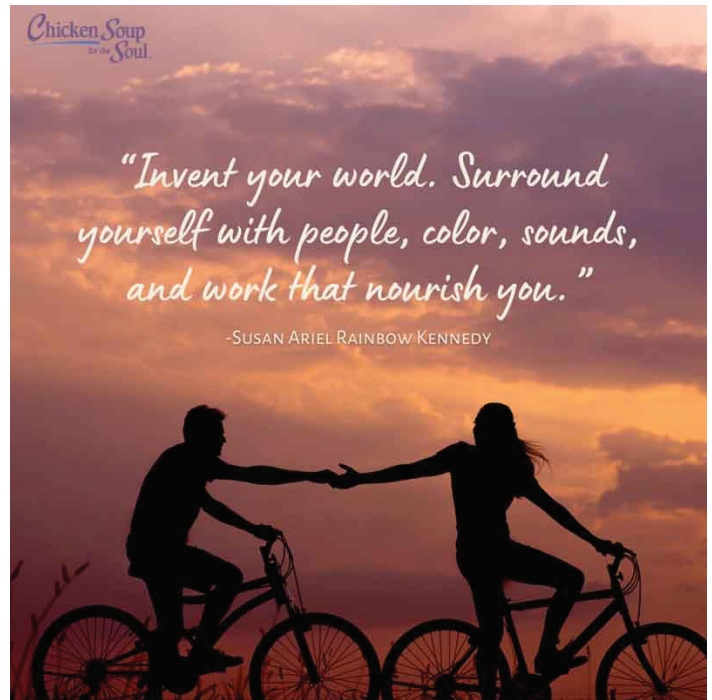


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Schedule

Sat., Jan. 23

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

Mon., Jan. 25

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

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton Area girls win, boys lose to Clark/Willow Lake

Groton Area girls hosted Clark/Willow Lake where the varsity team won and the junior varsity team lost; and then the boys traveled to Clark where the seventh grade boys and C team boys won and then the junior varsity and varsity teams lost.

Girls JV: Clark 23, Groton 7

Clark/Willow Lake jumped out to a 13-0 lead before Groton Area scores its first basket with 3:31 left in the first half. The Cyclones went on to win, 23-7. Jaedyn Penning had four points while Laila Roberts had two and Elizabeth Flihs one.

Musonda Kabwe led Clark/Willow Lake with nine points followed by Madison Burke with eight, and Haylee Tormanen, Medina Denoyer and Katelynn Merkel each had two points.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra.

Varsity Girls: Groton 34, Clark 33

Groton Area never trailed and the Cyclones never threatened as the Lady Tigers won the varsity game, 45-33. Groton Area led at the quarterstops at 11-5, 25-11 and 32-21.

Gracie Alyssa Thaler led the Tigers with 13 points followed by Brooke Gengerke with 11, Gracie Traphagen nine, Allyssa Locke eight and Aspen Johnson and Sydney Leicht each had two points. Thaler made two three-pointers while Gengerke and Traphagen each made one.

Groton Area made 13 of 32 two-pointers for 41 percent, four of 15 three-pointers for 27 percent, Traphagen had nine of the team's 31 rebounds, Thaler had three of the team's assists, and Locke had three of the team's eight steals. Groton Area had 14 turnovers and 10 team fouls.

Maggie Hovde and Jada Burke each had eight points for the Cyclones followed by Charity Kabwe and Alicia Vig with five each, Chayla Vig had three and Haylee Tormanen and Musonda Kabwe each had two points. Clark/Willow Lake made 13 of 50 field goals for 26 percent, was two of two from the line, had 11 turnovers and 16 team fouls.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Sponsors: Bierman Farm Sales, John Sieh Agency, Milbrandt Enterprises, Harr Motors (Bary Keith), Locke Electric, Groton Vet Clinic, Allied Climate Professionals (Kevin Nehls) SD Army National Guard (Brent Wienk) Bahr Spray Foam, Jark Real Estate and ThunderSeed (John Wheeting).

Groton Area is now 4-6 and Clark/Willow Lake is 3-6.

Boys 7th: Groton 35, Clark 27

The seventh grade boys team defeated Clark/Willow Lake, 36-27. The Cyclones led, 17-16 at half time.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique, which will be opening soon in downtown Groton.

Keegen Tracy led the Tigers with 15 points followed by Ryder Johnson with nine, Logan Warrington eight and JD Schwan and Gage Sippel each had two points. Tracy and Johnson each made two three-pointers.

Boys C: Groton 39, Clark 30

Groton Area won the C game, 39-30. After a tie at one, the Tigers never trailed, leading at the quarterstops at 14-11, 24-18 and 34-25.

Taylor Diegel led the Tigers with 11 points followed by Logan Ringgenberg with 10, Cade Larson six, Colby Dunker five, Holden Sippel four and Braxton Imrie three. Diegel made two three-pointers and Imrie made one.

Ryder Jutunen led Clark/Willow Lake with 13 points followed by Tyson Huber with eight, Jack Helkenn six and Aaron Zemlicka two.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Kyle and Tyhe Gerlach.

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Boys JV: Clark 37, Groton 24

Groton Area went scoreless for nearly 10 minutes while the Cyclones made 13 unanswered points to cruise to a 37-24 win in the junior varsity game.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Marilyn and Jerry Hearnen from Arizona grandparents of Wyatt Hearnen.

The lead changed hands five times and it was tied twice early in the game. Groton Area had a 12-10 lead with 4:22 left in the first quarter and the Cyclones then took a 23-12 lead with less than three minutes to go in the third quarter.

Wyatt Hearnen led the Tigers with 12 points while Favian Sanchez had five, Colby Dunker four and Cole Simon three. Hearnen made two three-pointers and Sanchez made one. Groton Area was one of five from the line and Clark/Willow Lake was six of nine. Noah Boykin led the Cyclones with 16 points while Kaplan Felberg had nine, Tate Burke six and Mitchell Larson, Cole Brenden and Wyatt Anderson each had two points.

Boys Varsity: Clark 48, Groton 43

Clark/Willow Lake staged off a late rally by Groton Area to post a 48-43 win over the Tigers.

Clark/Willow Lake opened up a 14-4 lead at the end of the first quarter and held a 16-point lead at half time, 27-11. The Cyclones still led by 15, 36-15, at the end of the third quarter.

Groton Area staged a come-back in the fourth quarter, led by Jayden Zak's 11 fourth-quarter points. It was 43-40 with 1:44 left in the game and the Tigers had a chance to tie the game, but Clark/Willow Lake would hang on to win.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Sponsors: Bierman Farm Sales, John Sieh Agency, Milbrandt Enterprises, Harr Motors (Bary Keith), Blocker Construction, Groton Vet Clinic, Allied Climate Professionals (Kevin Nehls) SD Army National Guard (Brent Wienk) Bahr Spray Foam, Jark Real Estate and ThunderSeed (John Wheeting).

Jayden Zak led the Tigers with 11 points followed by Tristan Traphagen with 10, Wyatt Hearnene eight, Tate Larson six, Lane Tietz four and Cole Simon and Jacob Zak with two each.

Groton Area made 13 percent of its shots in the first quarter, 30 percent in the second quarter, 50 percent in the third quarter and 42 percent in the fourth quarter. The Cyclones shot 43 percent in the first quarter, 50 percent in the second quarter, 44 percent in the third quarter and 50 percent in the fourth quarter.

For the game, Groton Area made 16 of 39 two-pointers for 41 percent, was two of 13 in three-pointers for 15 percent, was five of 14 from the line for 33 percent, Traphagen had nine of Groton Area's 21 rebounds, Larson had four of the team's 12 assists and Jayden Zak had two of the team's five steals. Groton Area had six turnovers and 16 team fouls.

Clark/Willow Lake was led by Kalab Marx with 18 points followed by Noah Boykin with 11, Jordan 10, Tyler O'Neill four, Trey Huber three and Cole Brenden two. Clark/Willow Lake made 18 of 39 field goals for 46 percent, was seven of 14 from the line for 50 percent, had 12 turnovers and 12 team fouls.

In three-pointers, Jayden Zak had two for Groton Area, and for Clark/Willow Lake, Boykin had two while Jordan, Marx and Huber each had one.

Groton Area is 7-2 and Clark/Willow Lake is 4-3.

- Paul Kosel

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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Allyssa Locke
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Brooke Gengerke
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Alyssa Thaler
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Elizabeth Fliehs
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)

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Laila Roberts
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Kennedy Hansen
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Allyssa Locke
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)



Brooke Gengerke
(Photo by Benjamin Higgins)

#334 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today looks about the way yesterday looked. We're up to 24,872,700 total cases in the US, 0.8% more than yesterday. We'll be over 25 million tomorrow unless a weekend miracle happens. There were 196,700 new cases reported today. This seven-day average continues to decline, which is a hopeful sign. Hospitalizations are off the record again today for the thirteenth consecutive day. This number continues to fall, another helpful trend.

While things seem to have leveled off in general, there are parts of the country where there are serious and growing outbreaks. Virginia has some of the highest new-case rates of the pandemic; South Carolina and Texas are dealing with very high numbers as well. We'll watch as various states begin to loosen restrictions again; if people go crazy and ignore precautions, we could see new surges.

We have epidemiologists who believe our case numbers have peaked, although we remain alert to the effects of these new, more infectious variants. Seven-day new-case averages have dropped by about a quarter in the past 10 days and test positivity has declined as well, although community transmission remains very, very high. The remaining fear is that one or more of these new variants is going to create a new spike. It will probably take weeks to months for the number of sick people to fall significantly: Michael T. Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and a member of President Biden's coronavirus advisory board, told the New York Times he believes the next three months could be "the worst part of the pandemic," adding, "I hope I'm dead wrong." Yeah, I do too, but I wouldn't bet on it; Osterholm is one of the most respected infectious disease experts in the nation. Estimates for when we're going to see worsening again range from late February to late March; much depends on what we do in the way of precautions.

Meanwhile, deaths are still at very high numbers and will be for a while. There were 3920 deaths reported today, and we're at 413,917, which is 1.0% more than yesterday. Kentucky reported a record number of deaths yesterday. Even as we vaccinate the most vulnerable, a new surge created by these new variants could run the deaths numbers up again just from sheer volume of cases.

As things stand, we can expect deaths to decline at some rather near point as we vaccinate nursing home residents; since they account for around 40 percent of deaths, getting the pandemic under control there is bound to help. It is also thought that, as the burden eases on hospitals, there will be fewer cases and more time to give optimal care. A study from the Veterans Administration found that patients were twice as likely to die in ICUs stretched to capacity compared to those at more normal census levels. There are some indications the next decline might be the last one given the declines are being seen across the country, not just in a few places with large populations. There is also some evidence we are less on the move lately, maybe slowing down transmission. It could be that, if we can vaccinate fast enough and enough people take vaccine, we might be able to put this virus into a permanent decline. We can hope.

There is work underway to test vaccines in mink; two companies have produced vaccine and are seeking licensing from the US Department of Agriculture. These are vaccines roughly similar to the human one in development and testing by Novavax, a protein subunit vaccine that is produced in insect cells infected by a baculovirus engineered to contain the gene for spike protein. Those infected cells produce spike proteins structured into spikes, just as they would be on the surface of the coronavirus. These get harvested and assembled into nanoparticles (very tiny particles) shaped a lot like a coronavirus, but incapable of replicating or causing disease. Those are what ends up in the vaccine, along with an adjuvant consisting of saponins, soap-like molecules which promote the immune response in the vaccinated person. (For a refresher on adjuvants, a subject that's going to come up a lot as more vaccines hit the market, see my Update #166 posted August 7 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3846639405352437>.) This mink vaccine also uses insect cells to produce spike protein, but in this vaccine, the proteins are attached to a harmless virus that enters host cells and releases its protein payload, which moves to the cell membrane to be presented on the cell's surface, where it stimulates the immune system from there.

Now I know minks are cute and cuddly-looking (although I'd beware of those sharp teeth), but why are

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we investing in vaccine for animals when so many people so desperately need vaccination? Well, there is an industry in peril here, but lots of people don't really approve of this industry, so they might think we shouldn't bother—sort of good riddance. This would be a very short-sighted position to take.

One reason there is concern is that there are a whole lot of mink around the world, and they live in proximity to the people who care for them. The virus spreads like wildfire among them. And, as we've discussed many times just lately (most recently just a couple of days ago when I referred those interested in more information to my Update #278 posted November 27 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4210859298930444>), more transmissions means more mutations, and more mutations means more chances for a mutation to arise that is real trouble not just for mink, but for any people who might catch it from the mink. So we have a vested interest in eliminating transmission among mink, whatever you think of the fur trade.

Another even greater concern is that all members of the weasel family are susceptible to this virus, not just commercially-raised mink. At least two mink have escaped from mink farms in the US, and one wild mink has tested positive, probably as a result of exposure to these escapees. There is real concern that this virus stands a chance of becoming established in wild populations. If that happens, these populations can serve as a reservoir in which it can spread and mutate to its heart's content and then reemerge, potentially in a far more virulent or transmissible form, to infect humans all over again. I don't know about you, but I am decidedly not in there for a second pandemic with this virus. Once was far more than enough for me.

And on the subject of vaccines, where are we with ones for humans? Here's a round-up of the near-term outlook for the US.

The likely next company to seek emergency use authorization for a vaccine is Johnson & Johnson's Janssen division, which is the vaccine-producing part of the company. This is a nonreplicating viral vector vaccine that uses a modified cold virus, an adenovirus, to get the vaccine's active ingredient into your cells. The way in which this adenovirus has been modified is to make unable to replicate, so it can't make you sick. It can, however, convey a reverse-engineered DNA copy of the coronavirus's genes for that spike (S) protein everyone seems to be targeting. Your cells use those DNA instructions to make the protein and present it on their surface, where your immune system discovers it and goes to town on it. This one's apparently just a couple of weeks from sending data to the FDA for a preliminary analysis before the Vaccines and Related Biologic Products Advisory Committee does its work. We should be a little bit familiar with this process since we watched it play out twice just last month. (If you need a quick review, have a look at my Update #288 posted December 7 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4240035699346137>. This vaccine would be a huge step up for the reason that it requires only one dose, and everyone agrees it will be easier to supply enough for more people and easier to fully immunize those people with a one-dose regimen. It would be a big boost to our vaccination program.

Oxford/AstraZeneca's candidate has been authorized in many countries already, but there were regulatory hold-ups with its phase 3 trials in the US due to some safety concerns I never really understood—not that I think there was anything wrong with pausing for those concerns, only that I did not discover the nature of the concerns. This is also a nonreplicating viral vector vaccine carrying viral S protein genes as DNA reverse engineered from the viral genes, very similar in its action to the Janssen candidate. The viral vector in question is another adenovirus, this one isolated from chimpanzees. The US trials for this candidate resumed some time ago after the FDA's concerns were resolved, and so we're waiting for sufficient data to enable making a call about efficacy. That is expected to happen some time in March with an EUA application by the end of the month. This is a two-dose vaccine candidate with a four to twelve week interval between doses.

We already discussed the Novavax candidate above when we talked about vaccinating mink. This phase 3 trial began in the US in December. The company says it expects results in the first quarter of this year and will, if all goes well, be seeking EUA as soon as possible after the data set is complete. This protein subunit vaccine candidate calls for two doses, three weeks apart.

My final thought for you today is a bit off the path I've laid over these many weeks and months, more of a reflection on where we've been and where we are today. When I was in college taking a graduate

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course called Molecular and Microbial Genetics, I was studying a field in its infancy. Scientists were just starting to sequence DNA using a laborious method that involved all of these steps that called for mixing and incubating and pouring off—and then doing that again and again and again just for a tiny step forward. None of this work was aimed at solving some specific problem; it was aimed simply at finding out. Because we were interested. Because it was fascinating work. Because of pure curiosity. A lot of money got spent doing that work. Some years into my career (1990), the Human Genome Project began with the stated goal to sequence the entire human genome within 15 years. It was an audacious project. Budget was \$3 billion.

The Human Genome Project finished early and under budget: 2003 and \$2.7 billion. It was a remarkable achievement. Now you can get your DNA sequenced for a few hundred dollars. The actual lab work takes less time than lunch break. And that laid the groundwork for a bunch of stuff—including having a vaccine designed against this virus last January already.

Seriously: A Chinese scientist released the entire genome for this SARS-CoV-2 virus on January 10 (and got into a world of trouble with his government for that). A group of scientists at Moderna spent the weekend designing a vaccine. They had it finished up on Monday, the 13th. By the time the first US death was announced in late February, they had manufactured enough for trials and shipped it off to the NIH.

The reason they could do this so quickly was that the groundwork was laid with investment in basic research that started way back in the '70s—and even before, research that cost a bundle and didn't at the time have any discernible purpose or real-world application. Never let anyone convince you that basic research wastes money. You never know when something you learned "just because" might save a bunch of lives. Maybe yours. Or mine. Including research for which the purpose is obscure at the time you do it. Everyone's on board with finding a cure for cancer or making babies healthier, but it's harder to make the case for research that we can't see directly leading to that kind of outcome—research to find things out just because we're interested. That's what the early DNA sequencing procedures were about back when I was a wide-eyed college kid. No one then knew they would give us the tools to fight back a world-wide plague, and yet here we are.

As bad as this is—and it's bad—there is no time in history that would have been a better time for this, and there are a great, great many which would have been considerably worse. So chin up: There are some really smart people who have our backs.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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Jan. 22nd 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: +319 (106,721 total) Positivity Rate: 8.1%

Total Tests: 3930 (848,541 total)

Total Persons Tested: 962 (395,477 total)

Hospitalized: +26 (6159 total) 177 currently hospitalized (-8)

Avera St. Luke's: 7 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Sanford Aberdeen: 2 (-1) COVID-19 Occupied beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ICU Beds, 0 (-0) COVID-19 ventilators.

Deaths: +11 (1684 total)

Female: 9, Male: 2

Age Groups: 40s=1, 60s=2, 70s=2, 80+=6

Counties: Beadle-1, Clay-1, Davison-1, Fall River-1, Gregory-1, Hughes-1, Meade-1, Pennington-2, Todd-1, Tripp-1.

Recovered: +304 (100,942 total)

Active Cases: +1 (4090)

Percent Recovered: 94.6%

Vaccinations: +6739 (69104)

Vaccinations Completed: +3202 (14487)

Brown County Vaccinations: +509 (3226) 615 (+347) completed

Beadle (39) +0 positive, +1 recovered (62 active cases)

Brookings (32) +12 positive, +19 recovered (217 active cases)

Brown (75): +14 positive, +26 recovered (185 active cases)

Clark (4): +0 positive, +2 recovered (5 active cases)

Clay (14): +5 positive, +5 recovered (65 active cases)

Codington (73): +4 positive, +1 recovered (154 active cases)

Davison (55): +8 positive, +0 recovered (98) active cases)

Day (23): +3 positive, +2 recovered (24 active cases)

Edmunds (5): +2 positive, +5 recovered (32 active cases)

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

Grant (36): +14 positive, +3 recovered (49 active cases)

Hanson (4): +0 positive, +0 recovered (11 active cases)

Hughes (31): +11 positive, +2 recovered (105 active cases)

Lawrence (35): +2 positive, +7 recovered (65 active cases)

Lincoln (70): +14 positive, +13 recovered (278 active cases)

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

McCook (22): +1 positive, +2 recovered (18 active cases)

McPherson (4): +3 positive, +1 recovery (29 active case)

Minnehaha (321): +84 positive, +59 recovered (963 active cases)

Pennington (165): +42 positive, +51 recovered (465 active cases)

Potter (3): +4 positive, +2 recovered (22 active cases)

Roberts (34): +4 positive, +4 recovered (46 active cases)

Spink (24): +0 positive, +2 recovered (27 active cases)

Walworth (14): +3 positive, +4 recovered (42 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Jan. 22:

- 3.4% rolling 14-day positivity
- 196 new positives
- 6,260 susceptible test encounters
- 53 currently hospitalized (-1)
- 1,184 active cases (+15)
- 1,403 total deaths (+3)

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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	809	11	Substantial	8.82%
Beadle	2587	2484	5431	39	Substantial	11.98%
Bennett	376	356	1104	8	Moderate	3.08%
Bon Homme	1504	1466	1953	23	Substantial	6.15%
Brookings	3353	3104	10704	32	Substantial	9.31%
Brown	4825	4565	11670	75	Substantial	9.03%
Brule	676	643	1752	7	Substantial	15.38%
Buffalo	416	403	856	12	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	947	903	2979	20	Substantial	8.79%
Campbell	119	111	231	4	Minimal	0.00%
Charles Mix	1201	1122	3690	14	Substantial	9.09%
Clark	329	320	901	4	Moderate	9.52%
Clay	1739	1660	4817	14	Substantial	8.08%
Codington	3705	3478	9010	73	Substantial	11.36%
Corson	458	440	958	11	Minimal	10.81%
Custer	719	684	2520	10	Substantial	14.85%
Davison	2868	2715	6005	56	Substantial	5.18%
Day	586	539	1609	23	Substantial	9.76%
Deuel	451	423	1041	7	Substantial	11.43%
Dewey	1381	1316	3612	18	Substantial	6.56%
Douglas	409	382	851	9	Substantial	13.16%
Edmunds	448	404	930	5	Substantial	4.94%
Fall River	491	464	2404	14	Substantial	14.13%
Faulk	328	307	629	13	Minimal	7.14%
Grant	889	804	2031	36	Substantial	20.93%
Gregory	496	456	1152	27	Moderate	2.44%
Haakon	240	229	498	9	Minimal	9.09%
Hamlin	662	588	1607	38	Substantial	12.05%
Hand	321	308	728	4	Moderate	10.00%
Hanson	329	314	650	4	Moderate	8.57%
Harding	89	88	163	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2168	2034	5972	31	Substantial	3.96%
Hutchinson	746	690	2138	23	Substantial	17.86%

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Hyde	134	131	383	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	269	252	878	13	Minimal	8.33%
Jerauld	265	246	524	16	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	79	72	185	0	Minimal	16.67%
Kingsbury	597	552	1490	13	Substantial	21.05%
Lake	1119	1045	2956	16	Substantial	15.63%
Lawrence	2725	2625	7931	35	Substantial	10.32%
Lincoln	7328	6980	18480	70	Substantial	11.45%
Lyman	584	540	1790	10	Substantial	13.92%
Marshall	281	263	1066	5	Moderate	18.75%
McCook	714	675	1486	22	Substantial	4.55%
McPherson	231	198	525	4	Substantial	6.43%
Meade	2433	2314	7075	28	Substantial	14.89%
Mellette	234	227	686	2	Moderate	23.08%
Miner	258	228	527	7	Substantial	26.09%
Minnehaha	26676	25398	71585	296	Substantial	9.83%
Moody	594	540	1632	15	Substantial	18.82%
Oglala Lakota	2011	1907	6370	40	Substantial	13.39%
Pennington	12181	11551	36131	165	Substantial	12.38%
Perkins	321	291	723	11	Substantial	19.12%
Potter	342	317	762	3	Substantial	7.84%
Roberts	1089	1009	3868	34	Substantial	12.33%
Sanborn	323	309	630	3	Moderate	9.52%
Spink	747	696	1948	24	Substantial	10.53%
Stanley	309	293	840	2	Substantial	5.26%
Sully	133	114	265	3	Moderate	16.67%
Todd	1198	1163	3973	22	Substantial	5.26%
Tripp	652	627	1389	15	Moderate	5.71%
Turner	1029	944	2485	49	Substantial	6.90%
Union	1830	1672	5729	36	Substantial	17.33%
Walworth	692	634	1715	14	Substantial	17.00%
Yankton	2710	2613	8555	27	Substantial	23.35%
Ziebach	332	308	829	8	Substantial	23.08%
Unassigned	0	0	1945	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	4096	0
10-19 years	11849	0
20-29 years	19299	4
30-39 years	17570	14
40-49 years	15223	33
50-59 years	15036	89
60-69 years	12188	217
70-79 years	6503	377
80+ years	4952	950

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	55706	804
Male	51010	880

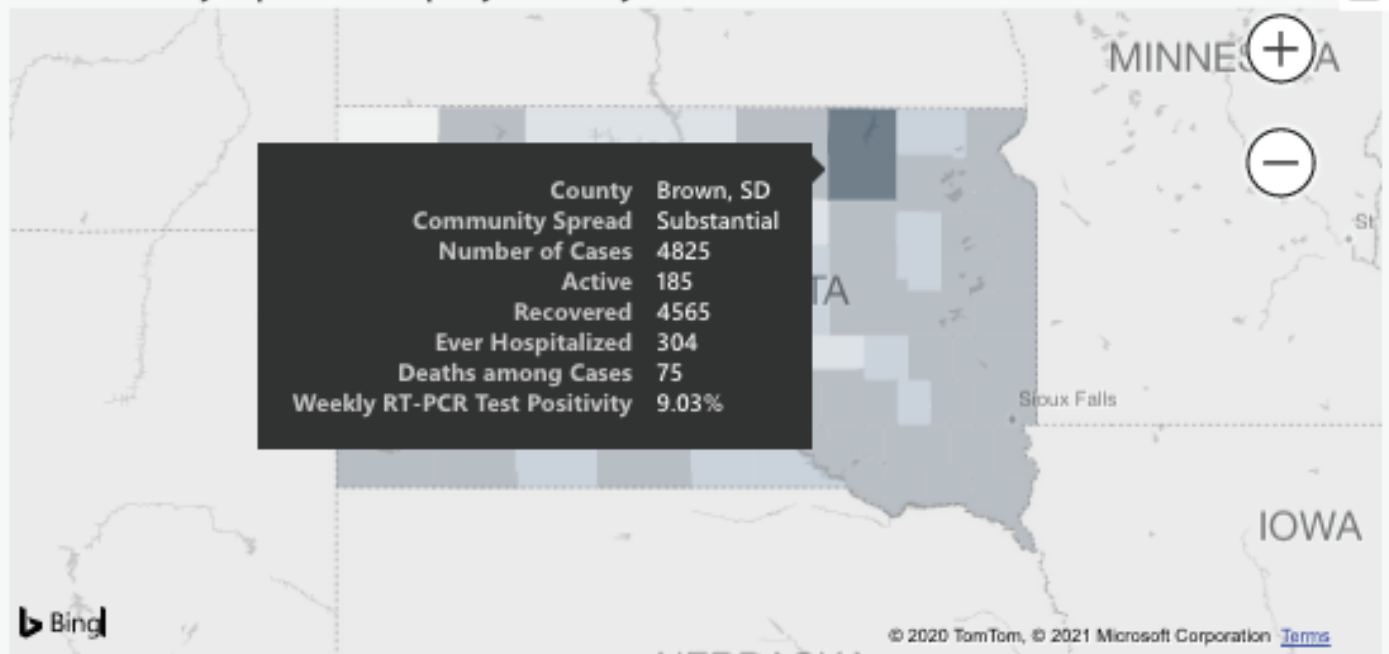
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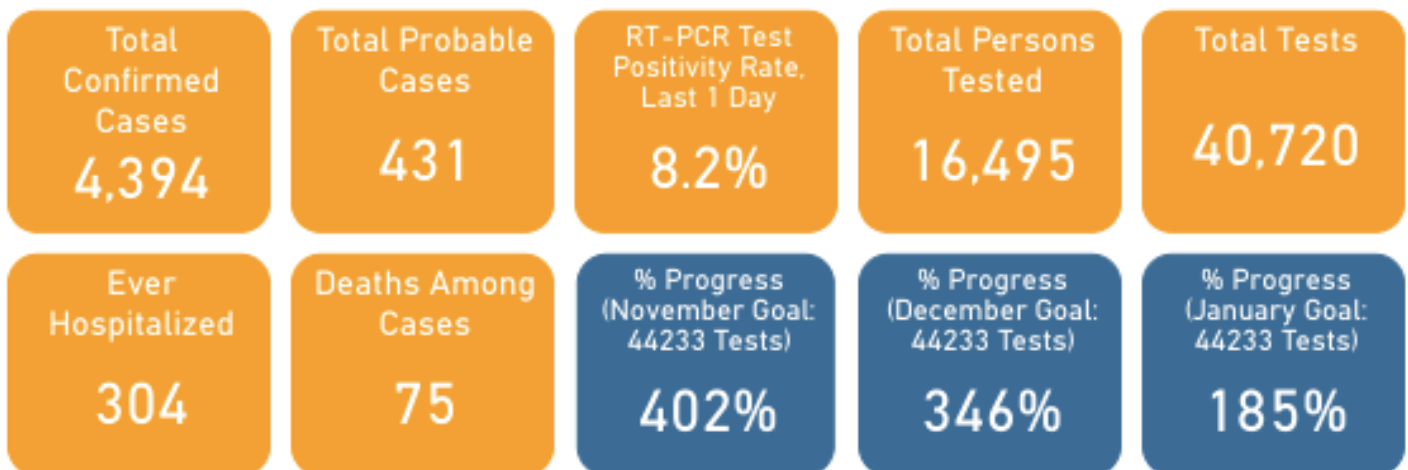
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



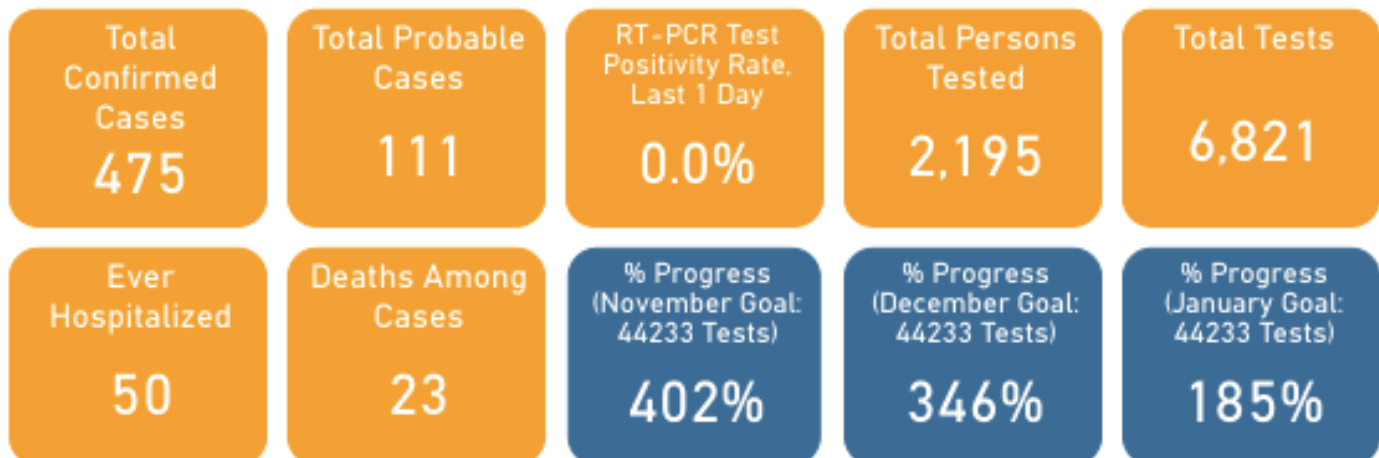
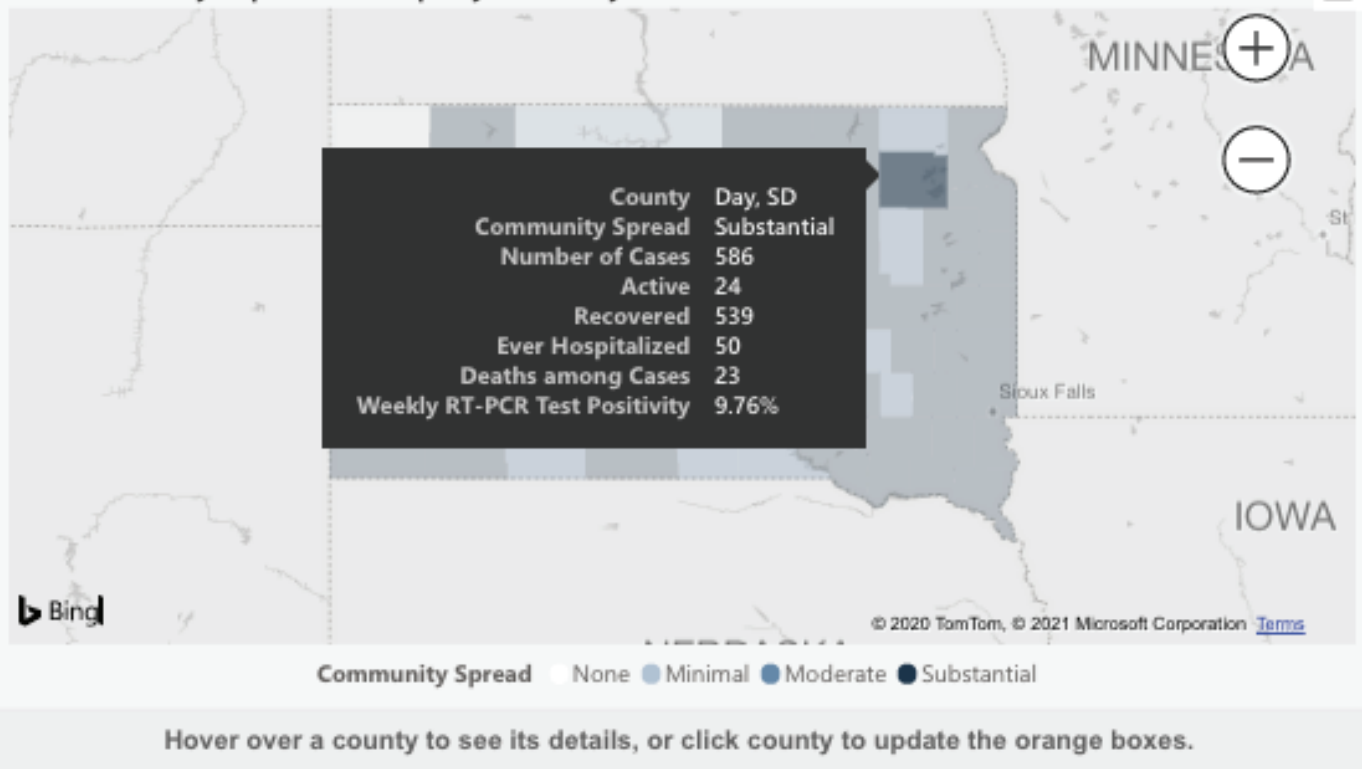
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

69,104

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

54,617

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	34,577
Pfizer	34,527

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	28,847
Moderna - Series Complete	2,865
Pfizer - 1 dose	11,283
Pfizer - Series Complete	11,622

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	96	94	1	95
Beadle	1306	634	336	970
Bennett*	104	98	3	101
Bon Homme*	466	416	25	441
Brookings	1799	1,089	355	1,444
Brown	3226	1,996	615	2,611
Brule*	328	258	35	293
Buffalo*	10	10	0	10
Butte	270	258	6	264
Campbell	227	191	18	209
Charles Mix*	421	385	18	403
Clark	236	220	8	228
Clay	906	760	73	833
Codington*	2243	1,421	411	1,832
Corson*	38	32	3	35
Custer*	460	348	56	404
Davison	1556	1,462	47	1,509
Day*	469	339	65	404
Deuel	286	184	51	235
Dewey*	114	108	3	111
Douglas*	217	211	3	214
Edmunds	235	181	27	208
Fall River*	501	361	70	431
Faulk	183	171	6	177
Grant*	448	416	16	432
Gregory*	301	281	10	291
Haakon*	154	80	37	117

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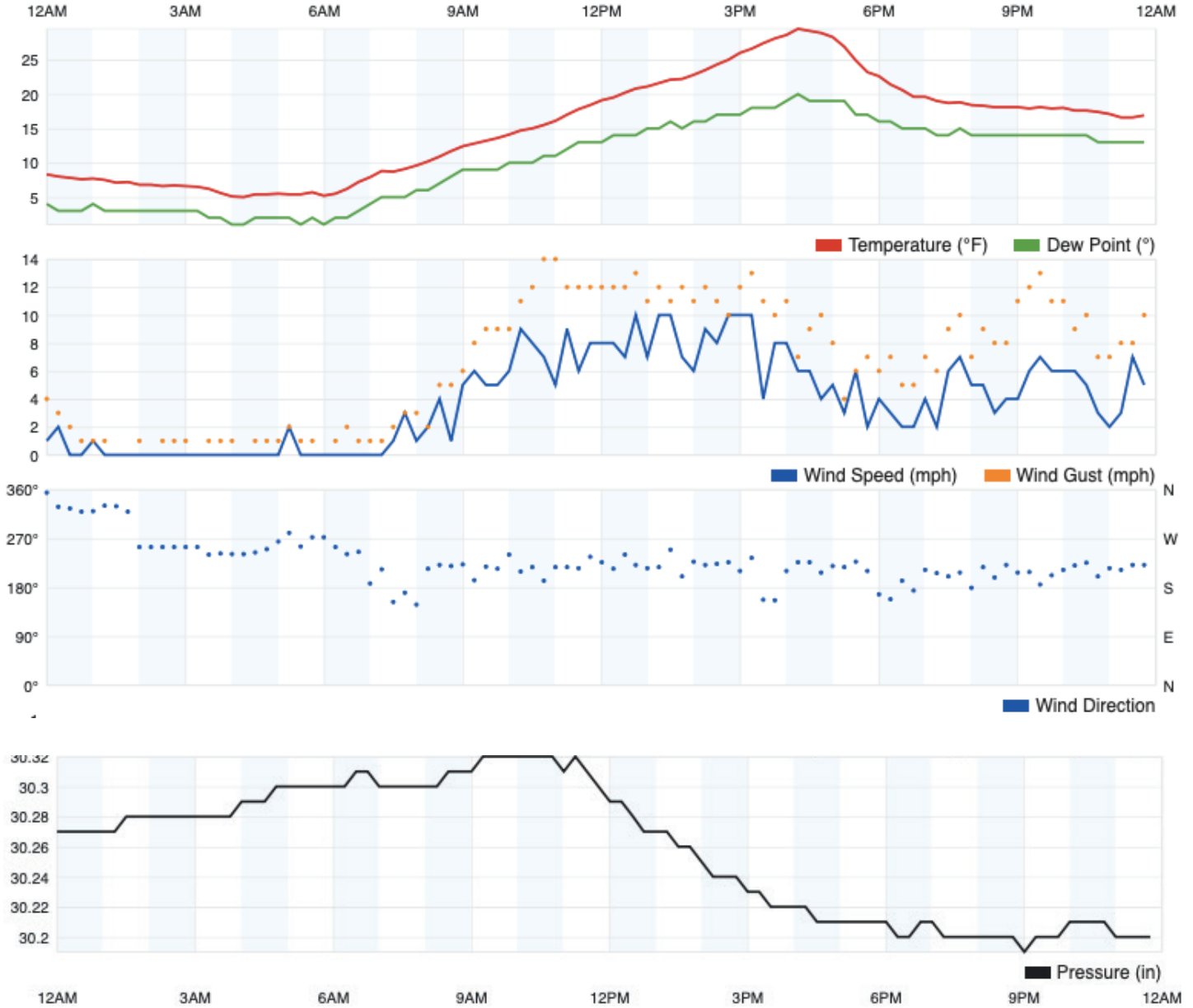
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Hamlin	345	165	90	255
Hand	295	251	22	273
Hanson	76	68	4	72
Harding	3	3	0	3
Hughes*	1329	1,005	162	1,167
Hutchinson*	732	608	62	670
Hyde*	103	97	3	100
Jackson*	81	69	6	75
Jerauld	105	81	12	93
Jones*	108	88	10	98
Kingsbury	390	282	54	336
Lake	974	328	323	651
Lawrence	1130	1,064	33	1,097
Lincoln	7975	2,771	2,602	5,373
Lyman*	95	79	8	87
Marshall*	240	222	9	231
McCook	436	286	75	361
McPherson	29	23	3	26
Meade*	973	753	110	863
Mellette*	10	8	1	9
Miner	157	117	20	137
Minnehaha	20965	8,273	6,346	14,619
Moody*	348	220	64	284
Oglala Lakota*	26	16	5	21
Pennington*	7379	5,331	1,024	6,355
Perkins*	75	59	8	67
Potter	135	125	5	130
Roberts*	653	601	26	627
Sanborn	180	156	12	168
Spink	626	574	26	600
Stanley*	182	130	26	156
Sully	47	23	12	35
Todd*	36	30	3	33
Tripp*	491	401	45	446
Turner	929	577	176	753
Union	346	300	23	323
Walworth*	490	280	105	385
Yankton	2105	1,637	234	1,871
Ziebach*	17	17	0	17
Other	1888	1,008	440	1,448

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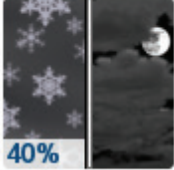



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
60%	40%			
Snow Likely	Chance Snow then Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy
High: 30 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 13 °F	Low: 5 °F	High: 16 °F

Snow Moves Into The Region This Morning

Today

Snow is already falling in southwest and south central SD moving east northeast. Breezy winds gusting 20-25mph this afternoon.

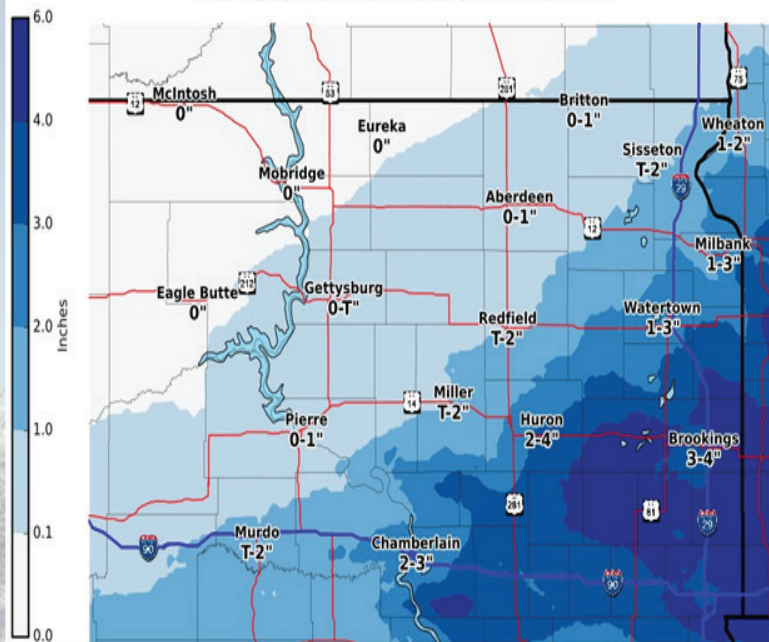
Highs today in the upper 20s to low 30s.

Tonight

Snow should be moved out of the region by midnight at the latest, earlier for central SD.

Lows tonight in the single digits for northeast SD. 10-15°F for central and north central SD

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast
Valid: 01/23/2021 04:00 AM - 01/24/2021 12:00 AM CST



 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 1/23/2021 4:25 AM Central

Snow is expected to move into our region later this morning and continue throughout today. Here is an updated graphic with the predicted snowfall amounts. Winds are expected to gust 20-25 mph this afternoon.

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Today in Weather History

January 23, 1969: Intermittent freezing rain on the 20th to the 22nd changed to snow on the 22nd which continued through the 24th. Snowfall of 2 to 6 inches fell across Minnesota and far northeast South Dakota. Blizzard conditions developed on the 23rd and 24th with 30 to 45 mph winds and temperatures dropping to below zero by the 24th. Most of the traffic was halted with many roads blocked from snow drifting. Some rural roads had been blocked for 3 to 4 weeks. Stranded motorists were common in the area. Some snowfall amounts included, 2 inches at Wilmot and Victor, 3 inches at Milbank and Artichoke Lake, and 4 inches at Clear Lake.

1556: An earthquake in Shaanxi, China kills an estimated 830,000 people. This estimated 8.0 to 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck in the middle of a densely populated area where many of the homes were a form of an earth shelter dwelling known as a yaodong. Much is known about this disaster as a scholar named Qin Keda survived the earthquake and recorded the details.

1812: A second major series of earthquakes was felt as part of the New Madrid Shocks of the winter of 1811-1812. Many observers reported that the January 23 shocks were as strong as the main earthquake on December 16th of the preceding year.

1916: Browning, Montana, saw the temperature plummet 100 degrees in 24 hours on January 23-24, from a relatively mild 44 to a bone-chilling 56 degrees below zero.

1969: An F4 tornado cut a 120-mile long path from Jefferson through Copiah, Simpson, Smith, Scott, and Newton Counties in Mississippi, killing 32 and injuring 241 others. Property damage was estimated at \$2 million. An inbound Delta Airlines aircraft reported a hook echo on its scope with this storm.

1780 - The coldest day of the coldest month of record in the northeastern U.S. A British Army thermometer in New York City registered a reading of 16 degrees below zero. During that infamous hard winter the harbor was frozen solid for five weeks, and the port was cut off from sea supply. (David Ludlum)

1971 - The temperature at Prospect Creek, AK, plunged to 80 degrees below zero, the coldest reading of record for the United States. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Strong winds ushered bitterly cold air into the north central U.S., and produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northwest Lower Michigan ranged up to 17 inches in Leelanau County. Wind chill temperatures reached 70 degrees below zero at Sault Ste Marie MI and Hibbing MN. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Northeastern Colorado experienced its most severe windstorm in years. A wind gust to 92 mph was recorded at Boulder CO before the anemometer blew away, and in the mountains, a wind gust to 120 mph was reported at Mines Peak. The high winds blew down a partially constructed viaduct east of Boulder, as nine unanchored concrete girders, each weighing forty-five tons, were blown off their supports. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to Wyoming, with 18 inches reported at the Shoshone National Forest, and 17 inches in the Yellowstone Park area. Gunnison CO, with a low of 19 degrees below zero, was the cold spot in the nation for the twelfth day in a row. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A Pacific cold front brought strong and gusty winds to the northwestern U.S. Winds in southeastern Idaho gusted to 62 mph at Burley. Strong winds also prevailed along the eastern slopes of the northern and central Rockies. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 74 mph in Goshen County. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

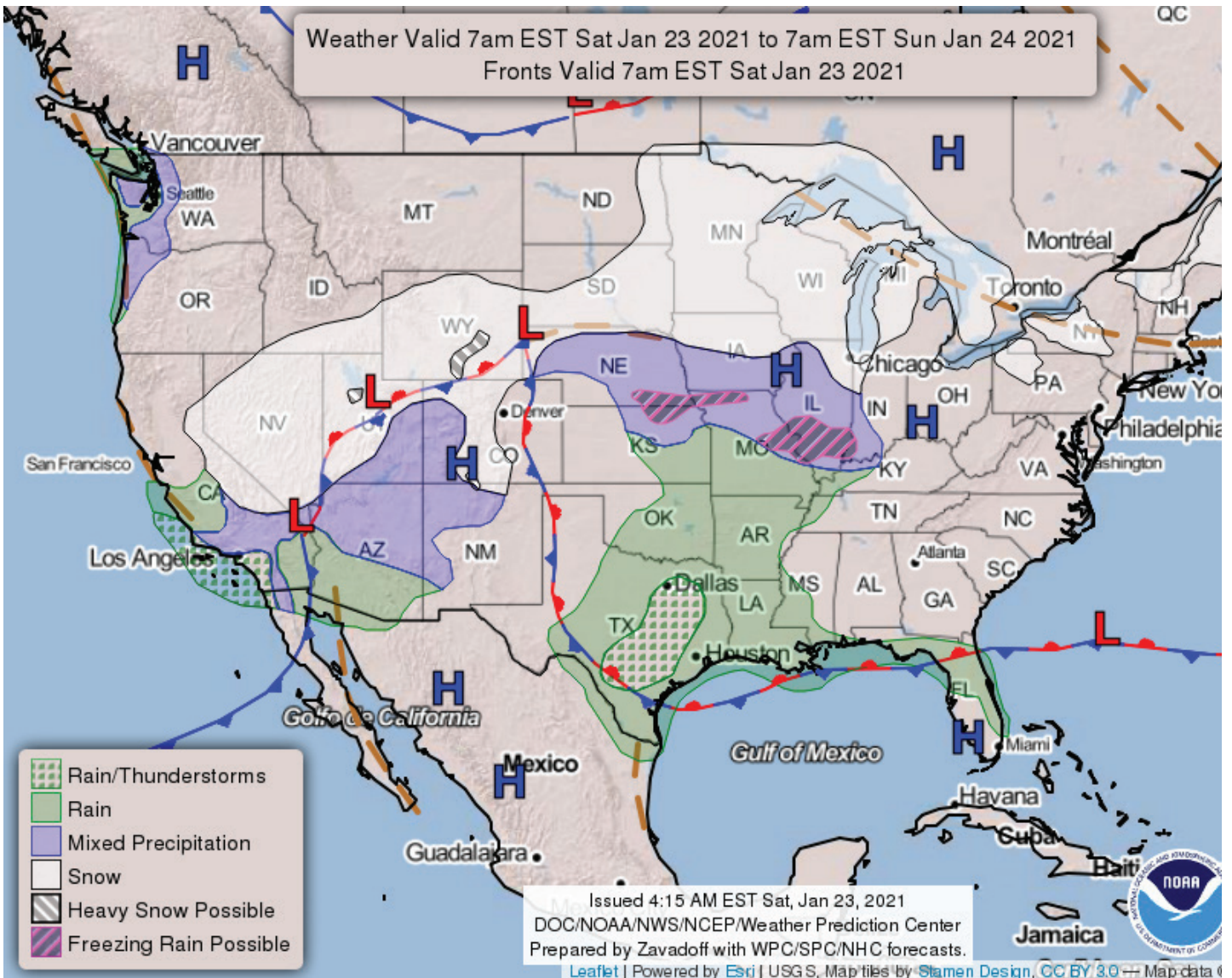
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 30 °F at 4:14 PM
Low Temp: 5 °F at 4:13 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 10:43 AM
Precip:

Record High: 60° in 1981
Record Low: -34° in 1897
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 1°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.35
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.35
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:28 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03 a.m.



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HEARING, ENCOURAGING, LISTENING

Years ago, I was sitting in front of a television trying to find an escape from the cares of the day. It had been an extremely difficult forty-eight hours serving as a Navy chaplain in a large hospital. I was trying to "get away" from the stressors and strains of being with sick and dying Marines as the "Chaplain on Duty." Suddenly, my young son burst into my attempt to escape reality, shouting, "Dad! Let's play."

Whatever he said did not register. So, he said it again and again, and then asked, "Dad, did you hear me?" "Of course, Son, I was listening carefully," was my reply.

Grabbing my face with his two little hands and looking into my eyes, he said, "Dad, I didn't ask if you were listening. I asked if you heard me." Then and there, I was taught the difference between listening and hearing.

The Psalmist recognized this difference, too. "You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them as You listen to their cry."

What a comforting thought! His ear is always open to the cries of His children and He waits attentively to hear their voices in times of need. What a beautiful picture of a loving Father. There is nothing we need to do to get His attention. Nor is there a magical formula to use when we pray. All we have to do is to cry out to Him.

We cry and He hears. His ear is always open for our particular voice. His eyes are always on us no matter where we may be. And His heart is always sensitive to our personal needs. When we cry, He hears, He listens, He understands, and He will respond to and meet our individual needs.

Prayer: Lord, You are above us but not beyond us. You listen as well as hear us when we cry and respond to us when the time is right. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them as You listen to their cry." Psalm 10:17

News from the Associated Press

Biden has North Dakota energy officials pondering the future

By AMY R. SISK The Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The inauguration of Joe Biden as president has many who care about energy in North Dakota wondering what his administration will tackle first as it seeks to bring about a cleaner environment.

Top of mind for some is the Dakota Access Pipeline, which carries as much as half of North Dakota's daily oil output to market. Energy observers also are keeping close tabs on Biden's Cabinet picks, as departments such as Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency could put forward regulations aimed at curbing climate change by targeting two powerful industries in North Dakota: oil and coal.

Biden has never spoken publicly about Dakota Access, but Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has. She and other Democratic lawmakers signed onto a legal brief last spring urging a federal judge to revoke a key permit for the pipeline while a lengthy environmental study is underway.

The document cites the need to protect the integrity of a federal law governing environmental reviews of infrastructure projects. It also seeks to ensure the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "takes seriously" issues raised by Native American tribes fighting the pipeline. The pipeline crosses under the Missouri River just upstream of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, and tribal members there are concerned about a potential oil leak, The Bismarck Tribune reports.

"The Biden administration can shut down the pipeline on Day 1 with the stroke of a pen," said Jan Hasselman, an attorney representing the tribe in its longstanding lawsuit against the Corps.

Those involved in the pipeline dispute are waiting on two court rulings. One could order the pipeline to shut down again, as occurred in July 2020 only to be overturned in part by a higher court and kicked back to the judge for further consideration. The other ruling will determine whether the pipeline must undergo another environmental study already in progress and whether the pipeline's easement was rightfully revoked last year by the judge who ordered the line to stop operating.

"As of today, the pipeline is operating illegally and the Army Corps is refusing to enforce the law by shutting it down," Hasselman said, adding that he expects federal officials in the Biden administration to discuss the possibility of intervening. "They will certainly be hearing from us and others."

The pipeline fight has already spanned two presidencies, and both those leaders waded into the dispute. Democratic President Barack Obama's administration halted construction of the pipeline in 2016 minutes after a judge ruled that work could continue. Later that year, the administration said it would not approve the pipeline's easement and planned to launch a more thorough review of the pipeline.

Immediately upon taking office in 2017, Republican President Donald Trump reversed course by signing a series of memos aimed at speeding up the permitting of major pipeline projects, including Dakota Access. The Corps under his watch scrapped the plans for a more thorough study and issued the pipeline easement in February that year. The pipeline began operating several months later.

Pipeline developer Energy Transfer declined to weigh in on whether it's concerned about any potential interference from the Biden administration, saying it does not comment on issues related to legal matters. The company has long maintained that the pipeline is safe, and its supporters say it plays a vital role in carrying Bakken crude to market. The line transports up to 570,000 barrels per day to Illinois, where the oil can travel via other pipelines to refiners and ports along the Gulf of Mexico.

Energy Transfer plans to bolster the pipeline to accommodate up to 1.1 million barrels of oil per day, and the expansion is among the issues the Corps will examine in its environmental review. The company is building pump stations in the Dakotas and Illinois to add horsepower to push more oil through the line.

Work began on the pump station slated for Emmons County last fall, but it has slowed somewhat this winter.

"We did complete some initial ground work at the new pump stations located in North and South Dakota

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prior to the ground freezing," Energy Transfer spokeswoman Lisa Coleman said in a statement. "While some types of work will resume once the ground thaws, other work at the site currently remains underway on above-ground piping, valves, electrical installation, and erecting the pump building."

North Dakota's top oil regulator characterized anxiety surrounding the pipeline's future under the Biden administration as "pretty high."

State Mineral Resources Director Lynn Helms said he doesn't anticipate the administration immediately stepping into the dispute, given the pending court rulings. But he expects a pipeline shutdown would lead to added costs to transport Bakken crude to market via other means such as rail. That would hurt the state's oil industry right as it's starting to recover from the downturn brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, he said.

"We're at a tipping point," Helms said.

Crude prices fell dramatically last year and they haven't yet risen to a level that would usher in new drilling, but they've climbed just enough to prompt some oil producers to frack wells they had drilled but left idle amid poor economics, he said. Injecting water, sand and chemicals underground to crack open rock and release oil -- the process known as fracking or hydraulic fracturing -- is among the final steps necessary for Bakken wells to start producing oil.

Helms is among many in North Dakota anxious about Biden's Cabinet picks.

He described the president-elect's choice for Interior secretary -- Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M. -- as an activist who has supported the Green New Deal, a package of proposals within Congress aimed at tackling climate change.

She would oversee the Interior Department, which has authority over trust lands on American Indian reservations such as Fort Berthold. Biden campaigned on a promise to end fracking on federal lands, which could be facilitated through a ban on oil permitting or leasing in those areas. It's unclear whether such a ban, if proposed, would apply to trust lands. Three Affiliated Tribes Chairman Mark Fox told the Tribune last fall he would demand that the tribe and not the federal government make decisions about energy development on those lands.

"We anticipate a negative impact on that, but we can't really quantify that as to the timing or how that might play out," Helms said.

Others in North Dakota are excited about Haaland and look forward to the new administration.

Lisa DeVille, a co-founder of Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights, called Haaland's nomination "historic," adding that it feels like Native Americans finally "got a voice at the table." Haaland is a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe and would be the first Native American Interior secretary and the first to serve in a president's Cabinet.

DeVille hopes Haaland will work with grassroots organizations such as hers, which focuses on environmental issues, and not just tribal leaders as has happened in past administrations.

DeVille's group has fought the Trump administration's effort to roll back an Obama-era rule seeking to curb leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. She said she would like to see the Biden administration tackle that issue, and she's encouraged by the president-elect's talk of promoting renewable energy.

"I hope some of that translates into projects on reservations like Fort Berthold," she said.

Some lawmakers at the state Capitol in Bismarck are concerned about Biden's Cabinet picks, even putting forward legislation last week targeting the incoming president's power. While it's sure to face pushback and a debate about state and federal rights, one measure, House Bill 1164, aims to give the state and cities the ability to disregard certain presidential executive orders targeting oil, coal and pandemics, among other issues.

One of its sponsors, Rep. Tom Kading, R-Fargo, said the bill is in part a reaction to the types of people Biden has selected to help him govern who "have a history of being anti-coal, anti-energy."

Within North Dakota's lignite coal industry, one leader described Biden's appointees as "a mixed bag."

Jason Bohrer, president and CEO of the Lignite Energy Council, said he felt his group could find common ground with the president-elect's choice for energy secretary, former Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm,

on priorities such as electrifying the transportation fleet, battery storage and research to reduce carbon emissions.

Talk of reducing emissions at North Dakota's lignite coal-fired power plants has centered around building systems to capture carbon dioxide and store it underground. The technology is in its infancy and would be pricey to build. A significant amount of research on carbon capture and storage stems from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Bohrer said he's trying to keep his thoughts positive in regard to the incoming administration.

"I haven't yet seen an appointee I can't work with or that, like, scares me," he said.

Routine childhood vaccines decline due to the coronavirus

By WENDY PITLICK Black Hills Pioneer

SPEARFISH, S.D. (AP) — More than 20% of South Dakota children have missed routine vaccinations since the COVID-19 pandemic swept the country.

The numbers are in line with a national trend that shows significant decreases in the number of vaccinations administered in 2020, according to a recent study by Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield. The national data shows that children across the country missed approximately 9 million vaccines, or at least 26% of the recommended doses.

According to the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Association, 40% of parents and legal guardians report that their children missed vaccinations during the pandemic. The first vaccines were missed when COVID-19 swept the nation last spring. The second drop off occurred in August 2020, when students who would ordinarily be receiving shots to prepare for the school year discovered instead that they would be remote learning at home.

Dr. Rose Oakley, a pediatrician with Monument Health in Spearfish, said though it is difficult to gauge exact percentages of vaccines distributed locally, due to the families who simply do not seek vaccines, the report does not surprise her.

"This year in particular there has certainly been a drop off in immunizations," she said. "We have families that are nervous to take their children into clinic because of COVID, and so they are skipping multiple well child checks."

Oakley said the drop in regular visits and vaccinations worries her because children who are not vaccinated miss out on a critical period for protection against diseases, some of which can be life threatening. Oakley cited meningitis (an infection of fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord), and epiglottitis (a condition that occurs when cartilage surrounding the wind pipe swells and blocks air flow to the lungs) as two main examples.

"There are some life threatening illnesses prevented by vaccines that occur more often in kids, such as epiglottitis," Oakley said. "This is why it is so important to immunize children before they are adults. It is for the same reason we make children wear seatbelts in the car, cover electrical outlets in the home, or give them bitter tasting medicine when they have an infection: they are too young to know better and it is in their best interest.

"Every year in our community we have multiple children who come into our clinic or emergency department with life threatening illnesses that could have been prevented if they had been immunized," she continued.

Additionally, Oakley said she is very concerned about children who are missing regular well-child checkups, where conditions can be identified and treated early, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

"Well child checks are the time that we make sure a child is growing well," Oakley said, adding that it's not always possible to gauge healthy growth simply by looking at a child. "We make sure that they have good vision, that they don't have hernias, scoliosis, or exam findings concerning for some types of cancer. When children miss these visits, they are missing out on both immunizations and an important checkup."

Oakley said parents who stay away from the clinic due to COVID-19 concerns should know about and be encouraged with the protocols in place to ensure the health and safety of patients. All patients and their families are screened before coming in to the clinic, and appointments are rescheduled for those who

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exhibit symptoms. Additionally, parents are not allowed to bring extra children who do not have appointments in to the clinic. The patient schedule has also been adjusted to minimize risk of exposure.

"We try very hard to see healthy and higher risk children in the morning and sick children in the afternoon," she said. "We also have different exam rooms where we see sick versus healthy children."

In addition to COVID-19 concerns, there are other reasons parents don't immunize their children. Families who live in rural areas sometimes decline the shots because they believe their children are rarely in contact with others because of living on a ranch or in small communities. But many immunizations, such as tetanus, protect against environmental diseases, to which these children are equally susceptible. HIB (hemophilic influenzae) is a bacterium that can unknowingly develop in the back of the throat of healthy individuals, and easily spread to unimmunized children who have weak immune systems and can develop a more life threatening condition.

Some parents, Oakley said, refuse immunizations because of faulty information they have received about their safety or efficacy. If parents have concerns about vaccines, Oakley said it is important for them to discuss them with a healthcare provider, rather than relying on a variety of information sources that are circulating. Some anti-vaccination information may seem legitimate, she said, but it often takes a trained professional to identify the flaws in studies or reports.

"I appreciate so much when parents are open with me about their concerns," she said. "This allows me to address those concerns directly, and make sure that they are receiving information from non-biased sources. When parents are closed off and don't want to discuss concerns it is harder to make sure that they have all the information they need to come to an informed decision."

There are also vaccine booster shots that parents need to be conscious of keeping on schedule. The whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine is a good example. Oakley pointed to a 2014 outbreak of whooping cough in the Northern Hills, which was the result of people failing to receive booster shots against the illness.

Oakley said while there is still high herd immunity from certain vaccine prevented diseases such as polio and smallpox, parents' hesitancy to immunize their children on a regular schedule could tip the balance and risk a preventable outbreak that would be devastating to the population.

"We live in a time when we are fortunate to still have a lot of herd immunity from major diseases that immunizations prevent because most people are immunized," she said. "We are, however, approaching a tipping point. If immunization rates continue to decline, we will see more resurgence of disease. My aunt was part of the last group of people in the United States to have polio. She was in an iron lung for several months and had paralysis of her right leg for the rest of her life. Most people have never seen the horrifying scars left behind by small pox, if someone survived. These are horrible, traumatic diseases that we are sheltered from because of immunizations. It would break my heart if that were to change because it is preventable."

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

04-26-42-50-60, Mega Ball: 24, Megaplier: 2

(four, twenty-six, forty-two, fifty, sixty; Mega Ball: twenty-four; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$1.00 Billion

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 62, Waubay/Summit 52

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Aberdeen Roncalli 61, Webster 52
Belle Fourche 50, Hot Springs 34
Beresford 63, Canton 60
Clark/Willow Lake 48, Groton Area 43
Dakota Valley 76, Tri-Valley 68
Dell Rapids St. Mary 74, Estelline/Hendricks 38
Elkton-Lake Benton 66, Deubrook 50
Flandreau 62, McCook Central/Montrose 44
Gayville-Volin 66, Colome 53
Hamlin 68, Tiospa Zina Tribal 60
Herreid/Selby Area 41, North Central Co-Op 36
Kadoka Area 43, Jones County 30
Lake Preston 60, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 56
Langford 56, Castlewood 46
Lower Brule 102, Omaha Nation, Neb. 46
Milbank 67, Florence/Henry 55
Mitchell 68, Watertown 58
Pierre 68, Douglas 60
Platte-Geddes 49, Lennox 40
Rapid City Christian 80, Harding County 46
Sioux Falls Christian 64, Madison 51
Sioux Falls Lincoln 69, Huron 38
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 67, Rapid City Central 48
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 60, Rapid City Stevens 38
Spearfish 77, Hill City 62
Tea Area 64, Aberdeen Central 61
Vermillion 76, Garretson 56
Viborg-Hurley 63, Baltic 40
Warner 58, Britton-Hecla 27
Waverly-South Shore 59, Wilmot 37
281 Conference=
Seventh Place=
Iroquois 69, Sunshine Bible Academy 50
Third Place=
Highmore-Harrold 63, James Valley Christian 53
Consolation Championship=
Hitchcock-Tulare 52, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 47
Championship=
Wessington Springs 47, Wolsey-Wessington 43
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Central 71, Tea Area 59
Aberdeen Roncalli 61, Webster 52
Belle Fourche 49, Hot Springs 19
Beresford 44, Canton 34
Dakota Valley 60, Tri-Valley 51
Flandreau 50, McCook Central/Montrose 49
Garretson 54, Vermillion 42
Hamlin 55, Tiospa Zina Tribal 21
Hanson 53, Canistota 20

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Harrisburg 61, Brookings 44
Herreid/Selby Area 55, North Central Co-Op 40
Jones County 60, Kadoka Area 40
Kimball/White Lake 46, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 41
Lower Brule 66, Omaha Nation, Neb. 48
Menno 55, Freeman Academy 41
Mitchell 41, Watertown 40
Mobridge-Pollock 76, Strasburg-Zeeland, N.D. 26
Platte-Geddes 47, Lennox 41
Rapid City Stevens 61, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 49
Sioux Falls Christian 55, Madison 33
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 66, Rapid City Central 27
Sioux Valley 59, Dell Rapids 58
Sisseton 80, Deuel 48
Spearfish 48, Hill City 43
Viborg-Hurley 63, Baltic 54
Waubay/Summit 47, Aberdeen Christian 35

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

Freidel carries South Dakota St. past North Dakota 92-73

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Noah Freidel had 24 points as South Dakota State got past North Dakota 92-73 on Friday night.

Freidel hit 6 of 9 3-pointers.

Luke Appel had 15 points for South Dakota State (9-3, 3-0 Summit League), which earned its fourth straight victory. Alex Arians added 12 points. Douglas Wilson had 12 points. Baylor Scheierman had 10 points and 10 rebounds.

South Dakota State posted a season-high 21 assists.

South Dakota State totaled 56 first-half points, a season best for the team.

Tyree Ihenacho had 14 points and eight rebounds for the Fighting Hawks (4-12, 3-4). Filip Rebraca added 14 points. Seybian Sims had 10 points.

The Jackrabbits improve to 2-0 against the Fighting Hawks this season. South Dakota State defeated North Dakota 74-62 on Dec. 11.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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Kamateros carries South Dakota past W. Illinois 65-60

MACOMB, Ill. (AP) — Tasos Kamateros had 15 points as South Dakota narrowly defeated Western Illinois 65-60 on Friday night.

Xavier Fuller had 14 points and seven rebounds for South Dakota (7-6, 5-0 Summit League), which won its sixth straight game. A.J. Plitzuweit added 13 points. Damani Hayes had eight rebounds.

Stanley Umude, the Coyotes' leading scorer heading into the matchup at 21.0 points per game, had only four points on 2-of-10 shooting.

Will Carius scored a season-high 21 points for the Leathernecks (2-10, 0-5), whose losing streak reached six games. Tamell Pearson added 19 points. Cameron Burrell had 10 rebounds.

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Man in Minnesota charged with threatening member of Congress

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A marijuana industry activist who said he was temporarily living in Minnesota has been charged with threatening an unnamed member of Congress, according to court documents unsealed Friday.

Jason Robert Karimi, 32, was charged earlier this month with one count of interstate communication of a threat, and he made his first court appearance Friday. According to the charges, Karimi called a U.S. representative, who is not named in court documents, on Jan. 11 and left a voicemail threatening violence.

According to the charges, Karimi said, "I want to see you as scared as possible, terrified and (defecating) your pants ... we're coming for ya." The voicemail went on to say "we are going to cause you pain in every way possible ... we're going to end all political power you have (and) make it so you can't even walk in anything but a wheelchair."

The voicemail was left just five days after a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Capitol Police reviewed the voicemail, and authorities traced the number to Karimi. When an FBI agent contacted him, Karimi allegedly said, "Is this about the voicemails?" according to court documents.

The criminal complaint says Karimi admitted to leaving the voicemail but said he intended only "political pain" and he uses "political threatening" to get attention. He said that after he left the voicemail, he was afraid the Secret Service would come and get him.

Karimi allegedly told the FBI agent that he worked mostly in Iowa as a lobbyist for the marijuana industry and that he wants to lobby the U.S. government on marijuana issues. He said he planned to move to South Dakota and was staying in St. Paul with a friend temporarily.

Court documents list the Federal Defender's Office as Karimi's attorney, which is often the case for first appearances, but the court docket says an attorney will be appointed. A message left with the federal defender was not immediately returned.

The Star Tribune reported that Karimi has actively blogged for a website that promotes marijuana policy in Iowa called "WeedPress," and he's commented about the industry on local television shows there.

Arizona, 15th state with legal pot, sees recreational sales

By BOB CHRISTIE and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Legal sales of recreational marijuana in Arizona started on Friday, a once-unthinkable step in the former conservative stronghold that joins 14 other states that have broadly legalized pot.

The state Health Services Department on Friday announced it had approved 86 licenses in nine of the state's 15 counties under provisions of the marijuana legalization measure passed by voters in November. Most of the licenses went to existing medical marijuana dispensaries that can start selling pot right away.

"It's an exciting step for those that want to participate in that program," said Dr. Cara Christ, Arizona's state health director, on Friday.

Under the terms of Proposition 207, people 21 and older can grow their own plants and legally possess up to an ounce (28 grams) of marijuana or a smaller quantity of "concentrates" such as hashish. Possession of between 1 ounce and 2.5 ounces (70 grams) is a petty offense carrying a maximum \$300 fine.

The march toward decriminalization in the Sun Belt state was long. Approval of the legalization measure came four years after Arizona voters narrowly defeated a similar proposal, although medical marijuana has been legal in the state since 2010.

The initiative faced stiff opposition from Republican Gov. Doug Ducey and GOP leaders in the state

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Legislature, but 60% of the state's voters in the November election approved it.

The vote on marijuana reflected larger trends at play during the historic election that saw Democrat Joe Biden flip the longtime Republican state where political giants include five-term conservative senator Barry Goldwater and the late GOP Sen. John McCain.

Changing demographics, including a fast-growing Latino population and a flood of new residents, have made the state friendlier to Democrats.

The recreational pot measure was backed by advocates for the legal marijuana industry and criminal justice reform advocates who argued that the state's harsh marijuana laws were out of step with the nation. Arizona was the only state in the country that still allowed a felony charge for first-time possession of small amounts of marijuana, although most cases were prosecuted as lower-level misdemeanors.

The vast majority of the licenses issued Friday were in Maricopa County, the state's largest county that's home to Phoenix and its suburbs. Other counties with dispensaries now allowed to sell recreational pot are Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Pima, Pinal, Yavapai and Yuma counties.

Voters in New Jersey, South Dakota and Montana also approved making possession of recreational marijuana legal last November.

Arizona prosecutors dropped thousands of marijuana possession cases after the measure was approved. Possession in the state technically became legal when the election results were certified on Nov. 30 but there was no authorized way to purchase it without a medical marijuana card.

Voters in November dealt another blow to Republicans in control of the state's power levers when they approved a new tax on high earners to boost education funding, a move that came after years of GOP tax cuts and the underfunding of public schools.

South Dakota reports 11 more COVID-19 deaths, 316 new cases

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials reported Friday that an additional 11 people have died from COVID-19, and 316 more people have tested positive for the virus.

The figures bring the total number of deaths to 1,684 since the pandemic began. To date, 106,716 people have been infected in the state.

Hospitalizations in the state continue to trend downward. On Friday, 177 people were hospitalized, including 37 in intensive care. The number of people hospitalized is eight less than the day before.

South Dakota health officials say 69,104 doses of the vaccine have been administered, an increase of 6,739 over the day before, the Argus Leader reported.

The number of active infections increased by 12, to 4,090.

City of Presidents already working on adding Trump statue

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Donald Trump's presidency ended just two days ago, but the City of Presidents organization is already working on adding his statue in downtown Rapid City.

Dallerie Davis, co-founder and artist liaison for the organization, said the project is in the concept stage and that they plan to incorporate a couple of Trump's distinctive trademarks.

"Right now, we know we've got to deal with the very unusual hair style, and we know we'll have to involve tweeting," Davis said.

Twitter was a favorite means of communication for Trump throughout his presidential campaign and four years in the White House.

A location has not yet been selected for the nation's 45th president. Davis said the City of Presidents has more than 80 street corners to pick. The organization has not announced the artist who will create the bronze statue, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The City of Presidents is a privately funded series of life-sized bronze statues of the nation's presidents. The project was launched in 2000 to honor past and future presidents and increase foot traffic in downtown Rapid City.

The most recent addition to the project is President Barack Obama, which took about two years from

concept to completion.

Political upheaval alters strategies in US abortion debate

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Anti-abortion leaders across America were elated a year ago when Donald Trump became the first sitting U.S. president to appear in person at their highest-profile annual event, the March for Life held every January.

The mood is more sober now — a mix of disappointment over Trump's defeat and hope that his legacy of judicial appointments will lead to future court victories limiting abortion rights.

Organizers of this year's March for Life in Washington, scheduled for next Friday, have asked their far-flung supporters to stay home, due to political tensions in the city and the coronavirus pandemic. They plan instead to livestream the activities of a few invited participants, a sharp contrast to the tens of thousands of people who usually attend.

Meanwhile, Trump, whose administration took numerous steps to curtail abortion access, has been replaced as president by Joe Biden, a staunch supporter of abortion rights. Biden's fellow Democrats now control both chambers of Congress, thanks to victories in two Senate runoff elections in Georgia where anti-abortion groups campaigned vigorously for the Republican candidates who lost.

On Friday, the 48th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision establishing a nationwide right to abortion, Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris said they would seek to enshrine that right into federal law to protect it from court challenges.

"In the past four years, reproductive health, including the right to choose, has been under relentless and extreme attack," their statement said. "We are deeply committed to making sure everyone has access to care — including reproductive health care."

The president of the March for Life, Jeanne Mancini, said she and her allies worry the Biden administration will pursue "radical pro-abortion extremism." At the same time, anti-abortion activists are buoyed by Trump's appointment of scores of federal judges — including three Supreme Court justices — who are viewed as open to repealing or weakening Roe v. Wade.

In Republican-governed states, scores of tough anti-abortion bills have been enacted in recent years, and more are surfacing this year from GOP lawmakers eager to see if any of these measures might reach the Supreme Court as a challenge to Roe v. Wade.

"I am very optimistic," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee. "We'll see a lot of new pro-life bills... and we are going to see judges who are open to them."

In Arkansas, a new bill would criminalize abortions except to save a pregnant woman's life. The measure declares: "It is time for the United States Supreme Court to redress and correct the grave injustice and the crime against humanity which is being perpetuated by its decisions in Roe v. Wade" and other cases.

The Texas legislature also will consider several sweeping abortion bans. In Montana, anti-abortion bills are expected to advance now that Republican Greg Gianforte has replaced Democrat Steve Bullock as governor. Bullock supported abortion rights during eight years in office.

South Carolina lawmakers are considering a bill that would ban abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, usually around six weeks after conception. Similar bills have passed in several other states, but courts have blocked their implementation.

Elizabeth Nash, who tracks state government issues for the Guttmacher Institute, which supports abortion rights, says anti-abortion legislation may get top priority even in states where lawmakers confront multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and severe budgetary woes.

Referring to anti-abortion lawmakers, Nash said, "They see the Supreme Court as being in their corner, and it's their job to continue to pass restrictions and bans."

Among abortion-rights activists, there's relief and optimism as the Biden administration takes power. Biden is expected to soon issue executive orders reversing anti-abortion actions taken by Trump.

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One such order would rescind the so-called "global gag rule" that prohibits the use of U.S. foreign assistance for abortion-related services. Another order would rescind what abortion-rights supporters called the "domestic gag rule," barring Title X family planning funds from going to any health care providers who perform abortions or make referrals for them. The ban prompted Planned Parenthood, the leading abortion provider in the U.S., to quit the program rather than comply.

Abortion-rights supporters also hope that Congress, under Democratic control, will repeal the Hyde Amendment, which bans federal funding for abortions unless a woman's life is in danger or in cases of rape or incest.

Biden, a longtime supporter of the amendment, reversed himself in 2019 and now favors its repeal. But prospects for repeal are uncertain, given that Democrats would need some Republican votes in the Senate to overcome a potential filibuster.

However, the Democrats' narrow Senate majority is expected to be sufficient to confirm Biden's nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra – a strong supporter of abortion rights -- to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

Major anti-abortion groups invested large sums and mobilized hundreds of volunteers to back the losing GOP Senate candidates in Georgia, hoping to retain Republican control so Becerra could be rejected.

Becerra and Biden are Roman Catholic, and the new administration's support for abortion rights poses a dilemma for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its president, Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, congratulated Biden on his inauguration Wednesday, yet warned that his policies on abortion and contraception "advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity."

Alexis McGill Johnson, the president of Planned Parenthood, said the worries that plagued her throughout 2020 gave way to joy with the Democrats' Senate victories in Georgia.

"I was actually able to breathe in hope and possibility," she said. "But we recognize the fact that the fight is ongoing -- the courts and many of our state legislatures are going to be very difficult for us."

While not enough data exists yet to show whether abortions have increased or decreased during the pandemic, there's some evidence that more women induced their own abortions, using abortion pills they were able to purchase or receive by mail from a foreign source. It's become increasingly easy for women to circumvent the U.S. law requiring the pill to be dispensed by a health care professional.

Abigail Aiken, a professor of public affairs at the University of Texas, said the online abortion pill provider Aid Access received a surge of requests early in the pandemic, when some states cited the outbreak as a reason to limit abortion access at clinics.

Requests nearly doubled in Texas, which had the most severe pandemic-related restrictions on clinics, said Aiken, whose research was published in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

Elisa Wells, co-director of another online organization called Plan C, estimates that tens of thousands of American women annually are now seeking abortion pills for self-managed abortions – based on the number of clicks on Plan C's website that lists overseas pharmacies offering to ship the pills.

The Latest: Immigrant wariness a hurdle for vaccine efforts

By The Associated Press undefined

MECCA, Calif. — Advocacy groups are heading into farm fields in California to bring vaccines and information to migrant laborers in Spanish and other languages.

Some immigrants in the country illegally may fear that information taken during vaccinations could be turned over to authorities and not seek out vaccines. Those who speak little or no English may find it difficult to access shots.

These challenges are particularly worrying for Latino immigrants, who make a large portion of the workforce in industries where they have a significant risk of exposure.

In California's sprawling Riverside County, home to a \$1.3 billion agriculture industry, a health care non-profit went to a grape farm to register workers for vaccine appointments. The Desert Healthcare District and Foundation also shares information about the virus and how to get tested on WhatsApp in Spanish.

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The National Day Laborer Organizing Network has used a Spanish-language radio show on social media to share information.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

UK doctors urge government to review policy of delaying 2nd virus vaccine shot for 12 weeks. Hong Kong in lockdown to contain the coronavirus. Mexico president OKs states acquiring vaccines. French doctors suggest way to slow virus spread: Don't talk on public transportation. Life in the Chinese city of Wuhan has some normalcy a year after deadly pandemic erupted there. ____

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PRESCOTT VALLEY, Ariz. — A multipurpose arena in Prescott Valley will be the latest large venue in Arizona to become a COVID-19 vaccination site.

Cottonwood-based Spectrum Healthcare on Monday will open an appointment-only site called "Vaccination Station" inside Findlay Toyota Center, a 5,100-seat facility that has hosted events including basketball games, rodeos, concerts and ice shows. The Daily Courier reports that Spectrum plans to administer shots to as many as 1,000 people daily.

Pima County already opened a drive-through vaccination site in Tucson at Kino Sports Complex. The state plans to open a site at the Phoenix Municipal Stadium on Feb. 1.

Arizona has the worst infection rate in the country with 1 in every 141 residents diagnosed with the coronavirus in the past week.

The Department of Health Services on Friday reported 8,099 new cases and 229 more deaths. That increased the state's confirmed pandemic totals to 708,041 cases and 12,001 deaths.

MEXICO CITY — Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has given state governors permission to acquire coronavirus vaccines on their own.

With coronavirus infections and COVID-19 deaths at record highs in recent days, the federal government hasn't received enough vaccine for the country's 750,000 front-line medical workers.

So state governors have been calling for permission to obtain vaccines on their own, and the president said Friday they can do so as long as they inform federal officials and use only approved vaccines.

Also, López Obrador announced Mexico plans to start vaccinating teachers and other school personnel in one of the country's 32 states this weekend with an eye toward resuming in-person classes there in late February.

Officials reported more than 21,000 confirmed infections Friday, a day after the country listed a record 22,339 cases. Deaths related to the virus in the previous 24 hours reached 1,440.

Mexico ranks No. 4 in deaths with more than 147,000, behind the U.S., Brazil and India.

LISBON, Portugal — Portugal's medical agency says it has identified the first case in the country of the new coronavirus variant believed to have originated in South Africa.

The agency says the new variant was found in a South African resident of Lisbon. Medical authorities have already suggested a massive surge in infections is from the spread of a variant identified in southeast England.

Portugal's hospital COVID-19 wards and ICUs are on average around 90% full. Daily deaths reached a new record for a fifth day in a row at 234 on Friday, bringing the total to 9,920 in a country of 10.3 million.

The country also faces the challenge of holding a general election on Sunday.

LONDON — A leading politician in Wales has resigned from a senior post after he and colleagues had a drinking session inside the Welsh parliament buildings while pubs and bars are closed during a coronavirus

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lockdown.

Paul Davies says he was stepping down as leader of the Welsh Conservatives “for the sake of my party, my health and my own conscience.”

Another Welsh Conservative lawmaker, Darren Millar, was quitting as the party’s chief whip.

PARIS — French doctors have new advice to slow the spread of the virus: Stop talking on public transport.

The French Academy of Doctors issued guidance saying people should “avoid talking or making phone calls” in subways, buses or anywhere in public where social distancing isn’t possible. Masks have been required since May, but travelers often loosen or remove them to talk on the phone.

Other French experts are urging more dramatic measures — notably a third lockdown.

France’s hospitals hold more COVID patients than in October, when President Emmanuel Macron imposed a second lockdown. Virus patients occupy more than half of the country’s intensive care beds.

Infections in France are gradually rising this month, at more than 20,000 per day. France currently has the longest virus curfew in Europe, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and restaurants and tourist sites have been closed since October.

The government has so far sought to avoid a full new lockdown. Protests are expected around France on Saturday against virus-related layoffs and to support those arrested for holding a techno rave party despite virus restrictions.

France has registered 72,647 confirmed virus-related deaths.

LONDON — Britain’s main doctors’ organization says it is concerned about the U.K.’s decision to give people a second dose of coronavirus vaccine up to 12 weeks after the first, rather than the shorter gap recommended by manufacturers and the World Health Organization.

The U.K., which has Europe’s deadliest coronavirus outbreak, adopted the policy in order to give as many people a first dose of the vaccine as quickly as possible. So far almost 5.5 million people have received a first dose of either a vaccine made by Pfizer or one developed by AstraZeneca.

AstraZeneca has said it believes a dose of its vaccine offers protection after 12 weeks, but Pfizer says it has not tested the efficacy of its jab after such a long gap.

The British Medical Association urged England’s chief medical officer to “urgently review” the policy for the Pfizer vaccine. It says there was “growing concern from the medical profession regarding the delay of the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine as the U.K.’s strategy has become increasingly isolated from many other countries.”

Pfizer says its second dose should take place 21 days after the first. The WHO says the second shots of coronavirus vaccines can be given up to six weeks after the first.

HONG KONG — Thousands of Hong Kong residents were locked down in their homes Saturday in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening coronavirus outbreak in the city.

Authorities said 16 buildings in the city’s Yau Tsim Mong district would be locked down until all residents were tested. Residents would not be allowed to leave their homes until they received test results.

“Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained,” the government statement said.

The restrictions, which were announced at 4 a.m. in Hong Kong, were expected to end within 48 hours, the government said.

Hong Kong has been grappling to contain a fresh wave of the coronavirus since November. Over 4,300 cases have been recorded in the last two months, making up nearly 40% of the city’s total.

WUHAN, CHINA — A year ago, a notice sent to smartphones in Wuhan at 2 a.m. announced the world’s first coronavirus lockdown, bringing the bustling central Chinese industrial and transport center to a virtual

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standstill almost overnight. It would last 76 days.

Early Saturday morning, however, residents of the city where the virus was first detected were jogging and practicing tai chi in a fog-shrouded park beside the mighty Yangtze River.

Life has largely returned to normal in the city of 11 million, even as the rest of the world grapples with the spread of the virus' more contagious variants. The scourge has killed more than 2.1 million people worldwide.

Traffic was light in Wuhan but there was no sign of the barriers that a year ago isolated neighborhoods and confined people to their housing compounds and even apartments.

Wuhan accounted for the bulk of China's 4,635 deaths from COVID-19, a number that has largely stayed static for months. The city has been largely free of further outbreaks since the lockdown was lifted on April 8, but questions persist as to where the virus originated and whether Wuhan and Chinese authorities acted fast enough and with sufficient transparency to allow the world to prepare for a pandemic.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California is reporting a one-day record of 764 COVID-19 deaths but the rate of new infections is falling.

The deaths reported Friday by the California Department of Public Health top the previous mark of 708 set on Jan. 8. In the last two days California has recorded 1,335 deaths.

Hospitalizations and newly confirmed cases have been falling, however, and health officials are growing more optimistic that the worst of the latest surge is over.

The 23,024 new cases reported Friday are less than half the mid-December peak of nearly 54,000. Hospitalizations have fallen below 20,000, a drop of more than 10% in two weeks.

PORTLAND, Ore. — Gov. Kate Brown on Friday defended her decision to reject federal guidelines and prioritize teachers for the COVID-19 vaccine before the elderly, stating that if all of Oregon's seniors were vaccinated first teachers would likely not be vaccinated before the school year and many students would not return to in-person learning.

In officials from the Oregon Health Authority presented a new vaccination timeline that delays the eligibility for seniors 65 to 69 years old to be vaccinated until March 7 and those 70 to 74 pushed back to Feb. 28.

Last week, Oregon officials announced a change to the vaccine distribution — instead of vaccinating teachers and seniors at the same time, teachers would be vaccinated beginning Jan. 25 and people 80 or older beginning Feb. 8.

WASHINGTON — New research finds full doses of blood thinners such as heparin can help moderately ill hospitalized COVID-19 patients avoid the need for breathing machines or other organ support.

The preliminary results come from three large, international studies testing various coronavirus treatments and haven't yet been published. The U.S. National Institutes of Health and other sponsors released the results Friday to help doctors decide on appropriate care.

Nearly all hospitalized COVID-19 patients currently get low doses of a blood thinner to try to prevent clots from forming.

The new results show that "when we give higher doses of blood thinners to patients who are not already critically ill, there is a significant benefit in preventing them from getting sicker," said Dr. Matthew Neal, a trauma surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and one study leader.

However, the researchers say these drugs don't help and may harm people who are more seriously ill.

Puffin stuff: Herring rules could boost funny-looking bird

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

BATH, Maine (AP) — The commercial fishery for herring has suffered in recent years due to new restrictions, but those same rules could benefit some of Maine's most beloved birds — puffins.

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Atlantic puffins, known for their colorful beaks and waddling walks, were once nearly gone from Maine, the only U.S. state where they nest. Decades of conservation work have brought Maine's population of the birds to about 1,300 pairs that nest on small islands off the coast.

Those same Gulf of Maine waters are an important area for the U.S. herring fishery. The fishery has had to contend with quota cuts in recent years because of federal efforts to protect the fish's population, and more restrictions are on the way.

The U.S. catch of herring, based mostly in Maine and Massachusetts, fell from more than 200 million pounds in 2014 to less than 25 million pounds in 2019.

Puffins are dependent on small fish to survive, and new protections to the herring population could help them do that, said Don Lyons, director of conservation science for the National Audubon Society's Seabird Institute in Bremen, Maine.

"Herring are certainly a key food source for puffins. The kind of fish they do best on, that they best raise chicks feeding," Lyons said. "The declines of herring over the last decade or longer have not been good for puffins."

The herring fishery is facing a new set of restrictions from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration starting Feb. 10. The restrictions include a prohibition on the use of certain fishing gear in inshore waters. They also include new rules that account for herring's role in the ecosystem, federal documents state.

That's good news for puffins, because small fish close to shore are vitally important for puffin parents to be able to feed chicks, Lyons said. But it's going to challenge herring fishermen, said Mary Beth Tooley, director of government affairs for O'Hara Corp., a large Rockland, Maine-based bait dealer and herring harvester.

Herring are economically important because lobster fishermen have used them to bait traps for generations. Shortages of herring have complicated that in recent years, and bait crunches have resulted.

The herring fishery is hopeful for higher catch limits in the future, but 2021 and 2022 could be difficult years, Tooley said.

"A number of businesses are concerned about their ability to be viable," she said. "In the very near short-term it has been a challenge."

The puffins nest in the summer on islands such as Eastern Egg Rock off Maine's mid-coast region, where they are a popular tourism draw. Lyons described the birds' Maine population as "steady" over the past five years, if not possibly a bit larger.

Protests erupt across Russia demanding Navalny's release

By DARIA LITVINOVA and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Protests erupted in cities across Russia on Saturday to demand the release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the Kremlin's most prominent foe. Police arrested more than 1,600 people, some of whom took to the streets in temperatures as frigid as minus-50 Celsius (minus-58 Fahrenheit).

In Moscow, thousands of demonstrators filled Pushkin Square in the city center, where clashes with police broke out and demonstrators were roughly dragged off by helmeted riot officers to police buses and detention trucks, some beaten with batons.

Navalny's wife Yulia was among those arrested.

Police eventually pushed demonstrators out of the square. Thousands then regrouped along a wide boulevard about a kilometer (half-mile) away, many of them throwing snowballs at the police.

The protests stretched across Russia's vast territory, from the island city of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk north of Japan and the eastern Siberian city of Yakutsk, where temperatures plunged to minus-50 Celsius, to Russia's more populous European cities. The range demonstrated how Navalny and his anti-corruption campaign have built an extensive network of support despite official government repression and being routinely ignored by state media.

The OVD-Info group that monitors political arrests said more than 500 people were detained in Moscow

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on Saturday and more than 200 at another large demonstration in St. Petersburg. Overall, it said 1,614 people had been arrested in some 90 cities.

Navalny was arrested on Jan. 17 when he returned to Moscow from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from a severe nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin and which Russian authorities deny. Authorities say his stay in Germany violated terms of a suspended sentence in a 2014 criminal conviction, while Navalny says the conviction was for made-up charges.

The 44-year-old activist is well known nationally for his reports on the corruption that has flourished under President Vladimir Putin's government.

His wide support puts the Kremlin in a strategic bind — risking more protests and criticism from the West if it keeps him in custody but apparently unwilling to back down by letting him go free.

Navalny faces a court hearing in early February to determine whether his sentence in the criminal case for fraud and money-laundering — which Navalny says was politically motivated — is converted to 3 1/2 years behind bars.

Moscow police on Thursday arrested three top Navalny associates, two of whom were later jailed for periods of nine and 10 days.

Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on Aug. 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities insisted that the doctors who treated Navalny in Siberia before he was airlifted to Germany found no traces of poison and have challenged German officials to provide proof of his poisoning. Russia refused to open a full-fledged criminal inquiry, citing a lack of evidence that Navalny was poisoned.

Last month, Navalny released the recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him in August and then tried to cover it up. The FSB dismissed the recording as fake.

Navalny has been a thorn in the Kremlin's side for a decade, unusually durable in an opposition movement often demoralized by repressions.

He has been jailed repeatedly in connection with protests and twice was convicted of financial misdeeds in cases that he said were politically motivated. He suffered significant eye damage when an assailant threw disinfectant into his face. He was taken from jail to a hospital in 2019 with an illness that authorities said was an allergic reaction but which many suspected was a poisoning.

Larry King, broadcasting giant for half-century, dies at 87

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Larry King, the suspenders-sporting everyman whose broadcast interviews with world leaders, movie stars and ordinary Joes helped define American conversation for a half-century, died Saturday. He was 87.

King died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, his production company, Ora Media, tweeted. No cause of death was given, but a spokesperson said Jan. 4 that King had COVID-19, had received supplemental oxygen and had been moved out of intensive care. His son Chance Armstrong also confirmed King's death, CNN reported.

A longtime nationally syndicated radio host, from 1985 through 2010 he was a nightly fixture on CNN, where he won many honors, including two Peabody awards.

With his celebrity interviews, political debates and topical discussions, King wasn't just an enduring on-air personality. He also set himself apart with the curiosity he brought to every interview, whether questioning the assault victim known as the Central Park jogger or billionaire industrialist Ross Perot, who in 1992 rocked the presidential contest by announcing his candidacy on King's show.

In its early years, "Larry King Live" was based in Washington, which gave the show an air of gravitas. Likewise King. He was the plainspoken go-between through whom Beltway bigwigs could reach their pub-

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lic, and they did, earning the show prestige as a place where things happened, where news was made. King conducted an estimated 50,000 on-air interviews. In 1995 he presided over a Middle East peace summit with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, King Hussein of Jordan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. He welcomed everyone from the Dalai Lama to Elizabeth Taylor, from Mikhail Gorbachev to Barack Obama, Bill Gates to Lady Gaga.

Especially after he relocated to Los Angeles, his shows were frequently in the thick of breaking celebrity news, including Paris Hilton talking about her stint in jail in 2007 and Michael Jackson's friends and family members talking about his death in 2009.

King boasted of never overpreparing for an interview. His nonconfrontational style relaxed his guests and made him readily relatable to his audience.

"I don't pretend to know it all," he said in a 1995 Associated Press interview. "Not, 'What about Geneva or Cuba?' I ask, 'Mr. President, what don't you like about this job?' Or 'What's the biggest mistake you made?' That's fascinating."

At a time when CNN as the lone player in cable news was deemed politically neutral, and King was the essence of its middle-of-the-road stance, political figures and people at the center of controversies would seek out his show.

And he was known for getting guests who were notoriously elusive. Frank Sinatra, who rarely gave interviews and often lashed out at reporters, spoke to King in 1988 in what would be the singer's last major TV appearance. Sinatra was an old friend of King's and acted accordingly.

"Why are you here?" King asks. Sinatra responds, "Because you asked me to come and I hadn't seen you in a long time to begin with, I thought we ought to get together and chat, just talk about a lot of things."

King had never met Marlon Brando, who was even tougher to get and tougher to interview, when the acting giant asked to appear on King's show in 1994. The two hit it off so famously they ended their 90-minute talk with a song and an on-the-mouth kiss, an image that was all over media in subsequent weeks.

After a gala week marking his 25th anniversary in June 2010, King abruptly announced he was retiring from his show, telling viewers, "It's time to hang up my nightly suspenders." Named as his successor in the time slot: British journalist and TV personality Piers Morgan.

By King's departure that December, suspicion had grown that he had waited a little too long to hang up those suspenders. Once the leader in cable TV news, he ranked third in his time slot with less than half the nightly audience his peak year, 1998, when "Larry King Live" drew 1.64 million viewers.

His wide-eyed, regular-guy approach to interviewing by then felt dated in an era of edgy, pushy or loaded questioning by other hosts.

Meanwhile, occasional flubs had made him seem out of touch, or worse. A prime example from 2007 found King asking Jerry Seinfeld if he had voluntarily left his sitcom or been canceled by his network, NBC.

"I was the No. 1 show in television, Larry," replied Seinfeld with a flabbergasted look. "Do you know who I am?"

Always a workaholic, King would be back doing specials for CNN within a few months of performing his nightly duties.

He found a new sort of celebrity as a plainspoken natural on Twitter when the platform emerged, winning over more than 2 million followers who simultaneously mocked and loved him for his esoteric style.

"I've never been in a canoe. #Itsmy2cents," he said in a typical tweet in 2015.

His Twitter account was essentially a revival of a USA Today column he wrote for two decades full of one-off, disjointed thoughts. Norm Macdonald delivered a parody version of the column when he played King on "Saturday Night Live," with deadpan lines like, "The more I think about it, the more I appreciate the equator."

King was constantly parodied, often through old-age jokes on late-night talk shows from hosts including David Letterman and Conan O'Brien, often appearing with the latter to get in on the roasting himself.

King came by his voracious but no-frills manner honestly.

He was born Lawrence Harvey Zeiger in 1933, a son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who

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ran a bar and grill in Brooklyn. But after his father's death when Larry was a boy, he faced a troubled, sometimes destitute youth.

A fan of such radio stars as Arthur Godfrey and comedians Bob & Ray, King on reaching adulthood set his sights on a broadcasting career. With word that Miami was a good place to break in, he headed south in 1957 and landed a job sweeping floors at a tiny AM station. When a deejay abruptly quit, King was put on the air — and was handed his new surname by the station manager, who thought Zeiger "too Jewish."

A year later he moved to a larger station, where his duties were expanded from the usual patter to serving as host of a daily interview show that aired from a local restaurant. He quickly proved equally adept at talking to the waitresses, and the celebrities who began dropping by.

By the early 1960s King had gone to yet a larger Miami station, scored a newspaper column and become a local celebrity himself.

At the same time, he fell victim to living large.

"It was important to me to come across as a 'big man,'" he wrote in his autobiography, which meant "I made a lot of money and spread it around lavishly."

He accumulated debts and his first broken marriages (he was married eight times to seven women). He gambled, borrowed wildly and failed to pay his taxes. He also became involved with a shady financier in a scheme to bankroll an investigation of President John Kennedy's assassination. But when King skimmed some of the cash to pay his overdue taxes, his partner sued him for grand larceny in 1971. The charges were dropped, but King's reputation appeared ruined.

King lost his radio show and, for several years, struggled to find work. But by 1975 the scandal had largely blown over and a Miami station gave him another chance. Regaining his local popularity, King was signed in 1978 to host radio's first nationwide call-in show.

Originating from Washington on the Mutual network, "The Larry King Show" was eventually heard on more than 300 stations and made King a national phenomenon.

A few years later, CNN founder Ted Turner offered King a slot on his young network. "Larry King Live" debuted on June 1, 1985, and became CNN's highest-rated program. King's beginning salary of \$100,000 a year eventually grew to more than \$7 million.

A three-packs-a-day cigarette habit led to a heart attack in 1987, but King's quintuple-bypass surgery didn't slow him down.

Meanwhile, he continued to prove that, in his words, "I'm not good at marriage, but I'm a great boyfriend."

He was just 18 when he married high school girlfriend Freda Miller, in 1952. The marriage lasted less than a year. In subsequent decades he would marry Annette Kay, Alene Akins (twice), Mickey Sutfin, Sharon Lepore and Julie Alexander.

In 1997, he wed Shawn Southwick, a country singer and actress 26 years his junior. They would file for divorce in 2010, rescind the filing, then file for divorce again in 2019.

The couple had two sons — King's fourth and fifth kids, Chance, born in 1999, and Cannon Edward, born in 2000. In 2020, King lost his two oldest children, Andy King and Chaia King, who died of unrelated health problems within weeks of each other.

He had many other medical issues in recent decades, including more heart attacks and diagnoses of type 2 diabetes and lung cancer.

Through his setbacks he continued to work into his late 80s, taking on online talk shows and infomercials as his appearances on CNN grew fewer.

"Work," King once said. "It's the easiest thing I do."

Funeral arrangements and a memorial service will be announced later in coordination with the King family, "who ask for their privacy at this time," according to the tweet from Ora Media.

Former AP Television Writer Frazier Moore contributed biographical material to this report.

Democrats make federal election standards a top priority

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By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

Democrats plan to move quickly on one of the first bills of the new Congress, citing the need for federal election standards and other reforms to shore up the foundations of American democracy after a tumultuous post-election period and deadly riot at the Capitol.

States have long had disparate and contradictory rules for running elections. But the 2020 election, which featured pandemic-related changes to ease voting and then a flood of lawsuits by former President Donald Trump and his allies, underscored the differences from state to state: Mail-in ballots due on Election Day or just postmarked by then? Absentee voting allowed for all or just voters with an excuse? Same-day or advance-only registration?

Democrats, asserting constitutional authority to set the time, place and manner of federal elections, want national rules they say would make voting more uniform, accessible and fair across the nation. The bill would mandate early voting, same-day registration and other long-sought reforms that Republicans reject as federal overreach.

"We have just literally seen an attack on our own democracy," said U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota, referring to the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol. "I cannot think of a more timely moment to start moving on democracy reform."

The legislation first introduced two years ago, known as the For the People Act, also would give independent commissions the job of drawing congressional districts, require political groups to disclose high-dollar donors, create reporting requirements for online political ads and, in a rearview nod at Trump, obligate presidents to disclose their tax returns.

Republican opposition was fierce during the last session. At the time, then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., labeled it the "Democrat Politician Protection Act" and said in an op-ed that Democrats were seeking to "change the rules of American politics to benefit one party."

While Democrats control Congress for the first time in a decade, the measure's fate depends on whether enough Republicans can be persuaded to reconsider a bill they have repeatedly rejected. If not, Democrats could decide it's time to take the extraordinary and difficult step of eliminating the Senate filibuster, a procedural tool often used by the minority party to block bills under rules that require 60 votes to advance legislation.

Advocates say the bill is the most consequential piece of voting legislation since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. House Democrats vowed two years ago to make the bill a priority, and they reintroduced it this month as H.R. 1, underscoring its importance to the party.

"People just want to be able to cast their vote without it being an ordeal," said Rep. John Sarbanes, a Democrat from Maryland who is the lead sponsor of the House bill. "It's crazy in America that you still have to navigate an obstacle course to get to the ballot box."

Current plans would have the full House take up the bill as soon as the first week of February. The Senate Rules Committee would then consider a companion bill introduced in the Senate, and a tie vote there could allow it to move out of committee and to the floor as early as next month, said Klobuchar, who is expected to become the committee's next chair.

A quick vote would be remarkable considering the Senate also is likely to be juggling Trump's impeachment trial, confirmation of President Joe Biden's Cabinet choices and another round of coronavirus relief.

While states have long had different voting procedures, the November 2020 election highlighted how the variability could be used to sow doubt about the outcome. The bill's supporters, which include national voting and civil rights organizations, cited dozens of pre-election lawsuits that challenged procedural rules, such as whether ballots postmarked on Election Day should count.

They also pointed to the post-election litigation Trump and his allies filed to try to get millions of legitimately cast ballots tossed out. Many of those lawsuits targeted election changes intended to make voting easier. That included a Pennsylvania law the state's Republican-led legislature passed before the pandemic to make absentee ballots available to all registered voters upon request.

Government and election officials repeatedly have described the election as the most secure in U.S. history. Even former U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr, a Trump ally, said before leaving his post that there

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was no evidence of widespread fraud that would overturn the result.

"The strategy of lying about voter fraud, delegitimizing the election outcome and trying to suppress votes has been unmasked for the illegitimate attack on our democracy that it is, and I think that it opens a lot more doors to real conversations about how to fix our voting system and root out this cancer," said Wendy Weiser, head of the democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy institute.

Along with the election reform bill, the House two years ago introduced a related bill, now known as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act in honor of the late civil rights activist and congressman. House Democrats are expected to reintroduce it soon after it had similarly stalled in the Republican-controlled Senate.

That bill would restore a key provision of the Voting Rights Act that had triggered federal scrutiny of election changes in certain states and counties. A 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling set aside the method used to identify jurisdictions subject to the provision, known as preclearance, which was used to protect voting rights in places with a history of discrimination.

In general, state election officials have been wary of federal voting requirements. But those serving in states led by Democrats have been more open and want to ensure Congress provides money to help them make system upgrades, which the bill does.

"If you still believe in what we all learned in high school government class, that democracy works best when as many eligible people participate, these are commonsense reforms," said Sen. Alex Padilla, a Democrat who oversaw California's elections before being appointed to the seat formerly held by Vice President Kamala Harris.

But Republican officials like Alabama Secretary of State John Merrill remain opposed. Merrill said the federal government's role is limited and that states must be allowed to innovate and implement their own voting rules.

"Those decisions are best left up to the states, and I think the states are the ones that should determine what course of action they should take," Merrill said, noting that Alabama has increased voter registration and participation without implementing early voting.

"To just say that everything needs to be uniform, that's not the United States of America," Merrill said.

In the Senate, a key question will be whether there is enough Republican support for elements of the voting reform bill to persuade Democrats to break off certain parts of it into smaller legislation. For now, Democrats say they want a floor vote on the full package.

Edward B. Foley, an election law expert at Ohio State University, said Democrats should consider narrow reforms that could gain bipartisan support, cautioning that moving too quickly on a broad bill runs the risk of putting off Republicans.

"It would seem to me at this moment in American history, a precarious moment, the right instinct should be a kind of bipartisanship to rebuild common ground as opposed to 'Our side won, your side lost and we are off to the races,'" Foley said.

Cassidy reported from Atlanta.

Michigan Mega Millions ticket wins \$1 billion jackpot

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — One winning ticket was sold for the \$1 billion Mega Millions jackpot to someone who bought it in Michigan, making it the third-largest lottery prize in U.S. history.

The winning numbers for Friday night's drawing were 4, 26, 42, 50 and 60, with a Mega Ball of 24. The winning ticket was purchased at a Kroger store in the Detroit suburb of Novi, the Michigan Lottery said.

"Someone in Michigan woke up to life-changing news this morning, and Kroger Michigan congratulates the newest Michigan multimillionaire," said Rachel Hurst, a regional spokeswoman for the grocery chain. She declined to comment further.

The Mega Millions top prize had been growing since Sept. 15, when a winning ticket was sold in Wis-

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consin. The lottery's next estimated jackpot is \$20 million.

Friday night's drawing came just two days after a ticket sold in Maryland matched all six numbers drawn and won a \$731.1 million Powerball jackpot.

Only two lottery prizes in the U.S. have been larger than Friday's jackpot. Three tickets for a \$1.586 billion Powerball jackpot were sold in January 2016, and one winning ticket sold for a \$1.537 billion Mega Millions jackpot in October 2018.

The jackpot figures refer to amounts if a winner opts for an annuity, paid in 30 annual installments. Most winners choose a cash prize, which for the Mega Millions estimated jackpot would be \$739.6 million before taxes.

The odds of winning a Mega Millions jackpot are incredibly steep, at one in 302.5 million.

The game is played in 45 states as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Insurers add food to coverage menu as way to improve health

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

When COVID-19 first swarmed the United States, one health insurer called some customers with a question: Do you have enough to eat?

Oscar Health wanted to know if people had adequate food for the next couple weeks and how they planned to stay stocked up while hunkering down at home.

"We've seen time and again, the lack of good and nutritional food causes members to get readmitted" to hospitals, Oscar executive Ananth Lalithakumar said.

Food has become a bigger focus for health insurers as they look to expand their coverage beyond just the care that happens in a doctor's office. More plans are paying for temporary meal deliveries and some are teaching people how to cook and eat healthier foods.

Benefits experts say insurers and policymakers are growing used to treating food as a form of medicine that can help patients reduce blood sugar or blood pressure levels and stay out of expensive hospitals.

"People are finally getting comfortable with the idea that everybody saves money when you prevent certain things from happening or somebody's condition from worsening," said Andrew Shea, a senior vice president with the online insurance broker eHealth.

This push is still relatively small and happening mostly with government-funded programs like Medicaid or Medicare Advantage, the privately run versions of the government's health program for people who are 65 or older or have disabilities. But some employers that offer coverage to their workers also are growing interested.

Medicaid programs in several states are testing or developing food coverage. Next year, Medicare will start testing meal program vouchers for patients with malnutrition as part of a broader look at improving care and reducing costs.

Nearly 7 million people were enrolled last year in a Medicare Advantage plan that offered some sort of meal benefit, according to research from the consulting firm Avalere Health. That's more than double the total from 2018.

Insurers commonly cover temporary meal deliveries so patients have something to eat when they return from the hospital. And for several years now, many also have paid for meals tailored to patients with conditions such as diabetes.

But now insurers and other bill payers are taking a more nuanced approach. This comes as the coronavirus pandemic sends millions of Americans to seek help from food banks or neighborhood food pantries.

Oscar Health, for instance, found that nearly 3 out of 10 of its Medicare Advantage customers had food supply problems at the start of the pandemic, so it arranged temporary grocery deliveries from a local store at no cost to the recipient.

The Medicare Advantage specialist Humana started giving some customers with low incomes debit cards with either a \$25 or \$50 on them to help buy healthy food. The insurer also is testing meal deliveries in the second half of the month.

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That's when money from government food programs can run low. Research shows that diabetes patients wind up making more emergency room visits than, said Humana executive Dr. Andrew Renda.

"It may be because they're still taking their medications but they don't have enough food. And so their blood sugar goes crazy and then they end up in the hospital," he said.

The Blue Cross-Blue Shield insurer Anthem connected Medicare Advantage customer Kim Bischoff with a nutritionist after she asked for help losing weight.

The 43-year-old Napoleon, Ohio, resident had lost more than 100 pounds about 11 years ago, but she was gaining weight again and growing frustrated.

The nutritionist helped wean Bischoff from a so-called keto diet largely centered on meats and cheeses. The insurer also arranged for temporary food deliveries from a nearby Kroger so she could try healthy foods like rice noodles, almonds and dried fruits.

Bischoff said she only lost a few pounds. But she was able to stop taking blood pressure and thyroid medications because her health improved after she balanced her diet.

"I learned that a little bit of weight gain isn't a huge deal, but the quality of my health is," she said.

David Berwick of Somerville, Massachusetts, credits a meal delivery program with improving his blood sugar, and he wishes he could stay on it. The 64-year-old has diabetes and started the program last year at the suggestion of his doctor. The Medicaid program MassHealth covered it.

Berwick said the nonprofit Community Servings gave him weekly deliveries of dry cereal and premade meals for him to reheat. Those included soups and turkey meatloaf Berwick described as "absolutely delicious."

"They're not things I would make on my own for sure," he said. "It was a gift, it was a real privilege."

These programs typically last a few weeks or months and often focus on customers with a medical condition or low incomes who have a hard time getting nutritious food. But they aren't limited to those groups.

Indianapolis-based Preventia Group is starting food deliveries for some employers that want to improve the eating habits of people covered under their health plans. People who sign up start working with a health coach to learn about nutrition.

Then they can either begin short-term deliveries of meals or bulk boxes of food and recipes to try. The employer picks up the cost.

It's not just about hunger or a lack of good food, said Chief Operating Officer Susan Rider. They're also educating people about what healthy, nutritious food is and how to prepare it.

Researchers expect coverage of food as a form of medicine to grow as insurers and employers learn more about which programs work best. Patients with low incomes may need help first with getting access to nutritional food. People with employer-sponsored coverage might need to focus more on how to use their diet to manage diabetes or improve their overall health.

A 2019 study of Massachusetts residents with similar medical conditions found that those who received meals tailored to their condition had fewer hospital admissions and generated less health care spending than those who did not.

Study author Dr. Seth Berkowitz of the University of North Carolina noted that those meals are only one method for addressing food or nutrition problems. He said a lot more can be learned "about what interventions work, in what situations and for whom."

A lack of healthy food "is very clearly associated with poor health, so we know we need to do something about it," Berkowitz said.

Follow Tom Murphy on Twitter: @thpmurphy

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Supporters' words may haunt Trump at impeachment trial

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By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The words of Donald Trump supporters who are accused of participating in the deadly U.S. Capitol riot may end up being used against him in his Senate impeachment trial as he faces the charge of inciting a violent insurrection.

At least five supporters facing federal charges have suggested they were taking orders from the then-president when they marched on Capitol Hill on Jan. 6 to challenge the certification of Joe Biden's election win. But now those comments, captured in interviews with reporters and federal agents, are likely to take center stage as Democrats lay out their case. It's the first time a former president will face such charges after leaving office.

"I feel like I was basically following my president. I was following what we were called to do. He asked us to fly there. He asked us to be there," Jenna Ryan, a Texas real estate agent who posted a photo on Twitter of herself flashing a peace sign next to a broken Capitol window, told a Dallas-Fort Worth TV station.

Jacob Chansley, the Arizona man photographed on the dais in the Senate who was shirtless and wore face paint and a furry hat with horns, has similarly pointed a finger at Trump.

Chansley called the FBI the day after the insurrection and told agents he traveled "at the request of the president that all 'patriots' come to D.C. on January 6, 2021," authorities wrote in court papers.

Chanley's lawyer unsuccessfully lobbied for a pardon for his client before Trump's term ended, saying Chansley "felt like he was answering the call of our president." Authorities say that while up on the dais in the Senate chamber, Chansley wrote a threatening note to then-Vice President Mike Pence that said: "It's only a matter of time, justice is coming."

Trump is the first president to be twice impeached and the first to face a trial after leaving office. The charge this time is "inciting violence against the government of the United States." His impeachment lawyer, Butch Bowers, did not respond to call for comment.

Opening arguments in the trial will begin the week of Feb. 8. House Democrats who voted to impeach Trump last week for inciting the storming of the Capitol say a full reckoning is necessary before the country — and the Congress — can move on.

For weeks, Trump rallied his supporters against the election outcome and urged them to come to the Capitol on Jan. 6 to rage against Biden's win. Trump spoke to the crowd near the White House shortly before they marched along Pennsylvania Avenue to Capitol Hill.

"We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen," Trump said. "You don't concede when there's theft involved. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore."

Later he said: "If you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore." He told supporters to walk to the Capitol to "peacefully and patriotically" make your voices heard.

Trump has taken no responsibility for his part in fomenting the violence, saying days after the attack: "People thought that what I said was totally appropriate."

Unlike a criminal trial, where there are strict rules about what is and isn't evidence, the Senate can consider anything it wishes. And if they can show that Trump's words made a real impact, all the better, and scholars expect it in the trial.

"Bringing in those people's statements is part of proving that it would be at a minimum reasonable for a rational person to expect that if you said and did the things that Trump said and did, then they would be understood in precisely the way these people understood them," said Frank Bowman, a Constitutional law expert and law professor at University of Missouri.

A retired firefighter from Pennsylvania told a friend that that he traveled to Washington with a group of people and the group listened to Trump's speech and then "followed the President's instructions" and went to the Capitol, an agent wrote in court papers. That man, Robert Sanford, is accused of throwing a fire extinguisher that hit three Capitol Police officers.

Another man, Robert Bauer of Kentucky, told FBI agents that "he marched to the U.S. Capitol because President Trump said to do so," authorities wrote. His cousin, Edward Hemenway, from Virginia, told the FBI that he and Bauer headed toward the Capitol after Trump said "something about taking Pennsylvania Avenue."

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More than 130 people as of Friday were facing federal charges; prosecutors have promised that more cases — and more serious charges — are coming.

Most of those arrested so far are accused of crimes like unlawful entry and disorderly conduct, but prosecutors this week filed conspiracy charges against three self-described members of a paramilitary group who authorities say plotted the attack. A special group of prosecutors is examining whether to bring sedition charges, which carry up to 20 years in prison, against any of the rioters.

Two-thirds of the Senate is needed to convict. And while many Republicans — including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky— have condemned Trump's words, it remains unclear how many would vote to convict him.

"While the statements of those people kind of bolsters the House manager's case, I think that President Trump has benefited from a Republican Party that has not been willing to look at evidence," said Michael Gerhardt, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law who testified before the House Judiciary Committee during Trump's first impeachment hearings in 2019.

"They stood by him for the entire first impeachment proceeding, thinking that the phone call with the president of the Ukraine was perfect and I'm sure they will think that was a perfect speech too. There is nothing yet to suggest that they would think otherwise," Gerhardt said.

Richer reported from Boston.

UK doctors seek review of 12-week gap between vaccine doses

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A major British doctors' group says the U.K. government should "urgently review" its decision to give people a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine up to 12 weeks after the first, rather than the shorter gap recommended by the manufacturer and the World Health Organization.

The U.K., which has Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, adopted the policy in order to give as many people as possible a first dose of vaccine quickly. So far almost 5.5 million people have received a shot of either a vaccine made by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech or one developed by U.K.-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

AstraZeneca has said it believes a first dose of its vaccine offers protection after 12 weeks, but Pfizer says it has not tested the efficacy of its jab after such a long gap.

The British Medical Association on Saturday urged England's chief medical officer to "urgently review the U.K.'s current position of second doses after 12 weeks."

In a statement, the association said there was "growing concern from the medical profession regarding the delay of the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as Britain's strategy has become increasingly isolated from many other countries."

"No other nation has adopted the U.K.'s approach," Dr. Chaand Nagpaul, chairman of the BMA council, told the BBC.

He said the WHO had recommended that the second Pfizer vaccine shot could be given up to six weeks after the first but only "in exceptional circumstances."

"I do understand the trade-off and the rationale, but if that was the right thing to do then we would see other nations following suit," Nagpaul said.

Yvonne Doyle, medical director of Public Health England, defended the decision as "a reasonable scientific balance on the basis of both supply and also protecting the most people."

Researchers in Britain have begun collecting blood samples from newly vaccinated people in order to study how many antibodies they are producing at different intervals, from 3 weeks to 24 months, to get an answer to the question of what timing is best for the shots.

The doctors' concerns came a day after government medical advisers said there was evidence that a new variant of the virus first identified in southeast England carries a greater risk of death than the original strain.

Chief Scientific Adviser Patrick Vallance said Friday "that there is evidence that there is an increased risk

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for those who have the new variant," which is also more transmissible than the original virus. He said the new strain might be about 30% more deadly, but stressed that "the evidence is not yet strong" and more research is needed.

Research by British scientists advising the government said although initial analyses suggested that the strain did not cause more severe disease, several more recent ones suggest it might. However, the number of deaths is relatively small, and fatality rates are affected by many things, including the care that patients get and their age and health, beyond having COVID-19.

Britain has recorded 95,981 deaths among people who tested positive, the highest confirmed virus toll in Europe.

The U.K. is in a lockdown to try to slow the latest surge of the virus, and the government says an end to the restrictions will not come soon. Pubs, restaurants, gyms, entertainment venues and many shops are closed, and people are required to stay largely at home.

The British government is considering tightening quarantine requirements for people arriving from abroad. Already travelers must self-isolate for 10 days, but enforcement is patchy. Authorities are considering requiring arrivals to stay in quarantine hotels, a practice adopted in other countries, including Australia.

"We may need to go further to protect our borders," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday.

Follow AP coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at:

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At 78 and the oldest president, Biden sees a world changed

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Joe Biden took the oath of office as the 46th president, he became not only the oldest newly inaugurated U.S. chief executive in history but also the oldest sitting president ever.

Biden was born Nov. 20, 1942, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was 78 years, two months and one day old when he was sworn in on Wednesday. That's 78 days older than President Ronald Reagan was when he left office in 1989.

A look at how the country Biden now leads has changed over his lifetime and how his presidency might reflect that.

BIGGER, MORE DIVERSE PIE

The U.S. population is approaching 330 million people, dwarfing the 135 million at Biden's birth and nearly 60% greater than when he was first elected to the Senate in 1972. The world population in Biden's lifetime has grown from about 2.3 billion to 7.8 billion.

More striking is the diversity in Biden's America. The descendant of Irish immigrants, Biden was born during a period of relative stagnant immigration after U.S. limitations on new entries in the 1920s, followed by a worldwide depression in the 1930s. But a wave of European immigration followed World War II, when Biden was young, and more recently an influx of Hispanic and nonwhite immigrants from Latin America, Asia and Africa has altered the melting pot again.

In 1950, the first census after Biden's birth counted the country as 89% white. Heading into 2020, the country was 60% non-Hispanic white and 76% white, including Hispanic whites.

So, it's no surprise that a politician who joined an all-male, nearly all-white Senate as a 30-year-old used his inaugural address 48 years later to promise a reckoning on racial justice and, later that afternoon, signed several immigrant-friendly executive orders.

BIDEN, HARRIS AND HISTORY

Biden took special note of Vice President Kamala Harris as the first woman elected to national office, and the first Black woman and south Asian woman to reach the vice presidency. "Don't tell me things can't change," he said of Harris, who was a student in the still-mostly segregated Oakland public elementary school when Biden became a senator.

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The first time Biden addresses a joint session of Congress, there will be two women behind a president, another first: Harris and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. But change comes slowly. Harris was just the second Black woman ever to serve in the Senate. When she resigned Monday, the Senate was left with none -- and just three Black men out of 100 seats. Black Americans account for about 13% of the population.

MONEY MATTERS

Minimum wage in 1942 was 30 cents an hour. Median income for men according to the 1940 census, the last before Biden's birth, was \$956, with women earning about 62 cents for every dollar a man earned. Today, the minimum wage is \$7.25. The federal government's most recent weekly wage statistics reflect a median annual income of about \$51,100 for full-time workers. But the question is buying power, and that varies. The month Biden was born, a dozen eggs averaged about 60 cents in U.S. cities -- two hours of minimum wage work. A loaf of bread was 9 cents, about 20 minutes of work. Today, eggs can go for about \$1.50 (12 minutes of minimum-wage work); a loaf of bread averages \$2 (16 minutes).

College tuition is another story. Pre-war tuition at Harvard Business School was about \$600 a year -- roughly two-thirds of the median American worker's yearly wages. Today, the current Harvard MBA class is charged annual tuition of more than \$73,000, or a year and almost five months of the median U.S. salary (and that's before taxes).

Biden proposes raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour -- a move already drawing opposition from Republicans. He's called for tuition-free two-year community and technical college and tuition waivers for four-year public schools (so, not Harvard) for students from households with \$125,000 or less in annual income.

DEBT

National debt has soared in Biden's lifetime, from \$72 billion to \$27 trillion. But it's a recent phenomenon. Biden finished 36 years in the Senate and became vice president amid the fallout from the 2008 financial crash, when the debt was about \$10 trillion. Now he takes office amid another economic calamity: the coronavirus pandemic.

To some degree, this is a biographical bookend for Biden. He was born when borrowing to finance the war effort generated budget deficits that, when measured as percentage of the overall economy, were the largest in U.S. history until 2020, when emergency COVID spending, the 2017 tax cuts and loss of revenue from a lagging economy added trillions of debt in a single year.

Reflecting how President Franklin Roosevelt approached the Great Depression and World War II, Biden is nonetheless calling for an additional \$1.9 trillion in immediate deficit spending to prevent a long-term economic slide.

PLANES, TRANES AND AUTOMOBILES

As part of his proposed overhaul of the energy grid, Biden wants to install 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations by 2030, a move analysts project could spur the sale of 25 million electric vehicles. For context, federal statistics counted 33 million cars in the U.S. altogether in 1948, as Biden began grammar school.

A FIRST FOR THE SILENT GENERATION

Biden is part of the Silent Generation, so named because it falls between the "Greatest Generation" that endured the Depression and won World War II, and their children, the Baby Boomers, who made their mark through the sweeping social and economic changes of the civil rights era, Vietnam and the Cold War.

True to the stereotypes, Biden's generation looked for decades as if it would never see one of its own in the Oval Office. The Greatest Generation produced John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Then Boomers took over. Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Donald Trump were born in a span of 67 days in 1946, the first of the Boomer years. Barack Obama, born in 1961, bookended their generation as a young Boomer.

If his inaugural address is any indication, Biden seems eager to embrace the characteristics of his flanking generations. He ticked through the "cascading crises" -- a pandemic and economic fallout reminiscent of the Depression and subsequent war effort, a reckoning on race that's an extension of the civil rights era -- and summoned the nation "to the tasks of our time."

PLENTY OF FIRST-HAND LEARNING

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Biden lived through 14 presidencies before beginning his own, nearly one-third of all presidents. No previous White House occupant had lived through so many administrations before taking office.

Thousands of Hong Kongers locked down to contain coronavirus

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Thousands of Hong Kong residents were locked down in their homes Saturday in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening coronavirus outbreak in the city.

Authorities said in a statement that an area comprising 16 buildings in the city's Yau Tsim Mong district would be locked down until all residents were tested. Residents would not be allowed to leave their homes until they received their test results to prevent cross-infection.

"Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained," the government statement said.

The restrictions, which were announced at 4 a.m. in Hong Kong, were expected to end within 48 hours, the government said.

Hong Kong has been grappling to contain a fresh wave of the coronavirus since November. Over 4,300 cases have been recorded in the last two months, making up nearly 40% of the city's total.

Coronavirus cases in Yau Tsim Mong district represent about half of infections in the past week.

Approximately 3,000 people in Yau Tsim Mong had taken tests for coronavirus thus far, according to the Hong Kong government, joining the thousands of others around the crowded city of 7.5 million who have been tested in recent days.

Police guarded access points to the working-class neighborhood of old buildings and subdivided flats and arrested a 47-year-old man after he allegedly attacked an officer. The man had reportedly been told he would have to be tested after coming into the restricted area and would not be allowed to leave until he could show a negative test result.

Sewage testing in the area picked up more concentrated traces of the virus, prompting concerns that poorly built plumbing systems and a lack of ventilation in subdivided units may present a possible path for the virus to spread.

Hong Kong has previously avoided lockdowns in the city during the pandemic, with leader Carrie Lam stating in July last year that authorities will avoid taking such "extreme measures" unless it had no other choice.

The government appealed to employers to exercise discretion and avoid docking the salary of employees who have been affected by the new restrictions and may not be able to go to work.

Hong Kong has seen a total of 9,929 infections in the city, with 168 deaths recorded as of Friday.

More heads roll at US-funded international broadcasters

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The heads of three federally funded international broadcasters were abruptly fired late Friday as the Biden administration completed a house-cleaning of Donald Trump appointees at the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Two officials familiar with the changes said the acting chief of the USAGM summarily dismissed the directors of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks just a month after they had been named to the posts.

The changes came a day after the director of the Voice of America and his deputy were removed and the chief of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting stepped down. The firings follow the forced resignation of former President Donald Trump's handpicked choice to lead USAGM only two hours after Joe Biden took office on Wednesday.

Trump's USAGM chief Michael Pack had been accused by Democrats and others of trying to turn VOA

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and its sister networks into pro-Trump propaganda machines. Pack had appointed all of those who were fired on Thursday and Friday to their posts only in December.

The two officials said the acting CEO of USAGM, Kelu Chao, had fired Middle East Broadcasting Network director Victoria Coates, Radio Free Asia chief Stephen Yates and Radio Free Europe head Ted Lipien in a swift series of moves late Friday. It was not immediately clear if any of those removed would try to contest their dismissals.

The White House appointed Chao, a three-decade VOA veteran journalist, to be the agency's interim chief executive on Wednesday shortly after demanding Pack's resignation. Chao did not respond to phone calls seeking comment about her actions. The two officials familiar with the dismissals were not authorized to publicly discuss personnel matters and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Coates, Yates and Lipien, along with former VOA director Robert Reilly and former Cuba broadcasting chief Jeffrey Shapiro were all prominent conservatives chosen by Pack to shake up what Trump and other Republicans believed was biased leadership in taxpayer-funded media outlets.

Reilly and his deputy Elizabeth Robbins were removed just a week after coming under harsh criticism for demoting a VOA White House correspondent who had tried to ask former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo a question after a town hall event.

Pack had created a furor when he took over USAGM last year and fired the boards of all the outlets under his control along with the leadership of the individual broadcast networks. The actions were criticized as threatening the broadcasters' prized editorial independence and raised fears that Pack, a conservative filmmaker and former associate of Trump's onetime political strategist Steve Bannon, intended to turn venerable U.S. media outlets into pro-Trump propaganda machines.

Biden had been expected to make major changes to the agency's structure and management, and Pack's immediate dismissal on inauguration day signaled that those would be coming sooner rather than later. Pack had not been required to submit his resignation as his three-year position was created by Congress and not limited by the length of a particular administration.

VOA was founded during World War II and its congressional charter requires it to present independent news and information to international audiences.

Biden's early approach to virus: Underpromise, overdeliver

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a proven political strategy: Underpromise and overdeliver.

President Joe Biden, in his first three days in office, has painted a bleak picture of the country's immediate future, warning Americans that it will take months, not weeks, to reorient a nation facing a historic convergence of crises.

The dire language is meant as a call to action, but it's also a deliberate effort to temper expectations. In addition, it is an explicit rejection of President Donald Trump's tack of talking down the coronavirus pandemic and its economic toll.

Chris Lu, a longtime Obama administration official, said the grim tone is aimed at "restoring trust in government" that eroded during the Trump administration.

"If you're trying to get people to believe in this whole system of vaccinations, and if you want people to take seriously mask mandates, your leaders have to level with the American people," he said.

Biden said Thursday that "things are going to continue to get worse before they get better" and offered "the brutal truth" that it will take eight months before a majority of Americans will be vaccinated.

On Friday, he declared outright: "There's nothing we can do to change the trajectory of the pandemic in the next several months."

It's all part of Biden's pledge that his administration will "always be honest and transparent with you, about both the good news and the bad."

That approach, aides say, explains Biden's decision to set clear and achievable goals for his new administration. The measured approach is drawing praise in some corners for being realistic — but criticism

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from others for its caution.

Trump often dismissed the seriousness of the virus and even acknowledged to journalist Bob Woodward that he deliberately played down the threat to the U.S. to prop up the economy. Even as death tolls and infection rates soared, Trump insisted the country was already "rounding the turn."

Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said Biden's pledge for 100 million vaccinations in his first 100 days in office might fall short of what's needed to turn the tide on the virus.

"Maybe they're picking a number that's easier to achieve, rather than the number that we need to achieve. I would urge people to be bolder than that," he said.

Adalja argued that the goal they've set "should be the bare minimum that we accept." But he also acknowledged that there's a major political risk in overpromising.

"You don't want people to be discouraged or feel like the government is incompetent" if they fail to meet a goal, he said.

"It's a disappointingly low bar," said Dr. Leana Wen, a public health expert and emergency physician.

Biden on Friday acknowledged the criticism, saying he was hopeful for more vaccinations, but he avoided putting down a marker that could potentially fall out of reach.

"I found it fascinating that yesterday the press asked the question, 'Is 100 million enough?'" he said in the State Dining Room. "A week before, they were saying, 'Biden, are you crazy? You can't do 100 million in 100 days.' Well, we're — God willing — not only going to 100 million. We're going to do more than that."

In fact, while there was some skepticism when Biden first announced the goal on Dec. 8, it was generally seen as optimistic but within reach.

The Biden administration might be taking lessons from the earliest days of the Obama administration, when there was constant pressure to show real progress in turning around the economy during the financial crisis.

One former Obama administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to speak freely about internal conversations, said there was a fevered effort during the first few months of Obama's first term to play down the focus on evaluating the president's success within his first 100 days because aides knew the financial recovery would take far longer than that.

In one notable misstep, Obama's National Economic Council chair, Christina Romer, predicted that unemployment wouldn't top 8% if Congress passed the administration's stimulus package to address the financial crisis. It was signed into law a month into Obama's first term, but by the end of that year, unemployment nevertheless hit 10%.

The risk in setting too rosy expectations is that an administration might become defined by its failure to meet them. President George W. Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech in 2003 — at a time when the Iraq War was far from over — became a defining blunder of his presidency.

Trump provided an overreach of his own in May 2020, when he said the nation had "prevailed" over the virus. At the time, the country had seen about 80,000 deaths from the virus. This week, the U.S. death toll topped 412,000.

Trump's lax approach and lack of credibility contributed to poor adherence to public safety rules among the American public.

Former Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said Trump's handling of the virus caused so much damage to public perceptions of its severity that it's important for Biden to set a contrasting tone.

"I think it is really important to start telling the American people the truth. And that has not happened in a year, since we found the first case of coronavirus, so he's got a lot of damage to undo," she said.

"This is a very serious, very contagious, deadly disease, and anything other than that message — delivered over and over again — is, unfortunately, adding to the willingness of lots of people to pay no attention to how to stop the spread of the disease."

For 1st Black Pentagon chief, racism challenge is personal

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By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Newly confirmed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will have to contend not only with a world of security threats and a massive military bureaucracy, but also with a challenge that hits closer to home: rooting out racism and extremism in the ranks.

Austin took office Friday as the first Black defense chief, in the wake of the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, where retired and current military members were among the rioters touting far-right conspiracies.

The retired four-star Army general told senators this week that the Pentagon's job is to "keep America safe from our enemies. But we can't do that if some of those enemies lie within our own ranks."

Ridding the military of racists isn't his only priority. Austin, who was confirmed in a 93-2 vote, has made clear that accelerating delivery of coronavirus vaccines will get his early attention.

But the racism issue is personal. At Tuesday's confirmation hearing, he explained why.

In 1995, when then-Lt. Col. Austin was serving with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, three white soldiers, described as self-styled skinheads, were arrested in the murder of a Black couple who was walking down the street. Investigators concluded the two were targeted because of their race.

The killing triggered an internal investigation, and all told, 22 soldiers were linked to skinhead and other similar groups or found to hold extremist views. They included 17 who were considered white supremacists or separatists.

"We woke up one day and discovered that we had extremist elements in our ranks," Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "And they did bad things that we certainly held them accountable for. But we discovered that the signs for that activity were there all along. We just didn't know what to look for or what to pay attention to."

Austin is not the first secretary to grapple with the problem. Racism has long been an undercurrent in the military. While leaders insist only a small minority hold extremist views, there have been persistent incidents of racial hatred and, more subtly, a history of implicit bias in what is a predominantly white institution.

A recent Air Force inspector general report found that Black service members in the Air Force are far more likely to be investigated, arrested, face disciplinary actions and be discharged for misconduct.

Based on 2018 data, roughly two-thirds of the military's enlisted corps is white and about 17% is Black, but the minority percentage declines as rank increases. The U.S. population overall is about three-quarters white and 13% Black, according to Census Bureau statistics.

Over the past year, Pentagon leaders have struggled to make changes, hampered by opposition from then-President Donald Trump. It took months for the department to effectively ban the Confederate flag last year, and Pentagon officials left to Congress the matter of renaming military bases that honor Confederate leaders. Trump rejected renaming the bases and defended flying the flag.

Senators peppered Austin with questions about extremism in the ranks and his plans to deal with it. The hearing was held two weeks after lawmakers fled the deadly insurrection at the Capitol, in which many of the rioters espoused separatist or extremist views.

"It's clear that we are at a crisis point," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., saying leaders must root out extremism and reaffirm core military values.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., pressed Austin on the actions he will take. "Disunity is probably the most destructive force in terms of our ability to defend ourselves," Kaine said. "If we're divided against one another, how can we defend the nation?"

Austin, who broke racial barriers throughout his four decades in the Army, said military leaders must set the right example to discourage and eliminate extremist behavior. They must get to know their troops, and look for signs of extremism or other problems, he said.

But Austin — the first Black man to serve as head of U.S. Central Command and the first to be the Army's vice chief of staff — also knows that much of the solution must come from within the military services and lower-ranking commanders. They must ensure their troops are trained and aware of the prohibitions.

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"Most of us were embarrassed that we didn't know what to look for and we didn't really understand that by being engaged more with your people on these types of issues can pay big dividends," he said, recalling the 82nd Airborne problems. "I don't think that you can ever take your hand off the steering wheel here."

But he also cautioned that there won't be an easy solution, adding, "I don't think that this is a thing that you can put a Band-Aid on and fix and leave alone. I think that training needs to go on, routinely."

Austin gained confirmation after clearing a legal hurdle prohibiting anyone from serving as defense chief until they have been out of the military for seven years. Austin retired less than five years ago, but the House and Senate quickly approved the needed waiver, and President Joe Biden signed it Friday.

Soon afterward, Austin strode into the Pentagon, his afternoon already filled with calls and briefings, including a meeting with Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He held a broader video conference on COVID-19 with all top defense and military leaders, and his first call to an international leader was with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

Austin, 67, is a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He helped lead the invasion into Iraq in 2003, and eight years later was the top U.S. commander there, overseeing the full American troop withdrawal. After serving as vice chief of the Army, Austin headed Central Command, where he oversaw the reinsertion of U.S. troops to Iraq to beat back Islamic State militants.

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.

Trump shuns 'ex-presidents club' — and the feeling is mutual

By WILL WEISSERT and DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a club Donald Trump was never really interested in joining and certainly not so soon: the cadre of former commanders in chief who revere the presidency enough to put aside often bitter political differences and even join together in common cause.

Members of the ex-presidents club pose together for pictures. They smile and pat each other on the back while milling around historic events, or sit somberly side by side at VIP funerals. They take on special projects together. They rarely criticize one another and tend to offer even fewer harsh words about their White House successors.

Like so many other presidential traditions, however, this is one Trump seems likely to flout. Now that he's left office, it's hard to see him embracing the stately, exclusive club of living former presidents.

"He kind of laughed at the very notion that he would be accepted in the presidents club," said Kate Andersen Brower, who interviewed Trump in 2019 for her book "Team of Five: The Presidents' Club in the Age of Trump." "He was like, 'I don't think I'll be accepted.'"

It's equally clear that the club's other members don't much want him — at least for now.

Former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton recorded a three-minute video from Arlington National Cemetery after President Joe Biden's inauguration this week, praising peaceful presidential succession as a core of American democracy. The segment included no mention of Trump by name, but stood as a stark rebuke of his behavior since losing November's election.

"I think the fact that the three of us are standing here, talking about a peaceful transfer of power, speaks to the institutional integrity of our country," Bush said. Obama called inaugurations "a reminder that we can have fierce disagreements and yet recognize each other's common humanity, and that, as Americans, we have more in common than what separates us."

Trump spent months making baseless claims that the election had been stolen from him through fraud and eventually helped incite a deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. He left the White House without attending Biden's swearing-in, the first president to skip his successor's inauguration in 152 years.

Obama, Bush and Clinton recorded their video after accompanying Biden to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier following the inauguration. They also taped a video urging Americans to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. Only 96-year-old Jimmy Carter, who has limited his public events because of the pandemic, and Trump, who had already flown to post-presidential life in Florida, weren't there.

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Jeffrey Engel, founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, said Trump isn't a good fit for the ex-presidents club "because he's temperamentally different."

"People within the club historically have been respected by ensuing presidents. Even Richard Nixon was respected by Bill Clinton and by Ronald Reagan and so on, for his foreign policy," Engel said. "I'm not sure I see a whole lot of people calling up Trump for his strategic advice."

Former presidents are occasionally called upon for big tasks.

George H.W. Bush and Clinton teamed up in 2005 to launch a campaign urging Americans to help the victims of the devastating Southeast Asia tsunami. When Hurricane Katrina blasted the Gulf Coast, Bush, father of the then-current president George W. Bush, called on Clinton to boost Katrina fundraising relief efforts.

When the elder Bush died in 2018, Clinton wrote, "His friendship has been one of the great gifts of my life," high praise considering this was the man he ousted from the White House after a bruising 1992 campaign — making Bush the only one-term president of the last three decades except for Trump.

Obama tapped Clinton and the younger President Bush to boost fundraising efforts for Haiti after its devastating 2010 earthquake. George W. Bush also became good friends with former first lady Michelle Obama, and cameras caught him slipping a cough drop to her as they sat together at Arizona Sen. John McCain's funeral.

Usually presidents extend the same respect to their predecessors while still in office, regardless of party. In 1971, three years before he resigned in disgrace, Richard Nixon went to Texas to participate in the dedication of Lyndon Baines Johnson's presidential library. When Nixon's library was completed in 1990, then-President George H.W. Bush attended with former Presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford.

Trump's break with tradition began even before his presidency did. After his election win in November 2016, Obama hosted Trump at the White House promising to "do everything we can to help you succeed." Trump responded, "I look forward to being with you many, many more times in the future" — but that never happened.

Instead, Trump falsely accused Obama of having wiretapped him and spent four years savaging his predecessor's record.

Current and former presidents sometimes loathed each other, and criticizing their successors isn't unheard of. Carter criticized the policies of the Republican administrations that followed his, Obama chided Trump while campaigning for Biden and also criticized George W. Bush's policies — though Obama was usually careful not to name his predecessor. Theodore Roosevelt tried to unseat his successor, fellow Republican William Howard Taft, by founding his own "Bull Moose" party and running for president again against him.

Still, presidential reverence for former presidents dates back even further. The nation's second president, John Adams, was concerned enough about tarnishing the legacy of his predecessor that he retained George Washington's Cabinet appointments.

Trump may have time to build his relationship with his predecessors. He told Brower that he "could see himself becoming friendly with Bill Clinton again," noting that the pair used to golf together.

But the odds of becoming the traditional president in retirement that he never was while in office remain long.

"I think Trump has taken it too far," Brower said. "I don't think that these former presidents will welcome him at any point."

Democrats start reining in expectations for immigration bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's taken only days for Democrats gauging how far President Joe Biden's bold immigration proposal can go in Congress to acknowledge that if anything emerges, it will likely be significantly more modest.

As they brace to tackle a politically flammable issue that's resisted major congressional action since the 1980s, Democrats are using words like "aspirational" to describe Biden's plan and "herculean" to express

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the effort they'll need to prevail.

A similar message came from the White House Friday when press secretary Jen Psaki said the new administration hopes Biden's plan will be "the base" of immigration discussions in Congress. Democrats' cautious tones underscored the fragile road they face on a paramount issue for their minority voters, progressives and activists.

Even long-time immigration proponents advocating an all-out fight concede they may have to settle for less than total victory. Paving a path to citizenship for all 11 million immigrants in the U.S. illegally — the centerpiece of Biden's plan — is "the stake at the summit of the mountain," Frank Sharry, executive director of the pro-immigration group America's Voice, said in an interview. "If there are ways to advance toward that summit by building victories and momentum, we're going to look at them."

The citizenship process in Biden's plan would take as little as three years for some people, eight years for others. The proposal would make it easier for certain workers to stay in the U.S. temporarily or permanently, provide development aid to Central American nations in hopes of reducing immigration and move toward bolstering border screening technology.

No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois said in an interview this week that the likeliest package to emerge would create a path to citizenship for so-called Dreamers. They are immigrants who've lived in the U.S. most of their lives after being brought here illegally as children.

Over 600,000 of them have temporary permission to live in the U.S. under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. Former President Barack Obama created that program administratively and Durbin and others would like to see it enacted into law.

Durbin, who called Biden's plan "aspirational," said he hoped for other elements as well, such as more visas for agricultural and other workers.

"We understand the political reality of a 50-50 Senate, that any changes in immigration will require cooperation between the parties," said Durbin, who is on track to become Senate Judiciary Committee chairman. He said legislation produced by the Senate likely "will not reach the same levels" as Biden's proposal.

The Senate is split evenly between the two parties, with Vice President Kamala Harris tipping the chamber in Democrats' favor with her tie-breaking vote. Even so, major legislation requires 60 votes to overcome filibusters, or endless procedural delays, in order to pass. That means 10 Republicans would have to join all 50 Democrats to enact an immigration measure, a tall order.

"Passing immigration reform through the Senate, particularly, is a herculean task," said Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., who will also play a lead role in the battle.

Many Republicans agree with Durbin's assessment.

"I think the space in a 50-50 Senate will be some kind of DACA deal," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who's worked with Democrats on past immigration efforts. "I just think comprehensive immigration is going to be a tough sale given this environment."

Illustrating the detailed bargaining ahead, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, a moderate who's sought earlier immigration compromises, praised parts of the bill but said she wants more visas for foreign workers her state's tourism industry uses heavily.

Democrats' hurdles are formidable.

They have razor-thin majorities in a House and Senate where Republican support for easing immigration restrictions is usually scant. Acrid partisan relationships were intensified further by former President Donald Trump's clamorous tenure. Biden will have to spend plenty of political capital and time on earlier, higher priority bills battling the pandemic and bolstering the economy, leaving his future clout uncertain.

In addition, Democrats will have to resolve important tactical differences.

Sharry said immigration groups prefer Democrats to push for as strong a bill as possible without making any concessions to Republicans on issues like boosting border security spending. He said hopes for a bipartisan breakthrough are "a fool's errand" because the GOP has largely opposed expending citizenship opportunities for so long.

But prevailing without GOP votes would mean virtual unanimity among congressional Democrats, a huge

challenge. It would also mean Democrats would have to either eliminate the Senate filibuster, which they may not have the votes to do, or figure out other procedural routes around the 60-vote hurdle.

"I'm going to start negotiating" with Republicans, said Durbin. He said a bipartisan bill would be far better "if we can do it" because it would improve the chances for passage.

Democrats already face attacks from Republicans, eyeing next year's elections, on an issue that helped help power Trump's 2016 victory by fortifying his support from many white voters.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said Biden's bill would "prioritize help for illegal immigrants and not our fellow citizens." Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., who heads the National Republican Senatorial Committee, the Senate GOP campaign arm, said the measure would hurt "hard-working Americans and the millions of immigrants working their way through the legal immigration process."

Democrats say such allegations are false but say it's difficult to compose clear, sound-bite responses on what is a complex issue. Instead, it requires having "an adult conversation" with voters, Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., said in an interview.

"Yeah, this is about people but it's about the economy" as well, said Spanberger, a moderate from a district where farms and technology firms hire many immigrants. "In central Virginia, we rely on immigration. And you may not like that, but we do."

Top Lebanese hospitals fight exhausting battle against virus

By FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Death stalks the corridors of Beirut's Rafik Hariri University Hospital, where losing multiple patients in one day to COVID-19 has become the new normal. On Friday, the mood among the staff was even more solemn as a young woman lost the battle with the virus.

There was silence as the woman, barely in her 30s, drew her last breath. Then a brief commotion. The nurses frantically tried to resuscitate her. Finally, exhausted, they silently removed the oxygen mask and the tubes — and covered the body with a brown blanket.

The woman, whose name is being withheld for privacy reasons, is one of 57 victims who died on Friday and more than 2,150 lost to the virus so far in Lebanon, a small country with a population of nearly 6 million that since last year has grappled with the worst economic and financial crisis in its modern history.

In recent weeks, Lebanon has seen a dramatic increase in virus cases, following the holiday season when restrictions were eased and thousand of expatriates flew home for a visit.

Now, hospitals across the country are almost completely out of beds. Oxygen tanks, ventilators and most critically, medical staff, are in extremely short supply. Doctors and nurses say they are exhausted. Facing burnout, many of their colleagues left.

Many others have caught the virus, forcing them to take sick leave and leaving fewer and fewer colleagues to work overtime to carry the burden.

To every bed that frees up after a death, three or four patients are waiting in the emergency room waiting to take their place.

Mohammed Darwish, a nurse at the hospital, said he has been working six days a week to help with surging hospitalizations and barely sees his family.

"It is tiring. It is a health sector that is not good at all nowadays," Darwish said.

More than 2,300 Lebanese health care workers have been infected since February, and around 500 of Lebanon's 14,000 doctors have left the crisis-ridden country in recent months, according to the Order of Physicians. The virus is putting an additional burden on a public health system that was already on the brink because of the country's currency crash and inflation, as well as the consequences of the massive Beirut port explosion last summer that killed almost 200 people, injured thousands, and devastated entire sectors of the city.

"Our sense is that the country is falling apart," World Bank Regional Director, Saroj Kumar Jha, told reporters in a virtual news conference Friday.

At the Rafik Hariri University Hospital, the main government coronavirus facility, there are currently 40

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beds in the ICU — all full. According to the World Health Organization, Beirut hospitals are at 98% capacity.

Across town, at the private American University Medical Center — one of Lebanon's largest and most prestigious hospitals — space is being cleared to accommodate more patients.

But that's not enough, according to Dr. Pierre Boukhalil, head of the Pulmonary and Critical Care department. His staff were clearly overwhelmed during a recent visit by The Associated Press, leaping from one patient to another amid the constant beep-beep of life-monitoring machines.

The situation "can only be described as a near disaster or a tsunami in the making," he said, speaking to the AP in between checking on his patients. "We have been consistently increasing capacity over the past week or so, and we are not even keeping up with demands. This is not letting up."

Boukhalil's hospital raised the alarm last week, coming out with a statement saying its health care workers were overwhelmed and unable to find beds for "even the most critical patients."

Since the start of the holiday season, daily infections have hovered around 5,000 in Lebanon, up from nearly 1,000 in November. The daily death toll hit record-breaking more than 60 fatalities in the past few days.

Doctors say that with increased testing, the number of cases has also increased — a common trend. Lebanon's vaccination program is set to begin next month.

The World Bank said Thursday it approved \$34 million to help pay for vaccines for Lebanon that will inoculate over 2 million people.

Jha, the World Bank's regional director, said Lebanon will import 1.5 million doses of Pfizer vaccines for 750,000 people that "we are financing in full." He added that the World Bank also plans to help finance vaccines other than Pfizer in the Mediterranean nation.

Darwish, the nurse, said many COVID-19 patients admitted to Rafik Hariri and especially in the ICU, are young, with no underlying conditions or chronic diseases.

"They catch corona and they think everything is fine and then suddenly you find the patient deteriorated and it hits them suddenly and unfortunately they die,"

On Thursday night, 65-year-old Sabah Miree was admitted to the hospital with breathing problems. She was put on oxygen to help her breathe. Her two sisters had also caught the virus but their case was mild. Miree, who suffers from a heart problem, had to be hospitalized.

"This disease is not a game," she said, describing what a struggle it is for her to keep breathing. "I would say to everyone to pay attention and not to take this lightly."

A nationwide round-the-clock curfew imposed on Jan. 14 was extended on Thursday until Feb. 8 to help the health sector deal with the virus surge.

"I still have nightmares when I see a 30-year-old who passed away," said Dr. Boukhalil. "The disease could have been prevented."

"So stick with the lockdown ... it pays off," he said.

Schumer: Trump impeachment trial to begin week of Feb. 8

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Opening arguments in the Senate impeachment trial for Donald Trump over the Capitol riot will begin the week of Feb. 8, the first time a former president will face such charges after leaving office.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced the schedule Friday evening after reaching an agreement with Republicans, who had pushed for a delay to give Trump a chance to organize his legal team and prepare a defense on the sole charge of incitement of insurrection.

The February start date also allows the Senate more time to confirm President Joe Biden's Cabinet nominations and consider his proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package — top priorities of the new White House agenda that could become stalled during trial proceedings.

"We all want to put this awful chapter in our nation's history behind us," Schumer said about the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol siege by a mob of pro-Trump supporters.

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"But healing and unity will only come if there is truth and accountability. And that is what this trial will provide."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will send the article of impeachment late Monday, with senators sworn in as jurors Tuesday. But opening arguments will move to February.

Trump's impeachment trial would be the first of a U.S. president no longer in office, an undertaking that his Senate Republican allies argue is pointless, and potentially even unconstitutional. Democrats say they have to hold Trump to account, even as they pursue Biden's legislative priorities, because of the gravity of what took place — a violent attack on the U.S. Congress aimed at overturning an election.

If Trump is convicted, the Senate could vote to bar him from holding office ever again, potentially upending his chances for a political comeback.

The urgency for Democrats to hold Trump responsible was complicated by the need to put Biden's government in place and start quick work on his coronavirus aid package.

"The more time we have to get up and running ... the better," Biden said Friday in brief comments to reporters.

Republicans were eager to delay the trial, putting distance between the shocking events of the siege and the votes that will test their loyalty to the former president who still commands voters' attention.

Negotiations between Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell were complicated, as the two are also in talks over a power-sharing agreement for the Senate, which is split 50-50 but in Democratic control because Vice President Kamala Harris serves as a tie-breaking vote.

McConnell had proposed delaying the start and welcomed the agreement.

"Republicans set out to ensure the Senate's next steps will respect former President Trump's rights and due process, the institution of the Senate, and the office of the presidency," said McConnell spokesman Doug Andres. "That goal has been achieved."

Pelosi said Friday the nine House impeachment managers, or prosecutors, are "ready to begin to make their case" against Trump. Trump's team will have had the same amount of time since the House impeachment vote to prepare, Pelosi said.

Democrats say they can move quickly through the trial, potentially with no witnesses, because lawmakers experienced the insurrection first-hand.

One of the managers, California Rep. Ted Lieu, said Friday that Democrats would rather be working on policy right now, but "we can't just ignore" what happened on Jan. 6.

"This was an attack on our Capitol by a violent mob," Lieu said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It was an attack on our nation instigated by our commander in chief. We have to address that and make sure it never happens again."

Trump, who told his supporters to "fight like hell" just before they invaded the Capitol two weeks ago and interrupted the electoral vote count, is still assembling his legal team.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Friday deferred to Congress on timing for the trial and would not say whether Biden thinks Trump should be convicted. But she said lawmakers can simultaneously discuss and have hearings on Biden's coronavirus relief package.

"We don't think it can be delayed or it can wait, so they're going to have to find a path forward," Psaki said of the virus aid. "He's confident they can do that."

Democrats would need the support of at least 17 Republicans to convict Trump, a high bar. While most Republican senators condemned Trump's actions that day, far fewer appear to be ready to convict.

A handful of Senate Republicans have indicated they are open — but not committed — to conviction. But most have come to Trump's defense as it relates to impeachment, saying they believe a trial will be divisive and questioning the legality of trying a president after he has left office.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a close Trump ally who has been helping him find lawyers, said Friday there is "a very compelling constitutional case" on whether Trump can be impeached after his term — an assertion Democrats reject, saying there is ample legal precedent. Graham also suggested Republicans will argue Trump's words on Jan. 6 were not legally "incitement."

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"On the facts, they'll be able to mount a defense, so the main thing is to give him a chance to prepare and run the trial orderly, and hopefully the Senate will reject the idea of pursuing presidents after they leave office," Graham said.

Other Republicans had stronger words, suggesting there should be no trial at all. Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso said Pelosi is sending a message to Biden that "my hatred and vitriol of Donald Trump is so strong that I will stop even you and your Cabinet from getting anything done." Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson suggested Democrats are choosing "vindictiveness" over national security as Biden attempts to set up his government.

McConnell, who said this week that Trump "provoked" his supporters before the riot, has not said how he will vote. He said Senate Republicans "strongly believe we need a full and fair process where the former president can mount a defense and the Senate can properly consider the factual, legal and constitutional questions."

Trump, the first president to be impeached twice, is at a disadvantage compared with his first impeachment trial, in which he had the full resources of the White House counsel's office to defend him. Graham helped Trump hire South Carolina attorney Butch Bowers after members of his past legal teams indicated they did not plan to join the new effort.

Associated Press writers Amer Madhani in Washington, Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina, and Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Florida, contributed to this report.

Bus heading to Grand Canyon rolls over; 1 dead, 2 critical

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A Las Vegas-based tour bus heading to the Grand Canyon rolled over in northwestern Arizona on Friday, killing one person and critically injuring two others, authorities said.

A spokeswoman for the Mohave County Sheriff's Office said the cause of the Friday afternoon wreck was not yet known, but a fire official who responded said speed appeared to be a factor. No other vehicles were involved.

"It was a heavily damaged bus. He slid down the road quite a ways, so there was a lot of wreckage," said Lake Mohave Ranchos Fire District Chief Tim Bonney. "Just to put it in perspective, on a scale of zero to 10, an eight."

None of the passengers was ejected from the vehicle but they were all in shock, Bonney said.

"A lot of them were saying the bus driver was driving at a high rate of speed," he said.

A photo from the sheriff's office showed the bus on its side on a road that curves through Joshua trees with no snow or rain in the remote area.

There were 48 people on the bus, including the driver, authorities said. After the crash, 44 people were sent to Kingman Regional Medical Center, including two flown by medical helicopter, spokeswoman Teri Williams said. All the others were treated for minor injuries, she said.

Two people were critically injured, said Mohave County sheriff's spokeswoman Anita Mortensen.

The bus was heading to Grand Canyon West, about 2 1/2 hours from Las Vegas and outside the boundaries of Grand Canyon National Park. The tourist destination sits on the Hualapai reservation and is best known for the Skywalk, a glass bridge that juts out 70 feet (21 meters) from the canyon walls and gives visitors a view of the Colorado River 4,000 feet (1,219 meters) below.

Before the pandemic, about 1 million people a year visited Grand Canyon West, mostly through tours booked out of Las Vegas. The Hualapai reservation includes 108 miles (174 kilometers) of the Grand Canyon's western rim.

In addition to the Skywalk, the tribe has helicopter tours on its land, horseback rides, a historic guano mine and a one-day whitewater rafting trip on the Colorado River. Rafters who are on trips through the Grand Canyon also can get on and off the river on the reservation.

In a statement issued late Friday, the Hualapai Tribe and its businesses said they were saddened by the

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rollover and that safety is the highest priority for guests, employees and vendors.

"As a people, our hearts go out to those so deeply affected," the statement read. "We wish speedy recoveries to those requiring medical attention."

National Transportation Safety Board spokesman Keith Holloway said he didn't immediately have more details about the crash. The agency doesn't send investigators to all bus crashes.

Other, deadly crashes have happened before in the area.

Four Chinese nationals died in 2016 when their van collided with a Dallas Cowboys staff bus headed to a preseason promotional stop in Las Vegas.

In 2009, a tour bus carrying Chinese nationals overturned on U.S. 93 near the Hoover Dam, killing several people and injuring others. The group was returning from a Grand Canyon trip.

Federal investigators cited driver inattention as the probable cause of that crash. The bus driver was attempting to fix a problem with airflow through his door before the crash and became distracted, then veered off the road and overcorrected before crossing a median and overturning. Most of the passengers were ejected.

Fonseca reported from Flagstaff. Associated Press reporters Ken Ritter and Michelle L. Price in Las Vegas, Terry Tang in Phoenix and AP/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative corps member Sam Metz in Carson City, Nevada, contributed.

Hank Aaron, baseball's one-time home run king, dies at 86

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP National Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — His name is all over the baseball record book and, indeed, Hank Aaron could do it all.

Sure, he's remembered mostly for dethroning the Babe to become baseball's home run king on the way to 755, but don't forget about the .300 average, or the graceful way he fielded his position, or the deceiving speed he showed on the basepaths.

Yet, when talking about the true measure of the man, there was far more to "Hammerin' Hank" than his brilliance between the lines.

Exuding grace and dignity, Aaron spoke bluntly but never bitterly on the many hardships thrown his way — from the poverty and segregation of his Alabama youth to the ugly, racist threats he faced during his pursuit of one of America's most hallowed records.

He wasn't hesitant about speaking out on the issues of the day, whether it was bemoaning the lack of Blacks in management positions, or lobbying against putting Pete Rose in the Hall of Fame, or calling on those involved in the Houston Astros sign-stealing scandal to be tossed from the game for good.

"He never missed an opportunity to lead," former President Barack Obama said, describing Aaron as an "unassuming man" who set a "towering example."

Right up to his final days, the Hammer was making a difference.

Just 2 1/2 weeks before his death Friday at age 86, Aaron joined civil rights icons to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. He wanted to spread the word to the Black community that the shots were safe in the midst of a devastating pandemic.

"I feel quite proud of myself for doing something like this," Aaron said. "It's just a small thing that can help zillions of people in this country."

The Atlanta Braves, Aaron's longtime team, said he died in his sleep. No cause was given.

The Hammer set a wide array of career hitting records during a 23-year career spent mostly with the Milwaukee and Atlanta Braves, including RBIs, extra-base hits and total bases.

But the Hall of Famer will be remembered for one swing above all others, the one that made him baseball's home-run king on April 8, 1974.

It was a title he would hold for more than 33 years, a period in which Aaron slowly but surely claimed his rightful place as one of America's most iconic sporting figures, a true national treasure worthy of mention in the same breath with Ruth or Ali or Jordan.

"With courage and dignity, he eclipsed the most hallowed record in sports while absorbing vengeance

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that would have broken most people," President Joe Biden said. "But he was unbreakable."

Former President Jimmy Carter, described Aaron as "a personal hero."

"A breaker of records and racial barriers, his remarkable legacy will continue to inspire countless athletes and admirers for generations to come," said Carter, who often attended Braves games with his wife, Rosalynn.

George W. Bush, a one-time owner of the Texas Rangers, presented Aaron in 2002 with the Presidential Medal of Freedom — the nation's highest civilian honor.

"The former Home Run King wasn't handed his throne," Bush said in a statement Friday. "He grew up poor and faced racism as he worked to become one of the greatest baseball players of all time. Hank never let the hatred he faced consume him."

Aaron's death follows that of seven other baseball Hall of Famers in 2020 and two more — Tommy Lasorda and Don Sutton — already this year.

"He was a very humble and quiet man and just simply a good guy," said 89-year-old Willie Mays, who finished with 660 homers. "I have so many fond memories of Hank and will miss him very much."

Before a sellout crowd at Atlanta Stadium and a national television audience, Aaron broke Ruth's home run record with No. 715 off Al Downing of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Aaron's career total was surpassed by Barry Bonds in 2007 — though many continued to call the Hammer the true home run king because of allegations that Bonds used performance-enhancing drugs.

Bonds finished his career with 762. Aaron never begrudged someone — not even a tarnished star — eclipsing his mark.

His common refrain: More than three decades as the king was long enough. It was time for someone else to hold the crown.

Besides, no one could take away his legacy.

"I just tried to play the game the way it was supposed to be played," Aaron said, summing it up better than anyone.

Bonds praised Aaron "for being a trailblazer through adversity and setting an example for all of us African American ballplayers who came after you."

Aaron's journey to Babe Ruth's mark was hardly pleasant. He was the target of extensive hate mail as he closed in on Ruth's cherished record of 714.

"If I was white, all America would be proud of me," Aaron said almost a year before he passed Ruth. "But I am Black."

Aaron was shadowed constantly by bodyguards and forced to distance himself from teammates. He kept all those hateful letters, a bitter reminder of the abuse he endured and never forgot.

"It's very offensive," he once said. "They call me 'nigger' and every other bad word you can come up with. You can't ignore them. They are here. But this is just the way things are for Black people in America. It's something you battle all of your life."

After retiring in 1976, Aaron became a revered, almost mythical figure, even though he never pursued the spotlight. He was thrilled when the U.S. elected Obama as its first African American president in 2008. Former President Bill Clinton credited Aaron with helping carve a path of racial tolerance that made Obama's victory possible.

"You've given us far more than we'll ever give you," Clinton said at Aaron's 75th birthday celebration.

Aaron spent 21 of his 23 seasons with the Braves, first in Milwaukee, then in Atlanta after the franchise moved to the Deep South in 1966. He finished his career back in Milwaukee, traded to the Brewers after the 1974 season when he refused to take a front-office job that would have required a big pay cut.

While knocking the ball over the fence became his signature accomplishment, the Hammer was hardly a one-dimensional star. In fact, he never hit more than 47 homers in a season (though he did have eight years with at least 40 dingers).

Aaron was a true five-tool star.

He claimed two National League batting titles. He finished with a career average of .305.

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Aaron also was a gifted outfielder with a powerful arm, something often overlooked because of a smooth, effortless stride that his critics —with undoubtedly racist overtones — mistook for nonchalance. He was a three-time Gold Glove winner.

Then there was his work on the basepaths. Aaron posted seven seasons with more than 20 stolen bases, including a career-best of 31 in 1963.

Six feet tall and listed at 180 pounds during the prime of his career, Aaron was hardly an imposing player physically. But he was blessed with powerful wrists that made him one of the game's most feared hitters.

Aaron hit 733 homers with the Braves, the last in his final plate appearance with the team, a drive down the left field line off Cincinnati's Rawley Eastwick on Oct. 2, 1974. Exactly one month later, he was dealt to the Brewers for outfielder Dave May and minor league pitcher Roger Alexander.

The Braves made it clear they no longer wanted Aaron, then 40, returning for another season on the field. They offered him a front office job for \$50,000 a year, about \$150,000 less than his playing salary.

"Titles?" he said at the time. "Can you spend titles at the grocery store? Executive vice president, assistant to the executive vice president, what does it mean if it doesn't pay good money? I might become a janitor for big money."

Aaron became a designated hitter with the Brewers, but hardly closed his career with a flourish. He managed just 22 homers over his last two seasons, going out with a .229 average in 1976.

Even so, his career numbers largely stood the test of time.

Aaron still has more RBIs (2,297), extra-base hits (1,477) and total bases (6,856) than anyone in baseball history.

"I feel like that home run I hit is just part of what my story is all about," Aaron said.

He was NL MVP in 1957, when the Milwaukee Braves beat the New York Yankees in seven games to give Aaron the only World Series title of his career. It also was his lone MVP award, though he finished in the top 10 of the balloting 13 times.

Aaron also was selected for the All-Star Game 21 consecutive years — every season but his first and his last.

Still, Aaron never received the attention he deserved until late in his career. He played in only two World Series. He was stuck far from the media spotlight in Milwaukee and Atlanta. Early in Aaron's career, the press focused on outfielders like Mays, Mickey Mantle and Duke Snider, who benefited from playing in the media glare of New York City.

"In my day, sportswriters didn't respect a baseball player unless you played in New York or Chicago," Aaron said. "If you didn't come from a big city, it was hard to get noticed."

He was much more appreciated with the passing of time.

Aaron was elected to Cooperstown in 1982, his first year of eligibility and just nine votes short of being the first unanimous choice ever to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Bob Gibson, Tom Seaver, Whitey Ford, Lou Brock, Al Kaline, Joe Morgan and Phil Niekro — Aaron's teammate with the Braves for a decade — all died in 2020, the most Hall of Famers ever to pass away in a calendar year.

Henry Louis Aaron was born in Mobile, Alabama, on Feb. 5, 1934. He headed a long list of outstanding players who came from that Gulf Coast city — Satchel Paige, Willie McCovey, Billy Williams and Ozzie Smith among them.

Aaron, who initially hit with a cross-handed style, was spotted by the Braves while trying out for the Indianapolis Clowns, a Negro Leagues team. The Giants also were interested — imagine him in same outfield with Mays — but Aaron signed with Milwaukee, spent two seasons in the minors and came up to the Braves in 1954 after Bobby Thomson was injured in spring training.

Aaron was a full-fledged star by 1957, when he led the Braves to that World Series victory over Mantle's New York Yankees. The following year, Milwaukee made it back to the Series, only to blow a 3-1 lead and lose to the Yankees in seven games.

Though he played for nearly two more decades, Aaron never came so close to a championship again.

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In 1959, the Braves finished in a tie with the Los Angeles Dodgers for first in the NL, only to lose a best-of-three playoff to the Dodgers for the pennant. Aaron's only other playoff appearance came in 1969, when the Braves were swept by New York's Amazin' Mets in the inaugural NL Championship Series.

His dearth of October appearances was baseball's loss. In 17 postseason games, Aaron batted .362 (25 of 69) with six homers and 16 RBIs.

But forever, there was that April night in 1974.

Aaron whipped his 34-ounce Louisville Slugger through the strike zone with those powerful wrists. The ball rose higher and higher as the crowd of 53,775 rose to its feet with a collective roar.

Finally, home run No. 715 came down in the Braves bullpen. Despite a mighty leap that left him dangling atop the fence, Dodgers left fielder Bill Buckner never had a chance. Atlanta reliever Tom House made the catch at 9:07 p.m. and swiftly returned the ball to Aaron, who was celebrating at home plate with his teammates and parents.

As Aaron rounded second, two young fans sprinted in from right field, startling No. 44 when they patted him on the back before racing back to the stands in left.

"I guess that will always be a part of me running around the bases," Aaron said. "I never had anyone run with me before. They were just kids having a good time."

Dodgers announcer Vin Scully was among those delivering the call on the historic shot.

"What a marvelous moment for baseball. What a marvelous moment for Atlanta and the state of Georgia. What a marvelous moment for the country and the world," Scully said, well aware of the cultural significance. "A Black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep South for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol."

After retiring as a player, Aaron made amends with the Braves for trading him away. He returned as a vice president and director of player development, a task he held for 13 years before settling into a largely ceremonial role as senior vice president and assistant to the president in 1989.

He ventured into business, buying fast food chicken franchises, doughnut shops and an automobile dealership. He also dipped into politics as campaign treasurer for his brother-in-law, David Scott, who was elected to the U.S. House.

Aaron's younger brother, Tommie, played alongside his brother for parts of seven seasons in both Milwaukee and Atlanta. Though he never had much success, the Aarons hold the record for most homers (768) by a pair of siblings.

Of course, Tommie accounted for just 13 of them. He died of leukemia at age 45 in 1984.

Hank Aaron's survivors include his wife, Billye, and their daughter, Ceci. He also had four children from his first marriage to Barbara Lucas — Gail, Hank Jr., Lary and Dorinda.

Long after his career was over, Aaron acknowledged that today's athletes are bigger, stronger and more fit. Still, he would have been a success in any era.

"I may not have hit 70 homers in a season," Aaron once said, "but I would have been up there."

Follow Paul Newberry on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/pnewberry1963> and find his work at <https://apnews.com>

This story includes research from the late Ed Shearer, a longtime Atlanta sports writer for The Associated Press who covered Aaron's 715th homer.

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

Kansas House panel to warn new member over past behavior

By JOHN HANNA and ANDY TSUBASA FIELD Associated Press/Report for America

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — A newly elected Kansas lawmaker accused of threatening two state officials and abusive behavior toward girls and young women before taking his seat will get a public warning about his

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past conduct rather than facing possible removal from office, a committee decided Friday.

A state House committee reviewing a complaint against state Rep. Aaron Coleman, of Kansas City, Kansas, said it will draft and send him a public letter of warning that will include expectations about his future conduct. The panel's three Democrats preferred stronger action against Coleman, but its three Republicans were wary of disciplining him for actions occurring before he took office.

Some Democrats wanted to censure or expel the 20-year-old Coleman, but either action would take a two-thirds majority. The chamber's Republican leaders were wary of overturning an election, and during Friday's committee meeting, members of both parties said they didn't want to base their decision on Coleman's behavior as a minor.

The committee's decision means a complaint filed against Coleman by 13 Democrats, including House Minority Leader Tom Sawyer, of Wichita, will be dismissed. But committee members said the letter will act as a guide for Coleman, and if he does not abide by what it spells out, he could face another complaint.

Coleman was elected to the House as a Democrat but dropped affiliation with any party after Sawyer refused to give him committee assignments. He identifies as a progressive and socialist.

"Mr. Coleman's going to be watched," said committee Chair John Barker, an Abilene Republican.

A new allegation against Coleman became public Friday. Heather Sprague Scanlon, Sawyer's former chief of staff, said in a written statement that Coleman called her during the summer after House Democrats had denounced Coleman on social media and launched into a "raging diatribe." She said Coleman made threats to physically harm Sawyer.

When those statements were read to him, Coleman told the committee, "That is not accurate."

But he later apologized to Sawyer and said he's willing to apologize to Scanlon for his "inappropriate conduct." He publicly asked for a Statehouse mentor and said he's spoken to his attorney about counseling.

"I welcome an informal letter of warning and I am willing to voluntarily accept any recommendations," he said.

The committee's action ends the possibility of Coleman becoming the first state lawmaker in Kansas ousted from office. The Kansas State Library has found no record of any legislator being expelled, although in the past six years, lawmakers in at least four states have been expelled for misconduct.

"I know that prior to becoming a member of the Kansas House of Representatives, I have not always lived up to my own ideals of treating others with dignity and respect," Coleman said in opening remarks that he read to the committee.

Coleman narrowly ousted a veteran Democratic lawmaker in the August primary while running on a platform that included providing universal health coverage, ending college tuition and legalizing marijuana. He won that race even after admitting on social media that he had circulated revenge porn as a "sick and troubled" middle school-aged boy.

He faced only write-in candidates in the election, even as at least two other accusations of threatening or abusing girls or young women came to light. In December, the campaign manager for his primary opponent obtained an anti-stalking court order against him, but they settled the lawsuit she filed against him earlier this month.

The complaint against Coleman said another reason to expel him was a now-deleted post-November election tweet in which Coleman suggested Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly would face an "extremely bloody" primary in 2022 for not being progressive enough. Kelly has called Coleman unfit to serve in the Legislature.

"People will realize one day when I call a hit out on you it's real," he wrote. He later said he meant to use the phrase "political hit."

Coleman told the committee that the language of the tweet was "inappropriate" and said he now has a team of people handling social media posts for him.

Sawyer had called Coleman "a danger to women" and had said his removal from office was necessary to protect other lawmakers and the Legislature's staff.

"We would not want this person to blow up and do something dangerous to someone else," Sawyer told the committee Friday.

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But later, Sawyer said he hopes a public letter will tell Coleman "he's got to change or he's gone," and prevent bad behavior.

"I don't want to send the wrong message and say it's okay to be abusive to women and continue that pattern and get by with it," Sawyer told reporters.

Andy Tsubasa Field is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

On Twitter, follow John Hanna at: <https://twitter.com/apjdhanna> and Andy Tsubasa Field at <https://twitter.com/AndyTsubasaF>

Schumer: Trump impeachment trial to begin week of Feb. 8

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Opening arguments in the Senate impeachment trial for Donald Trump over the Capitol riot will begin the week of Feb. 8, the first time a former president will face such charges after leaving office.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced the schedule Friday evening after reaching an agreement with Republicans, who had pushed for a delay to give Trump a chance to organize his legal team and prepare a defense on the sole charge of incitement of insurrection.

The February start date also allows the Senate more time to confirm President Joe Biden's Cabinet nominations and consider his proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package — top priorities of the new White House agenda that could become stalled during trial proceedings.

"We all want to put this awful chapter in our nation's history behind us," Schumer said about the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol siege by a mob of pro-Trump supporters.

"But healing and unity will only come if there is truth and accountability. And that is what this trial will provide."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will send the article of impeachment late Monday, with senators sworn in as jurors Tuesday. But opening arguments will move to February.

Trump's impeachment trial would be the first of a U.S. president no longer in office, an undertaking that his Senate Republican allies argue is pointless, and potentially even unconstitutional. Democrats say they have to hold Trump to account, even as they pursue Biden's legislative priorities, because of the gravity of what took place — a violent attack on the U.S. Congress aimed at overturning an election.

If Trump is convicted, the Senate could vote to bar him from holding office ever again, potentially upending his chances for a political comeback.

The urgency for Democrats to hold Trump responsible was complicated by the need to put Biden's government in place and start quick work on his coronavirus aid package.

"The more time we have to get up and running ... the better," Biden said Friday in brief comments to reporters.

Republicans were eager to delay the trial, putting distance between the shocking events of the siege and the votes that will test their loyalty to the former president who still commands voters' attention.

Negotiations between Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell were complicated, as the two are also in talks over a power-sharing agreement for the Senate, which is split 50-50 but in Democratic control because Vice President Kamala Harris serves as a tie-breaking vote.

McConnell had proposed delaying the start and welcomed the agreement.

"Republicans set out to ensure the Senate's next steps will respect former President Trump's rights and due process, the institution of the Senate, and the office of the presidency," said McConnell spokesman Doug Andres. "That goal has been achieved."

Pelosi said Friday the nine House impeachment managers, or prosecutors, are "ready to begin to make

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their case" against Trump. Trump's team will have had the same amount of time since the House impeachment vote to prepare, Pelosi said.

Democrats say they can move quickly through the trial, potentially with no witnesses, because lawmakers experienced the insurrection first-hand.

One of the managers, California Rep. Ted Lieu, said Friday that Democrats would rather be working on policy right now, but "we can't just ignore" what happened on Jan. 6.

"This was an attack on our Capitol by a violent mob," Lieu said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It was an attack on our nation instigated by our commander in chief. We have to address that and make sure it never happens again."

Trump, who told his supporters to "fight like hell" just before they invaded the Capitol two weeks ago and interrupted the electoral vote count, is still assembling his legal team.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Friday deferred to Congress on timing for the trial and would not say whether Biden thinks Trump should be convicted. But she said lawmakers can simultaneously discuss and have hearings on Biden's coronavirus relief package.

"We don't think it can be delayed or it can wait, so they're going to have to find a path forward," Psaki said of the virus aid. "He's confident they can do that."

Democrats would need the support of at least 17 Republicans to convict Trump, a high bar. While most Republican senators condemned Trump's actions that day, far fewer appear to be ready to convict.

A handful of Senate Republicans have indicated they are open — but not committed — to conviction. But most have come to Trump's defense as it relates to impeachment, saying they believe a trial will be divisive and questioning the legality of trying a president after he has left office.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a close Trump ally who has been helping him find lawyers, said Friday there is "a very compelling constitutional case" on whether Trump can be impeached after his term — an assertion Democrats reject, saying there is ample legal precedent. Graham also suggested Republicans will argue Trump's words on Jan. 6 were not legally "incitement."

"On the facts, they'll be able to mount a defense, so the main thing is to give him a chance to prepare and run the trial orderly, and hopefully the Senate will reject the idea of pursuing presidents after they leave office," Graham said.

Other Republicans had stronger words, suggesting there should be no trial at all. Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso said Pelosi is sending a message to Biden that "my hatred and vitriol of Donald Trump is so strong that I will stop even you and your Cabinet from getting anything done." Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson suggested Democrats are choosing "vindictiveness" over national security as Biden attempts to set up his government.

McConnell, who said this week that Trump "provoked" his supporters before the riot, has not said how he will vote. He said Senate Republicans "strongly believe we need a full and fair process where the former president can mount a defense and the Senate can properly consider the factual, legal and constitutional questions."

Trump, the first president to be impeached twice, is at a disadvantage compared with his first impeachment trial, in which he had the full resources of the White House counsel's office to defend him. Graham helped Trump hire South Carolina attorney Butch Bowers after members of his past legal teams indicated they did not plan to join the new effort.

Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani in Washington, Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina, and Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Florida, contributed to this report.

For 1st Black Pentagon chief, racism challenge is personal

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Newly confirmed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will have to contend not only with a world of security

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threats and a massive military bureaucracy, but also with a challenge that hits closer to home: rooting out racism and extremism in the ranks.

Austin took office Friday as the first Black defense chief, in the wake of the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, where retired and current military members were among the rioters touting far-right conspiracies.

The retired four-star Army general told senators this week that the Pentagon's job is to "keep America safe from our enemies. But we can't do that if some of those enemies lie within our own ranks."

Ridding the military of racists isn't his only priority. Austin, who was confirmed in a 93-2 vote, has made clear that accelerating delivery of coronavirus vaccines will get his early attention.

But the racism issue is personal. At Tuesday's confirmation hearing, he explained why.

In 1995, when then-Lt. Col. Austin was serving with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, three white soldiers, described as self-styled skinheads, were arrested in the murder of a Black couple who was walking down the street. Investigators concluded the two were targeted because of their race.

The killing triggered an internal investigation, and all told, 22 soldiers were linked to skinhead and other similar groups or found to hold extremist views. They included 17 who were considered white supremacists or separatists.

"We woke up one day and discovered that we had extremist elements in our ranks," Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "And they did bad things that we certainly held them accountable for. But we discovered that the signs for that activity were there all along. We just didn't know what to look for or what to pay attention to."

Austin is not the first secretary to grapple with the problem. Racism has long been an undercurrent in the military. While leaders insist only a small minority hold extremist views, there have been persistent incidents of racial hatred and, more subtly, a history of implicit bias in what is a predominantly white institution.

A recent Air Force inspector general report found that Black service members in the Air Force are far more likely to be investigated, arrested, face disciplinary actions and be discharged for misconduct.

Based on 2018 data, roughly two-thirds of the military's enlisted corps is white and about 17% is Black, but the minority percentage declines as rank increases. The U.S. population overall is about three-quarters white and 13% Black, according to Census Bureau statistics.

Over the past year, Pentagon leaders have struggled to make changes, hampered by opposition from then-President Donald Trump. It took months for the department to effectively ban the Confederate flag last year, and Pentagon officials left to Congress the matter of renaming military bases that honor Confederate leaders. Trump rejected renaming the bases and defended flying the flag.

Senators peppered Austin with questions about extremism in the ranks and his plans to deal with it. The hearing was held two weeks after lawmakers fled the deadly insurrection at the Capitol, in which many of the rioters espoused separatist or extremist views.

"It's clear that we are at a crisis point," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., saying leaders must root out extremism and reaffirm core military values.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., pressed Austin on the actions he will take. "Disunity is probably the most destructive force in terms of our ability to defend ourselves," Kaine said. "If we're divided against one another, how can we defend the nation?"

Austin, who broke racial barriers throughout his four decades in the Army, said military leaders must set the right example to discourage and eliminate extremist behavior. They must get to know their troops, and look for signs of extremism or other problems, he said.

But Austin — the first Black man to serve as head of U.S. Central Command and the first to be the Army's vice chief of staff — also knows that much of the solution must come from within the military services and lower-ranking commanders. They must ensure their troops are trained and aware of the prohibitions.

"Most of us were embarrassed that we didn't know what to look for and we didn't really understand that by being engaged more with your people on these types of issues can pay big dividends," he said, recalling the 82nd Airborne problems. "I don't think that you can ever take your hand off the steering wheel here."

But he also cautioned that there won't be an easy solution, adding, "I don't think that this is a thing

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that you can put a Band-Aid on and fix and leave alone. I think that training needs to go on, routinely.” Austin gained confirmation after clearing a legal hurdle prohibiting anyone from serving as defense chief until they have been out of the military for seven years. Austin retired less than five years ago, but the House and Senate quickly approved the needed waiver, and President Joe Biden signed it Friday.

Soon afterward, Austin strode into the Pentagon, his afternoon already filled with calls and briefings, including a meeting with Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He held a broader video conference on COVID-19 with all top defense and military leaders, and his first call to an international leader was with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

Austin, 67, is a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He helped lead the invasion into Iraq in 2003, and eight years later was the top U.S. commander there, overseeing the full American troop withdrawal. After serving as vice chief of the Army, Austin headed Central Command, where he oversaw the reinsertion of U.S. troops to Iraq to beat back Islamic State militants.

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.

Florida governor walks back claim over 1 millionth shot

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis had a made-for-TV moment: A 100-year-old World War II veteran getting a vaccine against the coronavirus. “An American hero,” the governor proclaimed Friday, would be the 1 millionth senior in his state to get a lifesaving shot in the arm.

As it turned out, the assertion was premature, and the Republican governor later walked back the claim, saying instead that the injection was symbolic of the state being on track to hit 1 million doses soon.

State officials acknowledged that it could take a few more days to reach the milestone. DeSantis’ own health department reported that, as of Thursday, fewer than 840,000 seniors had received the shot.

The governor’s misstep came as Florida’s congressional Democrats, in a letter to DeSantis, expressed “serious concerns with the state’s rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine,” even as DeSantis has barnstormed the state in recent days to announce the expansion of vaccination sites.

The Democrats said more than 1 million unused vaccines were “on hold” in Florida, suggesting the state was not expeditiously administering them.

The letter chided the governor for confusing and misleading the public on vaccine distribution and availability, citing “a perception of unfairness and political motivation.” Democrats also faulted him and his administration for the delay in establishing a statewide system to schedule vaccination appointments.

State officials had no immediate comment on any of those assertions.

Earlier this week, the Florida Health Department expanded a new telephone appointment system meant to help counties better handle the demand for vaccines, but state officials pleaded with the public to be patient. The pilot program was rolled out in Miami-Dade County last week and then expanded to some of the state’s largest counties — Broward, Duval, Hillsborough and Lee.

Some hospitals, county health departments and vaccination centers were plunged into chaos after DeSantis announced last month that he would open the vaccines to seniors 65 and older, prompting long lines, crashed websites and disappointment among thousands of Floridians.

During a legislative hearing earlier this month, the state’s director of emergency management, Jared Moskowitz, acknowledged the “chaotic” environment spawned by the release of two vaccines approved by the federal government.

DeSantis himself has urged Floridians to remain patient as the state awaits more vaccine supplies.

The governor, who has yet to make it official that he will seek reelection in 2022, has tried to cast himself in an aggressive posture against the coronavirus, touting that his state has vaccinated more seniors than any other state.

That messaging may have taken a hit when he appeared Friday on Fox News with World War II veteran Henry Saylor, who got a shot in the arm on national cable news.

“He’s a hundred years old, and he’s got the opportunity now to get the vaccine, so we’re excited,” the

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governor said during the live broadcast. "And we do believe this is the 1 millionth senior, which the reporting will bear out over the next couple of days."

Reporters soon began asking about that figure because it did not appear to line up with reported vaccinations so far. DeSantis' office sent out a news release clarifying that the shot was symbolic of nearing the goal of 1 million.

"It's all about his PR and promotion of himself in stark contrast to what is happening in the state of Florida," said state Sen. Gary Farmer, the top Democrat in his chamber. "He's running around the state giving false hope to seniors and other people."

DeSantis said later at a news conference that there's a lag time in reporting the number of shots administered.

"We're 800-some thousand that's been reported as of midnight last night," DeSantis said. "We really believe that in a few more days as the reports come in, we will actually cross 1 million 65 and up that will have gotten shots."

Florida has recorded more than 1.6 million COVID-19 infections and over 25,400 deaths. On Friday, health officials reported 277 new deaths, matching the Aug. 11 record for the highest single-day toll since the pandemic began.

But hospitalization figures have begun ticking downward. There were 6,911 people being treated for the disease in the state's hospitals, according to an online census of hospitals — the first time that figure was below 7,000 for more than two weeks.

The current winter outbreak is the state's third major wave of infections since last March, with the worst coming last summer. Nearly 10,000 people were hospitalized with coronavirus at the height of Florida's summer wave.

Associated Press writers Adriana Gomez Licon in Miami and Brendan Farrington in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report. Follow Bobby Caina Calvin on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BobbyCalvan>.

Guard in DC forced to sleep in garages, sparking outcry

By NOMAAN MERCHANT, LOLITA BALDOR and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Images of National Guard soldiers camped in a cold parking garage after being sent to protect Washington sparked new calls Friday for investigations of the U.S. Capitol Police, now facing allegations that the agency evicted troops sent to help after its failure to stop rioting mobs two weeks ago.

President Joe Biden expressed his "dismay" Friday morning to Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, chief of the National Guard, about how the troops had been treated, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. Members of both parties were irate about reports that Guardsmen were forced to take rest breaks outside the Capitol building. About 25,000 Guard members from across the country deployed to help secure President Joe Biden's inauguration, which went off with only a handful of minor arrests.

Psaki said the president thanked Hokanson and the Guard for their help the last few weeks and offered his assistance if Hokanson needed anything. First lady Jill Biden visited Guard troops outside the Capitol on Friday, bringing them cookies and thanking them for protecting her family. She noted that the Bidens' late son, Beau, served in the Delaware Army National Guard.

A jittery Washington had requested aid following the riot where police were badly outnumbered, locking down the nation's capital with soldiers, police and barricades. Lawmakers and Biden took pains to thank security forces for their effort. All 25,000 Guard members were vetted by the FBI over concerns of an insider attack, and a dozen were removed from their posts including two who made extremist statements about the inauguration.

Both the Guard and Capitol Police issued a joint statement Friday afternoon saying they have now coordinated to establish "appropriate spaces" within Congressional buildings for on-duty breaks. The statement noted that off-duty troops have hotel rooms or "other comfortable accommodations."

The National Guard said it originally moved troops out of the Capitol Rotunda and other spaces to garages

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at the behest of the Capitol Police. The Guardsmen were allowed back inside late Thursday after reports were widely shared of the conditions in the garages, with few bathrooms and little covering from the cold.

Capitol Police Interim Chief Yogananda Pittman issued a statement Friday saying her agency "did not instruct the National Guard to vacate the Capitol Building facilities."

But two Capitol Police officers who spoke on condition of anonymity contradicted her statement, saying they were told department higher-ups had ordered the Guardsmen out. It was unclear why. The two officers spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized by the department to speak.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., said that "multiple members of military leadership" had told him a uniformed Capitol Police officer told them to leave the Capitol Visitor Center.

"The troops didn't move on their own," said Inhofe, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee. He added: "This isn't a blame game, but I want to know what happened so we can make sure it can't happen again."

Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, who leads a subcommittee that oversees the Capitol Police budget, said Pittman and other commanders would eventually need to testify about their decision-making.

"If the Capitol Police in any way, shape, or form pushed the Guard out into a cold garage, then there's going to be hell to pay," Ryan said. "We're already trying to re-establish trust with the Capitol Police and we've got to figure out exactly what happened."

The National Guard Bureau said Thursday that of the nearly 26,000 Guard troops deployed to D.C. for the inaugural, just 10,600 remain on duty. The bureau said the Guard is helping states with coordination and the logistics so that troops can get home.

Thousands of Guard troops from all across the country poured into D.C. by the planeload and busload late last week, in response to escalating security threats and fears of more rioting. Military aircraft crowded the runways at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, carrying Guard members into the region in the wake of the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Guard forces were scattered around the city, helping to secure the Capitol, monuments, Metro entrances and the perimeter of central D.C., which was largely locked down for several days leading up to Wednesday's inaugural ceremony.

Some local law enforcement agencies have asked for continued assistance from the Guard, so roughly 7,000 troops are expected to stay in the region through the end of the month.

The insurrection highlighted multiple failures by the Capitol Police to prepare for what became a violent mob overrunning parts of the building. Officers who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity said there was little planning before the riot or guidance from department leaders once the riot began.

The riot left five people dead, including Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, who was hit in the head by a fire extinguisher. Another officer died in an apparent suicide after the attack.

Merchant reported from Houston.

Biden's choice on econ aid: Deal with GOP or go for it all

By JOSH BOAK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden's ambitious opening bid, his \$1.9 trillion American Rescue economic package, will test the new president's relationship with Congress and force a crucial choice between his policy vision and a desire for bipartisan unity.

Biden became president this week with the pandemic having already forced Congress to approve \$4 trillion in aid, including \$900 billion just last month. And those efforts have politically exhausted Republican lawmakers, particularly conservatives who are panning the new proposal as an expensive, unworkable liberal wish-list.

Yet, Democrats, now with control of the House, Senate and White House, want the new president to deliver ever more sweeping aid and economic change.

On Friday, Biden took a few beginning steps, signing executive orders at the White House. But he also declared a need to do much more and quickly, saying that even with decisive action the nation is unlikely

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to stop the pandemic in the next several months and well over 600,000 could die.

"The bottom line is this: We are in a national emergency. We need to act like we're in a national emergency," he said. "So we got to move with everything we got. We've got to do it together. I don't believe Democrats or Republicans are going hungry and losing jobs, I believe, Americans are going hungry and losing jobs."

The limits of what Biden can achieve on his own without Congress was evident in the pair of executive orders he signed Friday. The orders would increase food aid, protect job seekers on unemployment, make it easier to obtain government aid and clear a path for federal workers and contractors to get a \$15 hourly minimum wage.

Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council, called the orders a "critical lifeline," rather than a substitute for the larger aid package that he said must be passed quickly.

All of this leaves Biden with a decision that his team has avoided publicly addressing, which is the trade-off ahead for the new president. He can try to appease Republicans, particularly those in the Senate whose votes will be needed for bipartisan passage, by sacrificing some of his agenda. Or, he can try to pass as much of his proposal as possible on a party-line basis.

Well aware of all that, Biden is a seasoned veteran of Capitol Hill deal-making and has assembled a White House staff already working privately with lawmakers and their aides to test the bounds of bipartisanship.

On Sunday, Deese, will meet privately with a bipartisan group of 16 senators, mostly centrists, who were among those instrumental in crafting and delivering the most recent round of COVID aid.

The ability to win over that coalition, led by Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., will be central to any path, a test-run for working with Congress on a bipartisan basis.

"Any new COVID relief package must be focused on the public health and economic crisis at hand," Collins said in a Friday statement.

She said she looks forward to hearing more about "the administration's specific proposals to assist with vaccine distribution, help keep our families and communities safe, and combat this virus so our country can return to normal."

The Biden team's approach could set the tenor for the rest of his presidency, showing whether he can provide the partisan healing that he called for in Wednesday's inaugural address and whether the narrowly split Senate will prove a trusted partner or a roadblock to the White House agenda.

"The ball will be in Biden's court to decide how much he is going to insist on and at what cost," said William Galston, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "As the old saw goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression."

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 the orders that Biden signed Friday asks the Agriculture Department to consider adjusting the rules for food assistance, so the government could be obligated to provide more money to the hungry. It also makes it easier for people to claim payments and benefits provided by the government. In addition, it would create a guarantee that workers could still collect unemployment benefits if they refuse to take jobs that could jeopardize their health.

Biden's second executive order would restore some union bargaining rights revoked by the Trump administration, protect the civil service system from changes made in the Trump years and promote a \$15 hourly minimum wage for all federal workers.

But neither of the orders would have the transformative potential of another round of Congress-passed stimulus. Biden's plan includes \$400 billion for national vaccinations and school reopenings, as well as direct payments of \$1,400 to eligible adults, state and local government aid and expanded tax credits for children and childcare.

Pushing for both bipartisanship and the full contents of their stimulus plan, Biden officials have signaled that the price tag and contents could change but have declined to provide any specifics.

"The final package may not look exactly like the package that he proposed, that's OK, that's how the

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process, the legislative process should work," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday.

Republican lawmakers want to tackle the pandemic, though they see much of the package as overly Democratic with its nationwide \$15 minimum wage and aid to state and local governments.

Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, who leads the GOP senators' reelection efforts, said the Biden proposal would "spend too much of the \$1.9 trillion dollars in taxpayer money on liberal priorities that have nothing to do with the coronavirus."

Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the second-ranking Republican, told reporters Friday there simply won't be Republican votes for a package "in that price range."

Thune had delivered a Senate speech on Biden's first full day in office advising the new president, "If there was any mandate given in this election, it was a mandate for moderation."

Austin wins Senate confirmation as 1st Black Pentagon chief

By ROBERT BURNS and ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lloyd J. Austin, a West Point graduate who rose to the Army's elite ranks and marched through racial barriers in a 41-year career, won Senate confirmation Friday to become the nation's first Black secretary of defense.

The 93-2 vote gave President Joe Biden his second Cabinet member; Avril Haines was confirmed on Wednesday as the first woman to serve as director of national intelligence. Biden is expected to win approval for others on his national security team in coming days, including Antony Blinken as secretary of state.

Biden is looking for Austin to restore stability atop the Pentagon, which went through two Senate-confirmed secretaries of defense and four who held the post on an interim basis during the Trump administration. The only senators who voted against Austin were Republicans Mike Lee of Utah and Josh Hawley of Missouri.

Before heading to the Pentagon, Austin wrote on Twitter that he is especially proud to be the first Black secretary of defense. "Let's get to work," he wrote.

And a short time later he arrived at the Pentagon's River Entrance, where he was greeted by holdover Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist, who has been the acting secretary since Wednesday, and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

He was sworn in and was to receive an intelligence briefing, then confer with senior civilian and military officials on the COVID-19 crisis. He also planned to speak by phone with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and to receive briefings about China and the Middle East.

Some of the global problems on Austin's plate are familiar to him, including one of the thorniest — Afghanistan. The White House said Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told his Afghan counterpart in a phone call Friday that the new administration will "review" the February 2020 deal that the Trump administration struck with the Taliban that requires the U.S. to withdraw all of its troops by May.

Trump ordered U.S. troops levels in Afghanistan cut to 2,500 just days before he left office, presenting Biden with decisions about how to retain leverage against the Taliban in support of peace talks.

Austin's confirmation was complicated by his status as a recently retired general. He required a waiver of a legal prohibition on a military officer serving as secretary of defense within seven years of retirement. Austin retired in 2016 after serving as the first Black general to head U.S. Central Command. He was the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army in 2012 and also served as director of the Joint Staff, a behind-the-scenes job that gave him an intimate view of the Pentagon's inner workings.

The House and the Senate approved the waiver Thursday, clearing the way for the Senate confirmation vote.

Austin, a large man with a booming voice and a tendency to shy from publicity, describes himself as the son of a postal worker and a homemaker from Thomasville, Georgia. He has promised to speak his mind to Congress and to Biden.

At his confirmation hearing Tuesday, Austin said he had not sought the nomination but was ready to lead the Pentagon without clinging to his military status and with full awareness that being a political appointee

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and Cabinet member requires "a different perspective and unique duties from a career in uniform."

As vice president, Biden worked closely with Austin in 2010-11 to wind down U.S. military involvement in Iraq while Austin was the top U.S. commander in Baghdad. American forces withdrew entirely, only to return in 2014 after the Islamic State extremist group captured large swaths of Iraqi territory. At Central Command, Austin was a key architect of the strategy to defeat IS in Iraq and Syria.

Biden said in December when he announced Austin as his nominee that he considered him "the person we need at this moment," and that he trusts Austin to ensure civilian control of the military. Critics of the nomination have questioned the wisdom of making an exception to the law against a recently retired military officer serving as defense secretary, noting that the prohibition was put in place to guard against undue military influence in national security matters.

Only twice before has Congress waived the prohibition — in 1950 for George C. Marshall during the Korean War and in 2017 for Jim Mattis, the retired Marine general who served as President Donald Trump's first Pentagon chief.

Austin has promised to surround himself with qualified civilians. And he made clear at his confirmation hearing that he embraces Biden's early focus on combatting 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.

"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.

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.

Tom Brokaw says he's retiring from NBC News after 55 years

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Longtime NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw, once television news' most popular broadcaster as he told viewers about the biggest events of that late 20th Century, said Friday that he's retiring from television.

Brokaw, who is 80, said he'll continue writing books and articles. He's the author of "The Greatest Generation," about those who fought World War II.

In a final essay that appeared on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on Dec. 30, Brokaw hinted at his announcement by reflecting on a career that took him from breaking into a local newscast in Nebraska and announcing the death of President John F. Kennedy, to coronavirus.

"For me, it's been an amazing journey — 57 years as a reporter," Brokaw said.

Fifty-five of those years were at NBC News, starting as a reporter in Los Angeles in the 1960s, covering the White House during the Nixon administration, hosting the "Today" show in the late 1970s and more than 20 years as "Nightly News" anchor.

For two decades, the triumvirate of Brokaw, ABC's Peter Jennings and CBS' Dan Rather were the nation's most visible broadcasters, anchoring major stories like the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the disputed 2000 election and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

After giving way at "Nightly News" to Brian Williams in 2004, Brokaw concentrated primarily on historical programming and commentary during big moments, like elections.

For health reasons, his appearances have been more sporadic lately. In 2013, Brokaw was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable blood cancer that affects the bone marrow. He did not return a message seeking comment on Friday.

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During his final essay last month, Brokaw reviewed some of the events of 2020. He took a swipe at former President Donald Trump and his "bizarre refusal" to accept the election results. "Before too long, his principal audience will be his caddies," he said.

Brokaw said the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 400,000 Americans in the past year, was the country's greatest test since the Civil War.

"We still have miles to go and no assurances of just how it will all turn out," he said.

A year after Wuhan lockdown, a world still deep in crisis

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

Nearly a year to the day after the Chinese city of Wuhan went into lockdown to contain a virus that had already escaped, President Joe Biden began putting into effect a new war plan for fighting the outbreak in the U.S., Germany topped 50,000 deaths, and Britain closed in on 100,000.

The anniversary of the lockdown Saturday comes as more contagious variants of the coronavirus spread and efforts to vaccinate people against COVID-19 have been frustrated by disarray and limited supplies in some places. The scourge has killed over 2 million people worldwide.

In the U.S., which has the world's highest death toll at over 410,000, Dr. Anthony Fauci said a lack of candor about the threat under President Donald Trump probably cost lives.

Fauci, who was sidelined by Trump, is now the chief medical adviser to Biden in an ambitious effort to conquer the virus. He told CNN that the Trump administration delayed getting sound scientific advice to the country.

"When you start talking about things that make no sense medically and no sense scientifically, that clearly is not helpful," he said.

Biden signed a series of executive orders Thursday to mount a more centralized attack on the virus and has vowed to vaccinate 100 million people in his first 100 days, a number some public health experts say is not ambitious enough.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said the U.S. should aim to vaccinate 2.5 million a day.

"This was already an emergency," Topol said, but with more contagious mutations of the virus circulating, "it became an emergency to the fourth power."

In Britain, where a more transmissible variant of the virus is raging, the death toll hit close to 96,000, the highest in Europe. And the government's chief scientific adviser warned that the mutated version might be deadlier than the original.

Patrick Vallance cautioned that more research is needed but that the evidence suggests that the variant might kill 13 or 14 people out of every 1,000 infected, compared with 10 in 1,000 from the original.

Germany extended its lockdown this week until Feb. 14 amid concern about the mutant viruses.

Some nations are imposing or considering new travel restrictions for the same reason. France said it will require a negative test from travelers arriving from other European Union countries starting Sunday. Canada said it may force visitors to quarantine in a hotel at their own expense upon arrival.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau warned the country: "No one should be taking a vacation abroad right now. If you've still got one planned, cancel it. And don't book a trip for spring break."

In another apparent setback, AstraZeneca said it will ship fewer doses of its vaccine than anticipated to the 27-country EU because of supply chain problems.

Amid the crisis, Japan is publicly adamant it will hold the postponed Olympics in July. Many experts believe that to pull that off, the nation will have to vaccinate all 127 million citizens, an effort that may not even begin until late February.

The 76-day Wuhan lockdown began a year ago with a notice sent to people's smartphones at 2 a.m. announcing the airport and train and bus stations would shut at 10 a.m. It eventually was expanded to most of the rest of Hubei province, affecting 56 million people. By the time of the lockdown, the virus had spread well beyond China's borders.

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Wuhan has largely returned to normal.

The rollout of shots in the U.S. has been marked by delays, confusion and, in recent days, complaints of vaccine shortages and inadequate deliveries from the federal government as states ramp up their vaccination drives to include senior citizens as well as teachers, police and other groups.

At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Friday that of nearly 40 million doses distributed to the states so far, just 19 million have been dispensed.

Why there are reports of shortages when so many doses are apparently going unused is not entirely clear. But some vaccination sites are believed to be holding back large quantities to make sure that people who got their first shot receive the required second one on schedule a few weeks later.

At the rate vaccines are being delivered, Alabama officials said it would take two years to vaccinate all adults in the state of 5 million people.

"Every state had the idea that they were going to get much more vaccine than they ultimately got," said Scott Harris, head of the state Department of Public Health. "There just wasn't enough vaccine to go around."

Louisiana said it plans to set up mass vaccination events but can't do so until it receives larger quantities of vaccine. The state said it has been receiving about 60,000 doses weekly for the last few weeks and was told by federal officials to expect similar allocations for the next month or so.

"We all are asking for the exact same thing," Gov. John Bel Edwards said of the nation's governors. "We want more vaccine as soon as we can possibly get it, and we want more lead time to know how many doses we're going to get so that we can do a better job of planning at the state level."

In Boston, nearly 2,000 doses vaccine were spoiled at a Veterans Affairs hospital after a contractor accidentally unplugged a freezer.

Biden pledged to set up Federal Emergency Management Agency mass vaccination sites, but some states said they need more doses of the vaccine, not more people or locations to administer them.

"We stand ready, willing and able to handle it," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said. "Trying to find FEMA set up sites, first of all, that would take like 30 days. It's not necessary in Florida. I would take all that energy and I would put that toward more supply of the vaccine."

California keeps key virus data out of public sight

By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom has from the start said his coronavirus policy decisions would be driven by data shared with the public to provide maximum transparency.

But with the state starting to emerge from its worst surge, his administration won't disclose key information that will help determine when his latest stay-at-home order is lifted.

State health officials said they rely on a very complex set of measurements that would confuse and potentially mislead the public if they were made public.

Dr. Lee Riley, chairman of the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health infectious disease division, disagreed.

"There is more uncertainty created by NOT releasing the data that only the state has access to," he said in an email. Its release would allow outside experts to assess its value for projecting trends and the resulting decisions on lifting restrictions, he wrote.

Newsom, a Democrat, imposed the nation's first statewide shutdown in March. His administration developed reopening plans that included benchmarks for virus data such as per capita infection rates that counties needed to meet to relax restrictions.

It released data models state officials use to project whether infections, hospitalizations and deaths are likely to rise or fall.

As cases surged after Thanksgiving, Newsom tore up his playbook. Rather than a county-by-county approach, he created five regions and established a single measurement — ICU capacity — as the determination for whether a region was placed under a stay-at-home order.

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In short order, four regions — about 98% of the state's population — were under the restrictions after their capacity fell below the 15% threshold. A map updated daily tracks each region's capacity.

At the start of last week, no regions appeared likely to have the stay-at-home order lifted soon because their capacity was well below 15%. But within a day, the state announced it was lifting the order for the 13-county Greater Sacramento area.

Suddenly, outdoor dining and worship services were OK again, hair and nail salons and other businesses could reopen, and retailers were allowed more shoppers inside.

Local officials and businesses were caught off guard. State officials did not describe their reasoning other than to say it was based on a projection for ICU capacity.

State health officials relied on a complex formula to project that while the Sacramento region's intensive care capacity was below 10%, it would climb above 15% within four weeks. On Friday, it was 9%, roughly the same as when the order was lifted.

"What happened to the 15%? What was that all about?" asked Dr. George Rutherford, an epidemiologist and infectious-diseases control expert at University of California, San Francisco. "I was surprised. I assume they know something I don't know."

State officials projected future capacity using a combination of models. "At the moment the projections are not being shared publicly," Department of Public Health spokeswoman Ali Bay said in an email to The Associated Press.

California Health and Human Services Agency spokeswoman Kate Folmar said officials are committed to transparency, providing twice-weekly updates on whether regions can relax restrictions. But she said projected ICU capacity is based on multiple variables, including available beds and staffing that change regularly.

"These fluid, on-the-ground conditions cannot be boiled down to a single data point — and to do so would mislead and create greater uncertainty for Californians," she said in a statement.

First Amendment Coalition Executive Director David Snyder urged the state to change course.

"The state is wielding extraordinary power these days — power to close businesses, to directly impact people's livelihoods and even lives — and so it owes it to Californians to disclose how and why it makes those decisions," said Snyder, whose California public interest organization fights for greater government openness.

"Secrecy," he said, "is exactly the wrong approach here and will only breed further mistrust, confusion and contempt for the crucial role of government in bringing us out of this crisis."

Restaurants, among other businesses, would benefit by being able to watch trends toward reopening so they could start ordering supplies and rehiring workers, California Restaurant Association president and CEO Jot Condie said.

Last week's sudden easing of restrictions "was a good surprise, but we just didn't see it coming," Condie said. "We just don't know what happens behind the curtain."

San Bernardino County spokesman David Wert said officials there aren't aware of the models the state is using. "If they do exist, the county would find them helpful," he said.

Riley said he would base reopening decisions on current coronavirus cases rather than ICU projections, partially because most people who are hospitalized never require intensive care.

California became the nation's epicenter for the virus in December, but it has fared better in the new year. The 23,024 new cases reported Friday are less than half the mid-December peak of nearly 54,000.

California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly this week cited slowing hospital and skilled nursing home admissions and lower positivity and transmission rates as "rays of hope" for overburdened hospitals.

Yet the data model that he has repeatedly pointed to as key to planning still shows hospitalizations bumping up over the next month, though projections flatten more each day.

The model is based on historical infection data that follows a pattern where about 12% of those with the virus get hospitalized and 12% of them end up in the ICU. The model's projections do not account for

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changes in conditions, such as more vaccinations or a lifted stay-at-home order.

It is one of 16 forecasting models listed on a "technical notes" page of the state's website, with links for more information to help the public understand projections that can sometimes show contradictory trends. Another 12 models assess transmission rates.

Computer models must take into account so many factors that they may be valuable only on a much smaller scale, experts said, perhaps to allow local officials to spot outbreaks or target vaccination campaigns.

The computer model Ghaly has been citing seems to be accurate "only afterwards, like Monday morning football," Riley said, "so I don't take the modeling that seriously."

For example, Riley expects holiday-related cases to continue plaguing hard-hit Southern California for at least a couple more weeks and keep ICU space extremely tight.

Yet the state's public model shows a roughly 30% decline in Southern California ICU patients over the next month even as hospitalizations flatten and deaths climb. The model shows a smaller but still significant decline in the equally hard-hit San Joaquin Valley.

"My reading of the tea leaves," Rutherford said, "is that we're at the very cusp of entering a period of falling case numbers."

Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne and Amy Taxin contributed. Taxin reported from Orange County.

Speculation over Tokyo Olympics: 2021, 2032 or not at all?

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — Just about everybody, especially the organizers in Japan and Switzerland, want the Tokyo Olympics to open on July 23 — as scheduled.

And yet, 2021 is starting on a similar path that led to the decision last March to postpone the games for a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Japanese authorities and the International Olympic Committee moved quickly Friday to dismiss a report by The Times of London that quoted an anonymous government official claiming it has been concluded the games will be canceled.

"Categorically untrue," Japan's government said in a statement endorsed by the IOC.

The same unidentified government official said Tokyo could instead host in 2032, after Paris and Los Angeles take their turns in 2024 and 2028, respectively.

It follows surveys suggesting Japanese people feel less and less enthusiastic about an Olympics already costing the host nation about \$25 billion of mostly public money.

When will the Tokyo Olympics be held, if at all?

CANCELLATION?

Speculation was fueled this month when Japan's government put Tokyo under a state of emergency order to curb a surge of COVID-19 cases.

The virus is resistant to being brought under control worldwide. Its future path is uncertain as more transmissible mutant strains emerge.

Vaccination programs have been slower than hoped for in some wealthier countries that secured significant numbers of doses.

If an unwanted cancellation decision must be made, it should be led by Japanese authorities. The United Nations could be asked to help, a veteran IOC official suggested this month.

If clarity is needed soon, with more than 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes due to compete in Tokyo, March has key dates in the Olympic calendar.

The IOC has meetings scheduled March 7-12 in Athens, Greece, if such gatherings are possible. The full membership is set to re-elect Thomas Bach unopposed for a second presidential term.

On March 25, the torch relay is due to start in Japan. It will involve 10,000 runners across the country.

The postponement last March was announced two days before the torch relay was to start.

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2021?

It's this year or never: So runs the consistent message out of Tokyo and the IOC's home city of Lausanne, Switzerland.

"There is no Plan B," Bach told the Japanese news agency Kyodo on Thursday.

However, he also insisted last year there would be no postponement, and it soon became inevitable.

For the games to go ahead as planned, the travel, quarantine and safe conduct rules will be strict. These would apply also to any fans allowed to enter venues.

Organizers plan to publish within weeks "Playbooks" that "outline the personal responsibilities each person attending the games must follow," the International Paralympic Committee said Friday. The Tokyo Paralympics start Aug. 24.

2022?

There was support last year in Japan for a two-year postponement direct to 2022.

One factor tempts some to think 2022 is open: There is no soccer World Cup in its usual June-July slot.

The other global sports behemoth was moved in 2015 by FIFA to play in Qatar from Nov. 21-Dec. 18 next year.

Postponing again would inconvenience two key Olympic sports that already moved their 2021 world championships to make space for Tokyo.

The swimming worlds are now in May 2022 in Fukuoka, Japan. Track and field's worlds are now in July 2022 at Eugene, Oregon.

A bigger barrier to this option is the extra costs and fatigue in Japan of extending contracts for one more year. For staff, venue rentals, hotels and, crucially, the athlete village.

Owners of pre-sold apartments in the 5,600-unit complex are already being compensated for waiting one more year to access their property.

2032?

The next available slot in the four-year Summer Games cycle is 2032, after Paris and Los Angeles.

Could Tokyo be offered it to cancel this year and re-start in several years' time? That would upset would-be hosts already talking to the IOC.

An Australian bid centered on Brisbane is a front-runner in a new process that aims to be more pro-active and cut costs. The is promoted by Australian Olympic official John Coates, a key Bach ally.

FINANCES

Financial implications for Olympic stakeholders of canceling Tokyo are huge though likely not crippling.

The IOC earned \$5.7 billion in the four years to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, and would have expected more from Tokyo.

Broadcast and sponsor deals are at risk, though the IOC has strong relationships with long-term commercial partners.

The most consequential deal, NBC's broadcast rights in the United States, is worth \$7.75 billion through the 2032 Summer Games.

The IOC was insured against a cancellation in 2020 but that policy did not cover a postponement.

It does have substantial reserves, including an Olympic Foundation portfolio worth \$989 million according to the published accounts for 2019. The fund's purpose includes "to cover the IOC's operating cash requirements in the event of a cancellation of any future Olympic Games."

The IOC is due to share about \$600 million among 27 sports as their share of its Tokyo Olympics revenue.

Canceling Tokyo is a big hit for some of those governing bodies, though most have their own reserves. They also had access to loans from the IOC and government of Switzerland, where most are based.

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

Kansas advances anti-abortion measure on Roe anniversary

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

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TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Republicans on Friday pushed a proposed anti-abortion amendment to the Kansas Constitution through the state House, a bitter reminder of election setbacks for abortion rights Democrats on the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion nationwide.

The vote was 86-38 on a measure that would overturn a 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision that declared access to abortion a “fundamental” right under the state’s Bill of Rights. Abortion opponents had two votes more than the two-thirds majority necessary for passage, sending the proposal to the Senate, where a debate could occur as early as next week.

The measure would add language to the state constitution declaring that it grants no right to abortion and that the Legislature can regulate abortion in line with U.S. Supreme Court decisions. The measure is not a state abortion ban, but it could allow one if a more conservative U.S. Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision protecting abortion rights.

“I think it’s about as ugly as you can get,” said Rep. Annie Kuether, a Topeka Democrat who supports abortion rights.

Republicans said the timing of the debate was a coincidence, but abortion rights Democrats, particularly women, saw it as a pointed message that GOP legislators and anti-abortion groups intend to keep moving toward a state ban. A similar proposal failed last year in the House when four GOP members objected, and elections last year left the Republican supermajority more conservative.

“It’s remarkable and it shows you that Kansas, that we are a pro-life state,” said Rep. Tori Arnberger, a Republican from the central Kansas town of Great Bend, who led the anti-abortion side during the debate.

Anti-abortion lawmakers said that if the Kansas court decision stands, two decades’ worth of restrictions on abortion enacted with bipartisan support could fall in state court challenges.

The 2019 ruling put on indefinite hold a law banning a common second trimester procedure — designated as “dismemberment abortion” in its language. Special health and safety standards for abortion providers, described by them as unnecessary and burdensome, have been on hold since 2011 because of a lawsuit.

Abortion opponents also worry that also in jeopardy are a 24-hour waiting period for an abortion, a requirement that most minors seeking abortions notify their parents and rules for what providers must tell their patients.

“The people, over the last three decades, have supported very strongly reasonable regulations on the abortion industry, and they want those protected,” said Jeanne Gawdun, a lobbyist for Kansans for Life, the state’s most influential anti-abortion group.

But several Republicans said in explaining their yes votes that they would continue to push for a ban on abortion if the amendment is added to the constitution.

Freshman Republican Rep Patrick Penn, of Wichita, said his late mother, a survivor of abusive relationships, had been urged by family to abort him “in accordance with every excuse promoted by the pro-death forces.”

If the Senate also approves the measure by a two-thirds majority, it would go on the ballot in the August 2022 primary, when approval by a simple majority of voters would add it to the state constitution.

“It will almost certainly lead to an abortion ban,” said freshman Democratic Rep. Lindsay Vaughn, a Kansas City-area abortion rights supporter, noting moves for near bans in other states, including Alabama, Tennessee and West Virginia.

The timing of the statewide vote was a key issue last year, when anti-abortion groups pushed to have the measure on the ballot in the August 2020 primary.

Four Republicans voted then against that measure, joining many Democrats in arguing that the larger and broader group of voters in the November general election should decide. In Kansas since 2010, an average of 3.5 times as many Republicans as Democrats have cast ballots in primaries, and the primary electorate tends to be more partisan.

Three of those Republican dissenters retired, and another lost his GOP primary race. The GOP had a net gain of two seats in the November election, making its majority 86-38, with one independent House member.

In Friday's vote, only Republicans backed this year's proposal, and only Democrats and the independent House member voted no.

The failure of last year's proposal led to an intensified focus by both anti-abortion and abortion rights groups on legislative races. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, sent hundreds of thousands of text messages, made tens of thousands of phone calls and knocked on thousands of doors. The national anti-abortion group Students for Life also became involved in Kansas races for the first time.

"It was, 'This is the time to protect life,'" said Kristan Hawkins, Students for Life's president. "We need to stand up and hold elected officials accountable, regardless of what party they're in."

But Kuether argued that Kansas legislators keep repeating the same decades-old "debates over controlling women" even after the U.S. elected its first female vice president, Kamala Harris. She said there's no debate over any proposal "to deny a right to men."

"Equality?" she said. "Not in Kansas."

Follow John Hanna on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/apjdhanna>

UK chief scientist says new virus variant may be more deadly

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — There is some evidence that a new coronavirus variant first identified in southeast England carries a higher risk of death than the original strain, the British government's chief scientific adviser said Friday -- though he stressed that the data is uncertain.

Patrick Vallance told a news conference that "there is evidence that there is an increased risk for those who have the new variant."

He said that for a man in his 60s with the original version of the virus, "the average risk is that for 1,000 people who got infected, roughly 10 would be expected to unfortunately die."

"With the new variant, for 1,000 people infected, roughly 13 or 14 people might be expected to die," he said.

But Vallance stressed that "the evidence is not yet strong" and more research is needed.

In contrast to that uncertainty, he said, there is growing confidence that the variant is more easily passed on than the original coronavirus strain. He said it appears to be between 30% and 70% more transmissible.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the World Health Organization's technical lead on COVID-19, said studies were underway to look at the transmission and severity of new virus variants.

She said so far "they haven't seen an increase in severity" but that more transmission could lead to "an overburdened health care system" and thus more deaths.

The evidence for the new variant being more deadly is in a paper prepared by a group of scientists that advises the government on new respiratory viruses, based on several studies.

The British scientists said that although initial analyses suggested that the strain, first identified in September, did not cause more severe disease, several more recent ones suggest it might. However, the numbers of deaths are relatively small, and case fatality rates are affected by many things including the care patients get and their age and health beyond having COVID-19.

The British scientists stress that the information so far has major limitations, and that they do not know how representative the cases included in the analyses are of what's happening throughout the country or elsewhere.

One analysis did not find an increased risk of death among people admitted to a hospital with the new strain. In another, the odds of being admitted to a hospital with the new strain compared to the previously dominant one were no different.

There is a lag in reporting hospitalizations after infection, and a further lag from infection to death, so officials expect to learn more in several weeks.

Paul Hunter, Professor in Medicine at the University of East Anglia, said "there is quite a bit of difference in the estimated increased risk of death between the different analyses, though most, but not all, show

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increased risk of death," he said.

Ian Jones, professor of Virology at the University of Reading, said "the data is limited and the conclusions preliminary. However, an increased case fatality rate is certainly possible with a virus that has upped its game in transmission."

British officials say they are confident that the vaccines that have been authorized for use against COVID-19 will be effective against the new strain identified in the country.

But Vallance said scientists are concerned that variants identified in Brazil and South Africa could be more resistant to vaccines, adding that more research needs to be done.

Concerns about newly identified variants have triggered a spate of new travel restrictions around the world. Many countries have closed their borders to travelers from Britain, and the U.K. has halted flights from Brazil and South Africa.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there could be further restrictions.

"We may need to go further to protect our borders," he said.

Britain has recorded 95,981 deaths among people who tested positive for the coronavirus, the highest confirmed total in Europe.

The U.K. is currently in a lockdown in an attempt to slow the latest surge of the coronavirus outbreak. Pubs, restaurants, entertainment venues and many shops are closed, and people are required to stay largely at home.

The number of new infections has begun to fall, but deaths remain agonizingly high, averaging more than 1,000 a day, and the number of hospitalized patients is 80% higher than at the first peak of the pandemic in the spring.

Johnson, who has often been accused of giving overly optimistic predictions about relaxing coronavirus restrictions, sounded gloomy.

"We will have to live with coronavirus in one way or another for a long while to come," he said, adding that "it's an open question" when measures could be eased.

"At this stage you've got to be very, very cautious indeed," he said.

Vallance agreed,

"I don't think this virus is going anywhere," he said. "It's going to be around, probably, forever."

___ AP Chief Medical Writer Marilynn Marchione and Medical Writer Maria Cheng contributed to this story.

Follow AP coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at:

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

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

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

VIRUS TODAY: Barriers slow efforts to vaccinate immigrants

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Friday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— Advocacy groups are warning that immigrants in the U.S. may be some of the most difficult people to reach during the national drive to vaccinate the population against the virus. Some immigrants in the country illegally fear that information taken during vaccinations could be turned over to authorities and so may not seek out vaccines, while those who speak little or no English may find it difficult to access shots.

— A group of fortunate Americans are getting pushed to the front of the line to get their COVID-19 vaccines as clinics scramble to get rid of extra, perishable doses by the end of the day. Some of those getting earlier than expected access just happen to be near a clinic at closing time, but clinic workers also go out looking for willing recipients. Other clinics are setting up lotteries to dispense their extra shots because the demand is so great. The process has emerged as one of the most unusual, and to some unseemly, quirks in the vaccination rollout.

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— The White House is following public health guidelines for preventing the coronavirus under President Joe Biden. Testing wristbands are in. Mask-wearing is mandatory. Desks are socially distanced. While the Trump administration was known for ignoring infection-control guidance, the Biden team has made a point of adhering to the same advice that federal health officials are counseling Americans to follow.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. is averaging more than 187,000 new cases and about 3,000 deaths each day. The nation's death toll since the start of the pandemic now stands at more than 410,000.

QUOTABLE: "It became political to say that the pandemic was devastating our community because it was interpreted as a judgment on Trump." — Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious-diseases physician and a professor at the Boston University School of Medicine, after National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci gave his first briefing since Biden took office.

ICYMI: California's public health agency recently surprised local officials by lifting a stay-at-home order in the 13-county Greater Sacramento region, relying on data not publicly shared despite repeated pledges of transparency. State officials projected intensive care unit capacity and virus spread four weeks into the future to make the determination. State health department spokeswoman Ali Bay said the data is not being shared, citing concerns it would cause more confusion.

ON THE HORIZON: President Joe Biden plans to take executive action to provide a stopgap measure of financial relief for millions of Americans. Biden is also seeking to pass a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package to help those affected by the coronavirus pandemic. It is unclear when the proposal will be introduced.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Twitter bans suspect Iran account after post threatens Trump

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Twitter said Friday it has permanently banned an account that some in Iran believe is linked to the office of the country's supreme leader after a posting that seemed to threaten former President Donald Trump.

In the image posted by the suspect account late Thursday, Trump is shown playing golf in the shadow of a giant drone, with the caption "Revenge is certain" written in Farsi.

In response to a request for comment from The Associated Press, a Twitter spokesman said the account was fake and violated the company's "manipulation and spam policy," without elaborating how it came to that conclusion.

The tweet of the golfer-drone photo violated the company's "abusive behavior policy," Twitter's spokesman added.

In Iran, the suspect account — @khamenei_site — is believed to be linked to the office of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei because its behavior mirrored that of other accounts identified in state-run media as tied to his office. It frequently posted excerpts from his speeches and other official content.

In this case, the account carried the link to Khamenei's website.

Other accounts tied to Khamenei's office that did not tweet the golf-drone photo, including his main English language account, remained active. The photo had also featured prominently on the supreme leader's website and was retweeted by Khamenei's main Farsi language account, @Khamenei-fa, which apparently deleted it after posting.

Earlier this month, Facebook and Twitter cut off Trump from their platforms for allegedly inciting the assault on the U.S. Capitol, an unprecedented step that underscored the immense power of tech giants in regulating speech on their platforms. Activists soon urged the companies to apply their policies equally to other political figures worldwide, in order to combat hate speech and content that encourages violence.

The warning in the caption referenced Khamenei's remarks last month ahead of the first anniversary of the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guard general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad. In his speech, Khamenei did not call out Trump by name, but reiterated a vow for vengeance against those who ordered and executed the attack on Soleimani.

"Revenge will certainly happen at the right time," Khamenei had declared.

Iran blocks social media websites like Facebook and Twitter, and censors others. While top officials have unfettered access to social media, Iran's youth and tech-savvy citizens use proxy servers or other workarounds to bypass the controls.

Soon after Trump's ban from Twitter ignited calls to target tweets from other political leaders, the company took down a post by a different Khamenei-linked account that pushed a COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theory.

Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters in Iran, had claimed that virus vaccines imported from the U.S. or Britain were "completely untrustworthy."

Venezuela power struggle impedes delivery of COVID vaccine

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and SCOTT SMITH Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's political conflict has claimed another casualty: relief from the coronavirus pandemic.

The socialist government of Nicolás Maduro and the U.S.-backed opposition are accusing each other of playing politics with proposals to finance United Nations-supplied vaccines — so far blocking any option from going ahead.

The cash-strapped government, shut out from western banks by U.S. sanctions, has proposed selling a small part of the \$2 billion Venezuela's central bank has sitting frozen in the U.K. Lawyers for Venezuela's central bank warn a "humanitarian disaster, and a potentially large loss of life" could result if the U.K. funds aren't freed up.

But the opposition led by Juan Guaidó opposes that plan — a stance that scuppers any movement until Britain's Supreme Court decides the thorny question of who is Venezuela's legitimate president, with oversight of its assets.

The opposition says Maduro can't be trusted to fairly distribute the vaccine and contends the government's real aim is to create a precedent allowing it to access the funds, which includes billions in gold ingots stored at the Bank of England, that has been frozen by British courts — equal to a third of the nation's foreign currency reserves.

The opposition has instead proposed tapping similarly embargoed funds it has access to in the U.S. and deploying monitors to make sure distribution of the vaccine isn't used as a cover for political patronage — a potential victory for Guaidó's faction since Maduro has effectively shut it out of power within Venezuela's borders.

The acrimonious posturing has already led Venezuela to miss a December deadline to make an \$18 million down payment on vaccines to the U.N. The high-stakes tug of war means Venezuelans are likely to continue suffering the effects of the virus even as vaccine rollouts begin elsewhere in Latin America, with the only possible help coming from the Sputnik V vaccine provided by Maduro's staunch ally Russia.

It also underscores the new Biden administration's challenges in bridging the divisions that have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis overwhelming the country's neighbors, who have absorbed more than 5 million Venezuelan migrants in recent years.

"It's not enough to allocate blame," said Francisco Rodriguez, a Venezuelan economist behind Oil for Venezuela, a U.S.-based group advocating for greater assistance to the most vulnerable. "To actually resolve the problems, both sides need to show a willingness to cooperate so that the Venezuelan people are not collateral damage in this political conflict."

The vaccine fight came to light as part of a courtroom battle between Maduro and Guaidó over control of the gold at the Bank of England. The U.K.'s Supreme Court in December agreed to hear the case, which hinges on who Britain recognizes as the Venezuela's legitimate leader: the one Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government says it backs — Guaidó — or Maduro, with whom it maintains tense diplomatic ties.

In September, Maduro's health minister agreed to purchase 11 million doses of vaccines in the first round of the U.N.-backed program, known as COVAX, which seeks to buy and distribute vaccines to more than 100 countries. Under the terms, it was required to make a down payment of over \$18 million by Dec. 15

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and provide financial guarantees for another \$101 million.

"Regrettably, due to the impact of the U.S. government sanctions, it has not been possible for Venezuela to meet either of those obligations," lawyers for Maduro's central bank, London-based Zaiwalla & Co., said in a Dec. 23 letter sent to counsel for Guaidó in which they proposed the proceeds from a gold swap with Deutsche Bank be used to pay for the vaccines.

Six days later, Guaidó's attorneys rejected the plan, arguing that other payment mechanisms exist, including funds that were seized by the Trump administration and that have already been used to provide cash bonuses for underpaid health workers on the front lines of the raging medical crisis.

While Maduro's government claims that Western banks refuse to process Venezuela's payments, Guaidó's attorneys said humanitarian aid isn't impeded by U.S. sanctions and the Treasury Department specifically exempts any COVID-related assistance. The U.S. government has already provided \$1 billion to mitigate the effects of the nation's crisis, both in Venezuela and across the region, including \$47 million to support water and sanitation, case management and disease surveillance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Very clearly Maduro is trying to get his nose under the tent so he can grab the gold," said Vanessa Neumann, who was Guaidó's envoy to London until November. "This is about creating a legal precedent. But using international guilt over COVID and suffering of the Venezuelan people is a deplorable way to go about it."

A copy of the letters was provided to the AP by a public relations firm representing lawyers for Maduro's central bank.

Miguel Pizarro, a humanitarian aid coordinator for Guaidó, said monitoring of vaccine distribution by the Roman Catholic Church and civil society groups is key after Maduro's government broke an agreement reached last June with the Pan American Health Organization, or PAHO, to combat the virus jointly with the opposition.

The deal, hailed at the time as a rare respite from the nation's winner-take-all politics, called for the delivery of protective gear and COVID antigen testing kits using offshore funds controlled by Guaidó, according to Pizarro.

But upon the arrival of the supplies in October, the government took control of the tests and it's unknown if they were ever distributed to the 27 hospitals selected to receive them, according to Pizarro. PAHO, the regional office for the World Health Organization in the Americas, said this week that only 3,000 of the 340,000 tests sent to the country have been used.

"We don't know what happened to the tests," said Pizarro. "But clearly Maduro can't be taken at his word."

Venezuela's government has reported 1,122 deaths from 121,691 cases of coronavirus, one of the lowest infection rates in the region, a sign the virus hasn't hit as hard as feared in a country with a collapsed health care system and where hospitals lack basic supplies like running water and syringes. Medical groups opposed to the government put the death toll four times higher, but still well below the rate of countries like neighboring Colombia, which has recorded nearly 50,000 deaths.

But Venezuela risks falling behind the world in vaccinating health workers and the most-vulnerable populations. Ciro Ugarte, director of health emergencies at PAHO, said this week that the deadline to join the COVAX program had passed and Venezuela's ability to acquire the vaccine through the Washington-based group's revolving fund was also blocked until it pays off a \$11 million debt.

The haggling is of little interest to regular Venezuelans, who will take relief from wherever it comes. For now, that's likely Russia, from which Maduro has said he'll acquire 10 million doses.

Peter Contrera, 40, said he's still not sure whether he trusts the science behind the Russian-made vaccine, which hasn't been approved by the World Health Organization or other strict regulatory agencies. He also doubts it will ever reach common folks like him when it does arrive.

"Supposedly, a shipment is coming to Venezuela," said Contrera, who buys and sells food products and car parts to support his family. "I don't understand whether it's for the government or for the people."

Contrera, who doesn't align himself with either side of Venezuela's polarized politics, was sitting on a bench in front of a public hospital in a poor hillside neighborhood of Caracas, waiting to deliver clean sheets

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and food for his 73-year-old father, who was hospitalized a week ago with COVID-related pneumonia. "Right now, I don't know anything about its effects," he said of the vaccine. "Somebody needs to explain it to me."

_____:
Goodman reported from Miami.

Dry January is moist for some at the rocky start of 2021

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A raging pandemic, tumultuous presidential election and deadly Capitol insurrection have combined to make the annual tradition of Dry January more moist than air-tight for some.

Not Sarah Arvizo. She considers it her easiest yet.

As much as the 32-year-old Manhattanite would love to partake in a little "vinopeutics," she said the abstinence period she's participated in for several years has been made smoother this time around by her at-home pandemic life and the closing of bars and restaurants.

"Longing for those days, for sure," said the social drinker who lives alone. "But unless I want to freeze outside, that's largely off the table this year."

Eight-year-old Dry January, which comes at the height of resolution season after the holidays, has brought on the desired benefits for many among the millions participating around the world. They're losing quarantine weight, experiencing more clarity and sleeping easier.

Others with lockdown time on their hands and round-the-clock access to TV news and the home liquor cabinet are struggling to meet the challenge. Some who have already cheated hoisted a glass on Inauguration Day, Dry January's surreal New Year's Eve.

Sue Cornick, 52, in Los Angeles, wanted to experience Dry January after her consumption of alcohol rose from three or four days a week to five or six. But she knew pulling the plug wouldn't work before a celebratory Inauguration Day, so it's Dry February for her.

"Full disclosure, my Dry February will be more like almost dry. I'll definitely have a cheat day here and there. Just no daily habit," she said.

Others are holding steadfast but said the horrid year that was and the chaotic events of January have made it far more difficult. The odds aren't in their favor. Studies over the years have shown that a small percentage of New Year's resolutions overall are actually achieved.

Peta Grafham, a 61-year-old retired IT specialist in Tryon, North Carolina, signed on to Dry January after watching her alcohol intake creep up during the pandemic and months of political and racial turmoil.

"I'm a social creature and isolating has been difficult. I found that I would open a bottle of wine and watch TV, usually CNN, and could knock back a bottle in less than two hours. Then I would move on to the Grand Marnier," said Grafham, who lives with her husband. "I announced to my friends and family that I was doing a Dry January, so my pride is what's keeping me sober."

She hasn't had a drop since Dec. 31. Her spouse didn't join, but she said he's an efficient nurser of bourbon or vodka and has supported her effort.

"I seemed incapable of limiting myself to just one glass," Grafham said.

According to a recent survey from the American Psychological Association, 78% of adults report the COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant source of stress, and 65% said the amount of uncertainty in the world is causing strain.

At 27, Emily Roethle in Encinitas, California, nearly broke on Jan. 6, when a riotous mob descended on the Capitol.

"This is my second Dry January," she said. "It's difficult this year. I've looked to my glass of wine to separate work from home as I work remote, but in ways it's easier as there's no happy hour or dinner invitations."

While addiction treatment experts note that a month of forced sobriety may not have a lasting impact and may lead to binge drinking in February, others believe the show of sobriety can't hurt.

Dry January began after a woman training for her first half-marathon, Emily Robinson in the U.K., decided

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to quit drinking for the month. She later went to work for an alcohol awareness organization that launched a national campaign. The event slowly went global.

Well before that, in 1942, Finland began a program called Raitis Tammikuu, meaning sober January, to assist the war effort against the Soviet Union, said Hilary Sheinbaum, who wrote a new book about Dry January, "The Dry Challenge." She said she wrote from personal experience.

"On Dec. 31, 2016, moments before the ball dropped, I made a Dry January bet with a friend," Sheinbaum said. "In the end, I ended up going the full 31 days. My friend did not. He ended up buying me a very fancy meal, but I had the opportunity to see how alcohol was affecting my day-to-day life. With Dry January, I had clearer skin. I was sleeping better. I had so much more financial savings at the end of the month. This is my fifth Dry January."

When she took on her first dry challenge, she was working regularly at booze-infused events as a red carpet reporter, and a food and beverage writer. She was also single and going on a lot of dates. Now in a two-year relationship, she and her live-in boyfriend do Dry January together.

"Having someone doing it with you is definitely encouraging," Sheinbaum said. "For many Americans, we start off the year with a number of resolutions, whether that's saving money, losing weight, just being healthier in general. Dry January checks the boxes for those goals and many more."

She and others note that the ritual isn't meant as a substitute for addiction treatment and recovery. Dr. Joseph DeSanto, an MD and addiction specialist for the recovery program BioCorRx, agreed but said Dry January may give those in trouble "something to rally around, especially if they're not in a 12-step group, and provide a sense of community."

He added: "Any kind of harm reduction is advantageous. If someone is a heavy drinker, they could benefit greatly from switching to moderate to light drinking, even if they can't stop altogether. I've never met an alcoholic that felt worse from drinking less or not drinking."

MJ Gottlieb is co-founder and CEO of the 100,000-strong Loosid, a sober social network with both physical and virtual events and services around the country. He's in recovery himself and launched the company in part to show the world that sobriety doesn't mean the "end of fun."

Since the pandemic, he said Loosid has seen a spike in people posting on its app, messaging its hotlines and accessing its support groups as the pandemic brought on isolation and more drinking at home.

That's where Dry January plays a role.

"A lot of people who did not have problems previous to the pandemic and were drinking a glass of wine a night are now drinking a couple of bottles a night," Gottlieb said. "They're wondering what's going on. They're wondering, how did I get here?"

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 former President Donald Trump's administration waited until last year to start talks and made the extension contingent on

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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.

The Russian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, noted in a statement that Russia always has called for maintaining the treaty and said Russian diplomats are ready to quickly engage in contacts with the U.S. to formalize its extension for five years "without any delay."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the U.S. decision and Russia's reiteration. He encouraged both countries "to work quickly to complete the necessary procedure for the New START's extension before the Feb. 5 expiration and move as soon as possible to negotiations on new arms control measures," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"A five-year extension would not only maintain verifiable caps on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals but will also provide time to negotiate new nuclear arms control agreements to grapple with our increasingly complex international environment," Dujarric said.

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.

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.

NFL giving free Super Bowl tickets to 7,500 health workers

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — The NFL announced Friday that 7,500 health care workers vaccinated for the coronavirus will be given free tickets to next month's Super Bowl to be played in Tampa, Florida.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell also said in a news release that attendance at the Feb. 7 game would be limited to those workers and about 14,500 other fans. Raymond James Stadium, home of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, has a capacity of just under 66,000, according to its website.

Most of the health care workers who will get free game tickets will come from the Tampa Bay area and central Florida, Goodell said. But he added that all 32 NFL teams will choose some workers from their cities to attend the game.

"These dedicated health care workers continue to put their own lives at risk to serve others, and we owe them our ongoing gratitude," Goodell said. "We hope in a small way that this initiative will inspire our country and recognize these true American heroes."

There will also be what Goodell called "a variety of special moments" to honor health care workers in the stadium during the game and also on the television broadcast by CBS.

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor said the NFL's decision is a perfect way to honor health care workers at such a high-profile event.

"Our country has endured too much over the last year and we can't lose sight of those who worked day in and day out to keep us safe," Castor said in the NFL release.

As with NFL games throughout the season, the Super Bowl will include mandatory wearing of masks, social distancing, touchless concession stands and controlled entry and exits. The NFL had about 1.2 million fans attend 116 games so far during the regular season and playoffs, Goodell said.

This Sunday's two conference championships will determine which teams meet in the Super Bowl. Tampa Bay travels to face the Green Bay Packers in the NFC, while the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs host the Buffalo Bills in the AFC.

If Tampa Bay wins, the Buccaneers will be the first team ever to play in a Super Bowl on their home field.

Poverty and hopelessness beget violence in Tunisia's suburbs

By FRANCESCA EBEL Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Protests have swept towns and cities throughout Tunisia for a week, often turning to violence as demonstrators denounce what they say are broken promises from the government, which hasn't been able to turn around an economy on the verge of bankruptcy.

Many protesters are disenfranchised young people, a third of whom are unemployed, taking their voices to the street after being left behind by the country's leadership. But Tunisian students, artists and left-wing activists have also protested, only to be met with tear gas and a muscular police response.

Rights groups say the police have arrested some 1,000 people — many of them minors — for alleged acts of vandalism and theft, while parents and families are now also joining the protests, lobbying for the release of their children.

Other people are simply exploiting the chaos to loot supermarkets and smash up local shops.

The Tunis suburb of Hay Ettadhamen — among the capital's poorest districts — saw some of this week's most regular and violent demonstrations. One of the most densely populated areas in North Africa, it has a population of more than 140,000.

Tunisian media were quick to label all the protesters "vandals and criminals," but the identity of the demonstrators is complex and many of the protesters were peaceful. In Hay Ettadhamen, The Associated Press spoke to young protesters desperate for a positive vision of the future. None of them would give their full name or have their photo taken, for fear of repercussions from law enforcement.

They also have a deep distrust of the media. "It's not a circus for you here" said one café owner, Mohammed, who would only give his first name. "You only come here when there is chaos. Where are you

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the rest of the time?"

Aziz says his district is bankrupt, "There's no money here," said the 17-year-old, who works in a metal workshop. Aziz is not his real name, which he did not want to provide for fear of state reprisals.

"I turn 18 in a few months and then I'll try to make the crossing to Europe with my friends — there's money there, at least."

In 2020, attempts to migrate by sea soared, with Italian authorities reporting 12,883 irregular arrivals from Tunisia, compared with 2,654 in 2019.

Around a third of 15 to 29-year-olds are unemployed in Tunisia. Some young people, faced with few options, make money stealing phones or selling drugs.

Tarik, 16, is an athlete for a national team, but also gives an alias. Despite his easy smile, he says he feels lost and hopeless. He feels a lot of disgust and anger toward the police and the state.

He tells an anecdote about trying to get his passport approved to attend an international sports competition — three times, he says, it was rejected simply because of prejudice against the inhabitants of Hay Ettadhamen.

Unlike some of his friends, Tarik still attends school, and is a promising sportsman, but still feels he has no future.

Tarik and his teenage friends were eager to show videos of themselves throwing fireworks and rocks at the police, the pride visible on their faces. "That's me!" said one. "The police are bastards."

"I hit the tear gas canisters back at them with a tennis racket!" said another. In a country with less and less to offer them, these teens have little to fear and little to lose.

Police brutality has defined these protests. On Tuesday night, the AP followed the police and national guard — armed with tear gas and armored vehicles — as they pushed back the crowd throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails, often shooting into narrow side-streets and causing an outcry from inhabitants as houses filled up with gas.

Videos of police beating protesters then circulated on social media. The young people the AP interviewed were outspoken about their hatred for the police, brimming with stories of day-to-day injustices. They said that instead of President Kais Saied, they'd rather see El Castro — a Tunisian rapper from a similarly impoverished neighborhood — as president.

A coalition of Tunisian NGOs, including the National Union of Tunisian Journalists and Lawyers Without Borders, held a news conference Thursday to condemn the police violence — which they said was in response to "legitimate protest" — and media rhetoric that has framed the protesters as criminals.

"These young people did not commit crimes. They are protesters. They protested against economic and social policy," said Mehdi Jlassi, an activist and member of the journalists' union. They don't even have hope to dream of a future that is better than the prison they find themselves in."

"There is no dialogue between the state and these young people, so they turn to radical solutions, radical protest... That's why you see their frustration against the police."

Rim Ben Ismail, a psychologist, previously carried out a study of 800 young people in some of the neighborhoods that have seen protests in the past week.

Those she interviewed tended to be jobless, from poor families or had left school early. In the past decade, 1 million children in Tunisia have dropped out of school. Although she noted that the phenomenon of minors engaging with such protests needs more study, Ben Ismail said that their experience of the 2011 revolution may have deeply impacted them.

Visiting schools in 2011 "we saw that these children had lived through so many violent acts — the noise of the firearms, death, violence in their neighborhood — and that this had troubled them and traumatized them."

She said studies showed that prior experience of violence — in the neighborhood or in the home — would lead to a tendency to engage with such forms of radical protest.

"These same young people find that the only way they can express themselves is by violence," she said.

In Russia, effort underway to curb upcoming Navalny protests

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Authorities in Russia have taken elaborate measures to curb protests against the jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, planned by his supporters for Saturday in more than 60 Russian cities.

Navalny's associates in Moscow and other regions have been detained in the lead-up to the rallies. Opposition supporters and independent journalists have been approached by police officers with official warnings against protesting.

Universities and colleges in different Russian regions have urged students not to attend rallies, with some saying they may be subject to disciplinary action, including expulsion.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that "it is only natural that there are warnings ... about the possible consequences related to noncompliance with the law" since there are calls for "unauthorized, unlawful events."

Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and Kremlin's fiercest critic, was arrested Sunday when he returned to Russia from Germany, where he had spent nearly five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. On Monday, a judge ordered Navalny jailed for 30 days.

He faces a years-long prison term — authorities accused him of violating the terms of a suspended sentence in a 2014 conviction for financial misdeeds, including when he was convalescing in Germany.

Navalny's supporters have called for nationwide demonstrations on Saturday to pressure the government into releasing the politician, but have come under pressure themselves.

On Thursday evening, police in Moscow detained three top associates of Navalny. On Friday, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh was ordered to spend nine days in jail, and Georgy Alburov was jailed for 10 days. Navalny's close ally Lyubov Sobol was released Thursday night, but ordered by a court on Friday to pay a fine equivalent to \$3,300. All three have been charged with violating protest regulations.

More than a dozen activists and Navalny allies in several Russian regions have been detained as well.

Russia's Prosecutor General's office and police have issued public warnings against attending or calling for unauthorized rallies. The prosecutors have also demanded Roskomnadzor, Russia's media and internet watchdog, to restrict access to websites containing calls to protest on Saturday.

On Friday, Russia's largest social network VKontakte blocked all the pages dedicated to the rallies.

Roskomnadzor also announced that it would fine social media companies for encouraging minors to participate in the protests. The move came amid media reports of calls for demonstrations — and videos of school students replacing portraits of President Vladimir Putin in their classrooms with that of Navalny — going viral among teenagers on social network TikTok.

Russia's Education Ministry has issued a statement urging parents to "shield" their children from the events on Saturday, stating that "no one has the right to drag young people into various political actions and provocations."

And the Investigative Committee has opened a criminal probe into the "involvement of minors in illegal activity," accusing unidentified supporters of Navalny of encouraging minors to participate in the rallies on social media.

Also on Friday, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin urged Muscovites not to attend the rally, in a video statement shown by the Moskva24 TV channel. Sobyenin cited coronavirus concerns, called the upcoming demonstration "unlawful" and said that "law enforcement agencies will ensure the necessary order in the city."

Navalny's allies are telling supporters not to get discouraged and to show up on Saturday.

"Don't be afraid. Leave it to the Kremlin. We're in the right, and we're the majority," Lyubov Sobol wrote in a Facebook post.

Dozens of influential Russians, including actors, musicians, journalists, writers, athletes and popular bloggers, have come out with statements in support of Navalny, and some promised to attend the demonstrations.

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 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.

On Friday Fauci went further, saying a lack of candor and facts about the coronavirus pandemic over the last year under Trump "very likely" cost lives because it delayed getting sound scientific advice out to the country.

"You know, it very likely did," Fauci told CNN. "When you start talking about things that make no sense medically and no sense scientifically, that clearly is not helpful."

Biden, during his presidential campaign, pledged to make 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

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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 nToday in History
By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2021. There are 342 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 23, 2020, Chinese state media said the city of Wuhan would be shutting down outbound flights and trains, trying to halt the spread of a new virus that had sickened hundreds of people and killed at least 17. The World Health Organization said the viral illness in China was not yet a global health emergency, though the head of the U.N. health agency added that "it may yet become one."

On this date:

In 1812, the second New Madrid Earthquake struck, with an estimated magnitude of 7.5, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1845, Congress decided all national elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

In 1937, 17 people went on trial in Moscow during Josef Stalin's "Great Purge." (All were convicted of conspiracy; all but four were executed.)

In 1950, the Israeli Knesset approved a resolution affirming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

In 1962, Jackie Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. Tony Bennett recorded "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" in New York for Columbia Records.

In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution, eliminating the poll tax in federal elections, was ratified as South Dakota became the 38th state to endorse it.

In 1968, North Korea seized the U.S. Navy intelligence ship USS Pueblo, commanded by Lloyd "Pete" Bucher, charging its crew with being on a spying mission; one sailor was killed and 82 were taken prisoner. (Cmdr. Bucher and his crew were released the following December after enduring 11 months of brutal captivity at the hands of the North Koreans.)

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced an accord had been reached to end the Vietnam War, and would be formally signed four days later in Paris.

In 1977, the TV mini-series "Roots," based on the Alex Haley novel, began airing on ABC.

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In 1998, a judge in Fairfax, Virginia, sentenced Aimal Khan Kasi (eye-MAHL' kahn KAH'-see) to death for an assault rifle attack outside CIA headquarters in 1993 that killed two men and wounded three other people. (Kasi was executed in November 2002.)

In 2002, John Walker Lindh, a U.S.-born Taliban fighter, was returned to the United States to face criminal charges that he'd conspired to kill fellow Americans. (Lindh was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to providing support for the Taliban; he was released in May, 2019, after serving more than 17 years.)

In 2009, President Barack Obama quietly ended the Bush administration's ban on giving federal money to international groups that performed abortions or provided information on the option. New York Gov. David Paterson chose Democratic Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (KEHR'-sten JIL'-uh-brand) to fill the Senate seat vacated by Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Ten years ago: Allies and adversaries of President Hugo Chavez took to the streets of Caracas by the thousands, staging rival demonstrations to commemorate the 53rd anniversary of Venezuela's democracy. Fitness guru Jack LaLanne died in Morro Bay, California, at age 96.

Five years ago: A blizzard with hurricane-force winds brought much of the East Coast to a standstill, dumping as much as 3 feet of snow, stranding tens of thousands of travelers and shutting down Washington D.C. and New York City. Gracie Gold bounced back from a shaky short program with a flawless free skate to win her second U.S. Figure Skating title at the championship in St. Paul, Minnesota.

One year ago: In a second day of opening arguments at President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, Democratic prosecutors made the case that Trump had abused power like no other president in history, swept up by a "completely bogus" theory about Ukrainian interference in the 2016 U.S. election. "Sopranos" actor Annabella Sciorra confronted Harvey Weinstein from the witness stand at his New York trial, testifying that Weinstein had overpowered and raped her; she was the first of Weinstein's accusers to testify at his sexual assault trial. PBS announced that Jim Lehrer, the longtime host of the nightly "NewsHour" and the moderator of 11 presidential debates, had died at the age of 85. Three American flying firefighters were killed when their C-130 Hercules tanker crashed after dumping fire retardant on an out-of-control blaze in southeastern Australia.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Chita Rivera is 88. Actor-director Lou Antonio is 87. Jazz musician Gary Burton is 78. Actor Gil Gerard is 78. Sen. Thomas R. Carper, D-Del., is 74. Singer Anita Pointer is 73. Actor Richard Dean Anderson is 71. Rock musician Bill Cunningham is 71. Rock singer Robin Zander (Cheap Trick) is 68. Former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (vee-yah-ry-GOH'-sah) is 68. Princess Caroline of Monaco is 64. Singer Anita Baker is 63. Reggae musician Earl Falconer (UB40) is 62. Actor Peter Mackenzie is 60. Actor Boris McGiver is 59. Actor Gail O'Grady is 58. Actor Mariska Hargitay is 57. R&B singer Marc Nelson is 50. CBS Evening News anchor Norah O'Donnell is 47. Actor Tiffani Thiessen is 47. Rock musician Nick Harmer (Death Cab for Cutie) is 46. Actor Lindsey Kraft is 41. Singer-actor Rachel Crow is 23.

ow; 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.

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