

Groton Daily Independent

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Scores from last night
Varsity: Groton 45, Clark 33
JV: Clark 23, Groton 7



Schedule

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.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM



7th Boys

4:00 p.m.,
Friday, Jan. 22, 2021
Groton at Clark

7th grade game

Sponsored by Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique



Boys

4 p.m., Friday, Jan. 22, 2021
Groton at Clark/Willow Lake

7th Grade Boys
JV Boys, Varsity Boys

Legislation updates public notice law

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — Despite opposition from cities, counties and school districts, the House Local Government Committee Thursday endorsed a bill that would modernize the way public notices are handled in the state's newspapers.

House Bill 1050 would create a statewide public notice website run by the S.D. Newspaper Association, increase the price for legal notices as well as tie future increases to the Consumer Price Index, scrap the 90% rate in weekly newspapers for the publication of local government proceedings and make specifications about column width and font size.

Rep. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, the bill's sponsor, said he served in city government for 13 years. "It is only fair that they are paid a fair price for the service they provide," Reed said of newspapers.

David Bordewyk, executive director of the S.D. Newspaper Association, said that newspapers should be compensated fairly for their services. HB1050 would provide newspapers with a 3% to 5% increase in rates this year, Bordewyk said any future annual increases would be tied to the Consumer Price Index at no more than 2% per year.

Currently rate increases are handled by hearings before the Bureau of Administration. Using that system, the last rate increase was about 1.8% in 2016.

Bordewyk offered the committee examples of legal notices from South Dakota newspapers, the cost charged and the price that would be charged should HB1050 become law. In some cases, due to column width and font size requirements, the prices went down.

Justin Smith, a lobbyist for the S.D. Newspaper Association, said the private/public partnership between newspapers and local governments was likely the oldest in state history. Perhaps due to that long history, Smith said, the current pricing system for public notices is 100 years old.

Smith said the bill mandated that notices be published at a newspaper association-run website, sdpublicnotices.com, and noted that opponents of the bill have been pushing for years for the internet-only publication of notices. He said the third-party role of newspapers publishing notices in print and online was important.

That third-party role is also fulfilled by the audit of local governments. He asked if those should be eliminated. "Those governments could easily audit themselves," Smith said. "Transparency and accountability require third party oversight."

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Smith noted that publishing public notices is not a significant cost to local governments, often taking just .01% of .02% of the entire budget.

Matt Tranquill, publisher of the Rapid City Journal, said newspapers fulfill an important watchdog role. "We cannot allow local governments to watch over themselves," Tranquill said. "Having a third party for digital and print legals is a must."

Speaking in opposition to the bill was Yvonne Taylor, lobbyist for the S.D. Municipal League who thanked Bordewyk and Smith for making the Municipal League's point about the need to place public notices online. She noted, however, that a newspaper site has no standing when it comes to being the official repository of public notices.

"A newspaper site is not the official version of anything," Taylor said. "This bill is the worst of all worlds. It binds us to an outdated mechanism."

Dianna Miller, a lobbyist for large school districts, said passage of the bill would be too costly for school districts.

"We are here to save you money," Miller said. "Their bill doesn't save us any money."

Miller said in the past school districts have offered alternatives to newspaper publication that included posting notices on the internet, mailing minutes to citizens who don't have internet access and providing copies at libraries and school offices.

Miller objected to the notion that public notice costs were an insignificant part of school budgets.

"Every dollar at a school district is crucial," Miller said, noting that the bill's passage would raise public notice costs for schools by 20% to 30%. "We'll be paying them to keep them afloat."

Miller said newspapers should take a cue from radio and publish the notices as public service announcements.

Wade Pogany, representing the Associated School Boards of South Dakota, said the legislation hits schools twice, once by increasing the rates and again by repealing the provision that allows schools to pay at 90% of the rate.

"We think this could be pretty significant," Pogany said. "This hits us twice financially."

Pogany also questioned why the rate increase procedure would be taken away from the Bureau of Administration.

"Why are we changing the process?" Pogany asked. "Why would private industry have a right to an automatic rate increase?"

Reed defended the change in rates for school districts, pointing out that they probably don't get a 10% discount when they buy new snow plows.

"We have to do this at a fair price," Reed said. "That's good government."

The bill was approved by the committee on an 8-5 vote. It now goes to the full House.

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GUN SHOW: Dakota Territory Gun Collectors Association 18th Annual ABERDEEN Show, Saturday, February 6, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, February 7, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. DAKOTA EVENT CENTER on LaMont East. Laura Ennen 701-214-3388.

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Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Shih Tzus 15, Jackelopes 14, Chipmunks 10, Cheetahs 9

Men's High Games: Doug Jorgensen 201, Roger Spanier 200, 197, Randy Stanley 197

Women's High Games: Darci Spanier 180, 174, Lori Wiley 168, Nicole Kassube 168

Men's High Series: Randy Stanley 548, Roger Spanier 542, Brad Waage 513

Women's High Series: Darci Spanier 490, Lori Wiley 452, Nicole Kassube 435

South Dakota's Tourism Industry Shows Resilience Despite 2020 Challenges

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota's tourism industry held its own when compared to other states during the COVID-19 pandemic. During a Thursday address, Governor Kristi Noem and Jim Hagen, Secretary of the Department of Tourism, revealed 2020 tourism economic impact numbers.

According to the annual study done by Tourism Economics, South Dakota welcomed 12.6 million visitors, a decrease of only 13% from the year before. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, South Dakota was one of the best performing states in the country.

Visitors to South Dakota spent \$3.4 billion, a decline of only 18%. For comparison, on average, visitor spending was down 45% across the country. Through the summer months, South Dakota ranked third-best in the country in domestic bookings.

Spending generated by visitors flowed through the economy and contributed \$2.6 billion in GDP, accounting for 4.7% of the state's economy.

"South Dakota's tourism industry faced many challenges in 2020. They adapted and turned it into an incredible year," noted Noem. "Because of their efforts, we were able to put more than 3 billion dollars into South Dakota's economy and set the state up for a very bright future."

"Though the tourism industry has always been resilient, 2020 proved it more than ever," said Jim Hagen, Secretary of the Department of Tourism. "Tourism in South Dakota is a job-creating, revenue-generating industry that plays a vital role in supporting the state's economy year after year. And it didn't just make a difference for the state's bottom line. This money greatly impacts communities and families across South Dakota."

In 2020, tourism generated \$276 million in state & local tax revenue. Without tourism in South Dakota, each household would pay an additional \$780 more in taxes each year.

2020 Economic Impact Figures:

12.6 million – the number of visitors that came to South Dakota. Despite the pandemic, South Dakota saw a decline of only 13% from the previous year.

\$3.4 billion – the amount of visitor spending, a decrease of 18%

\$2.6 billion – the amount of GDP contributed to the state's economy, representing 4.7% of the South Dakota economy

\$276 million – the state and local tax dollars generated by travel and tourism activity. Tourism accounts for 11% of state sales tax collections.

\$157 million – amount of tax revenue collected by local governments from travel and tourism activity

\$119 million – amount of tax revenue collected by the State of South Dakota from travel and tourism

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activity

\$780 – the amount of tax dollars each South Dakota household saves because of the tourism industry
49,500 – number of jobs supported by the tourism industry, representing one out of 12 jobs in South Dakota. Tourism generated \$1.6 billion in income for those employed in those jobs.

Additional 2020 travel indicators:

46.3% – average hotel occupancy for the year, surpassing the national average of 44.7%

3.9 million – the number of hotel room nights booked in 2020

883,000 – number of room nights booked on AirBNB or Homeaway in 2020, a 22.3% increase

8 million – number of visitors to South Dakota's state parks, representing a 31% increase.

2 million – visitors to Custer State Park, reaching the 2 million mark for the first time in history

408,000 – airport arrivals at Sioux Falls and Rapid City Regional Airports, a 48% decrease

To view the full 2020 Tourism Economics report, visit SDVisit.com.

The South Dakota Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism and the South Dakota Arts Council. The department is led by Secretary James Hagen.

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*Source: Tourism Economics, AirDNA

#333 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

It was one year ago today when the first case of Covid-19 was identified in the United States. We've traveled quite a path since then. We have learned an enormous amount about how this virus spreads and how to prevent that transmission, we've learned a great deal about how the virus does its damage and how to treat the infection, and we've developed and put on the market two highly effective vaccines with several more promising candidates in the pipeline. This is all quite remarkable. Of course, we have to place all of that in context with the catastrophic loss of life, the lingering damage in survivors, and the significant ways in which our lives have been diminished in the course of this pandemic; and we also have to recognize we are far from through this at the moment. We are still fighting about the most basic public health measures that are proven to limit spread, reduce morbidity, and limit mortality. We have a health care system strained to breaking and health care workers burnt out, exhausted, stressed, and contemplating getting out of the business entirely, which could cripple the system for years and years to come. We have been racking up medical bills that are going to make your eyeballs bleed when you see the totals. We have severe and long-term economic damage, both to the national economy and to the personal and business finances of individuals and families. We have a population a large proportion of which is not convinced of the need for any public health measures at all and which is also not persuaded of the safety of the vaccines or believes they're part of some plot to—I don't know—exert mind control or something. Sigh.

Today was not a great day. We're up from that first one case to 24, 676,000 total cases in the US, 0.8% more than yesterday. That means we're averaging over two million cases a month for the duration and averaging well over seven million a month lately. There were 194,000 new cases reported today, which is still a whole lot, although our seven-day new-case number has declined over the past 14 days. Hospitalizations are down almost 10,000 from the peak and below that peak for the twelfth consecutive day. Hospitalizations are showing a week-on-week decline nationwide although they are very problematic in some states. Deaths remain frighteningly high at 4177 on the day. The total is 409,997, some 1.0% more than yesterday. Seven-day average here is increasing and is expected to for some time to come.

Alabama's having a post-holiday surge. At one point last week, the state had just 39 available ICU beds. That's pretty frightening. On the other hand, California hospitalizations have been coming down by over eight percent in the past two weeks; the number of ICU patients is also declining. Test positivity has dropped below 10 percent for the first time in a long while, so it looks like there is less undetected spread in our largest state.

There is some evidence in a new study based on lab tests and available in preprint (so not yet peer-reviewed) that the new variant of SARS-CoV-2 that turned up in South Africa has some ability to evade our antibody response generated after prior natural infection. We don't know yet exactly what this means. There is a number of reasons for this uncertainty. (a) It was a very small study of plasma from just 44 patients who'd recovered from prior infections. (b) Vaccinated people were not studied. (c) These tests were done in the lab, so we don't know how things will play out in actual people. (d) The antibody assays done in the lab did not measure the cell-mediated arm of the immune response, and we have strong indications this is an important part of the way we respond to this virus.

David Monefiori, virologist at Duke University Medical Center who was not involved in this study, told CNN he thinks the vaccine will turn out to be somewhat less effective against this variant, but probably not a great deal less effective. He says this because the two vaccines we have now are so very effective that there's some cushion here, and also because this variant is not showing up across the world in large numbers at all. Even in the UK where the genomic surveillance for viral variants is very aggressive, only 45 cases have shown up. That's a drop in the bucket to the UK's four and a half million total. No other country outside South Africa has double-digit numbers of cases with this variant. We can hope to buy valuable time to sort ourselves out before this thing spreads more widely.

In addition, he believes vaccine may trigger a stronger, more multi-faceted immune response than natural infection does. There is apparently some research support for that conclusion: a study done at Sheba

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Medical Center in Israel, but whose data are not yet available, found that mean antibody levels in those vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine are higher than those seen in people who've recovered from severe infections (which should theoretically generate the greatest response among natural infections).

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a briefing today that he has not yet seen evidence this variant threatens the efficacy of vaccines. He said that what he has seen so far "does not mean that the vaccines will not be effective," citing the overwhelming activity seen against the virus in vaccinated people. He is apparently not alone in this line of thinking, so we'll have to wait for further evidence. He did add, "It is all the more reason why we should be vaccinating as many people as we can." I know we've had this talk before, but the more this thing transmits, the greater the odds we do encounter a disastrous variant: This is the time to double down on precautions and sign up for vaccine as soon as you can before this virus has several more billions of opportunities to replicate, each replication carrying a possibility for a serious mutation. It is not a fast mutator, but it is a fast spreader, and that can have a similar real world effect. Time to pull the plug on those replications by every means at our disposal. If you ever were cautious, be more cautious. If you were careless, time to buckle down. We are in a race against time and a relentless virus.

Some better news is out on Eli Lilly's monoclonal antibody treatment, bamlanivimab. You will recall that monoclonal antibodies are those laboratory-produced versions of the ones we make in our bodies in response to a pathogen, only in very purified form—just one kind of antibody instead of the mix of several we see in plasma. This drug received emergency use authorization (EUA) from the FDA in November for use in mild cases as prophylaxis against the development of more severe disease. (To review, see my Update #260 posted on November 9 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4157451100937931>.) A new phase 3 trial in almost 1100 nursing home residents found the antibody helps to prevent disease, lowering the risk of developing symptoms by up to 80% and reducing mortality as well. Lilly's chief scientific officer and president of Lilly Research laboratories, Dr. Daniel Skovronsky, said in the announcement, "We are exceptionally pleased with these positive results, which showed bamlanivimab was able to help prevent Covid-19, substantially reducing symptomatic disease among nursing home residents." The company will be seeking EUA for use in nursing homes. Every little thing helps in this most vulnerable population.

There was a lot of over a million doses of Moderna vaccine distributed to 37 different states, California among them receiving more than 330,000 doses, earlier this month. Then after some tens of thousands of doses had been administered in California, a concerning pattern of allergic reactions began to surface in San Diego, causing state health officials to declare a statewide pause on administration of doses from that lot. The pause permitted time to do a thorough safety review and consult with the company and local and federal health authorities. Fortunately, after deep analysis, the result was that there was, according to the state, "no scientific basis to continue the pause." What had appeared to be a pattern turned out to be a fluke instead, a cluster of people who happened to have reactions at just one vaccination site out of 287 that received doses from the lot in question, and so officials ruled that vaccinations could resume. All in all, there were fewer than 10 people who had adverse reactions over a 24-hour period. This is good news three ways: No one received defective vaccine, we don't have a bunch of people who got sick, and we didn't have to waste precious doses of a life-saving vaccine. Vaccinations have resumed. If this sounds scary, it is actually the opposite. It showed us the system works: We know how to monitor for adverse events, we paused when it looked like there was something there, and we resumed only when the determination was made that the vaccine lot is safe. State epidemiologist, Dr. Erica Pan, said in a statement, "These findings should continue to give Californians confidence that vaccines are safe and effective, and that the systems put in place to ensure vaccine safety are rigorous and science-based." Good enough for me.

Romania is a member of the European Union, but it is desperately poor, their troubles driven by mismanagement and corruption. As a result, out of a population of 19 million, hundreds of thousands of children don't have the most basic necessities of life and have no means to go to school. Fortunately for at least some of these children, Valeriu Nicolae lives in Romania too, and Nicolae is committed to improving the lives of the poorest of the poor. He started a humanitarian organization, Casa Buna (Good House) in 2007, and he currently supports and supervises 315 children. His group provides food, hygiene supplies, medicines,

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clothing, computers, and books to these children and their families. The only condition for receiving this aid is that the kids must not drop out of school.

Nicolae knows something about conditions of life for these children; he grew up in a community of Roma (people who have been known pejoratively as Gypsies), one of Romania's most discriminated against populations, and he received help as a child which got him through the difficult days of his childhood. Aware from his own life experience of the damaging effects of racism, he spearheaded an anti-racism campaign associated with the World Cup in 2010. He has won international awards for his work in children's education, but I don't think that's why he does what he does. He told the AP, "There is nothing better than seeing you've changed the life of a child for the better. I don't think there are many people more rewarded by what they do than me." I think this is why he does it.

As the pandemic has worsened conditions for so many of Romania's poor, he and his teams continue to visit villages throughout the country, bringing supplies and hope. His idea is that educated kids don't have to grow up to live a life on the streets, suffering from alcoholism and drug addiction. I looked today at photos of Nicolae showing children how to properly use a toothbrush; carrying boxes of supplies to cramped, half-finished homes; helping them to make video calls to teachers on computers provided by Casa Buna; and bandaging sprained ankles. He seems to me to be a full-service helper.

And he thinks that for societies to change, individuals must change. He thinks politicians should be required to help someone before they are allowed to take office. "It should be the basics: do good things for others! Even a tiny bit of good for someone around you, and no bad at all." I like the way he thinks, and I wonder how many of our purported leaders would have their jobs if this was a requirement.

I'm going to let Nicolae take us out with this, as told to the AP: "I was successful in helping many children and adults. I am stubborn and don't do things just for one day. I also failed thousands of times but that has placed me in a position to succeed (the next time). I never failed in the same way twice. . . . I want to be a better person, a little better every year if possible." And I love this: "I don't want to be a saint, because saints tend to have a tragic end."

Can we all borrow just a page or two from Mr. Nicolae's book? We can aim to get better every year, but not to become saints. The more of us who do, the better the place is going to look.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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Jan. 21st 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: +337 (106,402 total) Positivity Rate: 5.2%

Total Tests: 6430 (848,541 total)

Total Persons Tested: 1172 (394,515 total)

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

Avera St. Luke's: 8 (-2) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

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

Deaths: +6 (1673 total)

Female: 2, Male: 4

Age Groups: 60s=1, 70s=2, 80+=3

Counties: Grant-1, Hutchinson-1, Meade-1, Pennington-2, Todd-1.

Recovered: +345 (100,638 total)

Active Cases: -14 (4089)

Percent Recovered: 94.6%

Vaccinations: +3909 (62365)

Vaccinations Completed: +1320 (11285)

Brown County Vaccinations: +405 (2717) 268 (+245) completed

Beadle (38) +1 positive, +5 recovered (64 active cases)

Brookings (32) +12 positive, +7 recovered (224 active cases)

Brown (75): +14 positive, +16 recovered (197 active cases)

Clark (4): +0 positive, +1 recovered (7 active cases)

Clay (13): +11 positive, +8 recovered (66 active cases)

Codington (73): +15 positive, +11 recovered (151 active cases)

Davison (55): +2 positive, +8 recovered (90) active cases)

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

Edmunds (5): +6 positive, +6 recovered (35 active cases)

Faulk (13): +1 positive, +0 recovered (8 active cases)

Grant (36): +6 positive, +1 recovered (38 active cases)

Hanson (4): +1 positive, +3 recovered (11 active

cases)

Hughes (30): +17 positive, +5 recovered (97 active cases)

Lawrence (35): +4 positive, +14 recovered (70 active cases)

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

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

McCook (22): +2 positive, +0 recovered (18 active cases)

McPherson (4): +3 positive, +0 recovery (27 active case)

Minnehaha (296): +83 positive, +82 recovered (963 active cases)

Pennington (163): +24 positive, +45 recovered (476 active cases)

Potter (3): -1 positive, +1 recovered (20 active cases)

Roberts (34): +3 positive, +2 recovered (46 active cases)

Spink (24): +0 positive, +1 recovered (29 active cases)

Walworth (14): +0 positive, +4 recovered (43 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 21:

- 3.5% rolling 14-day positivity
- 152 new positives
- 6,337 susceptible test encounters
- 54 currently hospitalized (-1)
- 1,169 active cases (-8)
- 1,400 total deaths (+13)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
▲						
Aurora	440	408	805	11	Substantial	8.82%
Beadle	2587	2485	5417	38	Substantial	11.98%
Bennett	373	356	1102	8	Moderate	3.08%
Bon Homme	1504	1467	1950	23	Substantial	6.15%
Brookings	3341	3085	10679	32	Substantial	9.31%
Brown	4811	4539	11641	75	Substantial	9.03%
Brule	672	638	1752	7	Substantial	15.38%
Buffalo	416	403	856	12	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	944	903	2972	20	Substantial	8.79%
Campbell	117	111	231	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1198	1121	3676	14	Substantial	9.09%
Clark	329	318	900	4	Moderate	9.52%
Clay	1734	1655	4809	13	Substantial	8.08%
Codington	3701	3477	8976	73	Substantial	11.36%
Corson	458	442	958	11	Minimal	10.81%
Custer	718	682	2512	10	Substantial	14.85%
Davison	2860	2715	5995	55	Substantial	5.18%
Day	583	537	1601	23	Substantial	9.76%
Deuel	450	422	1041	7	Substantial	11.43%
Dewey	1372	1314	3603	18	Substantial	6.56%
Douglas	409	382	846	9	Substantial	13.16%
Edmunds	446	399	927	5	Substantial	4.94%
Fall River	489	461	2396	13	Substantial	14.13%
Faulk	327	306	629	13	Minimal	7.14%
Grant	875	801	2020	36	Substantial	20.93%
Gregory	496	460	1151	26	Moderate	2.44%
Haakon	240	227	496	9	Minimal	9.09%
Hamlin	658	582	1608	38	Substantial	12.05%
Hand	321	308	727	4	Moderate	10.00%
Hanson	329	314	650	4	Moderate	8.57%
Harding	89	88	163	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2157	2032	5961	30	Substantial	3.96%
Hutchinson	742	689	2135	23	Substantial	17.86%

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Hyde	134	131	383	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	269	252	877	13	Minimal	8.33%
Jerauld	265	245	524	16	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	76	70	184	0	Minimal	16.67%
Kingsbury	593	550	1485	13	Substantial	21.05%
Lake	1112	1040	2946	16	Substantial	15.63%
Lawrence	2723	2618	7921	35	Substantial	10.32%
Lincoln	7314	6967	18427	70	Substantial	11.45%
Lyman	584	539	1786	10	Substantial	13.92%
Marshall	281	263	1066	5	Moderate	18.75%
McCook	713	673	1478	22	Substantial	4.55%
McPherson	228	197	522	4	Substantial	6.43%
Meade	2428	2302	7061	27	Substantial	14.89%
Mellette	233	227	684	2	Moderate	23.08%
Miner	257	225	524	7	Substantial	26.09%
Minnehaha	26592	25339	71436	296	Substantial	9.83%
Moody	589	535	1624	15	Substantial	18.82%
Oglala Lakota	2013	1904	6359	40	Substantial	13.39%
Pennington	12139	11500	36040	163	Substantial	12.38%
Perkins	321	289	721	11	Substantial	19.12%
Potter	338	315	762	3	Substantial	7.84%
Roberts	1085	1005	3872	34	Substantial	12.33%
Sanborn	323	309	628	3	Moderate	9.52%
Spink	747	694	1945	24	Substantial	10.53%
Stanley	306	291	831	2	Substantial	5.26%
Sully	130	114	265	3	Moderate	16.67%
Todd	1192	1161	3971	21	Substantial	5.26%
Tripp	649	624	1383	14	Moderate	5.71%
Turner	1028	940	2481	49	Substantial	6.90%
Union	1824	1664	5714	36	Substantial	17.33%
Walworth	689	630	1709	14	Substantial	17.00%
Yankton	2706	2589	8552	27	Substantial	23.35%
Ziebach	333	309	813	8	Substantial	23.08%
Unassigned	0	0	1956	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	4072	0
10-19 years	11795	0
20-29 years	19259	4
30-39 years	17528	14
40-49 years	15195	32
50-59 years	14991	89
60-69 years	12149	215
70-79 years	6474	375
80+ years	4937	944

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	55555	795
Male	50845	878

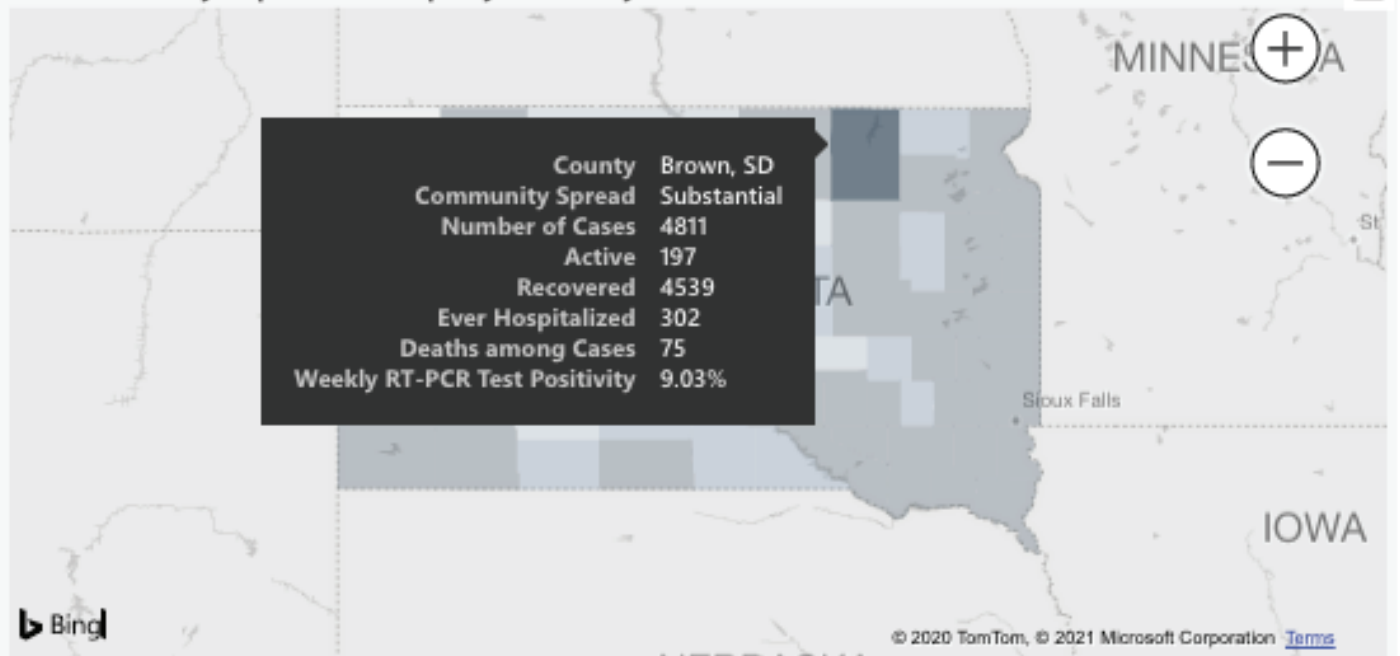
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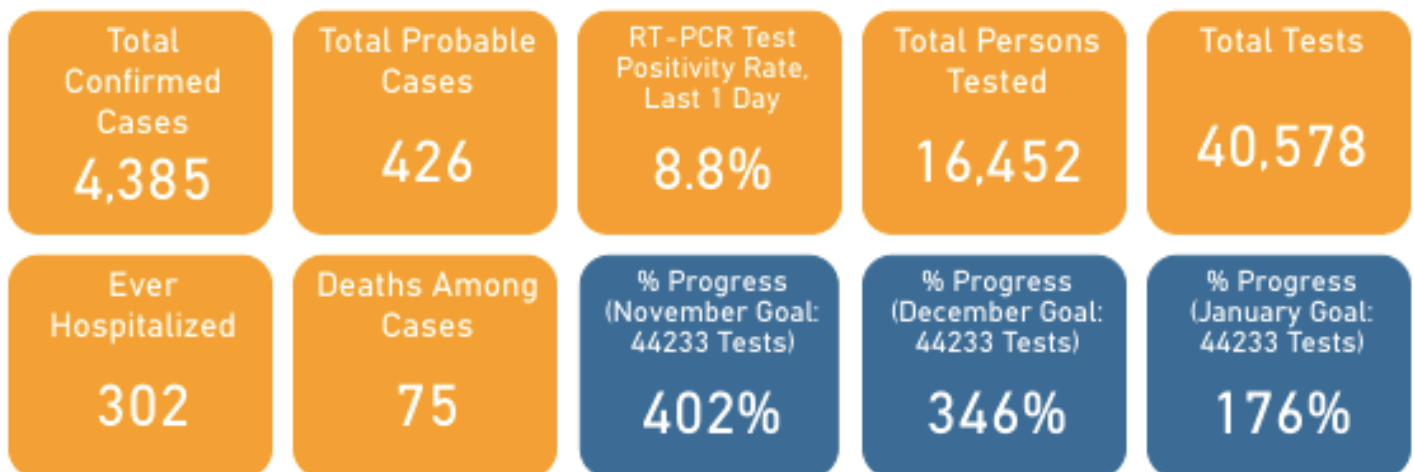
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



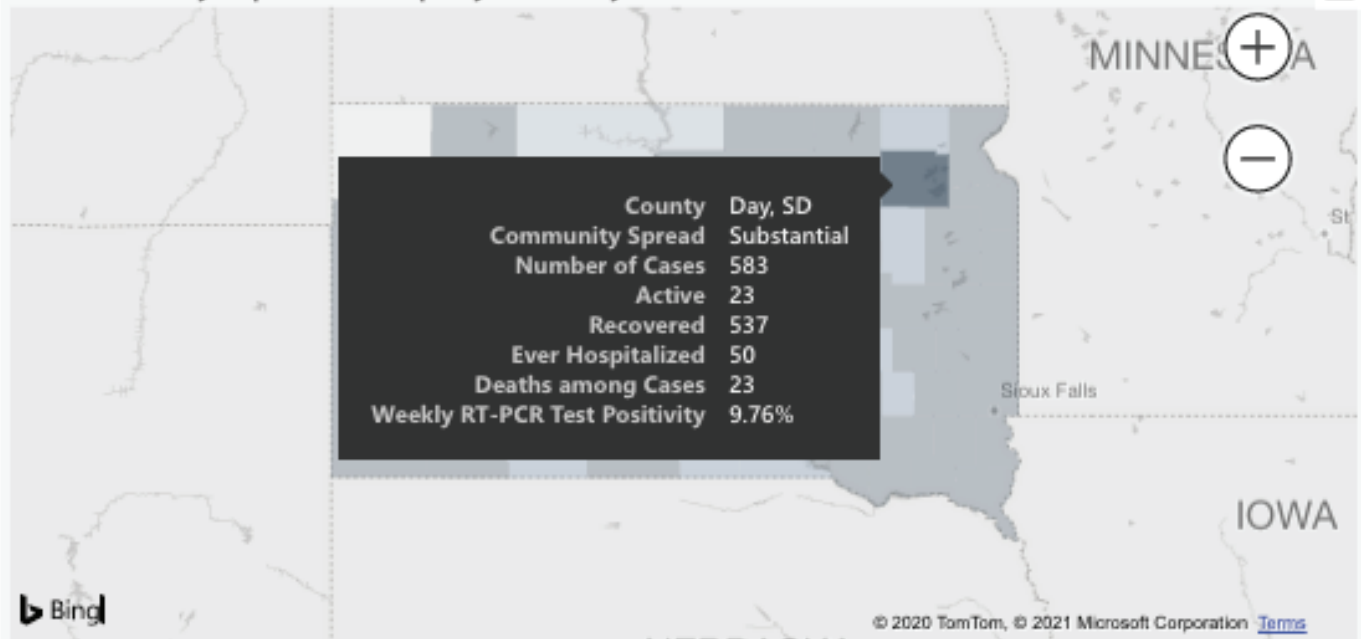
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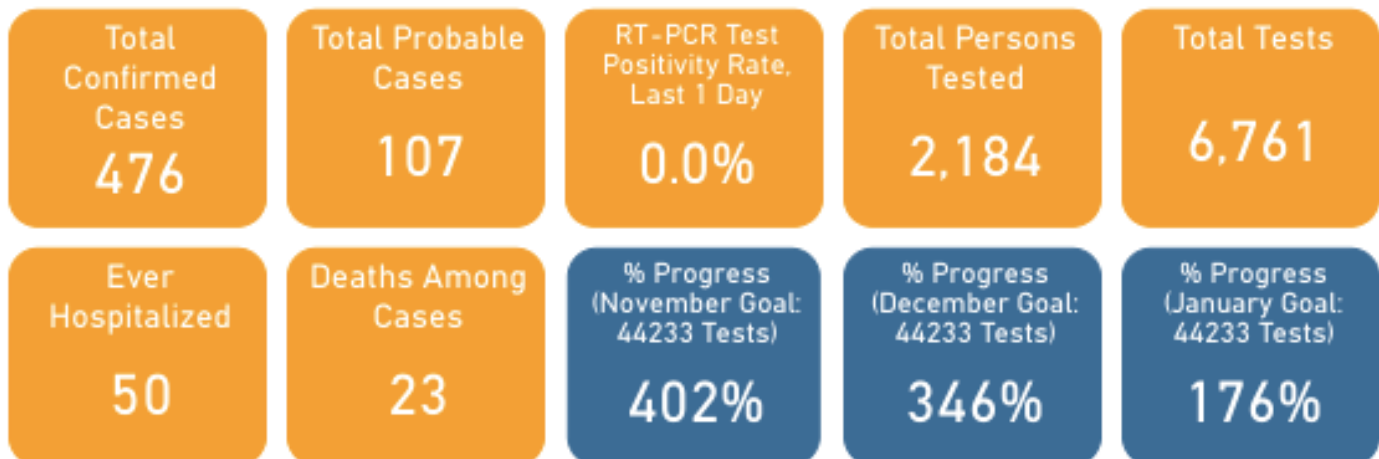
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

62,365

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

51,080

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	31,056
Pfizer	31,309

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	28,774
Moderna - Series Complete	1,141
Pfizer - 1 dose	11,021
Pfizer - Series Complete	10,144

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	94	94	0	94
Beadle	1138	636	251	887
Bennett*	102	98	2	100
Bon Homme*	451	431	10	441
Brookings	1649	1,131	259	1,390
Brown	2717	2,181	268	2,449
Brule*	285	273	6	279
Buffalo*	8	8	0	8
Butte	245	233	6	239
Campbell	202	176	13	189
Charles Mix*	405	375	15	390
Clark	211	195	8	203
Clay	858	782	38	820
Codington*	2015	1,301	357	1,658
Corson*	20	18	1	19
Custer*	390	316	37	353
Davison	1516	1,434	41	1,475
Day*	385	359	13	372
Deuel	211	161	25	186
Dewey*	92	90	1	91
Douglas*	213	209	2	211
Edmunds	204	174	15	189
Fall River*	469	387	41	428
Faulk	172	168	2	170
Grant*	444	418	13	431
Gregory*	266	252	7	259
Haakon*	106	106	0	106

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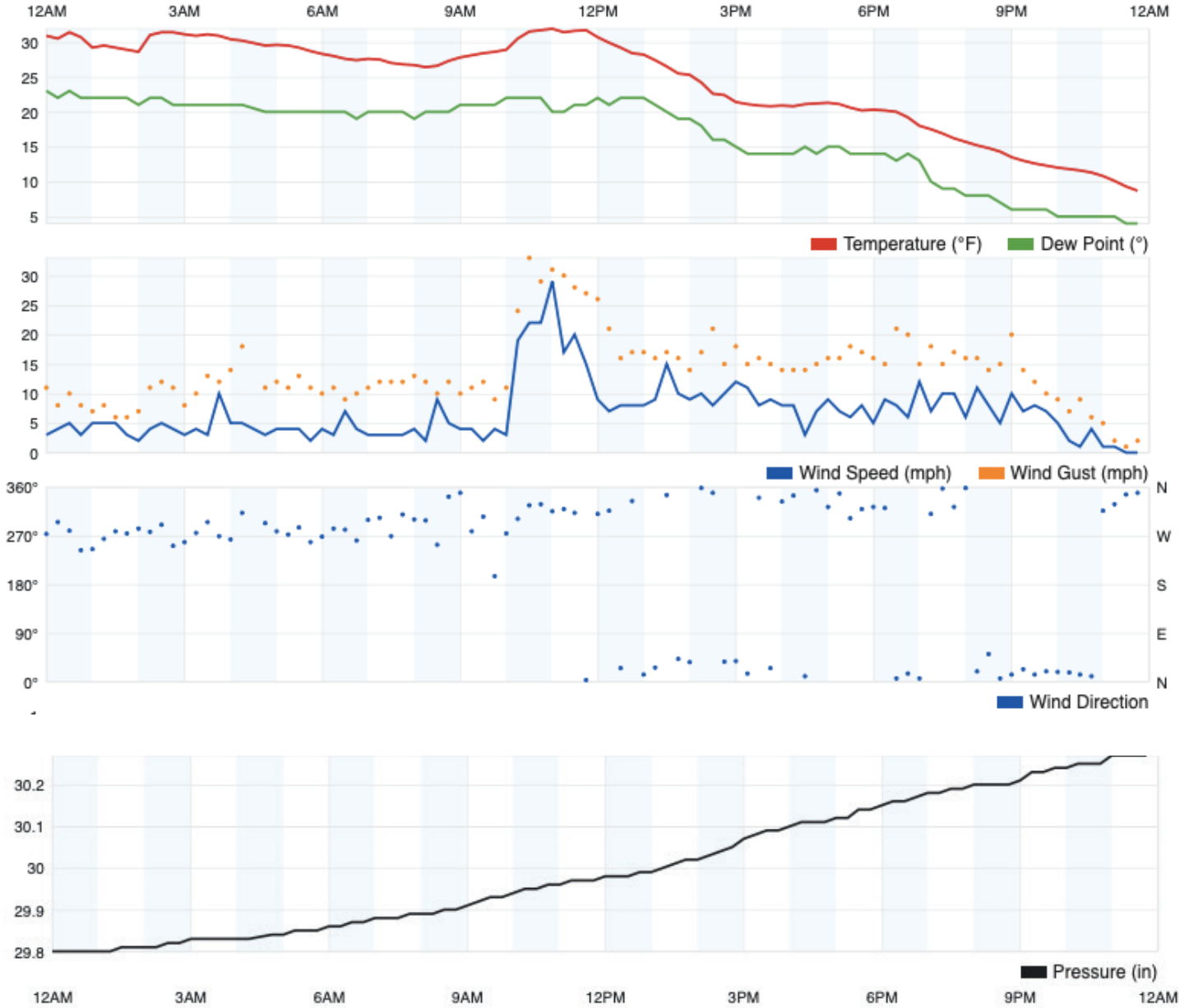
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Hamlin	273	199	37	236
Hand	222	186	18	204
Hanson	73	65	4	69
Harding	3	3	0	3
Hughes*	1089	1,035	27	1,062
Hutchinson*	683	623	30	653
Hyde*	100	100	0	100
Jackson*	74	72	1	73
Jerauld	105	83	11	94
Jones*	99	93	3	96
Kingsbury	367	273	47	320
Lake	875	247	314	561
Lawrence	1010	952	29	981
Lincoln	7418	3,022	2,198	5,220
Lyman*	79	77	1	78
Marshall*	229	223	3	226
McCook	426	292	67	359
McPherson	26	24	1	25
Meade*	910	700	105	805
Mellette*	8	8	0	8
Miner	148	110	19	129
Minnehaha	19021	8,293	5,364	13,657
Moody*	304	214	45	259
Oglala Lakota*	25	15	5	20
Pennington*	6638	4,842	898	5,740
Perkins*	64	64	0	64
Potter	131	123	4	127
Roberts*	618	606	6	612
Sanborn	165	151	7	158
Spink	558	530	14	544
Stanley*	151	141	5	146
Sully	33	27	3	30
Todd*	33	27	3	30
Tripp*	429	399	15	414
Turner	783	587	98	685
Union	332	300	16	316
Walworth*	326	164	81	245
Yankton	1884	1,846	19	1,865
Ziebach*	17	17	0	17
Other	1768	1,056	356	1,412

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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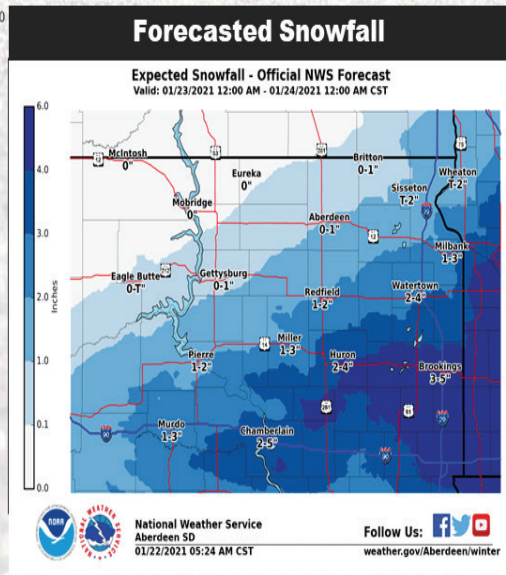
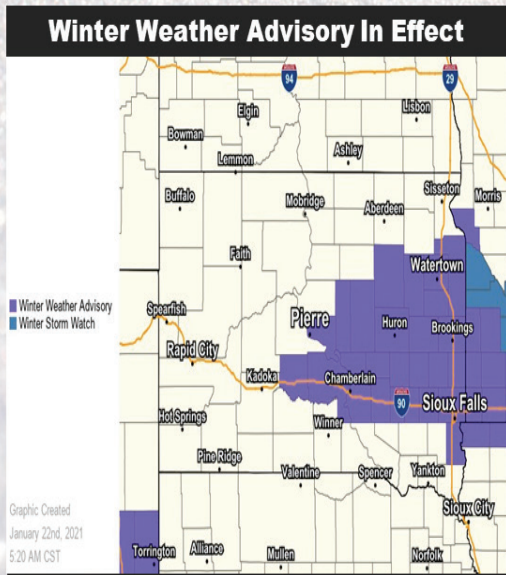
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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Snow and Patchy Fog then Wintry Mix	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 27 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 29 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 16 °F



Snow Moves In After Midnight

Late tonight a winter storm system moves into the region producing light to moderate snow throughout much of Saturday. The snowfall ends by Sunday morning however winds pick up Sunday morning and may cause reduced visibility due to blowing snow.



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

Updated: 1/22/2021 5:40 AM CT



A Winter Weather Advisory has been issued for parts of eastern SD, starting at midnight tonight. Light to moderate snowfall should begin early Saturday morning. Winds will generally be light during the event Saturday, however may pick up Sunday morning, causing patchy blowing snow.

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Snow Timeline

Light to moderate snow is expected across central to northeastern South Dakota and west-central Minnesota Saturday. Snow will move into central South Dakota early Saturday, and overspread much of the area. Brief periods of moderate snow are possible, with the lightest snow amounts expected over north central South Dakota. **Stay tuned to latest forecasts!**

	Midnight Sat	6am Sat	Noon Sat	6pm Sat	Midnight Sun	6am Sun
Mobridge & surrounding area		Snow				
Pierre & surrounding area		Moderate Snow	Snow			
Miller & surrounding area		Moderate Snow	Snow			
Aberdeen & surrounding area		Snow				
Sisseton & surrounding area		Snow	Moderate Snow	Snow		
Watertown & surrounding area		Snow	Moderate Snow	Snow		

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

Updated: 1/21/2021 1:48 PM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

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Today in Weather History

January 22, 1973: Chinook winds during the early morning hours caused the temperature at Spearfish, South Dakota to rise from 4 below zero to 45 above in just two minutes, the most dramatic temperature rise in the world. An hour and a half later the mercury plunged from 54 above to 4 below zero in 27 minutes. January 22, 1982:

A winter storm lasting three days from the 22nd to the 24th virtually paralyzed South Dakota with snowfall of 6 to 20 inches. Subzero temperatures statewide coupled with strong winds of 30 to 50 mph brought wind chills of 50 to 70 below zero. One woman died of exposure near her home in Aurora County. Snow drifted as high as 15 feet. Blowing snow caused a reduction in visibility to near zero for most of the duration of the storm. Hundreds of motorists were stranded. Numerous traffic accidents occurred due to near zero visibilities. Some power outages occurred. Major highways, interstates, and airports were closed. Numerous businesses and schools were closed for several days.

January 22, 2010: A powerful mid-season winter storm moved northeast out of the four corners region of the United States and into the Northern Plains. Ahead of this system, warm and moist air streamed northward creating widespread fog and freezing fog conditions during the days leading up to the event. Heavy riming frost began to accumulate on power lines and tower guide wires, placing a heavy strain on them by the time the freezing rain arrived in the late morning and afternoon hours on Friday, January 22nd. Along with the freezing rain, southeast winds gusting to 30 mph also created a strain on sagging power lines. Scattered power outages were reported as early as Tuesday, January 19th due to the frost covered lines, but the majority of the power lines and power pole damage occurred during the evening of the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd. The freezing rain that arrived during the afternoon and evening of the 22nd was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back." By the time the rain, freezing rain, and snow ended Saturday morning, January 23rd, nearly every power cooperative across central and northeast South Dakota suffered extensive power pole and power line damage. Also, several radio and television towers were downed by the icing and strong winds. The heavy icing and strong winds downed over 5000 power poles along with 21,000 miles of power lines across South Dakota leaving thousands of households without power. Several homes sustained substantial damage caused by broken water pipes. Power was still not restored for many customers until several weeks after the event. Power line crews from Minnesota, Kansas, and Oklahoma were called upon to help restore power. Several counties, along with the state emergency operations center, opened emergency shelters for people to stay. Forty-one National Guard members were on active duty across the state helping to restore power. Many flights were delayed or canceled at several airports. The ice and the wind also helped topple a canopy at a truck stop at the intersection of Highway 20 and 212. On January 23rd, a radio and television transmission tower northwest of South Shore was downed along with a tower north of Reliance and a radio tower southwest of Marvin. The hardest hit area with this storm was the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux reservations in central and north central South Dakota. With no electricity, residents were dependent on donations of food, bottled water, blankets, heat and light sources, toiletries, and cots. The rural water system serving the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe was shut down resulting in the state EOC shipping water to the reservation. The Governor asked for a presidential disaster declaration for most of the counties and three reservations. The request was for both public and individual assistance for total damages estimated over 20 million dollars for the state.

1904: An unusual estimated F4 tornado leveled the northern part of Moundville, Alabama just after midnight, killing 37 people. The tornado reportedly had a phosphorescent glow. An engineer on a northbound Great Southern train saw the destruction right after it occurred, and backed his train 12 miles in reverse to the town of Akron, where he sent a telegram for help.

1937: Low of 9 degrees above zero in Las Vegas froze many pipes. Schools had trouble keeping warm, and coal was in short supply in the city. January 1937 was the coldest month on record for Las Vegas with an average temperature of 31.2 degrees, which is 17.5 degrees below normal.

1982: Boulder, Colorado recorded a wind gust to an incredible 150 mph!

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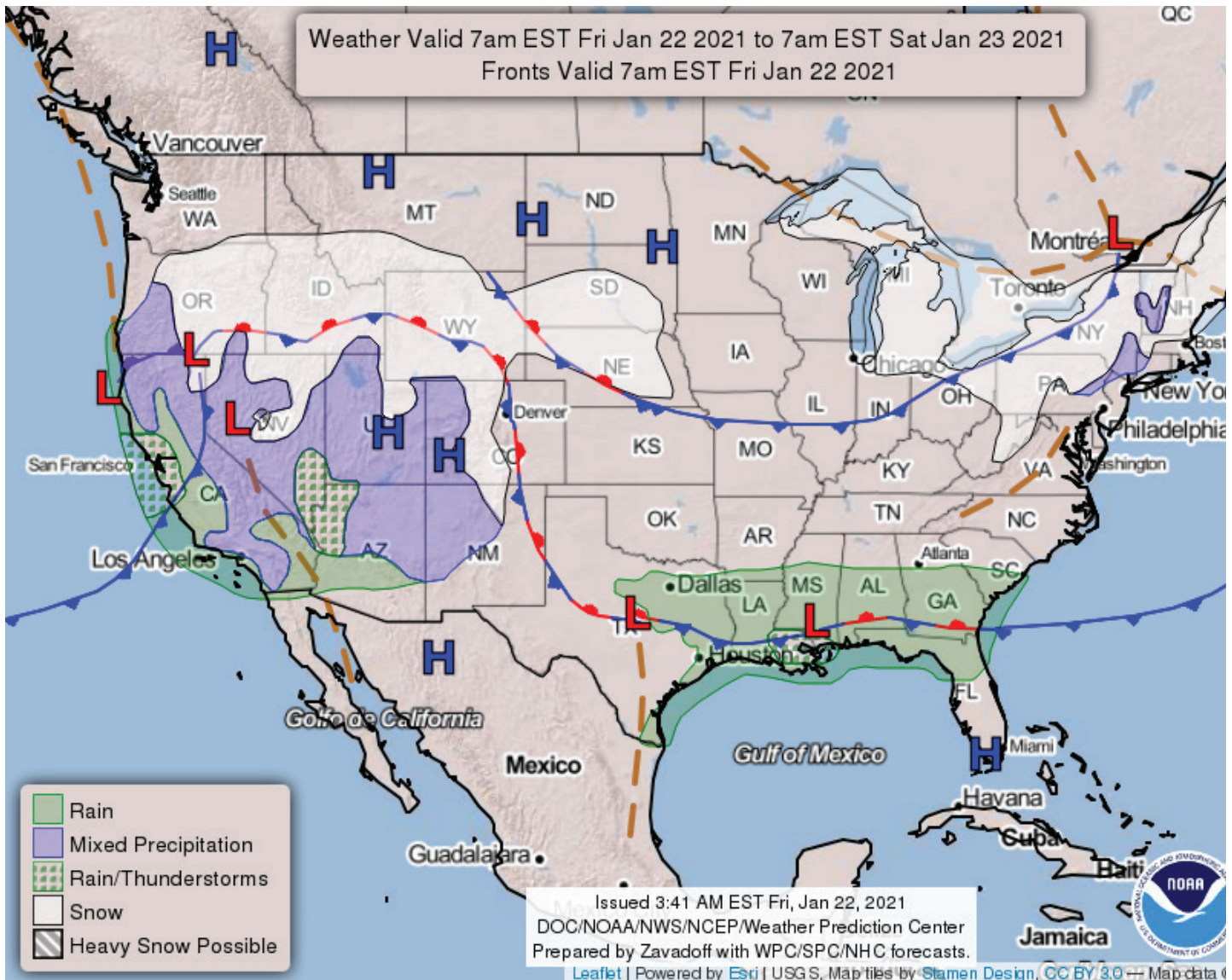
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 10:56 AM
Low Temp: 8 °F at 11:57 PM
Wind: 33 mph at 10:29 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 58° in 1942
Record Low: -30° in 1936, 1937
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.34
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.34
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:27 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:04 a.m.



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EXCLUDING GOD

Nations, like individuals, are destined to live or die. And both face the same choice: do what is right or accept the consequences. Right choices lead to eternal life and the wrong choices that are not consistent with God's Word and His teachings, lead to death.

The Bible very clearly, carefully, and consistently distinguishes the difference between right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness. And this distinction applies to cities as well as to citizens.

Individuals like Abel, Moses, Daniel, and Paul took the right way. Men like Cain, Pharaoh, Herod, and Judas took the wrong way.

Cities like Sodom and Gomorrah took the wrong way and perished. And the "international graveyards" of Ancient Rome, Babylon, Media, Persia, and Ancient Greece also provide historical proof of the fact that: "Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people."

The desolation, destruction, and death of cities and nations are recorded in the pages of history. The evidence provided by archeologists to prove this fact is powerful and plentiful. Yet, many refuse to see and acknowledge the hand of God and the lessons from God that He has planted in the "sands of time."

However, to deny a fact will not make it go away nor will ignoring it excuse any person, city, or nation from its consequences. Punishment for sin is awaiting those who refuse to accept the love, mercy, grace, and salvation of God. But those who trust in and live for the Lord will be saved.

Prayer: Father, whether we like it or not, accept it or not, believe it or not, we will be judged by Your Word. May we turn to You and be saved! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The wicked will go down to the grave. This is the fate of all the nations who ignore God. Psalm 9:17

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 59, Brookings 44

Canistota 65, Hanson 55, OT

Canton 66, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 54

Chamberlain 82, Miller 38

Chester 62, Baltic 34

Dell Rapids 64, Madison 54

Elk Point-Jefferson 68, Akron-Westfield, Iowa 39

Ethan 63, Corsica/Stickney 52

Great Plains Lutheran 59, Tri-State, N.D. 45

Gregory 58, Kimball/White Lake 51

Hamlin 40, Milbank 35

Howard 57, Bridgewater-Emery 48, OT

Ipswich 46, Faulkton 44

Irene-Wakonda 37, Alcester-Hudson 34

Lyman 49, Faith 39

Marty Indian 57, Scotland 33

Menno 59, Freeman 33

Parkston 58, Bon Homme 36

Rapid City Christian 71, Bennett County 39

Redfield 62, Britton-Hecla 39

Sioux Falls Washington 60, Harrisburg 44

Sisseton 68, Deuel 39

Sully Buttes 47, Stanley County 35

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 40, Mitchell Christian 27

Vermillion 66, Sioux Falls Christian 53

West Central 52, Lennox 45

Winner 68, Tri-Valley 51

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 55, Webster 24

Akron-Westfield, Iowa 64, Elk Point-Jefferson 37

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 53, Avon 42

Baltic 81, Chester 69

Belle Fourche 40, Douglas 31

Brandon Valley 71, Brookings 36

Bridgewater-Emery 58, Howard 44

Chamberlain 53, Miller 43

Colman-Egan 36, Dell Rapids St. Mary 35

Corsica/Stickney 56, Ethan 50

Deubrook 40, Arlington 36, OT

Elkton-Lake Benton 41, Great Plains Lutheran 18

Estelline/Hendricks 46, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 21

Faith 56, Bison 44

Florence/Henry 59, Warner 31

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Groton Area 45, Clark/Willow Lake 33
Hamlin 61, Milbank 18
Ipswich 40, Faulkton 37
Irene-Wakonda 59, Alcester-Hudson 55
Lakota Tech 71, Lower Brule 46
Newell 57, Bison 19
Parkston 50, Bon Homme 47
Rapid City Christian 69, Bennett County 31
Redfield 64, Britton-Hecla 21
Sully Buttes 47, Stanley County 35
Timber Lake 57, Harding County 42
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 48, Mitchell Christian 34
Wall 54, Philip 45
Waubay/Summit 51, Wilmot 15
Waverly-South Shore 58, Langford 28
West Central 58, Lennox 29
White River 61, Gregory 43
Winner 60, Kadoka Area 32
281 Conference=
Seventh Place=
Iroquois 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 25
Fifth Place=
James Valley Christian 51, Wessington Springs 29
Third Place=
Hitchcock-Tulare 50, Wolsey-Wessington 36
Championship=
Highmore-Harrold 45, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 42

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

South Dakota 2020 tourism declined, but industry optimistic

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A reduction in visitors and tourism income broke a 10-year streak of industry growth last year, the Department of Tourism reported Thursday, although the state fared better than others during the pandemic.

The number of visitors to South Dakota dropped by 13% in 2020 to 12.6 million, according to an annual study by Tourism Economics. Nevertheless, the industry's annual two-day conference in Pierre was marked with optimism with many companies saying things were not as bad as they could have been.

Some attendees credited Gov. Kristi Noem's decision to forgo many coronavirus restrictions while marketing the state as "open for business," saying it could result in even better visitor numbers this year.

"The hard work that you did during the darkest days of 2020 will help bring folks back to our state to find the freedom that they've been longing to experience for nearly a year," Noem told the crowd at an awards ceremony Thursday.

Visitors to South Dakota spent \$3.4 billion, a decline of 18% from 2019. The Department of Tourism said that wasn't as bad as many other spots across the country, which saw a 45% downturn. Visitor spending contributed \$2.6 billion, making up 4.7% of the state's economy.

Epidemiologists blamed massive tourist events such as the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally for seeding virus infections across the Midwest. The state also suffered through a surge of virus infections that started in late August and peaked in November, with some of the worst rates in the country.

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Tourism Secretary Jim Hagen said his department followed the governor's lead and preached personal responsibility to mitigate the spread of infections.

"The industry took that personal responsibility and the fact that we were open to heart," Hagen said. "It was their responsibility to keep those visitors safe when they came."

With the state carving out a reputation for personal liberties and Noem relying on her fame in conservative circles, many tourism businesses felt the industry was ready to come roaring back this year.

Susan Johnson, who operates Black Hills Central Reservations, praised Noem, saying the industry had benefitted from "a nationally recognized celebrity and her message of freedom."

"What you get is the greatest COVID comeback of any state in this country," she said.

SD governor gave Trump bust with face on Mount Rushmore

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday said she gave former president Donald Trump a \$1,100 bust depicting the president on Mount Rushmore last year because she knew it was something he wanted to receive.

The gift was presented to Trump when he visited South Dakota on July 3 for an Independence Day fireworks celebration. The Mount Rushmore miniature stood 4 feet (1.3 meters) and depicted Trump alongside former presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

It was not immediately known where Trump's face was positioned on the bust that Noem gave him.

Trump's financial disclosures released Wednesday by the Office of Government Ethics say the bust cost \$1,100, which Noem said was paid by private donations she solicited.

The Republican governor said she always tries to give gifts "that somebody wants to receive."

"I knew that that was something that he would find special," she said.

Noem said in 2018 that Trump once told her that it was his dream to have his face carved into the monument. He later joked at a campaign rally about joining the presidents on the massive monument.

Noem pushed to have fireworks return to Mount Rushmore last year as part of an Independence Day celebration. The pyrotechnic display was canceled for a decade because of fire danger after a pine beetle infestation.

Noem said Thursday that she hoped that the fireworks could continue every year and said she would like to have President Joe Biden attend.

South Dakota's rolling average of daily virus cases down 37%

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Johns Hopkins University researchers say the rolling average number of daily new COVID-19 cases over the last two weeks in South Dakota has decreased by 37%.

State health officials on Thursday reported 337 new positive tests for the coronavirus, increasing the total number of the cases to 106,400. One in every 472 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week, researchers said.

The update showed six deaths since Wednesday, for a cumulative total of 1,673. The death toll is the sixth highest per capita in the country at about 189 deaths per 100,000 people, according to The COVID Tracking Project.

A total of 185 people are hospitalized with the virus, including 38 patients in intensive care unit and 26 patients requiring ventilators, health officials said.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

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Noem defends Trump legacy, deflects blame for Capitol mob

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Wednesday defended Donald Trump's legacy as president while refusing to say whether he held any responsibility in goading the mob that attacked the Capitol.

The Republican governor was a close Trump ally and supported his efforts to overturn the results of the presidential election. Shortly after the November election, she called election systems "rigged," despite there being no evidence of widespread fraud.

Other Republicans have said Trump's lie that the election was stolen has tarnished his place in history. But in her first news conference since a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol two weeks ago, Noem said that Trump's policies were "overwhelmingly" good for South Dakota and signaled she wanted to skip over holding anyone responsible for the attack on Congress.

When asked whether Trump had any responsibility for the insurrection, she said, "What happened on January 6 was horrible and should never happen again in this country. What I want to do is look forward and make sure that we continue to have fair and transparent elections that people can trust."

Amid a reckoning in the GOP over Trump's actions, Noem has deflected blame from Trump and at times struck a combative tone against Democratic politicians. In the days after the Capitol insurrection, Noem falsely called the two Democrats who won Georgia's Senate elections "communists."

She defended those remarks Thursday without going into specifics on her reasons for leveling the accusation.

"When we look at that situation with those two individuals we need to look at their history and what they have said and what they've chosen not to say," she said.

Both of the Georgia Republicans who ran against Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff tried to paint them as socialists, with David Perdue running ads that lobbed a false claim that Ossoff was endorsed by the Communist Party USA. A fact check by The Associated Press debunked that claim.

Noem is seen by some political commentators as a potential heir to Trump at the top of the GOP. Though she has said she will not run for president in 2024, the governor has frequently delved into national hot-button issues. As South Dakota's legislative session gets underway, her legislative priorities this year have hit on abortion rights, history and civics education, privacy for donors to nonprofits and shedding government regulations to attract people to move to the state.

As Trump's 1776 Commission report was anticipated last week, Noem introduced an initiative to remake the state's history and civics curriculums that she said had the goal of convincing students that the United States is the "most unique nation in the history of the world."

But Noem said Thursday she would not be deciding what goes into the new curriculum covering South Dakota's history, saying that historians would tell "all events" of the state's history.

In one of his first actions, President Joe Biden revoked the 1776 Commission report after it was criticized by historians as political propaganda that papered over the country's legacy of slavery and racism.

While Noem enjoyed close access to the White House during Trump's term, she appeared to be adjusting to life under Biden, whose policies she is likely to decry.

After attending Biden's inauguration Wednesday, Noem said she was "very disappointed" at the president's decision to effectively cancel construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, but that she is hoping to find ways to work with his administration.

Bankers survey shows gains in rural economy of 10 states

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The rural economy in parts of 10 Plains and Western states continues to grow, but rural bank CEOs say their biggest fears for the 2021 economy are excessive inflation and higher long-term interest rates, according to a new monthly survey of bankers.

The overall index of the Rural Mainstreet Survey improved to 52.0 in January from December's 51.6 — the highest reading since before the onset last year of the coronavirus pandemic.

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Any score above 50 suggests a growing economy, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy. Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, reiterated that improvements in agriculture commodity prices, federal farm support payments and the Federal Reserve's record low short-term interest rates have underpinned the region's economy. But rural bankers continue to worry that fewer farmers taking out loans will hurt their institutions.

"Approximately 44% of bank CEOs expect low loan demand to be the greatest issue facing their banks for 2021," Goss said. "This is up from 7% that recorded this as a top concern last year at this time."

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming were surveyed.

Elderly murder defendant released from jail in Minnesota

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — An elderly Sioux Falls man charged in a 1974 stabbing death has been released from jail because of his declining health, according to authorities working on the case.

Algene Vossen, 80, was charged last summer with killing 74-year-old Mable Herman, at her home in Willmar, Minnesota after investigators found new DNA evidence they say ties him to the crime. Prosecutors say Herman had been stabbed 38 times.

Willmar Police Chief Jim Felt says Vossen has been released from the Kandiyohi County Jail after suffering some medical complications. Felt says the Minnesota Department of Corrections was unable to find an appropriate care facility within the system, so, in an unusual move, he was released to a relative in Iowa.

Vossen was arrested last summer at his home in Sioux Falls after the case was revived. Felt says authorities will continue to pursue the case, KELO-TV reported.

"Mr. Vossen has not appeared in court and been found guilty or plead guilty to this yet, we are really working toward that conviction for murder in this case, we think it'll bring some justice to Mae Herman, you know who was killed back in 1974 and there have been questions amongst her family ever since that time, so if we could get some resolution to this that would be terrific," Felt said.

Vossen is charged with second-degree murder.

Biden ordering stopgap help as talks start on big aid plan

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — President Joe Biden plans to take executive action Friday to provide a stopgap measure of financial relief to millions of Americans while Congress begins to consider his much larger \$1.9 trillion package to help those affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The two executive orders that Biden is to sign would increase food aid, protect job seekers on unemployment and clear a path for federal workers and contractors to get a \$15 hourly minimum wage.

"The American people cannot afford to wait," said Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council. "So many are hanging by a thread. They need help, and we're committed to doing everything we can to provide that help as quickly as possible."

Deese emphasized that the orders are not substitutes for the additional stimulus that Biden says is needed beyond the \$4 trillion in aid that has already been approved, including \$900 billion this past December. Several Republican lawmakers have voiced opposition to provisions in Biden's plan for direct payments to individuals, state and local government aid and a \$15 hourly minimum wage nationwide.

Most economists believe the United States can rebound with strength once people are vaccinated from the coronavirus, but the situation is still dire as the disease has closed businesses and schools. Nearly 10 million jobs have been lost since last February, and nearly 30 million households lack secure access to food.

One of Biden's orders asks the Agriculture Department to consider adjusting the rules for food assistance, so that the government could be obligated to provide more money to the hungry.

Children who are unable to get school meals because of remote learning could receive a 15% increase in food aid, according to a fact sheet provided by the White House. The lowest-income households could

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qualify for the emergency benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. And the formula for calculating meal costs could become more generous.

The order also tries to make it easier for people to claim direct payments from prior aid packages and other benefits. In addition, it would create a guarantee that workers could still collect unemployment benefits if they refuse to take a job that could jeopardize their health.

Biden's second executive order would restore union bargaining rights revoked by the Trump administration, protect the civil service system and promote a \$15 hourly minimum wage for all federal workers. The Democratic president also plans to start a 100-day process for the federal government to require its contractors to pay at least \$15 an hour and provide emergency paid leave to workers, which could put pressure on other private employers to boost their wages and benefits.

These orders arrive as the Biden White House has declined to provide a timeline for getting its proposed relief package through, saying that officials are beginning to schedule meetings with lawmakers to discuss the proposal.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at a Thursday briefing that the proposal has support ranging from democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

But not all components of the package are popular among Republicans, and that could delay passage in ways that could injure the economy. Psaki stressed that Biden wants any deal to be bipartisan and that the process of meeting with lawmakers to talk through the plan is just beginning.

Biden must balance the need for immediate aid against the risk of prolonged negotiations. Psaki told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Friday that Biden is "not going to take tools off the table" as he looks to bring Republicans to the table, and she argued that the back-and-forth is "exactly how it should work."

"We'll figure out what the sausage looks like when it comes out of the machine," she said.

Neil Bradley, chief policy officer at the Chamber, told reporters Thursday that Congress should act fast to approve the roughly \$400 billion for national vaccination and reopening schools and other elements of the plan with bipartisan support, rather than drag out negotiations.

"We're not going to let areas of disagreement prevent progress on areas where we can find common ground," Bradley said. "We cannot afford six months to get the vaccination process working right. ... We can't even wait six weeks to get vaccinations distributed and schools reopened."

AP writer Zeke Miller in Washington contributed.

Fauci unleashed: Doc takes 'liberating' turn at center stage

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dr. Anthony Fauci is back.

In truth, the nation's leading infectious-diseases expert never really went away. But after enduring nearly a year of darts and undermining comments from former President Donald Trump, Fauci now speaks with the authority of the White House again.

He called it "liberating" Thursday to be backed by a science-friendly administration that has embraced his recommendations to battle COVID-19.

"One of the new things in this administration is, if you don't know the answer, don't guess," Fauci said in one pointed observation during a White House briefing. "Just say you don't know the answer."

Fauci's highly visible schedule on Thursday, the first full day of President Joe Biden's term, underscored the new administration's confidence in the doctor but also the urgency of the moment.

His day began with a 4 a.m. virtual meeting with officials of the World Health Organization, which is based in Switzerland, and stretched past a 4 p.m. appearance at the lectern in the White House briefing room.

The breakneck pace showcased the urgent need to combat a pandemic that has killed more than 400,000 people in the United States and reached its deadliest phase just as the new president comes to office.

Fauci made clear that he believed the new administration would not trade in the mixed messages that so often came from the Trump White House, where scientific fact was often obscured by the president's

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political agenda.

"The idea that you can get up here and talk about what you know and what the science is ... it is something of a liberating feeling," Fauci told reporters. White House press secretary Jen Psaki had invited Fauci to take the podium first at her daily briefing.

While choosing his words carefully, Fauci acknowledged that it had been difficult at times to work for Trump, who repeatedly played down the severity of the pandemic, refused to consistently promote mask-wearing and often touted unproven scientific remedies, including a malaria drug and even injecting disinfectant.

"It was very clear that there were things that were said, be it regarding things like hydroxychloroquine and other things, that really was uncomfortable because they were not based in scientific fact," Fauci said. He added that he took "no pleasure" in having to contradict the president, a move that often drew Trump's wrath.

Biden, during his presidential campaign, pledged to making Fauci his chief medical adviser when he took office, and the 80-year-old scientist was immediately in motion.

Fauci was up well before dawn Thursday for the virtual meeting with WHO, which Biden had rejoined the previous day after Trump withdrew the U.S. from the group out of anger over how it dealt with China in the early days of the pandemic. Fauci told the group that the United States would join its effort to deliver coronavirus vaccines to poor countries.

In the afternoon, the doctor stood alongside Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in the White House as they unveiled a series of executive orders aimed at slowing the spread of the virus, which is killing more than 4,000 people a day in the U.S., as well as bolstering the nation's sluggish vaccine distribution program.

Fauci had chatted amiably with reporters while awaiting the tardy new president. He acknowledged it was a long day and said that while he'd prefer to go for a run, he planned to powerwalk a few miles Thursday evening.

It was all a stark contrast after being kept on a tight leash by the Trump administration. Their West Wing press shop had tightly controlled Fauci's media appearances — and blocked most of them. The doctor went from being a constant presence in the briefing room during the first weeks of the pandemic to largely being banished as Trump grew jealous of the doctor's positive press and resentful of Fauci's willingness to contradict him.

Moreover, Trump frequently undermined Fauci's credibility, falsely insisting that the pandemic was nearly over. The president regularly referenced Fauci's early skepticism about the effectiveness of masks for ordinary Americans, a position that Fauci quickly abandoned in the face of more evidence. And he even made fun of Fauci's first pitch at a Washington Nationals game.

The president's attacks on Fauci — and his dismissiveness of the science — handicapped medical professionals trying to get Americans to take the virus seriously.

"There was clear political influence on the message of the pandemic. It became political to say that the pandemic was devastating our community because it was interpreted as a judgment on Trump," said Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious-diseases physician and a professor at the Boston University School of Medicine. "It actively created enemies of the public health folks in a segment of the population."

Having Fauci return to a central role, Bhadelia said, is a sign "that science was being repressed and now back."

As his handling of the pandemic became the defining issue in the 2020 campaign, Trump insisted on portraying the virus as a thing of the past. He also mercilessly attacked Fauci, retweeting messages that called for the doctor's dismissal and reveled in "Fire Fauci!" chants at some of his rallies.

Trump sidelined Fauci but dared not dismiss him, after aides convinced him of the move's political danger.

But Fauci, who has now served under seven presidents, persevered, telling friends that he would keep his head down and aim to outlast Trump and the obfuscations of his administration.

"Clarity of message is the most important thing the government can be doing right now; the single biggest disservice Trump did was constantly telling people that pandemic was about to be over," said Dr. Ashish

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Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, who has known Fauci for more than 20 years. In his return to the briefing room, Fauci joked with reporters, seemingly far more relaxed than at any point last year. And as he stepped off the stage, Psaki said she'd soon have him back.

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Amid cancellation talk, Tokyo Olympics `focused on hosting'

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — IOC President Thomas Bach and local organizers are pushing back against reports that the postponed Tokyo Olympics will be canceled.

Now set to open July 23, the Tokyo Games were postponed 10 months ago at the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and now the event appears threatened again.

The Times of London, citing unidentified government sources, reported that the games will have to be canceled. It quoted an unidentified senior member of the ruling government coalition.

"No one wants to be the first to say so but the consensus is that it's too difficult," the person said. "Personally, I don't think it's going to happen."

In a statement Friday, the local organizing committee did not address directly The Times story, but said the Olympics were going forward and had the support of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

"All our delivery partners including the national government, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee, the IOC and the IPC (International Paralympic Committee) are fully focused on hosting the games this summer," the statement said.

"We hope that daily life can return to normal as soon as possible, and we will continue to make every effort to prepare for a safe and secure games."

The IOC released a brief statement saying it is "fully concentrated on and committed to the successful delivery of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 this year."

The IPC added that it's goal of having the games this year has not changed.

"There is no doubt the Tokyo 2020 Games will be very different to any previous games and that this summer's event looks a long way off right now. However, we believe that with the robust measures and plans we have in place, the games can and will go ahead safely," the IPC said.

Managu Sakai, the deputy chief cabinet secretary and an ally of the prime minister, also shot down the story.

"There is no such fact and we clearly deny (the report)," he said.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike told her regular news conference on Friday that she has "never heard such a thing." She even suggested action against the British newspaper.

"Perhaps we should file a protest," she said.

The Times of London said Japan hoped to land the 2032 Olympics. The IOC has already awarded the 2024 Olympics to Paris and the 2028 version to Los Angeles.

The idea of Tokyo waiting a decade seems unlikely, given the cost of maintaining venues, negotiating new leases, and so forth. Tokyo has already spent about \$25 billion to organize these Olympics, most of which is public money.

Several reports of a cancellation began to surface this month when the Japanese government put Tokyo and other prefectures under a state of emergency order to counter a surge of rising COVID-19 cases.

"We have at this moment, no reason whatsoever to believe that the Olympic Games in Tokyo will not open on the 23rd of July in the Olympic stadium in Tokyo," Bach told the Japanese news agency Kyodo on Thursday.

He also said there is "no Plan B."

Senior International Olympic Committee member Richard Pound said earlier in the week that the Olympics may be held largely without fans, making it a mostly television event.

The Switzerland-based IOC gets 73% of its income from selling broadcast rights and has seen its main

revenue source stalled by the Olympic postponement. A largely TV-only event would suit the IOC better than a cancellation.

Unlike other sports businesses that offer hundreds of games, the IOC has only two main events to sell — the Summer and Winter Olympics.

Bach hinted that radical changes may be needed to pull off the Tokyo Olympics, which involve 11,000 athletes and tens of thousands of coaches, officials, judges, VIPs, media and broadcasters.

About 4,400 athletes will attend the Paralympics, which are set to open Aug. 24.

"You may not like it but sacrifices will be needed," Bach said. "This is why I'm saying, safety first, and no taboo in the discussion to ensure safety."

Japan has reported fewer than 5,000 deaths from the coronavirus and has handled the virus better than most countries. But the surge is not tapering off in Tokyo, a sprawling metropolitan area of 35 million.

Public opinion in Japan has also turned against the games with 80% in several polls saying they should be postponed again or canceled.

Bach said organizers were in a better position to hold the Olympics now than they were 10 months ago when the games were postponed.

"First of all, let me be clear that you cannot compare March 2021 with March 2020 because there is such great progress in science, medicine, vaccination and (virus) tests," Bach told Kyodo. "All this was not available in March last year. Nobody knew yet how really to deal with the pandemic, and now we know much more."

Japan is experiencing a slow roll out of vaccines. However, the IOC has said its measures against the virus will focus on testing, quarantines, social distancing and keeping athletes largely isolated.

The IOC has encouraged athletes to be vaccinated but will not require it.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

2 films offer 2 tales ahead of Wuhan lockdown anniversary

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — Two new films about Wuhan were released Friday, the eve of the anniversary of the start of a 76-day lockdown in the central Chinese city where the coronavirus was first detected. How they were released and who their audiences are stand in stark contrast.

The first, a state-backed film praising Wuhan's sacrifices, is being screened throughout China, targeting audiences that firmly back the ruling Communist Party's response to the outbreak. The second, a somber documentary about the pandemic from artist and political activist Ai Weiwei, has been forced to seek viewers online, a testimony to the party's influence over the global film industry.

The Chinese government has sought to control the narrative and deflect blame about the pandemic's origins. It has weaved a story of triumph against the virus through TV shows, social media campaigns and books, lauding nurses and doctors and government-backed vaccine companies. Any criticism of early missteps is silenced.

The state-backed film "Days and Nights in Wuhan" features contributions from 30 filmmakers portraying the suffering of the city's 11 million residents, medical staff and front-line workers as they battled the virus that began racing through the city in December 2019.

Ai's "Coronation" has been rejected by festivals, theaters and streaming services including Amazon and Netflix, he said. He attributes the censorship to fears over offending the ruling party, which controls what movies can be shown in China and what Chinese films can be displayed abroad.

"I don't care about the film festivals," Ai said in a virtual news conference Friday hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. "But they are a platform, they should present meaningful films. That's their duty. If there's a failure of this duty, then I feel ashamed of them."

The lockdown in Wuhan, imposed on Jan. 23, 2020, was eventually extended to surrounding areas in

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Hubei province, confining some 56 million people to their homes.

"Days and Nights in Wuhan," directed by Cao Jinling, debuted in Wuhan earlier and was released nationwide Friday. The film echoes China's official line that the measures it took, including the lockdown, bought precious time for the world to prepare for the pandemic. Critics say habitual Communist Party secrecy and weak control measures allowed the virus' initial spread.

It's not clear if there are plans to show it overseas.

"We wanted to record the journey of battling against the COVID-19 epidemic via motion picture. Some of the details, including the intense care, anxious waiting, heartbreaking farewells and hopeful rebirths, might strike a chord with viewers," Cao was quoted as saying by state broadcaster CCTV.

In the trailer, medical staff repeatedly express their determination to prevail over the outbreak. "I have a burning love for my hometown and I will do whatever I can to save it," says one ambulance driver.

Ai's film tackles the same story from the perspective of construction workers, delivery staff, medical workers and Wuhan residents. Like the other film, it is a collage, but draws instead on footage filmed sometimes surreptitiously by friends, colleagues and amateur videographers, some of whom remain anonymous to avoid repercussions from the authorities.

His film offers a rare glimpse of the pain that COVID-19 patients in China suffered, with footage of them struggling to breathe as medical workers in protective gear attempted to save them.

Hospitals and morgues were overwhelmed at the height of the crisis and Wuhan accounts for the bulk of China's death toll of 4,635.

Following a thinly attended showing of "Days and Nights in Wuhan" on Friday morning, Wang Yu said the movie had awakened both memories of the trauma of lockdown and fears for what might still lie ahead.

"It's hard to describe. It's been a year since then, and to think back now, it's still painful," said Wang, 31. Relatives of her husband who died in the outbreak appeared in the film, she said.

"There is the mutated virus, there's fear. It's the second Lunar New Year holiday that we have to pass like this," she said. "Things are little better than last year but I'm worried, its not completely over. You're still under the effect of the virus, the fear and the terror."

Wuhan has been largely free from the virus since the end of lockdown, while smaller outbreaks have set off renewed containment measures in many other Chinese cities.

China's government has sought to cast doubt that Wuhan is the source of the pandemic, pushing fringe theories that the virus was actually brought from outside the country, possibly by U.S. soldiers.

The city is now hosting a team sent by the World Health Organization to begin investigating the virus' origins.

A panel of experts commissioned by the WHO criticized China and other countries this week for not moving faster to stem the initial outbreak, prompting Beijing to concede it could have done better but also to defend its response.

Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan. Associated Press photographer Ng Han Guan in Wuhan, China, contributed to this report.

McConnell seeks to push Trump impeachment trial to February

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is proposing to push back the start of Donald Trump's impeachment trial to February to give the former president time to prepare and review his case.

House Democrats who voted to impeach Trump last week for inciting the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot have signaled they want to move quickly to trial as President Joe Biden begins his term, saying a full reckoning is necessary before the country — and the Congress — can move on.

But McConnell in a statement Thursday evening suggested a more expansive timeline that would see the House transmit the article of impeachment next week, on Jan. 28, launching the trial's first phase.

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After that, the Senate would give the president's defense team and House prosecutors two weeks to file briefs. Arguments in the trial would likely begin in mid-February.

"Senate Republicans are strongly united behind the principle that the institution of the Senate, the office of the presidency, and former President Trump himself all deserve a full and fair process that respects his rights and the serious factual, legal, and constitutional questions at stake," especially given the unprecedented speed of the House process, McConnell said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., is reviewing the plan and will discuss it with McConnell, a spokesperson said. The two leaders are also negotiating how the new 50-50 Senate will work and how they will balance other priorities.

A trial delay could appeal to some Democrats, as it would give the Senate more time to confirm Biden's Cabinet nominees and debate a new round of coronavirus relief. Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, a key ally of the president's, told CNN that Democrats would consider a delay "if we are making progress on confirming the very talented, seasoned and diverse team that President Joe Biden has nominated."

The ultimate power over timing rests with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who can trigger the start of the trial at any point by sending to the Senate the charge of incitement of an insurrection. The California Democrat has not yet said when she will do that.

"It will be soon. I don't think it will be long, but we must do it," Pelosi said Thursday. She said Trump doesn't deserve a "get-out-of-jail card" just because he has left office and Biden and others are calling for national unity.

Facing his second impeachment trial in two years, Trump began to assemble his defense team by hiring attorney Butch Bowers to represent him, according to an adviser. Bowers previously served as counsel to former South Carolina Govs. Nikki Haley and Mark Sanford.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina helped Trump find Bowers after members of his past legal teams indicated they did not plan to join the new effort. Trump is at a disadvantage compared to his first trial, in which he had the full resources of the White House counsel's office to defend him.

Pelosi's nine impeachment managers, who will be prosecuting the House case, have been regularly meeting to discuss strategy. Pelosi said she would talk to them "in the next few days" about when the Senate might be ready for a trial.

Shortly before the Jan. 6 insurrection, Trump told thousands of his supporters at a rally near the White House to "fight like hell" against the election results that Congress was certifying. A mob marched down to the Capitol and rushed in, interrupting the count. Five people, including a Capitol Police officer, died in the mayhem, and the House impeached Trump a week later, with 10 Republicans joining all Democrats in support.

Pelosi said it would be "harmful to unity" to forget that "people died here on Jan. 6, the attempt to undermine our election, to undermine our democracy, to dishonor our Constitution."

Trump was acquitted by the Republican-led Senate at his first impeachment trial. The White House legal team, aided by Trump's personal lawyers, aggressively fought the House charges that he had encouraged the president of Ukraine to investigate Biden in exchange for military aid. This time around, Pelosi noted, the House is not seeking to convict the president over private conversations but for a very public insurrection that they themselves experienced and that played out on live television.

"This year, the whole world bore witness to the president's incitement," Pelosi said.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat, said it was still too early to know how long a trial would take or if Democrats would want to call witnesses. But he said, "You don't need to tell us what was going on with the mob scene we were rushing down the staircase to escape."

McConnell, who said this week that Trump "provoked" his supporters before the riot, has not said how he will vote. He told his GOP colleagues that it will be a vote of conscience.

Democrats would need the support of at least 17 Republicans to convict Trump, a high bar. While a handful of Senate Republicans have indicated they are open to conviction, most have said they believe a trial will be divisive and questioned the legality of trying a president after he has left office.

Graham said that if he were Trump's lawyer, he would focus on that argument and on the merits of the case — and whether it was "incitement" under the law.

"I guess the public record is your television screen," Graham said. "So, I don't see why this would take a long time."

Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard in Columbia, S.C., and Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Fla., contributed to this report.

German virus death toll tops 50,000 even as infections sink

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The death toll from the coronavirus in Germany has passed 50,000, a number that has risen swiftly over recent weeks even as infection figures are finally declining.

The country's disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said Friday that another 859 deaths were reported over the past 24 hours, taking the total so far to 50,642.

Germany had a comparatively small number of deaths in the pandemic's first phase and was able to lift many restrictions quickly.

But it has seen much higher levels of infections in the fall and winter. Hundreds of deaths, sometimes more than 1,000, have been reported daily in the country of 83 million people over recent weeks. Germany hit the 40,000 mark on Jan. 10.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will leave a light shining in a window at his Bellevue palace in Berlin every evening starting Friday in memory of the dead and those fighting for their lives, his office said. He encouraged other Germans to do the same.

Steinmeier plans to lead a central memorial event for the dead after Easter.

The lights are meant as a sign that "the dead in the corona pandemic are not just statistics for us," Steinmeier said. "Even if we don't know their names and families, we know that every figure stands for a loved one whom we miss infinitely."

Chancellor Angela Merkel echoed those comments this week, describing the recent death figures as "terrible." Still, she said that daily infections are dropping and somewhat fewer people are receiving intensive care than over Christmas.

In Europe, the U.K., Italy, France and Spain, all of which have smaller populations, still have higher death tolls.

The head of the Robert Koch Institute, Lothar Wieler, said this week the explanation for the high death figures is "relatively simple but relatively depressing."

"The increase is simply linked to the fact that the case numbers went up so much," he said.

Wieler said there are still a lot of outbreaks at nursing homes — over 900 at present. Some homes are better-prepared than others to combat the pandemic, he said. There are also large numbers of cases among the over-80s.

Overall, new infections peaked in December. On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute reported 17,862 new cases, down from 22,368 a week ago. Germany's total so far is a bit over 2.1 million. The number of new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days stood at 115.3, after reaching nearly 200 a month ago. It's still well above the government's target of a maximum 50.

There are currently 4,787 COVID-19 patients in intensive care, said Gernot Marx, the head of Germany's intensive care association, DIVI.

That is down from a peak of nearly 5,800 on Jan. 3, he said — "that was the most critical situation, in my opinion, since there has been intensive care in Germany." He added that there has been no sign of a Christmas or new year peak.

Germany's current lockdown was extended this week until Feb. 14 amid concern about the possible impact of virus mutations such as the one first detected in England.

Authorities are trying to encourage more people to work from home, thus reducing the numbers who

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use public transport. Restaurants, bars, sports and leisure facilities have been closed since early November. Schools and nonessential shops followed in mid-December, and professional sports events are taking place without spectators.

Merkel says everyone in Germany will be offered a vaccination by late September. There has been frustration with the slow start to vaccinations. By Thursday, nearly 1.39 million people had received a first dose and over 115,000 a second dose.

Britain has delayed giving second doses for up to three months so it can give the first dose to as many as possible. But Health Minister Jens Spahn signaled that Germany won't follow suit, pointing to concerns over a lack of study data and the need for the most vulnerable and elderly to get "comprehensive" protection.

"We will, according to all the scientific groundwork we have at the moment, stick to the ... recommended rhythm for the second dose," Spahn said Friday.

Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

Russia welcomes US proposal to extend nuclear treaty

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Kremlin on Friday welcomed U.S. President Joe Biden's proposal to extend the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the two countries, which is set to expire in less than two weeks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said that Russia stands for extending the pact and is waiting to see the details of the U.S. proposal.

The White House said Thursday that Biden has proposed to Russia a five-year extension of the New START treaty.

"We can only welcome political will to extend the document," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "But all will depend on the details of the proposal."

The treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance. It expires on Feb. 5.

Russia has long proposed to prolong the pact without any conditions or changes, but President Donald Trump's administration waited until last year to start talks and made the extension contingent on a set of demands. The talks stalled, and months of bargaining have failed to narrow differences.

"Certain conditions for the extension have been put forward, and some of them have been absolutely unacceptable for us, so let's see first what the U.S. is offering," Peskov said.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador at the international organizations in Vienna, also hailed Biden's proposal as an "encouraging step."

"The extension will give the two sides more time to consider possible additional measures aimed at strengthening strategic stability and global security," he tweeted.

Biden indicated during the campaign that he favored the preservation of the New START treaty, which was negotiated during his tenure as U.S. vice president.

The talks on the treaty's extension also were clouded by tensions between Russia and the United States, which have been fueled by the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and other irritants.

Despite the extension proposal, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden remains committed to holding Russia "to account for its reckless and adversarial actions," such as its alleged involvement in the Solar Winds hacking event, 2020 election interference, the chemical poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the widely reported allegations that Russia may have offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan.

Asked to comment on Psaki's statement, Peskov has reaffirmed Russia's denial of involvement in any such activities.

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After both Moscow and Washington withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, New START is the only remaining nuclear arms control deal between the two countries.

Arms control advocates have strongly called for New START's preservation, warning that its lapse would remove any checks on U.S. and Russian nuclear forces.

Last week, Russia also declared that it would follow the U.S. to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities to help build trust and transparency between Russia and the West.

While Russia always offered to extend New START for five years — a possibility envisaged by the pact — Trump asserted that it put the U.S. at a disadvantage and initially insisted that China be added to the treaty, an idea that Beijing flatly rejected. Trump's administration then proposed to extend New START for just one year and also sought to expand it to include limits on battlefield nuclear weapons.

Moscow has said it remains open for new nuclear arms talks with the U.S. to negotiate future limits on prospective weapons, but emphasized that preserving New START is essential for global stability.

Russian diplomats have said that Russia's prospective Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile and the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle could be counted along with other Russian nuclear weapons under the treaty.

The Sarmat is still under development, while the first missile unit armed with the Avangard became operational in December 2019.

The Russian military has said the Avangard is capable of flying 27 times faster than the speed of sound and could make sharp maneuvers on its way to a target to bypass missile defense systems. It has been fitted to the existing Soviet-built intercontinental ballistic missiles instead of older type warheads, and in the future could be fitted to the more powerful Sarmat.

Timeline: China's COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown of Wuhan

WUHAN, China (AP) — The Chinese city of Wuhan is looking back on a year since it was placed under a 76-day lockdown beginning Jan. 23, 2020. It was the most extreme step taken up to that point against the coronavirus.

China presents the lockdown as a huge sacrifice that bought the rest of the world time to prepare for the pandemic. Critics say earlier, more decisive measures would have prevented more people from leaving the city and spreading the virus around China and globally.

Some events before and during that crucial period:

— Mid-December 2019: Patients begin showing up in Wuhan hospitals complaining of flu-like symptoms including high fever, cough and breathing difficulties.

— Dec. 27: A Chinese lab assembles a near-complete sequence of the virus, showing it to be similar to the coronavirus that caused the 2002-03 SARS outbreak. The lab alerts health authorities, but the information is kept under wraps.

— Dec. 30: Doctors begin warning about the disease independently on social media — most prominently Dr. Li Wenliang, who shares a lab report indicating the pathogen is a SARS-like virus.

— Dec. 31: Officials close Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, which was linked to dozens of the earliest cases. Li is punished by police and his superiors and told he is "spreading rumors."

— Jan. 3, 2020: The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention obtains a full sequence of the virus but doesn't release it. China reports the outbreak to the WHO, but Chinese authorities order labs and medical institutes to destroy patient samples.

— Jan. 9: WHO says Chinese investigators have conducted gene sequencing of the virus, an initial step toward treatment and a vaccine. It does not recommend any specific measures for travelers.

— Jan. 13: The first case outside China is identified in Thailand.

— Jan. 14: Chinese health officials say in an internal meeting that "clustered cases suggest human-to-human transmission is possible" and order emergency preparations for a pandemic. In public, they downplay the virus's ability to infect.

— Mid-January: The Lunar New Year travel rush — the world's largest annual human migration — gets

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underway, with millions of people leaving Wuhan to return home or passing through on their journeys.

— Jan. 18: Tens of thousands of Wuhan families take part in a mass Lunar New Year banquet hosted by the city. Many became infected.

— Jan. 20: A top Chinese medical expert, Dr. Zhong Nanshan, announces on state television that the virus is transmissible between people.

— Jan. 22: Wuhan's top officials attend a Lunar New Year gala. Dozens of actors, dancers and musicians perform. Some have sniffles and sneezes.

— Jan. 23: The Wuhan lockdown begins with a notice sent to people's smartphones at 2 a.m. announcing the airport and train and bus stations will be shut at 10 a.m. Construction begins on the first of two hastily built field hospitals as thousands of patients overwhelm the city's health care system. Eventually, most of the rest of Hubei province would be locked down, affecting 56 million people.

— Feb. 2: The first field hospital, Huoshenshan, opens 10 days later. Eventually, more than a dozen venues such as gymnasiums and conference centers are converted to sprawling medical wards to treat and isolate the less serious cases.

— Feb. 7: Li Wenliang, the doctor reprimanded for sharing a lab report about the virus, dies of COVID-19. His death brings a national outpouring of grief and anger at authorities for punishing him.

— February-March: Wuhan's streets are deserted apart from ambulances and security personnel as the city's 11 million people are confined to their homes. Doctors and nurses arrive from around the country to help the city's exhausted medical staff, many of whom were infected in the early days when protective gear was in short supply and not always used.

— March 24: Authorities announce they will end the lockdown of most of Hubei province at midnight, as new cases subside. Wuhan remains locked down for two more weeks.

— April 8: Wuhan's lockdown is lifted. Residents celebrate their freedom after 76 days with riverside parties while the city puts on a sound-and-light show emphasizing its resiliency and the courage and sacrifice of first responders.

EXPLAINER: Why Navalny is a thorn in the Kremlin's side

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The return to Russia from Germany by opposition leader Alexei Navalny was marked by chaos and popular outrage, and it ended, almost predictably, with his arrest.

The Jan. 17 flight from Berlin, where Navalny spent nearly five months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning, carried him and his wife, along with a group of journalists documenting the journey. But the plane was diverted from its intended airport in Moscow to another one in the capital in what was seen as an apparent attempt to foil a welcome from crowds awaiting him.

Authorities also took him into custody immediately, sparking outrage at home and abroad. Some Western countries threatened sanctions and his team called for nationwide demonstrations Saturday.

Navalny had prepared his own surprise for his return: A video expose alleging that a lavish "palace" was built for President Vladimir Putin on the Black Sea through an elaborate corruption scheme. His team posted it on YouTube on Tuesday, and within 48 hours, it had gotten over 42 million views.

Navalny faces years in prison from a previous conviction he claims was politically motivated, while political commentators say there are no good options for the Kremlin.

The AP looks at his long standoff with authorities:

WHO IS ALEXEI NAVALNY?

Navalny, 44, is an anti-corruption campaigner and the Kremlin's fiercest critic. He has outlasted many opposition figures and is undeterred by incessant attempts to stop his work.

He has released scores of damning reports exposing corruption in Putin's Russia. He has been a galvanizing figure in mass protests, including unprecedented 2011-12 demonstrations sparked by reports of widespread rigging of a parliamentary election.

Navalny was convicted twice on criminal charges: embezzlement and later fraud. He received suspended

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sentences of five years and 3 1/2 years. He denounced the convictions as politically motivated, and the European Court of Human Rights disputed both convictions.

Navalny sought to challenge Putin in the 2018 election, but was barred from running by one of his convictions. Nevertheless, he drew crowds of supporters almost everywhere he went in the country.

Frequently arrested, he has served multiple stints in jail for charges relating to leading protests. In 2017, an attacker threw a green antiseptic liquid in his face, damaging his sight. He also was hospitalized in 2019 after a suspected poisoning while in jail.

None of that has stopped him. In August 2020, he fell ill while on a domestic flight in Siberia, and the pilot landed quickly in Omsk, where he was hospitalized. His supporters managed to have him flown to Berlin, where he lay in a coma for over two weeks and was diagnosed as having been poisoned by a Soviet-era nerve agent — an allegation the Kremlin denied.

After he recovered, Navalny released a recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he alleged was a member of Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him. The FSB dismissed the recording as a fake, but it still shocked many at home and abroad.

Navalny vowed to return to Russia and continue his work, while authorities threatened him with arrest.

WHY DID NAVALNY RETURN AT ALL?

Navalny said he didn't leave Russia by choice, but rather "ended up in Germany in an intensive care box." He said he never considered the possibility of staying abroad.

"It doesn't seem right to me that Alexei Navalny calls for a revolution from Berlin," he explained in an interview in October, referring to himself in the third person. "If I'm doing something, I want to share the risks with people who work in my office."

Analysts say it would have been impossible for Navalny to remain relevant as an opposition leader outside Russia. "Remaining abroad, becoming a political emigre, would mean death to a public politician," said Masha Lipman, an independent political analyst.

Nikolai Petrov, a senior research fellow in Chatham House's Russia and Eurasia Program, echoed her sentiment, saying: "Active, bright people who could initiate some real actions and take part in elections ... while in the country, once abroad, end up cut off from the real connection to the people."

WHY IS NAVALNY NOW FACING PRISON?

His suspended sentence from the 2014 conviction carried a probationary period that was to expire in December 2020. Authorities said Navalny was subject to regular in-person check-ins with law enforcement officers.

During the final days of Navalny's probation period, Russia's prison service put him on a wanted list, accusing him of not appearing for these checks, including when he was convalescing in Germany. Officials have petitioned the court to have him serve the full 3 1/2-year sentence. After his return, Navalny was placed in custody for 30 days, with a hearing to review his sentence scheduled for Feb. 2.

Earlier this month, Russia's Investigative Committee opened another criminal probe against him on fraud charges, alleging he embezzled donations to his Foundation for Fighting Corruption. If convicted, he could face up to 10 years in prison.

DOES NAVALNY THREATEN THE KREMLIN?

Putin never calls Navalny by name, and state-run media depict him as an unimportant blogger. But he has managed to spread his reach far outside Moscow through his widely popular YouTube accounts, including the one this week that featured the allegations about the massive Black Sea estate.

His infrastructure of regional offices set up nationwide in 2017 has helped him challenge the government by mobilizing voters. In 2018, Navalny launched a project called Smart Voting that is designed to promote candidates who are most likely to defeat those from the Kremlin's dominant United Russia party.

In 2019, the project helped opposition candidates win 20 of 45 seats on the Moscow city council, and regional elections last year saw United Russia lose its majority in legislatures in three cities.

Navalny has promised to use the strategy during this year's parliamentary election, which will determine who controls the State Duma in 2024. That's when Putin's current term expires and he is expected to seek

re-election, thanks to constitutional reforms last year.

Analysts believe Navalny is capable of influencing this key vote, reason enough to want him out of the picture.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Analysts say Navalny's return was a significant blow to Putin's image and left the Kremlin with a dilemma.

Putin has mostly worked from his residence during the coronavirus outbreak, and the widespread perception that he has stayed away from the public doesn't compare well to Navalny's bold comeback to the country where he was poisoned and faced arrest, said Chatham House's Petrov.

"It doesn't matter whether people support Navalny or not; they see these two images, and Putin loses," he said.

Commentators say there is no good choice for the Kremlin: Imprisoning Navalny for a long time will make him a martyr and could lead to mass protests, while letting him go threatens the parliamentary election.

So far, the crackdown has only helped Navalny, "and now, even thinking loyalists are, if not on his side, certainly not on the side of poisoners and persecutors," Alexander Baunov of the Moscow Carnegie Center wrote in a recent article.

All eyes are on what happens at Saturday's planned protests, Petrov said. In 2013, Navalny was quickly released from prison following a five-year sentence from embezzlement conviction after a large crowd gathered near the Kremlin.

Putin's government has since become much tougher on dissent, so it is unlikely that mass protests will prompt Navalny's immediate release, Petrov said. But the Kremlin still fears that a harsh move may destabilize the situation, and the scale of the rallies could indicate how the public would react to Navalny being imprisoned for a long time.

Associated Press journalist Kostya Manenkov contributed.

Lucky few hit COVID-19 vaccine jackpot for rare extra doses

By BERNARD CONDON, CANDICE CHOI and MATT SEDENSKY Associated Press

Fortune struck one man in the bakery aisle at the supermarket. Two others were working the night shift at a Subway sandwich shop. Yet another was plucked from a list of 15,000 hopefuls.

With millions of Americans waiting for their chance to get the coronavirus vaccine, a lucky few are getting bumped to the front of the line as clinics scramble to get rid of extra, perishable doses at the end of the day.

It is often a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Sometimes people who just happen to be near a clinic at closing time are offered leftover shots that would otherwise be thrown away. Sometimes health workers go out looking for recipients. Some places keep waiting lists and draw names at random. Such opportunities may be becoming more prized as shortages around the U.S. lead some places to cancel vaccinations.

"One of the nurses said I should go buy a lottery ticket right now," said Jesse Robinson, outside a Nashville, Tennessee, clinic this week where the 22-year-old was picked from a 15,000-name list for a shot. "I'm not going to question it too much. Just glad it was me."

David MacMillan was grabbing ingredients for a coconut chickpea dish at a Giant grocery store in Washington when a woman in a lab coat from the in-store pharmacy came up to him and his friend.

"I got two doses of the Moderna vaccine. The pharmacy is closing in 10 minutes. Do you want them?" MacMillan, 31, recalled the woman saying. "I thought, 'Let's go for it.'"

After MacMillan posted a video of his experience on TikTok, the supermarket chain was inundated for days with calls and people hanging around, hoping to score a shot.

It has become one of the most unusual quirks in the often uneven, monthlong rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Once a vial is thawed from the deep freeze and, even more so, once its seal is punctured and the first

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dose is drawn, those administering the vaccine are in a race to use it up before it spoils—even if it means giving shots to those who don't fit into the priority list.

While it may be unsettling to see a 20-something getting a shot while an 90-year-old woman in a nursing home is still waiting, public health experts say getting a dose into someone's arm, anyone's arm, is better than throwing it away.

"As far as I'm concerned, vaccinate anyone but the dog," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious-disease expert at Vanderbilt University.

In New York City, a rumor that the Brooklyn Army Terminal had extra doses triggered a rush to the vaccine distribution site, leading to bumper-bumper traffic in the streets and a line of hundreds on the sidewalks until police came out to say they had been duped.

Mike Schotte, 53, and his 72-year-old mother started showing up at pharmacies near their home in Hurst, Texas, in hopes of getting a leftover shot. Eventually they put their names on a waiting list and got a call saying shots might be available if they arrived within a half-hour.

"We didn't have to speed, but it was pretty close," Schotte said. "I'm excited that I got it."

Nashville started its lottery system to avoid more haphazard ways of distributing leftover shots. In one case last month, the city's health department ended up giving extra doses to two workers at a Subway restaurant in a nearby hospital so they wouldn't go to waste.

Vaccine clinics expect only a few leftover doses, at most, on any given day. Providers also note that the chances of leftover shots becoming available to the broader public are diminishing with each passing week as eligibility for the vaccine widens beyond the very old, nursing home residents and front-line medical workers.

Waste is common in global inoculation campaigns, with millions of doses of flu shots trashed each year. By one World Health Organization estimate, more than half of all vaccines are thrown away because they were mishandled, unclaimed or expired. The coronavirus rollout appears to have bucked the trend.

Though federal data is not available, health authorities in various jurisdictions contacted by The Associated Press reported very little waste beyond a few notable cases of doses that were accidentally or deliberately spoiled.

In Chicago's Cook County, Illinois, the health department reported just three of 87,750 doses were wasted, each accidentally spilled by staff. In Ohio, officials said 165 of 459,000 doses distributed as of last week were damaged or lost in transit, thrown away because of vaccine no-shows, or otherwise wasted. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Houston and other cities and states all have similarly reported tiny fractions of waste.

"It's like gold in Fort Knox," said Dr. Ramon Tallaj, whose physician network SOMOS has been administering the vaccine in New York City.

Those giving out the vaccines are choreographing an intricate dance to ensure they are handled right. Vials of the Pfizer vaccine contain five doses – and sometimes an extra one – and Moderna's contain 10. And clinics try their best not to open a new container unless they have a registered recipient scheduled to get inoculated.

At a clinic on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, Jill Price said that as the end of the day nears, if it looks like some doses will be left, calls are made to those registered for vaccinations the following day to see if they can come in right away.

"It is such a precious commodity no one wants to waste it," Price said.

Associated Press writer Kristin M. Hall contributed from Nashville, Tennessee.

Iran, pressured by blackouts and pollution, targets Bitcoin

By NASSER KARIMI and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's capital and major cities plunged into darkness in recent weeks as rolling outages left millions without electricity for hours. Traffic lights died. Offices went dark. Online classes stopped.

With toxic smog blanketing Tehran skies and the country buckling under the pandemic and other mount-

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ing crises, social media has been rife with speculation. Soon, fingers pointed at an unlikely culprit: Bitcoin.

Within days, as frustration spread among residents, the government launched a wide-ranging crackdown on Bitcoin processing centers, which require immense amounts of electricity to power their specialized computers and to keep them cool — a burden on Iran's power grid.

Authorities shuttered 1,600 centers across the country, including, for the first time, those legally authorized to operate. As the latest in a series of conflicting government moves, the clampdown stirred confusion in the crypto industry — and suspicion that Bitcoin had become a useful scapegoat for the nation's deeper-rooted problems.

Since former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from Tehran's nuclear accord with world powers and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, cryptocurrency has surged in popularity in the Islamic Republic.

For Iran, anonymous online transactions made in cryptocurrencies allow individuals and companies to bypass banking sanctions that have crippled the economy. Bitcoin offers an alternative to cash printed by sovereign governments and central banks — and in the case of Iran and other countries under sanctions like Venezuela, a more stable place to park money than the local currency.

"Iranians understand the value of such a borderless network much more than others because we can't access any kind of global payment networks," said Ziya Sadr, a Tehran-based Bitcoin expert. "Bitcoin shines here."

Iran's generously subsidized electricity has put the country on the crypto-mining map, given the operation's enormous electricity consumption. Electricity goes for around 4 cents per kilowatt-hour in Iran, compared to an average of 13 cents in the United States.

Iran is among the top 10 countries with the most Bitcoin mining capacity in the world — 450 megawatts a day. The U.S. network has a daily capacity of more than 1,100 megawatts.

On Tehran's outskirts and across Iran's south and northwest, windowless warehouses hum with heavy industrial machinery and rows of computers that crunch highly complex algorithms to verify transactions. The transactions, called blocks, are then added to a public record, known as the blockchain.

"Miners" adding a new block to the blockchain collect fees in bitcoins, a key advantage amid the country's currency collapse. Iran's rial, which had been trading at 32,000 to the dollar at the time of the 2015 nuclear deal, has tumbled to around 240,000 to the dollar these days.

Iran's government has sent mixed messages about Bitcoin. On one hand, it wants to capitalize on the soaring popularity of digital currency and sees value in legitimizing transactions that fly under Washington's radar. It authorized 24 Bitcoin processing centers that consume an estimated 300 megawatts of energy a day, attracted tech-savvy Chinese entrepreneurs to tax-free zones in the country's south and permitted imports of computers for mining.

Amir Nazemi, deputy minister of telecommunications and information, declared last week that cryptocurrency "can be helpful" as Iran struggles to cope with sanctions on its oil sector.

On the other hand, the government worries about limiting how much money is sent abroad and controlling money laundering, drug sales and internet criminal groups.

Iranian cryptocurrency miners have been known to use ransomware in sophisticated cyber attacks, such as in 2018 when two Iranian men were indicted in connection with a vast cyber assault on the city of Atlanta. On Thursday, British cybersecurity firm Sophos reported it found evidence tying crypto-miners in Iran's southern city of Shiraz to malware that was secretly seizing control of thousands of Microsoft servers.

Iran is now going after unauthorized Bitcoin farms with frequent police raids. Those who gain authorization to process cryptocurrency are subject to electricity tariffs, which miners complain discourage investment.

"Activities in the field are not feasible because of electricity tariffs," said Mohammad Reza Sharafi, head of the country's Cryptocurrency Farms Association. Despite the government giving permits to 1,000 investors, only a couple dozen server farms are active, he added, because tariffs mean Bitcoin farms pay five times as much for electricity as steel mills and other industries that consume far more power.

Now, miners say, the government's decision to close down major Bitcoin farms operating legally seems

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designed to deflect concerns about the country's repeated blackouts.

As Tehran went dark last week, a video showing industrial computers whirring away at a massive Chinese cryptocurrency farm spread online like wildfire, prompting outrage about Bitcoin's outsized thirst for electricity. Within days, the government closed that plant despite its authorization to operate.

"The priority is with households, commercial, hospitals and sensitive places," said Mostfa Rajabi Mashhadi, spokesman of Iran's electricity supply department, noting that illegal farms sucked up daily some 260 megawatts of electricity.

Although Bitcoin mining strains the power grid, experts say it's not the real reason behind Iran's electricity outages and dangerous air pollution. The telecommunications ministry estimates that Bitcoin consumes less than 2% of Iran's total energy production.

"Bitcoin was an easy victim here," said Kaveh Madani, a former deputy head of Iran's Department of Environment, adding that "decades of mismanagement" have left a growing gap between Iran's energy supply and demand.

Bitcoin "mining's energy footprint is not insignificant but these problems are not created overnight," he said. "They simply need one trigger to spiral out of control."

A sharp drop in supply or spike in demand, like this winter when more people are staying home because of the coronavirus pandemic, can upset the balance of a grid that draws mostly from natural gas. Authorities reported that households have increased their heating gas usage by 8% this year, which Tehran's electric supply company said led to "limitations in feeding the country's power plants and a lack of electricity."

Sanctions targeting Iran's aging oil and gas industry have compounded the challenges, leaving Iran unable to sell its products abroad, including its low-quality, high-sulfur fuel oil known as mazut. If the hazardous oil isn't sold or shipped it must be swiftly burned — and it is, in 20% of the country's power plants, according to environmental official Mohammad Mehdi Mirzai. The smoldering fuel blackens the skies, particularly when the weather cools and wind carries emissions from nearby refineries and industrial sites into Tehran.

During the power blackouts, thick layers of pollution coated mountain peaks and hovered over cities, with readings of dangerous fine particulate pollution spiking to over 200 micrograms per cubic meter, a level considered "dangerously" unhealthy.

As the government publicized its clampdown on Bitcoin farms, miners balked at all the blame over their energy guzzling. Many warned that despite its potential to become a cryptocurrency utopia, Iran would continue to fall behind.

"These moves harm the country," said Omid Alavi, a cryptocurrency consultant. "Many neighboring nations are attracting foreign investors."

DeBre reported from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

Cesar Chavez's son happy dad's bust is in Biden Oval Office

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Paul Chavez had no idea where a sculpture of his father, Latino American civil rights and labor leader Cesar Chavez, would end up in the White House.

He agreed just this week to lend the bronze bust to President Joe Biden and hustled to get it wrapped up and shipped across the country from California. It was an utter surprise Wednesday when he saw Biden at his desk in the Oval Office, with the bust of the late Cesar Chavez right behind the president.

"We're still smiling cheek to cheek," Paul Chavez said in an interview Thursday.

Biden pressed themes of unity and inclusivity and advocacy for racial justice during the campaign, and Chavez said Biden appeared to be trying to convey that through a series of quick decorative changes he's made to the world's most powerful office.

Chavez said the prominent placement of his father's likeness in the White House sends the message that it's a "new day" following the tenure of Donald Trump and the anti-immigrant policies that he and

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his advisers pushed. Chavez, who is president and chairman of the board of directors of the foundation named for his father, predicted that "the contributions of working people, of immigrants, of Latinos ... will be taken into account" in the new administration.

Whenever Biden is seen at his desk, Chavez, a farm worker advocate, will be there, too.

Biden revealed his Oval Office touch-up Wednesday as he signed a raft of executive orders and other actions in his first hours as the nation's 46th president.

The most visually striking change is Biden's choice of a deep blue rug, with the presidential seal in the middle, that was last used by President Bill Clinton, to replace a light colored rug laid down by Trump. Biden is also using Clinton's deep gold draperies.

Busts of civil rights activists Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks are also on display, along with a sculpture of President Harry Truman. Biden removed a bust of Winston Churchill, the former British prime minister.

On the wall across from Biden's desk is a portrait collage of predecessors George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt, along with Alexander Hamilton, a Founding Father and former treasury secretary.

No longer on display is a portrait of President Andrew Jackson, a Trump favorite who signed the Indian Removal Act that forced tens of thousands of Native Americans out of their homeland.

Biden is keeping the Resolute desk, so named because it was built using oak from the British Arctic exploration ship HMS Resolute. But he got rid of the red button that Trump had on the desk and would push to have a butler bring him a Diet Coke, his beverage of choice.

All presidents tweak the Oval Office decor at the start of their terms to reflect their personal tastes or to telegraph broader messages to the public.

The White House maintains a vast collection of furniture, paintings and other artifacts that they can choose from. Presidents are also allowed to borrow items from the Smithsonian and other museums. The White House curator oversees everything, and the makeover is carried out in the hours after the outgoing president leaves the mansion and before the new president arrives.

Biden also replaced a row of military service flags Trump used to decorate the office with a single American flag and a flag with the presidential seal, both positioned behind his desk.

He also chose a tufted, dark brown leather chair instead of keeping the reddish brown desk chair Trump used.

Coronavirus guidelines now the rule at White House

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Testing wristbands are in. Mask-wearing is mandatory. Desks are socially distanced. The clearest sign that there's a new boss at the White House is the deference being paid to coronavirus public health guidelines.

It's a striking contrast to Donald Trump's White House, which was the epicenter of no less than three separate outbreaks of COVID-19, their true scale not fully known because aides refused to discuss cases publicly.

While the Trump administration was known for flouting safety recommendations, the Biden team has made a point of abiding by the same strict guidelines they're urging Americans to follow to stem the spread of the virus.

It's part of an overall effort from President Joe Biden to lead by example on the coronavirus pandemic, an ethos carried over from his campaign and transition.

"One of the great tragedies of the Trump administration was a refusal to recognize that many Americans model the behavior of our leadership," said Ben LaBolt, a former press secretary to President Barack Obama who worked on the Biden transition.

"The Biden administration understands the powerful message that adhering to their own guidelines and modeling the best public health behavior sends, and knows that that's the best path to climbing out of

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this until we can get a shot in the arm of every American.”

To that end, most of Biden’s White House staff is working from home, coordinating with colleagues by email or phone. While the White House aims to have more people working onsite next week, officials intend to operate with substantially reduced staffing for the duration of the pandemic.

When hundreds of administration staffers were sworn in by Biden on Wednesday, the ceremony was virtual, with the president looking out at team members displayed in boxes on video screens.

The emphasis on adhering to public safety guidelines touches matters both big and small in the White House.

Jeffrey Wexler is the White House director of COVID-19 operations, overseeing the implementation of safety guidelines throughout the administration, a role he also served during the transition and campaign. During her first press briefing, White House press secretary Jen Psaki suggested those working in the office would receive daily testing and N95 masks would be mandatory.

Indeed, Biden’s new federal mask mandate executive order requires that federal employees, contractors and others in federal buildings and on federal lands wear masks and adhere to social distancing requirements. The executive order allows for agency heads to make “case-by-case exceptions” — like, for instance, Psaki’s. She wears one until she steps up to the podium for briefings.

Officials in close contact with Biden wear wristbands to signify they have been tested that day. Every event with the president is carefully choreographed to maintain distancing, with strips of paper taped to the carpet to show the likes of Vice President Kamala Harris and Dr. Anthony Fauci where to stand when Biden is delivering an address.

When Biden met with his COVID team in the State Dining Room on Thursday, the five people in the room sat at individual tables placed at least six feet apart and four others joined by Zoom to keep numbers down.

Plexiglass barriers have been set up at some desks that are in open areas, but nearly all staff who are already working in the building have enclosed offices. The Biden team already had a robust contact tracing program set up during the transition, which it’s keeping around for any possible exposures.

Staffers also were issued laptops with wallpaper displays that offer a list of COVID symptoms and a directive to “call the White House medical unit” if they have experienced any of them.

The Trump White House was another story altogether.

After one virus scare in May, the White House mandated mask-wearing, with a memo from chief of staff Mark Meadows requiring their use in shared workspaces and meetings. Simple surgical masks were placed at the entrance to the West Wing.

But after only a few days of moderate compliance, mask-wearing fell away almost entirely, as Trump made it clear to aides he did not like the visual of people around him wearing masks — let alone wearing one himself.

Trump’s White House reduced staffing capacity during the earliest days of the pandemic, but by late spring, when Trump was intent on projecting that the country was “reopening” from pandemic lockdowns — and the U.S. was at roughly 80,000 deaths — aides quickly resumed normal operations. That provided ideal conditions for the spread of an airborne virus.

It was only after Trump himself tested positive that some aides began staggering their work schedules to provide enhanced distancing and contingencies in case someone tested positive.

Those working for the new administration welcome the stricter guidelines now, but they do pose some potential complications as the Biden team builds out its operation.

Karen Finney, who was a spokeswoman in the Clinton White House, said the first challenge may simply be creating a cohesiveness and camaraderie when some new staffers are brought on board without ever having worked in the same room.

“When you sit in the same office as everyone, it’s just a different dynamic,” she said. “There’s a sense of, ‘We’ve got each other’s backs, we’re going to be working together on this.’”

Finney added that most of the staff are used to working remotely at this point, so it’s not necessarily a new challenge. But she allowed that the national COVID response itself could be somewhat hamstrung by the COVID requirements at the White House.

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"Having to coordinate between limited staff in the office, those working remotely, along with governors, mayors, their staff, those on the Hill — it's a challenge," she said. "They've had the time to think through how to do some of this, but look, it's going to be a work in progress."

After Trump setbacks, Kim Jong Un starts over with Biden

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Last year was a disaster for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

He helplessly watched his country's already battered economy decay further amid pandemic border closures while brooding over the collapse of made-for-TV summits with former President Donald Trump that failed to lift crippling sanctions from his country.

Now he must start all over again with President Joe Biden, who has previously called Kim a "thug" and accused Trump of chasing spectacles instead of meaningful reductions of Kim's nuclear arsenal.

While Kim has vowed to strengthen his nuclear weapons program in recent political speeches, he also tried to give Biden an opening by saying that the fate of their relations depends on whether Washington discards what he calls hostile U.S. policies.

It's unclear how patient Kim will be. North Korea has a history of testing new U.S. administrations with missile launches and other provocations aimed at forcing the Americans back to the negotiating table.

In recent military parades in Pyongyang, Kim showcased new weapons he may test, including solid-fuel ballistic systems designed to be fired from vehicles and submarines, and the North's biggest intercontinental ballistic missile.

A revival of tensions would force the U.S. and South Korea to reckon more deeply with the possibility that Kim may never voluntarily deal away the weapons he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Kim's arsenal emerged as a major threat to the United States and its Asian allies following tests in 2017 that included a detonation of a purported thermonuclear warhead and flight tests of ICBMs that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland.

A year later, Kim initiated diplomacy with South Korea and the U.S., but it derailed in 2019 when the Americans rejected North Korea's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a piecemeal deal partially surrendering its nuclear capabilities.

North Korea won't likely be the top priority for Biden, who while facing mounting domestic issues is also gearing up for a push to get back into a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran that Trump blew up in favor of what he called maximum pressure against Iran.

The Biden administration's "sequence of policy attention will likely be: Get America's own house in order, strengthen U.S. alliances and align strategies toward China and Russia, and then address Iran and North Korea," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

But North Korea never likes to be ignored.

Although Biden served as vice president under Barack Obama, whose policy was to wait out North Korea while gradually increasing sanctions, that method might not work because the North's weapons capabilities have grown significantly in the years since.

While sanctions, border closures and crop-killing natural disasters have created the toughest challenges of Kim's nine-year rule, he won't be in a hurry to offer concessions, Easley said. Kim's government has a high tolerance for domestic suffering and could expect extensive help from China, its only major ally.

North Korea's first provocation under the Biden administration could possibly be related to submarine-launched ballistic systems, which Kim showcased in recent parades.

Kim's ambitions for longer-range ICBMs and reconnaissance satellites that he expressed during the ruling party congress this month could lead to a space launch that would double as a test of long-range missile technology. That would be reminiscent of a 2009 launch that took place weeks into Obama's first term.

"(The North) is capable of conducting tests that the U.S. and its allies cannot ignore," Easley said. "Kim is likely to exploit this."

The North Korean leader is trying to move the diplomacy toward an arms reduction negotiation between

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nuclear states, rather than talks that would culminate in a full surrender of his weapons, according to Shin Beomchul, an analyst with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.

But North Korea probably won't test weapons until after Biden's State of the Union address in February, where he could set the tone of his policy toward the North, Shin said. Kim may also want to see whether the United States and South Korea proceed with a major joint military exercise expected in March.

Although the allies have described their annual exercises as defensive in nature and downsized much of their combined training activity under Trump to make space for diplomacy, North Korea has called for a full stoppage of the drills, describing them as invasion rehearsals and proof of U.S. hostility.

"The North during the party congress has made clear it has no intentions of budging first, but it is also interested in hearing what the United States has to say," said Shin, who served as a South Korean diplomat during the Obama years.

"Biden will not inherit Trump's top-down diplomacy, but you could expect him to be more flexible about working-level negotiations, offering to talk with the North Koreans at any time and place and about anything," he said.

Shin expects Biden to eventually pursue a deal with North Korea that resembles the agreement with Iran that Trump pulled out of in 2018. It could provide North Korea some level of compensation for freezing its nuclear and missile capabilities at their current level.

While the United States won't likely give up its long-term commitment to denuclearizing North Korea, rolling back the country's nuclear capabilities to zero is not a realistic near-term diplomatic goal, he said.

But an Iran-style deal might not work with North Korea, which has much more advanced weapons and is unlikely to accept the monitoring steps baked into the Iran deal, said Park Won-gon, a professor at South Korea's Handong University.

One thing is clear, though, Park said: If North Korea tests its weapons, Biden will dial up sanctions that will continue to push Kim's economy to the brink.

Brazil awaits vaccine cargo from India amid supply concerns

By DIANE JEANTET and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazil's government is eagerly awaiting the Friday arrival of 2 million doses of coronavirus vaccine from India, while experts warn the precious cargo will do little to shore up an insufficient supply in South America's biggest nation.

Brazil's health ministry on Thursday announced the shipment of the vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford. It is expected to clear customs in Sao Paulo before being flown to Rio de Janeiro, where Brazil's state-run Fiocruz Institute is based, the ministry said. Fiocruz has a partnership with AstraZeneca and Oxford for the vaccine's distribution and production.

The 2 million doses from India only scratch the surface of addressing the shortfall, Brazilian public health experts told The Associated Press, as millions more doses will be needed to cover priority groups, and shipments of raw materials from Asia have been delayed.

"Counting doses from Butantan (Sao Paulo state's Butantan Institute) and those from India, there isn't enough vaccine and there is no certainty about when Brazil will have more, or how much," Mário Scheffer, professor of preventive medicine at the University of Sao Paulo, told The Associated Press. "It will interfere with our capacity in the near-term to reach collective immunity."

A flight from India planned for last week was postponed, derailing the federal government's plan to begin immunization with the AstraZeneca shot. Instead, vaccination in the nation of 210 million people began using the CoronaVac shot in Sao Paulo, where Butantan has a deal with Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac.

Neither Fiocruz nor Butantan have yet received the technology from their partners to produce vaccines domestically, and instead must import the active ingredient.

The Indian Embassy in Brasilia didn't respond to a request for comment on the announced shipment nor the cause for last week's delay.

Fiocruz said in a statement Thursday the Health Ministry could begin distribution of the imported Astra-

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Zeneca shots Saturday afternoon, following quality control inspection.

Butantan made available 6 million CoronaVac doses it imported from China in order to kick off Brazil's immunization, and it used materials imported from China to bottle an additional 4.8 million shots. The health regulator must approve use of the latter batch before it can be distributed to states and municipalities across Brazil.

Scheffer estimated in a report he published Jan. 18 that the government will need 10 million doses just to cover front-line health workers, leaving the elderly and other at-risk Brazilians included in priority groups without any vaccines. The government's own immunization plan doesn't specify how many Brazilians are included in priority groups.

"We are doing what is possible to get the vaccine," President Jair Bolsonaro said Thursday night in his weekly Facebook live broadcast, adding that his government will make free, non-mandatory vaccination available to all Brazilians.

Brazil has recorded 214,000 deaths related to COVID-19, the second-highest total in the world after the United States, and infections and deaths surging again.

While Brazil has a proud history of decades of immunization campaigns, in this pandemic it has struggled to cobble together a complete plan and suffered multiple logistical pitfalls.

"The vaccination plan is badly done, in general," said Domingos Alves, adjunct professor of social medicine at the University of Sao Paulo. "It's important that the information be transparent and clear for the population to know how this vaccination process will be done."

There has been some speculation on social media that diplomatic snafus — namely those stemming from allies of Bolsonaro who criticized the Chinese government — might explain the delay behind getting the required inputs.

Oliver Stuenkel, an international relations professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university, told AP that such a reading is overly simplistic amid heightened global demand.

"Of course, since Bolsonaro isn't on good terms with the Chinese government, he doesn't really have the direct access," Stuenkel said from Sao Paulo. "There is a chance that the bad relationship does wind up putting Brazil further down the line of recipients, but not because the Chinese are saying actively, 'Let's punish Brazil,' but perhaps because other presidents have a better relationship."

The newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported Wednesday that Brazilian Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello met with China's ambassador in Brasilia and that Bolsonaro had requested a call with China's Xi Jinping. Filipe Martins, an adviser to Bolsonaro on international relations, said in a television interview the same day that Brazil is seeking suppliers from other countries.

"Negotiations are well advanced," Martins told RedeTV!. He added that there is "a big fuss over nothing."

Lawmakers including House Speaker Rodrigo Maia and the president of the Brazil-China parliamentary group, Sen. Roberto Rocha, also met with the Chinese ambassador.

Butantan had planned to supply Brazil's Health Ministry with 46 million doses by April. It is awaiting the import of 5,400 liters of the active ingredient before the end of the month to make about 5.5 million doses, and new shipments from China depend on authorization from the Chinese government, according to a statement from its press office.

Fiocruz had initially scheduled the delivery of 100 million doses to begin in February and 110 million more in the second half of the year. As of Dec. 30, its plan was down to delivering 30 million doses by the end of February, but the first delivery has been postponed to March, the institute said.

"Brazil doesn't have vaccines available for its population," Margareth Dalcolmo, a prominent pulmonologist at Fiocruz who has treated COVID-19 patients, said this week. "That's absolutely unjustifiable."

AKA sorority members celebrate Kamala Harris inauguration

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Elizabeth Shelby had her inauguration outfit planned weeks in advance: blue jeans, a Kamala Harris sweatshirt, a green coat, and pink Chuck Taylors as an homage to her sorority's colors and Vice President Harris' signature shoe.

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And pearls, just like the ones Harris wore when she graduated from Howard University, was sworn into Congress, and was sworn in as the first woman, first Black and South Asian person, and first Alpha Kappa Alpha member to serve as vice president.

Shelby, a member of the Alpha Psi chapter of AKA, had hoped to wear her pearls at the inauguration in Washington, D.C. Instead, she donned them at home in Nashville, Tennessee.

Following the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, AKA, the oldest sorority of the historically Black fraternities and sororities that make up the Divine Nine, called off inauguration events and urged members to stay home. So countless AKA members celebrated the historic moment in their living rooms, on Twitter and on Zoom calls.

"I wanted to help show Kamala that her sisters are behind her always," Shelby said. "I wanted her to look out and see a sea of pink and green and know that this is her moment."

After the Capitol insurrection, Shelby canceled her plane tickets and hotel reservation. The rioting robbed many AKAs of their feeling of safety at the inauguration and beyond, she said, and many members have been telling each other to stop wearing their letters in public for safety reasons.

But Shelby said that didn't stop her from celebrating at a Zoom viewing party with her local graduate chapter.

"I'm not going to let this take the joy out of this moment," she said.

Harris, the daughter of an Indian mother and Jamaican father, joined AKA in 1986 at Howard University, one of the country's oldest historically Black colleges and universities. When she accepted the Democratic vice-presidential nomination in August, she thanked AKA, saying, "Family is my beloved Alpha Kappa Alpha." Soon after, donations in increments of \$19.08, marking the year, 1908, when the sorority was founded, started flowing in to a Biden-Harris campaign fundraising committee.

Alpha Kappa Alpha declared on Twitter that Jan. 20 would be Soror Kamala D. Harris Day, and encouraged members to share photos of their celebrations with the hashtag #KamalaHarrisDay.

Andrea Morgan, who became an AKA the same year Harris did, posted photos of her pink sweater and pearls on Twitter with the hashtag, which she told the AP "makes us feel closer together even when we're far apart."

"If we were able to be there in person, I don't think you'd be able to look anywhere without seeing pink and green," said Genita Harris of the Delta Omega Omega chapter in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. "Now on social media, this is a showing of our solidarity, of our love and support for our soror."

She said group chats with her sorority sisters were "going bananas" during a historic moment for the sisterhood and for HBCUs.

"It's been the same story of white men for centuries," she said. "Now a new story is being written, and it's our story."

AKA soror Josclynn Brandon booked her plane tickets to D.C. the day Biden announced Harris as his running mate in August. When the 2020 presidential election was called, CNN was playing on her phone on the dashboard of her car. She pulled over and cried.

"I knew then that I was going to see Kamala Harris make history," she said. "It confirmed that Black women and women of color are so much more capable than some people believe us to be."

Brandon made plans to be in D.C. from Jan. 13-21 to celebrate the sorority's Founders' Day on Jan. 15, as well as Martin Luther King Jr. Day and the inauguration, all in the same city where AKA was founded. After the Jan. 6 insurrection, she, too, canceled her trip.

"It did rob me of my feeling of safety while going to D.C., and it robbed me of the moment of seeing a Black woman and sorority sister become VP right in front of me," she said. "But it took away so much more than just me going to D.C. It takes away from this celebration and robs our incoming administration of the full celebration they deserved."

Brandon watched Harris' swearing-in from her home in Indianapolis while wearing a sweatshirt with a photo of Harris from college and the words, "The Vice President is my sorority sister."

"I'm still going to celebrate," she said. "I'm not going to let that group's action take away this moment."

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I don't want to let them win."

Shelby grew up hearing young Black boys say they wanted to be president after Barack Obama made history as the country's first Black president. Now, she hopes Black girls will have those dreams too.

"It's a historic moment," she said. "To see not only a woman but a woman of color and member of the Divine Nine become vice president is something I never even dreamed of happening as a little girl growing up in America."

"There is a pride I can't put into words," she continued. "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. She is truly our ancestors' wildest dreams."

Associated Press writer Cheyanne Mumphrey in Phoenix contributed. Fernando is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/christinetfern>.

Time, transparency needed as Biden inherits frazzled census

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Battered by criticism that the 2020 census was dangerously politicized by the Trump administration, the U.S. Census Bureau under a new Biden administration has the tall task of restoring confidence in the numbers that will be used to determine funding and political power.

Picking up the pieces of a long, fractious process that spooled out during a global pandemic starts with transparency about irregularities in the data, former Census Bureau directors, lawmakers and advocates said.

They advised the new administration to take more time to review and process population figures to be sure they get them right. The high-stakes undertaking will determine how many congressional seats and Electoral College votes each state gets as well as the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending each year.

"We are optimistic that things at the Census Bureau will be better. The question is whether the damage caused by the Trump administration can be rectified," said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. Morial's organization, along with other advocacy groups and municipalities, sued former President Donald Trump's administration last year over a decision to end the once-a-decade head count early.

According to critics, that damage includes a failed effort to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census questionnaire and a Trump order to figure out who is a citizen and who is in the U.S. illegally. They say another Trump directive to exclude people in the country illegally from the apportionment of congressional seats, shortened schedules to collect and process data, and four political appointments to top positions inside the bureau also threatened the count's integrity.

Census workers across the country have told The Associated Press and other media outlets that they were encouraged to falsify responses in the rush to finish the count so the numbers used for determining how many congressional seats each state gets could be produced under the Trump administration. Census Bureau officials said such problems were isolated.

Census advocates were heartened Wednesday by President Joe Biden's quick revocations of Trump's order to produce citizenship data and the former president's memo attempting to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the apportionment count. The Biden administration also has pledged to give the Census Bureau the time it needs to process the data.

The Census Bureau also said Thursday that redistricting data it's releasing later this year for states and municipalities to use in creating legislative districts won't include information on citizenship or immigration status. It also said the agency is suspending all work on trying to produce the immigration status of U.S. residents for the census.

"President Biden's swift action today finally closes the book on the Trump administration's attempts to manipulate the census for political gain," said Dale Ho, director of the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, who

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argued against the legality of the apportionment memo before the Supreme Court last year. The high court ruled that any challenge was premature.

After the bureau missed a year-end deadline for turning in the apportionment numbers, it said the figures would be completed as close to the previous deadline as possible. Trump administration attorneys recently said they won't be ready until early March because the bureau needs time to fix irregularities in the data.

There will be flaws, likely undercounts of communities of color and overcounts of whites, but "they will just have to 'bake the best cake possible' through identifying and correcting the errors they can find," said Rob Santos, president of the American Statistical Association.

Trump's four political appointments to the Census Bureau last year were denounced by statisticians and Democratic lawmakers worried they would politicize the once-a-decade head count. The Office of Inspector General last week said two of them had pressured bureau workers to figure out who is in the U.S. illegally before Trump left office, with one whistleblower calling the effort "statistically indefensible." Then-Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham ordered a technical report on that effort but halted it after blowback. He resigned this week after Democratic lawmakers and civil rights groups called for his departure.

The bureau's new interim chief, Deputy Director Ron Jarmin, didn't respond to a request for an interview. He will report to Biden's new pick to head the Commerce Department — which oversees the Census Bureau — Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo.

Former Census Bureau Director Kenneth Prewitt said he's optimistic the final product will be as accurate as past censuses, especially now that Jarmin is at the helm.

"They know how to do it right. It just takes time," said Prewitt, who served in the Clinton administration.

Another former bureau director, John Thompson, said the exit of Trump's appointees will help eliminate distractions to finishing the 2020 census, but the agency needs to hold a public forum to discuss what anomalies bureau statisticians have found in the data and what they're doing to fix them ahead of the apportionment numbers being turned in.

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz, a Democrat from Hawaii, asked Biden to set up a nonpartisan commission to review the apportionment data to make sure it's fair and accurate before it's delivered to the House of Representatives.

"The Census Bureau faced a number of challenges with the 2020 Census," Schatz said in a letter. "Some, like the pandemic, were beyond the agency's control. However, the Trump Administration actively interfered with the agency's operations."

Despite facing pressures from their political bosses, the Census Bureau's career staff did a good job of resisting the Trump administration's most questionable orders by coming forward when they found errors in the data without worrying about the deadline and by whistleblowing to the inspector general when they felt pressured to produce citizenship of dubious accuracy, according to Morial, Santos and Thompson.

"They deserve to be honored," Santos said.

This story has corrected the first name of Rob Santos, instead of Ron Santos.

Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

Health experts blame rapid expansion for vaccine shortages

By CARLA K. JOHNSON, BRIAN MELLE and KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

Public health experts Thursday blamed COVID-19 vaccine shortages around the U.S. in part on the Trump administration's push to get states to vastly expand their vaccination drives to reach the nation's estimated 54 million people age 65 and over.

The push that began over a week ago has not been accompanied by enough doses to meet demand, according to state and local officials, leading to frustration and confusion and limiting states' ability to attack the outbreak that has killed over 400,000 Americans.

Over the past few days, authorities in California, Ohio, West Virginia, Florida and Hawaii warned that their

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supplies were running out. New York City began canceling or postponing shots or stopped making new appointments because of the shortages, which President Joe Biden has vowed to turn around. Florida's top health official said the state would deal with the scarcity by restricting vaccines to state residents.

The vaccine rollout so far has been "a major disappointment," said Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute.

Problems started with the Trump administration's "fatal mistake" of not ordering enough vaccine, which was then snapped up by other countries, Topol said. Then, opening the line to senior citizens set people up for disappointment because there wasn't enough vaccine, he said. The Trump administration also left crucial planning to the states and didn't provide the necessary funding.

"It doesn't happen by fairy dust," Topol said. "You need to put funds into that."

Last week, before Biden took over as president, the U.S. Health and Human Services Department suggested that the frustration was the result of unrealistic expectations among the states as to how much vaccine was on the way.

But some public health experts said that the states have not been getting reliable information on vaccine deliveries and that the amounts they have been sent have been unpredictable. That, in turn, has made it difficult for them to plan how to inoculate people.

"It's a bit of having to build it as we go," said Dr. George Rutherford, an epidemiologist at the University of California, San Francisco. "It's a front-end supply issue, and unless we know how much vaccine is flowing down the pipe, it's hard to get these things sized right, staffed, get people there, get them vaccinated and get them gone."

State health secretaries have asked the Biden administration for earlier and more reliable predictions on vaccine deliveries, said Washington state Health Secretary Dr. Umair Shah.

Dr. Marcus Plescia of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials was also among those who said opening vaccinations to senior citizens was done too soon, before supply could catch up.

"We needed steady federal leadership on this early in the launch," Plescia said. "That did not happen, and now that we are not prioritizing groups, there is going to be some lag for supply to catch up with demand."

Supply will pick up over the next few weeks, he said. Deliveries go out to the states every week, and the government and drugmakers have given assurances large quantities are in the pipeline.

The rollout has proceeded at a disappointing pace. The U.S. government has delivered nearly 38 million doses of vaccine to the states, and about 17.5 million of those have been administered, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About 2.4 million people have received the necessary two doses, by the CDC's count — well short of the hundreds of millions who will have to be inoculated to vanquish the outbreak.

Biden, in one of his first orders of business, signed 10 executive orders to combat the coronavirus pandemic on Thursday, including one broadening the use of the Defense Production Act to expand vaccine production. The 1950 Korean War-era law enables the government to direct the manufacture of critical goods.

He also mandated masks for travel, including in airports and on planes, ships, trains, buses and public transportation, and ordered the Federal Emergency Management Agency to set up vaccination centers and the CDC to make vaccines available through pharmacies starting next month.

Biden has vowed to dispense 100 million shots in his first 100 days.

"We'll move heaven and earth to get more people vaccinated for free," he said.

Florida was one of the first states to open vaccine eligibility to members of the general public over 65. Now uncertainty over the vaccine supply has prompted the state surgeon general, Scott Rivkees, to advise counties to prioritize available doses for state residents, including so-called snowbirds who live there part-time. People seeking vaccination will have to provide a driver's license or other document, such as rental leases and utility bills.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Gov. Andrew Cuomo have been pleading for more doses. Appointments through Sunday for the first dose of the vaccine at 15 community vaccination hubs set up by the

city health department were postponed to next week.

Vaccinations in New York haven't stopped, but demand for the shots now far exceeds the number of doses available, the mayor said.

"It's just tremendously sad that we have so many people who want the vaccine and so much ability to give the vaccine, what's happening?" de Blasio said. "For lack of supply, we're actually having to cancel appointments."

Rosa Schneider had jumped at the chance to make a vaccination appointment once she heard that educators like her were eligible in New York. A high school English teacher who lives in New York City but works in New Jersey, she said that a day before she was to be vaccinated on Wednesday at a city-run hospital, she got a call saying the supply had run out and the appointment was canceled.

"I was concerned, and I was upset," said Schneider, 32, but she is trying daily to book another appointment. She is hopeful availability will improve in the coming weeks.

Associated Press writer Jennifer Peltz contributed to this report from New York.

Fauci unleashed: Doc takes 'liberating' turn at center stage

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dr. Anthony Fauci is back.

In truth, the nation's leading infectious-diseases expert never really went away. But after enduring nearly a year of darts and undermining comments from former President Donald Trump, Fauci now speaks with the authority of the White House again.

He called it "liberating" Thursday to be backed by a science-friendly administration that has embraced his recommendations to battle COVID-19.

"One of the new things in this administration is, If you don't know the answer, don't guess," Fauci said in one pointed observation during a White House briefing. "Just say you don't know the answer."

Fauci's highly visible schedule on Thursday, the first full day of President Joe Biden's term, underscored the new administration's confidence in the doctor but also the urgency of the moment.

His day began with a 4 a.m. virtual meeting with officials of the World Health Organization, which is based in Switzerland, and stretched past a 4 p.m. appearance at the lectern in the White House briefing room.

The breakneck pace showcased the urgent need to combat a pandemic that has killed more than 400,000 Americans and reached its deadliest phase just as the new president comes to office.

Fauci made clear that he believed the new administration would not trade in the mixed messages that so often came from the Trump White House, where scientific fact was often obscured by the president's political agenda.

"The idea that you can get up here and talk about what you know and what the science is ... it is something of a liberating feeling," Fauci told reporters. White House press secretary Jen Psaki had invited Fauci to take the podium first at her daily briefing.

While choosing his words carefully, Fauci acknowledged that it had been difficult at times to work for Trump, who repeatedly played down the severity of the pandemic, refused to consistently promote mask-wearing and often touted unproven scientific remedies, including a malaria drug and even injecting disinfectant.

"It was very clear that there were things that were said, be it regarding things like hydroxychloroquine and other things, that really was uncomfortable because they were not based in scientific fact," Fauci said. He added that he took "no pleasure" in having to contradict the president, a move that often drew Trump's wrath.

Biden, during his presidential campaign, pledged to making Fauci his chief medical adviser when he took office, and the 80-year-old scientist was immediately in motion.

Fauci was up well before dawn Thursday for the virtual meeting with WHO, which Biden had rejoined the previous day after Trump withdrew the U.S. from the group out of anger over how it dealt with China in

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the early days of the pandemic. Fauci told the group that the United States would join its effort to deliver coronavirus vaccines to poor countries.

In the afternoon, the doctor stood alongside Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in the White House as they unveiled a series of executive orders aimed at slowing the spread of the virus, which is killing more than 4,000 Americans a day, as well as bolstering the nation's sluggish vaccine distribution program.

Fauci had chatted amiably with reporters while awaiting the tardy new president. He acknowledged it was a long day and said that while he'd prefer to go for a run, he planned to powerwalk a few miles Thursday evening.

It was all a stark contrast after being kept on a tight leash by the Trump administration. Their West Wing press shop had tightly controlled Fauci's media appearances — and blocked most of them. The doctor went from being a constant presence in the briefing room during the first weeks of the pandemic to largely being banished as Trump grew jealous of the doctor's positive press and resentful of Fauci's willingness to contradict him.

Moreover, Trump frequently undermined Fauci's credibility, falsely insisting that the pandemic was nearly over. The president regularly referenced Fauci's early skepticism about the effectiveness of masks for ordinary Americans, a position that Fauci quickly abandoned in the face of more evidence. And he even made fun of Fauci's first pitch at a Washington Nationals game.

The president's attacks on Fauci — and his dismissiveness of the science — handicapped medical professionals trying to get Americans to take the virus seriously.

"There was clear political influence on the message of the pandemic. It became political to say that the pandemic was devastating our community because it was interpreted as a judgement on Trump," said Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious-diseases physician and a professor at the Boston University School of Medicine. "It actively created enemies of the public health folks in a segment of the population."

Having Fauci return to a central role, Bhadelia said, is a sign "that science was being repressed and now back."

As his handling of the pandemic became the defining issue in the 2020 campaign, Trump insisted on portraying the virus as a thing of the past. He also mercilessly attacked Fauci, retweeting messages that called for the doctor's dismissal and reveled in "Fire Fauci!" chants at some of his rallies.

Trump sidelined Fauci but dared not dismiss him, after aides convinced him of the move's political danger.

But Fauci, who has now served under seven presidents, persevered, telling friends that he would keep his head down and aim to outlast Trump and the obfuscations of his administration.

"Clarity of message is the most important thing the government can be doing right now; the single biggest disservice Trump did was constantly telling people that pandemic was about to be over," said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, who has known Fauci for more than 20 years.

In his return to the briefing room, Fauci joked with reporters, seemingly far more relaxed than at any point last year. And as he stepped off the stage, Psaki said she'd soon have him back.

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

Judge says Amazon won't have to restore Parler web service

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Amazon won't be forced to immediately restore web service to Parler after a federal judge ruled Thursday against a plea to reinstate the fast-growing social media app, which is favored by followers of former President Donald Trump.

U.S. District Judge Barbara Rothstein in Seattle said she wasn't dismissing Parler's "substantive underlying claims" against Amazon, but said it had fallen short in demonstrating the need for an injunction forcing it back online.

Amazon kicked Parler off its web-hosting service on Jan. 11. In court filings, it said the suspension was a "last resort" to block Parler from harboring violent plans to disrupt the presidential transition.

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The Seattle tech giant said Parler had shown an "unwillingness and inability" to remove a slew of dangerous posts that called for the rape, torture and assassination of politicians, tech executives and many others.

The social media app, a magnet for the far right, sued to get back online, arguing that Amazon Web Services had breached its contract and abused its market power. It said Trump was likely on the brink of joining the platform, following a wave of his followers who flocked to the app after Twitter and Facebook expelled Trump after the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol.

Rothstein said she rejected "any suggestion that the public interest favors requiring AWS to host the incendiary speech that the record shows some of Parler's users have engaged in." She also faulted Parler for providing "only faint and factually inaccurate speculation" about Amazon and Twitter colluding with one another to shut Parler down.

Parler said Thursday it was disappointed by the ruling but remains confident it will "ultimately prevail in the main case," which it says will have "broad implications for our pluralistic society." Amazon said it welcomed the ruling and emphasized that "this was not a case about free speech," a point also underscored by the judge.

Parler CEO John Matze had asserted in a court filing that Parler's abrupt shutdown was motivated at least partly by "a desire to deny President Trump a platform on any large social-media service." Matze said Trump had contemplated joining the network as early as October under a pseudonym. The Trump administration last week declined to comment on whether he had planned to join.

Amazon denied its move to pull the plug on Parler had anything to do with political animus. It claimed that Parler had breached its business agreement "by hosting content advocating violence and failing to timely take that content down."

Parler was formed in May 2018, according to Nevada business records, with what co-founder Rebekah Mercer, a prominent Trump backer and conservative donor, later described as the goal of creating "a neutral platform for free speech" away from "the tyranny and hubris of our tech overlords."

Amazon said the company signed up for its cloud computing services about a month later, thereby agreeing to its rules against dangerous content.

Matze told the court that Parler has "no tolerance for inciting violence or lawbreaking" and has relied on volunteer "jurors" to flag problem posts and vote on whether they should be removed. More recently, he said the company informed Amazon it would soon begin using artificial intelligence to automatically pre-screen posts for inappropriate content, as bigger social media companies do.

Amazon last week revealed a trove of incendiary and violent posts that it had reported to Parler over the past several weeks. They included explicit calls to harm high-profile political and business leaders and broader groups of people, such as schoolteachers and Black Lives Matter activists.

Google and Apple were the first tech giants to take action against Parler in the days after the deadly Capitol riot. Both companies temporarily banned the smartphone app from their app stores. But people who had already downloaded the Parler app were still able to use it until Amazon Web Services pulled the plug on the website.

Parler has kept its website online by maintaining its internet registration through Epik, a U.S. company owned by libertarian businessman Rob Monster. Epik has previously hosted 8chan, an online message board known for trafficking in hate speech. Parler is currently hosted by DDoS-Guard, a company whose owners are based in Russia, public records show.

DDoS-Guard did not respond to emails seeking comment on its business with Parler or on published reports that its customers have included Russian government agencies.

Parler said Thursday it is still working to revive its platform. Although its website is back, it hasn't restored its app or social network. Matze has said it will be difficult to restore service because the site had been so dependent on Amazon engineering, and Amazon's action has turned off other potential vendors.

The case has offered a rare window into Amazon's influence over the workings of the internet. Parler argued in its lawsuit that Amazon violated antitrust laws by colluding with Twitter, which also uses some Amazon cloud computing services, to quash the upstart social media app.

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Rothstein, who was appointed to the Seattle-based court by Democratic President Jimmy Carter, said Parler presented “dwindlingly slight” evidence of antitrust violations and no evidence that Amazon and Twitter “acted together intentionally — or even at all — in restraint of trade.”

AP Technology Writer Frank Bajak contributed to this report from Boston.

Democrats ask ethics panel to investigate Sens. Cruz, Hawley

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seven Democratic senators on Thursday asked the Senate Ethics Committee to investigate the actions of Republican Sens. Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley “to fully understand their role” in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump.

Thousands had gathered that day as Congress voted to formally certify President Joe Biden’s victory over Trump in November. Hawley and Cruz led objections in the Senate to Biden’s victory, despite the widespread recognition that the effort would fail.

In the end, Congress certified Biden’s Electoral College victory, but not before thousands marched to the Capitol at Trump’s urging, overwhelmed security and interrupted the proceedings. In the end, the violence led to five deaths, injured dozens of police officers and caused extensive damage to the Capitol.

The Democratic senators said the question for the Senate to determine is not whether Cruz and Hawley had the right to object, but whether the senators failed to put loyalty “to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to persons, party, or Government department.” They also said the investigation should determine whether Cruz, of Texas, and Hawley, of Missouri, engaged in “improper conduct reflecting on the Senate.”

“Until then, a cloud of uncertainty will hang over them and over this body,” the Democratic senators wrote in a letter to the leaders of the Senate Ethics Committee.

The Democratic senators said Cruz and Hawley announced their intentions to object even though they knew that claims of election fraud were baseless and had led to threats of violence.

“Their actions lend credence to the insurrectionists’ cause and set the stage for future violence. And both senators used their objections for political fundraising,” the Democratic senators said in their letter.

Cruz and Hawley have condemned the violence on Jan. 6. Cruz called it a “despicable act of terrorism.” Hawley said those who attacked police and broke the law must be prosecuted.

Cruz helped force a vote on Biden’s victory in Arizona, while Hawley helped force one on Biden’s victory in Pennsylvania.

“Joe Biden and the Democrats talk about unity but are brazenly trying to silence dissent,” Hawley said in a prepared statement. “This latest effort is a flagrant abuse of the Senate ethics process and a flagrant attempt to exact partisan revenge.”

“It is unfortunate that some congressional Democrats are disregarding President Biden’s call for unity and are instead playing political games by filing frivolous ethics complaints against their colleagues,” said a Cruz spokesperson, Maria Jeffrey Reynolds.

Those Democrats requesting the investigation are Sens. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, Ron Wyden of Oregon, Tina Smith of Minnesota, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, Tim Kaine of Virginia and Sherrod Brown of Ohio.

‘Your Land’? Some Native Americans question inaugural song

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — On the first day of Joe Biden’s presidency, Native Americans had reason to celebrate. Biden halted construction of the border wall that threatened to physically separate Indigenous people living on both sides.

He also revoked a permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline that tribes fought in court for years, and he agreed to restore the boundaries of the first national monument created specifically at the request of

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tribes in southern Utah. Inaugural events showcased tribes across the country in traditional regalia, dancing and in prayer.

But amid the revelry, some Native Americans saw a glitch in Wednesday's swearing-in ceremony. The only mention of Indigenous people came in the benediction delivered by the Rev. Silvester Beaman. And then there was the mishmash of songs sung by Jennifer Lopez that included lyrics from "This Land is Your Land." The folk tune is popular around campfires and in grade schools, but it also called to mind the nation's long history of land disputes involving tribes.

"Oh, I love J.Lo," said Kristen Herring, who is Lumbee and lives in Austin, Texas. "It wasn't super disappointing that she sang it. But I was like, 'Oh, why did that have to be on the list of things to sing?'"

Woody Guthrie, who wrote the song in the 1940s, meant it as a retort to "God Bless America" and a rebuke to monetizing land at a time of economic crisis, said Gustavus Stadler, an English professor and author of "Woodie Guthrie: An Intimate Life."

Lopez put a twist on it, throwing in part of the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish that translates to "justice for all." The Guthrie song has been a symbol of equality, inclusion and unity.

Lady Gaga sang a rendition of it at the Super Bowl months after Donald Trump took office. It was part of Barack Obama's inaugural programming, with a trio of singers, including Bruce Springsteen, adding back some of the original, more controversial verses.

But arriving amid an effort by some tribes to be recognized as stewards of ancestral land, a movement known as Land Back, the lyrics hit the wrong note for some tribal members.

"It's a nice little sentiment that America is this mixing pot," said Benny Wayne Sully, who is Sicangu Lakota and lives in Los Angeles. "But does anybody believe this land was made for you and me? Or was it made for white folks? People forget this land was made of brown people before it was colonized."

Rep. Deb Haaland, who is from Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, acknowledged that perspective in a virtual welcoming to the inaugural events over the weekend. She's been nominated to lead the Interior Department, which oversees tribal affairs. If confirmed, she would be the first Native American in a Cabinet post.

That's one of the reasons Cherie Tebo was able to look past the song that she said was inappropriate and emphasized how little some Americans know about Indigenous people. She sees an opportunity for tribes to have a seat at the table in Biden's administration, citing Haaland and Winnebago tribal member Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes, who has been named a deputy solicitor for the Interior Department.

"In order to make it work, 'this land is your land, this land is my land,' people (need) to understand it doesn't belong to us," said Tebo, who also is Winnebago. "If anything, we belong to it. And when our land is sick, we are sick."

Fonseca is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/FonsecaAP>.

Biden halts border wall building after Trump's final surge

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — In the days before Joe Biden became president, construction crews worked quickly to finish Donald Trump's wall at an iconic cross-border park overlooking the Pacific Ocean, which then-first lady Pat Nixon inaugurated in 1971 as a symbol of international friendship.

Biden on Wednesday ordered a "pause" on all wall construction within a week, one of 17 executive orders issued on his first day in office, including six dealing with immigration.

The order leaves billions of dollars of work unfinished — but still under contract — after Trump worked feverishly last year to build more than 450 miles (720 kilometers), a goal he said he achieved eight days before leaving office.

As of Jan. 15, the government spent \$6.1 billion of the \$10.8 billion in work it signed contracts to have done, according to a Senate Democratic aide with knowledge of the contracts who spoke on condition of anonymity because details have not been made public. The full amount under contract would have

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extended Trump's wall to 664 miles (1,069 kilometers).

Biden, seeking to fulfill a pledge not to build "another foot," gave his administration two months to determine how much it would cost to cancel contracts and whether money could be spent elsewhere. The Senate aide said fees would be negotiated with contractors and the administration would seek to spend whatever's left on related uses on the border, such as roads, lights, sensors and other technology.

Publicly, the Trump administration said it secured \$15 billion for the wall. The Senate aide said it was actually \$16.45 billion as of Wednesday, \$5.8 billion of which was appropriated by Congress and the rest diverted from the Defense and Treasury departments.

The Trump administration notified the Senate aide on Jan. 14 that it was moving ahead with a contract for \$863 million, but it was not awarded.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which has awarded wall contracts with Defense Department money, said Thursday that it told crews not to install any additional barriers and to limit activity over the next few days to what is "necessary to safely prepare each site for a suspension of work."

John Kurc, an activist who posts videos of dynamite blasts by wall construction crews, said he saw one dynamite charge being set Wednesday afternoon in Guadalupe Canyon in easternmost Arizona, even as the inauguration was playing out in Washington.

Heavy machines have been crawling over roadways gouged into rocky mountainsides, tapping open holes for posts on U.S. Bureau of Land Management property.

Advocates in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the busiest area for illegal crossings, and near Nogales, Arizona, saw idle construction equipment Thursday.

But in San Diego, crews were out replacing a steel fence with imposing, tightly spaced poles topped with flat steel plates rising 30 feet (9 meters), said Dan Watman of Friends of Friendship Park, a group that promotes public access to the cross-border park overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Contractors began last week, said Watman, who was informed of the project in a December conference call with Border Patrol agents but got no explanation for it. The agency referred questions to the White House, which had no immediate comment.

Trump said the border wall would be "virtually impenetrable" and paid for by Mexico, which never happened. While the wall is much more formidable than the barriers it replaced, it isn't uncommon for smugglers to guide people over or through it. Portions can be sawed with power tools sold at home improvement stores.

Despite Trump's bravado, Border Patrol officials have said the wall was never meant to stop everyone but rather to slow their advance.

Jose Edgar Zuleta, whose business selling religious jewelry in the Mexican city of Puebla dried up during the coronavirus pandemic, cleared two walls in Friendship Park in October with a special ladder. He moved through brush in a heavily patrolled area for about half an hour before getting caught. His 21-year-old son, who went ahead of him, got picked up hours later.

The cross-border park has hosted yoga classes, concerts and countless news conferences, including one in 2018 with then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions to announce a "zero tolerance" policy that caused thousands of children to be separated from their parents at the border.

An old bullfighting ring and ocean-view restaurants surround the Mexican side; wetland scrub stretches into the United States.

Years ago, people passed baked goods, kissed and shook hands through a chain-link fence. Watman remembers passing tools back and forth in 2007 to plant a cross-border garden that still stands.

Since 2012, after construction of a double wall at the park, the Border Patrol has opened a gate many weekends for up to 10 people at a time to exchange words with those in Mexico.

SLSCO Ltd. of Galveston, Texas, won contracts to build double walls blanketing 14 miles (22 kilometers) in San Diego. Company spokeswoman Liz Rogers said work at Friendship Park is separate and done by another company.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next month on whether the government' illegally

diverted billions of dollars from the Defense Department to build the wall after Congress denied money that Trump sought, triggering a 35-day government shutdown in 2017.

It is unclear if Biden will adopt Trump's position before the Supreme Court. The government's brief is due Feb. 11.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador welcomed Biden's decision to stop wall construction but, in defense of Trump, noted that U.S. presidents going back to 1990s built border barriers. He displayed a chart to prove his point.

Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Houston, Anita Snow in Phoenix and Christopher Sherman in Mexico City contributed.

This story has been corrected to show that border wall contractor SLSCO Ltd. says another company is doing the work at Friendship Park in San Diego.

McConnell seeks to push Trump impeachment trial to February

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is proposing to push back the start of Donald Trump's impeachment trial to February to give the former president time to prepare and review his case.

House Democrats who voted to impeach Trump last week for inciting the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot have signaled they want to move quickly to trial as President Joe Biden begins his term, saying a full reckoning is necessary before the country — and the Congress — can move on.

But McConnell in a statement Thursday evening suggested a more expansive timeline that would see the House transmit the article of impeachment next week, on Jan. 28, launching the trial's first phase. After that, the Senate would give the president's defense team and House prosecutors two weeks to file briefs. Arguments in the trial would likely begin in mid-February.

"Senate Republicans are strongly united behind the principle that the institution of the Senate, the office of the presidency, and former President Trump himself all deserve a full and fair process that respects his rights and the serious factual, legal, and constitutional questions at stake," especially given the unprecedented speed of the House process, McConnell said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., is reviewing the plan and will discuss it with McConnell, a spokesperson said. The two leaders are also negotiating how the new 50-50 Senate will work and how they will balance other priorities.

A trial delay could appeal to some Democrats, as it would give the Senate more time to confirm Biden's Cabinet nominees and debate a new round of coronavirus relief. Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, a key ally of the president's, told CNN that Democrats would consider a delay "if we are making progress on confirming the very talented, seasoned and diverse team that President Joe Biden has nominated."

The ultimate power over timing rests with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who can trigger the start of the trial at any point by sending to the Senate the charge of incitement of an insurrection. The California Democrat has not yet said when she will do that.

"It will be soon. I don't think it will be long, but we must do it," Pelosi said Thursday. She said Trump doesn't deserve a "get-out-of-jail card" just because he has left office and Biden and others are calling for national unity.

Facing his second impeachment trial in two years, Trump began to assemble his defense team by hiring attorney Butch Bowers to represent him, according to an adviser. Bowers previously served as counsel to former South Carolina Govs. Nikki Haley and Mark Sanford.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina helped Trump find Bowers after members of his past legal teams indicated they did not plan to join the new effort. Trump is at a disadvantage compared to his first trial, in which he had the full resources of the White House counsel's office to defend him.

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Pelosi's nine impeachment managers, who will be prosecuting the House case, have been regularly meeting to discuss strategy. Pelosi said she would talk to them "in the next few days" about when the Senate might be ready for a trial.

Shortly before the Jan. 6 insurrection, Trump told thousands of his supporters at a rally near the White House to "fight like hell" against the election results that Congress was certifying. A mob marched down to the Capitol and rushed in, interrupting the count. Five people, including a Capitol Police officer, died in the mayhem, and the House impeached Trump a week later, with 10 Republicans joining all Democrats in support.

Pelosi said it would be "harmful to unity" to forget that "people died here on Jan. 6, the attempt to undermine our election, to undermine our democracy, to dishonor our Constitution."

Trump was acquitted by the Republican-led Senate at his first impeachment trial. The White House legal team, aided by Trump's personal lawyers, aggressively fought the House charges that he had encouraged the president of Ukraine to investigate Biden in exchange for military aid. This time around, Pelosi noted, the House is not seeking to convict the president over private conversations but for a very public insurrection that they themselves experienced and that played out on live television.

"This year, the whole world bore witness to the president's incitement," Pelosi said.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat, said it was still too early to know how long a trial would take or if Democrats would want to call witnesses. But he said, "You don't need to tell us what was going on with the mob scene we were rushing down the staircase to escape."

McConnell, who said this week that Trump "provoked" his supporters before the riot, has not said how he will vote. He told his GOP colleagues that it will be a vote of conscience.

Democrats would need the support of at least 17 Republicans to convict Trump, a high bar. While a handful of Senate Republicans have indicated they are open to conviction, most have said they believe a trial will be divisive and questioned the legality of trying a president after he has left office.

Graham said that if he were Trump's lawyer, he would focus on that argument and on the merits of the case — and whether it was "incitement" under the law.

"I guess the public record is your television screen," Graham said. "So, I don't see why this would take a long time."

Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard in Columbia, S.C., and Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Fla., contributed to this report.

Testing wristbands, masks signs of a new boss at White House

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Testing wristbands are in. Mask-wearing is mandatory. Desks are socially distanced. The clearest sign that there's a new boss at the White House is the deference being paid to coronavirus public health guidelines.

It's a striking contrast to Donald Trump's White House, which was the epicenter of no less than three separate outbreaks of COVID-19, their true scale not fully known because aides refused to discuss cases publicly.

While the Trump administration was known for flouting safety recommendations, the Biden team has made a point of abiding by the same strict guidelines they're urging Americans to follow to stem the spread of the virus.

It's part of an overall effort from President Joe Biden to lead by example on the coronavirus pandemic, an ethos carried over from his campaign and transition.

"One of the great tragedies of the Trump administration was a refusal to recognize that many Americans model the behavior of our leadership," said Ben LaBolt, a former press secretary to President Barack Obama who worked on the Biden transition.

"The Biden administration understands the powerful message that adhering to their own guidelines and modeling the best public health behavior sends, and knows that that's the best path to climbing out of

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this until we can get a shot in the arm of every American.”

To that end, most of Biden’s White House staff is working from home, coordinating with colleagues by email or phone. While the White House aims to have more people working onsite next week, officials intend to operate with substantially reduced staffing for the duration of the pandemic.

When hundreds of administration staffers were sworn in by Biden on Wednesday, the ceremony was virtual, with the president looking out at team members displayed in boxes on video screens.

The emphasis on adhering to public safety guidelines touches matters both big and small in the White House.

Jeffrey Wexler is the White House director of COVID-19 operations, overseeing the implementation of safety guidelines throughout the administration, a role he also served during the transition and campaign. During her first press briefing, White House press secretary Jen Psaki suggested those working in the office would receive daily testing and N95 masks would be mandatory.

Indeed, Biden’s new federal mask mandate executive order requires that federal employees, contractors and others in federal buildings and on federal lands wear masks and adhere to social distancing requirements. The executive order allows for agency heads to make “case-by-case exceptions” — like, for instance, Psaki’s. She wears one until she steps up to the podium for briefings.

Officials in close contact with Biden wear wristbands to signify they have been tested that day. Every event with the president is carefully choreographed to maintain distancing, with strips of paper taped to the carpet to show the likes of Vice President Kamala Harris and Dr. Anthony Fauci where to stand when Biden is delivering an address.

When Biden met with his COVID team in the State Dining Room on Thursday, the five people in the room sat at individual tables placed at least six feet apart and four others joined by Zoom to keep numbers down.

Plexiglass barriers have been set up at some desks that are in open areas, but nearly all staff who are already working in the building have enclosed offices. The Biden team already had a robust contact tracing program set up during the transition, which it’s keeping around for any possible exposures.

Staffers also were issued laptops with wallpaper displays that offer a list of COVID symptoms and a directive to “call the White House medical unit” if they have experienced any of them.

The Trump White House was another story altogether.

After one virus scare in May, the White House mandated mask-wearing, with a memo from chief of staff Mark Meadows requiring their use in shared workspaces and meetings. Simple surgical masks were placed at the entrance to the West Wing.

But after only a few days of moderate compliance, mask-wearing fell away almost entirely, as Trump made it clear to aides he did not like the visual of people around him wearing masks — let alone wearing one himself.

Trump’s White House reduced staffing capacity during the earliest days of the pandemic, but by late spring, when Trump was intent on projecting that the country was “reopening” from pandemic lockdowns — and the U.S. was at roughly 80,000 deaths — aides quickly resumed normal operations. That provided ideal conditions for the spread of an airborne virus.

It was only after Trump himself tested positive that some aides began staggering their work schedules to provide enhanced distancing and contingencies in case someone tested positive.

Those working for the new administration welcome the stricter guidelines now, but they do pose some potential complications as the Biden team builds out its operation.

Karen Finney, who was a spokeswoman in the Clinton White House, said the first challenge may simply be creating a cohesiveness and camaraderie when some new staffers are brought on board without ever having worked in the same room.

“When you sit in the same office as everyone, it’s just a different dynamic,” she said. “There’s a sense of, ‘We’ve got each other’s backs, we’re going to be working together on this.’”

Finney added that most of the staff are used to working remotely at this point, so it’s not necessarily a new challenge. But she allowed that the national COVID response itself could be somewhat hamstrung by

the COVID requirements at the White House.

"Having to coordinate between limited staff in the office, those working remotely, along with governors, mayors, their staff, those on the Hill — it's a challenge," she said. "They've had the time to think through how to do some of this, but look, it's going to be a work in progress."

Biden proposes 5-year extension of nuke treaty with Russia

By MATTHEW LEE and ROBERT BURNS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has proposed to Russia a five-year extension of a nuclear arms treaty that is otherwise set to expire in February, the White House said Thursday.

Biden proposed the extension even as he asked the intelligence community to look closely into Russia's cyberattacks, its alleged interference in the 2020 election and other actions, press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters.

Russia has said for some time that it would welcome an extension of the New START treaty, which limits the number of U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear weapons. The Trump administration made a late bid to extend the treaty, but its conditions were rejected by Russia.

U.S. allies, particularly in Europe, are sure to applaud Biden's proposal, which also provides an early signal of his intent to pursue arms control,

Psaki noted that a five-year extension is permitted by the treaty and it "makes even more sense when the relationship with Russia is adversarial as it is at this time."

She called the treaty, which is the last remaining arms control pact between Washington and Moscow since the Trump administration withdrew from two others, "an anchor of strategic stability between our two countries."

Despite the extension proposal, Psaki said Biden was committed to holding Russia "to account for its reckless and adversarial actions," such as its alleged involvement in the Solar Winds hacking event, 2020 election interference, the chemical poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the widely reported allegations that Russia may have offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan.

The Pentagon's chief spokesman, John Kirby, said allowing the treaty to lapse would have weakened U.S. understanding of Russia's nuclear forces.

"Extending the treaty's limitations on stockpiles of strategic nuclear weapons until 2026 allows time and space for our two nations to explore new verifiable arms control arrangements that could further reduce risks to Americans," he said. "And the department stands ready to support our colleagues in the State Department as they effect this extension and explore those new arrangements."

Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan was to convey the extension proposal to Russia's ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Antonov, on Thursday afternoon, according to one official familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private diplomatic conversations.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg earlier Thursday called on the United States and Russia to extend the treaty and to later broaden it.

"We should not end up in a situation with no limitation on nuclear warheads, and New START will expire within days," Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels. The treaty expires on Feb. 5.

Stoltenberg underlined that "an extension of the New START is not the end, it's the beginning of our efforts to further strengthen arms control."

The treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads.

Obama won Senate ratification of the treaty with a commitment to move ahead with a vast and enormously expensive recapitalization of the U.S. nuclear force. That program, which some Democrats in Congress call excessive, is likely to be further scrutinized by the Biden administration. At a projected cost exceeding \$1 trillion over the next several decades, the plan is to replace each of the three "legs" of the U.S. nuclear triad — ballistic missile submarines, nuclear-capable bomber aircraft and land-based nuclear missiles.

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President Donald Trump had been highly critical of New START, asserting that it put the United States at a disadvantage. His administration waited until last year to engage Russia in substantive talks on the treaty's future. Trump insisted that China be added to the treaty, but Beijing rejected the idea out of hand.

Trump's lead negotiator on New START discussions with the Russians, Marshall S. Billingslea, wrote on Twitter on Thursday that Biden would be making a mistake by quickly agreeing to a five-year extension.

"Hope this is not true," he wrote, referring to news reports of Thursday's proposal. "If so, shows stunning lack of negotiating skill. Took just 24 hours for Biden team to squander most significant leverage we have over Russia."

Robert Soofer, who was the Trump administration's top nuclear policy official at the Pentagon, said in an interview that he sees the Biden decision to accept a five-year extension as a lost opportunity.

"The Russians are likely to pocket this extension and walk away from the table," Soofer said, rather than accede to a longstanding U.S. request that they negotiate limits on other categories of nuclear weapons, such as tactical weapons.

Some U.S. officials have been leery of renewing New START without getting a Russian commitment to negotiate limits on new types of strategic weapons, including Moscow's nuclear-capable Avangard hypersonic long-range missile.

Biden, who indicated during the campaign that he favored extending New START, is not proposing any alterations, the U.S. official said. Thus it appeared likely that Moscow would be amenable to an extension.

The proposal was reported first by The Washington Post.

Biden signs burst of virus orders, vows 'Help is on the way'

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a burst of executive orders, President Joe Biden served notice Thursday that America's war on COVID-19 is under new command, promising an anxious nation progress to reduce infections and lift the siege it has endured for nearly a year.

At the same time, he tried to manage expectations in his second day in office, saying despite the best intentions "we're going to face setbacks." He brushed off a reporter's question on whether his goal of 100 million coronavirus shots in 100 days should be more ambitious, a point pressed by some public health experts.

The 10 orders signed by Biden are aimed at jump starting his national COVID-19 strategy to increase vaccinations and testing, lay the groundwork for reopening schools and businesses, and immediately increase the use of masks — including a requirement that Americans mask up for travel. One directive calls for addressing health care inequities in minority communities hard hit by the virus.

"We didn't get into this mess overnight, and it will take months to turn this around," Biden said at the White House. U.S. deaths have have surged past 400,000, and he noted projections that they could reach 500,000 in a month.

But then, looking directly into the TV camera, Biden declared: "To a nation waiting for action, let me be clear on this point: Help is on the way."

The new president has vowed to take far more aggressive measures to contain the virus than his predecessor, starting with stringent adherence to public health guidance. A key difference is that under Biden, the federal government is assuming full responsibility for the COVID response. And instead of delegating major tasks to states, he is offering to help them with technical backup and federal money.

He faces steep obstacles, with the virus actively spreading in most states, vaccine shortages, slow progress on distribution and political uncertainty over whether congressional Republicans will help him pass a \$1.9 trillion economic relief and COVID response package.

Adding to the challenges are virus mutations, particularly one that has emerged in South Africa, that may make vaccines somewhat less effective. Dr. Anthony Fauci told reporters at the White House briefing that "we are paying very close attention to it." Biden's plan includes an expansion of research capabilities to map out the genetic structure of new variants.

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On Thursday a group influential with Republican office holders lent its support to the president's strategy. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said, "We support the new administration's focus on removing roadblocks to vaccinations and reopening schools, both of which are important steps to accelerating a broad-based economic recovery for all Americans."

Biden officials have said they've been hampered by a 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. 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's mask order for travel applies 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 must 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. The action was applauded by airline unions and supported by a major industry trade group.

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 said his administration's coronavirus decisions would be based on science, not politics.

Biden is seeking to expand testing and vaccine availability, with the goal of 100 million shots in his first 100 days in office. But some independent experts say his administration should strive for two or three times that number. Even with the slow pace of vaccinations, the U.S. is already closing in on 1 million shots a day.

"It's a disappointingly low bar," said Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert and emergency physician.

Asked about that at the White House on Thursday, Biden told a reporter: "When I announced it, you all said it's not possible. Come on, give me a break, man."

Fauci told reporters the U.S. could return to "a degree of normality" by the fall if the vaccination campaign goes well. Achieving widespread or "herd" immunity would require vaccinating as many as 280 million people.

Biden 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, building on a plan devised by the Trump administration. And he's launching an effort to train more people to administer shots.

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 them safely. States would also be able to tap FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund to help get schools back open.

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

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

Biden is giving government agencies a green light to use the Cold War-era Defense Production Act. It allows the government to direct private industry to produce supplies needed in times of national emergency. In this case it could be anything from swabs, to masks, to certain chemicals.

"We do not have nearly enough testing capacity in this country," said White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients.

The Biden plan estimates that a national vaccination strategy with expanded testing requires \$160 billion, and he wants an additional \$170 billion to aid the reopening of schools and universities.

As part of his strategy, Biden ordered establishment of a 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 higher among African Americans, a problem the administration plans to address through an education campaign.

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

Congress poised for quick action on Biden's Pentagon nominee

By ROBERT BURNS and ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled Congress easily passed legislation Thursday required to confirm retired Gen. Lloyd Austin as President Joe Biden's secretary of defense, brushing aside concerns that his retirement occurred inside the seven-year window that safeguards civilian leadership of the military.

It would be the first measure to be signed into law by brand-new President Joe Biden.

The Senate sent the measure exempting Austin from the seven-year rule to Biden after a 69-27 Senate tally that came moments after a comparably lopsided 326-78 House vote. The back-to-back votes put Austin in position to be confirmed as secretary by Friday.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, confirmed that the confirmation vote on Austin would be conducted Friday.

Austin, a 41-year veteran of the Army, has promised to surround himself with qualified civilians and include them in policy decisions. He said he has spent nearly his entire life committed to the principle of civilian control over the military.

While the waiver is expected to be approved, the vote puts some Democrats in a position to look like they've flip-flopped. Many of them opposed a similar waiver in 2017 for Jim Mattis, former President Donald Trump's first secretary of defense.

Austin, who would be the first Black secretary of defense, said he understands why some have questioned the wisdom of putting a recently retired general in charge of the Defense Department. Much of his focus this week, including in his remarks at his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday, has been on persuading members of Congress that although he has been out of uniform for less than five years, he sees himself as a civilian, not a general.

Some aspects of his policy priorities are less clear. He emphasized on Tuesday that he will follow Biden's lead in giving renewed attention to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

"I will quickly review the department's contributions to coronavirus relief efforts, ensuring we are doing everything we can — and then some — to help distribute vaccines across the country and to vaccinate our troops and preserve readiness," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Under questioning by senators, Austin pledged to address white supremacy and violent extremism in the ranks of the military — problems that received relatively little public attention from his immediate predecessor, Mark Esper. Austin promised to "rid our ranks of racists," and said he takes the problem personally.

"The Defense Department's job is to keep America safe from our enemies," he said. "But we can't do that if some of those enemies lie within our own ranks."

Austin said he will insist that the leaders of every military service know that extremist behavior in their ranks is unacceptable.

"This is not something we can be passive on," he said. "This is something I think we have to be active on, and we have to lean into it and make sure that we're doing the right things to create the right climate."

He offered glimpses of other policy priorities, indicating that he embraces the view among many in Congress that China is the "pacing challenge," or the leading national security problem for the U.S.

The Middle East was the main focus for Austin during much of his 41-year Army career, particularly when he reached senior officer ranks. He served several tours of duty as a commander in Iraq, including as the top commander in 2010-11.

An aspect of the defense secretary's job that is unfamiliar to most who take the job is the far-flung and complex network of nuclear forces that are central to U.S. defense strategy. As a career Army officer, Austin had little reason to learn the intricacies of nuclear policy, since the Army has no nuclear weapons. He told his confirmation hearing that he would bone up on this topic before committing to any change in the nuclear policies set by the Trump administration, including its pursuit of nuclear modernization.

Austin, a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, served in 2012 as the first Black vice

chief of staff of the Army. A year later he assumed command of Central Command, where he fashioned and began implementing a strategy for rolling back the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

He describes himself as the son of a postal worker and a homemaker from Thomasville, Georgia, who will speak his mind to Congress and to Biden.

Chicago teachers begin vote to defy order to return to class

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago teachers began voting Thursday to defy orders to report for in-person class next week ahead of elementary students' return, actions the nation's third-largest school district said could lead to "an illegal strike."

The Chicago Teachers Union fiercely opposes Chicago Public Schools' reopening plans over safety concerns during the coronavirus pandemic. The roughly 355,000-student district, which went online in March 2020, has gradually welcomed students back. Thousands of pre-kindergarten and special education students chose in-person learning this month. Teachers who didn't show were punished.

Roughly 10,000 educators in kindergarten through eighth grade are expected to report for duty next week, but the union's House of Delegates approved a resolution late Wednesday to skip classroom teaching and continue remotely. Students in kindergarten to eighth grade have the option to return two days a week starting Feb. 1. No return date has been set for high school students.

Both sides have been negotiating for months with the union, saying the district hasn't gone far enough in its safety plan and is putting educators at unnecessary risk. CPS officials say, among other things, it has placed thousands of air purifiers in classrooms and required masks. The district also cites a city study on private schools, which have largely remained open.

"We are only moving forward with our reopening plan because public health experts have made it clear that bringing students back is both safe and necessary, and we are fully committed to providing you the safe working environment you deserve," the district said in a letter to staff Thursday, adding that teachers would be expected to return to work unless they had an approved reason. "A collective failure to do so constitutes an illegal strike."

CTU officials disagreed.

The union's collective bargaining agreement, approved after a 2019 strike, prevents the union from striking during the contract and district officials from locking out workers.

Teachers and other staff that have continually failed to report for duty without an approved excuse — there were 87 as of Friday — have been docked pay and booted out of CPS systems until they return. CTU has blasted the move as illegal. Some educators have continued to teach through recorded videos or Facebook Live.

It was unclear if the district would punish teachers who failed to show up next week. Union officials argued that if the district punished teachers the same way, it would be responsible for a work stoppage.

CPS officials didn't immediately have further comment Thursday.

The union's resolution would have its members stay out of the classroom until there's an agreement on health and safety protocols. The union has asked for new metrics to determine when it's safe to reopen and more widespread vaccinations, among other things.

The union's roughly 25,000 members began voting by electronic ballot Thursday. If a majority approve the resolution by Saturday, teachers would stay at home Monday and could continue to teach students remotely. Several Chicago aldermen back the union.

"An overwhelming majority of our delegates are resolved to putting safety first and continuing to teach remotely," CTU President Jesse Sharkey said in a Wednesday statement. "In the absence of an actual commitment on safety from CPS leadership, the best assurance we have for the safety of our students and school staff right now is to continue remote learning."

More than 76% of the roughly 3,787 school employees expected to report for duty in pre-kindergarten and special education showed up, according to Friday district attendance figures. Among teachers, it was

72%, or 1,229 of 1,708.

The district hasn't released student attendance data, but early district surveys showed roughly 40% of eligible students, about 77,000, expressed interest in returning.

Follow Sophia Tareen on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sophiatareen>.

Trump returns to a business empire ravaged by pandemic

By BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump is returning to a family business ravaged by pandemic shutdowns and restrictions, with revenue plunging more than 40% at his Doral golf property, his Washington hotel and both his Scottish resorts over the past year.

Trump's 2020 financial disclosure released as he left office this week was just the latest bad news for his financial empire after banks, real estate brokerages and golf organizations announced they were cutting ties with his company following the storming of the Capitol this month by his political supporters.

The disclosure showed sizable debt facing the company of more than \$300 million, much of it coming due in the next four years, and a major bright spot: Revenue at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, his new post-presidency home, rose by a few million dollars.

Eric Trump, who with Donald Trump Jr. has run the Trump Organization the past four years, told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday that the disclosure doesn't tell the whole story, calling the debt "negligible" and the outlook for the company bright, especially at its golf resorts and courses.

"The golf business has never been stronger. We took in hundreds and hundreds of new members," he said, adding that profits were in the "tens of millions."

Hinting at possible new ventures in the post-presidency era, Eric Trump raised the prospect of a flurry of new licensing deals in which the Trump name is put on a product or building for a fee, a business that has generated tens of millions for the company in the past.

"The opportunities are endless," he said, declining to give details.

The disclosure report filed each year with federal ethics officials shows only revenue figures, not profits, but the hit to Trump's business appeared widespread.

The National Doral Golf Club outside of Miami, his biggest money maker among the family's golf properties, took in \$44.2 million in revenue, a drop of \$33 million from 2019. The Trump International Hotel in Washington, once buzzing with lobbyists and diplomats before operations were cut back last year, generated just \$15.1 million in revenue, down more than 60% from the year before.

Trump's Turnberry club in Scotland took in less than \$10 million, down more than 60%. Revenue at the family's golf club in Aberdeen dropped by roughly the same proportion.

The Mar-a-Lago, the Palm Beach club where Trump arrived Wednesday, saw revenue rise 10% to \$24.2 million. Revenue at a golf club near that club and one in Charlotte, North Carolina, also rose, up about 5 percent to \$13 million each.

In total, Trump's vast holding of hotels, resorts, office buildings, licensing deals and other assets took in at least \$278 million for 2020 and the first few weeks of the new year, down more than a third from a minimum of about \$450 million in 2019.

The financial blow from former clients and business partners cutting ties to Trump is unclear, but it could be sizable. The PGA of America canceled a championship tournament at Trump's Bedminster club in New Jersey, and several banks said they would no longer lend to the company, making it more difficult to roll over its debt with new loans.

In addition, New York City said it would be canceling various contracts with the company, including those running skating rinks and a golf club in the Bronx. Revenue at that course, the Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point, fell 20% last year to \$6.4 million.

Eric Trump dismissed the backlash, saying parts of the business that get less attention, such as its commercial buildings, are thriving.

"I've signed 125,000 square feet of office space in the fourth quarter alone," he said, referring to new leases. "We hit it out of the park."

The disclosure report was unclear on that claim, though the revenue at four of the company's most important commercial buildings — Trump Tower on New York's Fifth Avenue, a Wall Street building, and two towers owned with real estate giant Vornado -- seemed to have held up during the pandemic.

The report, which gives some figures in broad ranges and vague "more than" estimates, said the four took in over \$20 million in total last year, unchanged from a year earlier.

Biden's climate steps could have big impact on energy firms

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden has put his team to work reviewing dozens of actions taken by former President Donald Trump, aiming to reverse orders that he says harm the environment or endanger public health.

For the energy and auto industries, the impact could be far-reaching.

Biden aims to reduce harmful emissions from cars, trucks and SUVs. Oil and gas operations are being scrutinized as well — from how companies extract resources from the ground to the safety of pipelines that distribute the fuels. The new president aims to transition the country to 100% renewable energy for electricity generation by 2035 and net-zero emissions in the overall economy by 2050.

His campaign website promises to develop "rigorous" new fuel economy standards and eventually make all light- and medium-duty vehicles electric, though it provides no time frame. During his campaign, Biden also spoke about restricting oil and gas drilling on federal lands and reducing methane emissions from oil and gas operations.

Many experts agree that Biden's actions could help the nation achieve ambitious climate goals and further enhance the renewable energy sector, driving job growth. Others say they worry more that stricter regulations could hurt companies struggling to recover from the pandemic, which decimated demand for fuel.

Hours after his inauguration Wednesday, Biden directed federal agencies to immediately review regulations and executive actions taken in the past four years that threatened public health or the environment. Ultimately, his success will require surmounting opposition in the energy industry as well as in Congress.

"Yes, we have a blue wave, but it's a pretty thin wave with a 50/50 split in the Senate," said Stewart Glickman, senior equity analyst at CFRA Research. "Still, this is the first presidency that is actively trying to discourage fossil fuel development while promoting renewables.

Here is look at some energy issues Biden plans to tackle:

METHANE LEAKS

Methane, the main component of natural gas, frequently leaks from oil and gas wells and pipelines. As it does, it exerts a powerful warming effect on the atmosphere. Methane accounted for 10% of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. And the oil and gas industry produced nearly 30% of the country's methane emissions.

Under President Barack Obama, oil and gas operations were required to inspect equipment built or modified after 2015 twice a year for methane leaks and fix leaks that they found. Trump weakened those rules. Now, Biden is expected to restore Obama-era methane regulations. He may also extend those requirements to those older wells, which could put some operators out of business.

"Texas' Permian Basin is one of the largest sources of methane emissions in the world," noted Emma Pabst, an advocate with Environment Texas. "Reinstituting these rules will have a significant impact on our state's climate and environment. Requiring oil and gas companies to address methane leaks along the production line sends a clear message that our Environmental Protection Agency is no longer giving out free passes to pollute."

Trump's decision to loosen methane regulations was opposed even by BP, Chevron Shell and ExxonMobil and other major oil and gas companies because they had invested heavily to reduce methane emissions. If Biden were to just reverse Trump's rule and restore Obama's methane regulations, it would have little impact. That's because many big companies already tightened their methane leak prevention techniques.

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But Biden may extend the methane regulations to older wells. That worries independent producers, especially those that operate "stripper wells" that produce just a barrel or two of oil a day, that the expense of controlling methane leaks could put them out of business.

"We are very concerned about, especially for our members, our independent producers, that if there's a heavy Washington-bound approach that handcuffs the industry from finding solutions to this methane question, that would be a mistake," said Dan Naatz of the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

Low-producing stripper wells could become uneconomical through high compliance costs if these rules were expanded, and the move would certainly face legal challenges, said Parker Fawcett, an analyst for S&P Global Platts.

FUEL ECONOMY

The new administration intends to undo one of Trump's biggest changes: His gutting of Obama-era fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions standards for automobiles through 2025. But the regulatory slog could take a couple of years unless Trump's rollbacks are thrown out by the courts. Biden will also likely reverse Trump's decision to revoke California's ability to set its own pollution standards.

David Friedman, a former acting administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one of the agencies that sets such auto standards, said he thinks it will take until the 2023 model year for stricter standards from Biden to take effect. The Trump administration cut Obama-era standards for model years 2021 to 2025 from 4.7% annual fuel efficiency gains to 1.5%, weakening one of the nation's biggest efforts to fight climate change. Trump contended that the changes would make cars more affordable and safer. Both points were disputed by environmental groups.

The rollback was largely supported by the auto industry, though Ford, BMW, Volkswagen, Honda and Volvo backed California for what amounted to 3.7% annual fuel efficiency increases. Many in the industry think the agreement with California is where bargaining will begin with the Biden administration.

Automakers have long maintained that they would have trouble meeting Obama-era standards if they aren't rolled back. The industry has said it supports increased standards but that because people are buying less-efficient SUVs and trucks, it would have trouble reaching the Obama numbers. Last year, 76% of the new vehicles sold in the U.S. were trucks and SUVs.

During the 2019 model year, 11 of 14 major automakers had to rely on regulatory credits because they didn't meet standards, according to EPA figures. Gas mileage declined and pollution went up in 2019 for the first time in five years.

The industry knows change is coming and is hoping for a settlement. It is "committed to working with President Biden and his team on our shared goals of reducing emissions and realizing the benefits of an electric future," said John Bozzella, CEO of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a trade group.

Friedman, now with Consumer Reports, says the industry already has the technology already to meet the Obama-era standards, even without a plethora of battery-powered electric vehicles that are coming to market. A Consumer Reports analysis of Trump's rollback found that it would increase fuel costs during the life of an average new vehicle by \$3,200.

"There's a lot of room to for this administration to lead this country forward, save consumers money and clean the air," Friedman said.

FEDERAL DRILLING BANS

Biden directed the Interior Department to halt all leasing for oil and natural gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. But his ambitions were broader. He also ordered a 60-day moratorium on new oil and gas leasing and drilling permits on federal land, as part of a review of Trump-era rules that were designed to accelerate such activity.

Some energy analysts suggested that the moratorium could be just the first step in a much larger agenda to end drilling on federal land.

"Today's initial suspension could give way to emergency suspension that lasts much longer, essentially ending lease sales," said Kevin Book, managing director of Clearview Energy Partners. Biden could, for example, declare a climate emergency, rewrite land management rules, slow permitting or make leases less financially attractive.

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Speculation alone had already sparked a flurry of activity. In the waning months of the Trump administration, companies began stockpiling permits to drill on federal land, and the federal government sped up approvals to help the industry.

Oil industry leaders said that restricting development on federal land might just lead the U.S. to import more oil.

"All a leasing ban will do is shift production to Saudia Arabia and Russia, which have far less-stringent environmental controls than American producers," Naatz said.

PIPELINES

Among his first executive orders, Biden revoked the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline, the 1,700-mile pipeline that was to carry oil from Alberta, Canada to the Texas Gulf Coast. Keystone XL began shutting down construction, and the company said it would eliminate more than 1,000 jobs in coming weeks.

The pipeline had been a symbol of struggle between the goals of preserving jobs and curtailing global warming. Trump had presided over an expansion of the nation's oil and gas pipeline network. But legal setbacks chipped away at his progress.

Biden's plans to apply a swift hammer to Keystone XL and reverse Trump administration roll-backs indicate that "any hope of Biden moderating his posture towards the industry once in office are now dashed," said Fawcett, the analyst for S&P Global Platts.

Environmentalists and Native American tribes had opposed the pipeline, arguing that new infrastructure for fossil fuels would worsen climate change. "We should invest in infrastructure that helps us build a cleaner and healthier America, not infrastructure that ties us to the dirty energy sources of the past," said Matt Casale of U.S. PIRG, a federation of nonprofits.

The American Petroleum Institute assailed Biden's actions on Keystone as a step backwards that would hurt union workers.

"Pipelines are the safest, most environmentally friendly way to transport energy, and the economy cannot recover at full speed unless we deliver reliable energy from where it is to where it is needed," said Mike Sommers, the institute's CEO.

PREVENTING BLOWOUTS

The president directed the Interior Department to review rules that are designed to prevent blowouts on offshore oil rigs. The Obama administration had adopted safety measures after the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster that killed 11 and spilled 134 million gallons of oil into the Gulf in 2010.

After that tragedy, Obama required companies to test blowout preventers, which are designed to seal a well in case of a blowout, every 14 days. Trump relaxed that standard to every 21 days. But deep-water exploration has expanded in recent years, even as safety inspections declined.

Environmentalists have been pushing for more frequent inspections, said Nancy Kinner of the University of New Hampshire's Coastal Response Research Center and Center for Spills and Environmental Hazards.

"The new administration's whole thought on this is really to go back and look at that and make sure it's rigorous enough," Kinner said.

Krisher reported from Detroit. AP Writers Janet McConnaughey in New Orleans and Matt Brown in Billings, Montana contributed to this report.

Biden inherits damaged economy, with signs of hope emerging

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has inherited a badly damaged economy pulverized by the pandemic, with 10 million fewer jobs than a year ago and as many as one in 6 small businesses shut down.

Yet there are also signs of resilience and recovery that suggest the prospect of a rebound, perhaps a robust one, by the second half of his first year in office. Despite the bleakness of the economic landscape, Biden by most accounts faces a less daunting challenge than he confronted as vice president under Barack Obama more than a decade ago in the depths of the Great Recession.

The hardships inflicted by the pandemic recession have been deep but concentrated in a few extremely

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hard-hit sectors and harshly unequal. Much of the economy, particularly housing and manufacturing, has held up surprisingly well compared with previous recessions. People fortunate enough to keep their jobs — disproportionately affluent Americans — have bulked up their savings. They could be poised to unleash a spending boom later this year once vaccines have been more broadly distributed.

There are also signs that the job market, for all its deep losses, is enduring less permanent harm than it has in the past and might be set up for a fast hiring recovery.

Still, for now, many signs are dreary: Consumers have retrenched, and months of job gains have turned to losses. New applications for unemployment benefits remain shockingly high 10 months since layoffs first spiked last March. And the human toll of the pandemic recession, from depressingly long food-bank lines to apartment evictions, has yet to show much improvement.

All of which helps explain why Biden saw the need last week to propose another mammoth federal rescue aid package — a \$1.9 trillion plan to end what he called “a crisis of deep human suffering.”

Here is a closer look at the economy the 46th president is confronting:

JOBS: MORE LOSSES, LESS SCARRING

The nation has regained more than half the 22 million jobs that were lost to the pandemic in March and April. But hiring has weakened for six straight months. In December, it actually turned negative, with the loss of 140,000 jobs.

Employers may still be cutting jobs because viral cases remain rampant, cold weather is restricting outdoor dining and other activities and consumers are avoiding in-person services, from hotels to airports to retail shops. With the unemployment rate at an elevated 6.7%, a shortage of hiring is prolonging the pain for people out of work.

A major concern for economists is what they call “scarring” in the job market — long-term and permanent job losses that detach people from the job market and diminish their skills and professional connections. This trend tends to make it harder to reabsorb the unemployed into the economy once it recovers.

Here the evidence is mixed: The number of unemployed who say their job losses are permanent — and therefore unlikely to return even when the economy rebounds — has jumped to 3.4 million, more than double the pre-pandemic level. But it appears to be levelling off: The number fell in December and is little changed from August. By comparison, permanent job losses peaked at 6.8 million during the Great Recession in 2008-2009.

And the ranks of those unemployed for 15 weeks or longer has tumbled from more than 8 million in August to 5.5 million last month. Those figures hold out hope that the unemployment rate will fall fairly quickly as growth accelerates.

CONSUMERS PULLING BACK, FOR NOW

The raging pandemic took a fresh toll on the economy over the holiday shopping season, with sales at retail stores falling for three months in a row. Sales at restaurants and bars tumbled 4.5% in December and collapsed by one-fifth for 2020 as a whole.

There are early signs, though, that the \$600 checks for most Americans that were authorized in last month’s rescue aid package are beginning to boost spending. Economists at Bank of America said that spending on their debit and credit cards jumped 9.7% for the week that ended Jan. 9 compared with a year earlier. That was up from a 2% year-over-year increase before the \$600 payments. And the increase was particularly pronounced for those making below \$50,000 a year, who spent 22% more, Bank of America said.

HOUSING SIZZLES FOR THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD ONE

Many Americans who have kept their jobs have capitalized on the new work-from-home culture, becoming first-time homebuyers or moving into larger digs. Builders broke ground in December on the most new homes since 2006. Home sales are running about 25% above year-ago levels. Four-fifths of construction jobs lost in the pandemic have returned, a much faster rebound than employment overall.

The housing boost has also lifted home prices nationwide, though the gains have been uneven. An analysis by housing website Zillow has found that the number of cities with a median home price of at least \$1 million surged 17% in the year ending in November. But nearly three-quarters of those gains occurred in

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subdivisions of nine large coastal metros, such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. That trend has likely contributed to worsening wealth inequality since the pandemic began.

MANUFACTURING IS SPARED THE WORST, FOR ONCE

Though factory output is still recovering from the initial pandemic-induced shutdowns, for once the nation's manufacturing workers aren't among the worst-hit. Manufacturing output rose 0.9% last month, its eighth straight increase. And factories have added jobs for eight months.

In a sign of the industrial economy's health, the Union Pacific railroad said it shipped 3% more volume in the final three months of the year, compared with a year earlier, its first gain since the pandemic. Even so, both manufacturing output and employment remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Manufacturers have benefited from a shift in spending toward goods — cars, electronics, furniture and the like — and away from travel and entertainment. Some of that pattern will likely reverse should the vaccines succeed in conquering the coronavirus.

A WILLING FEDERAL RESERVE

One more potential tailwind for the Biden economy is a Federal Reserve that has made clear that it plans to keep its benchmark short-term interest rate pegged near zero through at least 2023. Chair Jerome Powell has also said the Fed will keep buying \$120 billion in bonds a month until there is "substantial further improvement" in the economy, which most economists expect will last into 2022. The Fed's bond purchases are intended to keep long-term loan rates low to spur borrowing and spending.

That policy marks a key change for the Fed, which many economists think prematurely raised short-term rates in late 2015 as the economy was still improving and employers adding jobs. That rate increase was motivated by concerns that inflation was poised to accelerate as the unemployment rate fell close to 5%. Yet unemployment eventually fell to 3.5%, with inflation nowhere in sight.

Powell and other Fed officials have stressed that they have learned from that mistake and are now much less concerned about higher inflation and more focused on driving unemployment back down to an ultra-low level.

Bernie Sanders spawns splash of memes with inaugural attire

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Wearing mittens made out of recycled materials and a warm winter jacket, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders pulled off a casual inauguration outfit — and vibe — that only he could.

Many people quickly highlighted the 79-year-old independent Vermont senator's look, and created endless memes, from Wednesday's inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, which he said was more about keeping warm than fashion.

"You know in Vermont, we dress warm, we know something about the cold, and we're not so concerned about good fashion, we want to keep warm. And that's what I did today," Sanders told CBS on Wednesday.

People were particularly enthralled with Sanders' mittens, which were made by a Vermont elementary school teacher who has a side business making mittens out of recycled wool.

"I love it that he loves them, and that he wears them," Jen Ellis, an elementary school teacher, told NECN-TV. "And I'm totally honored that he wore them today."

Ellis has never met Sanders. But when her daughter went to a child care center owned by one of his relatives, she was able to slip a pair into Sanders' hands.

"I think people like a heartwarming story — especially now," she said when asked about the all the attention the mittens were getting on social media.

The widespread interest in the mittens prompted Ellis to tweet Wednesday that there were "no more" of the coveted hand warmers.

Sanders has donned the mittens before while running for president in 2020 and in interviews with Vermont journalists, the station reported.

Sanders' inauguration look, including a brown winter jacket made by Burton snowboards, has spawned countless memes since Wednesday including the former presidential candidate on the subway, on the moon, sitting on the couch with the cast of "Friends".

In memes spreading across Indian Country, Sanders is draped with a Pendleton blanket sitting alongside the parade route during a tribal fair, next to the fire during a ceremony and riding in the back of a pickup truck across remote land. Even before inauguration day, he was dubbed "cheii," the Navajo word for "grandfather."

Ryan Leclerc, a hard goods buyer for Onion River Sports in Montpelier, Vermont, said Sanders is more about substance than style. Leclerc noted the senator's inauguration attire emulated what is "great" about the him.

"Those are the mittens you might see when you're sipping cider around a fire. Sanders doesn't care and it's not important to him," Leclerc said.

Can COVID-19 vaccines be mixed and matched?

By The Associated Press undefined

Can COVID-19 vaccines be mixed and matched?

Health officials say both doses should be of the same vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccines rolling out in the United States, the United Kingdom and other parts of the world so far require two shots given a few weeks apart.

In the U.S. where Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being distributed, health officials say the vaccines are not interchangeable. In England where shots by Pfizer and AstraZeneca are available, officials also say the doses should be consistent.

But in the rare event that the same kind isn't available or if it's not known what was given for the first shot, English officials say it's OK to give whichever vaccine is available for the second shot. Since the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines focus on the spike protein that coats the coronavirus, they say a mismatched dose is better than partial protection.

But without any studies, vaccine doses should not be mixed, said Naor Bar-Zeev, a vaccine expert at Johns Hopkins University.

If people do happen to get a different vaccine for their second shot by accident, Bar-Zeev said it is likely "to work fine and likely to be well tolerated," but evidence is needed to be sure.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@AP.org.

Read previous Viral Questions:

Should I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I've had the virus?

If I've already had the coronavirus, can I get it again?

How quickly do I need a second vaccine shot?

Judge gives preliminary OK to \$641M Flint water deal

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — A judge granted preliminary approval Thursday to a \$641 million deal that would benefit thousands of Flint residents who were harmed by lead-contaminated water.

The settlement includes \$600 million from the state of Michigan, although Flint, an area hospital and an engineering firm are also part of the agreement. U.S. District Judge Judith Levy signed off in a 72-page opinion.

"There may be no amount of money that would fully recognize the harm the residents of Flint have experienced, including their anxiety, fear, distrust and anger over the events of the last seven years," Levy said. "Litigation has its benefits but also its limitations, and the preliminary approval of this settlement does not affect or preclude other avenues of redress."

Preliminary approval triggers a monthslong process during which Flint residents can object and pursue their own claims, Levy said. They will have until March 29 to register to participate.

Flint managers appointed by then-Gov. Rick Snyder and regulators in his administration allowed the city

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to use the Flint River in 2014-15 without treating the water to reduce corrosion. As a result, lead in old pipes broke off and flowed through taps.

Separately, experts have blamed the river water for an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease, which led to at least 12 deaths in the Flint area. They believe there wasn't enough chlorine in the water to fight off bacteria.

Snyder, a Republican, was charged last week with two misdemeanor counts of willful neglect of duty in Flint. Eight other people were also charged, including two health department officials who are blamed for the deaths of nine people with Legionnaires'.

The settlement was announced in August by Attorney General Dana Nessel and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, both Democrats, who were elected in 2018 while the litigation was pending.

The agreement makes money available to every Flint child who was exposed to the water, every adult who can show an injury, certain business owners and anyone who paid water bills, Levy said. Flint switched back to a Detroit regional water agency in fall 2015, when Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha publicly reported elevated lead levels in children.

Attorneys representing Flint residents have said 80% of payments will go to people who were under 18 when the river water was used. The estates of people who died from Legionnaires' would qualify for \$300,000 to \$1.5 million.

The judge has not yet determined legal fees.

"At last, the victims of the Flint water crisis no longer have to hope for a day of reckoning," said attorney Corey Stern, who represents 4,000 people. "This settlement promises to deliver restitution for the families, and children most especially, whose lives were senselessly and permanently damaged because they were denied their basic right to safe, clean drinking water."

Follow Ed White at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>

Facebook's oversight board to rule on Trump ban

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Facebook is passing the buck for its indefinite suspension of former president Donald Trump to a quasi-independent oversight board, setting up a major test of the recently established panel.

The social media giant said Thursday that it believes it made the right decision to suspend Trump after he incited his supporters to storm the U.S. Capitol in a deadly assault on Jan. 6. But it said it's referring the matter to the oversight board for what it called an "independent judgment" on upholding the decision.

Facebook's panel is intended to rule on thorny content issues, such as when posts constitute hate speech — or if the decision to ban a world leader was the right one. It is empowered to make binding rulings — that is, ones that can't be overturned by CEO Mark Zuckerberg — on whether posts or ads violate the company's rules. Any other findings will be considered "guidance" by Facebook. The board does not set Facebook policies or decide if the company is doing enough to enforce them in the first place.

Its 20 members, which will eventually grow to 40, include a former prime minister of Denmark, the former editor-in-chief of the Guardian newspaper, along with legal scholars, human rights experts and journalists such as Tawakkol Karman, a Nobel Laureate and journalist from Yemen, and Julie Owono, a digital rights advocate.

The first four board members were directly chosen by Facebook. Those four then worked with Facebook to select additional members. Facebook also pays the board members' salaries.

Twitter, by contrast, permanently banned Trump from its platform. CEO Jack Dorsey defended his company's Trump ban in a philosophical Twitter thread last week, saying that resulting risk to public safety created an "extraordinary and untenable circumstance" for the company.

But he acknowledged that shows of strength like the Trump ban could set dangerous precedents, even calling them a sign of "failure." He suggested that Twitter needs to find ways to avoid coming to have to make such decisions in the first place and lamented the fact that they highlight the extraordinary power

that Twitter and other Big Tech companies can wield without accountability or recourse.

Lilly: Drug can prevent COVID-19 illness in nursing homes

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Drugmaker Eli Lilly said Thursday its antibody drug can prevent COVID-19 illness in residents and staff of nursing homes and other long-term care locations.

It's the first major study to show such a treatment may prevent illness in a group that has been devastated by the pandemic.

Residents and staff who got the drug had up to a 57% lower risk of getting COVID-19 compared to others at the same facility who got a placebo, the drugmaker said. Among nursing home residents only, the risk was reduced by up to 80%.

The study involved more than 1,000 residents and staff at nursing homes and other long-term care locations like assisted living homes. The vast majority tested negative at the start of the study. Some were assigned to get the drug, called bamlanivimab and which is given through an IV, and others got placebo infusions.

The research was conducted with the National Institutes of Health. Results were released in a press release, and the company said it would publish more details in a journal soon.

Among the nearly 300 residents who did not have COVID-19, four later got the disease and died. Lilly said all of them had received the placebo.

The Food and Drug Administration in November allowed emergency use of Lilly antibody drug as a treatment for people ages 12 and older with mild or moderate cases of COVID-19 that do not require hospitalization. It's a one-time treatment.

Lilly said it plans to work with regulators to see about expanding the authorization to prevent and treat COVID-19 in long-term care facilities, where vaccinations are already underway.

Experts have said drugs like Lilly's could serve as a bridge to help manage the virus until vaccines are widely available.

Nursing homes and other long-term care locations have been hard hit by the pandemic. In the United States, they account for less than 1% of the population, but nearly 40% of deaths from COVID-19.

These long-term care locations have been given priority to vaccinate residents and staff with recently authorized COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccinations started last month at locations around the country.

The two vaccines approved for emergency use by Pfizer and Moderna require two doses. Major drugstore chains CVS and Walgreens are giving the shots at nursing homes in nearly all states.

The companies said they expect to finish giving first doses in nursing homes this month. Their vaccination programs in nursing homes are expected to largely wrap up in February and March. Progress has been slower at other long-term locations like assisted living, where residents require less medical care than those at nursing homes.

There will still be a need for Lilly's drug in places like nursing homes even though vaccines are already being distributed there, said WBB Securities President Steve Brozak, who follows the pharmaceutical industry.

But Brozak questioned how long the treatment might be effective with new variants of the virus popping up.

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Twin suicide bombings rock central Baghdad, at least 32 dead

By SAMYA KULLAB and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Twin suicide bombings ripped through a busy market in the Iraqi capital on Thursday, killing at least 32 people and wounding dozens, officials said in what was the first massive bombing in

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years, harkening back to darker days of rampant militant attacks.

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

By sundown, crowds reappeared at the site of the deadly attack, carrying the coffins of the deceased in a show of defiance. Many questioned the timing of the attack, which occurred a day after President Joe Biden was sworn into office. The U.S.-led coalition recently ceased combat activities and is gradually drawing down its troop presence in Iraq, sparking fears of an IS resurgence.

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

Iraq's health minister Hassan Mohammed al-Tamimi said at least 32 people were killed and 110 were wounded in the attack. He said some of the wounded were in serious condition. Iraq's military previously put the number of dead at 28. 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.

At the Vatican, Pope Francis denounced the attack in Baghdad as a "senseless act of brutality" and urged Iraqis to keep working to replace violence with fraternity and peace. The telegram of condolences sent to the Iraqi president was particularly heartfelt, given Francis is due to visit Iraq in early March to try to encourage the country's Christian communities that have been devastated by IS persecution.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the Baghdad attack and appealed to the Iraqi people "to reject any attempts to spread fear and violence aimed at undermining peace, stability and unity," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The U.N. chief called on the government "to ensure that those behind these horrific crimes are swiftly identified and brought to justice," Dujarric said.

Thursday's twin suicide bombings marked the first in three years to target Baghdad's bustling commercial district. 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, a Sunni militant group.

Iraq has seen assaults perpetrated by both the Islamic State group and mostly Shiite 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. For some it brought back painful memories from the height of Iraq's sectarian street wars, when suicide bombings were a near-daily occurrence.

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.

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 writers Murtada Faraj in Baghdad, Nicole Winfield in Rome and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

French victims of child abuse speak out in new #MeToo wave

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — "I was 9. ... It was my father. He raped me until I was 17."

The French government pledged on Thursday to toughen laws on the rape of children after a massive online movement saw hundreds of victims share accounts about sexual abuse within their families.

The move comes in the wake of child abuse accusations involving a prominent French political expert.

France's justice minister said Thursday the government will soon present new legal measures to better protect children, while a draft bill has started being debated at parliament to toughen laws on the rape of minors under 13.

The social media campaign was launched Saturday by activists of the French feminist group #NousToutes in reference to the #MeToo movement that sparked a global debate about sexual harassment and assault.

The #MeTooInceste hashtag overwhelmed French social media in just a few days. In French, the word "inceste" is widely used to refer to any sexual act between members of the same family, including abuse of children, stepchildren or younger siblings.

Hundreds of people shared appalling accounts about how they were sexually abused when they were children:

"I was between 11 and 14. It was my brother. I'm now 57 and still a victim of that past."

"I was 8. Abused by my grandfather."

"Just one amid so many others. I was 6-7-8 year-old, I don't remember."

Tens of thousands of people responded by sharing and commenting under the same hashtag.

Laurent Boyet, 49, was among those who tweeted. A police officer and head of the association Les Papillons ("Butterflies") fighting against child abuse, he published a book in 2017 to tell his story. He said he was raped by his brother, who was 10 years older than him, when he was between 6 and 9.

"I really hope society is going to have the courage to face the problem," he told The Associated Press. "We need to stop looking away."

When he spoke to his mother, over 30 years after the abuse started, Boyet said she answered: "I believe you because I had doubts about it."

"All the signals I had sent her, she got them but did nothing," he recalled.

"In 2021 we cannot keep quiet anymore, we need to take action," he added.

Boyet's association started in September placing mailboxes in schools to allow children to express their distress through letters. Boyet said some of the written notes have led to legal action, including for alleged sexual abuse.

The feminist activist behind the #MeTooInceste campaign, Madeline Da Silva, said "we are convinced that children actually speak out and what's a very big problem is that no one is hearing them."

Even if children don't say the words, they still show signs that they are suffering "and no one is trained to understand them," she regretted.

That's why, Da Silva said, the movement is not only about improving the laws but above all about introducing immediate, child-centered public policies.

"Today we know that when you're training social workers, teachers about prevention of violence, things

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are changing: you're saving lives," she said.

Her #NousToutes group launched a petition urging the government to require systematic training of all people working with children, including teachers, social workers and officials of sports and cultural associations. It was signed Thursday by over 36,000 people, less than two days after it was put online.

The debate about France's response to child abuse within families broke out earlier this month amid accusations involving top political expert Olivier Duhamel. A book written by Duhamel's stepdaughter, Camille Kouchner, accused him of abusing her twin brother during the late 1980s, when the siblings were 13 years old.

Some children protection groups are pushing to introduce statutory rape in law, which would state a legal age below which a child cannot agree to a sexual relationship with an adult.

Under French law, sexual relations between an adult and a minor under 15 are banned. Yet the law accepts the possibility that a minor is capable of consenting to sex, leading to cases where an adult faces a lighter prison sentence for sexual assault than if prosecuted for rape, which is punishable by 20 years in prison.

Many activists are also in favor of removing the statute of limitations, because the trauma is so deep it can take decades for victims to be able to speak out and face their abuser. The law currently provides that minor victims can file complaints until they are aged 48.

The World Health Organization say international studies show that one in five women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged under 18. Experts say sexual abuses are likely to be underestimated amid secrecy often surrounding the issue.

Hard-luck Maryland town gets a \$731.1 million Powerball win

LONACONING, Md. (AP) — The latest jackpot-winning Powerball ticket, worth \$731.1 million, was sold in a struggling coal mining town whose biggest previous claim to fame was being the hometown of baseball Hall of Famer Lefty Grove.

Someone bought it at Coney Market, a convenience store in the Allegany County town of Lonaconing, the Maryland Lottery announced on Thursday. The store will get a \$100,000 bonus for selling the ticket to the fifth-largest lottery prize in U.S. history.

It had been more than four months since anyone won the Powerball, allowing the game's jackpot to grow so large. An even larger Mega Millions jackpot will be up for grabs Friday night.

Just who will collect the Powerball prize may never be known: Maryland is one of the states that allow winners to remain anonymous.

But keeping quiet about such a huge windfall could prove difficult if the ticket was bought by a local. Lonaconing (pronounced LOH-nah-koh-ning) is a town of about 300 families that's well off the beaten track, with a poverty rate of more than 22 percent, well above the national average.

"We're really happy for somebody," Richard Ravenscroft, the store's owner, told The Associated Press by phone. "I can't wait to congratulate the person. I just hope whoever has won it uses it wisely and that other people benefit from it."

The lottery ticket is a big win for a town that has a long history of losses, from the iron furnace that closed in 1855 to the glassworks that were shuttered in the early 1900s, to the coal-mining jobs that virtually disappeared after World War II. Periodic floods along Georges Creek have been devastating, and local streams carry acid from abandoned mines.

Ravenscroft said there is still some strip mining in the area, although that's winding down because of environmental concerns, and the remaining factory, a pulp and paper company, shut down recently after going through a series of buyouts. Another company is coming in that plans to hire about 200 people to make something out of wood chips, he said.

Another positive headline came in 2001, when the town finally got a library after a local fundraising drive. It holds a most valuable player trophy awarded the town's previous biggest winner, Robert Moses Grove, who pitched nine seasons with the Philadelphia Athletics and eight with the Red Sox. Lefty Grove was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1947, and died in 1975.

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Coney Market, named for what locals call their town, is in a century-old building along Maryland's Route 36, which was designated a Coal Heritage Route in an attempt to attract tourists. It draws its share of regulars, who can eat hamburgers and submarine sandwiches in a small seating area.

Ravenscroft wants to expand the store's kitchen and serve real meals, like mashed potatoes and gravy. Perhaps the bonus can help with that.

The Powerball jackpot came only a day after nobody won the \$970 million Mega Millions prize, the third-largest prize in U.S. history.

Winning numbers for Wednesday night's Powerball drawing were: 40-53-60-68-69 and a Powerball of 22.

It was the first time both lottery jackpots topped \$700 million. The biggest prize was a \$1.58 billion Powerball jackpot won by three people in 2016.

No one had won either of the jackpots since mid-September, allowing the prizes to grow steadily for months. Such a long stretch without a winner is rare but also reflects the incredibly small odds of winning — 1 in 292.2 million for Powerball and 1 in 302.5 million for Mega Millions.

Maryland lottery director Gordon Medenica told the AP he's not surprised when people overcome the odds and hit a giant jackpot, because thousands of people win smaller prizes after every drawing. The chances of winning something are about one in 25.

"The fact is, people win all the time. Clearly the focus is on the big jackpot and that's what motivates people to play the game, but they come back and keep playing because there are so many other ways to win," Medenica said.

The prizes listed are for winners who choose an annuity option, paid over 30 years. Most winners opt for cash prizes, which for Mega Millions would be \$716.3 million and \$546.8 million for Wednesday's Powerball. After the Powerball win, the new jackpot has a \$15 million cash value.

Prizes are subject to federal taxes, and most states take a cut as well.

Mega Millions and Powerball are played in 45 states as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Powerball also is offered in Puerto Rico.

'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 past 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 long-standing 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 such as 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

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judges appointed by Trump.

Cruz on Wednesday acknowledged Biden's victory but refused, when pressed, to describe it as legitimate. "He won the election. He is the president. I just came from his inauguration," Cruz said 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 considering a White House run.

In the wake of the Capitol riot Jan. 6, a small but notable faction of high-profile Republicans is taking a stronger stance against Trump or seeking distance 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 has retreated to his South Florida club, 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 such as 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. Peter Meijer, said he bought body armor to protect himself from a wave of threats from Trump supporters.

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

"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

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 Mead Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming, contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Frank Eathorne is the GOP chairman in Wyoming, not Montana.

Dog spent days outside Turkish hospital waiting for owner

ISTANBUL (AP) — A devoted dog has spent days waiting outside a hospital in northern Turkey where her sick owner was receiving treatment.

The pet, Boncuk (Bon-DJUK), which means bead, followed the ambulance that transported her owner, Cemal Senturk, to hospital in the Black Sea city of Trabzon on Jan. 14. She then made daily visits to the facility, private news agency DHA reported on Wednesday.

Senturk's daughter, Aynur Egeli, said she would take Boncuk home but the dog would repeatedly run off and return to the hospital.

Hospital security guard Muhammet Akdeniz told DHA: "She comes every day around 9 a.m. and waits until nightfall. She doesn't go in."

"When the door opens she pokes her head inside," he said.

On Wednesday, Boncuk was finally reunited with Senturk when he was pushed outside in a wheelchair for a brief meeting with his dog.

"She's very used to me. And I miss her, too, constantly," he told DHA.

Senturk was discharged from the hospital later on Wednesday and returned home with Boncuk.

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

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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, defended the report, saying it calls for "a return to the unifying ideals stated in the Declaration of Independence." He said in a statement that the report "wasn't written for academic historians but for the American people, and I encourage them to read it for themselves."

One of the group's chairs, Carol Swain, a former law and political science professor at Vanderbilt University, said that if the commission had been allowed to continue its work, it would have added more members and issued a report with more than just "the highlights."

"Professional historians take themselves too seriously," she said in an interview. "I see the criticism as being ideologically driven."

In documents announcing Biden's executive order, administration officials said the panel "sought to erase America's history of racial injustice."

The American Historical Association condemned the report, 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 said 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 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,"

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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.

After the report was removed from a White House website, some of its authors moved to make it available on conservative websites. In an opinion piece published by the Heritage Foundation, one of the commissioners, Mike Gonzalez, said the members "intend to continue meeting and fulfilling the charges of our two-year remit."

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."

Woman accused of helping steal Pelosi laptop freed from jail

By MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — A Pennsylvania woman facing charges that she helped steal a laptop from the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during the attack on the U.S. Capitol will be released from jail, a federal judge decided Thursday.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Martin Carlson directed that Riley June Williams be released into the custody of her mother, with travel restrictions, and instructed her to appear Monday in federal court in Washington to continue her case.

"The gravity of these offenses is great," Carlson told Williams. "It cannot be overstated."

Williams, 22, of Harrisburg, is accused of theft, obstruction and trespassing, as well as violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds. Carlson noted Williams has no prior criminal record.

The FBI says an unidentified former romantic partner of Williams tipped them off that she appeared in video from the Jan. 6 rioting and the tipster claimed she had hoped to sell the computer to Russian intelligence.

Williams' defense lawyer, Lori Ulrich, told Carlson the tipster is a former boyfriend who had been abusive to Williams and that "his accusations are overstated."

Video from the riot shows a woman matching Williams' description exhorting invaders to go "upstairs, upstairs, upstairs" during the attack, which briefly disrupted certification of President Joe Biden's electoral victory.

"It is regrettable that Ms. Williams took the president's bait and went inside the Capitol," Ulrich told the judge.

Williams surrendered to face charges on Monday. She was expected to leave the county jail in Harrisburg later Thursday, and will be on electronic monitoring to await trial.

She did not respond to questions as a federal marshal led her in handcuffs out of the courtroom.

Carlson made direct reference to the attack on the Capitol, saying a howling crowd tried unsuccessfully to prevent the peaceful transition of power.

"It has been honored by generations of Americans for 232 years," Carlson said. "It has become so commonplace that we often think very little of it."

In adding the theft-related charges on Tuesday, a Virginia-based FBI agent said Williams was recorded on closed-circuit cameras in the Capitol going into and coming out of Pelosi's office.

The agent's affidavit said a cellphone video that was likely shot by Williams shows a man's gloved hand lifting an HP laptop from a table, and the caption read, "they got the laptop."

Pelosi's deputy chief of staff, Drew Hammill, has said a laptop used only for presentations was taken from a conference room. The current location of the computer has not been disclosed in court documents,

and was not discussed in court on Thursday.

French doctor who made Down discovery closer to sainthood

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The French doctor who discovered the genetic basis of Down syndrome but spent his career advocating against abortion as a result of prenatal diagnosis has taken his first major step to possible sainthood.

Pope Francis on Thursday approved the “heroic virtues” of Dr. Jerome Lejeune, who lived from 1926-1994 and was particularly esteemed by St. John Paul II for his anti-abortion stance.

The papal recognition of Lejeune’s virtues means that he is considered “venerable” by the Catholic Church. The Vatican must now confirm a miracle attributed to his intercession for him to be beatified, and a second one for him to be declared a saint.

According to his official biography, Lejeune in 1958 discovered the existence of an extra chromosome on the 21st pair during a study of the chromosomes of a child. It was the first time scientists had found a link between an intellectual disability and a chromosomal anomaly; the condition is now known as trisomy 21.

“Although the results of his research should have helped medicine to advance toward a cure, they are often used to identify children carrying these diseases as early as possible, usually with the aim of terminating pregnancy,” the Jerome Lejeune Foundation wrote in its biography.

“As soon as the pro-abortion laws were drafted in western countries, Lejeune began advocating for the protection of the unborn with Down syndrome: he gave hundreds of conferences and interviews across the globe in defense of life,” the group said.

John Paul in 1974 made Lejeune a member of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences think tank and later named him the first chairman of the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Holy See’s main bioethics advisory commission.

John Paul visited Lejeune’s grave during the Paris World Youth Day in 1997.

Though John Paul made the church’s firm opposition to abortion a hallmark of his quarter-century papacy, Francis too has strongly denounced what he calls today’s “throwaway culture” that considers the weak, disabled or sick disposable. He has likened abortion to hiring a “hit man” to take care of a problem.

US jobless claims decline to a still-high 900,000

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell slightly last week to 900,000, still a historically high level that points to ongoing job cuts in a raging pandemic.

The Labor Department’s report Thursday underscored that President Joe Biden has inherited an economy that faltered this winter as virus cases spiked, cold weather restricted dining and federal rescue aid expired. The government said 5.1 million Americans are continuing to receive state jobless benefits, down from 5.2 million in the previous week. That suggests that while some of the unemployed are finding jobs, others are likely using up their state benefits and transitioning to separate extended-benefit programs.

More than 10 million people are receiving aid from those extended programs, which now offer up to 50 weeks of benefits, or from a new program that provides benefits to contractors and the self-employed. All told, nearly 16 million people were on unemployment in the week that ended Jan. 2, the latest period for which data is available.

“Unemployment claims continue to show a job market unable to progress further as long as COVID-19 remains in the driver’s seat,” said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at Glassdoor. “While the vaccine offers a light at the end of the tunnel, we’re still far away from a complete reopening of the economy that could drive rehiring and stem further layoffs.”

New viral infections have begun to slow after months of relentless increases, though they remain high and are averaging about 200,000 a day. The number of deaths in the United States from the pandemic

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that erupted 10 months ago has surpassed 400,000.

Economists say one factor that has likely increased jobless claims in the past two weeks is a government financial aid package that was signed into law in late December. Among other things, it provided a \$300-a-week federal unemployment benefit on top of regular state jobless aid. The new benefit, which runs through mid-March, may be encouraging more Americans to apply for aid.

Once vaccines become more widely distributed, economists expect growth to accelerate in the second half of the year as Americans unleash pent-up demand for travel, dining out and visiting movie theaters and concert halls. Such spending should, in theory, boost hiring and start to regain the nearly 10 million jobs lost to the pandemic.

But for now, the economy is losing ground. Retail sales have fallen for three straight months. Restrictions on restaurants, bars and some stores, along with a reluctance of most Americans to shop, travel and eat out, have led to sharp spending cutbacks. Revenue at restaurants and bars plunged 21% in 2020.

The loss of so many jobs has meant hardship for millions of American households. In December, employers cut 140,000 positions, the first loss since April and the sixth straight month in which hiring has weakened. The unemployment rate remained stuck at a still-high 6.7%.

Yet there are signs that the \$900 billion federal aid package enacted late last month may have begun to cushion the damage, in large part thanks to \$600 checks being sent to most adults. The government began distributing the payments at the end of last month.

Those payments have likely helped drive an increase in spending on debit and credit cards issued by Bank of America, economists at the bank wrote last week. Total card spending jumped 9.7% for the week that ended Jan. 9 compared with a year earlier. That was up from a 2% year-over-year increase before the stimulus payments, Bank of America said.

Last week, Biden unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan that would provide, among other things, \$1,400 checks for most Americans, which, on top of the \$600 checks already being distributed, would bring the total to \$2,000 per adult.

The new plan would also make available \$400 a week in federal benefits for jobless Americans and extend a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September. Biden's proposal will require congressional approval, and some congressional Republicans have already expressed reservations about its size.

Experts: 15 more days to reach trapped China mine workers

BEIJING (AP) — It will take at least 15 more days to get through a massive amount of debris and reach miners already trapped for 11 days since an explosion in a gold mine in eastern China, authorities said Thursday.

The mine shaft is blocked 350 meters (1,000 feet) below the surface by 70 tons of debris that extends down another 100 meters (330 feet), the Yantai city government said in a statement on its social media account.

"Based on expert evaluations, the extent of the blockage ... is well out of expectation," the statement said.

One worker has died from head injuries in the explosion, state media said earlier Thursday. Of the remaining 21, rescuers have established contact with 10, one is reportedly alive in a nearby chamber, and the status of the other 10 is unknown.

The deceased worker had been in a coma. Two others are said to be in poor health. Rescuers have delivered food, medicine and other supplies to the group of 11 as they work to remove debris and improve ventilation.

The state media reports said exhaustion has set in among some of the workers since the Jan. 10 explosion ripped through the mine that was under construction in Qixia, a jurisdiction under Yantai in Shandong province.

Rescuers were attempting to clear cages and other debris blocking the main shaft while drilling other shafts for communication, ventilation and possibly to lift workers to the surface. Boring has reached depths

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of around 700 meters (about 2,000 feet), the reports said.

Mine managers have been detained for waiting more than 24 hours before reporting the accident, the cause of which has not been announced.

Increased supervision has improved safety in China's mining industry, which used to average 5,000 deaths per year. Yet demand for coal and precious metals continues to prompt corner-cutting, and two accidents in Chongqing last year killed 39 miners.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 22, the 22nd day of 2021. There are 343 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Jan. 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its Roe v. Wade decision, declared a nationwide constitutional right to abortion. Former President Lyndon B. Johnson died at his Texas ranch at age 64.

On this date:

In 1901, Britain's Queen Victoria died at age 81 after a reign of 63 years; she was succeeded by her eldest son, Edward VII.

In 1907, the Richard Strauss opera "Salome" made its American debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York; its racy content sparked outrage and forced cancellation of additional performances.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces began landing at Anzio, Italy.

In 1970, the first regularly scheduled commercial flight of the Boeing 747 began in New York and ended in London some 6 1/2 hours later.

In 1973, George Foreman upset reigning heavyweight champion Joe Frazier with a second round TKO in their match in Kingston, Jamaica.

In 1987, Pennsylvania treasurer R. Budd Dwyer, convicted of defrauding the state, proclaimed his innocence at a news conference before pulling out a gun, placing the barrel in his mouth and shooting himself to death in front of horrified onlookers.

In 1995, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy died at the Kennedy compound at Hyannis Port, Mass., at age 104.

In 1997, the Senate confirmed Madeleine Albright as the nation's first female secretary of state.

In 1998, Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) pleaded guilty in Sacramento, California, to being the Unabomber responsible for three deaths and 29 injuries in return for a sentence of life in prison without parole.

In 2006, Kobe Bryant scored 81 points, the second-highest in NBA history, in the Los Angeles Lakers' 122-104 victory over the Toronto Raptors.

In 2007, a double car bombing of a predominantly Shiite commercial area in Baghdad killed 88 people. Iran announced it had barred 38 nuclear inspectors on a United Nations list from entering the country in apparent retaliation for U.N. sanctions imposed the previous month.

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp within a year. (The facility remained in operation as lawmakers blocked efforts to transfer terror suspects to the United States; President Donald Trump later issued an order to keep the jail open and allow the Pentagon to bring new prisoners there.)

Ten years ago: Drawing inspiration from a revolt in Tunisia, thousands of Yemenis demanded the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh (AH'-lee ahb-DUH'-luh sah-LEH') in a noisy demonstration that appeared to be the first large-scale public challenge to the strongman. (He stepped down as president in 2012.)

Five years ago: North Korea said it had detained Otto Warmbier, a university student from Ohio, for what the authoritarian nation called a "hostile act." (Warmbier was later sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labor; he'd said he had tried to steal a propaganda banner as a trophy for an acquaintance. Warmbier died in 2017, shortly after he returned to the U.S. in a coma and showing apparent signs of torture while in custody.) California Gov. Jerry Brown rejected parole for a third time for Bruce Davis, a follower of cult

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leader Charles Manson.

One year ago: Chinese health authorities urged people in the city of Wuhan to avoid crowds and public gatherings after warning that a new viral illness that had infected hundreds of people and caused at least nine deaths could spread further. Health officials in Washington state said they were actively monitoring 16 people who'd come in close contact with a traveler to China, the first U.S. resident known to be infected with the virus. In opening arguments at President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, House Democrats appealed to skeptical Republican senators to oust Trump from office to "protect our democracy." In an NBA debut that had been delayed three months by knee surgery, Zion Williamson, the league's top draft pick, scored 22 points for the New Orleans Pelicans, but the Pelicans lost 121-117 to the San Antonio Spurs.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Piper Laurie is 89. Celebrity chef Graham Kerr (TV: "The Galloping Gourmet") is 87. Author Joseph Wambaugh is 84. Singer Steve Perry is 72. Country singer-musician Teddy Gentry (Alabama) is 69. Movie director Jim Jarmusch is 68. Actor John Wesley Shipp is 66. Hockey Hall of Famer Mike Bossy is 64. Actor Linda Blair is 62. Actor Diane Lane is 56. Actor and rap DJ Jazzy Jeff is 56. Celebrity chef Guy Fieri is 53. Actor Olivia d'Abo is 52. Actor Katie Finneran is 50. Actor Gabriel Macht is 49. Actor Balthazar Getty is 46. Actor Christopher Kennedy Masterson is 41. Jazz singer Lizz Wright is 41. Pop singer Willa Ford is 40. Actor Beverley Mitchell is 40. Rock singer-musician Ben Moody is 40. Actor Kevin Sheridan is 39. Actor-singer Phoebe Strole is 38. Rapper Logic is 31. Tennis player Alizé Cornet (uh-LEEZ' kohr-NAY') is 31. Actor Sami Gayle is 25.