students' access to sports, bathrooms and locker rooms in accordance with their gender identity.

"States that like Idaho attempt to bar trans girls from girls sports, regardless of age of transition, medical intervention or anything else, with a new federal administration, will now be risking lawsuits by the federal government, Justice Department intervention and the loss of federal funding," said Chase Strangio, the American Civil Liberties Union's deputy director for transgender justice.

In Idaho, a law signed in March became the nation's first to prohibit transgender students who identify as female from playing on female teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. The law was supported by President Donald Trump's administration but blocked from implementation by a federal judge while a legal challenge by ACLU proceeds.

"Allowing males to enter our sports isn't fair," Madison Kenyon, a cross-country runner at Idaho State, said in a statement Friday. "It changes everything because it eliminates the connection between an athlete's effort and her success. Idaho's law helps make sure that, when women like me work hard, that hard work pays off, and we have a shot at winning."

In Connecticut, the Trump administration intervened in support of a lawsuit filed by several non-transgender girls in Connecticut who were seeking to block a state policy that allows transgender athletes to compete in line with their identity. The plaintiffs argued transgender female runners had an unfair physical advantage.

But the two transgender runners at the center of that case said in court filings that being able to run against girls was central to their well-being.

"Running has been so important for my identity, my growth as a person, and my ability to survive in a world that discriminates against me," Andraya Yearwood wrote to the court. "I am thankful that I live in Connecticut where I can be treated as a girl in all aspects of life and not face discrimination at school."

Neither of the two closely watched cases is expected to be decided for months. A federal judge has scheduled a hearing for Feb. 26 on a request to dismiss the Connecticut lawsuit.

The ACLU and the Christian nonprofit Alliance Defending Freedom, which is fighting in Connecticut and Idaho to bar the participation of trans athletes, expect Biden's administration to declare that Title IX also protects transgender girls from discrimination.

Opponents say Title IX protects cisgender girls and allowing trans girls to participate against them is a violation of the statute.

"I think that is extremely concerning for the future of women's sports and would reverse nearly 50 years of gains for women under Title IX," said Christiana Holcomb, an attorney for the Alliance Defending Freedom.

In states that have adopted policies on transgender participation high school sports, approaches have varied.

Currently, 14 states and the District of Columbia have policies similar to Connecticut's, according to Transathlete.com. Fourteen others allow transgender participation with certain conditions, such as hormone treatments or other proof the athlete is transitioning, according to the organization.

Opponents of bans are encouraged by Biden's victory and a 2020 Supreme Court decision that found that transgender people are protected from discrimination in employment.

"It's possible that the Connecticut case could evaporate under a new administration that doesn't want to press it," said Erin Buzuvis, a professor at the Western New England School of Law who specializes in gender and discrimination in education and athletics.

"The Idaho situation is different because it is a state law that is being challenged under the equal protection doctrine," Buzuvis said. "That could set some sort of national standard about what kind of policies states are allowed to have or prohibited to have. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the case would say, 'Here is the one policy that all states must have.'"

'This is not a game': Global virus death toll hits 2 million

By CHRIS SHERMAN, MARIA CHENG, JOHN LEICESTER and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press
MEXICO CITY (AP) — The global death toll from COVID-19 topped 2 million Friday, crossing the threshold amid a vaccine rollout so immense but so uneven that in some countries there is real hope of vanquishing the outbreak, while in other, less-developed parts of the world, it seems a far-off dream.

The numbing figure was reached just over a year after the coronavirus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The number of dead, compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Brussels, Mecca, Minsk or Vienna. It is roughly equivalent to the Cleveland metropolitan area or the entire state of Nebraska.

"There's been a terrible amount of death," said Dr. Ashish Jha, a pandemic expert and dean of Brown University's School of Public Health. At the same time, he said, "our scientific community has also done extraordinary work."

In wealthy countries including the United States, Britain, Israel, Canada and Germany, millions of citizens have already been given some measure of protection with at least one dose of vaccine developed with revolutionary speed and quickly authorized for use.

But elsewhere, immunization drives have barely gotten off the ground. Many experts are predicting another year of loss and hardship in places like Iran, India, Mexico and Brazil, which together account for about a quarter of the world's deaths.

"As a country, as a society, as citizens we haven't understood," lamented Israel Gomez, a Mexico City paramedic who spent months shuttling COVID-19 patients around by ambulance, desperately looking for vacant hospital beds. "We have not understood that this is not a game, that this really exists."

Mexico, a country of 130 million people, has received just 500,000 doses of vaccine and has put barely half of those into the arms of health care workers.

That's in sharp contrast to the situation for its wealthier northern neighbor. Despite early delays, hundreds of thousands of people are rolling up their sleeves every day in the United States, where the virus

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has killed about 390,000, by far the highest toll of any country.

All told, over 35 million doses of various COVID-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, according to the University of Oxford.

While vaccination drives in rich countries have been hamstrung by long lines, inadequate budgets and a patchwork of state and local approaches, the obstacles are far greater in poorer nations, which can have weak health systems, crumbling transportation networks, entrenched corruption and a lack of reliable electricity to keep vaccines cold enough.

Also, the majority of the world's COVID-19 vaccine doses have already been snapped up by wealthy countries. COVAX, a U.N.-backed project to supply shots to developing parts of the world, has found itself short of vaccine, money and logistical help.

As a result, the World Health Organization's chief scientist warned it is highly unlikely that herd immunity — which would require at least 70% of the globe to be vaccinated — will be achieved this year. As the disaster has demonstrated, it is not enough to snuff out the virus in a few places.

"Even if it happens in a couple of pockets, in a few countries, it's not going to protect people across the world," Dr. Soumya Swaminathan said this week.

Health experts fear, too, that if shots are not distributed widely and fast enough, it could give the virus time to mutate and defeat the vaccine — "my nightmare scenario," as Jha put it.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the 2 million milestone "has been made worse by the absence of a global coordinated effort." He added: "Science has succeeded, but solidarity has failed."

Meanwhile, in Wuhan, where the scourge was discovered in late 2019, a global team of researchers led by WHO arrived Thursday on a politically sensitive mission to investigate the origins of the virus, which is believed to have spread to humans from wild animals.

The Chinese city of 11 million people is bustling again, with few signs it was once the epicenter of the catastrophe, locked down for 76 days, with over 3,800 dead.

"We are not fearful or worried as we were in the past," said Qin Qiong, a noodle shop owner. "We now live a normal life. I take the subway every day to come to work in the shop. ... Except for our customers, who have to wear masks, everything else is the same."

It took eight months to hit 1 million dead but less than four months after that to reach the next million.

While the death toll is based on figures supplied by government agencies around the world, the real number of lives lost to is believed to be significantly higher, in part because of inadequate testing and the many fatalities inaccurately attributed to other causes, especially early in the outbreak.

"What was never on the horizon is that so many of the deaths would be in the richest countries in the world," said Dr. Bharat Pankhania, an infectious diseases expert at Britain's University of Exeter. "That the world's richest countries would mismanage so badly is just shocking."

In rich and poor countries alike, the crisis has devastated economies, thrown multitudes out of work and plunged many into poverty.

In Europe, where more than a quarter of the world's deaths have taken place, strict lockdowns and curfews have been reimposed to beat back a resurgence of the virus, and a new variant that is believed to be more contagious is circulating in Britain and other countries, as well as the U.S.

Even in some of the wealthiest countries, the vaccination drives have been slower than expected. France, with the second-largest economy in Europe and more than 69,000 known virus deaths, will need years, not months, to vaccinate its 53 million adults unless it sharply speeds up its rollout, hampered by shortages, red tape and considerable suspicion of the vaccines.

Still, in places like Poissy, a blue-collar town west of Paris, the first shots of the Pfizer formula were met with relief and a sense that there is light at the end of the pandemic tunnel.

"We have been living inside for nearly a year. It's not a life," said Maurice Lachkar, a retired 78-year-old acupuncturist who was put on the priority list for vaccination because of his diabetes and his age. "If I catch the virus I am done."

Maurice and his wife, Nicole, who also got vaccinated, said they might even allow themselves hugs with their two children and four grandchildren, whom they have seen from a socially safe distance only once

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or twice since the pandemic hit.

"It is going to be liberating," he said.

Throughout the developing world, the images are strikingly similar: rows and rows of graves being dug, hospitals pushed to the limit and medical workers dying for lack of protective gear.

In Peru, which has the highest COVID-19 fatality rate in Latin America, hundreds of health care workers went on strike this week to demand better pay and working conditions in a country where 230 doctors have died of the disease. In Brazil, authorities in the Amazon rainforest's biggest city planned to transfer hundreds of patients out because of a dwindling supply of oxygen tanks that has resulted in some people dying at home.

In Honduras, anesthesiologist Dr. Cesar Umaña is treating 25 patients in their homes by phone because hospitals lack the capacity and equipment.

"This is complete chaos," he said.

Cheng reported from Toronto, Leicester from Poissy, France, and Goodman from Miami. Associated Press writers Victoria Milko in Jakarta, Indonesia, and David Biller in Rio de Janeiro contributed to this report, along with AP video journalist Sam McNeil in Wuhan, China.

Global death toll from COVID-19 tops 2M amid vaccine rollout

The Associated Press undefined

The global death toll from COVID-19 topped 2 million Friday as vaccines developed at breakneck speed are being rolled out around the world in an all-out campaign to vanquish the threat.

The milestone was reached just over a year after the coronavirus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

The number of dead, compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Brussels, Mecca, Minsk or Vienna. It is roughly equivalent to the population of the Cleveland metropolitan area or the entire state of Nebraska.

While the count is based on figures supplied by government agencies around the world, the real toll is believed to be significantly higher, in part because of inadequate testing and the many fatalities that were inaccurately attributed to other causes, especially early in the outbreak.

It took eight months to hit 1 million dead. It took less than four months after that to reach the next million.

"Behind this terrible number are names and faces — the smile that will now only be a memory, the seat forever empty at the dinner table, the room that echoes with the silence of a loved one," said U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres. He said the toll "has been made worse by the absence of a global coordinated effort."

"Science has succeeded, but solidarity has failed," he said.

In wealthy countries including the United States, Britain, Israel, Canada and Germany, millions of citizens have already been given some measure of protection with at least one dose of vaccine developed with revolutionary speed and quickly authorized for use.

But elsewhere, immunization drives have barely gotten off the ground. Many experts are predicting another year of loss and hardship in places like Iran, India, Mexico and Brazil, which together account for about a quarter of the world's deaths.

Rare sedition charge gains interest after Capitol attack

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Civil War-era sedition law being dusted off for potential use in the mob attack on the U.S. Capitol was last successfully deployed a quarter-century ago in the prosecution of Islamic militants who plotted to bomb New York City landmarks.

An Egyptian cleric, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, and nine followers were convicted in 1995 of seditious conspiracy and other charges in a plot to blow up the United Nations, the FBI's building, and two tunnels

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and a bridge linking New York and New Jersey.

Applications of the law making it a crime to conspire to overthrow or forcefully destroy the government of the United States have been scant. But its use is being considered against the mob that killed a police officer and rampaged through the U.S. Capitol last week.

Michael Sherwin, acting U.S. attorney for D.C., has said "all options are on the table," including sedition charges, against the Capitol invaders.

"Certainly if you have an organized armed assault on the Capitol, or any government installation, it's absolutely a charge that can be brought," said Andrew McCarthy, a former federal prosecutor who secured convictions at Abdel-Rahman's 1995 trial.

The challenge, he said, is whether prosecutors can prove people conspired to use force.

"In our case, conspiracy was a layup because of the nature of the terrorist cell we were targeting. In this case, can they show conspiratorial activity or was it one of these things that spontaneously combusted, which makes conspiracy harder to prove?" McCarthy said.

Karen Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at the Fordham University School of Law, said sedition charges in an attack against the center of U.S. government are even more appropriate than in the New York bombing plot.

"Of course we should use it here. That's what this is, seditious conspiracy," she said.

Prosecutors had scant evidence against Abdel-Rahman when they arrested him months after a bomb exploded in February 1993 at the World Trade Center, killing six people.

Then-Manhattan U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White went to Washington to convince the FBI and Attorney General Janet Reno that Abdel-Rahman should be charged with seditious conspiracy, a law enacted after the Civil War to arrest Southerners who might keep fighting the U.S. government.

The law's hefty penalty — up to 20 years — boosted its value before terrorism laws were overhauled in 1996, McCarthy said.

Prosecutors offered jurors Abdel-Rahman's fiery speeches, witness testimony and a recording of his conversation with an FBI informant in which the sheikh said U.S. military installations could be attacked.

Abdel-Rahman argued on appeal that he was never involved in planning actual attacks against the U.S. and his hostile rhetoric was protected free speech. His conviction was upheld and the so-called "Blind Sheikh" died in prison in 2017 at 78.

In another case, Oscar Lopez Rivera — a former leader of a Puerto Rican independence group that orchestrated a bombing campaign that left dozens of people dead or maimed in the 1970s and 1980s — spent 35 years in prison for seditious conspiracy before President Barack Obama commuted his sentence in 2017.

In 2012, U.S. District Judge Victoria A. Roberts in Detroit dismissed seditious conspiracy charges brought against a militia group's members who spoke of engaging local, state and federal law enforcement in combat.

While considering bail in the case, the judge said "their right to engage in hate filled, venomous speech, is a right that deserves First Amendment protection." She also wrote that the group's rhetoric spoke of "reclaiming America, not overthrowing the United States Government."

Before the Capitol attack, federal prosecutors talked about using the seditious conspiracy statute in cases involving protests against police brutality, though none were brought.

In a Sept. 17 memorandum, Jeffrey A. Rosen, now the acting U.S. Attorney General, urged prosecutors nationwide to consider filing seditious conspiracy charges against what he called "violent rioters" during racial injustice demonstrations sparked by the police killing of George Floyd.

Rosen wrote that the law didn't require proof of a plot to overthrow the U.S. government.

Lawyers interviewed by The Associated Press agreed that it would be stretch to try to put President Donald Trump or lawyer Rudolph Giuliani on trial for sedition for what some have criticized as incendiary rhetoric at the rally preceding the mob attack on the Capitol.

McCarthy labeled Trump's actions that day reprehensible, but said "you would never be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he intended force to be used."

Carl Tobias, a University of Richmond law professor, said prosecuting Trump for urging people to march

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to the Capitol and not be "weak" or other statements would be a problem.

"I think people who work in the area of criminal procedure would say it has a checkered history," Tobias said of seditious conspiracy law, which has drawn criticism for targeting those with unpopular views and chilling free speech.

"People who are absolutists about the First Amendment would be troubled by it and civil libertarians on either end of the spectrum," he said.

New York civil rights lawyer Ron Kuby, who represented Abdel-Rahman for a time, predicted that with or without a sedition charge, the people who committed the most serious offenses at the Capitol will pay "a substantial price, certainly a price none of them ever expected."

"Those who started a riot have no idea just how oppressive the government can actually be and they are about to find out," Kuby said.

Wisconsin teen charged with killing infant daughter in woods

MONROE, Wis. (AP) — A 16-year-old boy has admitted fatally shooting his newborn daughter and leaving her body inside a fallen tree in the woods in southern Wisconsin, according to prosecutors.

Logan Kruckenburg-Anderson, of Albany, is charged as an adult with first-degree intentional homicide and hiding a corpse. He's being held on \$1 million bail following a hearing this week in Green County Circuit Court in Monroe.

His public defender did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

According to a criminal complaint, the teen took the infant shortly after she was born Jan. 5 to a wooded area in Albany, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) southwest of Milwaukee, placed her inside a fallen tree and shot her twice in the head.

The complaint says Kruckenburg-Anderson's girlfriend gave birth to the child, whom she named Harper, in a bathtub at her home in Albany.

Prosecutors said the couple decided they could not keep the baby and talked about several options, including dropping her off at a local fire station or placing her up for adoption, the State Journal reported.

They agreed that Kruckenburg-Anderson would get rid of the infant simply by dropping her somewhere, according to authorities. Several days later the girlfriend's father called police to report that Kruckenburg-Anderson had taken the child and the baby had not been seen since.

Kruckenburg-Anderson was arrested Sunday after telling investigators where he left the child. A preliminary hearing will be held on Jan. 20.

Unity has long been a theme, and anxiety, for new presidents

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When Joe Biden addresses the country for the first time as president, his inaugural speech is likely to echo calls for unity that predecessors have invoked since the first time George Washington was sworn in.

Unity has since been a theme, and an anxiety, for many incoming presidents, who have faced economic and social crises and moments when the very future of the U.S. was in doubt. Historians mention the first inaugural speeches of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln as possible parallels for Biden, who has said his goal is to "restore the soul" of the country.

Biden, who assumes office just two weeks after an armed seige of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump, will preside over a nation in which millions believe Trump's baseless claims that the election was stolen. Few presidents have faced such questions about their own legitimacy.

"Unity has always been an aspiration," says presidential historian Douglas Brinkley. "It seems like whenever we have foreign policy flare-ups, we use the word freedom. But when we have domestic turmoil we use the word unity."

The United States was forged through compromise among factions that disagreed profoundly on slavery,

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regional influence and the relative powers of state and federal government. When Washington assumed office in 1789 he cited the blessings of providence in noting that “the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which most governments have been established.”

Jefferson was the third U.S. president, and the first whose rise was regarded by opponents as a kind of emergency. The 1800 election won by Jefferson marked the beginning of competing political parties — Jefferson was a leader of the Democratic-Republican Party, losing incumbent John Adams a Federalist — and critics regarded the new president as a dangerous atheist. “JEFFERSON — AND NO GOD!!!” was how one Federalist paper described Jefferson’s candidacy. Adams did not attend the inauguration, a breach rarely repeated although Trump has vowed to do the same.

“Let us then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind,” Jefferson urged in his address. “We are all republicans: we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this union, or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it.”

Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, a Federalist who administered the oath of office to Jefferson, wrote later that the speech was “in the general well judged and conciliatory.”

Lincoln’s pleas were more dire, and tragically unmet, despite what historian Ted Widmer calls his “genius to combine urgency with literary grace.” Seven out of 11 future Confederate states had seceded from the U.S. before he spoke, in March 1861, over fears he would end slavery. The Civil War would begin a month later. “We are not enemies, but friends,” Lincoln had insisted, reminding fellow Americans of their “mystic chords of memory” while also warning that resistance to the will of voters would destroy democracy.

“A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does of necessity fly to anarchy or to despotism,” he said.

Historian David Greenberg, whose books include “Nixon’s Shadow” and “Republic of Spin,” cites Richard Nixon’s inaugural in 1969 as another speech given at a time of social turmoil. The U.S. was violently divided over the Vietnam War and civil rights, and Nixon himself had long been seen as an unprincipled politician exploiting fears and resentments — appealing to what he would call “the silent majority.” His speech at times was openly and awkwardly modeled on the 1961 inaugural of John F. Kennedy, who had defeated Nixon in 1960.

“We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division, wanting unity,” Nixon stated. “We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another — until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices.”

Some presidents asked for unity, others asserted it.

Franklin Roosevelt, elected in a landslide in 1932 during the Great Depression, said in his first inaugural speech: “If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other.” Four years later, having won by an even greater landslide, he declared the country had “recognized” a need beyond financial help, a “deeper” need, “to find through government the instrument of our united purpose.”

Unity can prove more imagined than real. When James Buchanan spoke in 1857, three years before the Civil War, he claimed that “all agree that under the Constitution slavery in the states is beyond the reach of any human power except that of the respective states themselves wherein it exists.” Rutherford B. Hayes, whose presidency was marked by the retrenchment of federal troops from the post-Civil War South and ongoing resistance from Southern whites to equal rights for Blacks, declared during his 1877 inaugural that true peace could be achieved through the “united and harmonious efforts of both races” and the honest work of local self-government.

“A president often claims the country is ‘united’ behind a belief when it’s more wishful thinking than reality,” Widmer says. “I’m not sure how many Americans wanted to do something for their country after JFK asked them to — although there were impressive new kinds of volunteers, like the Peace Corps.

And I think that many Americans still appreciated help from the government, even after Ronald Reagan declared that 'government is the problem.' That's the problem with soundbites: They often oversimplify."

VIRUS DIARY: Unpacking one vaccination day, step by step

By CAROLE FELDMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The line stretched nearly a block long. Nobody was grumbling about the wait. Those gathered at a senior wellness center in Washington, D.C., viewed it as a matter of life or death. The nation's capital had just opened up coronavirus vaccines to people 65 and older because of their increased risk. I was among those who had a shot within reach.

In the nation's capital, along with the rest of the country, coronavirus cases have surged since the holidays. More than 32,800 positive cases have been recorded overall in the city. Nearly 850 people have died. And now add fears that the mob insurrection at the Capitol earlier this month could turn into a superspreader event, adding to the totals.

People were on edge.

As I waited for my shot, I wondered if I should be there. The district had offered the vaccine first to health care workers, but were there others who should have come before me, people like teachers and workers in grocery stores and other businesses providing essential services during the pandemic? What about the older old — people over 75?

Yes, journalists are considered essential, and I also am a teacher at the college level. But equally important to me, I haven't seen my grandson and his parents in California for more than a year — half his life — and I long to get on a plane to visit. And I do fit the new criteria for vaccines, people 65 and older. So I was all in.

The city started offering appointments to the over-65 crowd Monday. I called up the website, filled in the questionnaire and looked for a location. The site closest to my home had no times available so I widened my search, finally choosing a senior center about 3 miles away.

Later, I checked my neighborhood listserv. It was filled with complaints from residents who found the whole process unwieldy and were furious that all the available appointments had been booked. A D.C. council member acknowledged that "the rollout came with a significant number of frustrations and challenges" but said there would be other opportunities for seniors to get the vaccine.

It's an issue of supply and demand. There are just under 85,000 D.C. residents 65 and older who qualify for shots, but only 6,700 appointments were available the first week. I was one of the lucky ones.

It was cold, but the length of the line at the wellness center didn't bother me. I was grateful that we were outside for much of the wait, and that people were voluntarily self-distancing. That was enforced once we moved inside. Everyone wore a mask.

Some people who were visibly frail were moved to front of the line. No one complained.

And while I waited, I worked. In a bit of irony, that meant consulting with a colleague on a story about the Trump administration's push to expand vaccination to more people, including those over 65. The District of Columbia, it turns out, was ahead of the curve.

Ninety minutes after I arrived, I was given the Moderna vaccine, administered by a Safeway pharmacy manager brought in from Rehoboth, Delaware. After we talked about her hometown — a favorite beach vacation spot for my family — and other vaccinations I might need, she told me how to sign up for the second dose. Then I was sent to wait in another room to make sure I didn't have a serious allergic reaction to the shot. I didn't.

I get my second dose Feb. 10. I've already started thinking about booking that flight to California.

There's only one negative — now everyone knows my age.

Virus Diary, an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus pandemic through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world. Follow Washington-based AP news editor Carole Feldman on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/CaroleFeldman>

Iranian Guard drones in drill mirror those in Saudi attacks

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard conducted a drill Friday that saw "suicide drones" crash into targets and explode, triangle-shaped aircraft that strongly resembled those used in a 2019 attack in Saudi Arabia that temporarily cut the kingdom's oil production by half.

Iran has long denied launching the attack on the sites of Abqaiq and Khurais while Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels initially claimed the assault.

However, the United States, Saudi Arabia and U.N. experts believe the drones were Iranian, likely launched amid an escalating series of incidents stemming from President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The Guard's decision to use the drones on Friday alongside a series of missile drills comes as Iran tries to pressure President-elect Joe Biden over the nuclear accord, which he has said America could re-enter.

Tehran recently seized a South Korean oil tanker and begun enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade levels, as the U.S. sent B-52 bombers, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and a nuclear submarine into the region as a deterrent in Trump's final days as president.

"The nuclear issue is likely to be the Biden administration's first foreign policy test," wrote Simon Henderson, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near-East Policy. "Ultimately, the United States holds the best hand, but Iran may still be able to play the game quite well, even with a weak hand."

Iranian state television described the drill as taking place in the country's vast central desert, the latest in a series of snap exercises called amid the escalating tensions over its nuclear program. The footage showed four of the unmanned, triangle-shaped drones flying in a tight formation.

Another scene showed the drones smash into targets Iran described as being "hypothetical enemy bases" and detonate. One target appeared to be a missile vehicle — a telling target in a region where American forces and their Gulf Arab allies rely on Patriot missile batteries for defense.

Looking at the footage frame by frame, the triangle-shape drone appeared to have two fins on either side. This strongly resembles the so-called "Delta" drones used both in the Abqaiq and Khurais assault in September 2019, as well as a May 2019 attack on Saudi Arabia's crucial East-West pipeline. Saudi Arabia showed damaged drones to journalists after the attacks, while U.N. experts included images of the drone in a report.

Experts refer to such bomb-carrying drones as "loitering munitions." The drone flies to a destination, likely programmed before its flight, and either explodes in the air over the target or on impact against it.

Iranian officials did not acknowledge the resemblance, nor did they immediately identify the drones used.

"The message of this drill is our might and firm determination to defend our sovereignty, our holy ruling system and our values against the enemies of Islam and Iran," said Gen. Hossein Salami, the Guard's top commander.

The Guard also launched solid-fuel ballistic missiles named Dezful and Zolfaghar during the drill, with state TV repeatedly airing imagery of the simultaneous launch of eight missiles from truck-based launchers.

Iran's missile program has a 2,000-kilometer (1,250-mile) range, far enough to reach archenemy Israel and U.S. military bases in the region. Last January, after the U.S. killed a top Iranian general in a drone strike in Baghdad, Tehran retaliated by firing a barrage of ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops, which saw dozens of troops injured with concussions.

Associated Press journalists Amir Vahdat and Mehdi Fattahi in Tehran, Iran, contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

Groton Daily Independent

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Today is Saturday, Jan. 16, the 16th day of 2021. There are 349 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 16, 2020, the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump opened in the Senate, with senators standing and swearing an oath of "impartial justice." Trump again denounced the proceedings as a "hoax," while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said new evidence reinforced the need to call additional witnesses.

On this date:

In 1865, Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman decreed that 400,000 acres of land in the South would be divided into 40-acre lots and given to former slaves. (The order, later revoked by President Andrew Johnson, is believed to have inspired the expression, "Forty acres and a mule.")

In 1912, a day before reaching the South Pole, British explorer Robert Scott and his expedition found evidence that Roald Amundsen of Norway and his team had gotten there ahead of them.

In 1919, pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski (pah-dehr-EHF'-skee) became the first premier of the newly created Republic of Poland.

In 1920, Prohibition began in the United States as the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution took effect, one year to the day after its ratification. (It was later repealed by the 21st Amendment.)

In 1969, two manned Soviet Soyuz spaceships became the first vehicles to dock in space and transfer personnel.

In 1987, Hu Yaobang resigned as head of China's Communist Party, declaring he'd made mistakes in dealing with student turmoil and intellectual challenges to the system.

In 1989, three days of rioting began in Miami when a police officer fatally shot Clement Lloyd, a Black motorcyclist, causing a crash that also claimed the life of Lloyd's passenger, Allan Blanchard. (The officer, William Lozano, was convicted of manslaughter, but then was acquitted in a retrial.)

In 1991, the White House announced the start of Operation Desert Storm to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. (Allied forces prevailed on Feb. 28, 1991.)

In 2002, Richard Reid was indicted in Boston on federal charges alleging he'd tried to blow up a U.S.-bound jetliner with explosives hidden in his shoes. (Reid later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2003, the space shuttle Columbia blasted off for what turned out to be its last flight; on board was Israel's first astronaut, Ilan Ramon (ee-LAHN' rah-MOHN'). (The mission ended in tragedy on Feb. 1, when the shuttle broke up during its return descent, killing all seven crew members.)

In 2006, Africa's first elected female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn in as Liberia's new president.

In 2007, Democratic Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois launched his successful bid for the White House.

Ten years ago: Former Haitian strongman Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, who'd been living in exile in France, made a surprise return to Haiti as the country wrestled with a political crisis, cholera outbreak and stalled reconstruction from a devastating earthquake. "The Social Network" won top movie honors at the Golden Globes with four prizes, including best drama and director; top TV honors went to "Boardwalk Empire" and "Glee."

Five years ago: The U.N. nuclear agency certified that Iran had met all of its commitments under a landmark deal, prompting the West to lift economic sanctions that had been in place for years. Taiwan elected Tsai Ing-wen as its first female president, handing her pro-independence party its first majority in the national legislature. Former NFL coach Ted Marchibroda, 84, died in Weems, Virginia.

One year ago: Health authorities in China announced that a second person had died from a new coronavirus. The Senate overwhelmingly approved a pact rewriting the rules of trade with Canada and Mexico. Six months after becoming president and CEO of the Recording Academy, Deborah Dugan was placed on "administrative leave"; she said she was ousted after complaining of sexual harassment and questioning the integrity of the Grammy nominations process. (Dugan was fired weeks later.) The New York Mets announced that they and manager Carlos Beltrán had agreed to "mutually part ways"; the former Houston Astros player had been the only player mentioned by name when Major League Baseball issued its findings from an investigation of sign-stealing by the Astros.

Today's Birthdays: Author William Kennedy is 93. Author-editor Norman Podhoretz is 91. Opera singer

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Marilyn Horne is 87. Hall of Fame auto racer A.J. Foyt is 86. Singer Barbara Lynn is 79. Country singer Ronnie Milsap is 78. Singer Katherine Anderson Schaffner (The Marvelettes) is 77. Country singer Jim Stafford is 77. Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger is 74. Movie director John Carpenter is 73. Actor-dancer-choreographer Debbie Allen is 71. Rhythm-and-blues singer Maxine Jones (En Vogue) is 62. Singer Sade (shah-DAY') is 62. Pop/rock singer-songwriter Jill Sobule is 62. Rock musician Paul Webb (Talk Talk) is 59. Actor David Chokachi (CHOH'-kuh-chee) is 53. Former Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta is 52. Actor-writer-director Josh Evans is 50. Actor-comedian Jonathan Mangum is 50. Actor Richard T. Jones is 49. Actor Josie Davis is 48. Model Kate Moss is 47. Actor-playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda is 41. Country musician James Young (The Eli Young Band) is 41. Rock musician Nick Valensi (The Strokes) is 40. Actor Renee Felice Smith is 36. NFL quarterback Joe Flacco is 36. Actor Yvonne Zima is 32.