

Groton Daily Independent

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Schedule

Thurs., Jan. 21

Junior High Boys Basketball at Britton-Hecla (7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m.)
Girls Basketball hosting Clark/Willow Lake. JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity

Friday, Jan. 22

Updated: Boys Basketball at Clark. 7th grade at 4 p.m., No 8th grade game. C game at 4:30 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Sat., Jan. 23

10:00am: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Invitational at Arlington

Mon., Jan. 25

Boys basketball with Northwestern in Groton. 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Tuesday, Jan. 26: Boys basketball with Warner in Groton. 7th at 5:30 p.m. and 8th at 6:30 p.m.



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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Coming up on GDILIVE.COM



Basketball Recaps

JV Girls: Groton 51, Ab. Christian 12

Groton Area's junior varsity team defeated Aberdeen Christian, 51-12. The game was played at the Aberdeen Civic Center and was broadcast on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the White House Inn.

Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 12-4, 26-6 and 39-12.

Sydney Leicht led the Tigers with 11 points followed by Elizabeth Fliehs with seven, Faith Traphagen, Brooklyn Hansen and Emily Clark each had five, Kennedy Hansen and Lydia Meier each had four, Jerica Locke and Emma Schinkel each had three and Laila Roberts and Mia Crank each had two.

Aberdeen Christian was led by Bailey Englund with six while Rachel Beaner had four and Sophie Bosma and Kayla Block each had one.

Girls Varsity: Groton 38, Ab. Christian 27

The varsity team jumped out to a 5-0 lead and then led at the quarter breaks, 14-8, 27-10 and 30-22 en route to a 38-27 win.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bierman Farm Service, Jark Real Estate, Harr Motors - Bary Keith, Bahr Spray Foam, Allied Climate Professionals- Kevin Nehls, S.D. Army National Guard - Brent Wienk, John Sieh Agency, Groton Vet Clinic, Grand Slam Computers, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting and Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

Gracie Traphagen had 17 points which included five three-pointers. Alyssa Thaler had 12 points while Brooke Gengerke had four, Kenzie McInerney three and Allyssa Locke added two points.

Aspen Johnson had 10 of the team's 35 rebounds, Gengerke had three of the team's 11 assists and McInerney had three of the team's five steals. Groton Area had 10 turnovers and 12 team fouls.

Grace Kaiser led the Knights with nine points while Kaylee Block had six, Chloe Bosma five, Joy Rohrbach three and Chloe Holt and Sophie Bosma each had two points.

Groton Area made six of 24 two-pointers for 25 percent, eight of 24 three-pointers for 33 percent and was two of two from the line off of Aberdeen Christian's 12 team fouls.

The Knights were 10 of 46 from the field for 22 percent and was six of 10 from the line off of Groton Area's 12 team fouls.

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JV Girls: Groton 21, Webster 14

The Lady Tigers posted a 21-14 win over Webster Area. Groton Area had a 13 point rally in the second half to get the upper hand. The Bearcats led, 4-3, after the first quarter, and 10-6 at half time. Groton Area took the lead at the end of the third quarter, 13-10.

Jerica Locke and Sydney Leicht each had five points, Brooklyn Hansen, Kennedy Hansen and Lydia Meier each had three points and Jaedyn Penning had one point.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by James and Arlene Olson, Pierpont, grandparents of Jaedyn Penning.

Payton Snell led Webster with six points, Erin Case had four and Addy Kucker and Elliott Steiner each had two points.

Varsity Girls: Groton 39, Webster 35

Alyssa Thaler had a double-double night the Lady Tigers with 13 points and 10 rebounds as Groton Area defeated Webster Area, 44-39. The game was played in Webster.

Groton Area led at the quarterstops, 14-4, 25-15 and 33-26.

Allyssa Locke added 10 points, Brooke Gengerke had eight, Kenzie McInerney seven, Gracie Traphagen four and Aspen Johnson two. Thaler and Gengerke each made two three-pointers and Traphagen made one.

Groton Area made 10 of 28 two-pointers for 36 percent, five of 22 in three-pointers for 23 percent, and was nine of 17 from the line for 53 percent off of Webster's 18 team fouls. The Tigers had 19 turnovers while Webster had 17. Traphagen had four of the team's 10 assists and Gengerke had three of the team's nine steals. Traphagen had one block shot.

Webster made 14 of 45 shots for 31 percent and was eight of 13 from the line for 62 percent off of Groton Area's 16 team fouls.

Both varsity games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bierman Farm Service, Jark Real Estate, Harr Motors - Bary Keith, Bahr Spray Foam, Allied Climate Professionals- Kevin Nehls, S.D. Army National Guard - Brent Wienk, John Sieh Agency, Groton Vet Clinic, Blocker Construction, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting and Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc.

Varsity Boys: Groton 58, Webster 52

The Groton boys varsity team had a 15-point lead late in the third quarter, but watched it disappear as Webster came to with four, 54-50. The Tigers went on to win, 58-52.

Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 20-8, 33-22 and 50-37.

Lane Tietz made four three-pointers in the first quarter and added one in the second quarter as led all scorers with 28 points. Others adding to the Tiger tally were Tristan Traphagen and Tate Larson with eight each, Jacob Zak had five, Jayden Zak four, Isaac Smith made a three-pointer for three points and Cole Simon had two points. Jacob Zak also had a three-pointer.

Groton Area was 15 of 32 in two-pointers for 47 percent, made seven of 17 in three-pointers for 41 percent, was seven of 11 from the line for 64 percent off of Webster's 13 team fouls, Traphagen had nine of the team's 25 rebounds, Tietz and Jayden Zak each had four of the team's 15 assists, and Jacob Zak and Larson each had three of the team's 12 steals. Both teams had 16 turnovers.

Jaydon Keller led Webster with 23 points as he made four three-pointers. Jacob Pereboom had 12, Jake Case nine, Jacob Keller six and Brent Bearman added two points.

JV Boys: Groton 38, Webster 21

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 38-21. The Tigers led at the quarterstops at 12-5, 24-10 and 34-16.

Logan Ringgenberg led the Tigers with 11 points followed by Wyatt Hearnen with nine, Colby Dunker, Jackson Cogley and Holden Sippel each had four and Cole Simon, Favian Sanchez and Cade Larson each had two points.

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Carson Mount and Gavins Sannes each had four points to lead Webster with Tommy Vergeldt and Jared Schimmel each having three and Peyton Kuecker and Arden Knoll each had two points.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Jim and Shirley VanDenHemel, grandparents of Cade and Tate Larson.

- Paul Kosel

Conde National League

Team Standings: Cubs 16, Mets 16, Pirates 13, Giants 12, Braves 12, Tigers 3

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 267, 202; Lance Frohling 226, 201; Ryan Bethke 207; Russ Bethke 202

Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 641, Lance Frohling 590, Ryan Bethke 572

Women's High Games: Women Mary Larson 171, 151, 150; Sam Bahr 170, 149; Nancy Radke 146

Women's High Series: Mary Larson 472, Sam Bahr 465, Vickie Kramp 402

Groton hosts wrestling quad

Groton Area hosted a quadrangular wrestling match on Tuesday. Groton wrestled 10 matches among the three teams with Groton winning 11 matches via forfeits. Groton beat Britton-Hecla and Hamlin and lost to Clark/Willow Lake.

Groton 42, Britton-Hecla 18

Easten Ekern, Cole Bisbee, Lane Krueger, Adrian Knutson and Dragr Monson all won by forfeit in Groton Area's match with Britton-Hecla.

There were only two matches: Christian Ehresmann pinned Connor Glines, 1:02, and Korbin Kucker pinned Dashed Davidson, 2:33.

Clark/Willow Lake 42, Groton 24

Dragr Monson, Christian Ehresmann and Lane Krueger all posted wins over Clark/Willow with Korbin Kucker and Cole Bisbee winning by forfeit.

Monson pinned Matthew Batchelor in 1:03 at 113 pounds, Ehresmann decisioned Gunnar Kvistad, 3-2, at 126 pounds, and Lane Krueger decisioned Kasey Michalski, 3-0, at 220 pounds.

Easten Ekern was pinned by Elliot Bratland, 2:59, and Adrian Knutson was pinned by Avery Nichols, 3:03.

Groton 42 Hamlin 6

Groton wrestled three matches against Hamlin with Christian Ehresmann pinning Brock Gisselbeck, 3:36, at 132 pounds; Cole Bisbee pinned Kaden St. Pierre, 3:23, at 160 pounds; and Lane Krueger pinned Michael Stevenson, 4:33, at 195 pounds. Winning by forfeit were Dragr Monson, Korbin Kucker, Easten Ekern and Adrian Knutson.

City puts in bid for Wells Fargo Building

The Groton City Council voted Tuesday night to submit a bid for the Wells Fargo Building located in downtown Groton. Wells Fargo will be closing the Groton branch and the building is up for sale. According to Brown County records, the property is assessed at \$320,647.

The taxes on the property are \$6,703.76 for the 2020 tax year. Of that, \$2,603.97 goes to the city, \$1,153.69 goes to the county, \$129.22 goes to the fire district, \$2,707.32 goes to the school and \$19.56 goes to the James River Water Development District. The taxes, in addition to revenue loss from electric, water and sewer, will no longer be paid if the property comes off the tax roles.



Piping put together

Some of the piping for the new water tower and new pump house has been put together and set in the hole. The new pump house will be built over these pipes, just south of the current pump house. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

#332 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Mixed numbers tonight: New cases and hospitalizations are down, which bodes well for the future; but deaths are way, way up, which means our present is grim. Here it is:

There were 183,200 new cases reported today, a good sign that the declines seen over the long weekend may not have offered false hope. The seven-day new-case average has declined by 11 percent; it's been a long while since this number showed a decline. We're now at 24,482,000, which is 0.8% more than yesterday's total. And hospitalizations are flat, also for the first time in a long time. We're off the record for an eleventh consecutive day.

The dark spot is the deaths report: 4213 today. Fourth-worst ever and likely to get worse—much worse—in the next few weeks as that big holiday surge in new cases turns up in the mortality statistics. We have now lost 405,820 American lives to this virus, 1.0% more than yesterday. Tragic.

Texas looks to be in real trouble again: averaging 20,000 new cases per day over the past week. They were at 4000 per day in October, so this is worlds worse. Test positivity rates are soaring in some areas of the state, hospitals are filling up, and deaths are increasing. California may be leveling off, but is still in deep trouble too. And Arizona, Oklahoma, and South Carolina are sinking. New York is surging; after months fighting back this virus, numbers are rising again.

Despite this bad news, there is good news as some states emerge from the depths of the latest surge, falling at long last below 25 daily new cases/100,000 residents: Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, and Michigan. So we have progress. The heat map looks better today than it has looked in two solid months—since November 20. So there's that.

In the not-so-great news category, there seems to be a new variant of this coronavirus, this one apparently originating in southern California. That makes sense when you consider the huge infection rate in that region and that more transmissions means more mutations. We also know that any one of those mutations may be beneficial to the virus and can, under the right (wrong??) conditions produce a prevalent variant. (For a review of how higher transmission rates can lead to mutations better adapted to spread and cause disease, see my Update #278 posted November 27 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4210859298930444>.) This new one, named CAL.20C, seems to have first showed up in July, but didn't cause a great many cases until November when it began to spread quickly. More than half the samples collected on January 13 in Los Angeles County were of this variant. We don't know much about CAL.20C yet, either whether it causes more severe disease or whether it is more contagious, but if it has so quickly increased in prevalence in this population to 20 to 30 percent of samples being sequenced, there's at least a chance it spreads more easily. Further evidence that it may be more easily transmissible is that it has also shown up in Washington, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, New York, Connecticut, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. We're not sure how common it is outside California, but it's worrying we're seeing it elsewhere at all, much less across the country. This could be just a so-called founder effect, where a variant emerges into a situation ripe for it to spread rapidly, for example, falling into a few big superspreader events; or it could be truly more transmissible. It's not great that Eric Vail, director of molecular pathology at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, told the New York Times that "I'm decently confident that this is a more infectious strain of the virus." We did not need this.

Let's talk about this new variant we know more about and strongly suspect is more highly transmissible, B.1.1.7. We're not sure yet just why it is more transmissible, but it is possible it binds more efficiently to our cells, which means it will be more efficient in causing infection once it's in a new host. If that's the case, then it could take less virus to establish infection—which means less time in the same room with an infected person will transmit it. Or it could simply mean an infected person sheds more virus and that increases the risk. We will undoubtedly discover more as time goes on, but in the meanwhile, what are we supposed to do about it?

First thing is to do everything you've been doing—or should have been doing—all along, only more. Don't skip a precaution just this once because just this once may well be the one time that does it. Then step it

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up: Consider a more effective mask—two or three layers. I am seeing some recommendations you seek out a surgical mask now that they are more available; if you have a mask with a filter pocket, consider putting in that additional filter if you haven't done that. For the next month or two, don't spend time indoors with people who are not in your household. If you have to work, of course you will; but don't spend time indoors with anyone in circumstances you can avoid. Distance. Rigorously. Ten feet is better than six feet. Hand hygiene. Any risk you took before takes on additional danger now, so don't take it if you can avoid it. Shop less often, and take less time when you do. Go shopping when crowding will be less. Get delivery or curbside pickup if you can afford it. Avoid nonessential shopping. Turn down that dinner invitation; turn down all indoor social invitations. Get takeout. See your friends later, not now. If you must spend time indoors with others, seek out spaces with excellent ventilation. Open windows if the weather permits. If you can't avoid these indoor exposures, consider acquiring a stand-alone high efficiency particulate (HEPA) filter sufficient to the size of the room. Limit the time you spend in high-risk environments. Avoid air travel for now. Reduce possible exposures and increase your precautions. You can't afford to get sloppy now. Really. And if you have the chance to be vaccinated, take it. Please. That's for all of us, not just for you, and your failure to be vaccinated impacts many more people than you

This is brief because I've spent the day as I do every Inauguration Day (I cop to being a total political junkie), no matter who wins, watching the transfer of power in this great country. What I saw today gives me hope that we can come together in our fight against this virus for the good of all of us. I listened to President Bush acknowledge that our new President's success is our success.

And I listened to our 22-year-old inaugural poet say, "So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left, with every breath from my bronze, pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one, we will rise from the golden hills of the West, we will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution, we will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states, we will rise from the sunbaked South, we will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation, in every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful, when the day comes we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it."

In an interview tonight, as she was asked about these final lines, she said, "Hope isn't something we ask from others it is something that we have to demand from ourselves." Let's do that. Please.

Stay well. We will talk tomorrow.

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Jan. 20th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota: Community Spread for week of Jan. 18:

None: Harding downgraded from minimal to none.

Minimal: Corson, Faulk, Haakon downgraded from moderate to minimal.

Moderate: Hand, Mellette upgraded from minimal to moderate; Tripp downgraded from substantial to moderate.

Substantial: Aurora, Brule, Lyman, McPherson, Miner, Potter, Ziebach upgraded from moderate to substantial, .

No Spread: Buffalo and Harding.

Positive: +277 (106,065 total) Positivity Rate: 6.9%

Total Tests: 3989 (842,111 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1018 (393,343 total)

Hospitalized: +17 (6109 total) 195 currently hospitalized (-5)

Avera St. Luke's: 10 (+2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 4 (+1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +0 (1667 total)

Recovered: +406 (100,293 total)

Active Cases: -129 (4103)

Percent Recovered: 94.6%

Vaccinations: +980 (58456)

Vaccinations Completed: +136 (9965)

Brown County Vaccinations: +90 (2312) 23 (+1) completed

Beadle (38) +6 positive, +6 recovered (68 active cases)

Brookings (32) +20 positive, +32 recovered (219 active cases)

Brown (75): +12 positive, +28 recovered (199 active cases)

Clark (4): +4 positive, +0 recovered (8 active cases)

Clay (13): +1 positive, +7 recovered (63 active cases)

Codington (73): +4 positive, +19 recovered (147 active cases)

Davison (55): +4 positive, +7 recovered (96) active cases)

Day (23): +0 positive, +1 recovered (23 active cases)

Edmunds (5): +2 positive, +3 recovered (35 active cases)

Faulk (13): +2 positive, +0 recovered (7 active cases)

Grant (35): +4 positive, +0 recovered (34 active cases)

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

Hughes (30): +9 positive, +7 recovered (85 active cases)

Lawrence (35): +5 positive, +11 recovered (80 active cases)

Lincoln (70): +33 positive, +26 recovered (277 active cases)

Marshall (5): +1 positive, +2 recovered (12 active cases)

McCook (22): +1 positive, +3 recovered (16 active cases)

McPherson (4): +3 positive, +1 recovery (24 active case)

Minnehaha (296): +52 positive, +88 recovered (962 active cases)

Pennington (161): +47 positive, +55 recovered (499 active cases)

Potter (3): +0 positive, +2 recovered (22 active cases)

Roberts (34): +0 positive, +3 recovered (45 active cases)

Spink (24): +5 positive, +4 recovered (30 active cases)

Walworth (14): +2 positive, +3 recovered (47 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 20:

- 3.6% rolling 14-day positivity
- 158 new positives
- 5,258 susceptible test encounters
- 55 currently hospitalized (-33)
- 1,177 active cases (-57)
- 1,387 total deaths (+1)

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| County | Positive Cases | Recovered Cases | Negative Persons | Deceased Among Cases | Community Spread | % RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly) |
|-------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|--|
| Aurora | 439 | 408 | 804 | 11 | Substantial | 8.82% |
| Beadle | 2586 | 2480 | 5401 | 38 | Substantial | 11.98% |
| Bennett | 374 | 357 | 1101 | 8 | Moderate | 3.08% |
| Bon Homme | 1502 | 1462 | 1946 | 23 | Substantial | 6.15% |
| Brookings | 3329 | 3078 | 10642 | 32 | Substantial | 9.31% |
| Brown | 4797 | 4523 | 11613 | 75 | Substantial | 9.03% |
| Brule | 671 | 635 | 1744 | 7 | Substantial | 15.38% |
| Buffalo | 415 | 403 | 856 | 12 | Minimal | 0.00% |
| Butte | 941 | 899 | 2965 | 20 | Substantial | 8.79% |
| Campbell | 116 | 111 | 229 | 4 | Minimal | 0.00% |
| Charles Mix | 1187 | 1113 | 3664 | 14 | Substantial | 9.09% |
| Clark | 329 | 317 | 897 | 4 | Moderate | 9.52% |
| Clay | 1723 | 1647 | 4796 | 13 | Substantial | 8.08% |
| Codington | 3686 | 3466 | 8951 | 73 | Substantial | 11.36% |
| Corson | 457 | 442 | 957 | 11 | Minimal | 10.81% |
| Custer | 715 | 682 | 2509 | 10 | Substantial | 14.85% |
| Davison | 2858 | 2707 | 5975 | 55 | Substantial | 5.18% |
| Day | 582 | 536 | 1599 | 23 | Substantial | 9.76% |
| Deuel | 450 | 422 | 1040 | 7 | Substantial | 11.43% |
| Dewey | 1371 | 1314 | 3599 | 18 | Substantial | 6.56% |
| Douglas | 409 | 382 | 844 | 9 | Substantial | 13.16% |
| Edmunds | 440 | 393 | 926 | 5 | Substantial | 4.94% |
| Fall River | 487 | 457 | 2394 | 13 | Substantial | 14.13% |
| Faulk | 326 | 306 | 628 | 13 | Minimal | 7.14% |
| Grant | 869 | 800 | 2015 | 35 | Substantial | 20.93% |
| Gregory | 495 | 460 | 1148 | 26 | Moderate | 2.44% |
| Haakon | 240 | 227 | 494 | 9 | Minimal | 9.09% |
| Hamlin | 656 | 578 | 1601 | 38 | Substantial | 12.05% |
| Hand | 321 | 308 | 726 | 4 | Moderate | 10.00% |
| Hanson | 328 | 311 | 644 | 4 | Moderate | 8.57% |
| Harding | 89 | 88 | 163 | 1 | None | 0.00% |
| Hughes | 2140 | 2027 | 5941 | 30 | Substantial | 3.96% |
| Hutchinson | 738 | 689 | 2130 | 22 | Substantial | 17.86% |

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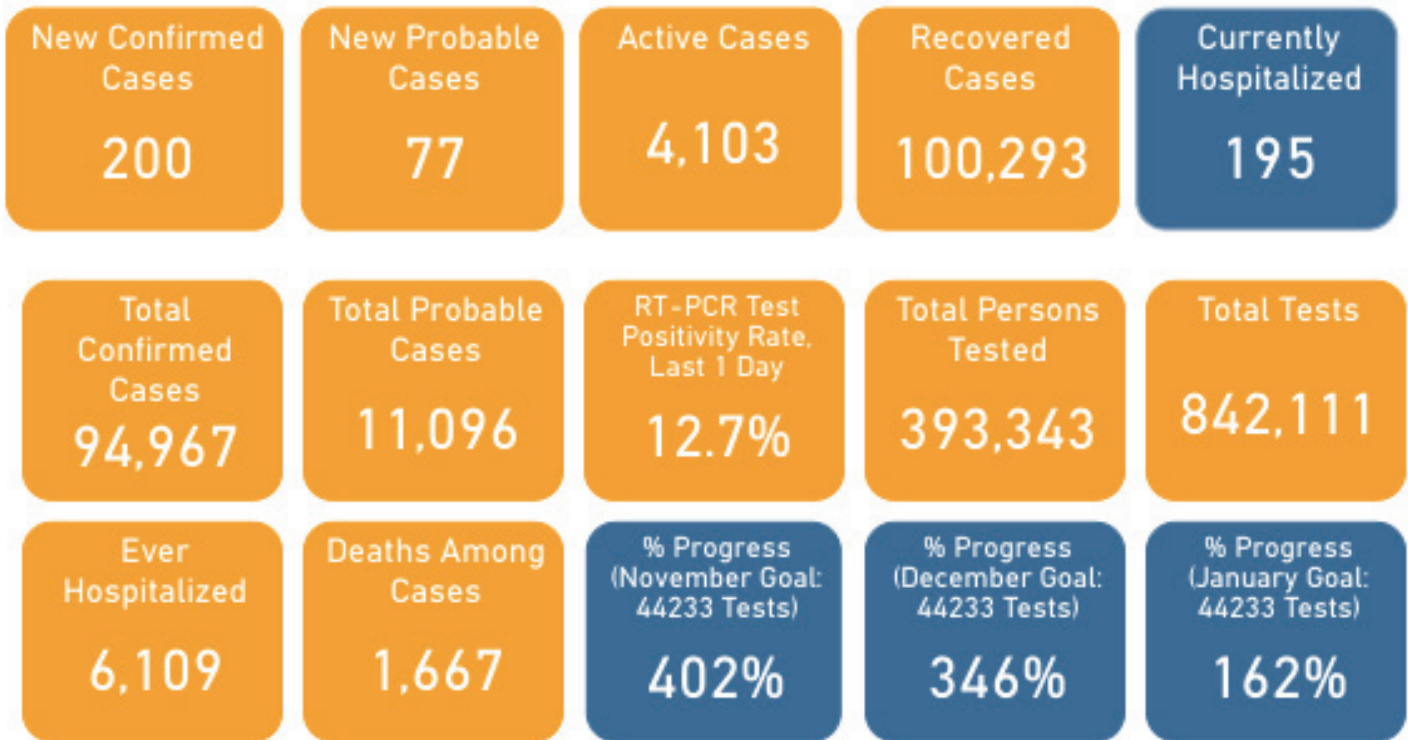
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| | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------|--------|
| Hyde | 134 | 131 | 379 | 1 | Minimal | 0.00% |
| Jackson | 269 | 252 | 875 | 13 | Minimal | 8.33% |
| Jerauld | 265 | 242 | 524 | 16 | Minimal | 0.00% |
| Jones | 77 | 70 | 184 | 0 | Minimal | 16.67% |
| Kingsbury | 591 | 548 | 1481 | 13 | Substantial | 21.05% |
| Lake | 1106 | 1036 | 2933 | 16 | Substantial | 15.63% |
| Lawrence | 2719 | 2604 | 7902 | 35 | Substantial | 10.32% |
| Lincoln | 7281 | 6934 | 18357 | 70 | Substantial | 11.45% |
| Lyman | 575 | 532 | 1786 | 10 | Substantial | 13.92% |
| Marshall | 280 | 262 | 1063 | 5 | Moderate | 18.75% |
| McCook | 711 | 673 | 1476 | 22 | Substantial | 4.55% |
| McPherson | 225 | 197 | 518 | 4 | Substantial | 6.43% |
| Meade | 2416 | 2293 | 7039 | 26 | Substantial | 14.89% |
| Mellette | 233 | 226 | 681 | 2 | Moderate | 23.08% |
| Miner | 256 | 223 | 524 | 7 | Substantial | 26.09% |
| Minnehaha | 26509 | 25257 | 71249 | 296 | Substantial | 9.83% |
| Moody | 586 | 534 | 1621 | 15 | Substantial | 18.82% |
| Oglala Lakota | 2008 | 1897 | 6344 | 40 | Substantial | 13.39% |
| Pennington | 12115 | 11455 | 35920 | 161 | Substantial | 12.38% |
| Perkins | 320 | 289 | 716 | 11 | Substantial | 19.12% |
| Potter | 339 | 314 | 759 | 3 | Substantial | 7.84% |
| Roberts | 1082 | 1003 | 3862 | 34 | Substantial | 12.33% |
| Sanborn | 323 | 309 | 625 | 3 | Moderate | 9.52% |
| Spink | 747 | 693 | 1938 | 24 | Substantial | 10.53% |
| Stanley | 304 | 290 | 823 | 2 | Substantial | 5.26% |
| Sully | 129 | 113 | 262 | 3 | Moderate | 16.67% |
| Todd | 1192 | 1158 | 3953 | 20 | Substantial | 5.26% |
| Tripp | 648 | 623 | 1379 | 14 | Moderate | 5.71% |
| Turner | 1024 | 934 | 2468 | 49 | Substantial | 6.90% |
| Union | 1815 | 1652 | 5692 | 36 | Substantial | 17.33% |
| Walworth | 689 | 626 | 1700 | 14 | Substantial | 17.00% |
| Yankton | 2696 | 2586 | 8542 | 27 | Substantial | 23.35% |
| Ziebach | 333 | 309 | 810 | 8 | Substantial | 23.08% |
| Unassigned | 0 | 0 | 1953 | 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 | 4055 | 0 |
| 10-19 years | 11742 | 0 |
| 20-29 years | 19211 | 4 |
| 30-39 years | 17469 | 14 |
| 40-49 years | 15150 | 32 |
| 50-59 years | 14951 | 89 |
| 60-69 years | 12106 | 214 |
| 70-79 years | 6454 | 373 |
| 80+ years | 4925 | 941 |

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

| Sex | # of Cases | # of Deaths Among Cases |
|--------|------------|-------------------------|
| Female | 55389 | 793 |
| Male | 50674 | 874 |

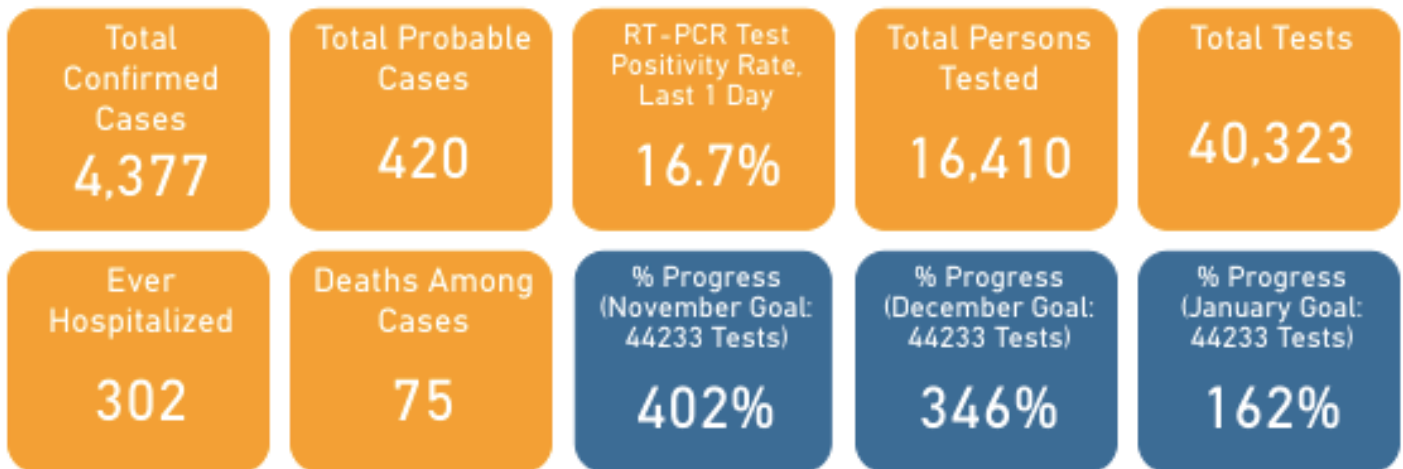
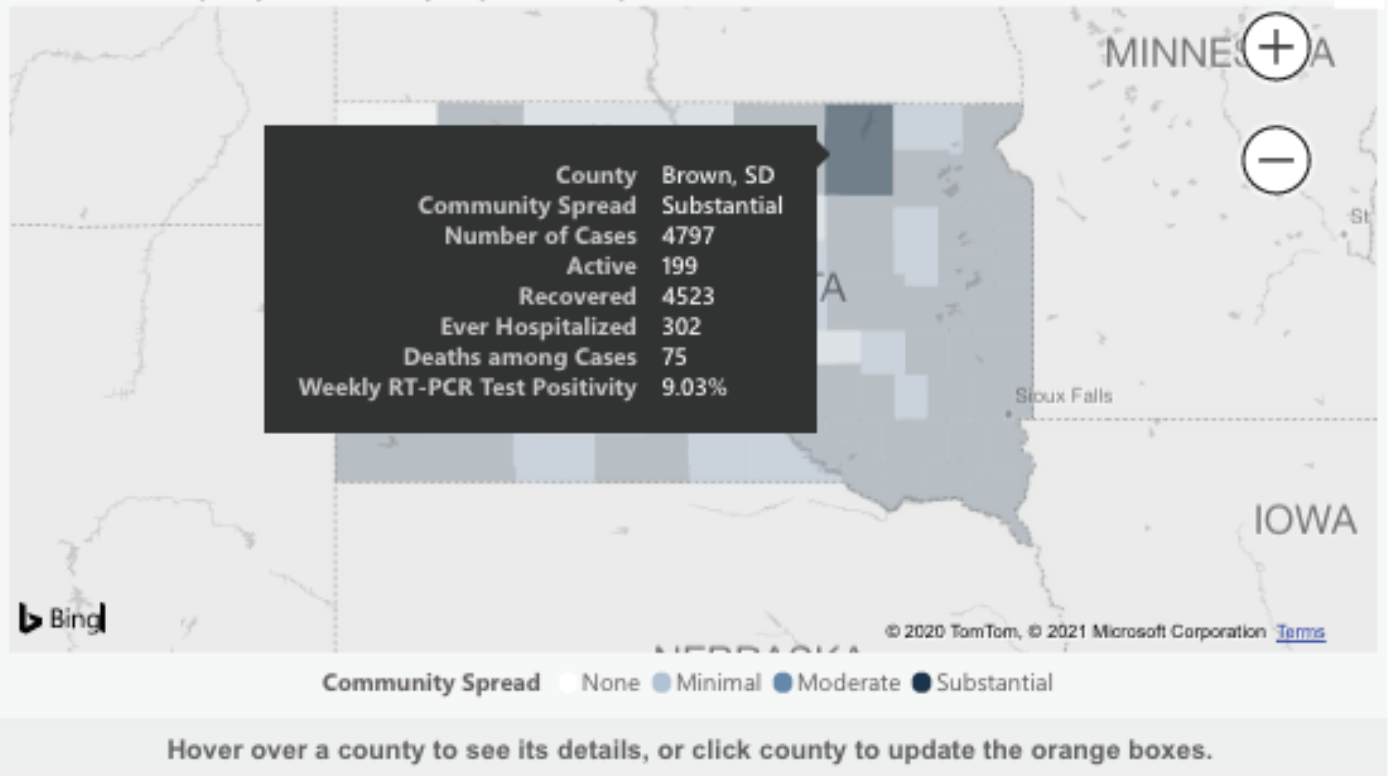
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



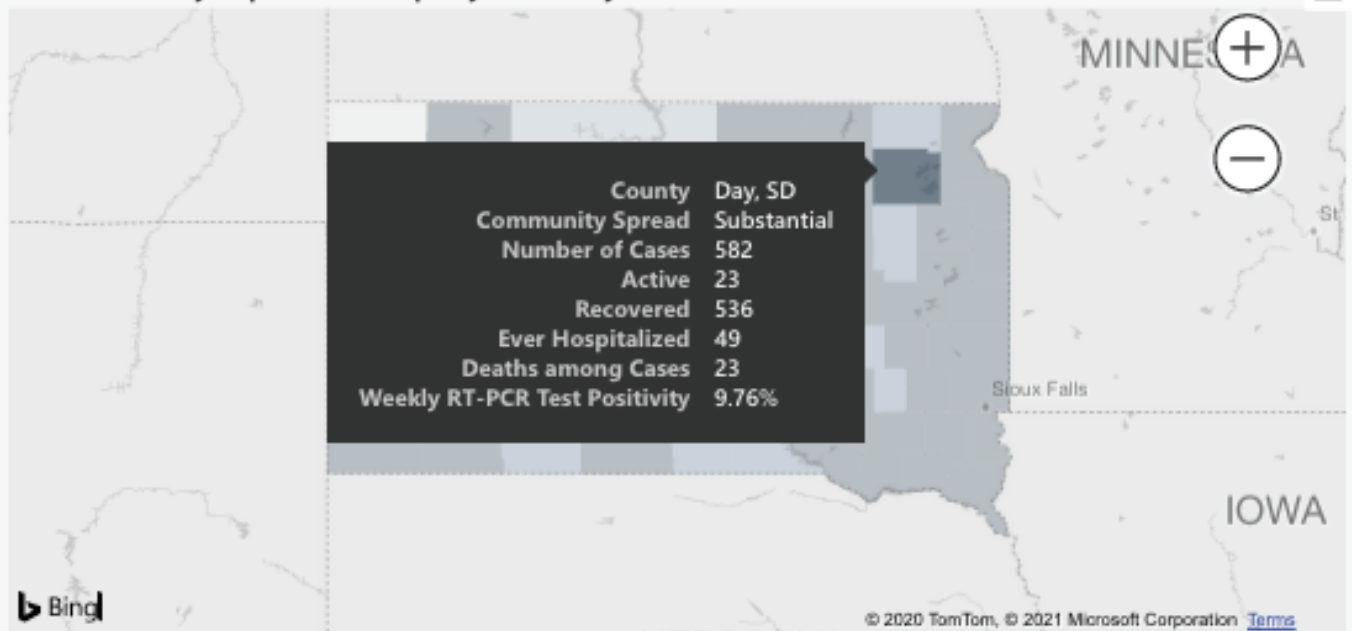
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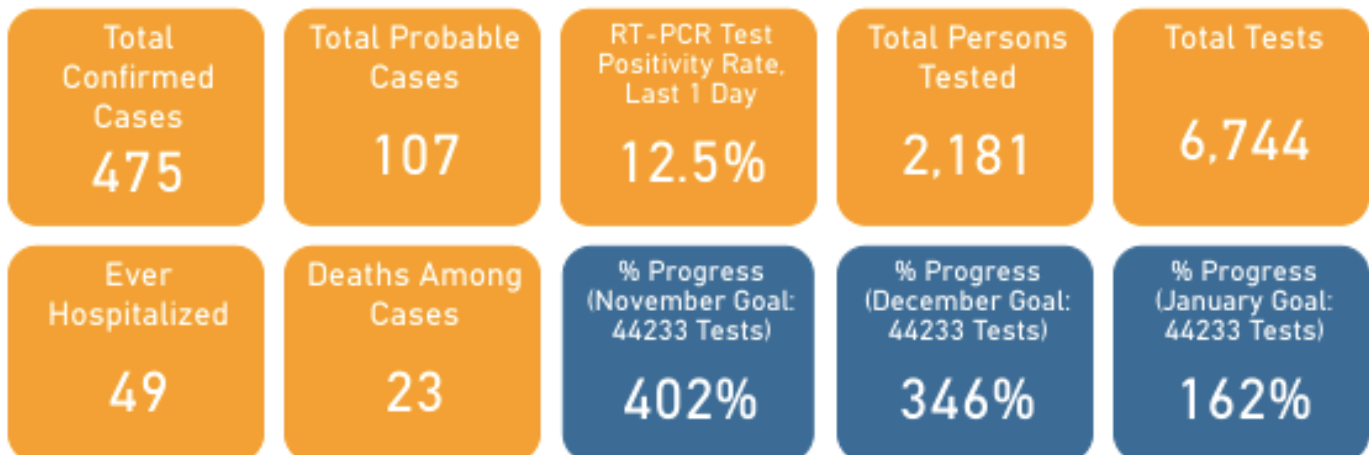
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

58,456

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

48,491

| Manufacturer | Number of Doses |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Moderna | 28,684 |
| Pfizer | 29,772 |

| Doses | Number of Recipients |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Moderna - 1 dose | 28,444 |
| Moderna - Series Complete | 120 |
| Pfizer - 1 dose | 10,082 |
| Pfizer - Series Complete | 9,845 |

| County | # Doses | # Persons (1 dose) | # Persons (2 doses) | Total # Persons |
|--------------|---------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Aurora | 88 | 88 | 0 | 88 |
| Beadle | 1053 | 667 | 193 | 860 |
| Bennett* | 71 | 67 | 2 | 69 |
| Bon Homme* | 446 | 428 | 9 | 437 |
| Brookings | 1555 | 1,119 | 218 | 1,337 |
| Brown | 2402 | 2,356 | 23 | 2,379 |
| Brule* | 246 | 242 | 2 | 244 |
| Buffalo* | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Butte | 216 | 206 | 5 | 211 |
| Campbell | 202 | 176 | 13 | 189 |
| Charles Mix* | 367 | 361 | 3 | 364 |
| Clark | 189 | 175 | 7 | 182 |
| Clay | 845 | 773 | 36 | 809 |
| Codington* | 1805 | 1,423 | 191 | 1,614 |
| Corson* | 20 | 18 | 1 | 19 |
| Custer* | 356 | 324 | 16 | 340 |
| Davison | 1493 | 1,417 | 38 | 1,455 |
| Day* | 340 | 322 | 9 | 331 |
| Deuel | 191 | 163 | 14 | 177 |
| Dewey* | 89 | 87 | 1 | 88 |
| Douglas* | 213 | 209 | 2 | 211 |
| Edmunds | 185 | 181 | 2 | 183 |
| Fall River* | 418 | 412 | 3 | 415 |
| Faulk | 167 | 165 | 1 | 166 |
| Grant* | 439 | 423 | 8 | 431 |
| Gregory* | 243 | 235 | 4 | 239 |
| Haakon* | 99 | 99 | 0 | 99 |

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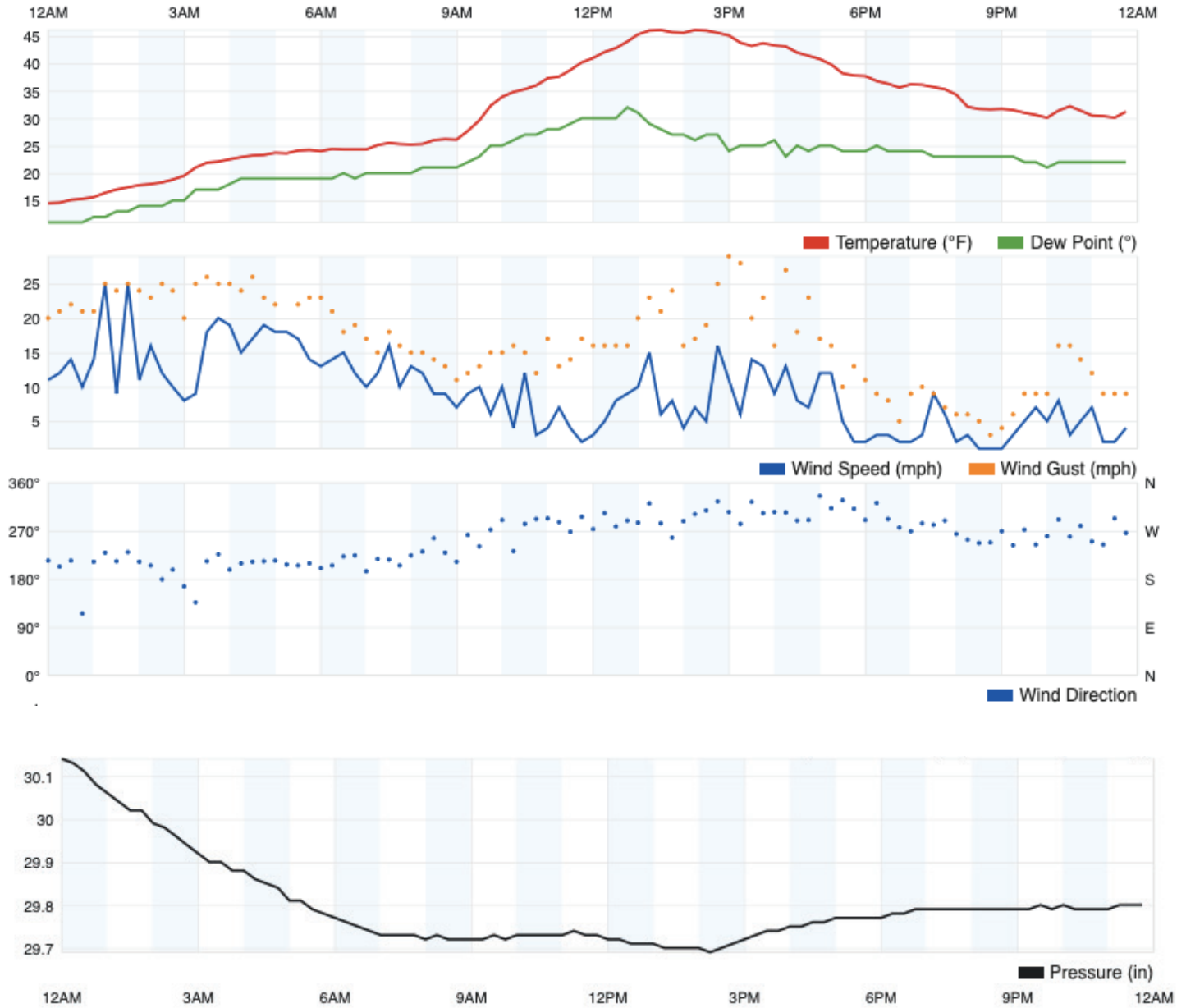
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| | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Hamlin | 252 | 202 | 25 | 227 |
| Hand | 210 | 190 | 10 | 200 |
| Hanson | 73 | 65 | 4 | 69 |
| Harding | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Hughes* | 1060 | 1,028 | 16 | 1,044 |
| Hutchinson* | 587 | 537 | 25 | 562 |
| Hyde* | 100 | 100 | 0 | 100 |
| Jackson* | 63 | 63 | 0 | 63 |
| Jerauld | 77 | 63 | 7 | 70 |
| Jones* | 98 | 94 | 2 | 96 |
| Kingsbury | 357 | 275 | 41 | 316 |
| Lake | 732 | 324 | 204 | 528 |
| Lawrence | 869 | 825 | 22 | 847 |
| Lincoln | 7164 | 2,862 | 2,151 | 5,013 |
| Lyman* | 71 | 69 | 1 | 70 |
| Marshall* | 226 | 220 | 3 | 223 |
| McCook | 415 | 289 | 63 | 352 |
| McPherson | 25 | 25 | 0 | 25 |
| Meade* | 852 | 644 | 104 | 748 |
| Mellette* | 8 | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| Miner | 146 | 112 | 17 | 129 |
| Minnehaha | 17829 | 7,817 | 5,006 | 12,823 |
| Moody* | 279 | 229 | 25 | 254 |
| Oglala Lakota* | 24 | 16 | 4 | 20 |
| Pennington* | 6298 | 4,576 | 861 | 5,437 |
| Perkins* | 63 | 63 | 0 | 63 |
| Potter | 129 | 123 | 3 | 126 |
| Roberts* | 543 | 531 | 6 | 537 |
| Sanborn | 146 | 136 | 5 | 141 |
| Spink | 522 | 504 | 9 | 513 |
| Stanley* | 147 | 141 | 3 | 144 |
| Sully | 33 | 27 | 3 | 30 |
| Todd* | 30 | 26 | 2 | 28 |
| Tripp* | 348 | 346 | 1 | 347 |
| Turner | 688 | 498 | 95 | 593 |
| Union | 325 | 293 | 16 | 309 |
| Walworth* | 326 | 164 | 81 | 245 |
| Yankton | 1875 | 1,841 | 17 | 1,858 |
| Ziebach* | 17 | 17 | 0 | 17 |
| Other | 1702 | 1,038 | 332 | 1,370 |

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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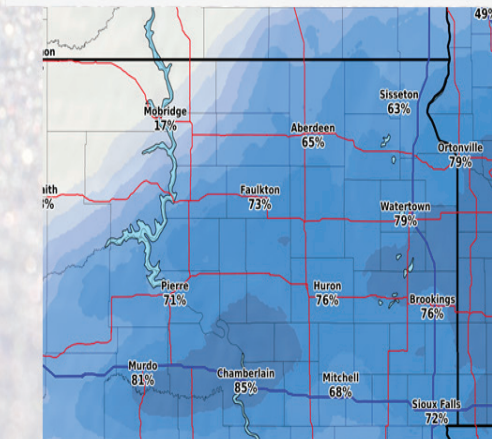
| Today | Tonight | Friday | Friday Night | Saturday |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Increasing Clouds and Blustery | Partly Cloudy | Mostly Sunny | Mostly Clear then Slight Chance Snow | Snow Likely |
| High: 31 °F | Low: 9 °F | High: 26 °F | Low: 13 °F | High: 28 °F |



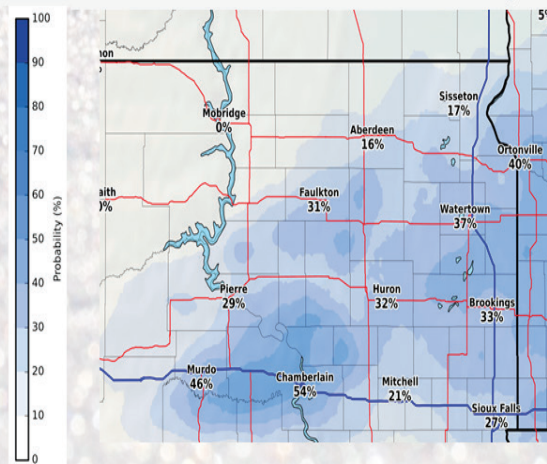
Accumulating Snowfall Ahead

- A swath of 2 to 5 inches of snow, with locally higher amounts, appears likely across central and eastern South Dakota mainly early Saturday morning into Saturday night.
- Breezy south winds on Saturday may lead to patchy blowing snow.
- **Travel will be impacted.** Keep an eye on the forecast, plan ahead, drive to conditions!

Chance for 2"+ of snow Saturday



Chance for 4"+ of snow Saturday



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

Updated: 1/21/2021 4:40 AM CT



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

The likelihood of light to moderate snowfall on Saturday is continuing to gain traction. Currently, it appears that snowfall should be reaching central South Dakota by early Saturday morning, spreading north and east across much of the region during the day, before moving east out of the area Saturday night. There could be some minor blowing and drifting snow on southerly breezes while the snow is falling on Saturday. Plan accordingly! Temperatures over the next few days are going to experience a cooling trend, down to more normal readings for this time of year.

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Accumulating Snow Ahead

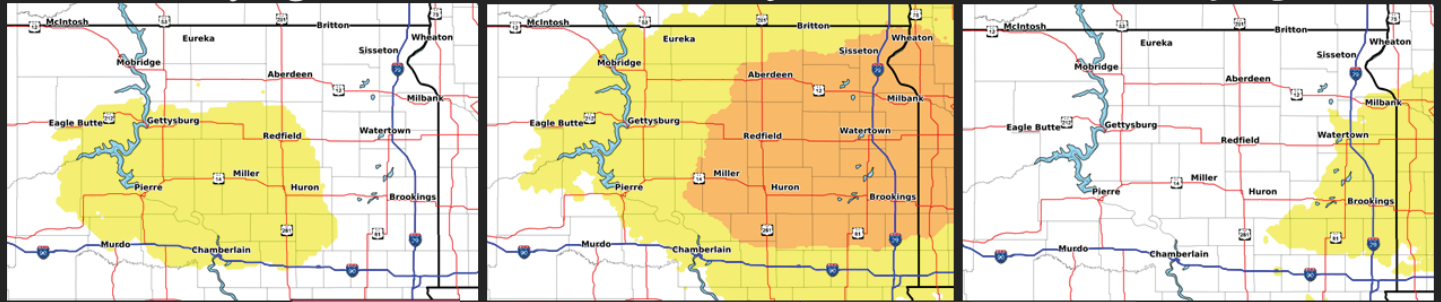


Potential for Plowable Snow

Friday Night

Saturday

Saturday Night



Very High

High

Medium

Low

Very Low

What

Light to Moderate Snow.

When

Friday Night into Saturday Night.

Impacts

Traveling? Pay attention to the latest forecast as well as road conditions before heading out.

Uncertainty

While we have moderate confidence that we will see plowable snow over portions of e SD and w central MN, the specific location or snow amounts remain uncertain.

Aberdeen, SD
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 1/20/2021 9:17 AM CT

Light to moderate snow possible Friday night into Saturday night. Stay tuned, as there may be some travel impacts on Saturday.

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Today in Weather History

January 21, 1999: Widespread dense fog and freezing drizzle created treacherous driving conditions across part of northeast South Dakota from the evening of the 21st to around noon on the 22nd. The freezing drizzle ended in the early morning hours of the 22nd. As a result, slippery conditions developed, especially across Hamlin, Deuel, and Codington counties. Many vehicles slid into the ditch. There were a few accidents resulting in minor injuries. Numerous activities were canceled the evening of the 21st and many schools had delayed starts on the 22nd.

1985: Jacksonville, Florida recorded its all-time record low of 7 degrees. Macon, Georgia had its coldest day ever with a temperature of 6 degrees. It was the coldest Inauguration day in history as President Reagan is sworn in for a second term during cold and winds that resulted in wind chill readings of 30 degrees below zero. Because of the bitter cold temperatures, many of the outdoor Inauguration events were cancelled and President Reagan was sworn in the Capitol Rotunda.

1999: A major tornado outbreak occurred from southwest into central and northeast Arkansas during the afternoon and evening. In the Little Rock Area, 30 tornadoes tracked across 15 counties. Homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed in areas like Little Rock, Beebe, McRae, and in areas farther north and east. Eight deaths resulted from the tornadoes with 140 to 150 injuries also reported.

1926 - A hurricane came inland near Daytona Beach, FL. The hurricane caused 2.5 million dollars damage in eastern Florida, including the Jacksonville area. (David Ludlum)

1939 - The temperature at Lewiston, ID, hit 117 degrees to establish an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1943 - On a whim, and flying a single engine AT-6, Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair and Colonel Duckworth were the first to fly into a hurricane. It started regular Air Force flights into hurricanes. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Minnesota spawned a tornado which moved in a southwesterly direction for a distance of thirty miles across Rice County and Goodhue County. Trees were uprooted and tossed about like toys, and a horse lifted by the tornado was observed sailing horizontally through the air. Thunderstorms drenched La Crosse, WI, with 5.26 inches of rain, their second highest 24 hour total of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hot weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Williston, ND, reported a record high of 108 degrees. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S., and in southeastern Texas. Richland County, SC, was soaked with up to 5.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, AZ, experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong thunderstorm winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is normally received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24 hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions. (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Wisconsin and northern Illinois to New England, with 103 reports of large hail and damaging winds through the day. Thunderstorms in Wisconsin produced hail three inches in diameter near Oshkosh, and wind gusts to 65 mph at Germantown. (The National Weather Summary)

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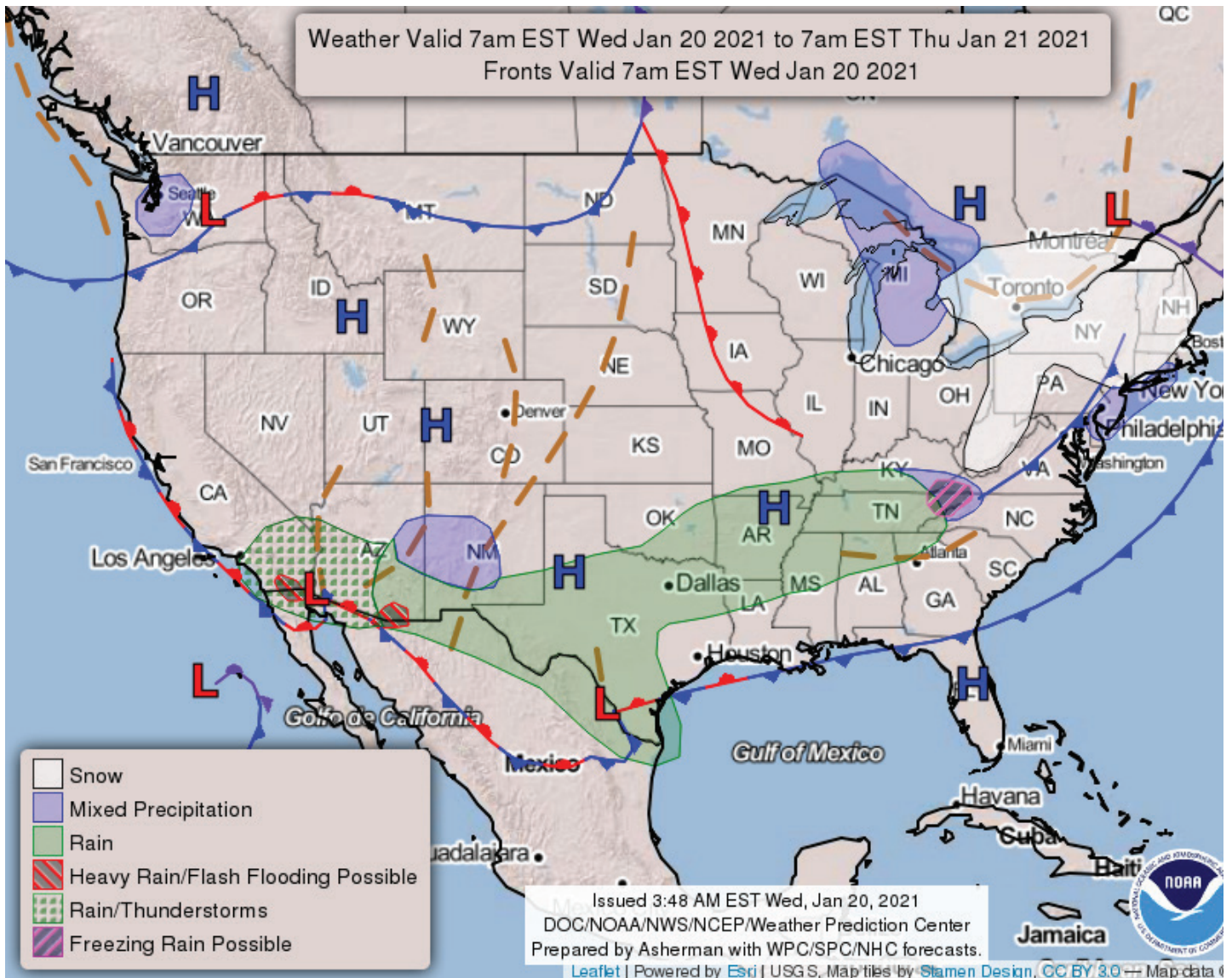
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 1:22 PM
Low Temp: 14 °F at 12:03 AM
Wind: 29 mph at 2:58 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 57° in 1900, 1942
Record Low: -31° in 1949
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.32
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.32
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:25 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04 a.m.



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NEVER FORSAKEN

Their first child was about to be born. The expectant father was standing by the soon-to-be mother when the nurse came into the room and said, "O.K. Time to leave. We're taking her to the delivery room."

"Not without me," he said defiantly.

"Oh yes, we are," she said as she tried to push him out of the way.

Suddenly, he pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped one end to the gurney and the other to his arm. Unprepared for such an event, in their state of confusion, they wheeled him into the delivery room, too.

His wife looked at him with compassion and said, "I knew you'd never leave me."

The presence of a loved one in times of uncertainty and insecurity can be much more than comforting. They can be essential for maintaining one's sanity.

No doubt David had this in mind when he wrote, "For You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You."

God will never forsake us when we face the dangers of life. One evening, a powerful storm arose without any warning. High waves sent the small boat high into the air before it came crashing down. Water was sweeping over the sides, and it was about to sink. "Don't You care?" cried the disciples. "We are about to drown!"

"Quiet down," said Jesus. And the turbulent seas and pounding hearts of the disciples both became as peaceful as a sleeping baby in the arms of its mother.

"I'll never leave you nor forsake you," said Jesus.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the power in Your words and the promise of Your presence when life threatens us. Increase our faith in the storms of life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You. Psalm 9:10

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

04-13-21-31-32

(four, thirteen, twenty-one, thirty-one, thirty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$100,000

Lotto America

06-14-16-38-49, Star Ball: 3, ASB: 2

(six, fourteen, sixteen, thirty-eight, forty-nine; Star Ball: three; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.6 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$970 million

Powerball

40-53-60-68-69, Powerball: 22, Power Play: 3

(forty, fifty-three, sixty, sixty-eight, sixty-nine; Powerball: twenty-two; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$730 million

Man charged in Rapid City triple homicide appears in court

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A New York City man accused of killing three people in Rapid City made his first appearance in Pennington County Court on Wednesday, nearly five months after the alleged triple homicide.

Aranson Absolu, 36, is charged with three counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of Charles Red Willow, Ashley Nagy and Dakota Zaiser. If convicted, Absolu will be sentenced to death or life in prison without parole. It would be up to the Pennington County State's Attorney's Office to decide whether it wants to pursue the death penalty if there's a conviction.

Red Willow, a 26-year-old from Rapid City, and Nagy, a 29-year-old from Greeley, Colorado, were found dead Aug. 24 from multiple bullet wounds inside a car in a Rapid City park. The body of the 22-year-old Zaiser, of Rapid City, was found in some woods outside the city about a month later.

Police have said all three killings may be related to drugs.

Absolu made his initial appearance via a video feed from the jail. He told a magistrate judge he didn't have a lawyer and didn't understand his rights and the charges against him. He also complained that his civil rights were being violated, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Health officials describe 'tricky' vaccine delivery process

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — As South Dakota attempts to continue the fast pace of its COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, health officials on Wednesday described a multi-step process that at times created a scramble for drivers to deliver vaccine shipments in winter weather.

Health officials have not received reports of vaccines going to waste, as has happened elsewhere. Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon credited the work of people who have jumped in to help. The cold storage requirements make delivery of the vaccines a "tricky process," she said.

She described how a vaccine shipment arrived late into a FedEx distribution center on Friday. Drivers who had been scheduled to deliver the vaccines across the state were no longer available late Friday, so the company scrambled to find people willing to drive into the night. Despite bad weather, all the vaccine shipments arrived at hospitals by 12:15 a.m. Saturday, Malsam-Rysdon said.

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The state has administered vaccines to over 52,000 people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This week, health officials opened distribution to people who are over 79 years old or have certain medical conditions.

The number of new cases declined by 30% over the last two weeks. There were 277 new cases and no new deaths reported.

Trump pardons ex-boyfriend of deported Russian agent

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — President Donald Trump renewed his grievance over the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election by pardoning Paul Erickson, a former conservative operative once romantically linked to Russian agent Maria Butina.

Erickson received the pardon even though he had pleaded guilty to fraudulent investment schemes that had nothing to do with Russia or the agent. It was part of a flurry of clemency action by Trump just before his term ended, with the White House characterizing his conviction as “based off the Russian collusion hoax” and saying his pardon “helps right the wrongs of what has been revealed to be perhaps the greatest witch hunt in American History.”

But Erickson’s schemes started long before he met Butina, who was deported in 2019 after serving time for failing to register as a foreign agent. Erickson pleaded guilty to wire fraud and money laundering after being charged with operating fraudulent investment schemes over a 20-year period from 1996 to August 2018. The schemes bilked \$5.3 million from 78 people and originated long before Erickson met Butina, according to court documents.

Erickson’s investment schemes, run from Sioux Falls, included recruiting investors for a string of elder care homes; developing a wheelchair that allowed a person to use the bathroom from the chair; and home-building in North Dakota’s booming oil fields.

Erickson received a seven-year prison sentence in July after pleading guilty to charges related to the North Dakota home-building scheme. A pre-sentence report recommended a range of 33 to 41 months, but federal Judge Karen Schreier went above that, saying that Erickson had targeted friends and family. She also pointed to a recent case in South Dakota where a man had received a lengthier prison sentence for defrauding people of less money.

“You’re a thief, and you have betrayed your friends and family, pretty much everyone you know,” Schreier said at his sentencing hearing.

Erickson was being held Wednesday at a federal minimum-security prison in Duluth, Minnesota. The Bureau of Prisons did not say when he would be released.

But one of his former victims worried that Erickson would continue to bilk people out of money.

“Two decades of stealing from people, he’s a great storyteller,” said Greg Johnson, a South Dakota pastor whom Erickson defrauded. “He steals money, he steals people’s names and he just keeps stealing from people.”

The two had been friends since their childhood until Johnson said Erickson stole his concept for a wheelchair that would allow people to use the bathroom. The pastor said Erickson used his name, and even stole his company, as he attracted investors into the scheme.

Erickson also ran in nationwide Republican circles for many years. He was the national political director for Pat Buchanan’s challenge to President George H. W. Bush in the 1992 Republican primary. He worked as a media adviser to John Wayne Bobbitt, the Virginia man whose wife cut off his penis with a kitchen knife in 1993. And he joined with Jack Abramoff, a Washington lobbyist later imprisoned for corruption, in producing an anti-communist action movie.

Erickson met Butina as she sought to set up back channels of communication between American conservatives and Russia. Butina admitted in 2018 that Erickson had helped her, using his ties with the National Rifle Association.

For Loretta Waltner, a Sioux Falls woman who once rented office space to Erickson, the pardon was an

unsurprising development in Erickson's saga.

"He's always skated through life," she said. "He got off pretty easy, and he did this time too."

Erickson was among six people from South Dakota who received pardons from Trump. Gregory and Deborah Jorgensen, of Winner, were granted pardons and Martin Jorgensen was given a posthumous pardon. The Jorgensens were convicted in 1996 for selling misbranded beef under their premium label, but knowing that it was mixed with "inferior, commercial beef trim."

Trump also pardoned Jessica Frease, of Rapid City, who was convicted of converting stolen checks at the bank where she worked as a teller and John Nystrom, of Pierre, who was working as a contractor on a school reconstruction project when a subcontractor received double payments for work performed.

Gov. Kristi Noem had advocated in all three of those cases, but not for Erickson. Instead, former Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway did.

Johnson, the pastor, said as he heard the news of the pardon he "ached" for all the people who had been hurt by Erickson. But he still held out hope that Erickson could find redemption.

"If he could just use his incredible brain for good," Johnson said. "He's just a genius."

Twin suicide bombings rock central Baghdad, at least 28 dead

By SAMYA KULLAB and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Twin suicide bombings ripped through a busy market in the Iraqi capital Thursday, killing at least 28 people and wounding dozens, officials said.

The rare suicide bombing attack hit the Bab al-Sharqi commercial area in central Baghdad amid heightened political tensions over planned early elections and a severe economic crisis. Blood smeared the floors of the busy market amid piles of clothes and shoes as survivors took stock of the disarray in the aftermath.

No one immediately took responsibility for the attack, but Iraqi military officials said it was the work of the Islamic State group.

Iraq's military said at least 28 people were killed and 73 were wounded in the attack; some of the wounded were in serious condition. Several health and police officials said the toll might be higher. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The Health Ministry announced that all of its hospitals in the capital were mobilized to treat the wounded.

Maj. Gen. Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for the Joint Operations Command, which includes an array of Iraqi forces, said the first suicide bomber cried out loudly that he was ill in the middle of the bustling market, prompting a crowd to gather around him — and that's when he detonated his explosive belt. The second detonated his belt shortly after, he said.

"This is a terrorist act perpetrated by a sleeper cell of the Islamic State," al-Khafaji said. He said IS "wanted to prove its existence" after suffering many blows in military operations to root out the militants.

The suicide bombings marked the first in three years to target Baghdad's bustling commercial area. A suicide bomb attack took place in the same area in 2018 shortly after then-Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State group.

No one immediately took responsibility for Thursday's attack, but Iraq has seen assaults perpetrated by both the Islamic State group and militia groups in recent months.

Militias have routinely targeted the American presence in Iraq with rocket and mortar attacks, especially the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone. The pace of those attacks, however, has decreased since an informal truce was declared by Iran-backed armed groups in October.

The style of Thursday's assault was similar to those IS has conducted in the past. But the group has rarely been able to penetrate the capital since being dislodged by Iraqi forces and the U.S.-led coalition in 2017.

IS has shown an ability to stage increasingly sophisticated attacks across northern Iraq, where it still maintains a presence, three years after Iraq declared victory over the group.

Iraqi security forces are frequently ambushed and targeted with IEDs in rural areas of Kirkuk and Diyala. An increase in attacks was seen last summer as militants took advantage of the government's focus on tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

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The twin bombings Thursday came days after Iraq's government unanimously agreed to hold early elections in October. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi had announced in July that early polls would be held to meet the demands of anti-government protesters.

Demonstrators took to the streets in the tens of thousands last year to demand political change, and an end to rampant corruption and poor services. More than 500 people were killed in mass demonstrations as security forces used live rounds and tear gas to disperse crowds.

Iraq is also grappling with a severe economic crisis brought on by low oil prices that has led the government to borrow internally and risk depleting its foreign currency reserves. The Central Bank of Iraq devalued Iraq's dinar by nearly 20% last year to meet spending obligations.

Associated Press writer Murtada Faraj in Baghdad contributed to this report.

Fire hits building at Indian producer of COVID-19 vaccines

By RAFIQ MAQBOOL Associated Press

PUNE, India (AP) — A fire broke out Thursday at a building under construction at Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, but production of COVID-19 vaccine will not be affected, the company said.

Firefighters were extinguishing the flames, the fire office in Pune city in southern Maharashtra state said. The cause of the fire and extent of damage were not immediately clear.

"We have rescued three people and there are no casualties," said fire official Prashant Ranpise, who was supervising rescue operations.

The company said the fire was restricted to a new facility it is constructing to increase production of COVID-19 vaccines and ensure it is better prepared for future pandemics.

It said the fire did not affect existing facilities making COVID-19 vaccines or a stockpile of around 50 million doses.

CEO Adar Poonwala said there would be no loss in vaccine manufacturing because the company has other available facilities.

"So far the most important thing is that there have been no lives lost or major injuries due to the fire, despite a few floors being destroyed," Poonawalla said.

Images showed huge plumes of smoke billowing from the building as firefighters worked to extinguish the blaze. Dozens of company workers in lab suits left the compound.

Serum Institute of India is the world's largest maker of vaccines and has been contracted to manufacture a billion doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine.

Poonawalla said in an interview with The Associated Press last month that it hopes to increase production capacity from 1.5 billion doses to 2.5 billion doses per year by the end of 2021. The new facility is part of the expansion.

Of the more than 12 billion coronavirus vaccine doses expected to be produced this year, rich countries have already bought about 9 billion, and many have options to buy even more. As a result, Serum Institute is likely to make most of the vaccines that will be used by developing nations.

EXPLAINER: What's next for WHO after US takes steps to stay

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The Biden administration has taken quick steps to keep the United States in the World Health Organization and reinforce financial and staffing support for it — part of his ambition to launch a full-throttle effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with the world.

Biden, just hours after his inauguration Wednesday, made good on a campaign pledge and revoked a Trump administration order that would have pulled the U.S. out of the U.N. health agency this summer. Early Thursday, his top medical adviser on the pandemic, Dr. Anthony Fauci, was dispatched to show new U.S. support for WHO.

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Here's a look at the U.N. health agency and its handling of the pandemic:

WHAT IS WHO?

Established in 1948, the Geneva-based agency brings together 194 U.N. members under the founding principle that health is a human right. Today, it counts over 7,000 staffers working in more than 150 countries.

It is the only health agency in the world with the authority to coordinate a global response to public health threats like COVID-19 — but also works on the gamut of health issues like polio, maternal health care, tobacco and sugar consumption and even addiction to video games.

WHO's current two-year budget is \$5.84 billion — about half that of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. WHO is currently headed by Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. He's an Ethiopian microbiologist and malaria expert who is both the first African to run the agency, and the first WHO chief who is not a medical doctor. His first term is up next year and whether or not he gets a second could depend largely on who the U.S. supports.

WHY DID THE US ANNOUNCE PLANS TO LEAVE WHO?

To be clear, the United States hasn't left WHO.

But the Trump administration, triggering a one-year notification process required by Congress, announced plans to leave on July 6. The U.S. also cut all funding to WHO, stripping it of funds from the country that has long been — and by a longshot — its biggest donor.

The Trump administration faulted the agency for three main reasons: its allegedly slow response to the pandemic after it emerged in Wuhan, China, in late 2019; its alleged kowtowing to and excessive praise of China's government; and administration claims that WHO had criticized Trump's suspension of entries of people from China to the U.S. as the pandemic spread.

Officials at WHO did raise questions about the use of travel bans — out of concern they might hamper medical aid efforts — but didn't specifically criticize U.S. policy. The agency has been traditionally averse to public criticism of member states, particularly one as influential as the United States.

An Associated Press investigation last June found top WHO officials repeatedly lauded China in public even as they privately complained that Beijing was withholding critical outbreak data from them, including the new virus' genetic sequence. And a report issued to the media this week by a panel convened by WHO concluded the agency could have acted quicker to stem the emerging coronavirus and might have labeled it a pandemic sooner.

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION?

The administration wants to show the United States resuming work with its international partners in health care after a largely go-it-alone approach under Trump.

In his pre-dawn address on Thursday to the WHO's executive board, Fauci said the U.S. will resume full funding for WHO and maintain its staff support for it, while announcing the U.S. will join its efforts to get COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics to people in need around the world.

One of the key questions will be what kind of reforms — long sought by many member countries, health advocates and even some WHO leaders themselves — that the new administration might seek. The WHO has numerous reviews in motion about its handling of the pandemic and how it can change to strengthen its ability to respond to future ones.

Fauci expressed support for WHO reform, but didn't provide specifics.

The U.S. has long played an outsized role at WHO, including placing senior doctors in key positions and directing policies in programs ranging from AIDS to malaria to nutrition. Biden's decision to keep the U.S. in the U.N. agency may lend some much-needed credibility to WHO after it came under heavy criticism on multiple fronts last year.

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

Biden revokes Trump report promoting 'patriotic education'

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

President Joe Biden revoked a recent Trump administration report that aimed to promote "patriotic education" in schools but that historians mocked and rejected as political propaganda.

In an executive order signed on Wednesday in his first day in office, Biden disbanded Donald Trump's presidential 1776 Commission and withdrew a report it released Monday. Trump established the group in September to rally support from white voters and as a response to The New York Times' "1619 Project," which highlights the lasting consequences of slavery in America.

In its report, which Trump hoped would be used in classrooms across the nation, the commission glorifies the country's founders, plays down America's role in slavery, condemns the rise of progressive politics and argues that the civil rights movement ran afoul of the "lofty ideals" espoused by the Founding Fathers.

The panel, which included no professional historians of the United States, complained of "false and fashionable ideologies" that depict the country's story as one of "oppression and victimhood." Instead, it called for renewed efforts to foster "a brave and honest love for our country."

Historians widely panned the report, saying it offers a false and outdated version of American history that ignores decades of research.

"It's an insult to the whole enterprise of education. Education is supposed to help young people learn to think critically," said David Blight, a Civil War historian at Yale University. "That report is a piece of right-wing propaganda."

Trump officials heralded the report as "a definitive chronicle of the American founding," but scholars say it disregards the most basic rules of scholarship. It offers no citations, for example, or a list of its source materials.

It also includes several passages copied directly from other writings by members of the panel, as one professor found after running the report through software that's used to detect plagiarism.

Matthew Spalding, the panel's executive director and a vice president at the conservative Hillsdale College, denied any wrongdoing, saying the panel's members "contributed our own work and writing, under our own names, to the 1776 Report, which was an advisory report to the president."

Spalding and other commission leaders did not immediately respond to other criticism leveled against the report.

In his order dissolving the panel, Biden said it "sought to erase America's history of racial injustice."

The American Historical Association condemned the document, saying it glorifies the founders while ignoring the histories and contributions of enslaved people, Indigenous communities and women. In a statement also signed by 13 other academic groups, the organization says the report seeks "government indoctrination of American students."

The sharpest criticism of the report was directed at its presentation of slavery and race. The report attempts to undermine allegations of hypocrisy against Founding Fathers who owned slaves even as they espoused equality. It also attempts to soften America's role in slavery and explain it as a product of the times.

"Many Americans labor under the illusion that slavery was somehow a uniquely American evil," the panel wrote in the 20-page report. "The unfortunate fact is that the institution of slavery has been more the rule than the exception throughout human history."

Blight, at Yale, compared it to "a sixth or seventh grade kind of approach to history — to make the children feel good." He added: "But it's worse than that, because it comes out of an agenda of political propaganda."

The authors argue that the civil rights movement was distorted to advance programs promoting inequality and "group privilege." It complains, for example, about affirmative action and other forms of "preferential treatment."

Ibram X. Kendi, a scholar and historian of racism at Boston University, called the report "the last great

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lie from a Trump administration of great lies.”

“If we have commonly been given preferential treatment, then why do Black people remain on the lower and dying end of nearly every racial disparity?” Kendi said on Twitter. “Whenever they answer this question, they express racist ideas of Black inferiority while claiming they are ‘not racist.’”

Other scholars underscored what was left out. The report includes nothing of Native American history, and its only reference to Indigenous people is a racial slur quoted from the Declaration of Independence.

In one passage jeered by historians, the authors draw a comparison between the progressive movement in America and fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association, said the report is intended to discredit contemporary public policies rooted in America’s progressive reform movement. He worries that, even after Biden dissolved the commission, its report could end up in some classrooms.

“Historians need to be paying attention to curriculum conversations in localities and at the state level,” Grossman said. “The nonsense that’s in this report will be used to legitimate similar nonsense.”

In a public meeting of the commission this month, some members held out hope that Biden would keep the commission alive. But others said they needed to push the report to state and local education officials.

“It’s really going to be up to governors and state legislators and school board members and parents and higher education commissioners even students to take this charge and carry this work forward,” said Doug Hoelscher, a White House assistant under Trump.

The report ultimately demands a shift in teaching at schools and at U.S. universities, which the panel describes as “hotbeds of anti-Americanism.” It denounces any teaching that breeds contempt for American ideals, blaming that kind of “destructive scholarship” for the nation’s divisions and for “so much of the violence in our cities.”

“To restore our society,” the report says, “academics must return to their vocation of relentlessly pursuing the truth and engaging in honest scholarship that seeks to understand the world and America’s place in it.”

‘Just move on’: Republicans grapple with post-Trump future

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

For the first time in more than a decade, Republicans are waking up to a Washington where Democrats control the White House and Congress, adjusting to an era of diminished power, deep uncertainty and internal feuding.

The shift to minority status is always difficult, prompting debates over who is to blame for losing the last election. But the process is especially intense as Republicans confront profound questions about what the party stands for without Donald Trump in charge.

Over the last four years, the GOP’s values were inexorably tied to the whims of a president who regularly undermined democratic institutions and traded the party’s longstanding commitment to fiscal discipline, strong foreign policy and the rule of law for a brash and inconsistent populism. The party now faces a decision about whether to keep moving in that direction, as many of Trump’s most loyal supporters demand, or chart a new course.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, one of the few Republican elected officials who regularly condemned Trumpism, evoked President Ronald Reagan in calling this moment “a time for choosing.”

“We have to decide if we’re going to continue heading down the direction of Donald Trump or if we’re going to return to our roots,” Hogan, a potential 2024 White House contender, said in an interview.

“The party would be much better off if they were to purge themselves of Donald Trump,” he added. “But I don’t think there’s any hope of him completely going away.”

Whether the party moves on may come down to what Republicans like Texas Sen. Ted Cruz do next.

Cruz spent weeks parroting Trump’s baseless claims of election fraud, which helped incite the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol. Republican elections officials in several battleground states that President Joe Biden carried have said the election was fair. Trump’s claims were roundly rejected in the courts, including by judges appointed by Trump.

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Cruz acknowledged Biden's victory on Wednesday, but he refused to describe it as legitimate when pressed.

"He won the election. He is the president. I just came from his inauguration," Cruz said of Biden in an interview.

Looking forward, Cruz said Trump would remain a significant part of the political conversation, but that the Republican Party should move away from divisive "language and tone and rhetoric" that alienated suburban voters, particularly women, in recent elections.

"President Trump surely will continue to make his views known, and they'll continue to have a real impact, but I think the country going forward wants policies that work, and I think as a party, we need to do a better job winning hearts and minds," said Cruz, who is also eyeing a White House run.

In the wake of the Capitol riot, a small but notable faction of high-profile Republicans are taking a stronger stance against Trump or distancing themselves from him.

The Senate's top Republican, Mitch McConnell, said on the eve of the inauguration that the pro-Trump mob that stormed the Capitol was "provoked by the president." Even Mike Pence, Trump's vice president and long considered his most devoted cheerleader, skipped Trump's departure ceremony to attend Biden's inauguration.

Trump retreated Wednesday to his south Florida estate, where he has retained a small group of former White House aides who will work out of a two-story guest house on the Mar-a-Lago grounds. In addition to advisers in Washington, Trump will have access to a well-funded political action committee, the Save America PAC, that is likely to inherit tens of millions of dollars in donations that flooded his campaign coffers after his election loss.

Those close to Trump believe he will lay low in the immediate future as he focuses on his upcoming impeachment trial for inciting the riot. After that, he is expected to reemerge, likely granting media interviews and finding a new home on social media after losing his powerful Twitter bullhorn.

While his plans are just taking shape, Trump is expected to remain politically active, including trying to exact revenge by backing primary challenges against Republicans he believed scorned him in his final days. He continues to leave the door open to another presidential run in 2024. Some friends believe he might even flirt with running as a third-party candidate, which would badly splinter an already fractured GOP.

Trump issued an ominous vow as he left the White House for the last time as president: "We will be back in some form."

Many in the GOP's die-hard base continue to promote conspiracy theories, embrace white nationalism and, above all, revere Trump's voice as gospel.

Trump loyalists in states like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wyoming expressed outrage and disappointment in the 10 Republicans who voted with Democrats to impeach Trump last week. One of them, Michigan Rep. Pete Meijer, said he bought body armor to protect himself from a wave of threats from Trump supporters.

In Montana, state GOP Chairman Frank Eathorne raised the possibility of secession this week and criticized Rep. Liz Cheney, another Republican who backed Trump's impeachment, pledging continued loyalty to Trump.

"The Republican National Committee views President Trump as our party leader into the future... The (state party) agrees," Eathorne said, noting that Trump "represents the timeless principles" that the state and national GOP stand for.

Trump left office with a 34% approval rating, according to Gallup — the lowest of his presidency — but the overwhelming majority of Republicans, 82%, approved of his job performance. Even as some try to move on, Trump's continued popularity with the GOP's base ensures he will remain a political force.

Despite the GOP's many challenges, they're within reach of retaking one or both chambers of Congress in next year's midterm elections. Since the 2006 midterms, the party in the White House has lost on average 37 House seats. Currently, Democrats hold a 10-seat House majority and they're tied with Republicans in the Senate.

Hogan, the Maryland governor, said that the GOP may be at one of its lowest points ever, but noted that Reagan reclaimed the White House for Republicans just six years after President Richard Nixon was

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forced to resign in disgrace.

"Obviously, (Trump) still has got a lock on a pretty good chunk of the Republican base, but there are an awful lot of people that were afraid to speak out for four years — unlike me — who are now starting to speak out," Hogan said.

Still, there are plenty of hurdles ahead. Primary challenges could leave the party with congressional nominees next year who are even further to the right, potentially imperiling the GOP's grip on races they might otherwise win.

More immediately, Senate Republicans, including McConnell, are wrestling with whether to convict Trump of high crimes and misdemeanors as outlined in last week's House impeachment. The Senate could ultimately vote to ban Trump from ever holding office again.

"I hope that Republicans won't participate in this petty, vindictive, final attack directed at President Trump," Cruz said. "We should just move on."

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Meade Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming, contributed to this report.

Who's in charge: Career staffers move to acting Cabinet head

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

Like 8,000 flying trapeze artists passing in midair, the Biden and Trump administrations swapped out senior leadership of the federal government on the fly as Joe Biden was inaugurated as the nation's 46th president.

Biden announced the dozens of career civil servants who would be leading federal agencies, pending Senate approval of his permanent nominees. Acting heads of Cabinet agencies raised their right hands Wednesday afternoon for oaths of office. Emails went out briefing federal employees on just which career employee would be serving as their acting boss.

It's a painstakingly executed exchange of Cabinet agency senior staffing with inherent risk of bad goof-ups in the best of years, former agency officials and scholars of the federal bureaucracy say. And this year, when Biden's administration was starting work amid fears that President Donald Trump's followers would launch more attacks like the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, had added challenges.

"Day One is always going to be the riskiest" when it comes to uncertainty about who's in charge, or the new people missing news of some critical event during an agency transition, said Paul C. Light, a professor of public service at New York University. One example, he said, would be scientists in the ranks learning of some vital development in the spread of the coronavirus pandemic or development of vaccines.

"As sure as we're talking here, these things happen," Light said. "It's a very dense hierarchy and there are no alarm bells."

There was no immediate word of any trouble Wednesday in the first hours of the change in leadership. Biden supporters earlier had accused Trump security agencies of failing to share vital information in the weeks leading up to the handoff.

Trump's false insistence that he, not Biden, won the presidential election raised the level of worries over Wednesday's transition.

U.S. officials this month made a point of specifying in advance who would be the acting head of the Defense Department at 12:01 p.m. Wednesday, the minute after Biden became president.

Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist became acting head of the Defense Department between the resignation of Trump appointee Christopher C. Miller and Senate confirmation of Biden's nominee to replace him, retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin.

Across Cabinet-level agencies, most political appointees of the old administration turned in resignations by Inauguration Day, following tradition.

Before leaving office, Trump had tweaked the orders of succession at some agencies, including the

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Environmental Protection Agency, in ways that changed which career staffer was in charge when all the political appointees go away.

Environmental advocates and other opponents of the Trump administration, and scholars of government, expressed suspicion of some of Trump's succession changes in his last weeks, fearing he might plant loyalists as acting heads to make trouble for Biden.

But Barack Obama's White House and others before him in their final weeks also made adjustments to who's left in charge in agencies, said Anne Joseph O'Connell, a Stanford Law School professor and expert in government process.

That's usually "not because of party preferences but to help with good governance," O'Connell said. "To the extent you care about government, you care about transition."

However, with Trump's reluctance after Election Day to yield power, "you could see why many would question the need for changes to succession now," she added.

In any case, federal law on vacancies gives incoming presidents wide choice in picking their own acting agency heads from among employees, regardless of succession plans. Biden by Wednesday afternoon announced his own selections of acting agency heads, from the State Department to the Social Security Administration to the National Endowment for the Arts.

"My expectation is that the incoming Biden administration will be relying very heavily on the vacancies act to staff their administration until their nominations are confirmed," O'Connell said.

Another Trump-era complication for this election cycle's power swap: Trump added more layers and senior staffers to federal government, Light said.

Researchers have crunched the federal government's annual directory of executive-level Cabinet staffers — the associates to the chiefs of staff, the deputies to the deputies — each year since the Kennedy administration. There were 451 of them, then.

There were 3,265 of those senior Cabinet employees when Obama left town — and 4,886 at last count under Trump, Light said, in research that Brookings published in October.

The thicker bureaucracy adds to the risk of vital communications not making it up to new leaders, Light said.

The rule for any acting heads remaining from past administrations is simple, Light said: Do no harm.

The understanding over the years is "acting appointees are not going to do anything significant" without warning, he said. "We just cross our fingers and hope that people will behave."

Organists offer soundtrack to jabs at medieval UK cathedral

By DANICA KIRKA and JO KEARNEY Associated Press

SALISBURY, England (AP) — David Halls isn't a doctor, nurse or ambulance driver, but he wanted to contribute in the fight against COVID-19. So he did what he does best: He sat down on the bench beside at Salisbury Cathedral's historic organ and began to play.

Halls is one of the many people who have turned the 800-year-old cathedral in southwestern England into a mass vaccination center as the U.K. races to inoculate 50 million people. His contribution to the effort is offering a bit of Bach, Handel and even a little Rodgers & Hammerstein to the public as they shuffle through the nave to get their shots.

"At times of crisis, people come together and want to listen to music; at moments of joy, people want to listen to music," Halls, the cathedral's music director, told The Associated Press. "And so I don't think it's any surprise the effect of soothing music on people who probably are feeling quite stressed for various reasons."

Salisbury Cathedral, home to one of the best preserved copies of the Magna Carta and England's tallest church spire, has been enlisted as a vaccination center as the government expands its shot program to football stadiums, convention centers and hundreds of local doctors offices to speed delivery.

Hundreds of elderly residents have rolled up their sleeves and got their shots in the great nave, which is big enough to gather people together while also keeping them safely apart.

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It's in stark contrast to 1627, when church leaders locked the cathedral gates to keep townspeople out as plague swept through Salisbury. Canon Nicholas Papadopoulos, dean of the cathedral, says he reflected on that episode with "visceral discomfort" last year when he celebrated the building's 800th anniversary.

Now, it's time for a new chapter.

"If these stones could speak, they would talk about moments of incredible joy and moments of incredible sadness," Halls said. "It feels thoroughly appropriate that the cathedral is playing its part in trying to turn things around and to be part of the vaccinations ... To be part of that is such a privilege, such an honor."

The U.K. plans to offer a first dose of vaccine to more than 15 million people by mid-February as it targets the country's oldest and most vulnerable residents in the program's first phase. Progressively younger groups of people will follow suit, with the government planning to reach everyone over 18 by September.

The need is urgent. Britain's healthcare system is staggering as doctors and nurses battle a more contagious variant of COVID-19.

While new infections appear to have peaked, the number of people hospitalized is still rising. More than 39,000 patients are being treated in U.K. hospitals, 80% more than during the first peak of the pandemic last April. Britain has reported 93,463 coronavirus-related deaths, more than any other country in Europe and the fifth-highest toll worldwide.

The effort at the cathedral is a community one, involving many. Organists took turns of two hours playing the massive "Father Willis" — making sure to sanitize in between.

John Challenger, 32, Salisbury's assistant director of music, said many getting the shots are older people who are isolated and haven't been able to hear live music for months.

In addition to playing soothing music, Challenger used his time at the organ to entertain and spark memories by playing songs like Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."

"And in the more frivolous moments I played 'I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside,' because, you know, we all want to go on holiday and haven't been able to go where we want," he said.

Among those listening Wednesday was Sylvia Parkin, 82, who came with her husband, David, 86. They have had to stay home a lot for the past 10 months, which has been no fun.

"It's a trip out today, isn't it?" she said cheerfully. "It's a wonderful place to have an injection."

And while it may be a long way up to the organ loft, people have managed to get their requests in.

Halls played Handel's "Largo" and Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" for an 80-year-old neighbor who had sent an email asking for his favorites to be played precisely at 10:45 a.m. Saturday, just as the needle was going in.

As Halls finished, he glanced at the screen that shows the organist what's happening on the floor below and saw his neighbor frantically waving — windshield wiper style — and offering his thanks.

"He emailed me later and he said that was the best part of his entire life other than his wedding day," Halls said. "I think to come second to that is quite good, actually."

Kearney contributed from Salisbury, England.

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

The Latest: Merkel sees signs of virus decline in Germany

By The Associated Press undefined

BERLIN — Chancellor Angela Merkel says there are promising signs that coronavirus infections are declining in Germany and that fewer people require intensive care. But she says Germany "has to take very seriously" the risk posed by a more contagious variant first detected in Britain.

Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors on Tuesday decided to extend the country's lockdown by two weeks until Feb. 14 and tighten some measures, for example requiring surgical masks — rather than just fabric face coverings — in shops and on public transport.

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On Thursday, Germany's disease control center said that 20,398 new cases were reported over the past 24 hours, nearly 5,000 fewer than a week ago. The number of new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days stood at 119, the lowest since the beginning of November — though still well above the level of 50 the government is targeting. There were 1,013 more deaths, bringing Germany's total so far to 49,783.

Merkel said it's important to prevent the new variant, which has been detected in Germany but isn't yet dominant, from spreading. She pointed to the danger of a "third wave" of infections but said "there is still some time" to ward off that danger.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

Britain hits another record daily virus deaths. Ontario's leader asks Biden for 1 million vaccine shots due to Pfizer shortfall for Canada. India to start delivering Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines to neighboring countries. Expert panel says both China and the WHO should have acted faster to prevent the pandemic. Surging infections give Spain's new emergency hospital in Madrid a chance for use. Italy ponders suing Pfizer for vaccine delays.

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

LONDON — A coronavirus vaccine manufacturer says one of its facilities in Britain was threatened by floods triggered by a winter storm, but that manufacturing was not disrupted.

Drugmaker Wockhardt U.K. says its site producing the AstraZeneca-Oxford University vaccine in Wrexham, Wales, was surrounded by water on Wednesday, but that "all necessary precautions were taken, meaning no disruption to manufacturing or inlet of water into buildings."

"The site is now secure and free from any further flood damage and operating as normal," the firm said in a statement Thursday.

Wales and northwest England have been battered by heavy winds and rain from a storm that has seen some rivers surge to record levels.

Britain has ordered 100 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and is relying heavily on it in a campaign to inoculate the whole adult population by the autumn. So far almost 5 million people in the U.K. have had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey on Thursday expanded its COVID-19 inoculation campaign to include people aged 85 and older.

The country of 83 million rolled out its vaccination drive a week ago, starting with health care workers as well as nursing home residents and their care-givers. More than 1 million people received the first of two doses of the vaccine developed by China's Sinovac pharmaceutical company in the first week.

On Thursday, the more frail among those aged 85 and above were receiving their shots at home, while others made their way to health centers.

Turkey has so far received 3 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey is scheduled to receive between 25 and 30 million more doses, although there has been no word on when the additional doses will arrive.

Turkey has reported close to 2.4 million infections and more than 24,000 deaths since March.

DHAKA, Bangladesh — India on Thursday sent 2 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine to Bangladesh, a gift that is likely to foster bilateral relations further between the two South Asian neighbors.

Bangladesh's Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen and Health Minister Zahid Maleque received the consignment from Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Vikram Doraiswami in Bangladesh's capital.

The AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine, manufactured under license by Serum Institute of India, will be given to frontline workers including doctors and nurses. The government says the inoculations are

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expected to start early next month.

Momen praised India for the gesture.

"This proves the true friendship between Bangladesh and India," he said.

For decades Bangladesh has established a strong network of volunteers and health workers for vaccination.

More vaccines are expected from India under other arrangements soon, officials said.

Bilateral relations between the two neighbors have reached new heights over Bangladesh's support for India in many regional and international affairs, while India is a major trade partner.

Bangladesh usually balances diplomatically between two Asian powers — China and India — as both the countries are close allies. Officials say Bangladesh is also expecting to have Chinese vaccines in the future.

GENEVA — President Joe Biden's top medical adviser on COVID-19, Dr. Anthony Fauci, says the United States will cease reducing U.S. staff counts at the World Health Organization and pay its financial obligations to it as it vows to stay fully engaged with the U.N. health agency to help fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"I am honored to announce that the United States will remain a member of the World Health Organization," Fauci told the WHO's executive board meeting in Geneva via videoconference. The administration announced just hours after Biden's inauguration that the United States would revoke a planned pullout from the WHO in July that had been announced by the Trump administration.

Fauci's quick commitment to WHO -- whose response to the coronavirus outbreak was repeatedly berated by the Trump administration -- marks a dramatic and vocal shift toward a multilateral approach to fighting the pandemic.

He said the administration will "will cease the drawdown of U.S. staff seconded to the WHO" and resume "regular engagement" with WHO. He added: "The United States also intends to fulfill its financial obligations to the organization."

He also referred to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, as "my dear friend."

NAIROBI, Kenya — The director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says access to medical oxygen is a "huge, huge critical need" across the continent as Africa's case fatality rate from COVID-19 is now above the global average and health centers are overwhelmed.

John Nkengasong said the case fatality rate across the African continent is 2.5% while the global average is 2.2%. And while confirmed coronavirus cases in the past week across Africa dropped by 7%, deaths rose by 10%.

"It's beginning to be very worrying," Nkengasong told reporters Thursday. He noted that a Nigerian colleague has said struggling health workers are having to decide which cases to manage and which not to manage in Africa's most populous country.

Twenty-one of Africa's more than 50 countries have case fatality rates above the global average, led by Sudan at 6.2%. The continent has seen more than 6,000 deaths in the past week, with more than 81,000 overall. Africa has had more than 3.3 million confirmed virus cases. Almost all African countries are still waiting for COVID-19 vaccines.

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Hungarian authorities have approved a Russian coronavirus vaccine, moving the country closer to becoming the first in the European Union to administer the shot to its population.

The vaccine, Sputnik V, received a six-month authorization Wednesday from Hungary's National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition, institute director Matyas Szentivanyi told public television. It must now be approved by the country's National Public Health Center, a process which could take several weeks.

Hungary was the first EU country to receive samples of the Russian vaccine in November.

Around 134,000 people have been vaccinated with Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines in Hungary so far. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, has been critical of the speed of the EU's vaccine rollout, and pursued separate agreements with Russia and China in an effort to get more doses to the central

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European country.

"There are not enough vaccines in Europe, which raises the question of whether we made a good decision together with the 26 prime ministers when we decided to procure vaccines together," Orban said in a Jan. 15 interview on public radio.

Sputnik V -- hailed in August by Russian President Vladimir Putin as the world's first registered COVID-19 vaccine -- has not been approved by the European Medicines Agency, the bloc's medicines regulator. But member states may negotiate separately with manufacturers not covered by the bloc's joint procurement program, and issue temporary emergency use approval to such vaccines.

The Russian vaccine has been approved in six countries including Argentina, Belarus, and Serbia, Hungary's non-EU neighbor, which began administering Sputnik V early this month.

BERLIN — Germany is pushing its partners in the European Union to reduce coronavirus infections in an effort to keep a new variant first detected in Britain at bay, and says new border checks might be needed if they don't coordinate.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors agreed on Tuesday to extend the country's lockdown by two weeks until Feb. 14. Although Germany's infection figures are finally declining, officials worry that more infectious variants could push them back up quickly if allowed to take hold.

Merkel said on Tuesday: "If countries were to go very different ways -- which I don't see at the moment, but it could happen, then we would have to be prepared ... (to) say, then we have to reintroduce border controls." She stressed that "we don't want this."

Her chief of staff, Helge Braun, on Thursday emphasized the need to push infections down "to keep the mutation out of core Europe."

Braun told ARD television: "All countries must do this, and if a neighboring country doesn't do this we can hardly protect ourselves against the mutation, and then even tougher entry measures on our internal borders are unavoidable. And since everyone doesn't want that, it's important that we act together now."

STOCKHOLM — Sweden's government extended on Thursday several national COVID-19 restrictions, including requirements to work from home and a ban on selling alcohol after 8 p.m. Both were extended to Feb. 7.

A requirement that face masks be worn on public transportation was also extended through the spring.

A national recommendation on remote education also was extended to April 1 but adjusted so that distance learning and teaching on site will be mixed. It will be up to local principals to work that out.

"To Sweden's high school students: now a tough time continues. But you have shown that you can meet this challenge," said Sweden's Education Minister Anna Ekstrom.

The country of 10 million has opted to keep parts of its society open and lifted in September a national ban on visiting elderly care homes. It has reported 537,967 cases, including 10,797 deaths.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Sri Lanka is welcoming tourists again after keeping the doors closed to visitors for nearly 10 months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The government's action Thursday is seen as an effort to revive the island nation's tourism industry, which has been badly hit by the pandemic. Tourism accounts for about 5% of Sri Lanka's economy and before the pandemic employed 250,000 people directly and up to 3 million indirectly.

Under the reopening, visitors must be tested in their country 72 hours prior to their flight, when they arrive at their hotel and again seven days later. They will be allowed to travel in 14 tourism zones in a "travel bubble," without mixing with local people. About 180 hotels have been earmarked to provide accommodations for the tourists.

SYDNEY — People traveling to Australia from most other countries will need to test negative for the coronavirus before they depart, as of Friday.

Australian Health Minister Greg Hunt said Thursday that he has signed orders that require international

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travelers to have a negative test within three days of leaving for Australia. All international passengers will also have to wear masks on their flights.

New Zealand and a handful of Pacific Island countries are exempt from the new rules.

TOKYO — Japanese electronics maker Panasonic Corp. says it is using its refrigerator technology to develop special boxes for storing the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine, which must be kept at ultracold temperatures.

The company said Thursday that samples will be ready in March, with a product to follow a month or two later.

The box will use dry ice to maintain the temperature at the minus-70 degrees Celsius required for the Pfizer's vaccine. It does not need to plug in.

Japan's government has deals with various drug companies, including one with Pfizer for enough vaccine to inoculate 72 million people this year. That is more than half the nation's population.

Japan is pushing a vaccine rollout after a surge in coronavirus cases, including a more than doubling of its pandemic death toll in the last three weeks to more than 4,600.

BEIJING — China is imposing some of its toughest travel restrictions yet as coronavirus cases surge in several northern provinces ahead of the Lunar New Year.

Next month's festival is the most important time of the year for family gatherings in China, and for many migrant workers it is often the only time they are able to return to their rural homes.

This year, however, travelers must have a negative virus test within seven days of departure, and many local governments are ordering quarantines and other strict measures on travelers.

A national health official had this message Wednesday for Chinese citizens: "Do not travel or have gatherings unless it's necessary."

Officials are predicting Chinese will make 1.7 billion trips during the travel rush. That is down 40% from 2019.

MEXICO CITY — Mexico has had a second consecutive day of COVID-19 deaths surpassing 1,500. Officials reported 1,539 such deaths Wednesday, a day after 1,584 deaths were listed. There was also a near-record one-day rise in new virus cases of 20,548.

Mexico has seen almost 1.69 million confirmed coronavirus infections and over 144,000 test-confirmed deaths related to COVID-19. With the country's extremely low testing rate, official estimates suggest the real death toll is closer to 195,000.

Mexico City is the current epicenter of the pandemic in the country, and 89% of the capital's hospital beds are in use. For the nation as a whole, 61% of hospital beds are filled.

ATLANTA — Judges say Georgia's court system could take years to dig out of a backlog of jury trials delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

State Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton told lawmakers during hearings Wednesday that it could take one to two years to catch up. Superior Court Judge Wade Padgett estimated it could be more like three years.

Under state law, Melton has been renewing a declaration of judicial emergency every 30 days, limiting what court cases can happen in person. He says he's eager to resume jury trials as soon as possible.

For a period late last year, Melton allowed some jury trials to go ahead. But Melton says rising infection rates forced another shutdown.

NEW YORK — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday that he expects the state to exhaust its supply of vaccine available to people receiving their first dose within two or three days.

"What's clear now is we're going to be going from week to week and you will see a constant pattern of basically running out, waiting for the next week's allocation, and then starting up again," the Democrat said.

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He urged health care facilities to be careful not to schedule appointments to give away vaccine they haven't been allocated yet, "because we don't know what we're going to get next week and we don't know where we're going to distribute it next week."

Biden puts forth virus strategy, requires mask use to travel

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the U.S. enters "what may well be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus," President Joe Biden is putting forth a national COVID-19 strategy to ramp up vaccinations and testing, reopen schools and businesses and increase the use of masks — including a requirement that they be worn for travel.

Biden also will address inequities in hard-hit minority communities as he signs 10 pandemic-related executive orders on Thursday, his second day in office.

"We need to ask average Americans to do their part," said Jeff Zients, the White House official directing the national response. "Defeating the virus requires a coordinated nationwide effort."

But Biden officials say they're hampered by lack of cooperation from the Trump administration during the transition. They say they don't have a complete understanding of their predecessors' actions on vaccine distribution.

They're also depending on Congress to provide \$1.9 trillion for economic relief and COVID-19 response. And they face a litany of complaints from states that say they are not getting enough vaccine even as they are being asked to vaccinate more categories of people.

Biden acknowledged the urgency of the mission in his inaugural address. "We are entering what may well be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus," he said before asking Americans to join him in a moment of silence in memory of the more than 400,000 people in the U.S. who have died from COVID-19.

Biden's top medical adviser on COVID-19, Dr. Anthony Fauci, also announced renewed U.S. support for the World Health Organization after it faced blistering criticism from the Trump administration, laying out new commitments to tackle the coronavirus and other global health issues. Fauci said early Thursday that the U.S. will join the U.N. health agency's efforts to bring vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to people in need, whether in rich or poor countries and will resume full funding and staffing support for WHO.

The U.S. mask order for travel being implemented by Biden will apply to airports and planes, ships, intercity buses, trains and public transportation. Travelers from abroad must furnish a negative COVID-19 test before departing for the U.S. and quarantine upon arrival. Biden has already mandated masks on federal property.

Although airlines, Amtrak and other transport providers now require masks, Biden's order makes it a federal mandate, leaving little wiggle room for passengers tempted to argue about their rights. It marks a sharp break with the culture of President Donald Trump's administration, under which masks were optional, and Trump made a point of going maskless and hosting big gatherings of like-minded supporters. Science has shown that masks, properly worn, cut down on coronavirus transmission.

Biden also is seeking to expand testing and vaccine availability, with the goal of 100 million shots in his first 100 days in office. Zients called Biden's goal "ambitious and achievable."

The Democratic president has directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency to begin setting up vaccination centers, aiming to have 100 up and running in a month. He's ordering the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to begin a program to make vaccines available through local pharmacies starting next month. And he's mobilizing the Public Health Service to deploy to assist localities in vaccinations.

Some independent experts say the administration should be setting a higher bar for itself than 100 million shots. During flu season, the U.S. is able to vaccinate about 3 million people a day, said Dr. Christopher Murray of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle. "Given the number of people dying from COVID, we could and should do more — like what we're able to do on seasonal flu," he said.

Zients said Biden will not follow through on a Trump administration plan to penalize states lagging in vaccination by shifting some of their allocation to more efficient states. "We are not looking to pit one

state against another," he said.

Biden has set a goal of having most K-8 schools reopen in his first 100 days, and he's ordering the departments of Education and Health and Human Services to provide clear guidance for reopening schools safely.

Getting schools and child care going will help to ease the drag on the U.S. economy, making it easier for parents to return to their jobs and restaurants to find lunch-time customers.

But administration officials stressed that reopening schools safely depends on increased testing.

To ramp up supplies, Biden is giving government agencies a green light to use a Cold War-era law called the Defense Production Act to direct manufacturing.

"We do not have nearly enough testing capacity in this country," Zients said. "We need the money in order to really ramp up testing, which is so important to reopen schools and businesses."

This means that any efforts to reopen the economy will hinge on how quickly lawmakers act on the \$1.9 trillion package proposed by Biden, which includes separate planks such as \$1,400 in direct payments to people, a \$15 minimum wage and aid to state and local governments that some Republican lawmakers see as unnecessary for addressing the medical emergency. The Biden plan estimates that a national vaccination strategy with expanded testing requires \$160 billion, and he wants another \$170 billion to aid the reopening of schools and universities.

As part of his COVID-19 strategy, Biden will order the establishment of a COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force to ensure that minority and underserved communities are not left out of the government's response. Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans have borne a heavy burden of death and disease from the virus. Surveys have shown vaccine hesitancy is high among African Americans, a problem the administration plans to address through an education campaign.

But Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, the top White House health adviser on minority communities, said she's not convinced that race should be a factor in vaccination. Disparities seem to have more to do with risky jobs and other life circumstances.

"It's not inherent to race," she said. "It's from the exposures."

There's also support for states in the package. Biden is ordering FEMA to reimburse states for the full cost of using their National Guards to set up vaccination centers. That includes the use of supplies and protective gear as well as personnel. States would also be able to tap FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund to help them get schools back open.

Associated Press writers Collin Binkley and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

Fauci lays out Biden's support for WHO after Trump criticism

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — President Joe Biden's top medical adviser on COVID-19, Dr. Anthony Fauci, on Thursday announced renewed U.S. support for the World Health Organization after it faced blistering criticism from the Trump administration, laying out new commitments to tackle the coronavirus and other global health issues.

Fauci, speaking by videoconference from pre-dawn United States to WHO's executive board, said the U.S. will join the U.N. health agency's efforts to bring vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to people in need, whether in rich or poor countries. He said the U.S. will also resume full funding and staffing support for WHO.

Fauci's quick commitment to WHO — whose response to the coronavirus outbreak was repeatedly berated by the Trump administration — marks a dramatic and vocal shift toward a multilateral approach to fighting the pandemic.

"I am honored to announce that the United States will remain a member of the World Health Organization," Fauci said. Just hours after Biden's inauguration on Wednesday, his administration announced the U.S. will revoke a planned pullout from the WHO in July that had been announced by the Trump administration.

Fauci said the Biden administration "will cease the drawdown of U.S. staff seconded to the WHO" and

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resume "regular engagement" with WHO. "The United States also intends to fulfil its financial obligations to the organization," he added.

He referred to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, as "my dear friend."

Other countries and the WHO chief jumped in to welcome the U.S. announcements, and pledged to work with the Biden administration.

"This is a good day for WHO and a good day for global health," Tedros said, referring to "my brother Tony" in reference to Fauci, while congratulating Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris. "The role of the United States, its role, global role is very, very crucial."

The United States under Trump had been the highest-profile — and most deep-pocketed — holdout from the COVAX Facility, which has faced financial hurdles and contractual challenges with vaccine manufacturers as well as vast logistical issues. Both the European Union and China have given their support to the program.

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng contributed from Toronto.

Analysis: Biden faces a more confident China after US chaos

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — As a new U.S. president takes office, he faces a determined Chinese leadership that could be further emboldened by America's troubles at home.

The disarray in America, from the rampant COVID-19 pandemic to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol, gives China's ruling Communist Party a boost as it pursues its long-running quest for national "rejuvenation" — a bid to return the country to what it sees as its rightful place as a major nation.

For Joe Biden, sworn in Wednesday as the 46th president, that could make one of his major foreign policy challenges even more difficult as he tries to manage an increasingly contentious relationship between the world's rising power and its established one.

The stakes are high for both countries and the rest of the world. A misstep could spark an accidental conflict in the Western Pacific, where China's growing naval presence is bumping up against America's. The trade war under President Donald Trump hurt workers and farmers in both countries, though some in Vietnam and elsewhere benefited as companies moved production outside China. On global issues such as climate, it is difficult to make progress if the world's two largest economies aren't talking.

The Chinese government expressed hope Thursday that Biden would return to dialogue and cooperation after the divisiveness under Trump.

"It is normal for China and the United States to have some differences," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said. "Countries with different social systems, cultural backgrounds and ideologies should and can coexist ... and work together to achieve peace and stability and development in the world."

But Kurt Tong, a former U.S. diplomat in Asia, sees a stalemate in the coming few years in which China keeps doing what it has been doing and the U.S. is not happy about it.

"I think it's going to be a tough patch, it's just going to be more disagreements than agreements and not a lot of breakthroughs," said Tong, now a partner with The Asia Group consultancy in Washington, D.C.

A more confident China may push back harder on issues such as technology, territory and human rights. Analysts draw parallels to the 2008 global financial crisis, from which China emerged relatively unscathed. The country's foreign policy has grown increasingly assertive since then, from staking out territory in disputed waters in the South China Sea to its more recent use of Twitter to hit back at critics. China's relative success in controlling the pandemic could fuel that trend.

The U.S. has also shifted, with wide support among both Republicans and Democrats for treating China as a competitor, and embracing the need for a tougher approach to China, if not always agreeing with how Trump carried it out. Biden needs to be wary of opening himself up to attacks that he is soft on China if he rolls back import tariffs and other steps taken by his predecessor.

His pressing need to prioritize domestic challenges could give China breathing room to push forward its

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agenda, whether it be technological advancement or territorial issues from Taiwan to its border with India.

Biden has pointed to potential areas of cooperation, from climate change to curbing North Korea's nuclear weapons development, but even in those areas, the two countries don't always agree.

The pandemic, first viewed as a potential threat to President Xi Jinping's leadership as it spiraled out of control in the city of Wuhan in early 2020, has been transformed into a story of hardship followed by triumph.

The Communist Party has sought to use the pandemic to justify its continued control of the one-party, authoritarian state it has led for more than 70 years, while rounding up citizen-journalists and others to quash any criticism of its handling of the outbreak.

That effort has been aided by the failure of many other nations to stop the spread of COVID-19. Biden takes over a country where deaths continue to mount and virus-related restrictions keep it in recession. China is battling small outbreaks, but life has largely returned to normal and economic growth is accelerating.

"It would have been more difficult for them to push that narrative around the world if the United States had not done such a poor job," said Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington, D.C. "That's a theme that runs through many issues, that China's just able to point to the United States and democracy in general as not delivering good governance."

It's impossible to gauge support for the Communist Party in a country where many would be unwilling to criticize it publicly, for fear of repercussions. But Niu Jun, an international relations professor at Peking University, said that objectively, public trust should rise given China's faster recovery from the outbreak.

"To ordinary people, the logic is very simple," he said, predicting the pandemic would spark public thinking and discussion about which system of governance is more effective.

"The party's policies are good, our policies are not like the ones in foreign countries, ours are good," said Liu Shixiu, strolling with her daughter in Wuhan, the city that bore the brunt of the pandemic in China. "We listen to the party."

It is unclear whether the Communist Party foresees exporting its way of governance as an alternative to the democratic model. For now, Chinese officials note that countries choose different systems and stress the need for others to respect those differences.

"As China becomes more and more confident, maybe they'll try to shape the internal operations or ways of thinking of other countries," Tong said. "But to me, it feels more like they don't want anyone to be able to say that China is bad and get away with it."

The leadership wants China to be seen and treated as an equal and has shown a willingness to use its growing economic and military might to try to get its way.

Associated Press video journalist Emily Wang Fujiyama contributed to this report.

Moritsugu, The Associated Press' news director for Greater China, has reported in Asia for more than 15 years.

World hopes for renewed cooperation with US under Biden

By LORNE COOK and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — World leaders welcomed into their ranks the new U.S. President Joe Biden, noting their most pressing problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, require multilateral cooperation, an approach his predecessor Donald Trump ridiculed.

Many expressed hope Biden would right U.S. democracy two weeks after rioters stormed the Capitol, shaking the faith of those fighting for democracy in their own countries.

Governments targeted and sanctioned under Trump embraced the chance for a fresh start with Biden, while some heads of state who lauded Trump's blend of nationalism and populism were more restrained in their expectations.

But the chance to repair frayed alliances and work together on global problems carried the day.

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China, whose U.S. relations nosedived due to widespread frustration in Washington over its human rights record and accusations of technology theft, expressed hope about the change in the White House.

"I think after this very difficult and extraordinary time, both the Chinese and American people deserve a better future," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said at a daily briefing.

Biden "understands the importance of cooperation among nations," said former Colombian president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Juan Manuel Santos, who left office in 2018. "As a matter of fact, if we don't cooperate – all nations – to fight climate change, then we will all perish. It's as simple as that."

French President Emmanuel Macron and Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama were among those welcoming U.S. attention to climate change. After Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Paris climate accord, Biden reversed the move in the first hours of his presidency Wednesday.

With Biden, "we will be stronger to face the challenges of our time. Stronger to build our future. Stronger to protect our planet," Macron wrote on Twitter. "Welcome back to the Paris Agreement!"

Other European allies saw a chance to come in out of the cold after strained relationships with the Trump administration.

European Council President Charles Michel said trans-Atlantic relations have "greatly suffered in the last four years" while the world has become less stable and less predictable.

"We have our differences and they will not magically disappear. America seems to have changed, and how it's perceived in Europe and the rest of the world has also changed," added Michel, whose open criticism of the Trump era contrasted with the silence that mostly reigned in Europe while the Republican leader was in the White House.

In Ballina, Ireland, where Biden's great-great-grandfather was born in 1832, a mural of a smiling Biden adorned a wall in the town, where some of the president's relatives still live.

"As he takes the oath of office, I know that President Biden will feel the weight of history — the presence of his Irish ancestors who left Mayo and Louth in famine times in search of life and hope," Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who formed close ties with Trump, noted a personal friendship with Biden and said he looked forward to working together to further strengthen the U.S.-Israel alliance.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has accused Trump of unfair bias toward Israel with policies like moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, expressed hope for a more even-handed approach from Biden. He urged "a comprehensive and just peace process that fulfills the aspirations of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence."

In Latin America, Biden faces immediate challenges on immigration, and the leaders of the two most populous countries — Brazil and Mexico — were chummy with Trump. The Trump administration also expanded painful sanctions against governments in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

In Venezuela, President Nicolás Maduro's government urged dialogue with the Biden administration, while hoping the new president abandons the avalanche of damaging sanctions Trump imposed to attempt a regime change.

Some Venezuelans, however, like retired accountant Jesús Sánchez, 79, said he was disappointed to see Trump leave power. Trump backed opposition leader Juan Guaidó, giving Venezuelans like him hope that Maduro's days in power were numbered.

Carlos Vecchio, Guaidó's envoy in Washington who the U.S. recognizes as Venezuela's ambassador, tweeted photos of himself at Biden's inauguration. The invitation to attend was touted by Venezuela's opposition as evidence the Biden administration will continue its strong support and resist entreaties by Maduro for dialogue that the U.S. has strenuously rejected until now.

Cuba's leaders perhaps have a more realistic hope for improved relations: Biden was in the White House for the historic thaw in relations in 2014, and various officials expressed willingness to reopen a dialogue with Washington if there was respect for Cuba's sovereignty.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel railed against Trump via Twitter, citing "more than 200 measures that tightened the financial, commercial and economic blockade, the expression of a despicable and inhuman policy."

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In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who cultivated an unexpectedly friendly relationship with Trump and was one of the last world leaders to recognize Biden's victory, read from a letter he sent to Biden in 2012, calling for reorienting the bilateral relationship away from security and military aid and toward development.

He urged Biden to implement immigration reform, and added: "We need to maintain a very good relationship with the United States government and I don't have any doubt that it's going to be that way."

U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region expressed anticipation of strengthening those alliances under a Biden administration. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and others highlighted their shared values as leaders of democracies.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said: "America's new beginning will make democracy even greater."

Former Australian diplomat Rory Medcalf said Biden would likely find diplomatic partners across the Indo-Pacific region ready not for American leadership but partnership in "collective action" against Chinese "strategic assertiveness."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Biden was a good friend to New Zealand and highlighted in particular the words given in his inaugural address. "President Biden's message of unity as he takes office is one that resonates with New Zealanders," Ardern said.

World leaders also acknowledged the history of Vice President Kamala Harris taking office. She is the first woman, the first Black woman and the first South Asian to hold that office in the U.S.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Twitter congratulated both Biden and Harris, whose maternal grandfather was Indian.

"That is an historic moment and one that, I think as a father of daughters, you can only celebrate," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

Cook reported from Brussels. AP journalists around the world contributed to this report.

This version has been corrected by removing the reference to the U.S. as the world's largest democracy.

Biden takes the helm, appeals for unity to take on crises

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, ZEKE MILLER and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States, declaring that "democracy has prevailed" and summoning American resilience and unity to confront the deeply divided nation's historic confluence of crises.

Denouncing a national "uncivil war," Biden took the oath Wednesday at a U.S. Capitol that had been battered by an insurrectionist siege just two weeks earlier. Then, taking his place in the White House Oval Office, he plunged into a stack of executive actions that began to undo the heart of his polarizing predecessor's agenda on matters from the deadly pandemic to climate change.

At the Capitol, with America's tradition of peaceful transfers of power never appearing more fragile, the ceremony unfolded within a circle of security forces evocative of a war zone and devoid of crowds because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead, Biden gazed out on a cold Washington morning dotted with snow flurries to see over 200,000 American flags planted on the National Mall to symbolize those who could not attend in person.

"The will of the people has been heard, and the will of the people has been heeded. We've learned again that democracy is precious and democracy is fragile. At this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed," Biden declared in his speech. "This is America's day. This is democracy's day. A day of history and hope, of renewal and resolve."

History was made at his side, as Kamala Harris became the first woman to be vice president. The former U.S. senator from California is also the first Black person and the first person of South Asian descent elected to the vice presidency and the highest-ranking woman ever to serve in the U.S. government.

Biden never mentioned his predecessor, who defied tradition and left town ahead of the ceremony, but

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his speech was an implicit rebuke of Donald Trump. The new president denounced “lies told for power and for profit” and was blunt about the challenges ahead.

Central among them: the surging virus that has claimed more than 400,000 lives in the United States, as well as economic strains and a national reckoning over race.

“We have much to do in this winter of peril, and significant possibilities. Much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build and much to gain,” Biden said. “Few people in our nation’s history have been more challenged, or found a time more challenging or difficult than the time we’re in now.”

Biden was eager to go big early, with an ambitious first 100 days including a push to speed up the distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations to anxious Americans and pass a \$1.9 trillion economic relief package. It included a blitz of executive orders on matters that don’t require congressional approval — a mix of substantive and symbolic steps to unwind the Trump years. His actions included re-entry into the Paris Climate Accords and a mandate for wearing masks on federal property.

“There’s no time to start like today,” a masked Biden said. in the Oval Office. Then he swore in hundreds of aides — virtually — telling them, “You’re my possibilities.”

The absence of Biden’s predecessor from the inaugural ceremony underscored the national rift to be healed.

But a bipartisan trio of former presidents — Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — were there to witness the transfer of power. Trump, awaiting his second impeachment trial, was at his Florida resort by the time the swearing-in took place.

Biden, in his third run for the presidency, staked his candidacy less on any distinctive political ideology than on galvanizing a broad coalition of voters around the notion that Trump posed an existential threat to American democracy. Four years after Trump’s “American Carnage” speech painted a dark portrait of national decay, Biden warned that the fabric of the nation’s democracy was tearing but could be repaired.

“I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new. Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, demonization have long torn us apart,” Biden said. “This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward and we must meet this moment as the United States of America.”

Swearing the oath with his hand on a five-inch-thick Bible that has been in his family for 128 years, Biden came to office with a well of empathy and resolve born by personal tragedy as well as a depth of experience forged from more than four decades in Washington. At age 78, he is the oldest president inaugurated.

Both he, Harris and their spouses walked the last short part of the route to the White House after an abridged parade. Biden then strode into the Oval Office, a room he knew well as vice president, for the first time as commander in chief.

At the Capitol earlier, Biden, like all those in attendance, wore a face mask except when speaking. Tens of thousands of National Guard troops were on the streets to provide security precisely two weeks after a violent mob of Trump supporters, incited by the Republican president, stormed the building in an attempt to prevent the certification of Biden’s victory.

“Here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people,” Biden said. “To stop the work of our democracy. To drive us from this sacred ground. It did not happen. It will never happen. Not today, not tomorrow. Not ever. Not ever.”

The tense atmosphere evoked the 1861 inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, who was secretly transported to Washington to avoid assassins on the eve of the Civil War, or Franklin Roosevelt’s inaugural in 1945, when he opted for a small, secure ceremony at the White House in the waning months of World War II.

But Washington, all but deserted downtown and in its federal areas, was quiet. And calm also prevailed outside heavily fortified state Capitol buildings across nation after the FBI had warned of the possibility for armed demonstrations leading up to the inauguration.

The day began with a reach across the political aisle after four years of bitter partisan battles under Trump. At Biden’s invitation, congressional leaders from both parties bowed their heads in prayer in the socially distanced service a few blocks from the White House.

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Biden was sworn in by Chief Justice John Roberts; Harris by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court. Vice President Mike Pence, standing in for Trump, sat nearby as Lady Gaga, holding a golden microphone, sang the National Anthem accompanied by the U.S. Marine Corps band.

When Pence, in a last act of the outgoing administration, left the Capitol, he walked through a door with badly cracked glass from the riot two weeks ago. Later, Biden, Harris and their spouses were joined by the former presidents to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

By afternoon, a White House desolate in Trump's waning days sprang back to life, with Biden staffers settling in and new COVID-19 safety measures, like plastic shields on desks, in place.

In the evening, in lieu of the traditional balls that welcome a new president to Washington, Biden and Harris appeared separately at the Lincoln Memorial to take part in a televised concert that also marked the return of A-list celebrities to the White House orbit after they largely eschewed Trump. Among those in the lineup: Bruce Springsteen, Justin Timberlake and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The Bidens ended their evening watching fireworks from a White House balcony.

This was not an inauguration for the crowds. But Americans in the capital city nonetheless brought their hopes to the moment.

"I feel so hopeful, so thankful," said Karen Jennings Crooms, a D.C. resident who hoped to catch a glimpse of the presidential motorcade on Pennsylvania Avenue with her husband. "It makes us sad that this is where we are but hopeful that democracy will win out in the end. That's what I'm focusing on."

Trump was the first president in more than a century to skip the inauguration of his successor. After a brief farewell celebration at nearby Joint Base Andrews, he boarded Air Force One for the final time as president.

"I will always fight for you. I will be watching. I will be listening and I will tell you that the future of this country has never been better," said Trump. He wished the incoming administration well but never mentioned Biden's name.

Trump did adhere to one tradition and left a personal note for Biden in the Oval Office. Biden would only tell reporters that it was "a very generous letter."

Trump, in his farewell video remarks, hinted at a political return, saying "we will be back in some form." Without question, he will shadow Biden's first days in office.

Trump's second impeachment trial could start as early as this week. That will test the ability of the Senate, now coming under Democratic control, to balance impeachment proceedings with confirmation hearings and votes on Biden's Cabinet choices.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Darlene Superville in Washington and Michelle L. Price in Las Vegas contributed to this report.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>.

Hollywood on the Potomac: A-list turns out for Biden-Harris

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

A full-throated, supremely confident Lady Gaga belted out the national anthem at President Joe Biden's inauguration in a very Gaga way — with flamboyance, fashion and passion.

The Grammy winner wore a huge dove-shaped brooch and an impressively billowing red sculpted skirt as she sang into a golden microphone, delivering an emotional and powerful rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner." She was followed at Wednesday's ceremony by Jennifer Lopez, dressed all in white, who threw a line of Spanish into her medley of "This Land is Your Land" and "America the Beautiful" — a pointed nod to multiculturalism, just two weeks after white supremacists and other violent rioters stormed the Capitol in an effort to undermine the peaceful transfer of power.

And country star Garth Brooks, doffing his black cowboy hat, sang a soulful a capella rendition of "Amazing Grace," his eyes closed for much of the song. He asked the audience to sing a verse with him: "Not

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just the people here, but the people at home, to work as one united.”

The three superstars were among a slew of glittery celebrities descending on Washington — virtually or in person — to welcome the new administration of Biden and Kamala Harris, a duo popular in Hollywood, where former President Donald Trump was decidedly not. While stars mostly eschewed Trump’s inauguration four years ago, the A-list was back for Biden.

Brooks was careful to call his decision to perform on Wednesday non-political, and in the spirit of unity. He had performed during the inaugural celebration for Obama in 2009, but turned down a chance to perform for Trump in 2017, citing a scheduling conflict.

Gaga went on Twitter later to explain that the giant brooch accompanying her Schiaparelli haute couture outfit was “a dove carrying an olive branch. May we all make peace with each other.” Lopez was in all-white Chanel, and Brooks kept it real in jeans, an open-collared black shirt and blazer.

While the podium was full of high-wattage star power, there was little question that a new star had also emerged: 22-year-old poet Amanda Gorman, whose poise and urgency as she recited “The Hill We Climb” enthralled a global audience.

None other than Bruce Springsteen launched the evening’s entertainment: “Celebrating America,” a 90-minute, multi-network broadcast hosted by Tom Hanks that took the place of the usual official inaugural balls, with Biden and Harris watching along and giving brief remarks. Alone with his guitar, The Boss sang his “Land of Hope and Dreams” in front of the Lincoln Memorial. “I will provide for you, and I’ll stand by your side,” he sang. “You’ll need a good companion, for this part of the ride.”

Hanks, also at the Lincoln Memorial, spoke of “deep divisions and a troubling rancor in our land” over the past few years. “But tonight we ponder the United States of America, the practice of our democracy, the foundations of our republic, the integrity of our Constitution, the hope and dreams we all share for a more perfect union,” he said.

Jon Bon Jovi contributed a rendition of “Here Comes the Sun” from Miami, and Ant Clemons and Justin Timberlake performed “Better Days” from Memphis. John Legend sang “Feeling Good” in Washington; Foo Fighters sang “Times Like These” in honor of teachers, and Demi Lovato performed “Lovely Day” along with doctors and nurses in Los Angeles.

A starry collection of Broadway’s most prominent musical actors collaborated on a medley of “Seasons of Love” from the show “Rent” and “Let the Sunshine In” from “Hair,” among them Christopher Jackson, Renée Elise Goldsberry, Laura Benanti, Betty Buckley, Leslie Uggams and Javier Muñoz. “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda recited from “The Cure at Troy” by Irish poet Seamus Heaney.

Reciting excerpts of notable past inaugural addresses were basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, labor leader Dolores Huerta and Kim Ng, the first female general manager in MLB history. Peppering musical performances among stories of ordinary Americans and their contributions, the show included tributes to a UPS driver, a kindergarten teacher and Sandra Lindsay, the first in New York to receive the COVID-19 vaccine outside a clinical trial.

The proceedings ended with a lavish fireworks show in the Washington night sky, watched by Biden (at the White House) and Harris (at the Lincoln Memorial) and their families to — what else? — “Firework,” performed by Katy Perry.

The history of celebrities performing at inaugurations dates back to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s third inauguration in 1941, when a gala celebration the evening before saw performances from Irving Berlin, Mickey Rooney and Charlie Chaplin, says Lina Mann of the White House Historical Association. “Chaplin performed his monologue from ‘The Great Dictator,’” Mann notes.

The celebrity component only increased over time, and one of the starriest inaugurations was that of John F. Kennedy in 1961. That celebration, hosted by Frank Sinatra, drew Harry Belafonte, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Gene Kelly, Ethel Merman, Laurence Olivier, Sidney Poitier and other celebrities.

Fast forward to the first Obama inauguration in 2009, where Aretha Franklin sang “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” at the swearing-in, and the new president and his wife, Michelle, were serenaded by Beyoncé singing “At Last” at an inaugural ball.

AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton contributed to this report from Los Angeles.

For complete coverage of the inauguration, please visit: <https://apnews.com/hub/biden-inauguration>

Mobile labs take vaccine studies to diverse neighborhoods

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and JOSEPH B. FREDERICK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Lani Muller doesn't have to visit a doctor's office to help test an experimental COVID-19 vaccine — she just climbs into a bloodmobile-like van that parks on a busy street near her New York City neighborhood.

The U.S. is rightly fixated on the chaotic rollout of the first two authorized vaccines to fight the pandemic. But with more vaccines in the pipeline — critical to boosting global supplies — scientists worry whether enough volunteers will join and stick with the testing needed to prove if they, too, really work.

Those studies, like earlier ones, must include communities of color that have been hard-hit by the pandemic, communities that also voice concern about the vaccination drive in part because of a long history of racial health care disparities and even research abuses. To help, researchers in more than a dozen spots around the country are rolling out mobile health clinics to better reach minority participants and people in rural areas who might not otherwise volunteer.

Muller, who is Black, said her family was worried about the vaccine research so she didn't mention she'd signed up to test AstraZeneca's shot.

"The legacy of African Americans in science in these sort of trials hasn't been great and we haven't forgotten," said Muller, 49, a Columbia University employee whose participation in some prior research projects made her willing to get a test injection earlier this month.

Muller knows more than 20 people who have gotten or died from COVID-19. "I'm much more afraid of the disease than the vaccine trial," she said.

From the beginning, the National Institutes of Health was adamant that COVID-19 vaccines be tested in a population about as diverse as the nation's — key to building confidence in whichever shots proved to work. In studies of the Pfizer and Moderna shots so far cleared for widespread U.S. use, 10% of volunteers were Black, and more were Hispanic.

Diversity is an even tougher challenge now. The high-risk volunteers needed for final testing of other vaccine candidates have to decide if they want to stick with an experimental injection — one that might be a dummy shot — or try to get in line for a rationed but proven dose.

AstraZeneca, with about 30,000 volunteers so far, didn't release specific numbers but said the last weeks of enrollment are focusing on recruiting more minorities and people over age 65. Another maker, Novavax, just began recruiting for its final testing last month.

Studying the vaccines in diverse populations is only one step in building trust, said Dr. Wayne Frederick, president of Howard University, a historically Black university in the nation's capital.

Howard's hospital shared video of Frederick and other health workers getting vaccinated as a public service announcement encouraging African Americans to get their own shot as soon as it's their turn.

Frederick, a surgeon who's also at high risk because of diabetes and sickle cell disease, said he's dismayed to get emails espousing conspiracy theories such as that vaccination is "an experiment on African Americans."

"There is misinformation that does require all of us to be in the forefront of getting involved and challenging it," he said.

But efforts to build confidence in the vaccines could be undermined if, once there's more supply to go around, hard-hit minority communities get left behind.

"The equity issue is absolutely important," said Stephoun Wallace, a scientist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center who also is part of the NIH-created COVID-19 Prevention Network that helps with vaccine research and education. "It's important that we ensure that the vaccine is getting to the people, and that is an access issue."

Using vans to reach at-risk communities has long been a staple of fighting HIV, another illness that has

disproportionately struck Black Americans. And as more doses of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines arrive, mobile clinics are expected to help expand COVID-19 vaccination access, especially in rural areas.

But the NIH program has a different focus, offering RV-sized mobile clinics from Matrix Medical Network to help improve the diversity of ongoing vaccine studies. Officials say they've been used at a Lakota reservation, at chicken-processing plants with a largely Hispanic workforce, and in cities like Washington where Howard University is recruiting volunteers for the new Novavax study.

"I don't think we can sit in the ivory towers and hope that people come to us. I think that would be a mistake," said Howard's Frederick.

Researchers from the New York Blood Center regularly park their lab-on-wheels in parts of Queens and Brooklyn with large Black, Asian and Hispanic populations, so that even after study enrollment ends the participants can pop in for required check-ups.

They also make a point of standing outside to answer questions from passersby confused about COVID-19 vaccination in general.

It's "building trust and rapport," said Dr. Jorge Soler, who helps study the AstraZeneca vaccine as part of the blood center's Project Achieve. "I'm Latino and I'm a scientist. To be able to say that to people means something."

Soler sometimes has to dispel fears that getting vaccinated might mean being "injected with a chip," or having information collected for surveillance purposes.

He stresses that the Pfizer and Moderna shots now being used cannot give someone the coronavirus — that's biologically impossible as neither is made with the actual virus.

And over and over, people wonder how these vaccines appeared so quickly.

Soler's simple explanation for how to speed research without cutting corners? "This is what happens when the world is invested in something. You build a car faster with 20 people than you do with two."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Senate confirms Biden 1st Cabinet pick as Democrats control

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three new senators were sworn into office Wednesday after President Joe Biden's inauguration, securing the majority for Democrats in the Senate and across a unified government to tackle the new president's agenda at a time of unprecedented national challenges.

In a first vote, the Senate confirmed Biden's nominee for Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines. Senators worked into the evening and overcame some Republican opposition to approve his first Cabinet member, in what's traditionally a show of good faith on Inauguration Day to confirm at least some nominees for a new president's administration.

Haines, a former CIA deputy director, will become a core member of Biden's security team, overseeing the agencies that make up the nation's intelligence community. She was confirmed 84-10.

The new Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., urged colleagues to turn the spirit of the new president's call for unity into action.

"President Biden, we heard you loud and clear," Schumer said in his first speech as majority leader. "We have a lengthy agenda. And we need to get it done together."

Vice President Kamala Harris drew applause as she entered the chamber to deliver the oath of office to the new Democratic senators — Jon Ossoff, Raphael Warnock and Alex Padilla — just hours after taking her own oath at the Capitol alongside Biden.

The three Democrats join a Senate narrowly split 50-50 between the parties, but giving Democrats the majority with Harris able to cast the tie-breaking vote.

Ossoff, a former congressional aide and investigative journalist, and Warnock, a pastor from the late Martin Luther King Jr.'s church in Atlanta, won run-off elections in Georgia this month, defeating two Re-

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publicans. Padilla was tapped by California's governor to finish the remainder of Harris' term.

"Today, America is turning over a new leaf. We are turning the page on the last four years, we're going to reunite the country, defeat COVID-19, rush economic relief to the people," Ossoff told reporters earlier at the Capitol. "That's what they sent us here to do."

Taken together, their arrival gives Democrats for the first time in a decade control of the Senate, the House and the White House, as Biden faces the unparalleled challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and its economic fallout, and the nation's painful political divisions from the deadly Jan. 6 siege of the Capitol by a mob loyal to Donald Trump.

Congress is being called on to consider Biden's proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID recovery package, to distribute vaccines and shore up an economy as more than 400,000 Americans have died from the virus. At the same time, the Senate is about to launch an impeachment trial of Trump, charged by the House of inciting the insurrection at the Capitol as rioters tried to interrupt the Electoral College tally and overturn Biden's election. The Senate will need to confirm other Biden Cabinet nominees.

To "restore the soul" of the country, Biden said in his inaugural speech, requires "unity."

Yet as Washington looks to turn the page from Trump to the Biden administration, Republican leader Mitch McConnell is not relinquishing power without a fight.

Haines' nomination was temporarily blocked by Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Okla., as he sought information about the CIA's enhanced interrogation program. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., is holding back the Homeland Security nominee Alejandro Mayorkas over Biden's proposed immigration changes.

And McConnell is refusing to enter a power-sharing agreement with Senate Democrats unless they meet his demands, chiefly to preserve the Senate filibuster — the procedural tool often used by the minority party to block bills under rules that require 60 votes to advance legislation.

McConnell, in his first speech as the minority party leader, said the election results with narrow Democratic control of the House and Senate showed that Americans "intentionally entrusted both political parties with significant power."

The Republican leader said he looked forward working with the new president "wherever possible."

At her first White House briefing, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Biden's desire to have his Cabinet confirmed and in place is "front and center for the president," and she said he was hoping to have his national security nominees in place Thursday or Friday.

Psaki said the president will be "quite involved" in negotiations over the COVID relief package, but left the details of the upcoming impeachment trial to Congress.

The Senate can "multitask," she said.

That's a tall order for a Senate under normal circumstances, but even more so now in the post-Trump era, with Republicans badly split between their loyalties to the defeated president and wealthy donors who are distancing themselves from Republicans who back Trump.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi is expected to soon transmit to the Senate the House-passed article of impeachment against Trump, charged with incitement of insurrection, a step that will launch the Senate impeachment trial.

Meantime, the power-sharing talks between Schumer and McConnell have hit a stalemate.

It's an arcane fight McConnell has inserted into what has traditionally been a more routine organizing resolution over committee assignments and staffing resources, but a power play by the outgoing Republican leader grabbing at tools that can be used to block Biden's agenda.

Progressive and liberal Democrats are eager to do away with the filibuster to more quickly advance Biden's priorities, but not all rank-and-file Senate Democrats are on board. Schumer has not agreed to any changes but McConnell is taking no chances.

For now, it will take unanimous consent among senators to toggle between conducting votes on legislative business and serving as jurors in the impeachment trial. The House last week impeached Trump for having sent the mob to the Capitol to "fight like hell" during the tally of Electoral College votes to overturn Biden's election.

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Biden inaugural: Abrupt pivot to civility in post-Trump era

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington couldn't turn the page quickly enough from Donald Trump to President Joe Biden.

Trump's voice faded from the capital he had animated and antagonized since 2017 as he flew to private life in Florida, with his last trip on Air Force One tuned in to Biden's inauguration on television.

And quite suddenly, at least for the moment, the old ways were back: reverence of custom, rituals dating back two centuries, scenes of grace, calls for unity.

Four years after Trump's dark portrayal of "American carnage," Biden set out his intent on the same platform of the flag-bedecked Capitol to write "an American story of hope."

Masked in the Oval Office, as he'd been all day except when speaking, the new president began writing that story with his pen. He signed executive orders chipping away at Trump's legacy. One put the U.S. on track to rejoin the Paris climate accord.

As night fell, Biden leaned on Hollywood and the entertainment industry, led by Tom Hanks, to produce a television show that gave a high gloss to the president's regular Joe persona. The programming was a pandemic-induced, no-crowd necessity that allowed the president to keep attention focused on his vision for the days ahead instead of his predecessor's unfounded grievances about election wrongs.

Bruce Springsteen kicked it off, standing at the Lincoln Memorial and looking out with his guitar over the distant, illuminated Capitol across the National Mall. He sang "Land of Hope and Dreams." He had stood there in January 2009, too, then before a vast crowd lining the Reflecting Pool, to serenade the incoming President Barack Obama with "The Rising."

The noon-time ascension of the 46th president came with poetry, trumpets, Lady Gaga singing the national anthem, Garth Brooks singing "Amazing Grace" and keen memories of the insurrection on these grounds by Trump supporters only two weeks earlier.

"Democracy has prevailed," Biden said in his sober remarks, adding, "We must end this uncivil war."

"Modest, austere, grave, calming, cleansing, inspiring," historian Michael Beschloss said of Biden's speech.

The bigger names may well have been upstaged by 22-year-old Amanda Gorman, whose poem spoke of a country "Where a skinny Black girl, descended from slaves and raised by a single mother, can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one." Trump didn't summon a poet for his inauguration in 2017; not all presidents do.

Biden emerged from Blair House, the president's official guesthouse, to open his day just as Trump vanished inside the big plane at Joint Base Andrews, as if their footsteps had been choreographed. But the outgoing president was not one to coordinate anything with the incoming one.

Trump never conceded the election, declined to attend the inauguration and upended the tradition of sending a government plane to bring the president-elect to Washington. Nor did he invite the Bidens to the White House for morning coffee and tea, as the Obamas had done for the Trumps in 2017.

He hewed to one tradition, leaving a letter to his successor — a "very generous" one, Biden said without disclosing its contents right away.

Biden opened his presidency acknowledging former presidents on the platform, Republican and Democrat, and Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, who attended the ceremony and acknowledged Biden's victory in ways Trump never did. Biden did not offer a personal acknowledgment of the man he defeated, nor did Trump mention him.

Under threat of conviction from the Senate on an accusation of inciting insurrection, Trump departed with a perfunctory nod to those who have died from the coronavirus, an obligatory wish of "luck" to the next administration without mentioning Biden's name, a premature claim on any success Biden might have reviving the economy, and the cloudy threat of a return.

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"Have a nice life," Trump said in remarks to well-wishers upon his departure. As Air Force One flew low along the coast, Biden's inauguration played on Fox News on television aboard the flight. Trump's family was on board. He spent some of the flight with flight staff who went up to him to say goodbye.

Rituals of the republic went on without him, though in a way never before seen. Washington got on with things, this time with masks on everyone (except Brooks), people taking care to distance from each other and some 25,000 National Guard troops and police deployed to keep the peace.

In a striking tableau at the Capitol, three former presidents and first ladies of different parties mingled as though at a cocktail party. And again, in hushed moments at Arlington National Cemetery, where Biden and Harris led a wreath ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier while Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and spouses watched.

It was among the inaugural events where a new president and his successor normally come together but Trump had decided to skip the day's proceedings and Biden had said that was fine with him.

The inauguration crowds were sparse by design, with invitation-only guests at the immediate scene and 200,000 small flags standing in place of however many citizens would have come if the capital's core hadn't been under military lock and key and if no pandemic had been sweeping the country.

The parade to the White House in late afternoon had all of the usual pageantry and military pizzazz but none of the crowds that would be normally lining the route. Biden, a famously tactile politician, had little to touch other than the hand of his wife, Jill, when he and his family walked the last leg to their new home.

He darted away a few times to the sidewalk approaching the White House, saying hello to Washington's mayor, Muriel Bowser, at one point and giving weatherman Al Roker a fist bump as they stood among the officials and journalists in the secure area.

Earlier more than 100 people waited in the cold waiting to get through a security checkpoint to reach Pennsylvania Avenue, where they hoped to catch a glimpse of the procession. Many had to watch on their phones.

"We've turned the page," said Vernal Crooms, who attended Howard University when Harris studied there but didn't know her. He was happy to see the Trump era end. "Light prevailed," he said, "and the lie didn't last."

Raelyn Maxwell of Park City, Utah, came with an American flag, a poster board sign reading "Dear Women of Color, thank you" and a bouquet of roses she hoped to toss to Kamala Harris if she could somehow get close enough to the new vice president.

"I protested 45's inauguration," she said of Trump, the 45th president, "and I wanted to be here when he left. "And I wanted to celebrate the new president." She also carried Champagne to toast the occasion with friends here from France.

Biden, the second Roman Catholic president, attended a morning mass at St. Matthews Church with at least three Baptists — Harris and Republican leaders Mitch McConnell from the Senate and Kevin McCarthy from the House — and the Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, who is Jewish.

It was one of those bipartisan, not to mention multi-faith, events that Washington is known for, coexisting with searing political division.

St. Matthew, patron saint of civil servants, was a tax-collector and, on the brighter side, an apostle who spread the gospel exhorting people to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you," according to the church's teachings.

There were at least stirrings of that Wednesday.

Associated Press writers Ben Fox, Jill Colvin and Lynn Berry contributed to this report.

On Day One, Biden targets Trump policies on climate, virus

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is moving swiftly to dismantle Donald Trump's legacy on his first day in office, signing a series of executive actions that reverse course on immigration, climate change,

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racial equity and the handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The new president signed the orders just hours after taking the oath of office at the Capitol, pivoting quickly from his pared-down inauguration ceremony to enacting his agenda. With the stroke of a pen, Biden ordered a halt to the construction of Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall, ended the ban on travel from some Muslim-majority countries, declared his intent to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord and the World Health Organization and revoked the approval of the Keystone XL oil pipeline, aides said.

The 15 executive actions, and two directives, amount to an attempt to rewind the last four years of federal policies with striking speed. Only two recent presidents signed executive actions on their first day in office — and each signed just one. But Biden, facing the debilitating coronavirus pandemic, a damaged economy and a riven electorate, is intent on demonstrating a sense of urgency and competence that he argues has been missing under his Republican predecessor.

"There's no time to start like today," Biden said in his first comments to reporters as president.

Biden wore a mask as he signed the orders in the Oval Office — a marked departure from Trump, who rarely wore a face covering in public and never during events in the Oval Office. But virus precautions are now required in the building. Among the executive actions signed Wednesday was one requiring masks and physical distancing on federal property and by federal employees. Biden's order also extended the federal eviction freeze to aid those struggling from the pandemic economic fallout, created a new federal office to coordinate a national response to the virus and restored the White House's National Security Council directorate for global health security and defense, an office his predecessor had closed.

The actions reflected the new president's top policy priority — getting a handle on a debilitating pandemic. In his inaugural address, Biden paused for what he called his first act as president — a moment of a silent prayer for the victims of the nation's worst public health crisis in more than a century.

He declared that he would "press forward with speed and urgency" in coming weeks. "For we have much to do in this winter of peril and significant possibilities — much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build and much to gain," he said in the speech.

But Biden's blitz of executive actions went beyond the pandemic. He targeted Trump's environmental record, calling for a review of all regulations and executive actions that are deemed damaging to the environment or public health, aides said Tuesday as they previewed the moves.

Another order instructs federal agencies to prioritize racial equity and review policies that reinforce systemic racism. Biden revoked two Trump orders related to the 2020 census. The first attempted to discern the citizenship status of every U.S. resident, and the second sought to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the numbers used for apportioning congressional seats among the states."

He also ordered federal employees to take an ethics pledge that commits them to upholding the independence of the Justice Department.

The president also revoked the just-issued report of Trump's "1776 Commission" that promotes "patriotic education."

Those moves and others will be followed by dozens more in the next 10 days, the president's aides said, as Biden looks to redirect the country without having to go through a Senate that Democrats control by the narrowest margin and will soon turn to the impeachment trial of Trump, who is charged by the House with inciting the insurrection at the Capitol.

Republicans signaled that Biden will face fierce opposition on some parts of his agenda.

One of his orders seeks to fortify the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, known as DACA, a signature effort of the Obama administration that provided hundreds of thousands of young immigrants protection from deportation and a pathway to citizenship. That's part of a broader immigration plan Biden sent to Congress on Wednesday that would provide an eight-year path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million people living in the U.S. without legal status.

The plan would lead to "a permanent cycle of illegal immigration and amnesty that would hurt hard-working Americans and the millions of legal immigrants working their way through the legal immigration process," said Chris Hartline, a spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

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Even that familiar criticism seemed a return to the normalcy Biden has promised after years of disruptive and overheated politics. Hewing to tradition, Biden started his day by attending church with both Democratic and Republican leaders of Congress. His press secretary, Jen Psaki, held a briefing for reporters, a practice the Trump White House had all but abandoned in the final two months of the presidency. Psaki said she intended to restore regular briefings as part of the White House's commitment to transparency.

"I have deep respect for the role of a free and independent press in our democracy and for the role all of you play," she said.

Biden took other steps to try to signal his priorities and set the tone in his White House. As he swore in dozens of political appointees in a virtual ceremony, he declared he expected "honesty and decency" from all that worked for his administration and would fire anyone who shows disrespect to others "on the spot."

"Everyone is entitled to human decency and dignity," Biden said. "That's been missing in a big way for the last four years."

Biden takes the helm, appeals for unity to take on crises

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, ZEKE MILLER and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on Wednesday, declaring that "democracy has prevailed" and summoning American resilience and unity to confront the deeply divided nation's historic confluence of crises.

Denouncing a national "uncivil war," Biden took the oath at a U.S. Capitol that had been battered by an insurrectionist siege just two weeks earlier. Then, taking his place in the White House Oval Office, he plunged into a stack of executive actions that began to undo the heart of his polarizing predecessor's agenda on matters from the deadly pandemic to climate change.

At the Capitol, with America's tradition of peaceful transfers of power never appearing more fragile, the ceremony unfolded within a circle of security forces evocative of a war zone and devoid of crowds because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead, Biden gazed out on a cold Washington morning dotted with snow flurries to see over 200,000 American flags planted on the National Mall to symbolize those who could not attend in person.

"The will of the people has been heard, and the will of the people has been heeded. We've learned again that democracy is precious and democracy is fragile. At this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed," Biden declared in his speech. "This is America's day. This is democracy's day. A day of history and hope, of renewal and resolve."

History was made at his side, as Kamala Harris became the first woman to be vice president. The former U.S. senator from California is also the first Black person and the first person of South Asian descent elected to the vice presidency and the highest-ranking woman ever to serve in the U.S. government.

Biden never mentioned his predecessor, who defied tradition and left town ahead of the ceremony, but his speech was an implicit rebuke of Donald Trump. The new president denounced "lies told for power and for profit" and was blunt about the challenges ahead.

Central among them: the surging virus that has claimed more than 400,000 lives in the United States, as well as economic strains and a national reckoning over race.

"We have much to do in this winter of peril, and significant possibilities. Much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build and much to gain," Biden said. "Few people in our nation's history have been more challenged, or found a time more challenging or difficult than the time we're in now."

Biden was eager to go big early, with an ambitious first 100 days including a push to speed up the distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations to anxious Americans and pass a \$1.9 trillion economic relief package. It included a blitz of executive orders on matters that don't require congressional approval — a mix of substantive and symbolic steps to unwind the Trump years. His actions included re-entry into the Paris Climate Accords and a mandate for wearing masks on federal property.

"There's no time to start like today," a masked Biden said. in the Oval Office. Then he swore in hundreds of aides — virtually — telling them, "You're my possibilities."

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The absence of Biden's predecessor from the inaugural ceremony underscored the national rift to be healed.

But a bipartisan trio of former presidents — Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — were there to witness the transfer of power. Trump, awaiting his second impeachment trial, was at his Florida resort by the time the swearing-in took place.

Biden, in his third run for the presidency, staked his candidacy less on any distinctive political ideology than on galvanizing a broad coalition of voters around the notion that Trump posed an existential threat to American democracy. Four years after Trump's "American Carnage" speech painted a dark portrait of national decay, Biden warned that the fabric of the nation's democracy was tearing but could be repaired.

"I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new. Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, demonization have long torn us apart," Biden said. "This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward and we must meet this moment as the United States of America."

Swearing the oath with his hand on a five-inch-thick Bible that has been in his family for 128 years, Biden came to office with a well of empathy and resolve born by personal tragedy as well as a depth of experience forged from more than four decades in Washington. At age 78, he is the oldest president inaugurated.

Both he, Harris and their spouses walked the last short part of the route to the White House after an abridged parade. Biden then strode into the Oval Office, a room he knew well as vice president, for the first time as commander in chief.

At the Capitol earlier, Biden, like all those in attendance, wore a face mask except when speaking. Tens of thousands of National Guard troops were on the streets to provide security precisely two weeks after a violent mob of Trump supporters, incited by the Republican president, stormed the building in an attempt to prevent the certification of Biden's victory.

"Here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people," Biden said. "To stop the work of our democracy. To drive us from this sacred ground. It did not happen. It will never happen. Not today, not tomorrow. Not ever. Not ever."

The tense atmosphere evoked the 1861 inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, who was secretly transported to Washington to avoid assassins on the eve of the Civil War, or Franklin Roosevelt's inaugural in 1945, when he opted for a small, secure ceremony at the White House in the waning months of World War II.

But Washington, all but deserted downtown and in its federal areas, was quiet. And calm also prevailed outside heavily fortified state Capitol buildings across nation after the FBI had warned of the possibility for armed demonstrations leading up to the inauguration.

The day began with a reach across the political aisle after four years of bitter partisan battles under Trump. At Biden's invitation, congressional leaders from both parties bowed their heads in prayer in the socially distanced service a few blocks from the White House.

Biden was sworn in by Chief Justice John Roberts; Harris by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina member of the Supreme Court. Vice President Mike Pence, standing in for Trump, sat nearby as Lady Gaga, holding a golden microphone, sang the National Anthem accompanied by the U.S. Marine Corps band.

When Pence, in a last act of the outgoing administration, left the Capitol, he walked through a door with badly cracked glass from the riot two weeks ago. Later, Biden, Harris and their spouses were joined by the former presidents to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

By afternoon, a White House desolate in Trump's waning days sprang back to life, with Biden staffers settling in and new COVID-19 safety measures, like plastic shields on desks, in place.

In the evening, in lieu of the traditional balls that welcome a new president to Washington, Biden and Harris appeared separately at the Lincoln Memorial to take part in a televised concert that also marked the return of A-list celebrities to the White House orbit after they largely eschewed Trump. Among those in the lineup: Bruce Springsteen, Justin Timberlake and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

The Bidens ended their evening watching fireworks from a White House balcony.

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This was not an inauguration for the crowds. But Americans in the capital city nonetheless brought their hopes to the moment.

"I feel so hopeful, so thankful," said Karen Jennings Crooms, a D.C. resident who hoped to catch a glimpse of the presidential motorcade on Pennsylvania Avenue with her husband. "It makes us sad that this is where we are but hopeful that democracy will win out in the end. That's what I'm focusing on."

Trump was the first president in more than a century to skip the inauguration of his successor. After a brief farewell celebration at nearby Joint Base Andrews, he boarded Air Force One for the final time as president.

"I will always fight for you. I will be watching. I will be listening and I will tell you that the future of this country has never been better," said Trump. He wished the incoming administration well but never mentioned Biden's name.

Trump did adhere to one tradition and left a personal note for Biden in the Oval Office. Biden would only tell reporters that it was "a very generous letter."

Trump, in his farewell video remarks, hinted at a political return, saying "we will be back in some form." Without question, he will shadow Biden's first days in office.

Trump's second impeachment trial could start as early as this week. That will test the ability of the Senate, now coming under Democratic control, to balance impeachment proceedings with confirmation hearings and votes on Biden's Cabinet choices.

Additional reporting by Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Darlene Superville in Washington and Michelle L. Price in Las Vegas.

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Vice President Harris: A new chapter opens in US politics

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE AND ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris broke the barrier that has kept men at the top ranks of American power for more than two centuries when she took the oath Wednesday to hold the nation's second-highest office.

Hours after she was sworn in as the first female U.S. vice president — and the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent in the role — she cast the moment as one that embodied "American aspiration."

"Even in dark times we not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be," she said in brief remarks outside the Lincoln Memorial. "We are bold, fearless and ambitious. We are undaunted in our belief that we shall overcome, that we will rise up."

For Harris, the day was steeped in history and significance in more ways than one. She was escorted to the podium by Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman, the officer who single-handedly took on a mob of Trump supporters as they tried to breach the Senate floor during the Capitol insurrection, and she was sworn in by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first woman of color on the court, on a Bible that once belonged to former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. She wore a deep purple dress and coat created by two emerging Black designers.

Her rise is historic in any context, another moment when a stubborn boundary falls away, expanding the idea of what's possible in American politics. But it's particularly meaningful because Harris takes office at a moment when Americans are grappling over institutional racism and confronting a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated Black and brown communities.

Those close to Harris say she'll bring an important — and often missing — perspective to the debates on how to overcome the many hurdles facing the new administration.

"In many folks' lifetimes, we experienced a segregated United States," said Lateefah Simon, a civil rights advocate and longtime Harris friend and mentee. "You will now have a Black woman who will walk into

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the White House not as a guest but as a second in command of the free world.”

Harris — the child of immigrants, a stepmother of two and the wife of a Jewish man — “carries an intersectional story of so many Americans who are never seen and heard.”

Later during the procession to the vice presidential office building, she was led by her alma mater Howard University’s marching band and walked while holding the hand of her grandniece and alongside her husband, stepchildren, sister, brother-in-law and nieces.

She then quickly got to work, presiding as Senate president for the first time to swear in three new Democratic senators: Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff of Georgia and Alex Padilla of California, Harris’ replacement.

Harris, 56, moves into the vice presidency just four years after she first came to Washington as a senator from California, where she’d served as attorney general and as San Francisco’s district attorney. She had expected to work with a White House run by Hillary Clinton, but President Donald Trump’s victory quickly scrambled the nation’s capital and set the stage for the rise of a new class of Democratic stars. Her own presidential bid fizzled, but her rise continued when President Joe Biden chose her as his running mate.

Wednesday evening, she urged Americans to join Biden’s call for “the courage to see beyond crisis, to do what is hard, to do what is good.”

With Trump absent from the inauguration, Harris and her husband, Douglas Emhoff, took on the symbolic duty of escorting former Vice President Mike Pence and his wife, Karen Pence, out of the Capitol. It’s a gesture that would normally be performed by incoming and outgoing presidents.

To celebrate the historic day, the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, the nation’s oldest sorority for Black women, which Harris joined at Howard University, declared Wednesday as Soror Kamala D. Harris Day. Members of the sorority watching the celebrations across the country were clad in pearls, as was Harris, and the sorority’s pink and green colors.

“There is a pride I can’t put into words,” said Elizabeth Shelby, a member of the sorority’s Alpha Psi chapter, who watched from her home in Nashville, Tennessee. “It is such a joy to see her rise to this place in our country. It is such a joy to know that she is one of us, that she represents us.”

Biden, in his inaugural address, reflected on the 1913 march for women’s suffrage the day before President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, during which some marchers were heckled and attacked.

“Today, we mark the swearing in of the first woman in American history elected to national office, Vice President Kamala Harris. Don’t tell me things can’t change,” Biden said.

As vice president, Harris will expand the definition of who gets to hold power in American politics, said Martha S. Jones, a professor of history at Johns Hopkins University and the author of “Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All.”

People who want to understand Harris and connect with her will have to learn what it means to graduate from a historically Black college and university rather than an Ivy League school. They will have to understand Harris’ traditions, like the Hindu celebration of Diwali, Jones said.

“Folks are going to have to adapt to her rather than her adapting to them,” Jones said.

Her election to the vice presidency should be just the beginning of putting Black women in leadership positions, Jones said, particularly after the role Black women played in organizing and turning out voters in the November election.

“We will all learn what happens to the kind of capacities and insights of Black women in politics when those capacities and insights are permitted to lead,” Jones said.

Ronayne reported from Sacramento, California. Associated Press journalist Christine Fernando in Chicago contributed.

Americans who live, work near capitols see peace, new hope

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Normally quiet streets around U.S. state capitol buildings have looked more like

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battlegrounds recently, putting those who live and work there on edge.

More than most people, these Americans will have front-row seats on whether the change of leadership Wednesday in the White House will lead to a lessening of tension that has been afflicting the nation. They'll be watching what the next chapter brings from storefronts and the porches and stoops of their own homes.

Their sense of foreboding was lightened, just a little, by Wednesday's inauguration. As President Joe Biden was sworn into office, demonstrations at state capitols were scant, with only a few protesters showing up, and in some cities, none at all.

Some expect Biden's focus on unity — a word he used eight times in his inaugural address — will have an effect, but they say how the people react will be key.

Jonathan Jones' front-row seat to what happens next is his restaurant that is decorated with Black Lives Matter signs and art near the Oregon State Capitol. Epilogue Kitchen and Cocktails has been vandalized by a white supremacist. One day, police showed up as Jones, who is Black, and his friends were being accosted by neo-fascist Proud Boys. The police at first confronted Jones' group as if they were the threat.

"There's not a person who stood with me that day who didn't think that they might die," Jones said. "And the most awful part was not knowing if it was going to come from the police or from the Proud Boys."

Jones watched Biden's inauguration on TV, and in the afterglow called it "a beautiful moment."

"It was fantastic to see the president of the United States denounce and repudiate white supremacy multiple times and to acknowledge that we're long overdue as a country to actually achieve some form of racial justice," Jones said. "My hope is that things are dealt with quickly, but my expectation is that it will take quite some time to see any actual change."

Brian Henderson, minister of First Baptist Church of Denver that sits across an avenue from the shuttered Colorado Capitol, was so close to the upheavals of 2020 that he was struck in the left knee with a pepper ball. Henderson had been handing out water from the front steps of his small brick church as thousands battled police during riots over George Floyd's killing.

Many neighboring businesses and state government buildings have boarded up their windows and doors in anticipation of possible violence but the church has not, to avoid giving the wrong message.

"We can't let fear stop us from doing what we have to do," Henderson said.

Henderson watched the inaugural with church staff and then stepped outside to reflect and bask in the historic moment.

"There was this strong breeze. The sun was warm. The sky was blue. The air felt fresh. It's a new day. We have a new president," Henderson said.

In Washington state, a neighborhood next to the Capitol in Olympia boasts mid-century and 100-year-old homes. On normal days, the tranquil scene is one that Norman Rockwell could have depicted in idyllic portraits of American life, residents say.

But in recent weeks, frequent protests involving people in tactical gear and armed with guns have created a climate of fear. People shout into megaphones, loud trucks drive down narrow streets, residents are called names or harassed, media helicopters and police planes fly overhead.

"There's no retreat, because it's your house, it's where you live. It's been a little jolting, and exhausting," said the woman, who is so afraid for the safety of herself and her family that she spoke to a reporter only on condition she not be identified.

She said she is optimistic that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will be able to accomplish many things.

"But I'm not sure that will change the real divisions we've all seen," she said. "People are behaving so differently, openly, that I don't know — moving forward as a country — if we'll be able to find each other again."

Near the gold-domed Statehouse in Boston, Catya Kurban said Wednesday she's looking forward to more stability under Biden but worries about backlash and violence from supporters of former President Donald Trump.

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"I'm also trying to be realistic about changes," she said. "I know they won't happen overnight."

Isaac Smith, a 21-year-old Harvard University junior walking across the street, said he voted for Biden and was excited for what's to come.

"No matter which way you look at it, it's historic. Things are going to change," he said. "The previous administration harmed American democracy, and I think I'm with a lot of my fellow Americans in that I hope this administration can start to repair some of the relationships with our allies and the damage he's done in terms of climate change and immigration."

In Washington, D.C., a restaurant named We, the Pizza is located just one block from barricades surrounding the U.S. Capitol, where Biden was sworn in. The pizzeria has been feeding thousands of National Guard troops and other security and first responders, using donations from around the nation.

Manager Rob Earley said a girl around 6 years old brought in a check for \$1,000 on Tuesday — money she had raised to feed the soldiers.

"I had tears in my eyes," Earley said. "It's good to see people that young that are wanting to be so involved in what's going on and wanting to be part of making change."

He believes Biden's new tone "will help ease tensions and make things a little bit better. It will help mellow things out a little bit."

Back in Oregon, Jones has been buoyed by people coming out in support of his restaurant, as customers and guardians. On Sunday, Robert Fox, a glass-blowing artist, sat in his sedan parked in front of the restaurant, keeping watch before Jones and his wife, Maura Ryan, showed up to prepare meals, available only for takeout during coronavirus shutdowns.

"I'm just making sure nothing happens," Fox said as a dozen gun-toting, far-right protesters stood outside the Capitol, three blocks away.

Jones said actions like that give him hope.

"I think that in spite of how loud the far right is, I think the bulk of the country is not that," Jones said. "And I think that the more that we can embolden people to show that solidarity and be willing to stand up and stand next to everybody and present that unified front, then I think the quicker we'll get to the end of this."

Associated Press writers Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; James Anderson in Denver; and Philip Marcelo in Boston, contributed to this report.

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Immigrants cheered by possible citizenship path under Biden

By GISELA SALOMON, CLAUDIA TORRENS and ANITA SNOW Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. (AP) — Immigrants cheered President Joe Biden's plan to provide a path to U.S. citizenship for about 11 million people without legal status, mixing hope with guarded optimism Wednesday amid a seismic shift in how the American government views and treats them.

The newly inaugurated president moved to reverse four years of harsh restrictions and mass deportation with a plan for sweeping legislation on citizenship. Biden also issued executive orders reversing some of former President Donald Trump's immigration policies, such as halting work on a U.S.-Mexico border wall and lifting a travel ban on people from several predominantly Muslim countries. He also ordered his Cabinet to work to keep deportation protections for hundreds of thousands of people brought to the U.S. as children.

"This sets a new narrative, moving us away from being seen as criminals and people on the public charge to opening the door for us to eventually become Americans," said Yanira Arias, a Salvadoran immigrant with Temporary Protected Status who lives in Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory.

Arias is among about 400,000 people given the designation after fleeing violence or natural disasters.

"It sets a more hopeful future for immigrants in the U.S., but it all depends on the Congress, especially

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the Senate," Arias, a national campaigns manager for the immigrant advocacy group Alianza Americas, said of the citizenship effort.

Success of the legislation is far from certain in a divided Congress, where opposition is expected to be tough. The most recent immigration reform attempts on a similar scale failed — in 2007 under then-President George W. Bush and in 2013 under then-President Barack Obama.

Ofelia Aguilar, who watched Biden's inaugural address on TV with four other female farmworkers in agricultural Homestead, Florida, said she nevertheless felt positive about prospects for immigration reform.

"I am hopeful that he'll give us legal status," said Aguilar, who was pregnant and alone when she came to the U.S. from Mexico in 1993. She worked in the fields for years before starting her own business farming jicama root.

"There is hope!" Aguilar cried out after Biden was sworn in. "So many people have suffered."

Some of the farmworkers at the backyard gathering about 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of Miami said they were disappointed Biden didn't mention immigration reforms in his speech.

"I have faith in God, not in presidents," said Sofía Hernández, an agricultural worker who has lived in the U.S. without legal status since 1989. "So many have said they are going to do things, and I don't see any results."

Hernandez came from Mexico, seeking economic opportunity. Her three children were born in the U.S. and she regularly sent money to her family back home before her parents died.

"My dream is to go and see my family and come back to stay with my children," Hernandez said.

In New York, Blanca Cedillos said she also was disappointed Biden did not mention immigration during the speech she watched with a half-dozen other masked immigrants at the Workers Justice Project.

"I was hoping he would say something," said Cedillos, a Salvadoran who lost her job as a nanny during the coronavirus pandemic and now gets by with a few housecleaning jobs and a weekly food box from the nonprofit that offers services to immigrants.

Cedillos has lived in the U.S. without authorization for 18 years and hopes to eventually visit her four children in Central America, then return legally to the U.S.

"I have told them that that trip may happen now. Hopefully, if this new president gives me the opportunity," she said.

Guatemalan construction worker Gustavo Ajché, who came to the U.S. in 2004, watched the Spanish language broadcast with Cedillos.

"I don't want to get too excited because I might get frustrated afterward, like has happened in the past," Ajché said. "I have been here many years, I have paid my taxes, I am hoping something will be done."

In Phoenix, Tony Valdovinos, a local campaign consultant who was brought to the U.S. from Mexico as a small child, said he isn't celebrating yet.

He's among those who have benefited from the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which protects immigrants brought to the U.S. as children from deportation.

"It's hard to put your heart into it when these things have failed in the past," Valdovinos said. "We've been beaten down so much."

Maria Rodriguez, executive director of the Florida Immigrant Coalition in Miami, said she feels much the same way.

"I'm so happy and relieved, but we are still afraid of getting our hearts broken again," she said. "We've been through this so many times, but we really need to bring through a solution that goes forward."

Los Angeles janitor Anabella Aguirre wants that solution not only for herself, but for her two daughters, both DACA recipients now starting their careers.

"Like thousands of mothers and fathers, I want for my daughters to have something better in this country," Aguirre said. "We hope that today, this dawn, brings hope."

Torrens reported from New York, and Snow from Phoenix. Associated Press writer Amy Taxin contributed from Orange County, California.

Biden repudiates white supremacy, calls for racial justice

By KAT STAFFORD and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Rare for an inaugural address, President Joe Biden issued a strong repudiation of white supremacy and domestic terrorism seen on the rise under Donald Trump.

In his speech Wednesday, Biden denounced the "racism, nativism, fear, demonization," that propelled the assault on Capitol Hill by an overwhelmingly white mob of Trump supporters who carried symbols of hate, including the Confederate battle flag.

"A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us," Biden said in the nearly 23-minute-long speech promising to heal a divided nation. "A cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear. And now a rise of political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat."

Compared to his immediate predecessors, three of whom attended Wednesday's inauguration, Biden is the first president to directly address the ills of white supremacy in an inaugural speech. In his second inaugural address in 1997, former President Bill Clinton called out racial divisions as "America's constant curse," but stopped short of naming culprits.

Biden's words follow months of protests and civil unrest over police brutality against Black Americans, as well as a broader reckoning on the systemic and institutional racism that has plagued nonwhite Americans for generations.

"To be perfectly clear, it was incredibly powerful," Rashad Robinson, president of Color of Change, a national racial justice organization, told The Associated Press. "We shouldn't underestimate the cultural change that had to take place, in order for that to happen on one of the biggest political stages in the world."

"I think it's just really important that, as a result of our movement, racial justice became a majoritarian issue this summer," Robinson added. "Now the work begins in translating that rhetorical issue into a governing issue."

Biden delivered his inaugural address on the very platform that the insurrectionist mob scaled two weeks ago to breach the Capitol building, vandalizing federal property and taking selfies on the Senate floor. The riot left at least five people dead, including a Capitol police officer.

The rioters, some espousing racist and anti-Semitic views and conspiracy theories, were incited by baseless claims of widespread voter fraud in the November presidential election. Some attempted to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College results, in which Black and Latino voters played a significant role in handing victory to Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

Voter suppression, along with other forms of systemic racism, are top of mind for civil rights groups and supporters of Black Lives Matter, which last year became the largest protest movement in U.S. history.

"To overcome these challenges, to restore the soul and secure the future of America requires so much more than words," Biden said in his speech. "It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy. Unity."

Biden also highlighted the historic nature of the swearing in of Harris, the first woman and first Black and South Asian person to hold that office.

"It is exciting to see a Black woman become vice president, and yet we must hold her and President Biden accountable to ensure Black liberation and the eradication of white supremacy," said Patrisse Cullors, co-founder and executive director of Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

"We must heal from anti-Black racism and the heavy health and economic impacts from COVID-19," Cullors said in a statement. "Then, we can focus on thriving Black lives through investments in health, education, housing, and environmental justice."

Biden began addressing some of these issues in a series of executive orders signed after the inauguration.

They order federal agencies to prioritize racial equity and review policies that reinforce systemic racism, which the BLM foundation said mirrors a proposal contained in the BREATHE Act, proposed legislation championed by the foundation and the Movement for Black Lives. It calls for sweeping federal reforms, including overhauling police, the criminal justice system and immigration enforcement.

Susan Rice, Biden's incoming domestic policy adviser, said the new president would also revoke the just-issued report of Trump's "1776 Commission" that downplayed the historic legacy of slavery. The commission was created in response to The New York Times' "1619 Project," which highlights the long-term consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans.

Biden's remarks also came a day after the nation marked yet another grim milestone surpassing 400,000 U.S. deaths as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has disproportionately killed Black Americans and other people of color and laid bare longstanding racial disparities in the country's health system.

"We are entering what may be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus," Biden said. "We must set aside politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation."

In his speech, Biden invoked Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation committing to freeing enslaved Africans during the Civil War.

"When he put pen to paper, the president said, and quote, 'If my name ever goes down into history, it will be for this act and my whole soul is in it. My whole soul is in it,'" Biden said.

"Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this," he declared.

Stafford reported from Detroit and Morrison reported from New York City.

Stafford and Morrison are members of the AP's Race & Ethnicity team. Follow Morrison on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>. Follow Stafford on Twitter: https://www.twitter.com/kat__stafford.

Inauguration sows doubt among QAnon conspiracy theorists

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, AMANDA SEITZ and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP) — For years, legions of QAnon conspiracy theory adherents encouraged one another to "trust the plan" as they waited for the day when President Donald Trump would orchestrate mass arrests, military tribunals and executions of his Satan-worshipping, child-sacrificing enemies.

Keeping the faith wasn't easy when Inauguration Day didn't usher in "The Storm," the apocalyptic reckoning that they have believed was coming for prominent Democrats and Trump's "deep state" foes. QAnon followers grappled with anger, confusion and disappointment Wednesday as President Joe Biden was sworn into office.

Some believers found a way to twist the conspiracy theory's convoluted narrative to fit their belief that Biden's victory was an illusion and that Trump would secure a second term in office. Others clung to the notion that Trump will remain a "shadow president" during Biden's term. Some even floated the idea that the inauguration ceremony was computer-generated or that Biden himself could be the mysterious "Q," who is purportedly a government insider posting cryptic clues about the conspiracy.

For many others, however, Trump's departure sowed doubt.

"I am so scared right now, I really feel nothing is going to happen now," one poster wrote on a Telegram channel popular with QAnon believers. "I'm just devastated."

Mike Rothschild, author of a forthcoming book on QAnon called "The Storm is Upon Us," said it's too early to gauge whether the wave of disillusionment that swept through the QAnon ranks Wednesday is a turning point or a fleeting setback for the movement.

"I think these people have given up too much and sacrificed too much in their families and in their personal lives," he said. "They have believed this so completely that to simply walk away from it is just not in the realm of reality for most of these people."

On Wednesday, as it became obvious that Biden's inauguration would proceed, many QAnon message boards and online groups were bombarded by hecklers and trolls making fun of the conspiracy. Some longtime QAnon posters said they planned to step away from social media, if only temporarily.

"Trump has said, 'THE BEST IS YET TO COME.' I'm not giving up," Telegram user Qtah wrote in an announcement to his 30,000 subscribers that he was taking a social media break.

Some groups seized the moment to try to recruit disillusioned QAnon supporters to white supremacy

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and other far-right neofascist movements like the Proud Boys. On Wednesday, for example, an anonymous poster on 4chan posited in a thread that "this would be the perfect time to start posting Nat Soc propaganda in Q anon groups. Clearly, this is a very low point for Q believers, and once people have been broken, they will look for ways to cling back to hope again." Nat Soc stands for national socialism, commonly referred to as Nazism.

QAnon emerged in 2017 through anonymous, fringe online message boards before migrating to Twitter, Facebook and other mainstream platforms that were slow to purge the conspiracy theory from their sites.

Although Facebook and Twitter platforms vowed last year to rid their sites of QAnon, accounts with thousands of loyal followers remained until this month, when the tech companies finally disabled thousands of users who used violent rhetoric to encourage protests of the election results at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

Twitter announced it had suspended more than 70,000 QAnon accounts in the days following the riots. Facebook, meanwhile disbanded more than 57,000 pages, groups, Facebook profiles and Instagram accounts this month. Trump also was barred from using his Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts.

The crackdown sent some of the conspiracy theory's most ardent promoters fleeing to less populated social media sites like MeWe and the Telegram messaging app, where they quickly raked in thousands of followers.

But the social media companies' suspensions paralyzed QAnon chatter on the sites, with mentions of popular QAnon hashtags like #FightforTrump and #HoldTheLine declined by roughly 90%, according to an analysis by media intelligence firm Signal Labs.

Other QAnon believers still found ways to promote their message on Facebook and Twitter, urging followers to hold out hope that Trump would find a way to stay in office or expose the "deep state" network of government leaders who they believe operate a child sex trafficking ring.

Videos and posts on Facebook, Telegram and YouTube predicted Trump would take over the emergency broadcast system to declare martial law and arrest prominent Democrats.

"This presidential inauguration that we're going to see coming up ... I'm telling you it's going to be the biggest thing we've ever seen in the history of the United States," one pro-Trump singer, who promotes QAnon conspiracy theories, warned in a Facebook video viewed more than 350,000 times since Monday.

But the peaceful transfer of power from Trump to Biden came and went Wednesday.

Among the most notable defectors appeared to be Ron Watkins, a prominent promoter of election fraud conspiracy theories who helps run an online messaging board where QAnon conspiracy theories run wild.

"We gave it our all," Watkins wrote in a Telegram post, minutes after Biden was sworn into office. "Now we need to keep our chins up and go back to our lives as best we are able."

Travis View, a conspiracy theory researcher who co-hosts The QAnon Anonymous Podcast under his pseudonym, said Watkins encouraged Trump supporters to travel to Washington for the Jan. 6 rally that led to the Capitol riots.

"He did a lot of damage to a lot of people," he said. "He's responsible for a lot of pain."

Other QAnon followers spent their time online Wednesday calling Biden an illegitimate president and accusing Democrats of pulling off voter fraud. Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has expressed support for the conspiracy theories, called for Biden's impeachment across her Twitter, Facebook and Telegram accounts as the new president was sworn in.

Other followers continued to hunt for clues that QAnon prophecies would be fulfilled, with several social media posts noting that Trump's speech Wednesday was delivered in front of 17 American flags — a significant number to QAnon conspiracy theorists because "Q" is the 17th letter of the alphabet.

"I believe the game is still being played this is not over!" one QAnon user wrote to his 26,000 Telegram followers moments after Biden took office.

___ Seitz reported from Chicago and Klepper reported from Providence, Rhode Island. Associated Press reporter Garance Burke in San Francisco and researchers at the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center Investigations Lab and the Investigative Reporting Program contributed to this report.

Biden's first Cabinet member to lead battered intel agencies

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Wednesday confirmed Avril Haines as director of national intelligence, giving President Joe Biden the first member of his Cabinet and placing the first woman in charge of the nearly two-decade old agency.

Haines, a former deputy director of the CIA and deputy national security adviser in the Obama administration, was confirmed with an overwhelming 84-10 vote, signaling a bipartisan desire for confirming Biden's national security nominees and installing strong leadership after four turbulent years for the intelligence community.

Former President Donald Trump spent much of his presidency criticizing intelligence officials, doubting them and installing loyalist leaders — retribution for a probe into his ties to Russia that began before he was elected.

In her confirmation hearing Tuesday, Haines made clear she intends to end the Trump administration's practice of pressuring officials to shape their analysis to the president's liking.

"When it comes to intelligence, there is simply no place for politics — ever," she told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Haines said she sees the job as speaking "truth to power" and delivering accurate and apolitical intelligence even if it was uncomfortable or inconvenient for the administration. She said China would be a major focus.

Suspicious of leaks and backstabbing, Trump nominated and installed close allies to head the agency in his final year, further battering morale and creating suspicion within the community and in Congress, where leaders in both parties suspected they were not always getting the intelligence they were legally entitled to receive.

"The last four years have been hard on the intelligence community," said Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the new chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee after Democrats took the majority on Wednesday. Warner said Haines is "clear eyed" and "the right woman to repair this damage."

Warner said Haines "will support the men and women of the IC, and protect them from political pressure. She will insist that they tell us their best analysis and not shy away from telling decision-makers that their cherished beliefs are wrong."

Haines also won support from the committee's top Republican, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who said he looks forward to working with her. "Our adversaries will not stand by and wait for the new administration to staff critical positions," Rubio said.

The Senate was able to vote quickly on the nomination and bypass a committee vote, just hours after Biden's inauguration, when Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton dropped his objection to the nomination Wednesday evening.

Cotton had said he did not want the Senate to move forward on her nomination until he had assurances from her that she would not re-open investigations into Bush-era interrogation programs, citing comments she made at the hearing. He said Wednesday evening that Haines had clarified that she "had no intention to open up those investigations and expose operations officers inside the CIA to criminal prosecution."

For a splintered nation, a delicate moment of continuity

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

When it gazes into the mirror, the United States does not generally see a land of process and procedure. It sees what it has wanted to see since the beginning — a place of action and results and volume. The bold, splashy storylines that Americans crave, and have used to construct their nation, don't always play well with repetition and routine.

Then comes a day like Wednesday. Two weeks after the peaceful transfer of power was so nearly upended, ritual took center stage. And it turned out, after four years of a loud and splashy presidency, that there can be comfort — inspiration, even — in the performance of process and procedure that sends a resounding

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message to the idealistic and the disaffected alike: The United States continues. The republic still stands.

At no juncture in the past 150 years, perhaps, has such an expected and routine process of transition — a moment that Ronald Reagan, while experiencing it, called both “commonplace” and “nothing less than a miracle” — felt more necessary. Or, for that matter, more tenuous.

“We’ve learned again that democracy is precious. Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed,” freshly minted President Joe Biden said in his inaugural address.

More than 400,000 Americans are dead in a pandemic that has devastated the economy. We are two weeks out of an insurrection aimed at subverting an election. A departing president vigorously shredded the norms of his office, alienating many millions and unsettling millions more even as he thrilled his most ardent followers.

And so a moment of intricately scripted pomp — albeit one that unfolded against the jittery backdrop of a locked-down landscape and thousands of armed military personnel guarding against mayhem — became, once more, a national glue.

“Have we become too jaded, too accustomed to the ritual of the passing of the torch of democracy to realize what a blessing, what a privilege it is to witness this moment? I think not.” Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., said in opening the inaugural ceremony.

The American playbook has taught us that significant transitional moments — “inflection points,” as it has become fashionable to call them — tend to favor the loud. That ignores the mechanics, which is natural: As long as the car’s working and gets you there, you’re probably not thinking much about what’s under the hood.

That’s an incomplete view, though.

“America is a process. It’s not an end product,” says Susan Schulten, a professor at the University of Denver who specializes in 19th- and 20th-century U.S. history.

It was process personified Wednesday when American leaders who did their jobs and went home — from Dan Quayle all the way to Barack Obama, and now including Mike Pence — strode down the steps and took their seats to watch. It was process incarnate when the same oath handed by the Constitution to George Washington 231 years ago was uttered by Biden.

It was process expressed in music when Lady Gaga sang the National Anthem. It was process, too, when Jennifer Lopez sang “This Land Is Your Land,” an American ode written by Woody Guthrie, a man who painted these words on his guitar: “This machine kills fascists.”

It was part of the process and procedure, and something incredibly fresh and new as well, when 22-year-old Amanda Gorman took to the mic as the youngest poet ever to read at an inaugural. She even gave a nod to it in her poem, “The Hill We Climb”: “Somehow,” Gorman said, “we’ve weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken but simply unfinished.”

The process of inauguration held its contradictions, of course, given that two weeks ago many Americans wondered if any of it would even take place at all — and if it did, whether it would be relocated, sequestered and neutered in the interest of preventing insurrection.

There was the contradiction of holding a ceremony about democracy’s renewal at a building constructed with slave labor. There was the contradiction of convening that ceremony about freedom in a locked-down part of the national capital, with thousands of heavily armed Americans in uniform guarding the perimeter from saboteurs.

There was the contradiction that, because of both security and coronavirus concerns, the multitudes of Americans who normally turn out to see a new president take office weren’t allowed anywhere near the place.

“I wonder how that’s going to affect how Americans see this inauguration,” said Thurston Clarke, author of “Ask Not,” a book that unpacked the inaugural of John F. Kennedy in 1961. “I think it diminishes it.”

And there was, foremost, the contradiction of Donald Trump’s self-chosen absence, which subverted a fundamental step in the power-transfer process by excising the transferrer from the equation.

For a few hours Wednesday morning after he made his early exit from the White House and the capital, Trump’s absence created a lightheaded (and not necessarily in a good way) feeling of something that was in

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the process of becoming something else. While he remained president until noon, and there was no power vacuum, the sense of vulnerability that accompanies any political in-betweenness descended — intensified, no doubt, by the vulnerability that Washington actually faced in the wake of the Capitol insurrection.

“There’s usually a sense of closure there,” says Robert J. Thompson, director of the director of the Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture at Syracuse University. “This time around, any sense of closure, any sense that this story has at any point ever had some sense of completion, has been broken into a million little pieces.”

In his address, Biden kept talking about “the American story,” and rightly so: The United States is held together by the stories it tells. But the stories that become national myths do not come from nowhere. They coalesce. They grow. They marinate. And they do that incrementally, until the small becomes the epic.

That’s where process, procedure and ritual come in. Together, they can bog down the most exciting of endeavors. But together, too, they can foster continuity and stability. Many progressives who say change is overdue, and want it fast, may not like that. The MAGA base, it has become clear, does not endorse such a notion either.

But the tumult of the past four years, a good chunk of it intensified by the upending of norms and processes, suggests that incrementalism has its place in American society as well. And that for every deafening moment that lurches the nation forward, there are countless procedural ones that inch it along.

“It drives home how much institutions matter,” Schulten says.

The fabric of the American republic has been yanked, pulled taut, bloodied, stretched like seashore-town taffy by leaders and followers alike. What’s ahead is uncertain, as always — and will be distasteful to many and comforting to many others.

But on Wednesday, for one moment, any American carnage was elsewhere. For one moment, whatever kind of American you are, whatever you’re upset about and however you voted, this land was incontrovertibly your land.

For one interlude on a sunny January day in 2021, in the middle of what Biden called “this winter of peril and significant possibilities,” the state of the union — if not strong, precisely — was intact. The republic, for the moment, still stood.

Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation at The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

Some COVID-19 mutations may dampen vaccine effectiveness

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer

Scientists are reporting troubling signs that some recent mutations of the virus that causes COVID-19 may modestly curb the effectiveness of two current vaccines, although they stress that the shots still protect against the disease.

Researchers expressed concern Wednesday about the preliminary findings, in large part because they suggest that future mutations could undermine vaccines. The research tested coronaviruses from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil, and was led by Rockefeller University in New York with scientists from the National Institutes of Health and elsewhere.

A different, more limited study out Wednesday gave encouraging news about one vaccine’s protection against some of the mutations.

One way vaccines work is to prompt the immune system to make antibodies that block the virus from infecting cells. The Rockefeller researchers got blood samples from 20 people who had received either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine and tested their antibodies against various virus mutations in the lab.

With some, the antibodies didn’t work as well against the virus -- activity was one-to-threefold less, depending on the mutation, said the study leader, Rockefeller’s Dr. Michel Nussenzweig.

“It’s a small difference but it is definitely a difference,” he said. The antibody response is “not as good” at blocking the virus.

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Earlier research established that the two vaccines are about 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 illness. The latest findings were posted late Tuesday on an online website for researchers and have not yet been published in a journal or reviewed by other scientists. Nussenzweig is paid by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which also supports science coverage at The Associated Press. The university has applied for a patent related to his work.

The coronavirus has been growing more genetically diverse, and scientists say the high rate of new cases is the main reason. Each new infection gives the virus a chance to mutate as it makes copies of itself.

Recent variants, or versions of the virus that emerged in the U.K., South Africa and Brazil seem to spread more easily and scientists say that will lead to more cases, deaths and hospitalizations. The new variants do not seem to cause more serious disease but their ability to eventually undercut vaccines is a concern.

E. John Wherry, an immunology expert at the University of Pennsylvania, said the Rockefeller scientists are "among the very best in the world" at this work and their results are concerning.

"We don't want people thinking that the current vaccine is already outdated. That's absolutely not true," he said. "There's still immunity here ... a good level of protection," but the mutations "do in fact reduce how well our immune response is recognizing the virus."

The news comes at "a really important time in the pandemic," said Dr. Buddy Creech, a vaccine specialist at Vanderbilt University,

"We've got an arms race between the vaccines and the virus. The slower we roll out vaccine around the world, the more opportunities we give this virus to escape" and develop mutations, he said.

Dr. Matthew Woodruff, an immunology researcher at Emory University, agreed.

"This is going to be kind of a slow walk of evolution. We're going to have to have tools that slowly develop with it," such as treatments that offer combinations of antibodies rather than one, he said.

Dr. Drew Weissman, a University of Pennsylvania scientist whose work helped lead to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, said the antibody findings are worrisome, but noted that vaccines also protect in other ways, such as spurring responses from other parts of the immune system. The new work involved only 20 people and not a huge range of ages or races, "and all of that matters" in how generalizable the results are, he said.

On Wednesday, Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech reported a second round of reassuring findings about its vaccine against one of the variants.

Earlier this month, Pfizer and researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch said that the vaccine remained effective against a mutation called N501Y from new variants found in the U.K. and South Africa. Likewise, there was no sign of trouble when they tested some additional mutations.

The latest work tested all the mutations from the variant from the U.K. at once rather than one-by-one. Tests from 16 vaccine recipients showed no big difference in the ability of antibodies to block the virus, the researchers said in a report.

Pfizer didn't immediately comment about the Rockefeller findings, but its chief scientific officer, Dr. Philip Dormitzer, previously said next steps include testing the vaccine against additional mutations found in the variant from South Africa.

Moderna and AstraZeneca, which makes a different type of COVID-19 vaccine used in some countries, also have been testing how their vaccines hold up against different mutations.

If the virus eventually mutates enough that the vaccine needs adjusting — much like flu shots are altered most years — tweaking the recipe wouldn't be difficult for vaccines made with newer technologies. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are made with a piece of the virus genetic code that is simple to switch.

It's "wishful thinking" to believe that first-generation vaccines will be enough, or that vaccines alone will solve our problems, said Mayo Clinic vaccine expert Dr. Gregory Poland.

"We are shooting ourselves in the foot by allowing unmitigated transmission of this virus" and not doing "common sense" measures such as mandating mask-wearing as some other countries are doing, he said.

"How can the bars and restaurants be full? It's like 'what pandemic?' We've reaped the seeds we've sown," he said.

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Medical writer Lauran Neergaard contributed reporting.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's fiction in his goodbye to Washington

By HOPE YEN, CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In his final remarks as president, Donald Trump tried to take credit for accomplishments of his predecessor and even those to come under President Joe Biden.

Falsehoods suffused his farewell remarks Wednesday morning and the night before, though he was spot on with this: "We were not a regular administration."

As well, in noting Americans were "horrified" by the storming of the Capitol this month, he brushed past the encouragement he had given to the mob in advance — by falsely claiming widespread voting fraud — and his praise of the attackers as "very special" people while they were still ransacking the seat of power.

"There is truth and there are lies — lies told for power and for profit," Biden said after he took the helm as president. "Each of us has a duty and a responsibility as citizens, as Americans and especially as leaders ... to defend the truth and defeat the lies."

A look at some of Trump's statements to well-wishers at Joint Base Andrews en route to Florida on Wednesday and in his videotaped address Tuesday:

COVID-19

TRUMP, boasting of his accomplishments for the U.S.: "Again, we put it in a position like it's never been before, despite the worst plague to hit since I'd guess you say 1917, over a 100 years ago." — remarks Wednesday before leaving Washington.

THE FACTS: He got the year wrong for the Spanish flu that hit in 1918 and completely ignored the role his handling of the coronavirus pandemic played in the surging infections and deaths that beset the nation.

The U.S. in fact remains in a perilous position when it comes to COVID-19, surpassing 400,000 deaths this week.

The Spanish flu pandemic Trump referred to spread from early 1918 to late 1920.

After COVID-19 first appeared in the U.S., Trump repeatedly dismissed the virus as less of a danger than the common flu and something that would disappear soon enough. He ignored the advice of government public health officials that people should wear masks, and mocked Biden for doing so.

Although his administration shepherded the delivery of two highly successful vaccines, getting shots into the arms of Americans has been frustratingly slow with nearly 50% of the doses delivered to states actually administered. That followed a debacle with coronavirus testing last year.

As infections and deaths grew, Trump, who was hospitalized with COVID-19 himself, falsely asserted that the nation was "rounding the turn" on the virus and he continued to shun wearing a mask and to hold campaign rallies at which face masks were not required.

The U.S. has now surged past 24.2 million infections.

Biden planned on his first day in office to sign orders putting in place a mask mandate on federal property and creating a White House office to coordinate the national response to the virus.

TRUMP: "We got the vaccine developed in nine months instead of nine years or five years or 10 years, a long time. It was supposed to take a long time. ... We have two out, we have another one coming almost immediately." — remarks Wednesday.

TRUMP: "Another administration would have taken three, four, five, maybe even up to 10 years to develop a vaccine. We did in nine months." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Actually, the administration didn't develop any vaccines. Pharmaceutical companies did. And one of the two U.S. companies that have come out with vaccines now in use did not take development money from the government.

Trump's contention that a vaccine would have taken years under a different administration stretches

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credulity. COVID-19 vaccines were indeed remarkably fast, but other countries have been developing them, too. A vaccine for the coronavirus is not a singular achievement of the United States, much less the Trump administration.

U.S. drugmaker Pfizer developed its vaccine in partnership with Germany's BioNTech, eschewing federal money for development, though benefitting from an advance commitment from Washington to buy large quantities if the vaccine succeeded. A vaccine by Moderna, from the U.S., is also in widespread use.

But Britain's AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine is being administered in several countries, and vaccines from China and Russia are also in limited use. More than a dozen potential vaccines are in late stages of testing worldwide.

VETERANS

TRUMP: "We passed VA Choice." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: No, he did not get the Choice program passed. President Barack Obama did. Trump expanded it. The program allows veterans to get medical care outside the Veterans Affairs system under certain conditions. Trump has tried to take credit for Obama's achievement scores of times.

TAXES

TRUMP: "We also got tax cuts, the largest tax cut and reform in the history of our country by far." — remarks Wednesday.

TRUMP: "We passed the largest package of tax cuts and reforms in American history." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: His tax cuts are not close to the biggest in U.S. history.

It's a \$1.5 trillion tax cut over 10 years. As a share of the total economy, a tax cut of that size ranks 12th, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. President Ronald Reagan's 1981 cut is the biggest, followed by the 1945 rollback of taxes that had financed World War II.

Post-Reagan tax cuts also stand among the historically significant: President George W. Bush's cuts in the early 2000s and Obama's renewal of them a decade later.

ECONOMY

TRUMP: "We have the greatest economy in the world." — remarks Wednesday.

TRUMP: "We also built the greatest economy in the history of the world." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: No, the numbers show it wasn't the greatest in U.S. history. And he is the first president since Herbert Hoover in the Depression to leave office with fewer jobs than when he started.

Did the U.S. have the most jobs on record before the pandemic? Sure, the population had grown. The 3.5% unemployment rate before the recession was at a half-century low, but the percentage of people working or searching for jobs was still below a 2000 peak.

Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Romer looked at Trump's economic growth record. Growth under Trump averaged 2.48% annually before the pandemic, only slightly better than the 2.41% gains achieved during Obama's second term. By contrast, the economic expansion that began in 1982 during Reagan's presidency averaged 4.2% a year.

TRUMP, on the economy after the pandemic: "It's a rocket ship up." — remarks Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Not so.

There's been no dramatic, V-shaped economic recovery under Trump. Employers cut jobs during his final December in office. But economists say the additional aid approved in December and the prospect of more from Biden could cause the strongest growth this year in more than two decades.

TRUMP: "We reignited America's job creation and achieved record-low unemployment for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, women — almost everyone." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: Not an ignition. Job creation actually slowed in 2017, Trump's first year in office, to about 2 million, compared with nearly 2.5 million in 2016, Obama's last year in office.

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The low unemployment rates refer to a pre-pandemic economy that is no more. The pandemic has cost the U.S. economy 10 million jobs and has made Trump the first president since Hoover to oversee a net loss of jobs. The U.S. has about 2.8 million fewer jobs now than when Trump was inaugurated, and lost 140,000 just in December. And the job losses have fallen disproportionately on Black Americans, Hispanics and women.

TRUMP: "We rebuilt the American manufacturing base, opened up thousands of new factories, and brought back the beautiful phrase Made in the USA." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: That's a stretch. There are now 60,000 fewer manufacturing jobs in the U.S. than when Trump took office. Despite gains before the pandemic, the manufacturing base had not exactly been "rebuilt."

Before the coronavirus, nearly 500,000 manufacturing jobs were added under Trump, somewhat better than the nearly 400,000 gained during Obama's second term. Still, even before the pandemic, the U.S. had 4.3 million fewer factory jobs than it did in 2001, the year China joined the World Trade Organization and a flood of cheaper imports from that country entered the U.S.

CAPITOL INSURRECTION

TRUMP: "All Americans were horrified by the assault on our Capitol. Political violence is an attack on everything we cherish as Americans. It can never be tolerated." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: That may sum up the reaction of most Americans but it ignores his own part in stirring the anger of his supporters before they staged the violent melee.

For months, Trump falsely claimed the November election was stolen, then invited supporters to Washington and sent them off to the Capitol with the exhortation to "fight like hell."

With the uprising still underway and the velocity of the attack apparent from video and reports from the scene, Trump released a video telling them "to go home now" while repeating "this was a fraudulent election" and adding: "We love you. You're very special."

The House impeached Trump, accusing him of inciting an insurrection. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, a Trump political ally for four years, said Tuesday the Trump supporters were "fed lies" and "provoked by the president and other powerful people."

MILITARY

TRUMP: "We rebuilt the United States military." — remarks Wednesday.

THE FACTS: That's an exaggeration.

It's true that his administration accelerated a sharp buildup in defense spending, including a respite from what the U.S. military considered to be crippling spending limits under budget sequestration.

But a number of new Pentagon weapons programs, such as the F-35 fighter jet, were started years before the Trump administration. And it will take years for freshly ordered tanks, planes and other weapons to be built, delivered and put to use.

The Air Force's Minuteman 3 missiles, a key part of the U.S. nuclear force, for instance, have been operating since the early 1970s and the modernization was begun under the Obama administration. They are due to be replaced with a new version, but not until later this decade.

TRUMP: "We obliterated the ISIS caliphate." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: His suggestion of a 100% defeat is misleading as the Islamic State group still poses a threat.

IS was defeated in Iraq in 2017, then lost the last of its land holdings in Syria in March 2019, marking the end of the extremists' self-declared caliphate. Still, extremist sleeper cells have continued to launch attacks in Iraq and Syria in recent weeks and are believed to be responsible for targeted killings against local officials and members of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The continued attacks are a sign that the militant group is taking advantage of governments otherwise focused on the pandemic and the ensuing slide into economic chaos. The virus is compounding longtime concerns among security and U.N. experts that the group will stage a comeback.

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CHINA

TRUMP: "We imposed historic and monumental tariffs on China. ... Our trade relationship was rapidly changing, billions and billions of dollars were pouring into the U.S., but the virus forced us to go in a different direction." — address Tuesday.

THE FACTS: That's a familiar assertion, false to the core.

It's false to suggest the U.S. never collected tariffs on Chinese goods before he took action. Tariffs on Chinese goods are simply higher in some cases than they were before. It's also wrong to suggest that the tariffs are being paid by China.

Tariff money coming into the government's coffers is mainly from U.S. businesses and consumers, not from China. Tariffs are primarily if not entirely a tax paid domestically.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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Dream close to being sold, taking Loeffler out of WNBA

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

The Atlanta Dream are close to being sold, ending defeated U.S. Sen. Kelly Loeffler's contentious stint as a WNBA owner.

"As it relates to the Atlanta Dream, we understand a sale of the franchise is close to being finalized," the league said in a statement. "Once the sale negotiation is concluded, additional information will be provided."

A person with knowledge of the situation said there are five groups that have expressed interest in buying the Dream and that the team was "finalizing its decision." The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because none of those details had been revealed publicly by the team.

An Atlanta Dream spokeswoman said the team had no comment on the impending sale at this time.

Players around the league have called for Loeffler to sell her 49% stake in the Dream after she wrote a letter to WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert over the summer objecting to the league's initiatives to advocate for racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement.

When Loeffler, a Republican appointed to her Senate seat by Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, didn't immediately sell the team, WNBA players started to endorse and campaign for her opponent, Democrat Raphael Warnock, who defeated Loeffler in Georgia's runoff election on Jan. 5. That result, combined with Jon Ossoff's victory in a runoff for Georgia's other Senate seat, handed Democrats control of the Senate.

Warnock and Ossoff were set to be sworn in Wednesday, the same day President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, who will hold the tiebreaking vote in the 50-50 Senate, were inaugurated.

Loeffler, a wealthy businesswoman who had closely aligned herself with Trump, has been an owner of the Dream since 2011. She hadn't served as the franchise's representative to the league's Board of Governors since October 2019. She also wasn't involved in day-to-day business.

Text messages and phone calls to spokespeople for Loeffler's campaign and Senate office were not immediately returned.

Mary and John Brock are the Dream's majority owners.

After Warnock won the runoff, Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James tweeted a photo of Dream players wearing "Vote Warnock" shirts with the caption: "Think I'm gone put together an ownership group for the The Dream."

Carmelo Anthony, Dodgers outfielder Mookie Betts, actor Kevin Hart and former NFL player Champ Bailey

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all replied that they would be interested in helping to buy the team.

The Dream would be the second WNBA franchise sold this month. The Las Vegas Aces were bought, pending approval from the league's Board of Governors, by Raiders owner Mark Davis.

This story has been corrected to show that Loeffler was appointed to the Senate by Gov. Brian Kemp, not President Donald Trump.

AP Basketball Writer Tim Reynolds and Associated Press Writer Ben Nadler contributed to this report.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-basketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

VIRUS TODAY: US states report COVID-19 vaccine shortage

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Wednesday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— A number of states are reporting they are running out of vaccine, and tens of thousands of people who managed to get appointments for a first dose are seeing them canceled. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said about half of the 31 million doses distributed to the states by the federal government have been administered so far. Only about 2 million people have received the two doses needed for maximum protection against the virus.

— President Joe Biden is signing a series of executive actions that reverse his predecessor's orders on immigration, climate change and the coronavirus pandemic. Biden is requiring the use of masks and social distancing in all federal buildings, on federal lands and by federal employees and contractors. Biden also is directing the government to rejoin the World Health Organization.

— The incoming director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is arriving at an agency that has been relegated to the sidelines during the pandemic. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, 51, an infectious-diseases specialist at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, arrives at the CDC this week as the U.S. death toll from the coronavirus surpassed 400,000 and the nation's largest vaccination campaign in history encounters confusion and delays.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging about 201,000 new cases and about 3,000 deaths each day. The nation's death toll since the start of the pandemic now stands at about 403,000.

QUOTABLE: "It's so incredibly, unimaginably sad that so many people have died that could have been avoided." — Cliff Daniels, chief strategy officer for Methodist Hospital of Southern California, near Los Angeles, after the U.S. death toll topped 400,000.

ICYMI: California officials are pinning their hopes on President Joe Biden as they struggle to obtain coronavirus vaccines and to curb a surge in infections that has packed hospitals and morgues. San Francisco's public health department says it's likely to run out of vaccine on Thursday. Los Angeles County is starting to inoculate people age 65 and older despite the scarcity.

ON THE HORIZON: Biden has taken office as the 46th president of the U.S. His ambitious first 100-day plan includes a push to speed up the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to Americans and to pass a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Gas explosion rips through Madrid building, killing 4

By ARITZ PARRA and MANU FERNANDEZ Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — A powerful gas explosion tore through a residential building in central Madrid on Wednesday, killing four people and ripping the facade off the structure.

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A tower of smoke rose from the building, where repairs were being done to a gas boiler, and billowed through Toledo Street, near the city's center. Aerial footage shared by Spain's National Police showed rubble covering a nearby schoolyard — though Madrid's mayor said no one was seriously injured at the school.

All students and staff were inside the school buildings at the time of the blast.

At least 11 people were injured in the explosion, one seriously, the Madrid emergency service said in a tweet.

The Spanish government's representative for the Madrid region, José Manuel Franco, confirmed three casualties and the Catholic parish that owned the damaged building said the fourth victim was an electrician, a father of four, who was working on the boiler and had initially been considered missing.

A police spokesman on the ground told reporters that firefighters were trying to put out a small fire inside the building before they could bring in dogs, rescue teams, and experts to assess the structure of the damaged premises.

An Associated Press reporter saw emergency workers carry two bodies away from the area, one that firefighters covered with a blue blanket and another shrouded in reflective emergency sheeting.

The building belongs to the nearby La Paloma Catholic Parish and hosted the offices and apartments for some of its priests, Madrid Archbishop Carlos Osoro told Spanish public broadcaster, TVE. He confirmed that none of the clerics were among the victims.

Emy Lee Grau, a local resident who was watching television in a building across the street, said that the moment of the blast was "terrifying."

"Everything shook, it felt like the roof was falling on us. We were terrified when we saw the amount of smoke coming out of the church's building," the 20-year-old Madrid resident told The Associated Press.

A nearby nursing home was evacuated and no injuries were initially reported among the 55 residents, Madrid Mayor José Luis Martínez Almeida told reporters. They were taken to a hotel across the street and were later sent to other care homes, officials said.

Martínez Almeida also said that some mild damage had been identified in the school, where he said people suffered no more than "scratches."

Neighborhood resident Leire Reparaz said she heard the explosion and wasn't immediately sure where it was coming from.

"We all thought it was from the school. We went up the stairs to the top of our building and we could see the structure of the building and lots of gray smoke," the 24-year-old said.

Associated Press photographer Paul White contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: Election claims, and why it's clear Biden won

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — As Democrat Joe Biden is sworn in Wednesday as the nation's 46th president, Donald Trump's most ardent supporters still believe Biden was not legitimately elected after Trump continues to argue the election was stolen.

There is no evidence of the widespread fraud that Trump and his allies have claimed. Republican and Democratic election officials have certified the election as valid. Courts have rejected lawsuit after lawsuit, and a clear majority of Congress has confirmed the final result despite a riotous mob earlier this month that sought to disrupt the process.

So who has claimed what, precisely? What's the evidence that the 2020 election was valid and Biden is the duly elected president of the United States?

THE 'MOST SECURE' ELECTION IN U.S. HISTORY

After a rocky primary season that played out during the coronavirus pandemic, election officials were determined to ensure voters could safely cast their ballots and ramped up operations to handle a massive influx of absentee ballots. Voting absentee has long been available in the U.S., with some states limiting it to certain voters, and the process has safeguards so any ineligible voter or voter casting multiple ballots

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is caught and prosecuted.

In many places, election officials added drop boxes for voters concerned about widespread mail delays. Others offered curbside voting and a few states opted to send ballots to all registered voters. Although Trump and his allies claimed these changes were designed to rig the election in favor of Democrats, Trump saw more people vote for him in 2020 than four years earlier and Republicans gained seats in Congress.

One of the changes that drew the most scrutiny was the expansion of absentee voting in Pennsylvania, but that was done prior to the pandemic and authorized in a law passed with bipartisan support through the state's Republican-controlled Legislature.

State and local election officials have called the November election one of the smoothest in recent memory, with voting spread out across days and even weeks rather than a crush of people at polling places on Election Day. Even Trump's recently departed attorney general, William Barr, said he saw no evidence of widespread fraud.

And the fact that so many people voted using a paper ballot, which guarantees a record in the event of a dispute, prompted a coalition of government and election security officials, including representatives of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's cybersecurity agency, to issue a statement calling 2020 the "most secure" election.

WORK REVIEWED, RESULTS CERTIFIED

After voting ended, election officials counted the results and used various measures to verify the totals, such as looking at how many people checked in at each precinct and how many ballots were issued to ensure they add up. For mail ballots, election workers reviewed the voter's registration to ensure they were eligible to vote and many states matched voter signatures against ones on file.

Any discrepancies were investigated, and results were presented to local election boards and eventually to the state to certify the results as accurate. This happened across the country largely without controversy, except for a few instances in which Republicans raised questions. In these cases, the concerns were dismissed as without merit and the elections certified.

In Georgia, Biden's win was verified three times: with an initial count, a second conducted by hand and then a recount. The state also conducted an audit of voting machines to ensure the votes recorded electronically matched paper records submitted by voters. A limited review of voter signatures found no evidence of widespread illegal voting.

And ultimately, Republican and Democratic governors signed off on the results, including Trump allies Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia and Gov. Doug Ducey of Arizona who both certified that Biden won their states.

FLOOD OF LITIGATION, CLAIMS OF FRAUD

Trump and his GOP backers have suffered loss after loss in the legal system, all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, as they sought to overturn the will of voters in a few states that Trump lost with unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud. Their cases have drawn quick dismissals and scathing responses from judges, some of whom were appointed by Republicans or Trump himself:

— U.S. District Judge Timothy Batten in Georgia, an appointee of President George W. Bush, rejected a lawsuit alleging votes were manipulated in favor of Biden, saying "they want this court to substitute its judgment for that of two-and-a-half million Georgia voters who voted for Joe Biden and this I am unwilling to do."

— U.S. Circuit Judge Stephanos Bibas, a former law professor appointed by Trump, wrote, "voters, not lawyers, choose the president. Ballots, not briefs, decide elections," as his panel refused to grant a request to stop Pennsylvania from certifying its results.

In about 60 cases filed by Trump's legal team and Republican allies, Trump notched just one small victory in a fight over the deadline to provide missing proof of identification for certain absentee ballots and mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania.

As his legal bids failed, Trump tried to enlist the help of elected officials in key states. He summoned Michigan lawmakers to the White House in an unsuccessful attempt to set aside the vote tally. He asked Georgia's governor to convene the state legislature to overturn the results and told Georgia's top elections

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official to "find" enough votes to sway the state in his favor.

Amid all the claims, it was noteworthy that they began and ended with the presidential contest. There have not been widespread calls to redo the entire election, which also included congressional and state legislative seats.

AFTER MOB, CONGRESS CONFIRMS

The steady drumbeat of false claims about widespread fraud made it to the Capitol as Congress met to confirm Biden's victory, with more than 100 GOP lawmakers supporting objections.

The meeting to complete the Electoral College tally is normally a routine step. But the process turned deadly as a mob of thousands of Trump supporters stormed the building. After the melee was cleared, lawmakers reconvened and confirmed the results before dawn the following day.

In a strong rebuke Tuesday, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said "the mob was fed lies" by Trump and others. "They were provoked by the president and other powerful people, and they tried to use fear and violence to stop a specific proceeding of a branch of the federal government," McConnell said. He vowed a "safe and successful" inauguration of Biden.

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Izaguirre reported from Charleston, West Virginia. AP reporter Alanna Durkin Richer contributed from Boston.

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Associated Press coverage of voting rights receives support in part from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Rape charges denied by lawyer for '70s Show' actor Masterson

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — An attorney for "That '70s Show" actor Danny Masterson pleaded not guilty on his behalf Wednesday to the rapes of three women in the early 2000s.

Defense lawyer Tom Mesereau entered the plea for Masterson, who was not present in court, to three charges of rape by force or fear in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

The frequently delayed hearing coincided with the inauguration in Washington of President-elect Joe Biden, resulting in far less media attention than Masterson's initial court appearance in June. His arraignment has been postponed several times since.

Prosecutors have alleged that Masterson, 44, who has been free on bond since his June 17 arrest, raped a 23-year-old woman sometime in 2001, a 28-year-old woman in April of 2003, and a 23-year-old woman between October and December of 2003. All of the alleged rapes happened at his Hollywood Hills home.

Masterson could face up to 45 years in prison if convicted.

Mesereau, whose previous clients have included Michael Jackson and Bill Cosby, said in court in June that the charges were the result of unfair hype from media outlets and political pressure to prosecute his client. The lawyer said his team would prove that Masterson is not guilty.

Masterson's arrest came after a three-year investigation that resulted in the rare prosecution of a famous Hollywood figure in the #MeToo era. Despite dozens of investigations, most have led to no charges based on lack of evidence or too much time having passed since the alleged sexual assaults.

The alleged rapes happened at the height of Masterson's fame as he starred as Steven Hyde on Fox TV's retro sitcom "That '70s Show" from 1998 to 2006 alongside Ashton Kutcher, Mila Kunis and Topher Grace.

Lawyer says ex-royal staff will shed light on Meghan letter

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A lawyer for the publisher of the Daily Mail newspaper said Wednesday that the Duchess of Sussex had no reasonable expectation of privacy for a letter she sent to her estranged father after her marriage to Prince Harry.

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Arguing against the duchess' privacy-infringement claim in a London court, attorney Antony White said "it's to be inferred that the letter was written and sent by the claimant with a view to it being disclosed to third parties and read by the public."

He said ex-employees of Meghan and Harry would be able to shed light on the creation of the letter when the case comes to trial.

The former Meghan Markle, 39, is suing publisher Associated Newspapers for invasion of privacy and copyright infringement over five February 2019 articles in the Mail on Sunday and on the MailOnline website, which published portions of a handwritten letter to her father, Thomas Markle, after her 2018 wedding to Harry, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II.

Associated Newspapers is contesting the claim, and a full trial is due to be held in the autumn at the High Court. In hearings this week the duchess is seeking a summary judgment that would find in her favor and dismiss the newspaper's defense case without a trial.

Meghan's lawyer, Justin Rushbrooke, argued Tuesday that that the publisher had "no real prospect" of winning because "it's a very straightforward case about the unlawful publication of a private letter."

Rushbrooke said Meghan's five-page letter, sent in August 2018, was "a message of peace" intended for her father alone.

But the defense argues Meghan wrote the letter as part of a media strategy to rebut a negative view conveyed by her father, and with help from the communications team in the royal couple's Kensington Palace office.

"Why was the Kensington Palace communications team involved at all in the wording of the letter if it was a wholly private letter?" White said.

He said a full trial would be able to hear important evidence from former palace employees about how the contested letter was written.

Lawyers representing four former Kensington Palace staffers, including ex-communications secretary Jason Knauf, said in a letter submitted to the court that "one or more of our clients" would be able to provide insight on "whether or not the claimant anticipated that the letter might come into the public domain," and whether or not Meghan "directly or indirectly provided private information" to the authors of a book about her and Harry, called "Finding Freedom."

Meghan, an American actress and star of TV legal drama "Suits," married Harry at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son, Archie, was born the following year.

A year ago, Meghan and Harry announced they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America, citing what they said were the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. They recently bought a house in Santa Barbara, California.

Judge Mark Warby said he would give his ruling on the application for summary judgment "as soon as possible."

Follow all AP developments on Prince Harry and Meghan at <https://apnews.com/hub/prince-harry> and <https://apnews.com/hub/meghan-markle>

Trump pardons ex-strategist Steve Bannon, dozens of others

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, ERIC TUCKER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump pardoned former chief strategist Steve Bannon in the final hours of his White House term as part of a flurry of clemency action that benefited more than 140 people, including rap performers, ex-members of Congress and other allies of him and his family.

The last-minute clemency, announced after midnight on Wednesday, follows separate waves of pardons over the past month for Trump associates convicted in the FBI's Russia investigation as well as for the father of his son-in-law.

Taken together, the actions underscore the president's willingness, all the way through his four years in the White House, to flex his constitutional powers in ways that defy convention and explicitly aid his

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friends and supporters.

Trump did not pardon himself, despite speculation that he would, in the face of potential federal investigations. He had previously asserted that he had the authority to do so. He also did not pardon his children or his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani.

The final list was full of more conventional candidates whose cases had been championed by criminal justice activists. One man who has spent nearly 24 years in prison on drug and weapons charges but had shown exemplary behavior behind bars had his sentence commuted. So did a former Marine sentenced in 2000 in connection with a cocaine conviction.

Even so, the names of prominent Trump allies nonetheless stood out.

One pardon recipient was Elliott Broidy, a prominent Republican fundraiser who pleaded guilty last fall in a scheme to lobby the Trump administration to drop an investigation into the looting of a Malaysian wealth fund. Another was Ken Kurson, a friend of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner who was charged last October with cyberstalking during a heated divorce.

Hours later, the White House announced one last pardon, for Al Pirro, the ex-husband of Trump ally Jeanine Pirro, a Fox News Channel host. Al Pirro had been convicted in 2000 of tax charges.

Bannon's pardon was especially notable given that the prosecution was still in its early stages and any trial was months away. Whereas pardon recipients are conventionally thought of as defendants who have faced justice, often by having served at least some prison time, the pardon nullifies the prosecution and effectively eliminates any prospect for punishment.

Bannon was charged in August with duping thousands of donors who believed their money would be used to fulfill Trump's chief campaign promise to build a wall along the southern border. Instead, he allegedly diverted over a million dollars, paying a salary to one campaign official and personal expenses for himself. His co-defendants were not pardoned.

"Steve Bannon is getting a pardon from Trump after defrauding Trump's own supporters into paying for a wall that Trump promised Mexico would pay for," Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., said on Twitter. "And if that all sounds crazy, that's because it is. Thank God we have only 12 more hours of this den of thieves."

Other presidents have issued controversial pardons before leaving the White House. But perhaps no other commander in chief has so enjoyed using the clemency authority to benefit not only friends and acquaintances but also celebrity defendants and those championed by allies.

Wednesday's list includes its share of high-profile defendants.

Among them were rappers Lil Wayne and Kodak Black, both convicted in Florida on weapons charges. Wayne, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter, has frequently expressed support for Trump and recently met with the president on criminal justice issues. Kodak Black, also known as Bill K. Kapri, had his sentence commuted.

Others on the list included Death Row Records co-founder Michael Harris and New York art dealer and collector Hillel Nahmad.

Pardoned were former Rep. Rick Renzi, an Arizona Republican who was sentenced to three years for corruption, money laundering and other charges, and former Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham of California, who was convicted of accepting bribes from defense contractors. Cunningham, who was released from prison in 2013, received a conditional pardon.

Trump commuted the prison sentence of former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, who has served about seven years behind bars for a racketeering and bribery scheme.

Trump had already pardoned a slew of longtime associates and supporters, including his former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort; Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in-law; his longtime friend and adviser Roger Stone; and his former national security adviser Michael Flynn.

Bannon was the only most recent. He did not respond to questions Tuesday.

A voice of nationalist, outsider conservatism, Bannon led the conservative Breitbart News before being tapped to serve as chief executive officer of Trump's 2016 campaign in its critical final months.

He later served as chief strategist to the president during the turbulent early days of Trump's administra-

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tion and was at the forefront of many of its most contentious policies, including its travel ban on several majority-Muslim countries.

But Bannon, who clashed with other top advisers, was pushed out after less than a year. And his split with Trump deepened after he was quoted in a 2018 book making critical remarks about some of Trump's adult children. Bannon apologized and soon stepped down as chairman of Breitbart. He and Trump have recently reconciled.

In August, he was pulled from a luxury yacht off the Connecticut coast and brought before a judge in Manhattan, where he pleaded not guilty. When he emerged from the courthouse, Bannon tore off his mask, smiled and waved to news cameras. As he went to a waiting vehicle, he shouted, "This entire fiasco is to stop people who want to build the wall."

The organizers of the "We Build The Wall" group portrayed themselves as eager to help the president build a "big beautiful" barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, as he promised during the 2016 campaign. They raised more than \$25 million from thousands of donors and pledged that 100% of the money would be used for the project.

But according to the criminal charges, much of the money never made it to the wall. Instead, it was used to line the pockets of group members, including Bannon.

Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Lil Wayne, Kodak Black get clemency; Joe Exotic does not

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Two rappers were among the entertainment figures included in a list of 140 people who were pardoned or had their sentences commuted by President Donald Trump in a last-minute clemency flurry early Wednesday. But the news was not as good for one hopeful celebrity.

— Rapper Lil Wayne, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter Jr., was given a full pardon. The Grammy-winner was charged in Florida on Nov. 17 with possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, a federal offense that carries a potential sentence of up to 10 years in prison. In the pardon, Lil Wayne was praised for his "commitment to a variety of charities, including donations to research hospitals and a host of foodbanks." Pro Football Hall of Famer Deion Sanders backed the pardon. Lil Wayne is one of the seminal figures in rap in the last two decades, selling more than 20 million albums in the U.S. since releasing his debut in 1999. Sentencing for the rapper, who frequently expressed support for Trump, was set for Jan. 28. In a statement, Carter's attorney Howard Srebnick said a pardon was appropriate since "prosecuting a non-violent citizen for merely possessing a firearm violates the Second Amendment to the U. S. Constitution."

— Rapper Kodak Black, born Bill K. Kapri, was granted a commutation. The "Tunnel Vision" rapper is serving a three-year prison sentence for falsifying documents used to purchase weapons at a Miami gun store. Supporters included Gucci Mane, Lil Pump, Lil Yachty, and athletes Lamar Jackson and Jack Brewer. Kodak Black has sold over 30 million singles since 2014, and has had several multiplatinum and platinum-certified singles, including "Zeze," "No Flockin'" and "Roll in Peace." His lawyer, Bradford Cohen, was once a contestant on Trump's "Celebrity Apprentice" show. The pardon notes that Kodak Black paid for schoolchildren's notebooks, supplies to daycare centers and food for the hungry, and donated \$50,000 for restaurants in his hometown of Pompano Beach, Florida.

— Desiree Perez, CEO of Roc Nation, was granted a full pardon. Perez was arrested in 1994 for drug possession, and in 1998 for grand larceny and possession of a firearm. In 2019, she was named head of the entertainment company founded by rapper Jay-Z that's home to such artists as Rihanna, Alicia Keys and Megan Thee Stallion. The pardon mentions that "Perez has taken full accountability for her actions and has turned her life around. She has been gainfully employed and has been an advocate for criminal justice reform in her community."

— "Tiger King" Joe Exotic had hoped for good news, but it was not to be. The zookeeper-turned-reality-TV-star was sentenced in January 2020 to 22 years in federal prison for violating federal wildlife laws and

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for his role in a failed murder-for-hire plot. His team was so confident in a pardon that they'd readied a celebratory limousine and a hair and wardrobe team to whisk him away from a Texas prison. But he wasn't on the list announced Wednesday morning. Exotic, whose real name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage, was prominently featured in the popular Netflix documentary "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."

Associated Press reporter Curt Anderson in Miami contributed to this report.

EU sighs with relief as Biden readies to enter White House

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's top officials breathed a sigh of relief on Wednesday that Joe Biden will be taking over as president of the United States, but they warned that the world has changed after four years of Donald Trump and that trans-Atlantic ties will be different in the future.

"This new dawn in America is the moment we've been awaiting for so long," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, hailing Biden's arrival as "resounding proof that, once again after four long years, Europe has a friend in the White House."

"The United States are back, and Europe stands ready to reconnect with an old and trusted partner to breathe new life into our cherished alliance," she told EU lawmakers, hours before Biden was to be sworn in at his inauguration ceremony in Washington.

European Council President Charles Michel, who chairs summits between the EU's 27 heads of state and government, said that trans-Atlantic relations have "greatly suffered in the last four years. In these years, the world has grown more complex, less stable and less predictable."

"We have our differences and they will not magically disappear. America seems to have changed, and how it's perceived in Europe and the rest of the world has also changed," said Michel, whose open criticism of the Trump era contrasted starkly with the silence that mostly reigned in Europe while the Republican leader was in the White House.

This change, Michel said, means "that we Europeans (must) take our fate firmly into our own hands, to defend our interests and promote our values," and he underlined that "the EU chooses its course and does not wait for permission to take its own decisions."

The Europeans have invited Biden to a summit, quite probably in Brussels, in parallel with a top-level NATO meeting as soon as he's ready. Michel said the EU's priority is to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and climate change, rebuild the global economy and boost security ties with Washington.

In Germany, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier issued a video statement on his website as well as Instagram and Facebook before the inauguration, calling it a "good day for democracy."

He said that the U.S. had "faced tremendous challenges and endured."

"Despite the attempts to tear at America's institutional fabric, election workers and governors, the judiciary and Congress have proven strong," he said. "I am greatly relieved that, today, Joe Biden is being sworn in as president and will be moving into the White House. I know many people in Germany share this feeling."

With Biden and incoming Vice President Kamala Harris, Steinmeier said there was new hope that the U.S. would again be a "vital partner" internationally to tackle issues like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, security issues including arms control and disarmament, and multiple conflicts.

"When our views do differ, such differences of opinion will not divide us, but should rather spur us on to find joint solutions," he said. "Despite all the joy we feel today, we must not forget that even the most powerful democracy in the world has been seduced by populism."

"We must work resolutely to counter polarization, protect and strengthen the public square in our democracies, and shape our policies on the basis of reason and facts."

In Poland, where the right-wing government has been on very good terms with the Trump administration, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, said that he expects cooperation with Biden and his team to develop positively.

"We have many points in common, joint projects linked to the Three Seas Initiative (in central and east-

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ern Europe) where we are developing many infrastructure connections," Morawiecki told an online news conference.

He also mentioned the energy sector, where Poland is importing substantial quantities of U.S. liquefied gas, LNG, and security cooperation around NATO's borders with Russia, saying that "for these reasons and also due to the security cohesion, this cooperation will be developing well, or even very well."

David Rising in Berlin, and Monika Scislawska in Warsaw, contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Jan. 21, the 21st day of 2021. There are 344 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 21, 2020, the U.S. reported its first known case of the new virus circulating in China, saying a Washington state resident who had returned the previous week from the outbreak's epicenter was hospitalized near Seattle; U.S. officials stressed that they believed the overall risk of the virus to the American public remained low.

On this date:

In 1793, during the French Revolution, King Louis XVI, condemned for treason, was executed on the guillotine.

In 1915, the first Kiwanis Club, dedicated to community service, was founded in Detroit.

In 1924, Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin died at age 53.

In 1942, pinball machines were banned in New York City after a court ruled they were gambling devices that relied on chance rather than skill (the ban was lifted in 1976).

In 1954, the first atomic submarine, the USS Nautilus, was launched at Groton (GRAH'-tuhn), Connecticut (however, the Nautilus did not make its first nuclear-powered run until nearly a year later).

In 1976, British Airways and Air France inaugurated scheduled passenger service on the supersonic Concorde jet.

In 1977, on his first full day in office, President Jimmy Carter pardoned almost all Vietnam War draft evaders.

In 1997, Speaker Newt Gingrich was reprimanded and fined as the House voted for the first time in history to discipline its leader for ethical misconduct.

In 2003, the Census Bureau announced that Hispanics had surpassed blacks as America's largest minority group.

In 2007, Lovie Smith became the first Black head coach to make it to the Super Bowl when his Chicago Bears won the NFC championship, beating the New Orleans Saints 39-14; Tony Dungy became the second when his Indianapolis Colts took the AFC title over the New England Patriots, 38-34.

In 2010, a bitterly divided U.S. Supreme Court, in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, vastly increased the power of big business and labor unions to influence government decisions by freeing them to spend their millions directly to sway elections for president and Congress. Former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards finally admitted fathering a daughter during an affair before his second White House bid.

In 2019, first-term senator and former California attorney general Kamala Harris entered the Democratic presidential race. (Harris would withdraw from the race in December; she would be chosen the following August as the party's vice presidential nominee.) A light aircraft carrying Argentine soccer player Emiliano Sala to his new team in Wales went missing over the English Channel. (Sala's body was recovered from the wreckage two weeks later.)

Ten years ago: Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, seriously wounded in a shooting rampage, was transferred from the University Medical Center trauma center in Tucson to Texas Medical Center in Houston to undergo

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months of therapy. President Barack Obama visited Schenectady, New York, the birthplace of the General Electric Co., to declare that his job was "putting our economy into overdrive." South Korean special forces stormed a hijacked freighter in the Arabian Sea, rescuing all 21 crew members and killing eight Somali pirates. Ed Mauser, the oldest living member of a 101st Airborne Division company that became known as the "Band of Brothers" during World War II, died in Omaha, Nebraska, at age 94.

Five years ago: The Obama administration tightened restrictions on European and other travelers who had visited Iran, Iraq, Syria or Sudan in the previous five years. Daniel Holtzclaw, a former police officer convicted of raping and sexually victimizing women while on his beat in a low-income Oklahoma City neighborhood, was ordered to spend the rest of his life in prison.

One year ago: A rancorous dispute over rules marked the first full day of President Donald Trump's Senate impeachment trial; Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell added an extra day for opening arguments and agreed that evidence from the House impeachment proceedings would be included in the record. Terry Jones, a founding member of the Monty Python comedy troupe, died at his London home at the age of 77 after suffering from dementia. Derek Jeter came within one vote of being a unanimous pick for baseball's Hall of Fame, while Larry Walker earned baseball's highest honor in his last chance on the ballot. Heavy metal music legend Ozzy Osbourne announced that he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Today's Birthdays: World Golf Hall of Famer Jack Nicklaus is 81. Opera singer-conductor Placido Domingo is 80. Actor Jill Eikenberry is 74. Country musician Jim Ibbotson is 74. Singer-songwriter Billy Ocean is 71. Former U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke is 71. Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder is 70. Actor-director Robby Benson is 65. Actor Geena Davis is 65. Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., is 60. Basketball Hall of Famer Hakeem Olajuwon is 58. Actor Charlotte Ross is 53. Actor John Ducey is 52. Actor Karina Lombard is 52. Actor Ken Leung is 51. Rock musician Mark Trojanowski (Sister Hazel) is 51. Rock singer-songwriter Cat Power is 49. Rock DJ Chris Kilmore (Incubus) is 48. Actor Vincent Laresca is 47. Singer Emma Bunton (Spice Girls) is 45. Actor Jerry Trainor is 44. Country singer Phil Stacey is 43. R&B singer Nokio is 42. Actor Izabella Miko (MEE'-koh) is 40. Actor Luke Grimes is 37. Actor Feliz Ramirez is 29.