

Groton Daily Independent

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Junior High Teams beat Warner

Groton Area hosted Warner in junior high boys basketball action on Tuesday.

Groton Area won the seventh grade game, 46-17. Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique was the sponsor on GDILIVE.COM while Bob and Vicki Walter sponsored the eighth grade game.

Scoring for the seventh grade game were Ryder Johnson with 18, Gage Sippel eight, Keegen Tracy and Karter Moody with five each, JD Schwan and Logan Warrington with four each and Karsten Flihs added two points. Josiah Baum led Warner with seven points.

Groton Area won the eighth grade game, 46-25. Teylor Diegel led the Tigers with 13 points followed by Ryder Johnson with nine, Turner Thompson seven, Keegen Tracy had three and Carter Simon and Caden McInerney each had two points. Drew Bakeberg led Warner with eight points.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

Girls

JV at 6 p.m.
followed by varsity
Thursday, Jan. 28, 2021
Northwestern at Groton Area



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

You're Invited

Date: Saturday, Jan. 30th

Time: 9:00am-1:00pm

Location:

Aberdeen Civic Arena
203 S. Washington St.

**COVID protocols apply;
face covering required**

**Onsite
OFFERS**

3M

HIRING EVENT

- ✓ Production Operators
- ✓ Maintenance Technicians
- ✓ Electrical System Technicians

3M is an equal opportunity employer

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Upcoming Schedule

Thursday, Jan. 28

Girls Basketball hosts Northwestern (JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game).
Northeast Conference Wrestling at Redfield, 4 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 30

Groton Area Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m.
Boys Basketball at DAK12-NEC Clash in Madison

Sunday, Jan. 31

Carnival of Silver Skates: 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 1

Junior High Basketball at Redfield (7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m.)

Tuesday, Feb. 2

Boys Basketball at Langford (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity game)
Girls Basketball hosting Aberdeen Roncalli with JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Thursday, Feb. 4

Doubleheader Basketball hosting Faulkton. Girls JV at 4 p.m., Boys JV at 5 p.m., Girls Varsity at 6:30 p.m. followed by Boys Varsity.

Friday, Feb. 5

Wrestling at Lyman High School, 5 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 6

Girls Basketball at DAK12-NEC Clash in Madison.
Boys Basketball at Tiospa Zina (C game at 1 p.m., JV at 2:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

Monday, Feb. 8

Junior High Basketball hosts Webster. 5:30 p.m.
School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 9

Girls Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. JV game at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

Wednesday, Feb. 10

LifeTouch Pictures in GHS Gym, 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Thursday, Feb. 11

Parent-Teacher Conference, 1:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Basketball Doubleheader with Milbank in Groton. JV girls at 4 p.m. followed by JV boys, Varsity Girls and Varsity Boys.

Saturday, Feb. 12

Basketball Doubleheader at Mobridge. JV girls at 1 p.m., JV boys at 2 p.m., Varsity Girls at 3 p.m. followed by Varsity Boys.

Monday, Feb. 15

Junior High Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli Elementary School (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)
Boys Basketball at Aberdeen Roncalli (C game at 5 p.m., JV at 6:15 and Varsity at 7:30).

Thursday, Feb. 18

Junior High Basketball hosts Mobridge-Pollock in the Arena. 7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 19

Basketball Doubleheader with Deuel in Groton. JV girls at 4 p.m., JV boys at 5 p.m. followed by Varsity Girls and Varsity Boys.

Saturday, Feb. 20

Regional Wrestling Tournament in Groton, 10 a.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 23: GBB Region

Thursday, Feb. 25: GBB Region

Friday, Feb. 26

Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. JV at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Tuesday, March 2: BBB Region

Thursday, March 4: GBB SoDAK 16

Friday, March 5: BBB Region

Tuesday, March 9: BBB SoDAK 16

March 11-13: State Girls Basketball Tournament in Watertown

March 18-20: State Boys Basketball Tournament in Sioux Falls

Aging Gracefully Takes Planning, Positivity

BROOKINGS, S.D. - By 2030, one in five Americans will be in the 65 and older age group. Some will embrace the milestone and look forward to the years to come, while others will diverge, only seeing the negatives in their next chapter of life. However, Leacey Brown says 65 isn't the magic number we should be looking at in terms of aging, as the process begins decades earlier.

"There's just something about aging that people don't really want to talk about it, but the truth is we really need to start thinking about aging and thinking about being older and thinking about how we want that part of our life to look when we're younger," Brown says.

While the risk of developing a disease or disability does increase as we enter the last third of our lives, the SDSU Extension Gerontology Field Specialist says neither are inevitable outcomes of the aging process. She argues that people can age well and in place, but it takes planning, a different mindset and following the recommendations of their medical providers.

"Research tells us that how a person thinks about aging predicts a lot of their outcomes," Brown says. "In short, if you have a crummy outlook on getting older, you're going to have a crummy experience. It doesn't mean aging is going to be all roses and daisies and it's going to be wonderful and nothing bad is going to happen. There will be challenges — losing spouses, losing career, loss of friends, physical decline — those things are hard, and they are more prominent in older people, but we can still have a good quality of life."

Older population to reach historic levels

A Florida native and an Air Force veteran, Brown decided to stay in the Midwest after her enlistment ended in Minot, North Dakota. She enrolled at Minot State University and studied sociology and psychology. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in both fields, Brown realized she wanted to pursue a master's in gerontology.

The study of aging processes and individuals across the life course, gerontology examines the physical, mental and social changes in people as they age; the societal changes that stem from an aging population and how to best apply this knowledge to policies and programs.

"Where a person lives, the built environment, and services and resources available also are explored by a gerontologist. Research suggests that communities needed to be constructed in a way that accounts for the changes of aging. Housing is a great example of a barrier to aging well. Access to transportation is another important factor," Brown says. "Gerontologists look at individual aging, but we also explore the context where the individual is aging and how that influences their outcomes."

A broad field, gerontology will continue to be an important research sector now and in the future. By 2034, the United States Census Bureau projects older adults will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history. With the decline in birth rates and advances in public health, people age 65 and older are expected to reach 77 million strong, with those 18 and under making up 76.5 million of the country's population.

Since joining SDSU Extension in 2012, Brown has been narrowing her focus to assist South Dakotans with aging well, aging in place and falls prevention. Some of the educational information is for older adults themselves; while other material is geared towards those that are caring for them.

For example, Brown has been teaming up with NDSU Extension to host a Gerontology Lunch and Learn webinar series this winter. Each webinar addresses areas such as communicating with people who have Alzheimer's or dementia, purposeful aging and respite care.

"If you are caring full time for someone with dementia, you can almost never leave because that's just the nature of it. They need respite care though, those breaks, so respite care could be hiring someone to come into your house and take care of your loved one while you leave or respite care could be maybe they go to a facility for a week, so you can take a vacation," Brown says. "That's really important for people who are doing that full-time care, especially for someone with dementia, but it could be other things where maybe your loved one is really frail and they can't prepare meals, so you bring in somebody to maybe do the meal prep and you can take a break."

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According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, aging well is the product of eight wellness areas. If one of these areas is neglected, then wellness in other areas will likely be affected:

Physical wellness: Incorporating movement daily, eating nutritious foods and getting the recommended amount of sleep.

Emotional/mental wellness: Coping with stress and daily life challenges.

Social wellness: Maintaining a sense of connection and belonging to a well-developed support system.

Intellectual wellness: Engaging in creative activities and expanding knowledge and skills.

Vocational/occupational wellness: Discovering satisfaction and enrichment from work, whether volunteer or paid.

Spiritual wellness: Finding meaning and purpose in life.

Financial wellness: Sustaining a satisfactory financial situation now and in the future.

Environment wellness: Occupying a pleasant home and living in a community that provides sufficient stimulation and support.

Not aging-in-place ready

For most older South Dakotans, meeting the last wellness area is crucial. Aging in place is a high priority for adults age 50 and older. Unfortunately, Brown says architectural barriers in current private housing designs may make that goal difficult to achieve.

"A lot of people tell us over and over again that they would like to stay in their home for as long as possible, which makes sense," says Brown. "Your home is where your memories are, and your stuff is. We all feel more comfortable in our own home and the idea of not being in that space is very scary for people. But the fact of the matter is, as we get older, our risk of developing a disability is high and especially before the end of life, it's likely we will experience frailty."

In 2018 SDSU Extension and NDSU Extension conducted a joint survey with more than 600 Dakotans (<https://extension.sdstate.edu/housing-across-life-span-consumer-knowledge-preferences-and-barriers>) to explore consumer knowledge, motivation and barriers to accessible housing. The report found that most participants were aware that the current stock of homes was not appropriate for aging in place, but had limited knowledge about design solutions, such as universal design.

Universal design emerged in the 1980s as an approach to home design that aims to create products and environments to be used by people of all ages, sizes and abilities, with minimal need for specialized disability-specific features (e.g., lower counter type height). While converting a home to universal design may seem like a rather daunting or expensive approach, Brown says implementation in new housing could address the need for older adult housing and help to avoid costly structural renovations in the future.

She says part of the problem when describing universal design is that people's interpretations instantly go to the accessibility factor and fail to see how it fits their family and situation. For example, a no-step entrance benefits a person using a wheelchair or walker, as well as a parent pushing a stroller or a person delivering furniture.

For these reasons, Brown recommends the adoption of visitability in the housing stock of South Dakota. The goal of a visitability is to ensure that a person with a disability could visit a home. Below are recommended features to include in a home to make it visitable.

One zero-step entrance into the home

One bathroom and bedroom on the same level as the zero-step entrance

Bathroom wall reinforced for grab bars

Minimum 42-inch wide hallways and 36-inch passageways

Electrical wall outlets/receptacles should be 15 inches above the finished floor

Wall switches controlling light fixtures and fans shall be a maximum 48 inches above the finished floor

All exterior and interior doors shall be 32 inches in width

"People are often 'well I don't have a wheelchair, I don't need that,'" Brown says. "Well right now you don't, but what happens if you do, either permanently because you're facing the end of life or you temporarily get injured when working on the farm. It's really changing the mindset of it's not about aging and disability; it's the fact that our bodies are fragile, and they can break at a moment's notice."

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Brown says South Dakotans need to work together to find ways to modify the existing stock. For example, government agencies and other businesses (e.g., insurance broker) could offer incentives to increase the inclusion of visitability features in new and existing homes. Example of incentives include tax credits, reduced-price or waived permit fees, reduced-price long-term care insurance, mortgage discounts, priority review of building permits that include visitability, etc.

Fall Prevention Coalition

Falling should not be accepted as a normal part of growing older either, Brown says, but it is a problem. Between 2007 and 2016, South Dakota ranked fifth in the nation for deaths from falls among older adults. Falls can lead to depression, loss of mobility and loss of functional independence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about \$50 billion is spent each year on medical costs related to non-fatal fall injuries and \$754 million is spent related to fatal falls.

"When an individual experiences a fall, it has a domino effect on their quality of life," says Brown. "Beyond the challenges from recovering from the falls, older adults who have experienced a fall often develop a fear of falling again."

In 2020, SDSU Extension joined more than 20 other state organizations to form the SD Fall Prevention Coalition. By collaborating and providing evidence-based solutions for falls prevention, the group's vision is to reduce the number of fall-related deaths by 5%, and fall-related hospitalizations by 10% by 2025 or 2026.

In addition to hosting exercise fitness programs such as "Fit & Strong!" and "Walk With Ease,"(<https://extension.sdstate.edu/news/focus-your-health-2021-sdsu-extension>) SDSU Extension also has released a video series through the South Dakota Fall Prevention Coalition. Each of the five videos highlight simple exercises that can be done at home to strengthen the body, as research has shown that body weakness is a leading cause of falls.

Whether she's addressing falls prevention and aging in place, or family caregiving and life planning, Brown says her mantra is "aging is good — it's not easy, but it's part of the journey of living."

"I do hope that we can have more positive conversations around aging in our state. One of the big things that I try to do when I'm communicating about aging is say 'as we age, as we get older,' trying to keep myself included in this conversation, because aging doesn't magically start when we turn 65, we start aging when we are born," Brown says. "When we're proposing solutions for more nursing homes and assisted livings, how many people actually want that? Some people love it but there's others that feel that would be uncomfortable. How can we create solutions that we all want as opposed to what we think older people need?"

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#338 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today looks much like yesterday, only there was a whole lot more dying going on today. There were 158,600 new cases reported today, which brought our total 0.6% higher than yesterday's. We're nearly halfway to the next million at 25,478,000, but it took us three days to get there, so that rate of increase really does seem to be slowing. For the record, the world hit the 100 million case mark today. Hospitalizations dropped again for the sixteenth consecutive day to 109,936. It's been almost two months since we were below 100,000, but we look to be headed in that direction in maybe the next week or two. That would be lovely. On the other hand, 4211 deaths were reported today, which is pretty bad—sixth-worst day yet. We've known we had some dark days coming, but still. We've now lost 425,103 Americans to this virus, 1.0% more than yesterday.

I read about an interesting approach to identifying potential antiviral drugs which might be used as therapeutics in cases of Covid-19. One method we've discussed before is to look for already-approved drugs that interfere with viral proteins; this new thing is a twist aimed at interfering with host proteins needed by the virus for its replication and was pioneered at the University of California, San Francisco. We're more complex than viruses, so we have more proteins to target than they do. This opens up a whole new group of drugs, many of which have been developed for cancer therapy because a priority in treating cancer is to interfere with out-of-control cell division, sometimes by interfering with cell proteins needed for that reproductive process. One benefit of this approach is that it is impervious to viral mutation; whatever the virus does, the human proteins remain the same, and so a drug that targets those remains potent through any number of viral mutations.

The scientists approached this problem by identifying 332 proteins in human lung and blood vessel cells that are important to the virus when it infects these cells. They then examined the effect on the virus of eliminating or lowering the level of each of these proteins, one at a time. The researchers are hoping this general approach has spillover effect for other viruses, especially emerging coronaviruses in the future; but for now, it is yielding some results.

One drug that surfaced back in March from this effort is plitidepsin, or aplidin. Isolated from a rare sea squirt that lives near the island of Ibiza off the Spanish coast, this substance interferes with protein production in human cells. (As an aside, I sincerely hope that, in the process of extracting drugs from it, we don't go about depleting this organism in nature to the point where it's endangered; but I wouldn't necessarily bet on our good judgement prevailing here either—something else to watch, I guess.) It has already been approved in Australia as a therapy for multiple myeloma and has shown in lab trials in tissue culture to be 27.5 times more effective against SARS-CoV-2 than remdesivir has been. This work was done in infected human kidney cells and primary lung cells in the lab and also in mice infected with the virus, where it reduced the infection by a factor of 100.

There is further work just finished up at University College London showing effectiveness in human lung cells and human epithelial cells as well and also against the B.1.1.7 variant too. Here it has been through phase 2 clinical trials against Covid-19 and is ready for phase 3 trials.

David H. O'Connor, professor of pathology and laboratory medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, "The drug performs quite well in mice and the authors hint at it having potential against other viruses too. It is premature to say if it will have clinical benefit, but it definitely merits clinical trials."

We would normally have some concerns about using a cancer chemotherapeutic for other diseases because these drugs tend to be quite toxic to normal cells in the body. The reasons this one is not viewed as very risky for this additional use are that the doses here would be far smaller than the ones used in multiple myeloma therapy and the drug would be used for only a matter of days rather than weeks or months as it would be for multiple myeloma. We'll see what further trials show us.

It appears the US government is nearing a contract for the purchase of an additional 200 million doses of Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines by summer's end or early fall. This would bring total purchases

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to 600 million doses, enough to fully vaccinate 300 million Americans out of a population of 327 million. Clearly, it will take a while to get our hands on all of these doses because manufacturing capacity will remain fairly limited until April—takes time to build out capacity, but this will be quite remarkable if they can pull it off. It appears our weekly allocations of vaccine will increase by nearly a million and a half doses as early as next week (bringing the total up to 10 million weekly doses), which means, if we can sort out our logistical problems with getting that vaccine into people, we're going to be able to accelerate the process of getting people protected. This won't represent additional doses on the total contracted, but would mean getting it out faster. The administration's current goal is to see 1.5 million doses per day administered. We'll see whether we can get that done.

We have news of a new clinical trial of the Regeneron monoclonal antibody therapy. You may recall that monoclonals are those lab-made versions of the antibodies you will make when responding to an antigen, only in a highly-purified form. This particular therapeutic contains a "cocktail" of two kinds of these antibodies. It has already received emergency use authorization (EUA) for early infection in people who have been diagnosed and are at high risk for severe disease, but this was a trial in family members of those cases who have not been diagnosed. The study has not been published, but the company announcement says out of 186 participants receiving the therapy, 10 were infected, but did not get sick, while out of the 223 who received placebo, 23 became infected and eight got sick. This is a small study, but I like these findings. Better yet, this was given as an injection; the earlier trials the resulted in the EUA involved infusions which must be done in a clinic and require more time and more specialized care. Regeneron's chief scientific officer, Dr. George D. Yancopoulos, mentioned this prophylactic use might be useful in "breaking the chain" of transmission. You may remember that just last week, the Lilly monoclonal antibody therapy showed it could prevent infections in nursing homes with outbreaks.

If you'd been planning, despite my exhortations to knock it off, to travel out of the country, you should be aware that the US government is making such travel more challenging for the same reasons as I have been exhorting you to knock it off—unchecked transmission and spread of scary new variants and, you know, being a grown-up who takes some responsibility. Beginning today, travelers flying into the US from outside the country must present to the airline proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken within the three days immediately preceding the travel before they will be permitted to board a flight. If you test positive or cannot get a test, you could end up cooling your heels in another country for an extended period of time before you can return home. That would mean you must be prepared to pay for additional lodging, meals, and any needed medical care wherever you are, as well as to miss work, need extended child care arrangements, and such. So far, a rapid antigen test is acceptable, but given many countries already require a PCR test, I expect this could change. You do need to arrange for your own testing; it will not be offered in US embassies in other countries. If you have already had the infection, you must provide a dated copy of the test results and a physician's or public health official's clearance to travel before you will be permitted to enter the US.

If you were thinking the US had some sort of exclusive on misinformation, maybe this will make you feel better—even as it makes you feel worse. There has apparently been quite the stir in Germany over the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine. There have been reports going around that this vaccine is only eight percent effective in senior citizens, which would be close to useless and a real disaster. Except, of course, that's not accurate. The vaccine, which is expected to be approved this week for use in the European Union, has shown around 70% efficacy, which satisfies pretty much every regulatory body approving vaccines across the world these days. What happened is that, because there wasn't a huge number of older people in the trials for this vaccine, additional studies are underway to confirm efficacy in this group.

So the story was that only eight percent of trial participants were over 55, which somehow got twisted to mean the vaccine is only eight percent effective in that group, a wild misreading of the situation; in fact, age-specific data for this vaccine candidate have not even been released. The company says it published data in *The Lancet* in November showing that 100 percent of older adults generated spike-specific antibodies after the second dose; I have not read that article to confirm this, but have some difficulty believing they made it up, given how easy that would be to disprove. It remains to be seen just how well

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the candidate works in elderly, but what's going on here looks like the kinds of garbage we've been dealing with in this country.

Today, I saw a nice round-up of the variants on this coronavirus which have turned up and garnered much attention from scientists thus far. Based primarily on that Washington Post piece, here's a summary:

The original variant (D614G): While tiny variations have showed up all along, this is the first one that has really spread. It appears to have arisen in China a year ago and has become the dominant variant worldwide. It looks to be more transmissible than the original wild-type virus that arose the prior November in Wuhan, but there is no evidence it is more virulent or more lethal. It is the variant against which the vaccines were tested, so immune escape shouldn't be any issue at all. (If you want to read more about this variant and how it is different from the wild-type virus, check out my Update #275 posted on November 24 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4202064716476569>.)

The Denmark variant (L452R) was first seen in Denmark in March and has also been seen in Northern California and some other states. I am not clear whether this is the variant associated with that outbreak on mink farms in Denmark, although I do not think it is. We don't seem to know much about it yet with respect to transmissibility, virulence, or antigenic make-up. There has been disagreement whether it is likely to be an immunologic problem. Maybe I'm wrong about this, but it seems to me that if this variant was going to give us big problems, we'd have noticed that in the 10 months since it made its debut.

The Brazil variant (B.1.1.28.1 or P.1) turned up in Brazil in July, and it has spread to several other countries. It does seem to be traveling more slowly than some of the other variants, which probably explains why we're just starting to hear about it despite how long it's been around. It also appears to be more transmissible, although we have less evidence for this variant than for some others; we also lack evidence as to its comparative virulence. There is also some early evidence antibodies are not going to be as effective against it. I reported last night that while there appears to be some reduction in the effectiveness of a vaccine response against this variant, the vaccines are looking like they will still be effective. I'm sure more testing will follow.

The UK variant (B.1.1.7) appears to have arisen in the UK in about September and has been spreading in that country; it has been seen in many countries since, including the US. It is generally considered to be significantly more transmissible than the currently-dominant D614G variant and has been predicted to become the dominant variant by sometime in March; but we see no evidence it has higher virulence. It does not appear to pose any risk of immune escape, either from those immunized by natural infection or from those immunized by vaccine, although there is one study which indicates the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine may be somewhat less effective against it; the Moderna response looks about the same as for the dominant variant against which the vaccine was tested in clinical trials.

The South Africa variant (B.1.351 or 501Y.V2) apparently arose in South Africa in October and has spread to several countries since then. It also appears to be more transmissible, but we have no evidence it is more virulent. There is some idea it may be more resistant to antibodies developed against earlier variants. Tests show that the antibody response seen in vaccinated individuals appears in lab tests to remain effective against it, but that this effectiveness may be somewhat reduced.

We talked last night about work already underway to tweak these two currently authorized vaccines as needed to keep up with antigenic changes in this virus. It appears as though we may be looking at the same sort of situation as we have with flu vaccine, where a booster tailored to recent mutations might be needed annually to top up our protection. Then again, given that this is not inherently a rapidly mutating virus, more like one whose mutation rate is linked to wildly unchecked transmission, I wonder whether perhaps it will settle down if we ever wrestle it into some semblance of control so that it isn't replicating zillions of times a week.

Ravindra Gupta, professor of clinical microbiology at the University of Cambridge, told the Washington Post, "With the flu, we need to adapt the vaccines. We can see that already. The companies do realize there is a problem in the longer term, and they will deal with it just as we have done with flu every year."

But we will also want to remember the words of Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, when he was asked about these mutations. He replied, "Viruses don't

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mutate unless they replicate." We must slow down the replication. Please.

The Notchtop Bakery and Café in Colorado has struggled during the pandemic, just as have so many restaurants and cafes across the country. They had the additional challenge of wildfires in the area, which further depressed business. Some customers have bought gift cards when they weren't able to come in themselves, and that has helped. With a PPP loan from the CARES Act and spreading the available work hours around, no one's actually been laid off and the business has managed to stay open; nonetheless, it's been rough.

Then a few days ago, a customer came in—second time he's ever been there—and put a smile on everyone's face. The man known to the staff only as David ordered an eggs-and-sausage sort of breakfast and got his check for just over \$20. Then he asked his server how many people were working that morning. With cooks and dishwashers, there were seven. And so the guy left a \$1400 tip with instructions to divide it up evenly among the workers. His note on the bill read, "COVID Sucks! \$200.00 for each employee today!" He included a smiley face too. What a guy!

Maybe two hundred dollars won't change your life when things are this bad, but it certainly can change your outlook. Knowing someone gives a damn is a big deal. The world needs a few more Davids. I'd guess they're out there; I'll keep looking for them and reporting back when I find one.

Meanwhile, stay healthy. We'll talk tomorrow.

Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated January 22, 2021; 8:28 AM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

Updated January 25, 2021; 2:44 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4

Updated January 26, 2021; 3:57 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	445	414	810	12	Moderate	10.00%
Beadle	2600	2494	5465	39	Substantial	8.89%
Bennett	377	360	1112	9	Minimal	4.30%
Bon Homme	1480	1446	1962	23	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3375	3181	10771	33	Substantial	7.00%
Brown	4860	4628	11741	75	Substantial	9.01%
Brule	678	651	1761	8	Substantial	5.88%
Buffalo	416	403	859	12	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	950	911	3001	20	Substantial	7.07%
Campbell	121	112	233	4	Minimal	22.73%
Charles Mix	1217	1133	3705	15	Substantial	4.69%
Clark	332	321	903	4	Moderate	7.69%
Clay	1748	1686	4858	14	Substantial	8.82%
Codington	3717	3532	9079	73	Substantial	8.09%
Corson	459	442	961	11	Minimal	9.09%
Custer	723	693	2539	10	Substantial	13.33%
Davison	2881	2739	6055	56	Substantial	7.28%
Day	599	544	1623	25	Substantial	6.82%
Deuel	455	433	1050	7	Moderate	0.00%
Dewey	1384	1335	3631	18	Substantial	11.11%
Douglas	411	384	853	9	Moderate	8.82%
Edmunds	454	420	942	8	Substantial	6.38%
Fall River	499	471	2431	14	Substantial	7.32%
Faulk	332	309	642	13	Moderate	7.69%
Grant	905	815	2055	36	Substantial	27.18%
Gregory	498	461	1157	27	Moderate	17.07%
Haakon	240	230	499	9	Minimal	10.00%
Hamlin	664	602	1629	38	Substantial	9.09%
Hand	321	309	737	4	Minimal	3.85%
Hanson	329	320	655	4	Minimal	4.35%
Harding	90	89	165	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2187	2069	6038	31	Substantial	7.79%
Hutchinson	750	696	2161	23	Substantial	6.45%

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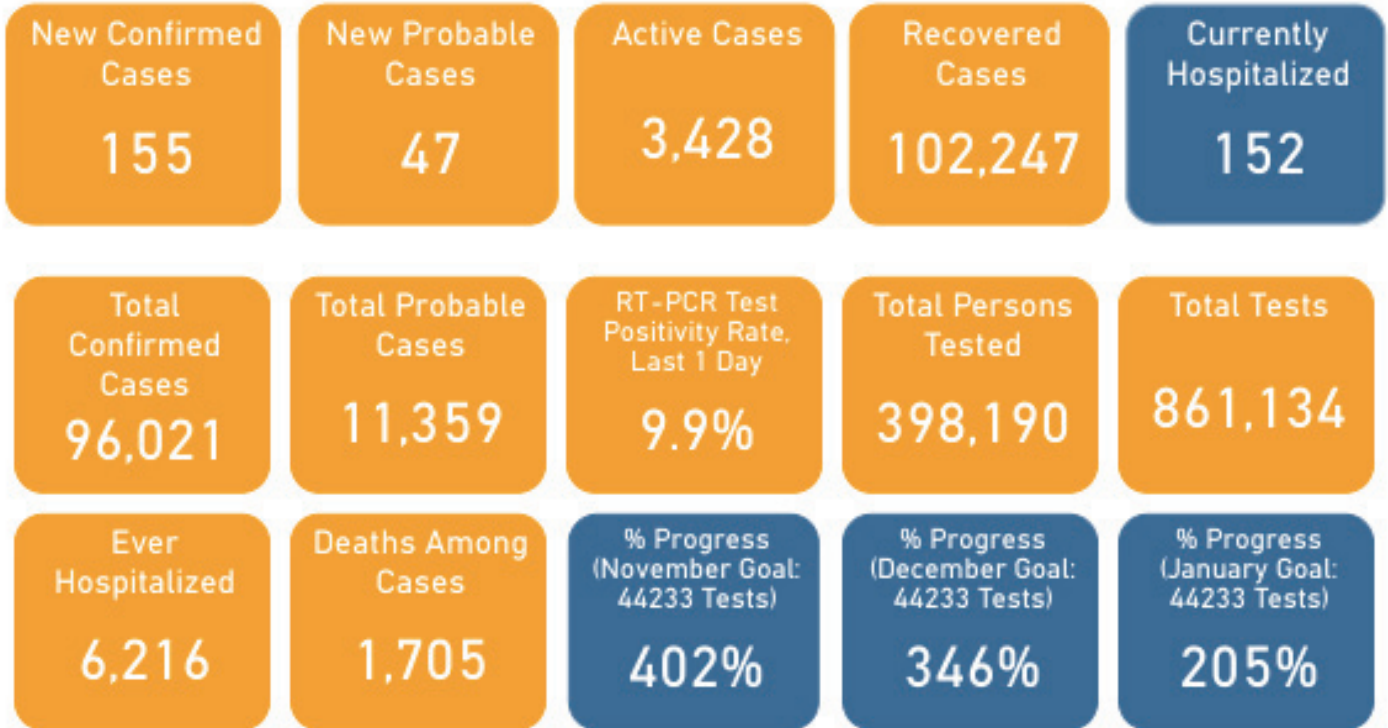
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Hyde	134	131	385	1	None	0.00%
Jackson	268	252	882	13	Minimal	0.00%
Jerauld	265	247	528	16	None	0.00%
Jones	80	74	188	0	Moderate	14.29%
Kingsbury	600	561	1501	13	Substantial	16.07%
Lake	1132	1062	2986	16	Substantial	7.37%
Lawrence	2738	2651	7981	35	Substantial	6.82%
Lincoln	7389	7082	18629	72	Substantial	13.52%
Lyman	587	547	1796	10	Substantial	7.37%
Marshall	283	267	1077	5	Moderate	7.14%
McCook	713	681	1493	22	Moderate	11.36%
McPherson	234	203	528	4	Substantial	3.28%
Meade	2456	2343	7116	28	Substantial	12.25%
Mellette	237	231	689	2	Moderate	19.23%
Miner	261	234	528	7	Moderate	22.22%
Minnehaha	26823	25708	72086	300	Substantial	10.99%
Moody	599	552	1641	15	Substantial	16.67%
Oglala Lakota	2031	1932	6377	41	Substantial	13.16%
Pennington	12271	11724	36458	166	Substantial	12.43%
Perkins	328	294	726	11	Substantial	28.21%
Potter	341	326	770	3	Moderate	5.56%
Roberts	1096	1031	3885	34	Substantial	13.27%
Sanborn	323	310	634	3	Moderate	0.00%
Spink	758	702	1967	25	Substantial	8.33%
Stanley	313	298	845	2	Moderate	3.03%
Sully	134	116	277	3	Moderate	14.29%
Todd	1205	1163	3980	23	Moderate	6.12%
Tripp	650	631	1402	15	Moderate	8.89%
Turner	1038	960	2501	49	Substantial	11.11%
Union	1843	1707	5761	36	Substantial	15.57%
Walworth	700	651	1723	14	Substantial	16.46%
Yankton	2719	2630	8607	27	Substantial	5.57%
Ziebach	334	313	825	9	Moderate	8.33%
Unassigned	0	0	1955	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	4135	0
10-19 years	11939	0
20-29 years	19374	4
30-39 years	17670	14
40-49 years	15311	34
50-59 years	15135	91
60-69 years	12273	220
70-79 years	6554	385
80+ years	4989	957

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	56068	815
Male	51312	890

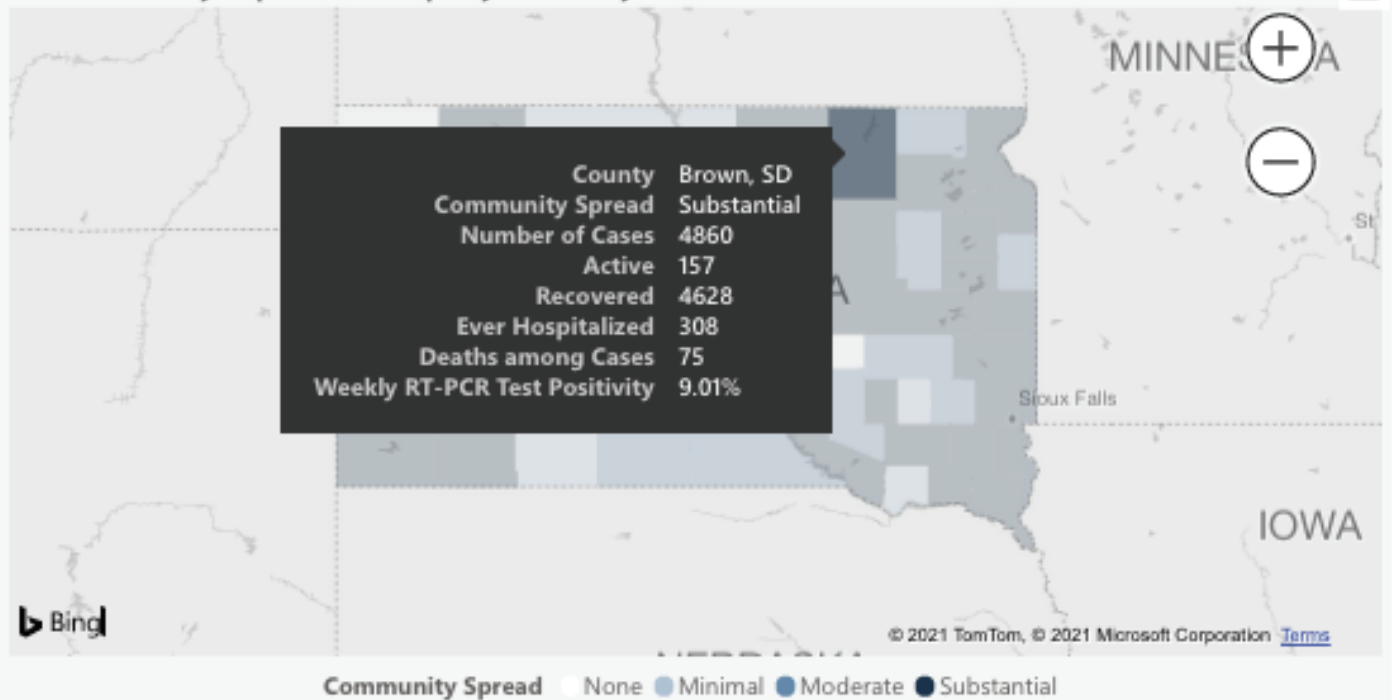
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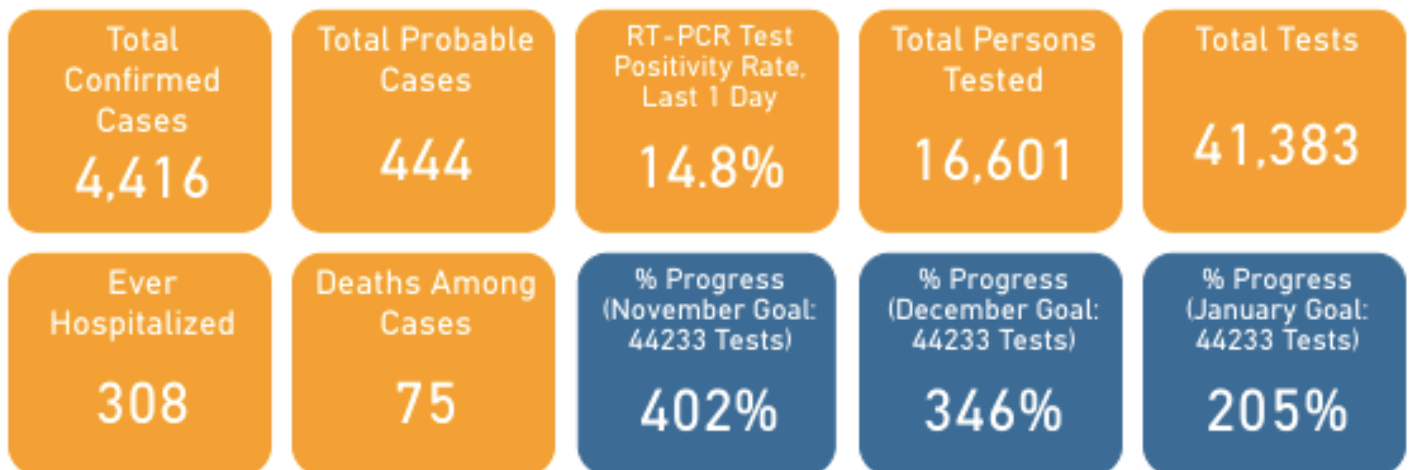
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



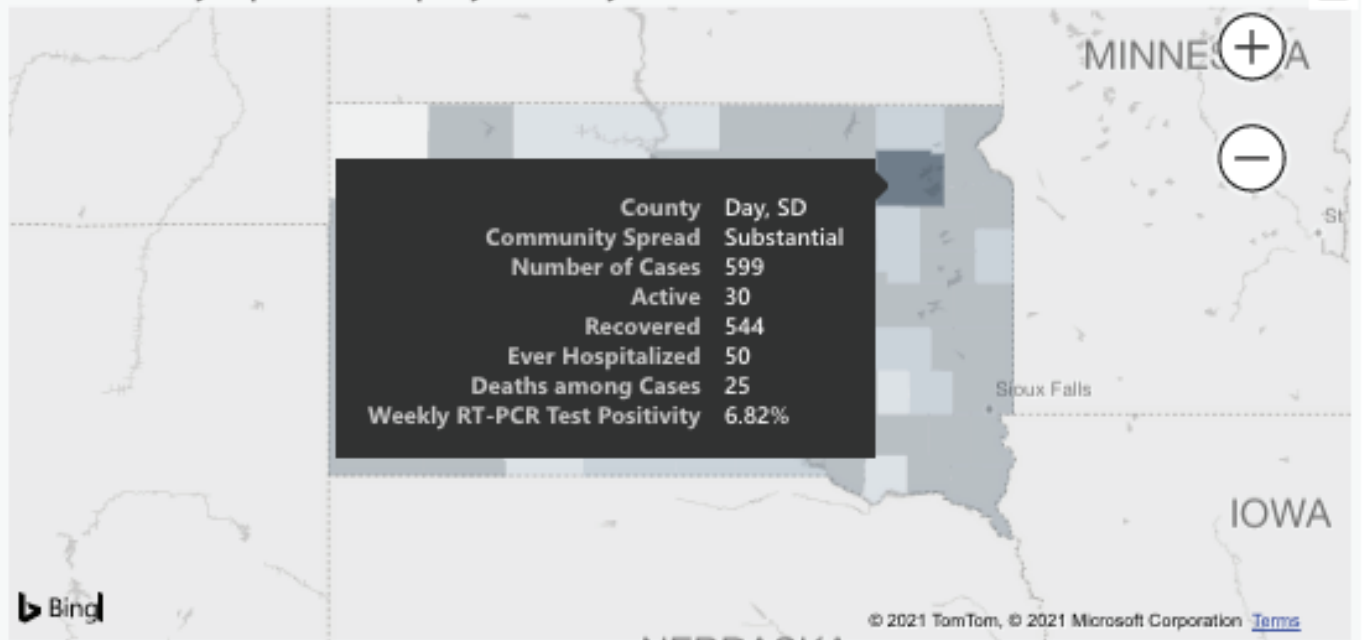
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Day County

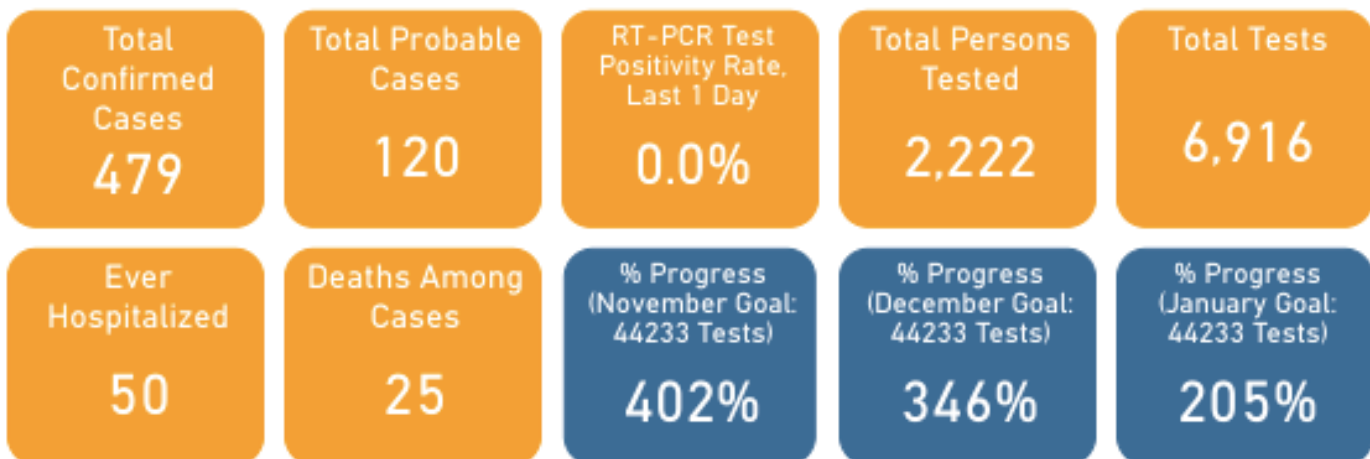


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● None ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

78,228

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

59,360

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	40,541
Pfizer	37,687

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	27,623
Moderna - Series Complete	6,459

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	137	69	34	103
Beadle	1388	592	398	990
Bennett*	160	124	18	142
Bon Homme*	620	298	161	459
Brookings	2012	1,280	366	1,646
Brown	3863	1,951	956	2,907
Brule*	410	318	46	364
Buffalo*	13	11	1	12
Butte	297	269	14	283
Campbell	298	156	71	227
Charles Mix*	530	290	120	410
Clark	267	247	10	257
Clay	1145	749	198	947
Codington*	2426	1,558	434	1,992
Corson*	52	46	3	49
Custer*	529	405	62	467
Davison	2053	989	532	1,521
Day*	585	373	106	479
Deuel	318	216	51	267
Dewey*	122	116	3	119
Douglas*	281	209	36	245
Edmunds	283	183	50	233
Fall River*	602	456	73	529
Faulk	195	177	9	186
Grant*	454	416	19	435
Gregory*	424	228	98	326
Haakon*	167	81	43	124

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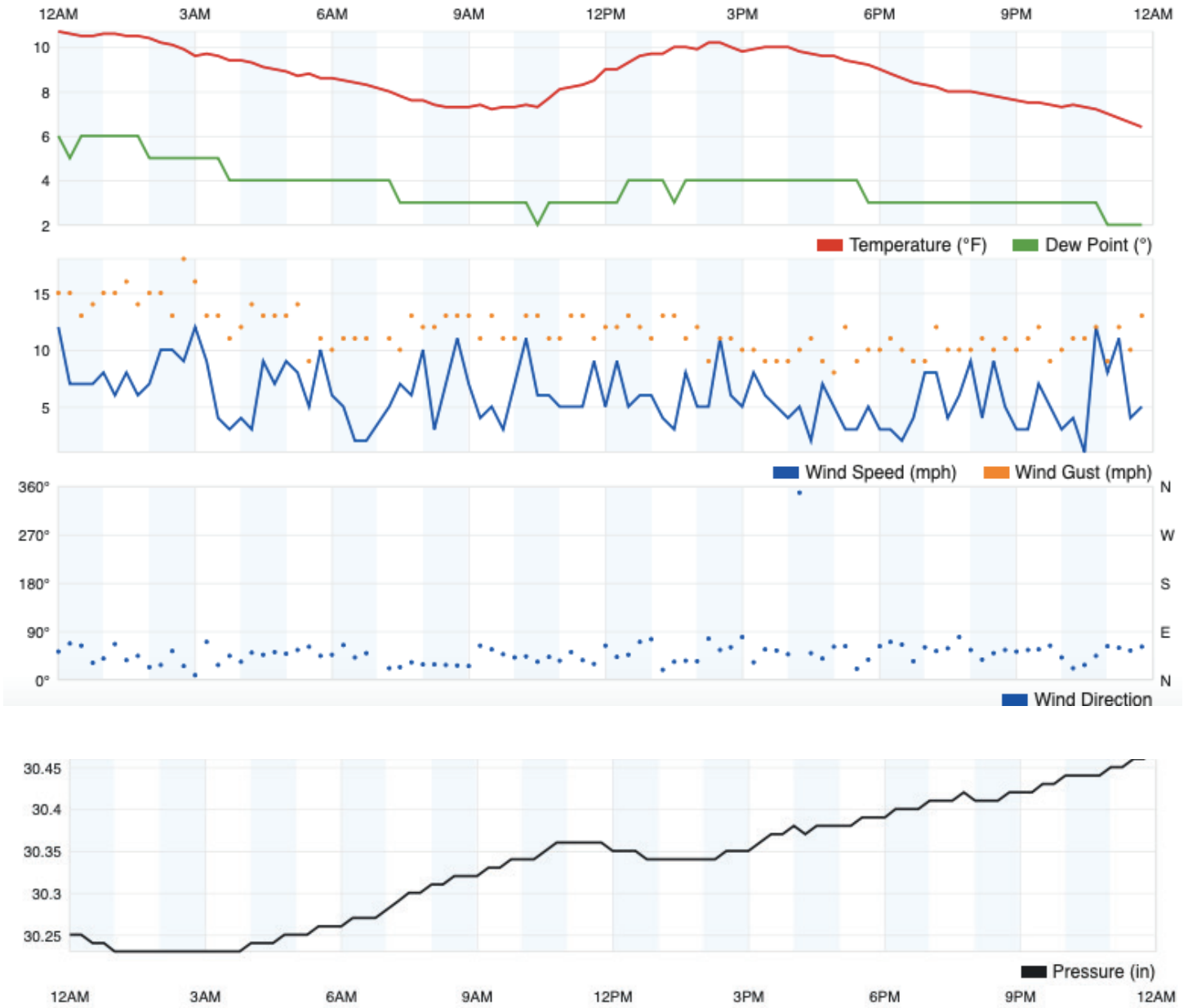
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Hamlin	422	230	96	326
Hand	301	135	83	218
Hanson	108	38	35	73
Harding	4	4	0	4
Hughes*	1920	990	465	1,455
Hutchinson*	941	427	257	684
Hyde*	113	93	10	103
Jackson*	89	75	7	82
Jerauld	149	41	54	95
Jones*	129	95	17	112
Kingsbury	461	267	97	364
Lake	993	337	328	665
Lawrence	1299	1,163	68	1,231
Lincoln	8276	2,894	2,691	5,585
Lyman*	138	96	21	117
Marshall*	386	174	106	280
McCook	482	290	96	386
McPherson	45	19	13	32
Meade*	1080	852	114	966
Mellette*	11	9	1	10
Miner	182	128	27	155
Minnehaha	22416	8,960	6,728	15,688
Moody*	368	206	81	287
Oglala Lakota*	34	24	5	29
Pennington*	8312	5,836	1,238	7,074
Perkins*	95	67	14	81
Potter	150	120	15	135
Roberts*	798	734	32	766
Sanborn	225	141	42	183
Spink	654	570	42	612
Stanley*	279	125	77	202
Sully	63	31	16	47
Todd*	36	28	4	32
Tripp*	506	392	57	449
Turner	1010	534	238	772
Union	462	262	100	362
Walworth*	572	354	109	463
Yankton	2901	929	986	1,915
Ziebach*	17	17	0	17
Other	2170	998	586	1,584

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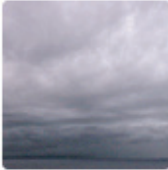



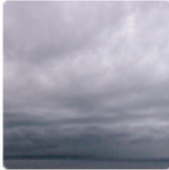
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Chance Flurries	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Cloudy
High: 18 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 25 °F	Low: 14 °F	High: 30 °F

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

<h2>Today</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mostly Cloudy with Scattered Flurries</i>• <i>Highs: 10 to 27°</i>	<h2>Tonight</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mostly Cloudy & Breezy</i>• <i>Lows: 3 to 16°</i>	<h2>Thursday</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Partly to Mostly Cloudy & Milder</i>• <i>Highs: 20 to 38°</i>
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Graphic Created 1/27/2021 4:58 AM



Clouds and flurries will persist today. Warmer and drier air will begin to push in tonight and Thursday.

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Today in Weather History

January 27th, 1969: Snowfall of 7 to 10 inches combined with winds of 15 to 30 mph caused widespread low visibilities along with heavy drifting from the 27th to the 29th across Minnesota. Many roads were blocked or remained blocked. Many schools were closed with many accidents.

1922: On this date through the 29th, a significant snowstorm struck the East Coast from South Carolina to southeastern, Massachusetts. Washington, DC, reported 28 inches of snow. The heavy snow on the Knickerbocker Theater's flat roof put a significant strain on the structure. On the evening of the 28th, during a showing of the silent comedy "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," the building collapsed, killing 98 people and injuring 130 others.

1967: Residents of Chicago, Illinois began to dig out from the storm of the 26th and 27th, which produced 23 inches of snow in 29 hours, their worse snowstorm. The snow paralyzed the city and suburbs for days, and business losses were enormous.

1989: Bitter cold air gripped most of Alaska during January 1989. Tanana, near Fairbanks, saw a low temperature of 76 degrees below zero on this day. The high for the day was 60 degrees below zero. With an average temperature of 68 degrees below zero, Tanana saw an average temperature of nearly sixty degrees below normal.

1772 - The "Washington and Jefferson Snowstorm" occurred. George Washington reported three feet of snow at Mount Vernon, and Thomas Jefferson recorded about three feet at Monticello. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1966 - Oswego, NY, was in the midst of a five day lake effect storm which left the town buried under 102 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Residents of Chicago, IL, began to dig out from a storm which produced 23 inches of snow in 29 hours. The snow paralyzed the city and suburbs for days, and business losses were enormous. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A powerful storm moving into the western U.S. produced 13 inches of snow at Daggett Pass NV, and 16 inches in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Reno NV, and wind gusts in Oregon exceeded 80 mph. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The nation got a breather from winter storms, however, cold arctic air settled into the southeastern U.S. Hollywood FL reported a record low reading of 39 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - The last half of January was bitterly cold over most of Alaska. Nearly thirty stations established all-time record low temperatures. On this date Tanana reported a low of -76 degrees. Daily highs of -66 degrees were reported at Chandalar Lake on the 22nd, and at Ambler on the 26th. (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Low pressure in north central Alaska continued to direct air across northern Siberia and the edges of the Arctic Circle into the state. The temperature at Fairbanks remained colder than 40 degrees below zero for the eighth day in a row. Lows of 68 below at Galena, 74 below at McGrath, and 76 below at Tanana, were new records for the date. Wind chill readings were colder than 100 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Another in a series of cold fronts brought high winds to the northwestern U.S., and more heavy snow to some of the higher elevations. The series of vigorous cold fronts crossing the area between the 23rd and the 27th of the month produced up to 60 inches of snow in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Month-to-date snowfall at Boston Logan International Airport totaled 43.1 inches, making January the snowiest month on record.

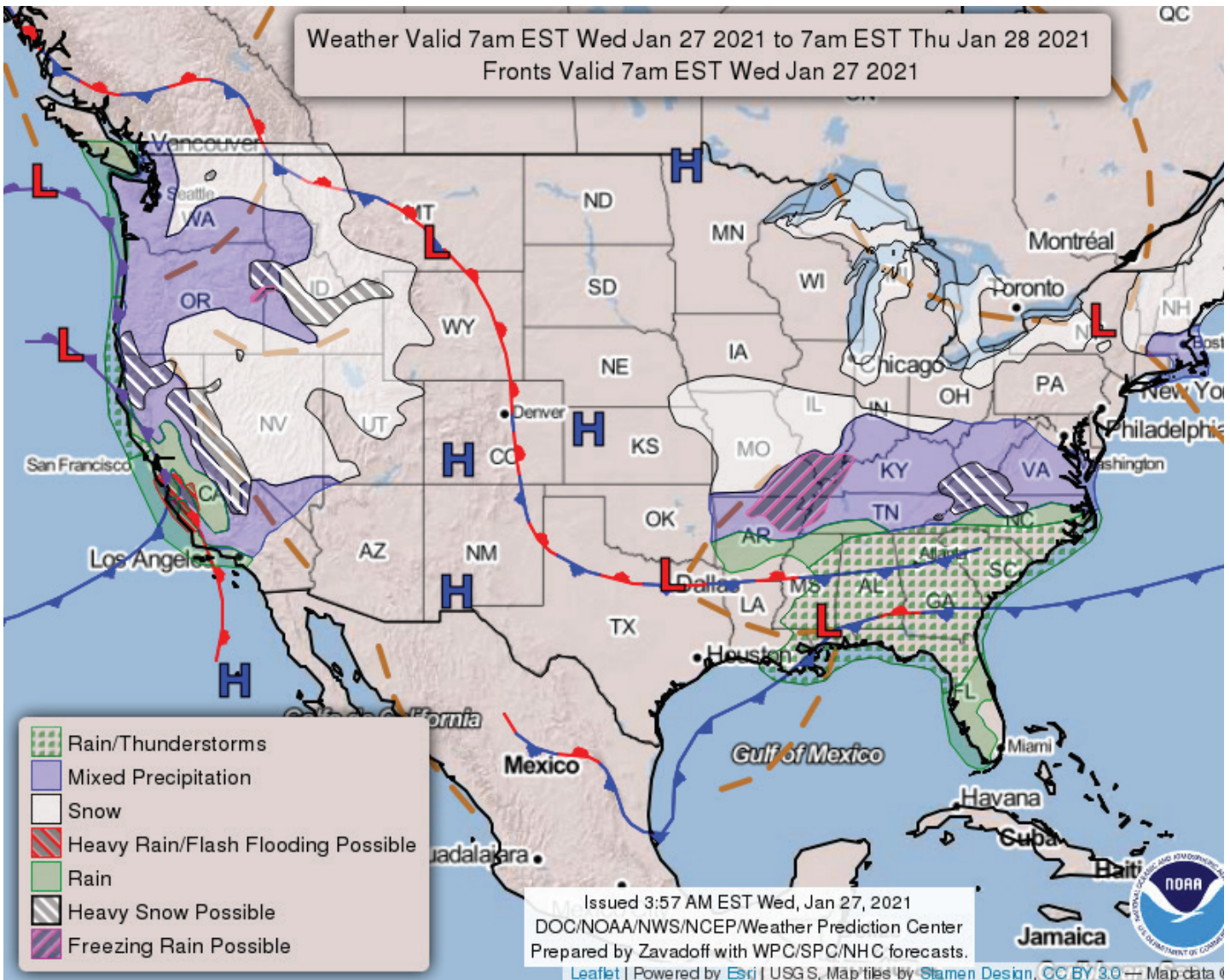
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 11 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 6 °F at 11:55 PM
Wind: 18 mph at 2:44 AM
Precip:

Record High: 53° in 1934
Record Low: -34° in 1915
Average High: 23°F
Average Low: 2°F
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.41
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.41
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:34 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:59 a.m.



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DOOMED!

Comparing the importance, significance, or value of one nation above or below another is an ongoing process. Various criteria are used to measure the worth of nations: the size of the military, gross national product, education, population, employment, agriculture, productivity - and the list goes on and on. But, in the eyes of the Lord, none of these areas are as critical as the one He would place at the top of His list. In fact, number one on His list would never be included or considered in the "nation evaluation list." Yet, nations rise and fall on what is most important to Him: righteousness.

Two of the most important nations of the ancient world were Sodom and Gomorrah. Their location was in the most fertile region of the then known world. So, they would certainly have been recognized as world leaders for their agricultural products. But, they weren't. They were recognized for their godlessness.

They were not ignorant of the Lord. Rather, they completely ignored Him. They refused to bring God in to their lives and weave Him into the fabric of their culture.

As a result of their complete indifference to God, He rained "down fire and brimstone" on them and utterly destroyed them - along with the other cities and villages on the plain, and eliminated all life - the people, the plants, and even the animals. Nothing was left.

God has not changed. Nations are, have been, and always will be graded by God on their righteousness: "On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur."

Prayer: We pray for our nation, Father that we will turn from our wicked ways and become a godly people once again. Grant us courage and power! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. Psalm 11:6

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News from the Associated Press

Noem would support grand jury in attorney general crash case

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem would support using a grand jury to decide whether charges should be filed against South Dakota's attorney general, who struck and killed a man along a highway in September.

Noem has been critical of the fact no decision has been made by prosecutors about whether Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg should face criminal charges in the Sept. 12 collision that took the life of 55-year-old Joseph Boever along Highway 14 west of Highmore.

"Gov. Noem would absolutely support empaneling a grand jury if it can help bring a speedy resolution to this case," Noem spokesman Ian Fury said in an email Tuesday to The Associated Press. "As the governor has repeatedly said, it is a grave disservice to Mr. Boever's family that this issue has not been resolved."

Prosecutors can use grand juries to file charges. The juries determine whether there is enough probable cause to indict a person.

Ravnsborg was returning to Pierre from a Republican fundraising dinner at the time. His car was too damaged to drive, so Hyde County Sheriff Mike Volek, who responded after Ravnsborg called 911, loaned Ravnsborg a personal vehicle.

Ravnsborg said he assumed he hit a deer, but that he discovered Boever's body the next morning when he returned to the scene. Ravnsborg has said he didn't commit a crime. He hasn't commented on how the case is being investigated.

The decision on charges is in the hands of Deputy State's Attorney Emily Sovell, who is also consulting with Beadle County State's Attorney Michael Moore and Pennington County State's Attorney Mark Vargo. Moore said prosecutors are still awaiting cellphone data and biological evidence.

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Central 70, Pierre 60

Aberdeen Christian 61, Herreid/Selby Area 41

Alcester-Hudson 46, Scotland 37

Belle Fourche 63, Lead-Deadwood 48

Bon Homme 46, Kimball/White Lake 44

Bridgewater-Emery 59, Freeman Academy/Marion 56

Canistota 54, Chester 44

Chamberlain 46, Madison 33

Dell Rapids St. Mary 66, Deubrook 58

Florence/Henry 57, Arlington 45

Garretson 74, Flandreau 66, OT

Great Plains Lutheran 62, Iroquois 35

Hamlin 47, Aberdeen Roncalli 42

Hanson 68, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 33

Harrisburg 53, Huron 26

Highmore-Harrold 61, James Valley Christian 38

Hill City 64, Sturgis Brown 41

Hot Springs 58, Wall 47

Howard 57, Elkton-Lake Benton 54

Leola/Frederick 57, Britton-Hecla 42

Lyman 50, Jones County 34

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McCook Central/Montrose 50, Freeman Academy 20
Menno 52, Gayville-Volin 38
Milbank 50, Deuel 42
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 70, Wagner 65
New Underwood 62, Newell 37
Northwestern 48, Faulkton 36
Parker 63, Irene-Wakonda 39
Platte-Geddes 69, Parkston 50
Potter County 78, Faith 67
Rapid City Christian 63, Custer 61
Redfield 68, Hitchcock-Tulare 35
Sioux Falls Christian 63, Tea Area 58
Sioux Falls Washington 69, Brandon Valley 62
St. Thomas More 68, Spearfish 41
Stanley County 65, Sully Buttes 41
Timber Lake 56, Kadoka Area 46
Tri-Valley 75, Canton 67
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 60, Centerville 42
Vermillion 54, West Central 42
Warner 46, Ipswich 33
Waubay/Summit 62, Wilmot 33
Waverly-South Shore 64, Webster 63
Wessington Springs 70, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 46
Winner 72, Bennett County 40
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Lawton-Bronson, Iowa, ppd.
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Central 61, Pierre 50
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 48, Wessington Springs 20
Belle Fourche 57, Lead-Deadwood 28
Brandon Valley 53, Watertown 43
Brookings 51, Yankton 29
Burke 48, Avon 43
Canton 49, Tri-Valley 47
Chamberlain 41, Madison 38
Clark/Willow Lake 67, Tiospa Zina Tribal 52
Custer 58, Rapid City Christian 53
Edgemont 54, Hulett, Wyo. 23
Faulkton 62, Northwestern 23
Florence/Henry 43, Arlington 37
Great Plains Lutheran 49, Langford 31
Gregory 60, Stanley County 36
Hamlin 47, Aberdeen Roncalli 46
Harrisburg 58, Huron 44
Herreid/Selby Area 38, Aberdeen Christian 36
Hill City 61, Sturgis Brown 48
Howard 40, Elkton-Lake Benton 31
Ipswich 46, Warner 36
Irene-Wakonda 67, Parker 63
Kimball/White Lake 52, Bon Homme 44

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Lakota Tech 83, Hay Springs, Neb. 25
Leola/Frederick 49, Britton-Hecla 36
Lower Brule 50, Mitchell Christian 44
May-Port CG, N.D. 59, North Border 42
Menno 60, Gayville-Volin 23
Milbank 41, Deuel 33
Mitchell 58, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 49
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 54, Wagner 42
Northern Cass, N.D. 71, Tri-State 37
Parkston 51, Platte-Geddes 31
Redfield 51, Hitchcock-Tulare 42
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 43, Hanson 38
Scotland 57, Alcester-Hudson 29
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 87, Tea Area 66
Sioux Valley 45, DeSmet 44
Spearfish 55, St. Thomas More 31
Timber Lake 57, Bison 48
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 60, Centerville 49
Vermillion 71, West Central 65
White River 84, Bennett County 28
Wolsey-Wessington 60, Sunshine Bible Academy 11
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Elk Point-Jefferson vs. Lawton-Bronson, Iowa, ppd.

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

29-49-56-66-67, Mega Ball: 24, Megaplier: 3

(twenty-nine, forty-nine, fifty-six, sixty-six, sixty-seven; Mega Ball: twenty-four; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

South Dakota reports no deaths due to COVID-19 for 2nd day

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Tuesday reported 202 new COVID-19 cases, lifting the number of positive tests to more than 107,000 since the start of the pandemic.

The COVID Tracking Project reports that over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has decreased by nearly 47%, which is a 5% improvement over numbers in Monday's report.

No new deaths were listed for the second day in a row, keeping the fatality count at 1,705. Hospitalizations dropped by nine, to 152.

Officials reported that 78,228 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered and 18,220 people have received both shots. South Dakota is among the top five states in the country in doses administered per capita at 9,362 shots per 100,000 people, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

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

South Dakota lawmakers revive bill decried by LGBTQ groups

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican lawmakers on Tuesday revived a proposed law that would ban people from changing the sex designation on their birth certificates, even after a House committee rejected the bill that LGBTQ advocates decried as an attack on transgender people.

Republicans in the House forced the bill to be brought to a vote by the full House through a rarely used legislative procedure known as a “smoke out.” At least one-third of the House supported the procedure.

A committee of lawmakers had earlier Tuesday dismissed the bill on a seven-to-six vote after five Republicans joined two Democrats to oppose the bill, which would stop people from changing the sex listed on birth certificates after one year from birth. The proposal will be delivered to the full chamber for consideration by Wednesday.

Law changes that affect transgender people have become a perennial topic in the South Dakota legislature, although transgender advocates say they are making progress in getting their voices heard and issues understood. A handful of advocates gathered in the pre-dawn cold outside the statehouse on Tuesday, waving rainbow and transgender flags.

“I want transgender people to know they have a home here, a family here,” said Seymour Otterman, a nonbinary transgender person who testified to lawmakers on their experience living in the state.

The legislative efforts to address transgender issues were spearheaded by Rep. Fred Deutsch, a Watertown Republican who introduced this year’s proposal. After the bill was rejected in committee, he said he had heard from fellow Republicans that they would like to debate and vote on the bill in a meeting of the full House.

Deutsch pushed a bill last year that would have banned puberty blockers and gender confirmation surgery for transgender children under 16. And in 2016, he introduced a bill that would have limited the bathrooms and locker rooms that transgender students can use.

Other Republican lawmakers have pushed the state’s high school athletics association to reconsider its policy of allowing transgender students to compete as the gender with which they identify.

But Deutsch’s efforts have increasingly struggled to gain traction: His 2016 bill cleared the House and Senate before being vetoed by former Gov. Dennis Daugaard, a Republican; his bill last year passed the House before being halted by a Senate committee; this year’s bill failed to clear its first hurdle in the House and had to be revived by the “smoke out” procedure.

Deutsch defended his efforts, saying he was not motivated by hate but by social importance.

He argued that the state’s judges have struggled with how to handle requests from people who want to change the sex on their birth certificates and that keeping vital records on sex is an important aspect of government business.

“Either biology matters or it doesn’t,” he said.

South Dakota courts have received 11 requests for updates to the sex listed on birth certificates since 2017, according to the court system.

Rep. Kevin Jensen, a Canton Republican who supported the bill, said he doesn’t feel it discriminates against transgender people, and that a birth certificate serves as an objective record of someone’s sex at birth.

But LGBTQ people see Deutsch’s efforts as an attack intended to send a message that they are not welcome in a state dominated by conservative politics. They warned that barring people from updating their birth certificates was dangerous, exposing them to violence, hate and discrimination. They could be unwillingly exposed as transgender when they apply for jobs, housing or health care.

“It’s incredibly disrespectful that we have to address this every year. It’s infuriating,” said Rep. Erin Healy, a Democrat from Sioux Falls. “We are disrupting the lives of a vulnerable population, and I think what we are missing today is empathy and compassion.”

Opponents to the bill pointed out that similar bans, such as a 2018 law passed in Idaho, have been struck down by federal courts as unconstitutional. LGBTQ advocates have also pointed to President Joe Biden’s

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order reversing a Trump-era Pentagon policy largely barring transgender people from military service as a sign that the federal government is taking a stronger approach to protections for transgender people.

Otterman said Deutsch's proposed ban did not come as a surprise, even though they are struck by increasing waves of anger and sadness each January when the bills come.

"In most places in South Dakota, it is a very lonely, isolating experience because of this sentiment," they said.

Healy said bills that delve into transgender issues can be harmful, even if they often fail.

"It's an emotional roller coaster," Healy said. "To be so happy and relieved that it died, only to see it resurrected and have that threat all over again."

Court upholds order for Dakota Access environmental review

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A federal appeals court on Tuesday upheld a district judge's order for a full environmental impact review of the Dakota Access pipeline, but declined to shut the line down while the review is completed.

Following a complaint by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg said in April 2020 that a more extensive review was necessary than the environmental assessment conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile (1,886 kilometer) pipeline crosses beneath the Missouri River, just north of the the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation that straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border. The tribe, which draws its water from the river, says it fears pollution.

The U.S. Court of Appeals ruling does not require the pipeline to stop operating or be emptied of oil, as Boasberg had initially ruled. The appellate court blocked that order last summer.

"This pipeline is now operating illegally. It doesn't have any permits," said Jan Hasselman, the EarthJustice attorney representing Standing Rock and other tribes. "The appeals court put the ball squarely in the court of the Biden administration to take action. And I mean shutting the pipeline down until this environmental review is completed."

EarthJustice said in a release Dakota Access should not be allowed to operate until the Corps decides after its review whether to reissue a federal permit granting easement for the pipeline to cross beneath Lake Oahe. The group said Biden has the discretion to shut the pipeline down; last week, the leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, and Yankton Sioux Tribe wrote to the president asking him to do so.

North Dakota Republican Sen. Kevin Cramer said the court was right to reject the shutdown and wants Biden to stay out of it.

"The Army Corps of Engineers should be allowed to proceed as they are without political interference from the Biden administration," Cramer said. "This is not another opportunity to wage war on North Dakota's energy producers."

The Dakota Access pipeline was the subject of months of sometimes violent protests in 2016 and 2017 during its construction. The Standing Rock Sioux continued to press legal challenges against the pipeline even after it began carrying oil from North Dakota across South Dakota and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois in June 2017.

The Obama administration originally rejected permits for the project, and the Corps prepared to conduct a full environmental review. In February 2017, after President Donald Trump took office, the agency scrapped the review and granted permits, concluding that running the pipeline under the Missouri River posed no significant environmental issues.

Boasberg ordered more review in 2020 because the agency did not adequately consider how an oil spill under the Missouri River might affect Standing Rock's fishing and hunting rights, or whether it might disproportionately affect the tribal community.

Toshiba Appoints Teresa Sternhagen to General Manager

LAKE FOREST, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan 26, 2021--

Toshiba America Business Solutions today promotes Teresa Sternhagen to general manager of the company's toner products division.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210126005008/en/>

Toshiba Appoints Teresa Sternhagen to General Manager. (Photo: Business Wire)

Sternhagen is now responsible for developing and executing strategic and tactical initiatives to ensure optimal operational efficiency for Toshiba's Mitchell, South Dakota toner-producing facility. She will implement, lead and ensure world-class manufacturing, engineering and supply chain processes.

The 25-year manufacturing professional assumes additional responsibility for applying industry best practices to maximize toner quality while ensuring the facility complies with local, state and national regulatory mandates.

These mandates include maintaining the facilities' current ISO Certifications (ISO 9001:2015 Quality, 14001:2015 Environmental and 45001:2019 Health and Safety) which ensure the highest levels of quality, environmental and occupational health and safety standards within its Mitchell facility.

Sternhagen also plays a primary role in Toshiba's ongoing commitment to a more sustainable earth through green manufacturing processes, toner and product recycling efforts and even re-pollination efforts for the local South Dakota environment. Since 2008, Toshiba has eliminated more than 1,610 U.S. tons of e-waste from entering landfills through its toner recycling efforts.

"Teresa is one of our company's most dynamic leaders, helping lead one of Toshiba's most globally profitable divisions," said Toshiba America Business Solutions President and Chief Executive Officer Scott Maccabe. "As our new general manager, I believe that the growth trajectory of our toner division will continue to surge."

Since joining Toshiba in 2008, Sternhagen has earned a reputation for leadership by successfully guiding the toner division's supply chain, inventory control and procurement activities. As Toshiba's assistant general manager and vice president of manufacturing, she was in charge of planning, implementing and supporting programs for the division. While serving in that role, Sternhagen specifically directed successful cost and inventory controls as well as personnel management measures. In her expanded role, Sternhagen will become the 11 th member of Toshiba's Executive Leadership Team, which is tasked with charting the strategic direction of the company.

Sternhagen is a 15-year board member of the Bon Homme School District 4-2 in Tyndall, South Dakota. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Dakota Wesleyan University and CPIM (Certified in Production and Inventory Management), while also completing coursework for her CSCP and CLTD, Certified Supply Chain Professional and Certified in Logistics, Transportation, and Distribution, respectively.

Toshiba's 25-acre toner producing facility employs nearly 100 people living in the greater Mitchell area and is the primary global supplier of color toner for the company's industry-recognized e-STUDIO™ copiers.

14-year-old girl shot, wounded in Sioux Falls

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sioux Falls police are investigating a shooting that left a 14-year-old girl wounded.

But, authorities say the victim is not cooperating with investigators.

Friends brought the girl to the hospital Monday, said Sioux Falls police spokesman Sam Clemens. She had sustained a gunshot wound to the leg in a shooting at an apartment in eastern Sioux Falls.

Clemens said the girl knows who shot her, but won't identify the individual. She claims the shooting was an accident.

The victim's injuries aren't believed to be life threatening.

Russian parliament OKs New START nuclear treaty extension

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian lawmakers on Wednesday quickly approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear Russia-U.S. arms control treaty, a fast-track action that comes just days before it's due to expire.

Both houses of parliament voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years, a day after a phone call between U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin said they agreed to complete the necessary extension procedures in the next few days.

Speaking via video link to the World Economic Forum's virtual meeting, Putin hailed the decision to extend the treaty as "a step in the right direction," but warned of rising global rivalries and threats of new conflicts.

The pact's extension doesn't require congressional approval in the U.S., but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move and Putin has to sign the relevant bill into law.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told lawmakers that the extension will be validated by exchanging diplomatic notes once all the procedures are completed.

The upper house speaker, Valentina Matvienko, said after the vote that the decision to extend the pact shows that Russia and the U.S. can reach agreements on major issues despite the tensions between them.

New START expires on Feb. 5. After taking office last week, Biden proposed extending the treaty for five years, and the Kremlin quickly welcomed the offer.

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.

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.

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

The negotiations were also marred 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.

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.

Earlier this month, Russia announced that it would follow the U.S. in pulling out of the Open Skies Treaty, which allowed surveillance flights over military facilities, to help build trust and transparency between Russia and the West.

Before the Biden administration took office, Russia always had offered to extend New START for five years — a possibility that was envisaged by the pact at the time it was signed. But President Donald Trump charged that it put the U.S. at a disadvantage. Trump initially insisted that China be added to the treaty, an idea that Beijing bluntly dismissed.

The Trump administration then proposed to extend New START for just one year and also sought to expand it to include limits on battlefield nuclear weapons.

Arms control advocates hailed the treaty's extension as a boost to global security and urged Russia and the U.S. to start negotiating follow-up agreements.

Ryabkov said that Russia will count its Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle along with other Russian nuclear weapons under the treaty limits.

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 a few existing Soviet-built intercontinental ballistic missiles instead of older type warheads, and in the future could be fitted to the Sarmat, a prospective intercontinental ballistic missile now under development.

Ryabkov said that Russia is ready to sit down for talks on prospective arms cuts, noting that they should also involve non-nuclear precision weapons with strategic range.

Indonesian volcano unleashes river of lava in new eruption

By SLAMET RIYADI Associated Press

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia's most active volcano erupted Wednesday with a river of lava and searing gas clouds flowing 3,000 meters (nearly 10,000 feet) down its slopes. No casualties were reported.

The sounds of the eruption could be heard 30 kilometers (18 miles) away, officials said. It was Mount Merapi's biggest lava flow since authorities raised its danger level in November, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center.

She said the volcano's lava dome is growing rapidly, causing hot lava and gas clouds to flow down its slopes.

After morning rain, the ashfall turned into muck in several villages. More than 150 people, mostly elderly, living within 5 kilometers (3 miles) of the crater were evacuated to barracks set up for displaced people.

Authorities in November had evacuated nearly 2,000 people living on the mountain in Magelang and Sleman districts but most have since returned.

The alert is being maintained at the second-highest level and authorities told people to stay out of an existing danger zone around the crater.

The 2,968-meter (9,737-foot) volcano is on densely populated Java island near the ancient city of Yogyakarta. It is the most active of dozens of Indonesian volcanoes and has repeatedly erupted with lava and gas clouds recently.

Merapi's last major eruption in 2010 killed 347 people.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity because it sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the ocean.

Class action opened over racial profiling by French police

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In a first for France, six nongovernmental organizations launched a class-action lawsuit Wednesday against the French government for alleged systemic discrimination by police officers carrying out identity checks.

The organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, contend that French police use racial profiling in ID checks, targeting Black people and people of Arab descent.

They served Prime Minister Jean Castex and France's interior and justice ministers with formal legal notice of demands for concrete steps and deep law enforcement reforms to ensure that racial profiling does not determine who gets stopped by police.

The lead lawyer in the case, Antoine Lyon-Caen, said that the legal action is not targeting individual police officers but "the system itself that generates, by its rules, habits, culture, a discriminatory practice."

"Since the shortcomings of the state (concern) a systemic practice, the response, the reactions, the remedies, the measures must be systemic," Lyon-Caen said at a news conference with NGOs taking action. They include the Open Society Justice Initiative and three French grassroots groups.

The issue of racial profiling by French police has festered for years, including but not only the practice of officers performing identity checks on young people who are often Black or of Arab descent and live in impoverished housing projects.

Serving notice is the obligatory first step in a two-stage lawsuit process. The law gives French authorities four months to talk with the NGOs about how they can meet the demands. If the parties behind the lawsuit are left unsatisfied, the case will go to court, according to one of the lawyers, Slim Ben Achour.

It's the first class-action discrimination lawsuit based on color or supposed ethnic origins in France. The NGO's are employing a little-used 2016 French law that allows associations to take such a legal move.

"It's revolutionary, because we're going to speak for hundreds of thousands, even a million people." Ben Achour told The Associated Press in a phone interview. The NGOs are pursuing the class action on behalf

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of racial minorities who are mostly second- or third-generation French citizens.

"The group is brown and Black," Ben Achour said.

The four-month period for reaching a settlement could be prolonged if the talks are making progress, he said.

The abuse of identity checks has served for many in France as emblematic of broader alleged racism within police ranks, with critics claiming that misconduct has been left unchecked or whitewashed by authorities.

Video of a recent incident posted online drew a response from President Emmanuel Macron, who called racial profiling "unbearable." Police representatives say officers themselves feel under attack when they show up in suburban housing projects. During a spate of confrontational incidents, officers became trapped and had fireworks and other objects thrown at them.

The NGOs are seeking reforms rather than monetary damages, especially changes in the law governing identity checks. They argue the law is too broad and allows for no police accountability because the actions of officers involved cannot be traced, while the stopped individuals are left humiliated and sometimes angry.

Among other demands, the organizations want an end to the longstanding practice of gauging police performance by numbers of tickets issued or arrests made, arguing that the benchmarks can encourage baseless identity checks.

The lawsuit features some 50 witnesses, both police officers and people subjected to abusive checks, whose accounts are excerpted in the 145-page letters of notice. The NGO's cite one unnamed person who spoke of undergoing multiple police checks every day for years.

A police officer posted in a tough Paris suburb who is not connected with the case told the AP that he is often subjected to ID checks when in civilian clothes.

"When I'm not in uniform, I'm a person of color," said the officer, who asked to remain anonymous in keeping with police rules and due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Police need a legal basis for their actions, "but 80% of the time they do checks (based on) heads" — meaning how a person looks.

Omer Mas Capitolin, the head of Community House for Supportive Development, a grassroots NGO taking part in the legal action, called it a "mechanical reflex" for French police to stop non-whites, a practice he said is damaging to the person being checked and ultimately to relations between officers and the members of the public they are expected to protect.

"When you're always checked, it lowers your self-esteem," and you become a "second-class citizen," Mas Capitolin said. The "victims are afraid to file complaints in this country even if they know what happened isn't normal," he said, because they fear fallout from neighborhood police.

He credited the case of George Floyd, the Black American whose died last year in Minneapolis after a white police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck, with raising consciences and becoming a catalyst for change in France.

"These are practices that impact the whole society," said Issa Coulibaly, the head of Pazapas-Belleville, another organization taking part in the case. Like a downward spiral, profiling hurts youths' "feeling of belonging" to the life of the nation and "reinforces prejudices of others to this population."

NGOs made clear they are not accusing individual police of being racist.

"It's so much in the culture. They don't ever think there's a problem," said Ben Achour, the lawyer.

Follow all AP stories about racial profiling at <https://apnews.com/Racialinjustice>.

US says Eritrean forces should leave Tigray immediately

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The United States says all soldiers from Eritrea should leave Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region "immediately."

A State Department spokesperson in an email to The Associated Press late Tuesday cited "credible re-

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ports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses.”

“There is also evidence of Eritrean soldiers forcibly returning Eritrean refugees from Tigray to Eritrea,” the spokesperson said.

The statement reflects new pressure by the Biden administration on the government of Ethiopia, Africa’s second-most populous country with 114 million people and the anchor of the Horn of Africa, and other combatants as the deadly fighting in Tigray nears the three-month mark.

The AP this week cited witnesses who fled the Tigray region as saying Eritrean soldiers were looting, going house-to-house killing young men and even acting as local authorities. The Eritreans have been fighting on the side of Ethiopian forces as they pursue the fugitive leaders of the Tigray region, though Ethiopia’s government has denied their presence.

The U.S. stance has shifted dramatically from the early days of the conflict when the Trump administration praised Eritrea for its “restraint.”

The new U.S. statement calls for an independent and transparent investigation into alleged abuses. “It remains unclear how many Eritrean soldiers are in Tigray, or precisely where,” it says.

It was not immediately clear whether the U.S. has addressed its demand directly to Eritrean officials. And the office of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed did not immediately respond to questions.

Witnesses have estimated that the Eritrean soldiers number in the thousands. Eritrean officials have not responded to questions. The information minister for Eritrea, one of the world’s most secretive countries, this week tweeted that “the rabid defamation campaign against Eritrea is on the rise again.”

The U.S. also seeks an immediate stop to the fighting in Tigray and “full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access” to the region, which remains largely cut off from the outside world, with Ethiopian forces often accompanying aid.

“We are gravely concerned by credible reports that hundreds of thousands of people may starve to death if urgent humanitarian assistance is not mobilized immediately,” the statement says.

The United Nations in its latest humanitarian update said it is receiving reports of “rising hunger” in Tigray and cited a “dire lack of access to food” since many farmers in the largely agricultural region missed the harvest because of the fighting, and as “critical staff” to scale up the humanitarian response can’t access the region. Transport, electricity, banking and other links “have yet to be restored in much of the region,” the U.N. said, and 78% of hospitals remain nonfunctional.

“Our concern is that what we don’t know could be even more disturbing,” U.N. children’s agency chief Henrietta Fore said in a statement Wednesday. “For 12 weeks, the international humanitarian community has had very limited access to conflict-affected populations across most of Tigray.”

Vaccinations have stopped across the region, Fore added.

The U.S. statement added that “dialogue is essential between the government and Tigrayans.” Ethiopia’s government has rejected dialogue with the former Tigray leaders, seeing them as illegitimate, and has appointed an interim administration.

The former Tigray leaders, in turn, objected to Ethiopia delaying a national election last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and considered Abiy’s mandate over.

Auschwitz survivors mark anniversary online amid pandemic

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Tova Friedman hid among corpses at Auschwitz amid the chaos of the extermination camp’s final days.

Just 6 years old at the time, the Poland-born Friedman was instructed by her mother to lie absolutely still in a bed at a camp hospital, next to the body of a young woman who had just died. As German forces preparing to flee the scene of their genocide went from bed to bed shooting anyone still alive, Friedman barely breathed under a blanket and went unnoticed.

Days later, on Jan. 27, 1945, she was among the thousands of prisoners who survived to greet the Soviet troops who liberated the camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.

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Now 82, Friedman had hoped to mark Wednesday's anniversary by taking her eight grandchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site, which is under the custodianship of the Polish state. The coronavirus pandemic prevented the trip.

So instead, Friedman will be alone at home in Highland Park, New Jersey, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yet a message of warning from her about the rise of hatred will be part of a virtual observance organized by the World Jewish Congress.

Across Europe, the victims were remembered and honored in various ways.

In Austria and Slovakia, hundreds of survivors were offered their first doses of a vaccine against the coronavirus in a gesture both symbolic and truly lifesaving given the threat of the virus to older adults. In Israel, some 900 Holocaust survivors died from COVID-19 out of the 5,300 who were infected last year, the country's Central Bureau of Statistics reported said Tuesday.

Pope Francis warned from the Vatican that distorted ideologies can "end up destroying a people and humanity." Meanwhile, Luxembourg signed a deal agreeing to pay reparations and to reconstitute dormant bank accounts, insurance policies and looted art to Holocaust survivors.

Institutions around the world, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial museum in Poland, Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. have online events planned. The presidents of Israel, Germany and Poland were among those planning to deliver remarks of remembrance and warning.

The online nature of this year's commemorations is a sharp contrast to how Friedman spent the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation last year, when she gathered under a huge tent with other survivors and dozens of European leaders at the site of the former camp. It was one of the last large international gatherings before the pandemic forced the cancellation of most large gatherings.

Many Holocaust survivors in the United States, Israel and elsewhere find themselves in a state of previously unimaginable isolation due to the pandemic. Friedman lost her husband last March and said she feels acutely alone now.

But survivors like her also have found new connections over Zoom: World Jewish Congress leader Ronald Lauder has organized video meetings for survivors and their children and grandchildren during the pandemic.

More than 1.1 million people were murdered by the German Nazis and their henchmen at Auschwitz, the most notorious site in a network of camps and ghettos aimed at the destruction of Europe's Jews. The vast majority of those killed at Auschwitz were Jews, but others, including Poles, Roma and Soviet prisoners of war, were also killed in large numbers.

In all, about 6 million European Jews and millions of other people were killed by the Germans and their collaborators. In 2005, the United Nations designated Jan. 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, an acknowledgement of Auschwitz's iconic status.

Israel, which today counts 197,000 Holocaust survivors, officially marks its Holocaust remembrance day in the spring. But events will also be held Wednesday by survivors' organizations and remembrance groups across the country, many of them held virtually or without members of the public in attendance.

While commemorations have moved online for the first time, one constant is the drive of survivors to tell their stories as words of caution.

Rose Schindler, a 91-year-old survivor of Auschwitz who was originally from Czechoslovakia but now lives in San Diego, California, has been speaking to school groups about her experience for 50 years. Her story, and that of her late husband, Max, also a survivor, is also told in a book, "Two Who Survived: Keeping Hope Alive While Surviving the Holocaust."

After Schindler was transported to Auschwitz in 1944, she was selected more than once for immediate death in the gas chambers. She survived by escaping each time and joining work details.

The horrors she experienced of Auschwitz — the mass murder of her parents and four of her seven siblings, the hunger, being shaven, lice infestations — are difficult to convey, but she keeps speaking to groups, over past months only by Zoom.

"We have to tell our stories so it doesn't happen again," Schindler told The Associated Press on Monday

in a Zoom call from her home. "It is unbelievable what we went through, and the whole world was silent as this was going on."

Friedman says she believes it is her role to "sound the alarm" about rising anti-Semitism and other hatred in the world, otherwise "another tragedy may happen."

That hatred, she said, was on clear view when a mob inspired by former President Donald Trump attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. Some insurrectionists wore clothes with anti-Semitic messages like "Camp Auschwitz" and "'6MWE," which stands for "6 million wasn't enough."

"It was utterly shocking and I couldn't believe it. And I don't know what part of America feels like that. I hope it's a very small and isolated group and not a pervasive feeling," Friedman said Monday.

Still, the mob violence could not shake her belief in the essential goodness of America and most Americans.

"It's a country of freedom. It's a country that took me in," Friedman said.

In her recorded message that will be broadcast Wednesday, Friedman said she compares the virus of hatred in the world to COVID-19. She said the world today is witnessing "a virus of anti-Semitism, of racism, and if you don't stop the virus, it's going to kill humanity."

The Latest: Moscow mayor lifts some coronavirus restrictions

By The Associated Press undefined

MOSCOW — Moscow's mayor on Wednesday lifted some coronavirus restrictions in the Russian capital, citing a downward trend in new infections.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said starting Wednesday, employers are no longer required to have 30% of staff work from home, although a recommendation to continue doing that remains. Sobyenin has also allowed cafes, restaurants and bars to operate between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m.

"Over the past week, the number of new infections didn't exceed 2,000-3,000 a day ... More than 50% of beds in coronavirus hospitals are free for the first time since mid-June," Sobyenin said. "The pandemic is on the decline ... and it's our duty to create conditions for the economy to recover as fast as possible."

The number of new coronavirus infections reported by Russian authorities has been on the decline this month, dropping from up to 25,000 a day in early January to under 20,000 this week. In Moscow, the number of daily new infections dropped to under 2,000 on Wednesday, from roughly 5,000 two weeks ago.

Russia has reported a total of 3.7 million confirmed coronavirus cases and over 70,000 deaths in the pandemic. In December, Russian authorities launched a vaccination campaign with the domestically developed Sputnik V jab, that is still undergoing advanced trials to ensure its safety and effectiveness.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- AstraZeneca and EU to meet in Brussels to talk over vaccine production delays
- French drugmaker Sanofi to produce coronavirus vaccines of its rival Pfizer since its own vaccine won't be ready until late 2021
- U.S. boosting vaccine deliveries amid complaints of shortages
- U.K. becomes first country in Europe to pass 100,000 coronavirus deaths
- IOC, Tokyo Olympics to unveil rule book for beating pandemic
- 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:

PARIS — French drug maker Sanofi says it will help manufacture 125 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine developed by rivals Pfizer and BioNTech, while its own vaccine candidate faces delays.

Germany-based BioNTech will initially produce the vaccines at Sanofi facilities in Frankfurt, starting in the summer, according to a Sanofi statement Wednesday. The company did not reveal financial details of the agreement.

The French government has been pressing Sanofi to use its facilities to help make rival vaccines, given

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high demand and problems with supplies of the few vaccines that are already available.

Sanofi and British partner GlaxoSmithKline will start a new phase-2 trial of their COVID-19 vaccine next month, Sanofi said. The two companies said last month that their vaccine won't be ready until late 2021 because the shot's effectiveness in older people needed to be improved.

BEIJING — China has given more than 22 million coronavirus vaccine shots to date as it carries out a drive ahead of next month's Lunar New Year holiday, health authorities said Wednesday.

The effort, which began six weeks ago, targets key groups such as medical and transport workers and has accelerated vaccinations in China. About 1.6 million doses had been given over several months before the campaign began.

"The carrying out of vaccination has been ongoing in a steady and orderly manner," Zeng Yixin, vice chairman of the National Health Commission said at a news conference.

He said that 22.76 million doses had been administered as of Tuesday. It's not clear how many people that represents since the vaccine is given in two doses, and some may have received their second shot.

China, which largely stopped the spread of the virus last spring, has seen fresh outbreaks this winter in four northern provinces. About 1,800 new cases have been reported since mid-December, including two deaths.

Authorities are strongly discouraging people from traveling during the Lunar New Year holiday, a time when Chinese traditionally return to their hometowns for family gatherings.

NEW DELHI — India has vaccinated 2 million health workers in less than two weeks and recorded 12,689 new coronavirus positive cases in the past 24 hours, a sharp decline from a peak level of nearly 100,000 in mid-September.

The health Ministry said the daily new cases had fallen below 10,000 on Tuesday with 9,102 cases. The daily new positive cases were 9,304 on June 4 last year.

India's fatalities dropped to 137 in the past 24 hours from a peak level of 1,089 daily deaths in September. India's total positive cases since the start of the epidemic have reached 10.6 million, the second highest after the United States with 25.43 million cases.

India started inoculating health workers on Jan. 16 in what is likely the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

India is home to the world's largest vaccine makers. Authorities hope to give shots to 300 million people. The recipients include 30 million doctors, nurses and other front-line workers.

SEOUL, South Korea -- South Korea has reported new 559 cases of the coronavirus, its highest daily increase in 10 days, as health workers scrambled to slow transmissions at religious facilities, which have been a major source of infections throughout the pandemic.

The figures released by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Wednesday brought the national caseload to 76,429, including 1,378 deaths.

The agency said 112 of the new cases came from the southwestern city of Gwangju where more than 100 infections have so far been linked to a missionary training school. An affiliated facility in the central city of Daejeon has been linked to more 170 infections.

Nearly 300 of the new cases came from the Seoul metropolitan area, home to half of the country's 51 million people, where infections have been tied to various places, including churches, restaurants, schools and offices.

JUNEAU, Alaska — Alaska has detected the state's first known case of the coronavirus variant identified last year in the United Kingdom, officials said Tuesday.

The infected person is an Anchorage resident who had traveled to a state where the variant had already been detected, the Alaska health department said. The person first experienced symptoms on Dec. 17,

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was tested three days later and received a positive result on Dec. 22.

The resident lived with another person in Anchorage, who also became ill. Both isolated and have since recovered, officials said.

It was not yet clear if the second person also was infected with the variant.

Dr. Joe McLaughlin, the state epidemiologist, said in a news release that the discovery of the variant is not surprising because viruses "constantly change through mutation."

He said this is one of several "variants that has been carefully tracked because it appears to spread more easily and quickly than other strains of the virus."

Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska's chief medical officer, said it is likely the variant will be detected again soon.

BOSTON — In his annual State of the Commonwealth address, Republican Gov. Charlie Baker defended his vaccine distribution plan, which some have criticized for being confusing and too narrowly focused at first.

Baker said the state is prepared to distribute and administer all the vaccine shots delivered by the federal government and is rapidly expanding the number of vaccination sites.

"Vaccinating 4 million adults in Massachusetts as the doses are allocated by the federal government is not going to be easy. But be assured that we will make every effort to get this done as quickly and efficiently as possible," he said. "We can only move as fast as the federal government delivers the vaccines."

SEATTLE - Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Tuesday touted big improvements in distributing the COVID-19 vaccines, but he also urged residents to remain vigilant as new, more contagious variants of the disease spread in the state.

Inslee said more than 36,000 doses were administered in Washington on Sunday and 39,000 on Monday — a big jump from about 16,000 a week earlier, and on the way toward the state's goal of 45,000 per day.

The number of vaccines actually administered could be even higher, given lags in reporting, but as of Monday more than 500,000 doses had been administered statewide, with four mass vaccination sites due to open this week.

President Joe Biden announced Tuesday the federal government is boosting vaccine supplies to the states by 16% over the next three weeks, giving states more certainty about upcoming deliveries than the one-week notice the Trump administration had been providing.

Protesting farmers return to camp after storming Indian fort

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Leaders of a protest movement sought Wednesday to distance themselves from a day of violence when thousands of farmers stormed India's historic Red Fort, the most dramatic moment in two months of demonstrations that have grown into a major challenge of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Farmers demanding the repeal of new agricultural laws briefly took over of the 17th-century fort, and images broadcast live on television shocked the nation. In a particularly bold rebuke to Modi's Hindu-nationalist government, the protesters hoisted a Sikh religious flag.

At least one protester died, and several demonstrators were injured, as were more than 300 police officers, and there are concerns the violence could undermine the protest movement that has thus far been largely peaceful and is growing in strength.

The farmers — many of them Sikhs from the major agricultural states of Punjab and Haryana — are demanding the repeal of new laws that they fear will favor large corporate agriculture and leave smallholders behind. The government insists the laws will benefit farmers and boost production through private investment, but, in the face of protests, it has offered to suspend them for 18 months. The farmers want nothing less than a full repeal.

On Tuesday, more than 10,000 tractors and thousands more people on foot or horseback moved into the capital, shoving aside barricades and buses blocking their path and at times met by police using tear

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gas and water cannons.

"The situation is normal now. The protesters have left the streets of the capital," New Delhi police officer Anto Alphonse said Wednesday morning.

Hundreds of police are now guarding the fort, while the farmers have returned to their camp at the edge of the capital, where they have hunkered down since November, when they last tried to march into New Delhi. Unfazed by the winter cold and frequent rains, they have said they will stay until the farm laws are repealed.

The protesting farmers' groups were scheduled to meet later Wednesday to discuss the future course of action. Another march is planned for Feb. 1 when the Modi government is scheduled to present the annual budget in Parliament.

As the protests have gathered strength, they have rattled the government like never before since they form the most influential voting bloc in India and are also crucial to its economy. But political analyst Arti Jerath said Tuesday's violence could dampen their power.

"The Supreme Court has all along said the farmers can continue with the protest without disrupting the life in New Delhi," she said. "Tuesday's development has given the government a handle to go to the top court and say see this is precisely what it was fearing that it would turn violent."

Cracks appeared Wednesday in the protest movement when a former convener of the farmers' umbrella organization disassociated himself from the group after Tuesday's violent clashes.

V.M. Singh said he was ready to hold talks with the government on legislation guaranteeing a minimum support price for wheat and rice. He said he is no longer seeking the repeal of the three new laws.

Protest organizer Samyukt Kisan Morcha, or United Farmers' Front, sought to distance the movement from the violence, accusing two outside groups of sabotage by infiltrating their movement.

"Even if it was a sabotage, we can't escape responsibility," said Yogendra Yadav, another protest leader.

Yadav said frustration had built up among the protesting farmers and asked, "how do you control it if the government is not serious about what they have been demanding for two months?"

Several roads were closed again on Wednesday near the police headquarters and Connaught Place, a shopping area close to government offices, following a protest by some retired Delhi police officers demanding prosecution of the protesting farmers who engaged in violence, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

Since returning to power for a second term, Modi's government has been rocked by several convulsions. The pandemic sent India's already-teetering economy into recession, social strife has widened and his government has been questioned over its response to the coronavirus pandemic. India last suffered a recession in 1979-80 after an oil shock.

In addition, India has seen a rising tide of Hindu nationalism under Modi that has rankled minority groups. In 2019, the year that witnessed the first major protests against his administration, a diverse coalition of groups rallied against a contentious new citizenship law that they said discriminated against Muslims.

Anger is now also beginning to rise among Sikhs, though the farmers' protests remain largely driven by economic factors. India is predominantly Hindu while Muslims comprise 14% and Sikhs nearly 2% of its nearly 1.4 billion people.

"The government on the national security front has failed. I think this government seems to be quite blinkered on the kind of security challenges that it is creating for itself by alienating minority communities, Muslims and Sikhs," said Jerath, the political analyst.

Tuesday's escalation overshadowed Republic Day celebrations, including the annual military parade that was already scaled back because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Neeraja Choudhury, a political analyst, said the government failed to anticipate what was coming and prepare for it adequately. "If the farmers are agitated overall India, you can't dismiss the protests as some opposition inciting the farmers."

Police said the protesting farmers broke away from the approved protest routes and resorted to "violence and vandalism." Anil Kumar, a police spokesman, said more than 300 police personnel were injured in

clashes. Several jumped into a deep dry drain in the fort area to escape the protesters who outnumbered them at several places.

Police said one protester died after his tractor overturned, but farmers said he was shot. Several bloodied protesters could be seen in television footage, it's not known how many were injured.

Eight buses and 17 private vehicles were damaged, said police, who filed vandalism charges against the protesters.

Biden says he's 'bringing back the pros' for virus briefings

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For nearly a year it was the Trump show. Now President Joe Biden is calling up the nation's top scientists and public health experts to regularly brief the American public about the pandemic that has claimed more than 425,000 U.S. lives.

Beginning Wednesday, administration experts will host briefings three times a week on the state of the outbreak, efforts to control it and the race to deliver vaccines and therapeutics to end it.

Expect a sharp contrast from the last administration's briefings, when public health officials were repeatedly undermined by a president who shared his unproven ideas without hesitation.

"We're bringing back the pros to talk about COVID in an unvarnished way," Biden told reporters Tuesday. "Any questions you have, that's how we'll handle them because we're letting science speak again."

The new briefings, beginning just a week into Biden's tenure, are meant as an explicit rejection of his predecessor's approach to the coronavirus outbreak.

President Donald Trump claimed center stage and muddled the message of the nation's top public health experts in the critical early days of the virus and eventually largely muzzled them as the pandemic's mortal toll grew steeper.

The new briefings are part of Biden's attempt to rebuild public confidence in institutions, particularly the federal government, with a commitment to share the bad news with the good.

"I'll always level with you about the state of affairs," he said Tuesday, repeating a central pledge of his inaugural address.

It's a message that helped carry Biden to the White House. As a candidate he warned that the nation faced a surge of coronavirus cases in what would be a "dark winter"; Trump, for his part, falsely claimed the worst of the virus was over.

Dr. David Hamer, a professor of global health and medicine at Boston University's School of Public Health, said having briefings from health officials that are "based on serious science" would go a long way toward improving public perceptions of the vaccine.

"There's a certain amount of vaccine hesitancy, and so educating people about the vaccine, how it works, how safe it is and how it can protect against the disease but also slow transmission is really important," he said.

The stakes for Biden, whose presidency hinges on his handling of the pandemic and the largest vaccination campaign in global history, could hardly be higher.

Biden is pushing a weary populace to recommit to social distancing measures and mask-wearing, pointing to scientific models that suggest the practices could save 50,000 lives over the coming months. He has insisted members of his administration model best behaviors for the country.

Those messages found few champions in the former administration, as Trump openly flouted science-based guidance from his own administration. Face coverings were sparse at his reelection rallies and social distancing nearly nonexistent.

In the weeks leading up to Biden's inauguration, the U.S. set records in new cases and reported deaths almost by the day, as many states reimposed costly restrictions to slow the spread of the virus. Even so, Trump restricted media appearances by his top scientists and public health officials and continued to spread misinformation.

Asked by CNN last week if the lack of candor from the Trump administration about the virus had cost

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lives, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, replied, "You know, it very likely did."

The Trump administration ended the practice of regular scientific briefings early in the pandemic, after Trump expressed anger over dire warnings about the virus by Dr. Nancy Messonnier, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's immunization and respiratory director who is leading the agency's COVID-19 efforts.

Trump later told journalist Bob Woodward that he had been "playing it down" to avoid creating panic about the virus. Aides said he also was trying to protect the economy to boost his reelection prospects.

As the pandemic took hold in the U.S. last spring, Trump adopted the position of a "wartime president," holding extended briefings at the White House, where he — not science — was the star. Trump pointed to the strong television ratings for his early appearances and timed the sessions to overtake the national evening news.

From the briefing room, Trump shared his skepticism about face coverings, despite the widespread conclusions of scientists that wearing a mask helps prevent the spread of the virus. He wondered aloud if Americans could ingest toxic bleach to kill the virus like cleaning a surface. He encouraged governors to "reopen" their states, even as cases surged.

Wednesday's briefing will be conducted virtually, rather than in person at the White House, to allow for questions from health journalists and to maintain a set timing no matter the schedule in the West Wing. It will feature Jeff Zients, the Biden administration's coordinator for pandemic response; his deputy, Andy Slavitt; Fauci; Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, the chair of Biden's COVID-19 equality task force; and Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the CDC.

It comes as government scientists, led by Fauci, have been making regular media appearances to share their expertise in television and podcast interviews. Last week, Fauci called his current circumstances "liberating" and offered that "one of the new things in this administration is, if you don't know the answer, don't guess."

Hamer said that the Trump administration had created enough confusion and distrust around the coronavirus and the vaccine that the Biden administration has a long way to go to rebuild public trust, adding that some Americans may never come around.

"It will take time. It's hard to say exactly how much damage has been done," he said. "I think there could be pockets within the country that may be more resistant to listening to evidence, because they may have set their minds on what they've heard from the past. But others still can be swayed and educated."

Associated Press writer Alexandra Jaffe contributed to this report.

Tensions rise as AstraZeneca, EU hold vaccine delivery talks

By RAF CASERT and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's dispute with AstraZeneca intensified Wednesday with the Anglo-Swedish drugmaker denying the EU's assertion that it had pulled out of talks on vaccine supplies.

AstraZeneca said in a statement that it still planned to meet with EU officials in Brussels later in the day. The comments came after EU officials said the company had informed the bloc that it wouldn't take part in a meeting to discuss delayed vaccine commitments — the third such talks in as many days .

"The representative of AstraZeneca had announced this morning, had informed us this morning, that their participation is not confirmed, is not happening," said Dana Spinant, the EU Commission's spokeswoman.

The spat between AstraZeneca and the EU has raised concerns about vaccine nationalism, as countries desperate to end the pandemic and return to normalcy jockey for limited supplies of the precious vaccine shots.

The latest disagreement between the two sides came after AstraZeneca rejected the EU's accusation that the company had failed to honor its commitments to deliver coronavirus vaccines. AstraZeneca said the figures in its contract with the EU were targets that couldn't be met because of problems in rapidly expanding production capacity.

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Chief Executive Pascal Soriot made the comments in an interview with the Italian newspaper La Repubblica following days of criticism from EU leaders furious about the news that initial shipments from AstraZeneca would be lower than anticipated.

The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker said last week that it planned to cut initial deliveries in the EU to 31 million doses from 80 million due to reduced yield in the manufacturing process.

"Our contract is not a contractual commitment," Soriot said. "It's a best effort. Basically we said we're going to try our best, but we can't guarantee we're going to succeed. In fact, getting there, we are a little bit delayed."

AstraZeneca said in a statement that it understands and shares "in the frustration that initial supply volumes of our vaccine delivered to the European Union will be lower than forecast."

On Monday, the EU threatened to impose tight export controls within days on COVID-19 vaccines made in the bloc.

The EU, which has 450 million citizens and the economic and political clout of the world's biggest trading bloc, is lagging badly behind countries like Israel and Britain in rolling out coronavirus vaccine shots for its health care workers and most vulnerable people. That's despite having over 400,000 confirmed virus deaths since the pandemic began.

The shortfall of planned deliveries of the AstraZeneca vaccine is coming at the same time as a slowdown in the distribution of Pfizer-BioNTech shots as that company upgrades production facilities at a plant in Belgium.

Kirka reported from London.

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GOP signals unwillingness to part with Trump after riot

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Donald Trump has lost his social media megaphone, the power of government and the unequivocal support of his party's elected leaders. But a week after leaving the White House in disgrace, a large-scale Republican defection that would ultimately purge him from the party appears unlikely.

Many Republicans refuse to publicly defend Trump's role in sparking the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. But as the Senate prepares for an impeachment trial for Trump's incitement of the riot, few seem willing to hold the former president accountable.

After House Republicans who backed his impeachment found themselves facing intense backlash — and Trump's lieutenants signaled the same fate would meet others who joined them — Senate Republicans voted overwhelmingly Tuesday for an attempt to dismiss his second impeachment trial. Only five Republican senators rejected the challenge to the trial.

Trump's conviction was considered a real possibility just days ago after lawmakers whose lives were threatened by the mob weighed the appropriate consequences — and the future of their party. But the Senate vote on Tuesday is a sign that while Trump may be held in low regard in Washington following the riots, a large swath of Republicans is leery of crossing his supporters, who remain the majority of the party's voters.

"The political winds within the Republican Party have blown in the opposite direction," said Ralph Reed, chair of the Faith and Freedom Coalition and a Trump ally. "Republicans have decided that even if one believes he made mistakes after the November election and on Jan. 6, the policies Trump championed and victories he won from judges to regulatory rollback to life to tax cuts were too great to allow the party to leave him on the battlefield."

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The vote came after Trump, who decamped last week to his private Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, began wading back into politics between rounds of golf. He took an early step into the Arkansas governor's race by endorsing former White House aide Sarah Huckabee Sanders, and backed Kelli Ward, an ally who won reelection as chair of Arizona's Republican Party after his endorsement.

At the same time, Trump's team has given allies an informal blessing to campaign against the 10 House Republicans who voted in favor of impeachment.

After Michigan Rep. Peter Meijer backed impeachment, Republican Tom Norton announced a primary challenge. Norton appeared on longtime Trump adviser Steve Bannon's podcast in a bid to raise campaign contributions.

On Thursday, another Trump loyalist, Rep. Matt Gaetz, plans to travel to Wyoming to condemn home-state Rep. Liz Cheney, a House GOP leader who said after the Capitol riot that "there has never been a greater betrayal by a president of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution."

Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr. — a star with Trump's loyal base — has encouraged Gaetz on social media and embraced calls for Cheney's removal from House leadership.

Trump remains livid with Republican Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia, who refused to support Trump's false charges that Georgia's elections were fraudulent. Kemp is up for reelection in 2022, and Trump has suggested former Rep. Doug Collins run against him.

Ohio Republican Sen. Rob Portman's decision not to seek reelection in 2022 opens the door for Rep. Jim Jordan, one of Trump's most enthusiastic supporters, to seek the seat. Several other Republicans, some far less supportive of the former president, are also considering running.

Trump's continued involvement in national politics so soon after his departure marks a dramatic break from past presidents, who typically stepped out of the spotlight, at least temporarily. Former President Barack Obama was famously seen kitesurfing on vacation with billionaire Richard Branson shortly after he left office, and former President George W. Bush took up painting.

Trump, who craves the media spotlight, was never expected to burrow out of public view.

"We will be back in some form," he told supporters at a farewell event before he left for Florida. But exactly what form that will take is a work in progress.

Trump remains deeply popular among Republican voters and is sitting on a huge pot of cash — well over \$50 million — that he could use to prop up primary challenges against Republicans who backed his impeachment or refused to support his failed efforts to challenge the election results using bogus allegations of mass voter fraud in states like Georgia.

"POTUS told me after the election that he's going to be very involved," said Matt Schlapp, the chair of the American Conservative Union. "I think he's going to stay engaged. He's going to keep communicating. He's going to keep expressing his opinions. I, for one, think that's great, and I encouraged him to do that."

Aides say he also intends to dedicate himself to winning back the House and Senate for Republicans in 2022. But for now, they say their sights are on the trial.

"We're getting ready for an impeachment trial — that's really the focus," said Trump adviser Jason Miller.

Trump aides have also spent recent days trying to assure Republicans that he is not currently planning to launch a third party — an idea he has floated — and will instead focus on using his clout in the Republican Party.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said he received a call from Brian Jack, the former White House political director, on Saturday at home to assure him that Trump had no plans for defection.

"The main reason for the call was to make sure I knew from him that he's not starting a third party and if I would be helpful in squashing any rumors that he was starting a third party. And that his political activism or whatever role he would play going forward would be with the Republican Party, not as a third party," Cramer said.

The calls were first reported by Politico.

But the stakes remain high for Trump, whose legacy is a point of fierce contention in a Republican Party that is grappling with its identity after losing the White House and both chambers of Congress. Just three

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weeks after a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol, Trump's political standing among Republican leaders in Washington remains low.

"I don't know whether he incited it, but he was part of the problem, put it that way," said Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville, a strong Trump supporter, when asked about the Capitol siege and the related impeachment trial.

Tuberville did not say whether he would personally defend Trump in the trial, but he downplayed the prospect of negative consequences for those Republican senators who ultimately vote to convict him.

"I don't think there'll be any repercussions," Tuberville said. "People are going to vote how they feel anyway."

Trump maintains a strong base of support within the Republican National Committee and in state party leadership, but even there, Republican officials have dared to speak out against him in recent days in ways they did not before.

In Arizona, Ward, who had Trump's backing, was only narrowly reelected over the weekend, even as the party voted to censure a handful of Trump's Republican critics, including former Sen. Jeff Flake and Cindy McCain, the widow of Sen. John McCain.

At the same time, Trump's prospective impeachment sparked a bitter feud within the RNC.

In a private email exchange obtained by The Associated Press, RNC member Demetra DeMonte of Illinois proposed a resolution calling on every Republican senator to oppose what she called an "unconstitutional sham impeachment trial, motivated by a radical and reckless Democrat majority."

Bill Palatucci, a Republican committeeman from New Jersey, slapped back.

"His act of insurrection was an attack on our very democracy and deserves impeachment," Palatucci wrote.

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

US boosting vaccine deliveries amid complaints of shortages

By JONATHAN DREW and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

Answering growing frustration over vaccine shortages, President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. is ramping up deliveries to hard-pressed states over the next three weeks and expects to provide enough doses to vaccinate 300 million Americans by the end of the summer or early fall.

Biden, calling the push a "wartime effort," said Tuesday the administration was working to buy an additional 100 million doses of each of the two approved coronavirus vaccines. He acknowledged that states in recent weeks have been left guessing how much vaccine they will have from one week to the next.

Shortages have been so severe that some vaccination sites around the U.S. had to cancel tens of thousands of appointments with people seeking their first shot.

"This is unacceptable," Biden said. "Lives are at stake."

He promised a roughly 16% boost in deliveries to states over the next three weeks.

The administration said it plans to buy another 100 million doses each from drugmakers Pfizer and Moderna to ensure it has enough vaccine for the long term. Even more vaccine could be available if federal scientists approve a single-dose shot from Johnson & Johnson, which is expected to seek emergency authorization in the coming weeks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the government plans to make about 10.1 million first and second doses available next week, up from this week's allotment of 8.6 million. The figures represent doses of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. It was not immediately clear how long the surge of doses could be sustained.

Governors and top health officials have been increasingly raising the alarm about inadequate supplies and the need for earlier and more reliable estimates of how much vaccine is on the way so that they can plan.

Biden's team held its first virus-related call with the nation's governors on Tuesday and pledged to pro-

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vide states with firm vaccine allocations three weeks ahead of delivery.

Biden's announcement came a day after he grew more bullish about exceeding his vaccine pledge to deliver 100 million injections in his first 100 days in office, suggesting that a rate of 1.5 million doses per day could soon be achieved.

The administration has also promised more openness and said it will hold news briefings three times a week, beginning Wednesday, about the outbreak that has killed more than 425,000 people in the United States.

"We appreciate the administration stating that it will provide states with slightly higher allocations for the next few weeks, but we are going to need much more supply," said Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican.

The setup inherited from the Trump administration has been marked by miscommunication and unexplained bottlenecks, with shortages reported in some places even as vaccine doses remain on the shelf.

Officials in West Virginia, which has had one of the best rates of administering vaccine, said they have fewer than 11,000 first doses on hand even after this week's shipment.

"I'm screaming my head off" for more, Republican Gov. Jim Justice said.

California, which has faced criticism over a slow vaccine rollout, announced Tuesday that it is centralizing its hodgepodge of county systems and streamlining appointment sign-up, notification and eligibility. Residents have been baffled by the varying rules in different counties.

And in Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said that the limited supply of vaccine from the federal government is prompting the state to repurpose second doses as first doses, though he expects that people scheduled for their second shot will still be able to keep their appointments.

The weekly allocation cycle for first doses begins on Monday nights, when federal officials review data on vaccine availability from manufacturers to determine how much each state can have. Allocations are based on each jurisdiction's population of people 18 and older.

States are notified on Tuesdays of their allocations through a computer network called Tiberius and other channels, after which they can specify where they want doses shipped. Deliveries start the following Monday.

A similar but separate process for ordering second doses, which must be given three to four weeks after the first, begins each week on Sunday night.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the CDC reported that just over half of the 44 million doses distributed to states have been put in people's arms. That is well short of the hundreds of millions of doses that experts say will need to be administered to achieve herd immunity and conquer the outbreak.

The U.S. ranks fifth in the world in the number of doses administered relative to the country's population, behind No. 1 Israel, United Arab Emirates, Britain and Bahrain, according to the University of Oxford.

The reason more of the available shots in the U.S. haven't been dispensed isn't entirely clear. But many vaccination sites are apparently holding large quantities of vaccine in reserve to make sure people who have already gotten their first shot receive the required second one on schedule.

Also, some state officials have complained of a lag between when they report their vaccination numbers to the government and when the figures are posted on the CDC website.

In the New Orleans area, Ochsner Health said Monday that inadequate supply forced the cancellation last week of 21,400 first-dose appointments but that second-dose appointments aren't affected.

In North Carolina, Greensboro-based Cone Health announced it is canceling first-dose appointments for 10,000 people and moving them to a waiting list because of supply problems.

Jesse Williams, 81, of Reidsville, North Carolina, said his appointment Thursday with Cone Health was scratched, and he is waiting to hear when it might be rescheduled. The former volunteer firefighter had hoped the vaccine would enable him to resume attending church, playing golf and seeing friends.

"It's just a frustration that we were expecting to be having our shots and being a little more resilient to COVID-19," he said.

The vaccine rollout across the 27-nation European Union has also run into roadblocks and has likewise been criticized as too slow. Pfizer is delaying deliveries while it upgrades its plant in Belgium to increase

capacity. And AstraZeneca disclosed that its initial shipment will be smaller than expected.

The EU, with 450 million citizens, is demanding that the pharmaceutical companies meet their commitments on schedule.

Associated Press writers around the U.S. contributed to this report.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Shoah survivors to get vaccine on Auschwitz liberation day

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and PHILIPP JENNE Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Hundreds of Holocaust survivors in Austria and Slovakia were poised to get their first coronavirus vaccination Wednesday, acknowledging their past suffering with a special tribute 76 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, where the Nazis killed more than 1 million Jews and others.

"We owe this to them," said Erika Jakubovits, the Jewish Community of Vienna organizer of the vaccination drive. "They have suffered so much trauma and have felt even more insecure during this pandemic."

More than 400 Austrian survivors, most in their 80s or 90s, were expected to get their first coronavirus shot at Vienna's largest vaccination center set up in the Austrian capital's convention center. Some were being brought by shuttle or by ambulance, while others were being brought in by their children. The fittest among them were even planning on taking the subway.

Jakubovits organized the vaccination drive with the support from the Austrian Health Ministry and Vienna city officials. Twelve doctors, all members of the Viennese Jewish community, volunteered to vaccinate the survivors.

Though organized to take place on what is known as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, vaccinations were not just being offered to survivors of the Shoah, but also all other Jews in the area older than 85.

Some survivors from Vienna's 8,000-person strong Jewish community already received the vaccination in December, when residents of the community's Jewish nursing home were vaccinated, Jakubovits said.

More broadly, a majority of elderly Austrians living in nursing homes have already received the first shot of a vaccine against COVID-19, the Austrian news agency APA reported.

Earlier this week, the president of the European Jewish Congress, or EJC, called on all countries in the European Union to ensure that Holocaust survivors have access to coronavirus vaccines as quickly as possible.

With the end of World War II now more than seven decades ago, the world's approximately 240,000 Holocaust survivors are all elderly. Since many were deprived of proper nutrition when they were young, they suffer from numerous medical issues today. In addition, many live isolated lives, having lost their entire families and also have psychological stresses because of their persecution under the Nazis.

More than six million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis during the Third Reich.

The vast majority of those killed in the Auschwitz death camp were Jews from across Europe, but other non-Jewish prisoners, including Poles, Roma and Soviet soldiers were also among the victims.

About 192,000 Jews lived in Austria before World War II. After the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938, which was enthusiastically supported by many Austrians, more than 100,000 Jews fled the country.

Tens of thousands were murdered in death camps and by the end of the war in 1945, only very few Austrian Jews remained in the country, most having hidden from the Nazis.

The EJC estimates that today only about 20,000 Holocaust survivors still live in the European Union.

"Throughout their lives, they have shown mighty strength of spirit, but in the current crisis, many have sadly died alone and in pain, or are now fighting for their lives, and many others are suffering from extreme isolation," said Moshe Kantor, the head of the EJC. "We have a duty to survivors, to ensure that they are able to live their last years in dignity, without fear, and in the company of their loved ones."

Vaccination efforts across the EU's 27 nations have been off to a slow start with not enough doses avail-

able, leading to wide criticism of officials.

In a similar project to that in Vienna, the Jewish community of Bratislava in Slovakia was also to vaccinate survivors on Wednesday.

"We're very, very grateful that the vaccinations are taking place on this symbolic day," said Tomas Stern, the head of the Jewish community in Bratislava.

Some 128 survivors were to receive their first shot at Bratislava's Jewish community center on Wednesday and another 330 across the country in the coming days.

In Israel, home to many Holocaust survivors, more than 80% of those over 70 have already received at least one dose of the vaccine, and nearly 60% have received the second dose. Because Israel's vaccination campaign has moved so quickly, there was no need to single out Holocaust survivors.

Still, about 900 Holocaust survivors died of COVID-19 in Israel last year before vaccines were available and about 5,300 survivors were infected, according to Israel's national statistics office.

Grieshaber reported from Berlin, Josef Federman contributed from Jerusalem.

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>

France's Sanofi to make vaccines from rival Pfizer-BioNTech

PARIS (AP) — French drug maker Sanofi said Wednesday it will help manufacture 125 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine developed by rivals Pfizer and BioNTech, while its own vaccine candidate faces delays.

The Germany-based BioNTech will initially produce the vaccines at Sanofi facilities in Frankfurt, starting in the summer, according to a Sanofi statement. The company did not reveal financial details of the agreement.

The French government has been pressing Sanofi to use its facilities to help make vaccines from its rivals, given high demand and problems with supplies of the few vaccines that are already available.

"We are very conscious that the earlier vaccine doses are available, the more lives can potentially be saved," Sanofi CEO Paul Hudson said in the statement.

Sanofi and British partner GlaxoSmithKline will start a new phase-2 trial of their COVID-19 vaccine next month, Sanofi said. The two companies said last month that their vaccine won't be ready until late 2021 because the shot's effectiveness in older people needed to be improved.

The European Union has been widely criticized for its slow rollout of a mass vaccination program. The bloc has approved using vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, and its regulatory agency on Friday was to consider approval for the vaccine made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

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>

IOC, Tokyo Olympics to unveil rule book for beating pandemic

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Remember the word: Playbook.

This is the rule book that the IOC and Tokyo organizers are set to roll out next week to explain how 15,400 Olympic and Paralympic athletes and tens of thousands of others will try to safely enter Japan when the Olympics open in just under six months.

Organizers and the International Olympic Committee are finally going public with their planning, hoping to push back against reports the Olympics will be canceled with Tokyo and much of Japan still under a state of emergency with COVID-19 cases rising.

The rollout at Olympic headquarters in Switzerland is planned for Feb. 4, with Tokyo likely to present on Feb. 5.

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"We created four different scenarios, one that had travel restrictions, clusters — to one where the pandemic was nearly gone," Lucia Montanarella, head of IOC media operations, explained Tuesday for a panel discussion held by the International Sports Press Association.

"The present scenario is very much like one of those that we'd created, with the pandemic still among us, and some countries being able to contain it, some not."

The playbook will be about creating safe bubbles in Tokyo, and will be updated with changing protocols as the July 23 opening gets closer. The Paralympics are scheduled to open on Aug. 24.

Athletes and those traveling to Japan — coaches, judges, media, broadcasters, VIPS — are likely to face some self-quarantine period before they leave home. This will be followed by tests at the airport, tests arriving in Japan, and frequent testing for those staying in the Athletes Village alongside Tokyo Bay.

Montanarella said "we know that we are facing a huge challenge, this is to create a bubble for all athletes. One thing is to create a bubble for 200 athletes in just one sport, and a very different thing is to create a bubble for thousands of athletes of different sports."

A major unanswered question involves fans. How many fans will be allowed into venues? Will fans from abroad be permitted?

Olympic Minister Seiko Hashimoto said Tuesday that the decision will be announced "by the spring." Fewer fans means more costs for Japan. The local organizing committee expected to receive \$800 million from ticket sales. Any shortfall will have to be made up by Japanese government entities.

Craig Spence, a spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee, said organizers must get the support of the Japanese public amid polls that show 80% of those surveyed think the Olympics should be canceled or postponed.

"If you are an athlete or a stakeholder, you will not be able to get on a plane until you provide a negative test," Spence told Associated Press. "When you see the number of tests we are going to do (on site), that should reassure people."

IOC President Thomas Bach, who has said vaccines are not "obligatory," is still pushing for all participants to be vaccinated. The World Health Organization said earlier this week that Olympic athletes should not be a priority ahead of health care workers, the elderly and the vulnerable.

The IOC has had its high-profile members speaking publicly.

IOC member Sebastian Coe was on Japanese television on Wednesday, and IOC member Dick Pound suggested last week the "most realistic way of going ahead" was prioritizing athletes. He received strong opposition.

The IOC receives almost 75% of its income from selling broadcast rights. Tokyo could be worth \$2 billion to \$3 billion in rights income, making Japan's games a financial imperative — even if it becomes a primarily television-only event.

"It is a difficult project with a number of demands," IOC executive board member Gerardo Werthein told the Argentine news site Infobae. "Circumstances force us to do these things, and it is a great challenge."

Japan has more than 5,000 deaths attributed to COVID-19, but its health care system is under stress with deaths and new cases rising. A vaccine rollout is expected next month, but later in spring for much of the general public.

The president of the Japan Medical Association sounded a warning last week when asked about the Olympics and possible patients from abroad.

"Many people will come from abroad, and it's a huge number, even with just the athletes," Dr. Toshio Nakagawa said. "In this situation, if coronavirus patients appear among them as a collapse of the medical system is happening and is spreading, it will not be possible to accept them. Unless a miracle happens, such as the vaccine rollout suddenly succeeding, or a cure is suddenly found, we are not able to accept more patients."

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Amid crisis, Hezbollah 'bank' a lifeline for some Lebanese

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By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — When Lebanon's financial meltdown began in late 2019, Hassan Shoumar was locked out of his dollar savings like everyone else in the country as banks clamped down with capital controls.

But the young engineer had an alternative. He could still pull out the dollars in his account at the al-Qard al-Hasan Association, the financial arm of the militant Hezbollah group.

Shoumar had kept an account at the association for years, ever since he had taken a loan from it to pay university fees. Unlike Lebanon's commercial banks, the accounts at the association didn't earn interest. But the 28-year-old Shoumar didn't care about that.

"What I care about is that when I want my money, I can get it," he said by telephone from south Lebanon.

Stepping in where the state and financial institutions have failed, Hezbollah is providing a vital lifeline for some Lebanese. In the country's wrecked economy, everyone is desperate for hard currency and liquidity as the local currency plummets in value. At commercial banks, depositors stand in line for hours and fight with managers in vain to access their dollar savings. Most banks have stopped giving loans.

But at Hezbollah's al-Qard al-Hasan people can take out small, interest-free loans in dollars, enabling them to pay school fees, get married, buy a used car or open a small business. They can also open saving accounts there.

The association, officially a non-profit charity, is one of the tools by which Hezbollah entrenches its support among the country's Shiite population, even as the group has come under enormous criticism over the past year among Lebanese furious at the political elite.

With poverty rising across Lebanon, Hezbollah provides its community with low-cost schools and hospitals and distributes heating fuel to the poor. Hezbollah continues to pay its fighters and employees in its institutions in U.S. dollars, while everyone else gets their salaries in Lebanese pounds, which lost about 80% of their value in the crisis.

Over the past year, the al-Qard al-Hasan association has seen a significant increase in clients, despite it being under U.S. Treasury sanctions since 2007.

"People's lack of confidence in the banking sector forced them to find other places," said Batoul Tahini, a spokeswoman for the association.

She said the number of deposits was much higher than 2019 and previous years, though loans did not increase very much. She declined to give exact figures.

In a recent speech, Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said around 300,000 people currently are dealing with the association on loans. The association says its clients are from Lebanon's various sects. But the vast majority are believed to be Shiite Muslims.

Roy Badaro, a Lebanese economist, said the association is part of Hezbollah's state-within-a-state and a "disguised way to complement their activity through microfinance, similar to Hezbollah-run schools, hospitals, etc."

"The aim is to absorb the economic crisis among poor Shiites," he said.

Al-Qard al-Hasan, whose name in Arabic means "the benevolent loan," offers interest-free loans up to \$5,000 and, importantly these days, it gives them in dollars. Active for more than three decades, it is considered Lebanon's largest non-banking financial institution giving microloans.

Clients must put up gold as collateral or bring a guarantor. They then pay back the loan in monthly installments for up to 30 months, after which the collateral is returned. Clients can also set up accounts to deposit money, which is then used to finance the loans. The association operates under Islamic rules forbidding interest.

Lebanon's economic and financial crisis is the country's worst in modern history, with the economy contracting 19% in 2020. Tens of thousands around the country have lost their jobs, and nearly half the population of more than 6 million is in poverty.

The crisis shattered people's confidence in Lebanon's banking system, once among the most respected in the region. As banks took a hit, many people decided to keep their money at home, amounting to up to \$10 billion, according to central bank governor Riad Salameh.

That has proven a boon for the al-Qard al-Hasan association, as some turned to it as an alternative to

store their cash.

The risk for Hezbollah is that as poverty rises and the economic crisis worsens, many people might default on their loans, the economist Badaro said. If that happens, Hezbollah might have to use its own funds to cover deposits, he said.

The association's prominence has also made it a target.

A hacking group calling itself "Spiderz" claimed that it broke into the association's system and posted the identities of some clients and security camera footage from some of its branches. It warned clients to withdraw their money or else they might come under American sanctions.

Al-Qard al-Hasan confirmed there was a cyberattack in late December that it called "partial and limited." It told clients not to worry about their identities being revealed. Tahini said the issue is under investigation.

The sight of the association's clients getting their dollars without problems has also bred resentments over Hezbollah's power in Lebanon.

"This shows that Hezbollah is safe and relaxed, while we are in a dilemma," Walid Joumblatt, political leader of Lebanon's Druze community and a Hezbollah critic, said in an interview with Sky News Arabia. He joked that he was growing his beard like conservative Muslims to get a loan from al-Qard al-Hasan.

In a speech days later, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah shot back, saying all anyone had to do was fill out an application and put up the gold collateral.

He also depicted the association as rock solid, providing \$3.7 billion in loans to some 1.8 million people since it was founded. He boasted that U.S. sanctions on Hezbollah officials only strengthened al-Qard al-Hasan, since some of them moved their accounts from banks to the association.

He revealed for the first time that during the 2006 war with Israel, Israeli warplanes struck a site where money and gold were stored. Despite that, he boasted, every client got their money.

"No one ever lost a cent," he said.

No Mardi Gras parades, so thousands make 'house floats'

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — You just can't keep a good city down, especially when Mardi Gras is coming.

All around New Orleans, thousands of houses are being decorated as floats because the coronavirus outbreak canceled the elaborate parades mobbed by crowds during the Carnival season leading to Fat Tuesday.

Some smaller groups announced no-parade plans before the city did. Pandemic replacements include scavenger hunts for signature trinkets that normally would be thrown from floats or handed out from a streetcar, as well as outdoor art and drive-thru or virtual parades. The prominent Krewe of Bacchus has an app where people can catch and trade virtual trinkets during Carnival and watch a virtual parade Feb. 14, when the parade had been scheduled.

But the "house float" movement started almost as soon as a New Orleans spokesman announced Nov. 17 that parades were off.

That morning, Megan Joy Boudreaux posted what she later called a silly Twitter joke: "We're doing this. Turn your house into a float and throw all the beads from your attic at your neighbors walking by."

But the more she thought about it, the more she liked it. She started a Facebook group, the Krewe of House Floats, expecting a few friends and neighbors to join. The numbers rose. Thirty-nine subgroups evolved to discuss neighborhood plans.

By Carnival season's official start Jan. 6, the group had more than 9,000 members, including out-of-state "expats." About 3,000, including a few as far afield as England and Australia, will have their houses on an official online map, said Charlotte "Charlie" Jallans-Daly, one of two mapmakers.

Houses are to be decorated at least two weeks before Fat Tuesday, which is Feb. 16 this year. With widespread addresses and two weeks to gawk, the hope is that people will spread out widely in time and space.

"I didn't think I was starting a Mardi Gras krewe. Here I am," Boudreaux said. "I've got myself a second

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full-time job.”

Discussions in the Facebook groups include how-tos, ads for props and neighborhood themes. Artists have given livestreamed outdoor lessons.

Katie Bankens posted that her block's theme was Shark Week staycation paradise. When a resident worried that she was not “crafty” enough, administrator Carley Sercovich replied that if they could play music and throw trinkets to neighbors, “you are perfect for this Krewe!”

Boudreaux also suggested that people could hire or buy from out-of-work Carnival artists and suppliers hit by the parade cancellation. A spreadsheet of artists and vendors followed. One of them, artist Dominic “Dom” Graves, booked more than 20 five-person classes in professional papier mache techniques, at \$100 a person.

Devin DeWulf, who already had started two pandemic charities as head of the Krewe of Red Beans walking club, kicked the house float idea up a few notches at the suggestion of Caroline Thomas, a professional float designer. Their “Hire a Mardi Gras Artist” crowdfunded lotteries collected enough money to put crews to work decorating 11 houses, plus commissioned work at two more houses and seven businesses.

“We’ve put about 40 people to work, which is nice,” DeWulf said. With Mardi Gras approaching, he said a 12th lottery would be the last.

One commissioned house is rented by a pair of nuns.

Sisters Mary Ann Specha and Julie Walsh, who run a shelter for homeless women with children, had to get permission for their own crowdfunding from the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dubuque, Iowa. “They loved it,” Specha said.

The crowdfunded decorations may be auctioned after Mardi Gras to raise more money, DeWulf said.

Several mansions along a short stretch of St. Charles Avenue had elaborate displays with signs noting their creation by one of the city’s biggest float-making studios.

Tom Fox, whose wife, Madeline, painted a Spongebob Squarepants scene and made jellyfish from dollar store bowls, said he thinks a new tradition may have begun.

“Even when Mardi Gras comes back, I think people are going to keep doing this,” he said.

AP Exclusive: DOJ rescinds ‘zero tolerance’ immigration rule

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department rescinded a Trump-era memo that established a “zero tolerance” enforcement policy for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, which resulted in thousands of family separations.

Acting Attorney General Monty Wilkinson issued the new memo to federal prosecutors across the nation on Tuesday, saying the department would return to its longstanding previous policy and instructing prosecutors to act on the merits of individual cases.

“Consistent with this longstanding principle of making individualized assessments in criminal cases, I am rescinding — effective immediately — the policy directive,” Wilkinson wrote.

Wilkinson said the department’s principles have “long emphasized that decisions about bringing criminal charges should involve not only a determination that a federal offense has been committed and that the admissible evidence will probably be sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction, but should also take into account other individualized factors, including personal circumstances and criminal history, the seriousness of the offense, and the probable sentence or other consequences that would result from a conviction.”

The “zero tolerance” policy meant that any adult caught crossing the border illegally would be prosecuted for illegal entry. Because children cannot be jailed with their family members, families were separated and children were taken into custody by Health and Human Services, which manages unaccompanied children at the border.

While the rescinding of “zero tolerance” is in part symbolic, it undoes the Trump administration’s massively unpopular policy responsible for the separation of more than 5,500 children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. Most families have not been prosecuted under zero tolerance since 2018, when the

separations were halted, though separations have continued on a smaller scale. Practically, the ending of the policy will affect mostly single men who have entered the country illegally. Prosecutions had dropped sharply after the Trump administration declared a pandemic-related health emergency that allows them to immediately expel Mexicans and many Central Americans without applying immigration laws.

"While policies may change, our mission always remains the same: to seek justice under the law," Wilkinson wrote in the memo, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

President Joe Biden has issued an executive order to undo some of Trump's restrictive policies, but the previous administration has so altered the immigration landscape that it will take quite a while to untangle all the major changes. Some of the parents separated from their children were deported. Advocates for the families have called on Biden to allow those families to reunite in the United States.

Then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, along with Trump and other top leaders in his administration, were bent on curbing immigration. The "zero tolerance" policy was one of several increasingly restrictive policies aimed at discouraging migrants from coming to the Southern border. Trump's administration also vastly reduced the number of refugees allowed into the U.S. and all but halted asylum at the border, through a combination of executive orders and regulation changes.

The policy was a disaster; there was no system created to reunite children with their families. A report from the Justice Department's inspector general, released earlier this month, found that the policy led to a \$227 million funding shortfall. Children suffered lasting emotional damage from the separations, and the policy was criticized as grossly inhumane by world leaders.

The policy began April 6, 2018, under an executive order that was issued without warning to other federal agencies that would have to manage the policy, including the U.S. Marshals Service and Health and Human Services. It was halted June 20, 2018. A federal judge ordered the families to be reunited.

The watchdog report also found that Sessions and other top officials knew the children would be separated under the policy and encouraged it. Justice officials ignored concerns from staff about the rollout and did not bother to set up a system to track families in order to reunite them. Some children are still separated.

Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Follow Balsamo and Long on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1> and <https://twitter.com/ctlong1>.

Kerry aims to talk US back into a lead role in climate fight

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

From a wood-paneled library in his Boston mansion, new climate envoy John Kerry is talking the U.S. back into a leading role in global climate action, making clear the nation isn't just revving up its own efforts to reduce oil, gas and coal pollution but that it intends to push everyone in the world to do more, too.

Kerry's diplomatic efforts match the fast pace of domestic climate directives by the week-old Biden administration, which created the job Kerry now holds. Those directives include a Biden order expected Wednesday spelling out how U.S. intelligence, defense and homeland security agencies should address the security threats posed by worsening droughts, floods and other natural disasters under global warming.

At 77, Kerry is working to make a success out of the global climate accord that he helped negotiate in Paris as President Barack Obama's secretary of state — and that he then saw rejected by President Donald Trump, who also spurned all other Obama-era legacy efforts to wean the U.S. and global economies off climate-damaging fossil fuels.

Success for Kerry is hardly assured. At home, he faces pushback from the oil and gas industry and hears concerns that jobs will be lost. Internationally, there's uncertainty about whether Biden's climate commitments can survive the United States' intensely divided politics, let alone the next presidential transition.

Meanwhile, environmentalists are pushing him to be aggressive — even demonstrating outside his house on his first full day on the job.

Underscoring the urgency, Kerry -- working from his home on Boston's patrician Beacon Hill during the

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COVID-19 pandemic -- sat before a computer screen and started talking before sunup last Thursday, his first full day in his new job, to a global business forum in Europe.

Since then, he has spoken virtually with U.S. mayors, foreign presidents and premiers, government ministers and others, until the light from the setting sun slides down the gilt spines of the shelves of leather-bound books in his library.

Kerry exhorts: Put your big one-off COVID-19 economic recovery funding into projects that boost cleaner energy. Get green projects going fast in Republican-leaning U.S. states to prove renewable energy can mean jobs and build needed political support. Get everyone to talk to China about things like stopping the building of dirty-burning coal-fired power plants.

If China and the U.S., as the world's No. 1 and 2 top carbon emitters, don't spell out exactly how they will curb climate-damaging emissions more quickly, "we're all going to lose credibility," Kerry told an online gathering of American mayors last weekend.

The U.S. has to have the "credibility to go to the table, show people what we're doing and push them to do more," Kerry said then. "So everybody can understand it's not fake, it's not a phony, empty promise — it really is getting real."

Kerry is a full-time principal member for climate on the White House's National Security Council. The role acknowledges what climate and military experts say will be growing conflicts around the world as climate change increases competition for natural resources. It takes into account a lack of U.S. readiness to protect military installations and overall infrastructure from worsening flooding and other natural disasters as temperatures rise.

By giving someone of Kerry's stature a job with equally high prominence, Biden aims to "bring the climate issue into the conversation" on national security matters routinely, said John Podesta, a climate counselor for Obama and a White House chief of staff for President Bill Clinton.

Kerry is expected to have desks at both the White House and the State Department.

In the meantime, the home library where Kerry now holds most of his big online meetings earned him a 10 out of 10 from the popular "Room Rater" Twitter account that judges the backdrop décor in people's Zoom calls and TV appearances. That's despite expressing doubt about whether it was a room or a set.

Kerry and other Biden administration climate leaders will be working to set a tougher goal for the U.S. for cutting emissions, as well as making good on pledges to increase climate funding for poorer countries.

On Thursday, the progressive Sunrise Movement's Boston branch had demonstrators outside his Boston house holding signs saying "Kerry be brave." The move shows the left keeping up pressure for what could be a politically tricky level of aggressiveness on cutting fossil fuels.

"Our role is ... now to hold them accountable," Sunrise Movement spokesperson Ellen Sciales said Tuesday, and keep them "pushing us forward to meet the scale and the urgency of the climate crisis."

On the right, some Republican lawmakers and the politically influential oil and gas industry have been subdued in the first week of the Biden administration, saying they hope to work with Kerry and others on climate efforts.

Kerry told the mayors he talked with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia at Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration. Kerry said he and Manchin, who has fought climate regulation he sees threatening his coal state's economy, agreed: Winning the U.S. fight on climate change will depend on getting renewable-energy jobs into places like West Virginia and Tennessee as soon as possible.

Then, "boom, you will begin to have believers," Kerry declared from his library. "They're not going to believe it when we just say it. We have to do it."

First Biden-Putin call shows both cautious on big concerns

By MATTHEW LEE and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin held their first conversation as counterparts Tuesday in a phone call that underscored troubled relations and the delicate balance between the former Cold War foes.

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According to the White House, Biden raised concerns about the arrest of opposition figure Alexei Navalny, Russia's alleged involvement in a massive cyber espionage campaign and reports of Russian bounties on American troops in Afghanistan. The Kremlin, meanwhile, focused on Putin's response to Biden's proposal to extend the last remaining U.S.-Russia arms control treaty.

While the readouts from the two capitals emphasized different elements, they both suggested that U.S.-Russia relations will be guided, at least at the beginning of the Biden administration, by a desire to do no harm but also no urgency to repair existing damage.

The two presidents agreed to have their teams work urgently to complete a five-year extension of the New START nuclear weapons treaty that expires next month. Former President Donald Trump's administration had withdrawn from two arms control treaties with Russia and had been prepared to let New START lapse.

Unlike his immediate predecessors — including Trump, who was enamored of Putin and frequently undercut his own administration's tough stance on Russia — Biden has not held out hope for a "reset" in relations. Instead he has indicated he wants to manage differences without necessarily resolving them or improving ties.

And with a heavy domestic agenda and looming decisions needed on Iran and China, a direct confrontation with Russia is not likely something Biden seeks.

Although the leaders agreed to work together to extend New START before it expires Feb. 5 and to look at other areas of potential strategic cooperation, the White House said Biden was firm on U.S. support for Ukraine's sovereignty, while Russia is supporting separatists in the country's east.

Biden also raised the SolarWinds cyberhack, which has been attributed to Russia, reports of Russian bounties on American soldiers in Afghanistan, interference in the 2020 U.S. election, the poisoning of Navalny and the weekend crackdown on Navalny's supporters.

"President Biden made clear that the United States will act firmly in defense of its national interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies," the White House said. Biden told Putin in the phone call, first reported by The Associated Press, that the U.S. would defend itself and take action, which could include further sanctions, to ensure Moscow does not act with impunity, officials said.

Moscow had reached out last week to request the call, according to U.S. officials familiar with the matter but not authorized to discuss it publicly. Biden agreed, but he wanted first to prepare with his staff and speak with European allies, including the leaders of Britain, France and Germany, which he did.

Before he spoke to Putin, Biden also called NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg to pledge U.S. commitment to the decades-old alliance founded as a bulwark against Russian aggression.

The Kremlin's readout of the call did not address the most contentious issues between the countries, though it said the leaders also discussed other "acute issues on the bilateral and international agenda."

It described the talk as "frank and businesslike" — often a diplomatic way of referring to tense discussions. It also said Putin congratulated Biden on becoming president and "noted that normalization of ties between Russia and the United States would serve the interests of both countries."

Among the issues the Kremlin said were discussed were the coronavirus pandemic, the Iran nuclear agreement, Ukraine and issues related to trade and the economy.

The call came as Putin considers the aftermath of pro-Navalny protests that took place in more than 100 Russian cities over the weekend. Biden's team has already reacted strongly to the crackdown on the protests, in which more than 3,700 people were arrested across Russia, including more than 1,400 in Moscow. More protests are planned for the coming weekend.

Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and Putin's best-known critic, was arrested Jan. 17 as he returned to Russia from Germany, where he had spent nearly five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Biden has previously condemned the use of chemical weapons.

Russian authorities deny the accusations.

Just from the public accounts, Biden's discussion with Putin appeared diametrically opposed to Trump's relationship with the Russian president.

Trump had seemed to seek Putin's approval, frequently casting doubt on Russian interference in the

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2016 elections, including when he stood next to Putin at their 2018 summit in Helsinki. He also downplayed Russia's involvement in the hack of federal government agencies last year and the allegations that Russia offered the Taliban bounties.

Still, despite that conciliatory approach, Trump's administration toed a tough line against Moscow, imposing sanctions on the country, Russian companies and business leaders for issues including Ukraine, energy supplies and attacks on dissidents.

Biden, in his call with Putin, broke sharply with Trump by declaring that he knew that Russia attempted to interfere with both the 2016 and 2020 U.S. elections.

Associated Press writer Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed to this report.

Baseball Hall gets no new members; Schilling 16 votes shy

By JAKE SEINER AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The baseball Hall of Fame won't have any new players in the class of 2021 after voters decided no one had the merits — on the field or off — for enshrinement in Cooperstown.

Curt Schilling, Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens were the closest in voting by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America released Tuesday, and the trio will have one more chance at election next year. It's the first time the BBWAA didn't choose anyone since 2013.

Schilling, a right-handed ace who won three World Series titles, finished 16 votes short of the 75% threshold necessary for enshrinement. He got 71.1% percent this time after coming up 20 votes shy at 70% last year.

Schilling's on-field accomplishments face little dispute, but he has ostracized himself in retirement by directing hateful remarks toward Muslims, transgender people, journalists and others.

"It's all right, the game doesn't owe me anything," Schilling said during a live video stream on his Twitter account.

He later wrote on Facebook that he has asked the Hall of Fame to remove his name from next year's ballot. Hall of Fame Board Chairman Jane Forbes Clark said in a statement that the board "will consider the request at our next meeting."

Bonds (61.8%) and Clemens (61.6%) made minimal gains and joined Schilling in falling short on their ninth tries. Both face suspicions of performance-enhancing drug use — Clemens has denied using PEDs and Bonds has denied knowingly using PEDs.

Bonds also has been accused of domestic violence and Clemens of maintaining a decade-long relationship with a singer who was 15 when they met.

Schilling, Clemens and Bonds will be joined on next year's ballot by sluggers Alex Rodriguez and David Ortiz. Rodriguez was suspended for the 2014 season for violating MLB's PED policy and collective bargaining agreement, and Ortiz's name allegedly appeared on a list of players who tested positive in 2003.

Omar Vizquel, an 11-time Gold Glove winner, dropped from 52.6% last year to 49.1% after his wife accused him of repeated domestic abuses in December. Braves star Andruw Jones, arrested in 2012 on a domestic violence charge, got 33.9% in his fourth year. Rockies slugger Todd Helton, who pleaded guilty to driving under the influence and was sentenced to two days in jail last year, got 44.9% in his third time on the ballot.

Some players missed out over old-fashioned baseball disagreements, too. Slick-fielding third baseman Scott Rolen moved from 35.3% to 52.9% and hard-throwing closer Billy Wagner from 31.7% to 46.4%.

It's the ninth time the BBWAA didn't elect anyone and just the third time since 1971. With the Hall of Fame's Era Committees postponing their scheduled elections until next offseason because of the pandemic, there won't be a new Hall class for the first time since 1960.

Cooperstown won't be without celebration next summer, though. After the 2020 ceremony in the upstate New York village was canceled due to the pandemic, Yankees great Derek Jeter and five-tool star Larry Walker will take center stage on July 25, a year later than planned. They'll be honored alongside catcher

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Ted Simmons and late players' association chief Marvin Miller.

BBWAA members are instructed to elect Hall members "based upon the player's record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played."

At a time when social justice movements are pushing for a broader reckoning on sexual misconduct and racial inequality, character evaluation took on an outsized role in this election cycle. While the Hall's inductees already include racists, cheaters, philanderers and criminals, the current voting bloc has — narrowly, in many cases — taken a stand against candidates they think have insufficient integrity.

With 401 ballots returned, candidates needed 301 votes to gain election. A record 14 voters submitted blank ballots, topping the 12 sent in 2006.

Schilling — a six-time All-Star over 20 seasons with Baltimore, Houston, Philadelphia, Arizona and Boston — has been embroiled in controversy throughout his retirement.

He launched a video game company, 38 Studios, that went bankrupt shortly after receiving a \$75 million loan guarantee from Rhode Island, then was fired as an ESPN analyst after he sent a tweet comparing Muslim extremists to Nazi-era Germans and posted a derogatory Facebook comment about transgender people.

Months later, Schilling was again criticized after using social media to applaud a T-shirt calling for journalists to be lynched.

On Jan. 6, the day of the attack on the U.S. Capitol, he said the following in a message on his Twitter account:

"You cowards sat on your hands, did nothing while liberal trash looted rioted and burned for air Jordan's and big screens, sit back and watch folks start a confrontation for (expletive) that matters like rights, democracy and the end of govt corruption."

That tweet was sent a few days after Hall of Fame ballots were due.

Schilling wrote on Facebook that he would like the veterans committee to review his Hall case. That panel — comprised of former players, managers and others in the game, along with some writers — is tasked with evaluating players who don't get election via the BBWAA vote.

"I'll defer to the veterans committee and men whose opinions actually matter and who are in a position to actually judge a player," Schilling wrote. "I don't think I'm a hall of famer as I've often stated but if former players think I am then I'll accept that with honor.

"In my heart I am at peace," he also wrote. "Nothing, zero, none of the claims being made by any of the writers hold merit."

Bonds' ex-wife testified in 1995 during divorce proceedings that he beat and kicked her. Bonds said he never physically abused her but once kicked her after she kicked him.

In 2008, the New York Daily News reported that Clemens had a decade-long relationship with country singer Mindy McCready that began when she was 15 and he was a star for the Boston Red Sox. Clemens apologized for unspecified mistakes in his personal life and denied having an affair with a 15-year-old. McCready later told "Inside Edition" she met Clemens when she was 16 and that the relationship didn't turn sexual until several years later.

The BBWAA recently voted overwhelmingly to remove the name and imprint of former Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis from MVP plaques. Landis became commissioner in 1920, and there were no Black players in the majors during his more than two decades in charge.

Further down the ballot, outfielder Gary Sheffield jumped from 30.5% to 40.6% on his seventh time on the ballot and Jeff Kent improved from 27.5% to 32.4% in his eighth year.

The 2022 ballot also will include Phillies stars Jimmy Rollins and Ryan Howard, switch-hitting slugger Mark Teixeira and two-time Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum.

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GOP largely sides against holding Trump impeachment trial

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All but five Senate Republicans voted in favor of an effort to dismiss Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial on Tuesday, making clear a conviction of the former president for "incitement of insurrection" after the deadly Capitol siege on Jan. 6 is unlikely.

While the Republicans did not succeed in ending the trial before it began, the test vote made clear that Trump still has enormous sway over his party as he becomes the first former president to be tried for impeachment. Many Republicans have criticized Trump's role in the attack — before which he told his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat — but most of them have rushed to defend him in the trial.

"I think this was indicative of where a lot of people's heads are," said South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, after the vote.

Late Tuesday, the presiding officer at the trial, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., was taken to the hospital for observation after not feeling well at his office, spokesman David Carle said in a statement. The 80-year-old senator was examined by the Capitol's attending physician, who recommended he be taken to the hospital out of an abundance of caution, he said. Later Tuesday, Carle said Leahy had been sent home "after a thorough examination" and was looking forward to getting back to work.

Leahy presided over the trial's first procedural vote, a 55-45 tally that saw the Senate set aside an objection from Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul that would have declared the impeachment proceedings unconstitutional and dismissed the trial.

The vote means the trial on Trump's impeachment will begin as scheduled the week of Feb. 8. The House impeached him Jan. 13, just a week after the deadly insurrection in which five people died.

What seemed for some Democrats like an open-and-shut case that played out for the world on live television is running into a Republican Party that feels very different. Not only do senators say they have legal concerns, but they are wary of crossing the former president and his legions of followers.

It's unclear if any Republicans would vote to convict Trump on the actual charge of incitement after voting in favor of Paul's effort to declare it unconstitutional.

Ohio Sen. Rob Portman said after the vote that he had not yet made up his mind, and that constitutionality "is a totally different issue" than the charge itself.

But many others indicated that they believe the final vote will be similar.

The vote shows that "they've got a long ways to go to prove it," Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst said of House Democrats' charge. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, a close Trump ally, said he thinks the vote was "a floor not a ceiling."

Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford said he thinks that most Republicans will not see daylight between the constitutionality and the article of incitement.

"You're asking me to vote in a trial that by itself on its own is not constitutionally allowed?" he asked.

Conviction would require the support of all Democrats and 17 Republicans, or two-thirds of the Senate — far from the five Republicans who voted with Democrats Tuesday to allow the trial to proceed. They were Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania — all recent critics of the former president and his effort to overturn President Joe Biden's win.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who has said Trump "provoked" the riots and indicated he is open to conviction, voted with Paul to move toward dismissing the trial.

Democrats rejected the argument that the trial is illegitimate or unconstitutional because Trump is no longer in office, pointing to an 1876 impeachment of a secretary of war who had already resigned and to the opinions of many legal scholars.

Democrats also say that a reckoning of the first invasion of the Capitol since the War of 1812, perpetrated by rioters egged on by a president as Electoral College votes were being tallied, is necessary.

"It makes no sense whatsoever that a president, or any official, could commit a heinous crime against

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our country and then defeat Congress' impeachment powers — and avoid a vote on disqualification — by simply resigning, or by waiting to commit that offense until their last few weeks in office," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Before the vote, the senators officially opened the trial by taking oaths to ensure "impartial justice" as jurors. The nine House Democrats prosecuting the case against Trump carried the sole impeachment charge across the Capitol on Monday evening in a solemn and ceremonial march along the same halls the rioters ransacked three weeks ago.

The lead House prosecutor, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, stood before the Senate to describe the violent events of Jan. 6 and read the House resolution charging "high crimes and misdemeanors."

For Democrats the tone, tenor and length of the trial so early in Biden's presidency poses its own challenge, forcing them to strike a balance between their vow to hold Trump accountable and their eagerness to deliver on the new administration's priorities following their sweep of control of the House, Senate and White House.

Chief Justice John Roberts is not presiding at the trial, as he did during Trump's first impeachment, potentially affecting the gravitas of the proceedings. The shift is said to be in keeping with protocol because Trump is no longer in office.

Instead, Leahy, who serves in the largely ceremonial role of Senate president pro tempore, was sworn in on Tuesday.

Leaders in both parties agreed to a short delay in the proceedings, which serves their political and practical interests, even as National Guard troops remain at the Capitol because of security threats to lawmakers ahead of the trial.

The start date gives Trump's still-evolving legal team time to prepare its case, while also providing more than a month's distance from the passions of the bloody riot. For the Democratic-led Senate, the intervening weeks provide prime time to confirm some of Biden's key Cabinet nominees.

US boosting vaccine deliveries amid complaints of shortages

By JONATHAN DREW and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

Answering growing frustration over vaccine shortages, President Joe Biden announced Tuesday that the U.S. is ramping up deliveries to hard-pressed states over the next three weeks and expects to provide enough doses to vaccinate 300 million Americans by the end of the summer or early fall.

Biden, calling the push a "wartime effort," said the administration was working to buy an additional 100 million doses of each of the two approved coronavirus vaccines. He acknowledged that states in recent weeks have been left guessing how much vaccine they will have from one week to the next.

Shortages have been so severe that some vaccination sites around the U.S. had to cancel tens of thousands of appointments with people seeking their first shot.

"This is unacceptable," Biden said. "Lives are at stake."

He promised a roughly 16% boost in deliveries to states over the next three weeks.

The administration said it plans to buy another 100 million doses each from drugmakers Pfizer and Moderna to ensure it has enough vaccine for the long term. Even more vaccine could be available if federal scientists approve a single-dose shot from Johnson & Johnson, which is expected to seek emergency authorization in the coming weeks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the government plans to make about 10.1 million first and second doses available next week, up from this week's allotment of 8.6 million. The figures represent doses of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. It was not immediately clear how long the surge of doses could be sustained.

Governors and top health officials have been increasingly raising the alarm about inadequate supplies and the need for earlier and more reliable estimates of how much vaccine is on the way so that they can plan.

Biden's team held its first virus-related call with the nation's governors on Tuesday and pledged to provide states with firm vaccine allocations three weeks ahead of delivery.

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Biden's announcement came a day after he grew more bullish about exceeding his vaccine pledge to deliver 100 million injections in his first 100 days in office, suggesting that a rate of 1.5 million doses per day could soon be achieved.

The administration has also promised more openness and said it will hold news briefings three times a week, beginning Wednesday, about the outbreak that has killed over 420,000 Americans.

"We appreciate the administration stating that it will provide states with slightly higher allocations for the next few weeks, but we are going to need much more supply," said Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican.

The setup inherited from the Trump administration has been marked by miscommunication and unexplained bottlenecks, with shortages reported in some places even as vaccine doses remain on the shelf.

Officials in West Virginia, which has had one of the best rates of administering vaccine, said they have fewer than 11,000 first doses on hand even after this week's shipment.

"I'm screaming my head off" for more, Republican Gov. Jim Justice said.

California, which has faced criticism over a slow vaccine rollout, announced Tuesday that it is centralizing its hodgepodge of county systems and streamlining appointment sign-up, notification and eligibility. Residents have been baffled by the varying rules in different counties.

And in Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said that the limited supply of vaccine from the federal government is prompting the state to repurpose second doses as first doses, though he expects that people scheduled for their second shot will still be able to keep their appointments.

The weekly allocation cycle for first doses begins on Monday nights, when federal officials review data on vaccine availability from manufacturers to determine how much each state can have. Allocations are based on each jurisdiction's population of people 18 and older.

States are notified on Tuesdays of their allocations through a computer network called Tiberius and other channels, after which they can specify where they want doses shipped. Deliveries start the following Monday.

A similar but separate process for ordering second doses, which must be given three to four weeks after the first, begins each week on Sunday night.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the CDC reported that just over half of the 44 million doses distributed to states have been put in people's arms. That is well short of the hundreds of millions of doses that experts say will need to be administered to achieve herd immunity and conquer the outbreak.

The U.S. ranks fifth in the world in the number of doses administered relative to the country's population, behind No. 1 Israel, United Arab Emirates, Britain and Bahrain, according to the University of Oxford.

The reason more of the available shots in the U.S. haven't been dispensed isn't entirely clear. But many vaccination sites are apparently holding large quantities of vaccine in reserve to make sure people who have already gotten their first shot receive the required second one on schedule.

Also, some state officials have complained of a lag between when they report their vaccination numbers to the government and when the figures are posted on the CDC website.

In the New Orleans area, Ochsner Health said Monday that inadequate supply forced the cancellation last week of 21,400 first-dose appointments but that second-dose appointments aren't affected.

In North Carolina, Greensboro-based Cone Health announced it is canceling first-dose appointments for 10,000 people and moving them to a waiting list because of supply problems.

Jesse Williams, 81, of Reidsville, North Carolina, said his appointment Thursday with Cone Health was scratched, and he is waiting to hear when it might be rescheduled. The former volunteer firefighter had hoped the vaccine would enable him to resume attending church, playing golf and seeing friends.

"It's just a frustration that we were expecting to be having our shots and being a little more resilient to COVID-19," he said.

The vaccine rollout across the 27-nation European Union has also run into roadblocks and has likewise been criticized as too slow. Pfizer is delaying deliveries while it upgrades its plant in Belgium to increase capacity. And AstraZeneca disclosed that its initial shipment will be smaller than expected.

The EU, with 450 million citizens, is demanding that the pharmaceutical companies meet their commitments on schedule.

Associated Press writers around the U.S. contributed to this report.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Biden orders Justice Dept. to end use of private prisons

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

President Joe Biden on Tuesday ordered the Department of Justice to end its reliance on private prisons and acknowledge the central role government has played in implementing discriminatory housing policies.

In remarks before signing the orders, Biden said the U.S. government needs to change "its whole approach" on the issue of racial equity. He added that the nation is less prosperous and secure because of the scourge of systemic racism.

"We must change now," the president said. "I know it's going to take time, but I know we can do it. And I firmly believe the nation is ready to change. But government has to change as well."

Biden rose to the presidency during a year of intense reckoning on institutional racism in the U.S. The moves announced Tuesday reflect his efforts to follow through with campaign pledges to combat racial injustice.

Beyond calling on the Justice Department to curb the use of private prisons and address housing discrimination, the new orders will recommit the federal government to respect tribal sovereignty and disavow discrimination against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community over the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden directed the Department of Housing and Urban Development in a memorandum to take steps to promote equitable housing policy. The memorandum calls for HUD to examine the effects of Trump regulatory actions that may have undermined fair housing policies and laws.

Months before the November election, the Trump administration rolled back an Obama-era rule that required communities that wanted to receive HUD funding to document and report patterns of racial bias.

The order to end the reliance on privately-run prisons directs the attorney general not to renew Justice Department contracts with privately operated criminal detention facilities. The move will effectively revert the Justice Department to the same posture it held at the end of the Obama administration.

"This is a first step to stop corporations from profiting off of incarceration," Biden said.

The more than 14,000 federal inmates housed at privately-managed facilities represent a fraction of the nearly 152,000 federal inmates currently incarcerated.

The federal Bureau of Prisons had already opted not to renew some private prison contracts in recent months as the number of inmates dwindled and thousands were released to home confinement because of the coronavirus pandemic.

GEO Group, a private company that operates federal prisons, called the Biden order "a solution in search of a problem."

"Given the steps the BOP had already announced, today's Executive Order merely represents a political statement, which could carry serious negative unintended consequences, including the loss of hundreds of jobs and negative economic impact for the communities where our facilities are located, which are already struggling economically due to the COVID pandemic," a GEO Group spokesperson said in a statement.

David Fathi, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project, noted that the order does not end the federal government's reliance on privately-run immigration detention centers.

"The order signed today is an important first step toward acknowledging the harm that has been caused and taking actions to repair it, but President Biden has an obligation to do more, especially given his history and promises," Fathi said.

Rashad Robinson, president of the national racial justice organization Color of Change, expressed disappointment that policing was not addressed in the executive action.

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"President Biden's executive orders to not renew contracts with for-profit prisons and to investigate housing discrimination wrought by Trump administration policies provide important steps forward, but do not go far enough," said Robinson, who noted that he had hoped Biden would have moved to reinstate an Obama-era policy barring the transfer of military equipment to local police departments.

The memorandum highlighting xenophobia against Asian Americans is in large part a reaction to what White House officials say was offensive and dangerous rhetoric from the Trump administration. Trump, throughout the pandemic, repeatedly used xenophobic language in public comments when referring to the coronavirus.

This memorandum will direct Health and Human Services officials to consider issuing guidance describing best practices to advance cultural competency and sensitivity toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the federal government's COVID-19 response. It also directs the Department of Justice to partner with AAPI communities to prevent hate crimes and harassment.

The latest executive actions come after Biden signed an order Monday reversing a Trump-era Pentagon policy that largely barred transgender people from serving in the military. Last week, he signed an order reversing Trump's ban on travelers from several predominantly Muslim and African countries.

Biden last week also directed law enforcement and intelligence officials in his administration to study the threat of domestic violent extremism in the United States, an undertaking launched weeks after a mob of insurgents loyal to Trump, including some connected to white supremacist groups, stormed the U.S. Capitol.

White House domestic policy adviser Susan Rice said Biden sees addressing equity issues as also good for the nation's bottom line. She cited a Citigroup study from last year that U.S. gross domestic product lost \$16 trillion over the last 20 years as a result of discriminatory practices in a range of areas, including in education and access to business loans. The same study finds the U.S. economy would be boosted by \$5 trillion over the next five years if it addressed issues of discrimination in areas such as education and access to business loans.

"Building a more equitable economy is essential if Americans are going to compete and thrive in the 21st century," Rice added.

Biden's victory over Trump in several battleground states, including Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, was fueled by strong Black voter turnout.

Throughout his campaign and transition, Biden promised that his administration would keep issues of equity — as well as climate change, another issue he views as an existential crisis — in the shaping of all policy considerations.

Biden, who followed through on early promise to pick a woman to serve as vice president, has also sought to spotlight the diversity of his Cabinet selections.

On Monday, the Senate confirmed Biden's pick for treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, who is the first woman to lead the department. Last week, the Senate confirmed Lloyd Austin as the nation's first Black defense secretary.

Associated Press writer Michael Balsamo and Aaron Morrison contributed to this report.

Kerry aims to talk US back into a lead role in climate fight

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

From a wood-paneled library in his Boston mansion, new climate envoy John Kerry is talking the U.S. back into a leading role in global climate action, making clear the nation isn't just revving up its own efforts to reduce oil, gas and coal pollution but that it intends to push everyone in the world to do more, too.

Kerry's diplomatic efforts match the fast pace of domestic climate directives by the week-old Biden administration, which created the job Kerry now holds. Those directives include a Biden order expected Wednesday spelling out how U.S. intelligence, defense and homeland security agencies should address the security threats posed by worsening droughts, floods and other natural disasters under global warming.

At 77, Kerry is working to make a success out of the global climate accord that he helped negotiate in Paris as President Barack Obama's secretary of state — and that he then saw rejected by President Donald

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Trump, who also spurned all other Obama-era legacy efforts to wean the U.S. and global economies off climate-damaging fossil fuels.

Success for Kerry is hardly assured. At home, he faces pushback from the oil and gas industry and hears concerns that jobs will be lost. Internationally, there's uncertainty about whether Biden's climate commitments can survive the United States' intensely divided politics, let alone the next presidential transition.

Meanwhile, environmentalists are pushing him to be aggressive — even demonstrating outside his house on his first full day on the job.

Underscoring the urgency, Kerry -- working from his home on Boston's patrician Beacon Hill during the COVID-19 pandemic -- sat before a computer screen and started talking before sunup last Thursday, his first full day in his new job, to a global business forum in Europe.

Since then, he has spoken virtually with U.S. mayors, foreign presidents and premiers, government ministers and others, until the light from the setting sun slides down the gilt spines of the shelves of leather-bound books in his library.

Kerry exhorts: Put your big one-off COVID-19 economic recovery funding into projects that boost cleaner energy. Get green projects going fast in Republican-leaning U.S. states to prove renewable energy can mean jobs and build needed political support. Get everyone to talk to China about things like stopping the building of dirty-burning coal-fired power plants.

If China and the U.S., as the world's No. 1 and 2 top carbon emitters, don't spell out exactly how they will curb climate-damaging emissions more quickly, "we're all going to lose credibility," Kerry told an online gathering of American mayors last weekend.

The U.S. has to have the "credibility to go to the table, show people what we're doing and push them to do more," Kerry said then. "So everybody can understand it's not fake, it's not a phony, empty promise — it really is getting real."

Kerry is a full-time principal member for climate on the White House's National Security Council. The role acknowledges what climate and military experts say will be growing conflicts around the world as climate change increases competition for natural resources. It takes into account a lack of U.S. readiness to protect military installations and overall infrastructure from worsening flooding and other natural disasters as temperatures rise.

By giving someone of Kerry's stature a job with equally high prominence, Biden aims to "bring the climate issue into the conversation" on national security matters routinely, said John Podesta, a climate counselor for Obama and a White House chief of staff for President Bill Clinton.

Kerry is expected to have desks at both the White House and the State Department.

In the meantime, the home library where Kerry now holds most of his big online meetings earned him a 10 out of 10 from the popular "Room Rater" Twitter account that judges the backdrop décor in people's Zoom calls and TV appearances. That's despite expressing doubt about whether it was a room or a set.

Kerry and other Biden administration climate leaders will be working to set a tougher goal for the U.S. for cutting emissions, as well as making good on pledges to increase climate funding for poorer countries.

On Thursday, the progressive Sunrise Movement's Boston branch had demonstrators outside his Boston house holding signs saying "Kerry be brave." The move shows the left keeping up pressure for what could be a politically tricky level of aggressiveness on cutting fossil fuels.

"Our role is ... now to hold them accountable," Sunrise Movement spokesperson Ellen Sciales said Tuesday, and keep them "pushing us forward to meet the scale and the urgency of the climate crisis."

On the right, some Republican lawmakers and the politically influential oil and gas industry have been subdued in the first week of the Biden administration, saying they hope to work with Kerry and others on climate efforts.

Kerry told the mayors he talked with Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia at Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration. Kerry said he and Manchin, who has fought climate regulation he sees threatening his coal state's economy, agreed: Winning the U.S. fight on climate change will depend on getting renewable-energy jobs into places like West Virginia and Tennessee as soon as possible.

Then, "boom, you will begin to have believers," Kerry declared from his library. "They're not going to believe it when we just say it. We have to do it."

This story has been corrected to show that Thursday's talk was with a global business forum in Italy, not government ministers.

Baseball gathers behind home plate to honor Hammerin' Hank

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Brian Snitker choked back tears as he remembered Hank Aaron's affection for those who didn't possess his unparalleled talent on the baseball field.

During his post-playing career running the Atlanta Braves farm system, the Hammer had a penchant for looking beyond the can't-miss prospects.

"He always wanted to move a player up, and he preferred that it wasn't the so-called bonus babies," said Snitker, who has managed the Braves since 2016 and got his start in the dugout thanks to Aaron. "He wanted to get that grinder guy, the guy who was overachieving."

Snitker was among those who spoke Tuesday at a memorial service honoring Aaron, who died last week from natural causes at the age of 86.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred, Hall of Famer Chipper Jones and former Braves outfielder Marquis Grissom were among those who spoke at the ceremony, which was held before a small, socially distanced crowd — including Aaron's widow, Billye, and other family members — on the concourse directly behind home plate at Truist Park.

The remarks were delivered in an exhibit known as Monument Garden, which prominently features a statue of Aaron delivering the swing that produced 755 homers.

Others sent videotaped tributes, including Baseball Hall of Famers John Smoltz and Tom Glavine, one-time Aaron teammate and current Houston Astros manager Dusty Baker, reigning National League MVP Freddie Freeman, and former Braves great Dale Murphy, who captured back-to-back MVP awards in the 1980s.

Aaron's famed No. 44 was painted in the dormant grass of center field. Braves Chairman Terry McGuirk noted the unseasonably warm January weather — the temperature climbed into the upper 60s — as a sign from above honoring one of the game's greatest icons.

Noting the 10 Baseball of Famers who have died in the past year, Manfred said Aaron "belongs on our sport's Mount Rushmore. He stood — on and off the field — above all others."

Most of the remembrances focused on Aaron's humbleness and the impact he made after retiring as a player in 1976. Few spoke about him being the one who famously eclipsed Babe Ruth's home run record, or the unprecedented, two-decade-long run of sustained excellence that helped him establish several other marks that still stand today.

Snitker remembered being a non-descript minor leaguer who got a shot at another calling when Aaron offered him his first managing job in 1982 with the Anderson Braves, a team in the Class A Sally League.

"The reason I'm here today is because of Hank Aaron," Snitker said, pausing to maintain his composure.

Snitker toiled in minor league obscurity through most of his coaching and managing career before finally getting the call to become Braves skipper at age 60. Since then, he has guided the team to three straight NL East titles, earning NL Manager of the Year honors in 2018.

"I'll miss the times he used to stop by, come by my office and we could just sit and talk," Snitker said. "I'll miss the friend and the mentor that I had in my life."

Jones recalled how Aaron pushed the Braves to select him with No. 1 overall pick in the 1990 amateur draft, when many considered pitcher Todd Van Poppel to be the leading prospect.

"Hank was very instrumental in me becoming an Atlanta Brave," Jones said. "The room of Braves decision-makers was split on who they were going to take with their first pick. As legendary scout Paul Snyder once told me, the vote came around to Hank. He paused, looked at everybody in the room, and he said, 'Y'all better draft that Jones boy.' I'll never forget that. That comment must've carried some weight."

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Van Poppel didn't do much in the big leagues, finishing with a 40-52 record. Jones spent his entire career with the Braves and was inducted into Cooperstown in 2018.

Jones said he once asked Aaron — who played in an era with dominating pitchers such as Sandy Koufax, Bob Gibson and Juan Marichal — if he was ever intimidated at the plate.

"He said, 'Chipper, I fear no man when I have a bat in my hand,'" Jones said, breaking into a smile.

According to former Braves third baseman, Aaron could be summed up in one word.

Beautiful.

"His swing, his smile, his spirit," Jones said. "They were all beautiful."

A private funeral service for Aaron will be held Wednesday. He will be buried at historic South-View Cemetery, the city's oldest Black cemetery, where he will be interred alongside civil rights leaders such as John Lewis, Julian Bond and Martin Luther King Sr.

The Braves plan to honor Aaron during the upcoming season. McGuirk announced the first of those initiatives: a \$1 million donation to establish the Henry Louis Aaron Fund, which will work to increase minority participation among players, managers, coaches and front-office personnel.

That was an issue that Aaron took a keen issue in throughout his life. He often criticized the lack of Black managers and general managers in Major League Baseball. He fretted fewer African-Americans were playing the game.

The Braves donation will be matched by \$500,000 apiece from both MLB and the players' association.

Manfred pointed to a "strong desire to continue with the good work he did throughout his life, particularly with encouraging minority participation in baseball."

Grissom said he'll always remember the advice Aaron gave him during his college days at Florida A&M, when the team got an impromptu tour of the Hammer's Atlanta home on the way to a game in North Carolina.

"If you get an opportunity, do your very best," Grissom recalled Aaron saying. "Those words stuck with me. They lit a fire in me that is still lit today."

Follow Paul Newberry on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/pnewberry1963> His work can be found at <https://apnews.com/search/paulnewberry>

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Democrats prep Biden's virus aid package with or without GOP

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats are preparing to push ahead quickly on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package even if it means using procedural tools to pass the legislation on their own, leaving Republicans behind.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told senators to be ready to vote as soon as next week on a budget reconciliation package that would lay the groundwork for swift passage. Coming so soon in Biden's administration, the action provides a first test of Republican opposition to the White House priorities as well as to the new president's promise of a "unity" agenda.

"The work must move forward, preferably with our Republican colleagues, but without them if we must," Schumer said after a private meeting of Democratic senators.

"Time is of the essence to address this crisis. We're keeping all options open on the table."

Unwilling to wait for Republicans who argue Biden's price tag is too high and his priorities too wide-ranging, Democrats are flexing their newfound power as they take control of the Senate alongside the House and White House.

It is the first time in a decade the party has held the full sweep of power in Washington, and Democrats say they have no time to waste trying to broker compromises with Republicans that may, or may not, happen. They have watched Republicans use similar procedural tools to advance their priorities, most

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recently the Trump administration's GOP tax cuts.

The fast-moving events days into the new majority on Capitol Hill come as the White House continued meeting privately with groups of Republican and Democratic lawmakers in hopes of striking a bipartisan agreement. Biden's COVID-19 aid package includes money for vaccine distribution, school reopenings and \$1,400 direct payments to households and gradually boosts the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour over five years.

The next steps remain highly fluid.

The bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus of more than 50 House lawmakers had a "productive meeting and constructive conversation" Tuesday with top administration officials on the virus aid and economic recovery package, according to a statement from Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., and Rep. Tom Reed, R-N.Y., who co-chair the group.

A White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the virtual conversation with the caucus, said there was agreement on the scope of the challenges facing the country and the need for additional relief. Biden and other members of his team intend to continue making their case to lawmakers about the need to act with urgency.

Separately, the dozen senators who emerged from a lengthy private meeting with the White House on Sunday evening are talking on their own about trying to craft a more targeted bill. The bipartisan group of senators assembled privately again Monday evening.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters earlier Tuesday that Biden is still looking to negotiate on an aid package, while emphasizing that several components of the existing aid will lapse in March.

"He laid out his big package, his big vision of what it should look like, and people are giving their feedback," Psaki said. "He's happy to have those discussions and fully expects it's not going to look exactly the same on the other end."

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who led a bipartisan effort for the last \$900 billion relief package, is working again with the senators on crafting an alternative package that she has said would be more focused on money for vaccine distribution and tailored economic assistance to the neediest Americans.

Collins said Tuesday that the White House made good on its commitment to deliver a more detailed accounting of the proposed expenditure. But she said the group is still waiting for data on how much funding remains unallocated from past relief measures that, by her tally, totals a whopping \$1.8 trillion still unspent.

Congress has approved some \$4 trillion in emergency aid since the start of the coronavirus pandemic last year, a stunning outlay and the largest rescue package in the nation's history.

Senators from both parties who joined the White House call over the weekend agreed the priority needs to be standing up the country's faltering vaccine distribution system.

With the death toll climbing, and new strains of the virus threatening more trouble ahead, ensuring vaccinations appears to be crucial to stemming the COVID-19 crisis.

Several senators from both parties also said they want the \$1,400 direct checks to be more targeted to those in need. They also want an accounting of what remains from previously approved aid bills.

But Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont and the incoming Budget Committee chair, said he is already working on the budget package for next week and expanding it to include Biden's proposal to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour over five years.

Raising the wage is a long-running Democratic priority that would essentially double the current \$7.25 hourly wage set the last time the party was in control in the Obama administration. Advocates say the pay raise would boost millions of full-time workers from poverty.

"There is a consensus," Sanders told reporters at the Capitol. "If Republicans are not prepared to come on board, that's fine. We're not going to wait. We're going forward soon and aggressively."

AP Exclusive: DOJ rescinds 'zero tolerance' immigration rule

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Tuesday rescinded a Trump-era memo that established

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a “zero tolerance” enforcement policy for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, which resulted in thousands of family separations.

Acting Attorney General Monty Wilkinson issued the new memo to federal prosecutors across the nation, saying the department would return to its longstanding previous policy and instructing prosecutors to act on the merits of individual cases.

“Consistent with this longstanding principle of making individualized assessments in criminal cases, I am rescinding — effective immediately — the policy directive,” Wilkinson wrote.

Wilkinson said the department’s principles have “long emphasized that decisions about bringing criminal charges should involve not only a determination that a federal offense has been committed and that the admissible evidence will probably be sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction, but should also take into account other individualized factors, including personal circumstances and criminal history, the seriousness of the offense, and the probable sentence or other consequences that would result from a conviction.”

The “zero tolerance” policy meant that any adult caught crossing the border illegally would be prosecuted for illegal entry. Because children cannot be jailed with their family members, families were separated and children were taken into custody by Health and Human Services, which manages unaccompanied children at the border.

While the rescinding of “zero tolerance” is in part symbolic, it undoes the Trump administration’s massively unpopular policy responsible for the separation of more than 5,500 children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. Most families have not been prosecuted under zero tolerance since 2018, when the separations were halted, though separations have continued on a smaller scale. Practically, the ending of the policy will affect mostly single men who have entered the country illegally. Prosecutions had dropped sharply after the Trump administration declared a pandemic-related health emergency that allows them to immediately expel Mexicans and many Central Americans without applying immigration laws.

“While policies may change, our mission always remains the same: to seek justice under the law,” Wilkinson wrote in the memo, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

President Joe Biden has issued an executive order to undo some of Trump’s restrictive policies, but the previous administration has so altered the immigration landscape that it will take quite a while to untangle all the major changes. Some of the parents separated from their children were deported. Advocates for the families have called on Biden to allow those families to reunite in the United States.

Then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, along with Trump and other top leaders in his administration, were bent on curbing immigration. The “zero tolerance” policy was one of several increasingly restrictive policies aimed at discouraging migrants from coming to the Southern border. Trump’s administration also vastly reduced the number of refugees allowed into the U.S. and all but halted asylum at the border, through a combination of executive orders and regulation changes.

The policy was a disaster; there was no system created to reunite children with their families. A report from the Justice Department’s inspector general, released earlier this month, found that the policy led to a \$227 million funding shortfall. Children suffered lasting emotional damage from the separations, and the policy was criticized as grossly inhumane by world leaders.

The policy began April 6, 2018, under an executive order that was issued without warning to other federal agencies that would have to manage the policy, including the U.S. Marshals Service and Health and Human Services. It was halted June 20, 2018. A federal judge ordered the families to be reunited.

The watchdog report also found that Sessions and other top officials knew the children would be separated under the policy and encouraged it. Justice officials ignored concerns from staff about the rollout and did not bother to set up a system to track families in order to reunite them. Some children are still separated.

Associated Press writer Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Follow Balsamo and Long on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1> and <https://twitter.com/ctlong1>.

Widespread internet outages hit northeast U.S.

By TALI ARBEL, MATT O'BRIEN and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

Internet users across the northeast U.S. experienced widespread outages for several hours Tuesday, interrupting work and school because of an unspecified Verizon network issue.

"An internet issue impacting the quality of our Fios service throughout the Northeast has been resolved," said spokesman Rich Young in an emailed statement Tuesday afternoon. He said service levels "are returning to normal" and the company is investigating what happened. The service interruptions were unrelated to a cut fiber in Brooklyn, New York, which caused problems for people in the area.

There are about 6.5 million Fios internet customers.

People posting on Twitter reported having issues connecting with various online services in the region stretching from Washington, D.C., to Boston. That densely populated area includes key U.S. government services as well as major financial companies such as Fidelity Investments.

Disruptions to internet services are always a hassle, but have become even more excruciating as the pandemic forces millions of people to work from home and students to attend school remotely.

Diana Gaspar's daughter in New York couldn't connect to her online classroom because their home internet was spotty for a couple of hours in the afternoon, although her daughter was able to log in with Gaspar's phone.

"We didn't see it as a major issue," Gaspar said. "The only inconvenience was me not having my phone."

For the Fairfax County Public Schools in the Washington, D.C., suburbs, teachers and students found workarounds, such as switching to another instruction platform if one wasn't working, said spokeswoman Lucy Caldwell. When her third-grade daughter's teacher couldn't log on to the education software they were using, a gym teacher came on to tell kids to do independent learning instead, said Fairfax parent Tracy Compton.

"My daughter came to me and I had to stop working and I had to work with her to do the assignment," Compton said, noting that frustrating tech issues are not unusual with remote learning.

At Galvin Middle School in Wakefield, Massachusetts, a suburb north of Boston, teachers sent students pen-and-paper assignments if there were internet problems, said Trish Dellanno, reached at the school by phone. "Teachers have been able to keep on moving. They're going old school."

The outage affected internet and cloud providers as well as major sites such as Google and Facebook. Amazon, whose web services division powers a wide range of online services, indicated its network wasn't the cause of the problem and that connectivity issues for its Amazon Web Services customers were resolved around 12:45 p.m., after an hour and a half. Google said it also had not found issues with its own services and was investigating.

The East Coast outages began at 11:25 a.m. local time and recovery began at 12:37 p.m., according to Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at Kentik, a network monitoring company. He reported a 12% drop in traffic volume to Verizon.

Madory said he did not yet know if other carriers were impacted. Comcast, another major internet service provider, said it had not observed problems with its network Tuesday. AT&T said it does not supply home internet in the northeast and customers were not affected.

Cary Wiedemann, a network engineer who had connectivity problems at his home in Northern Virginia, said that some online services could have been disrupted even if your home internet still worked, if the issue was with the backbone of Verizon's network.

"If Outlook works but YouTube doesn't, whose fault is it? Verizon's fault. But that's not obvious from the onset," he said.

This story has been revised to correct the spelling of the network monitoring company Kentik. It has also been updated to correct the name of the Verizon spokesman. It's Rich Young, not Jim Greer.

Foot of snow blankets parts of Midwest, disrupts travel

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A major winter storm dumped more than a foot of snow on parts of the middle of the country while another system blanketed areas of the Southwest, disrupting travel for a second consecutive day Tuesday and shuttering many schools.

Several coronavirus testing sites closed Monday and Tuesday in Nebraska and Iowa, as both states saw 12 to 15 inches (30.5 to 38.1 centimeters) of snow in places. At least 4 inches (10 centimeters) of snow was expected through Tuesday across most of an area stretching from central Kansas northeast to Chicago and southern Michigan.

National Weather Service meteorologist Taylor Nicolaisen, who is based near Omaha, said up to 15 inches (38 centimeters) was reported in spots between York, Nebraska, and Des Moines, Iowa. He said it's uncommon for the region to get more than a foot of snow from a single storm, and it has been decades since some cities saw this much.

"A lot of people tend to misremember snow events — especially from when you were a kid. Everything felt like a foot of snow when you were a kid," Nicolaisen said. "The snow drifts were literally higher than your head when you were a kid, but that's because you were 2 1/2 feet tall."

The storm made travel treacherous in places as wind-whipped snow piled up. Interstates were temporarily closed in western Nebraska and in Wisconsin near Milwaukee because of crashes, and scores of flights were canceled at airports across the region. Officials urged drivers to stay off the roads.

In Wisconsin, the weather service predicted up to 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) of snow could fall in the Milwaukee area, with the highest totals along Lake Michigan.

Wind gusts of 15 mph (24 kph) to 25 mph (40 kph) were reported across southern Wisconsin, creating drifting snow, reduced visibilities and complicating snow removal efforts, said Andy Boxell, a meteorologist with the weather service's office in Sullivan, Wisconsin.

In the Chicago area, more than 6 inches (15.24 centimeters) had already fallen by Tuesday afternoon and forecasters predicted up to 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) or more would fall in some areas before the storm ended Tuesday evening.

The last comparable snowfall hit the area in November 2018, when 8.4 inches (21.3 centimeters) fell.

Many schools and businesses across the Midwest closed for a second day Tuesday as crews worked to dig out after the storm.

Omaha had all 115 of its own plows and 300 contractors out Tuesday working around the clock to clear the streets in Nebraska's biggest city, but Assistant Public Works Director Todd Pfitzer cautioned that the effort will take some time to complete.

"We are asking for a little patience," Pfitzer told the Omaha World-Herald.

In West Des Moines, Iowa, Chris Borsberry said he needed four-wheel drive to make it into the Fairfield Inn & Suites where he works, and it took him twice as long as normal. Once at the hotel, Borsberry said he had to shovel the sidewalk seven times because it kept getting covered until the snow finally stopped.

"I got excited about that because it meant I only had one more shovel pass to do," said Borsberry, 45.

In the South, one person was dead and at least 30 others were injured after a tornado carved a 10-mile-long (16 kilometer) path of destruction north of Birmingham, Alabama, on Monday night, leaving the area with crumpled buildings and downed trees.

In the Southwest, more than a foot of snow fell in the mountains of Southern California, Nevada and Arizona. Icy conditions in mountains north of Los Angeles shut Interstate 5 in Tejon Pass and State Route 58 in Tehachapi Pass.

A storm buried northern Arizona in snow while sending flurries to the outskirts of Las Vegas and Phoenix. Preliminary snowfall reports from the latest storm included 14.2 inches (36 centimeters) at the Flagstaff airport and 16 inches (40.6 centimeters) at Payson between Sunday night and late Monday, the weather service said.

Most of Nevada was bracing for another series of powerful storms that generated a rare blizzard warn-

ing along with a forecast for as much as 6 feet (2 meters) of snow and wind gusting over 100 mph (160 kph) in the mountains above Lake Tahoe by early Friday. At lake level, the weather service expects 2 to 4 feet (61-122 centimeters) of snow with winds gusting to 50 mph (80 kph).

"Travel could be near impossible or even paralyzed with near-zero visibility through Friday morning," the service said.

Another major storm was approaching the coast with the potential to bring 10 to 15 inches (25.40 to 38.1 centimeters) of rain to central California and dump several feet of snow across the Sierra Nevada mountains over the next three days. That could lead to flash floods and debris flows — which can carry massive boulders, trees and other objects — to areas north and south of San Francisco Bay. Evacuation orders were in effect for areas of fire-scarred Santa Cruz County and evacuation warnings were issued in San Mateo County.

Yellen says Treasury focus to help nation reeling from virus

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Janet Yellen, sworn in Tuesday as the nation's 78th Treasury secretary and the first woman to hold the office, said in a message to the department's 84,000 employees that they would play a major role in addressing the country's biggest economic challenges.

"In addition to the pandemic, the country is also facing a climate crisis, a crisis of systemic racism and an economic crisis that has been building for fifty years," Yellen said in her message. "I believe our department can play a major role in addressing each of these crises."

She was sworn in by Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman elected to the position, at a ceremony performed outside on the East Wing entrance to the White House in view of the department Yellen will now lead. Yellen's husband, George Akerlof, winner of the 2001 Nobel prize in economics, and their son Robert, also an economist, were present for the brief ceremony.

In her message to Treasury employees, Yellen said she would be conducting a virtual listening tour in the next few weeks to meet with employees to get their views on how the department can do a better job of addressing the crises facing the country.

"We must help the American people endure the final months of this pandemic by making sure they have roofs over their head and food on the table," Yellen said. "Then, we must assist them in getting back to work safely."

Yellen said it will be important to then turn to addressing what she called a K-shaped economy where some people have done very well with "wealth built on wealth while certain segments of the population fell further and further behind."

Treasury said that Yellen spent her first day on the job meeting virtually with her advisers and career employees as well as getting an update on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan.

Yellen became the third of Biden's Cabinet nominees to win Senate approval on a vote of 84-15 late Monday. All of the no votes came from Republican senators.

The administration has emphasized the need to get its nominees approved quickly given the threats facing the country from a global pandemic and a slumping economy.

Yellen is expected to play a key role in gaining congressional approval of Biden's relief package, which is running into stiff opposition from Republicans who believe the price tag is too high.

Speaking on the Senate floor before Monday's vote, Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer noted the former Federal Reserve chairwoman had bipartisan support.

Schumer said Yellen has a "breathtaking range of experience" and support for her nomination reflected "just how well suited she is to manage the economic challenges of our time ... particularly during this moment of economic crisis."

Before the approval by the full Senate, Yellen had received unanimous backing from the Senate Finance Committee. Republicans on the panel said they had policy disagreements with Yellen and the Biden administration in such areas as raising taxes on corporations and the wealthy, but believed it was important to allow Biden to assemble his economic team quickly.

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At her confirmation hearing before the Finance Committee last week, Yellen argued that without prompt action the nation faced the threat of a "longer, more painful recession." She urged quick action on the relief package that would provide an additional \$1,400 in payments to individuals making below \$75,000 annually as well as providing expanded unemployment benefits, further aid for small businesses and support for cities and states to prevent layoffs.

The plan also provides more support for vaccine production and distribution.

But many GOP senators have pushed back on the proposal. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, told Yellen that Biden's plan represented a "laundry list of liberal structural economic reforms."

As Treasury secretary, Yellen, 74, will occupy a pivotal role in shaping and directing Biden's economic policies. She enters the Treasury job after many years serving in other top economic jobs, including as the first woman to serve as chair of the Federal Reserve from 2014 to 2018.

An economist by training who was a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Yellen will represent the Biden administration in global financial affairs and lead a sprawling department whose responsibilities cover overseeing IRS tax collections, making policy on banking regulations and serving as the administration's contact with Wall Street.

In her previous roles, Yellen developed an expertise in areas ranging from labor markets to international finance. Publicly, she frequently signaled concern about how economic policies affect ordinary people, especially disadvantaged communities.

She drew high marks for her stewardship at the Fed, where she employed record-low interest rates and massive bond buying, two policies begun by her predecessor Ben Bernanke, to support the economy as it struggled to emerge from a deep recession. She will now confront a new crisis brought on by a global pandemic.

Since leaving the Fed, Yellen has been a distinguished fellow in residence at the Brookings Institution, a liberal Washington think tank.

According to financial disclosure forms she provided during her confirmation, she collected more than \$7 million in speaking fees during more than 50 in-person and virtual engagements over the past two years, including with many Wall Street firms. Yellen has agreed to recuse herself from decisions that would affect certain financial organizations.

Let down your hair: New Army rules for ponytails, nail color

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Female soldiers can let their hair down, and flash a little nail color under new rules being approved by the Army. But male soldiers will still have to shave.

Army leaders announced Tuesday that they are loosening restrictions on various grooming and hairstyle rules, as service leaders try to address longstanding complaints, particularly from women. The changes, which also expand allowances for earrings and hair highlights and dyes, are particularly responsive to women of various ethnicities, and will allow greater flexibility for braids, twists, cornrows and other styles more natural for their hair.

The new regulations take effect in late February and come after months of study, in the wake of a directive by former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who ordered a new review of military hairstyle and grooming policies last July. The review was part of a broader order to expand diversity within the military and reduce prejudice, in the wake of widespread protests about racial inequality last summer.

"These aren't about male and female," said Sgt. Maj. Michael Grinston, the Army's top enlisted leader during a Facebook Live presentation on Tuesday about the latest changes. "This is about an Army standard and how we move forward with the Army, and being a more diverse, inclusive team."

The Army announcement has been long-planned, but it came just days after the Pentagon's first Black defense secretary — Lloyd Austin — took over. Austin has vowed to try to root out racism and extremism in the ranks and foster more inclusion. Esper and many of the service leaders have also been taking steps to make the military more diverse, particularly in the higher ranks.

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As an example, Esper last summer ordered that service members' photos no longer be provided to promotion boards. Officials said studies showed that when photos are not included "the outcomes for minorities and women improved."

On Tuesday, Army Sgt. Maj. Brian Sanders told reporters that the panel recommending the new grooming changes considered a variety of factors, including cultural, health and safety issues. He said the tight hair buns previously required by the Army can trigger hair loss and other scalp problems for some women. And larger buns needed to accommodate thick or longer hair, can make a combat helmet fit badly and potentially impair good vision.

At the same time, he said that changes, like allowing women in combat uniforms to wear earrings such as small gold, silver and diamond studs, let them "feel like a woman inside and outside of uniform."

He added, "At the end of the day, our women are mothers, they're spouses, they're sisters, they definitely want to be able to maintain their identity and that's what we want to get after."

In many cases — such as the earrings — the changes simply let female soldiers wear jewelry or hair-styles that are already allowed in more formal, dress uniforms, but were not allowed in their daily combat uniforms.

Army leaders said women will now be able to wear their hair in a long ponytail or braid and tuck it under their shirt. Sanders said that allowing that gives female soldiers, particularly pilots or troops at a firing range, greater ability to turn their head quickly, without the restraints that the buns created.

The new regulations also allow the exact opposite. Female soldiers going through Ranger or special operations training get their heads shaved, like male soldiers do. But when they leave training, their hair is too short, based on the Army's previous minimum length requirements. Now there will be no minimum length rules.

For men, however, the perennial request to allow beards is still a no-go.

Grinston's answer to the question from the online audience was short and direct: "No." He noted that the Army already makes exceptions for medical and religious reasons.

Also, male soldiers still can't wear earrings.

The new lipstick and nail polish rules, however, allow men to wear clear polish, and allow colors for women, but prohibit "extreme" shades, such as purple, blue, black and "fire engine" red. Men will also be able to dye their hair, but the colors for both genders are limited to "natural" shades. Prohibited colors include blue, purple, pink, green, orange or neon.

In another sign of the times, the new rules state that soldiers will now automatically receive black and coyote-colored face masks. They are also permitted to wear camouflage colored masks, but have to buy those themselves.

The Army also is taking steps to change wording in the regulations to remove racist or insensitive descriptions. References to "Fu Manchu" mustache and "Mohawk" hairstyle have been removed, and replaced with more detailed descriptions of the still-banned styles.

'THIS IS ME': Rioters flaunt involvement in Capitol siege

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — These suspects weren't exactly in hiding.

"THIS IS ME," one man posted on Instagram with a hand emoji pointing to himself in a picture of the violent mob descending on the U.S. Capitol. "Sooo we've stormed Capitol Hill lol," one woman texted someone while inside the building. "I just wanted to incriminate myself a little lol," another wrote on Facebook about a selfie he took inside during the Jan. 6 riot.

In dozens of cases, supporters of President Donald Trump downright flaunted their activity on social media on the day of the deadly insurrection. Some, apparently realizing they were in trouble with the law, deleted their accounts only to discover their friends and family members had already taken screenshots of their selfies, videos and comments and sent them to the FBI.

Their total lack of concern over getting caught and their friends' willingness to turn them in has helped authorities charge about 150 people as of Monday with federal crimes. But even with the help from the

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rioters themselves, investigators must still work rigorously to link the images to the vandalism and suspects to the acts on Jan. 6 in order to prove their case in court. And because so few were arrested at the scene, the FBI and the U.S. Marshals Service have been forced to send agents to track suspects down.

"Some of you have recognized that this was such an egregious incident that you've turned in your own friends and family members," Steven D'Antuono, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's Washington office, said of the tipsters Tuesday. "We know that those decisions are often painful, but you picked up the phone because it's the right thing to do."

In the last few weeks, the FBI has received more than 200,000 photos and video tips related to the riot. Investigators have put up billboards in several states with photos of wanted rioters. Working on tips from co-workers, acquaintances and friends, agents have tracked down driver's license photos to match their faces with those captured on camera in the building. In some cases, authorities got records from Facebook or Twitter to connect their social media accounts to their email addresses or phone numbers. In others, agents used records from license plate readers to confirm their travels.

More than 800 are believed to have made their way into the Capitol, although it's likely not everyone will be tracked down and charged with a crime. Federal prosecutors are focusing on the most critical cases and the most egregious examples of wrongdoing. And they must weigh manpower, cost and evidence when charging rioters.

A special group of prosecutors is examining whether to bring sedition charges against the rioters, which carry up to 20 years in prison. One trio was charged with conspiracy; most have been charged with crimes like unlawful entry and disorderly conduct.

Acting U.S. Attorney Michael Sherwin said prosecutors were "closely looking at evidence related to the sedition charges" and he believed "the results will bear fruit very soon."

Many rioters posted selfies inside the Capitol to their social media accounts, gave interviews to news outlets describing their experience and readily admitted when questioned by federal investigators that they were there. One man created a Facebook album titled "Who's House? OUR HOUSE" filled with photos of himself and others on Capitol grounds, officials said.

"They might have thought, like so many people that work with Trump, that if the president tells me to do it, it's not breaking the law," said Michael Gerhardt, an expert on impeachment and professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law.

Others made blunders, like a Houston police officer, who denied he went into the Capitol, then agreed to let agents look at the pictures on his phone. Inside his deleted photos folder were pictures and videos, including selfies he took inside the building, authorities said. Another man was wearing a court-ordered GPS monitor after a burglary conviction that tracked his every movement inside the building.

A retired firefighter from Long Island, New York, texted a video of himself in the Capitol rotunda to his girlfriend's brother, saying he was "at the tip of the spear," officials said. The brother happened to be a federal agent with the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, who turned the video over to the FBI. A lawyer for the man, Thomas Fee, said that he "was not part of any attempt to take over the U.S. Capitol" and that "the allegation is that he merely walked through an open door into the Capitol — nothing more."

Another man who was inside the Capitol was willing to rat out another rioter who stole House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's lectern and emailed the video to an FBI agent, even signing his own name to it. "Hello Nice FBI Lady," he wrote, "Here are the links to the videos. Looks like Podium Guy is in one of them, less the podium. Let me know if you need anything else."

In another case, a man was on a flight leaving D.C. two days after the riot when he kept shouting "Trump 2020!" and was kicked off. An airport police officer saw the man get off the plane and the man was booked on another flight. Forty-five minutes later, the officer was watching a video on Instagram and recognized the man in a group of rioters. The man, who was wearing the same shirt as the day he stormed the Capitol, was arrested at the airport, authorities said.

Even defense attorneys have acknowledged that the evidence poses a problem for them.

"I'm not a magician," said an attorney for the man seen in a photo carrying Pelosi's lectern. "We've

got a photograph of our client in what appears to be inside a federal building or inside the Capitol with government property.”

Police at the Capitol planned only for a free-speech demonstration and were overwhelmed by the mob that broke through and roamed the halls of the Capitol for hours as lawmakers were sent into hiding. Five people died in the melee, including a Capitol police officer who was struck in the head with a fire extinguisher.

Trump was impeached after the riot on a charge of “inciting violence against the government of the United States.” Opening arguments will begin the week of Feb. 8. He is the first president to be twice impeached and the first to face a trial after leaving office.

Unlike criminal cases, impeachment trials do not have specific evidence rules so anything said and done that day can be used. And several of the people charged have said in interviews with reporters or federal agents that they were simply listening to the president when they marched to the Capitol.

Richer reported from Boston.

Russia, US exchange documents to extend nuclear pact

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia and the United States traded documents Tuesday to extend their last remaining nuclear arms control treaty days before it is due to expire, the Kremlin said.

A Kremlin readout of a phone call between U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin said the two leaders voiced satisfaction with the exchange of diplomatic notes about extending the New START treaty.

“In the nearest days, the parties will complete the necessary procedures that will ensure further functioning of this important international legal nuclear arms control tool,” the Kremlin said.

The pact’s extension doesn’t require congressional approval in the U.S., but Russian lawmakers must ratify the move. Top members of the Kremlin-controlled parliament said they would fast-track the issue and complete the necessary steps to extend the treaty this week.

New START expires on Feb. 5. After taking office last week, Biden proposed extending the treaty for five years, and the Kremlin quickly welcomed the offer.

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.

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.

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

The negotiations were also marred 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.

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.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, praised “the businesslike, no-nonsense decision” to extend the treaty, saying it would help curtail the arms race and “create the potential for more ambitious steps to reduce the nuclear danger and move us closer to a world without nuclear weapons.”

“New START extension should be just the beginning and not the end of U.S. and Russian nuclear disarmament diplomacy,” Kimball said in a statement. “Both countries have a special responsibility and a national interest in reducing their bloated, costly, and deadly nuclear stockpiles.”

Earlier this month, Russia announced that it would follow the U.S. to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty, which allowed surveillance flights over military facilities to help build trust and transparency between Rus-

sia and the West.

The Kremlin said Putin and Biden discussed the Open Skies pact along with other issues during their Tuesday call.

While Russia always offered to extend New START for five years — a possibility that was envisaged by the pact at the time it was signed — former President Donald Trump charged that it put the U.S. at a disadvantage. Trump initially insisted that China be added to the treaty, an idea that Beijing bluntly dismissed.

The Trump administration then proposed to extend New START for just one year and also sought to expand it to include limits on battlefield nuclear weapons.

EU urges US to draft joint rule book to rein in tech giants

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union called Tuesday on U.S. President Joe Biden to help draw up a common rule book to rein in the power of big tech companies like Facebook and Twitter and combat the spread of fake news that is eating away at Western democracies.

In a speech to the Davos World Economic Forum, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urged the Biden administration to join forces against “the darker sides of the digital world,” which she said was partly behind the “shock” storming of Capitol Hill on Jan. 6.

“The business model of online platforms has an impact and not only on free and fair competition, but also on our democracies, our security and on the quality of our information,” von der Leyen said. “That is why we need to contain this immense power of the big digital companies.”

She urged the White House to join the 27-nation bloc’s efforts, saying that “together, we could create a digital economy rule book that is valid worldwide,” and would encompass data protection, privacy rules and the security of critical infrastructure.

Von der Leyen said the EU wants the onus put on the tech giants, with “it clearly laid down that internet companies take responsibility for the manner in which they disseminate, promote and remove content.”

In December, the European Commission proposed two new pieces of EU legislation to better protect consumers and their rights online, make tech platforms more accountable, and improve digital competition, building on the bloc’s data protection rules, which are among the most stringent in the world.

“We want the platforms to be transparent about how their algorithms work,” von der Leyen said. “Because we cannot accept that decisions that have a far-reaching impact on our democracy are taken by computer programs alone.”

Von der Leyen also referred to the decision earlier this month by Facebook and Twitter to cut off President Donald 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 to regulate speech.

“No matter how tempting it may have been for Twitter to switch off President Trump’s account, such serious interference with freedom of expression should not be based on company rules alone,” she said. “There needs to be a framework of laws for such far-reaching decisions.”

Trump’s permanent suspension from Twitter and Facebook is prompting EU member Hungary to push its own measures to regulate social media companies.

Hungary’s justice minister said Tuesday that large tech companies might face Hungarian government regulation over what she called “deliberate, ideological” censorship on social media.

In a Facebook post, Justice Minister Judit Varga wrote that the government would move to place restrictions on tech giants that she said arbitrarily silence users of online platforms, including the accounts of government state leaders - a reference to decisions by Twitter and Facebook to permanently suspend former U.S. president Donald Trump after his supporters mounted an assault on the U.S. capitol on Jan. 6.

Varga called for the “transparent and controllable operation” of tech companies, and said she would submit a bill on the matter to Hungary’s parliament in the spring to counter what she called their “systematic abuse of free speech.”

Hungary’s next parliamentary election is scheduled for 2022. Recent polls showed a tight race between the ruling Fidesz party and a six-party opposition coalition.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a Trump ally, has been accused of overseeing the consolidation of the country's media into the hands of business interests with ties to his party.

Opposition parties have used social media to reach potential voters amid a lack of coverage in Hungary's public outlets. A 2018 report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe found that national elections that year "were characterized by a pervasive overlap between state and ruling party resources" and media bias.

Last week, Varga claimed that tech companies "limit the visibility of Christian, conservative, right-wing opinions," and that "power groups behind global tech giants" were capable of deciding elections. She alleged that she had personally been "shadow banned" by Facebook, a term referring to social media platforms restricting the visibility of users' profiles or posts without their knowledge.

A representative for Facebook told local media that the company had not interfered with Varga's account. Facebook did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Navalny ally vows to press for his freedom despite crackdown

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A top ally of Alexei Navalny vowed Tuesday to keep up the fight to free the jailed Russian opposition leader and his battle to influence this year's parliamentary election despite a government crackdown on nationwide protests and its attempts to create a climate of fear.

U.S. officials said President Joe Biden raised concerns about Navalny's arrest in his call Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the G7 foreign ministers also criticized the jailing of Navalny and the demonstrators demanding his release.

Lawyer and politician Lyubov Sobol told a news conference that Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his team's regional offices will continue to operate even amid the "arrests of our followers and allies, open criminal probes (and) criminal probes that are yet to come."

Sobol, herself under investigation on criminal charges of trespassing that she insists are bogus, said she is not afraid of being arrested and doesn't plan to leave the country.

"It would be hard to say that I'm prepared for it, but silence, fear and indifference are more dangerous," she told reporters.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic, was arrested and jailed earlier this month after returning to Russia from Germany, where he had spent nearly five months recovering from a poisoning with a deadly nerve agent that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities deny the accusations.

The politician faces a prison term, with authorities accusing him of violating the terms of a 2014 conviction for fraud, a prosecution that he says was politically motivated.

On Saturday, nearly 4,000 people were detained across Russia during nationwide protests that drew tens of thousands demanding Navalny's release, according to OVD-Info, a human rights group that monitors political arrests.

Authorities launched 20 criminal investigations in different regions in the aftermath of the protests, mostly on the charges of violence against police, Russia's Investigative Committee said.

Dozens of Navalny associates in various cities were detained before the protests, including Sobol, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh and longtime ally Georgy Albuov. Sobol was released within hours and ordered to pay a fine, while Yarmysh and Albuov were jailed for nine and 10 days each.

"Putin is trying to stop people from protesting and fighting for their rights through fear and criminal probes," Sobol said. "We can only continue our work in these circumstances."

The crackdown continued to bring international outrage. The top diplomats of the United States, Britain, Canada, France Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as the high representative of the European Union, condemned the "politically motivated arrest and detention" of Navalny and said they were "deeply concerned by the detention of thousands of peaceful protesters and journalists."

The Kremlin had earlier dismissed Western criticism as interfering with Russia's internal affairs.

Navalny's team has called for more demonstrations on Jan. 31 and Feb. 2, when a court is scheduled to

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consider motions to convert his suspended sentence into a real prison term.

Even if he is sent to prison, his supporters won't be deterred, Sobol said, citing the political goals of stopping the Kremlin's party, United Russia, in the upcoming parliamentary balloting.

"There are lots of plans and tasks for the nearest future, (as well as) midterm and longterm (ones), and everyone understands what needs to be done both tomorrow, and a month from now, and half a year from now," Sobol said. "One of the main goals is to ... destroy the monopoly of United Russia in the parliamentary election that will take place this September."

Navalny has launched a campaign known as "Smart Voting" that is designed to promote candidates who are most likely to defeat those from the dominant ruling party.

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

Analysts believe Navalny is capable of influencing the parliamentary vote, a key for the Kremlin as it will determine who controls the State Duma in 2024. That's when Putin's current term expires and he is expected to seek reelection, thanks to constitutional reforms last year.

On Thursday, a court is scheduled to hear an appeal on the ruling to jail Navalny. When asked about a possible outcome, Sobol said that "we do live in an unpredictable country; what will happen next and tomorrow is literally unknown."

She cited an example of police officers unexpectedly showing up at her home 10 minutes before the news conference.

Almost proving her point, an official interrupted the event minutes later, trying to serve a subpoena to a Navalny ally who wasn't there.

"I (didn't do it) on purpose, they come on their own," Sobol said with a chuckle.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 27, the 27th day of 2021. There are 338 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 27, 1756, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria.

On this date:

In 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent for his electric incandescent lamp.

In 1901, opera composer Giuseppe Verdi died in Milan, Italy, at age 87.

In 1944, during World War II, the Soviet Union announced the complete end of the deadly German siege of Leningrad, which had lasted for more than two years.

In 1945, during World War II, Soviet troops liberated the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland.

In 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee died in a flash fire during a test aboard their Apollo spacecraft.

In 1972, "Queen of Gospel" Mahalia Jackson, 60, died in Evergreen Park, Ill.

In 1973, the Vietnam peace accords were signed in Paris.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, greeted the 52 former American hostages released by Iran at the White House.

In 1984, singer Michael Jackson suffered serious burns to his scalp when pyrotechnics set his hair on fire during the filming of a Pepsi-Cola TV commercial at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

In 1998, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, on NBC's "Today" show, charged the sexual misconduct allegations against her husband, President Bill Clinton, were the work of a "vast right-wing conspiracy."

In 2006, Western Union delivered its last telegram.

In 2010, Apple CEO Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad tablet computer during a presentation in San Francisco. J.D. Salinger, the reclusive author of "The Catcher in the Rye," died in Cornish, New Hampshire, at age 91.

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Ten years ago: Tens of thousands of Yemenis demanded their president step down; taking inspiration from Tunisians' revolt, they vowed to continue until their U.S.-backed government fell. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced that color-coded terror alerts would be phased out by late April 2011.

Five years ago: The Ferguson, Missouri, Police Department agreed to overhaul its policies, training and practices as part of a sweeping deal with the Justice Department following the 2014 fatal police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown. As he honored four people for risking their lives to protect Jews, President Barack Obama warned during a visit to the Israeli Embassy in Washington that anti-Semitism was on the rise; he said an attack on any faith was an attack on all faiths.

One year ago: China confirmed more than 2,700 cases of the new coronavirus with more than 80 deaths in that country; authorities postponed the end of the Lunar New Year holiday to keep the public at home. U.S. health officials said they believed the risk to Americans remained low and that they had no evidence that the new virus was spreading in the United States; they advised Americans to avoid non-essential travel to any part of China. Stocks fell for a fifth straight day as investors worried that the virus outbreak could hurt the global economy. Senators faced increasing pressure to summon former national security adviser John Bolton to testify at President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, after a draft of Bolton's forthcoming book said Trump had wanted to withhold military aid from Ukraine until it helped investigate Democrat Joe Biden; Trump denied having said that to Bolton.

Today's Birthdays: Actor James Cromwell is 81. Rock musician Nick Mason (Pink Floyd) is 77. R&B singer Nedra Talley (The Ronettes) is 75. Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov is 73. Latin singer-songwriter Djavan is 72. Chief U.S. Justice John Roberts is 66. Country singer Cheryl White is 66. Country singer-musician Richard Young (The Kentucky Headhunters) is 66. Actor Mimi Rogers is 65. Rock musician Janick Gers (Iron Maiden) is 64. Actor Susanna Thompson is 63. Political and sports commentator Keith Olbermann is 62. Rock singer Margo Timmins (Cowboy Junkies) is 60. Rock musician Gillian Gilbert is 60. Actor Tamlyn Tomita is 58. Actor Bridget Fonda is 57. Actor Alan Cumming is 56. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 53. Rock singer Mike Patton is 53. Rapper Tricky is 53. Rock musician Michael Kulas (James) is 52. Actor-comedian Patton Oswalt is 52. Actor Josh Randall is 49. Country singer Kevin Denney is 43. Tennis player Marat Safin is 41. Rock musician Matt Sanchez (American Authors) is 35. Actor Braeden Lemasters is 25.