

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Coming up on GDILIVE.COM



**82nd Annual  
Carnival of  
Silver Skates**  
**Sunday,  
Jan. 31, 2021**  
**2:30 p.m.**  
**Skating Rink**

Sponsored by  
the Carnival of  
Silver Skates

**Saturday**  
We will have 2 streams going  
for the wrestling tournament.  
Go to [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM) for those  
links.



**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

### 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 El-  
ementary 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

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## Call now to get your ADT security system starting at \$19.99/mo.\*



Plus get \$100 off installation† when you call today!

\*Requires 36-month monitoring contract for intrusion only with a minimum charge of \$28.99 after the 12 month term. Equipment shown requires ADT Secure or higher. Early term. and installation fees apply. Taxes add'l. For full terms and pricing see below.

†Requires minimum purchase of \$449.



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Choose from indoor, outdoor & doorbell cams so you can keep watch even when you aren't there with upgrade to ADT Video.

### Life safety

Let us help you stay protected from fire, CO, floods & more!



**\$100 off installation**  
Upgrade to a touchscreen panel and smart home equipment or stick with basic home security. Either way, you'll save \$100!



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STARTING AT  
**\$19.99** /mo

BONUS \$100 off installation



Call now to redeem your exclusive offer!

**▶ 1-605-824-1118**

Redemption code:

DF-CD-NP-Q121

Reply by:

April 15, 2021

We're available 24/7. See if you qualify for same-day service!

**\*\$19.99/month + †\$100 off Installation:** Requires 36-month monitoring contract with a minimum charge of \$28.99/mo. (before instant savings) (24-month monitoring contract in California, total fees from \$695.76 (before instant savings) and enrollment in Easy Pay. Service and installation charges vary depending on system configuration, equipment and services selected. Offer includes (i) \$9.00 instant savings per month applicable only towards monthly monitoring charge for the first 12 months of initial contract term (total value of \$108.00) and (ii) \$100 instant savings on installation with minimum purchase of \$449 after promotion is applied. Traditional Service Level requires landline phone. Excludes ADT's Extended Limited Warranty. Upon early termination by Customer, ADT may charge 75% of the remaining monthly service charges for the balance of the initial contract term. Limit one offer per new ADT customer contract. Not valid on purchases from ADT Authorized Dealers. Expires 4/15/2021.

**Interactive Services:** ADT Command Interactive Solutions Services ("ADT Command") helps you manage your home environment and family lifestyle. Requires purchase of an ADT alarm system with 36 month monitoring contract ranging \$45.99-\$57.99/mo with QSP (24-month monitoring contract in California, total fees ranging \$1,103.76-\$1,391.76), enrollment in ADT Easy Pay, and a compatible device with Internet and email access. These interactive services do not cover the operation or maintenance of any household equipment/systems that are connected to the ADT Command equipment. All ADT Command services are not available with all interactive service levels. All ADT Command services may not be available in all geographic areas. You may be required to pay additional charges to purchase equipment required to utilize the interactive service features you desire.

**General:** Additional charges may apply in areas that require guard response service for municipal alarm verification. System remains property of ADT. Local permit fees may be required. Prices and offers subject to change and may vary by market. Additional taxes and fees may apply. Satisfactory credit required. A security deposit may be required. Simulated screen images and photos are for illustrative purposes only.

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DF-CD-NP-Q121



**82nd Annual  
Carnival of Silver Skates  
"Faith, Hope, Love"  
Nearly 100 Skaters Performing!  
Sunday, Jan. 31,  
2021**

**Performances at  
2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.  
Groton Ice Rink  
(West side of Groton)**

**Admission is \$3 for those 13 years  
and older for the afternoon session.  
The evening session is free.**

**The Carnival of Silver Skates Queen  
will be crowned during the  
2 p.m. performance.**

**THERE WILL BE NO PARKING  
ON THE ICE THIS YEAR!**



**83<sup>rd</sup> Carnival of Silver Skates**  
**January 31, 2021**

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## 83rd Annual Carnival Celebration Royalty through the Years

1938	Lenora Luruhn Sheehan	1981	Brenda Sombke Waage
1939	Florence Wegner Miles	1982	Vonnie Bleibaum McKinney
1941	Gunrun Martison McCullough, Robert Pray	1983	Pam Sternhagen Hanson
1942	Dorothy Fangen Kah, Robert Pray	1984	Rosalie Martin Wylie
1946	Virginia Pratt Ablen	1985	Jodi Anderson Weigel
1947	Donna Wehde Cassels	1986	Cassie Ackman Kuentler
1948	Deseree Saltness	1987	Charlie Garness-Klauer
1949	Shirley Thompson Sultz	1988	Niki Schaller Christoffer
1950	Dona Cooper Anderson, Bob Richards	1989	Kris Sternhagen Barger
1951	Kay Stroh Fangen, Paul Roth	1990	Crystal Knoll Wheeler
1952	Jvon Gildy, Bill Fangen	1991	Becky Sperry Diegel
1953	Donna Oliver Nastos, Aaron Bade	1992	Becky McGannon
1954	Barbara Sippel Pharis, Jerald Lakemaker	1993	Heather Feser
1955	Patty Ennen Jackson, Rodney Bauer	1994	Brenda Herr Goetz
1956	Barbara Gildy Van Kempen, Tom Bauer	1995	Elizabeth Hoffman Doeden
1957	Connie Sippel Anderson, Jon Anderson	1996	Becky Hoffman Hearnen
1958	Susan Clawson Grace, Wayne Knoll	1997	Jennifer Sundstrom Little
1959	Karen Hubbard Berglun, Ron Mielke	1998	Lindsey Swisher Tietz
1960	Corinne Foss Scott, Lee Schinkel	1999	Jessica Hoffman Huber
1961	Charlotte Craig Rigger, Kent Johnson	2000	Tasha Sperry Dunker
1962	Darlyne Dunker Johnson, George Wegner	2001	Erica Swisher Roberts
1963	Jaci Jiran Bain, Bob Nielsen	2002	Katie Anderson
1964	Judy Fliehs Feser, Tom Paepke	2003	Shannon Daly Lehnberg
1965	Jeanne Wegner Wanous, Jeff Kolbo	2004	Erica Stanley Garvey
1966	Joan Fliehs Johnson, Greg Saunders	2005	Brittany Ronning Mollet
1967	Sandy Schaller, Lynn Schinkel	2006	Heather Dixon Phillips
1968	Diane Sundling Knutson, Gary Hoops	2007	Erin McNamara
1969	Carryl Bleibaum Goens, Jeff Von Wald	2008	Marqelle Albrecht
1970	Debbie Cassels Bollinger	2009	Morgan Schuring
1971	Renee Mydland Swisher	2010	Bailey Ronning Hoffmann
1972	Jill Mydland Zimmer	2011	Jenna LaMee
1973	Faye Siefkes	2012	Alexa Schuring
1974	Frankye Siefkes	2013	Cheyenne Schaller
1975	Sherry Schaller	2014	Breanna Marzahn Milbrandt
1976	April Ackman Madden	2015	Allison Weber
1977	Kim Volk Schweitzer	2016	Aubray Harry
1978	Cindy McKiver Hoops	2017	Katie Koehler
1979	September Ackman Kruse	2018	Jasmine Schinkel
1980	Stacey Larson Hines	2019	Taylor Holm
		2020	Nicole Marzahn

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## 2020 Carnival of Silver Skates Queen Nicole Marzahn

Nicole is the daughter of Wade and Renee Marzahn and the sister of Breanna and Jacob Milbrandt and Landon and Andrew Marzahn. Nicole is a freshman at South Dakota State University where she is pursuing a nursing degree. She has enjoyed playing intramural women's volleyball at SDSU. Her dream job is to be an obstetrics nurse in the delivery room one day! We miss Nicole's presence at the skating rink this year as she was a skater, an instructor, a specialty act performer and the skating rink manager last year. We are happy to welcome back our 2020 Silver Skates queen! Nicole would like to say good luck to all the skaters today and thank you all for coming!

## Queen Candidates/Skaters

### Seniors



Tessa Erdman



Alexis Hanten



Hailey Monson



Erin Unzen



Grace Wiedrick



## Queen Candidates/Skaters

### Juniors



Kennedy Anderson



Tina Zoellner



Julianna Kosel



Brooklyn Imrie



## 2021 Carnival of Silver Skates

### A few reminders - please:

- Have your children stay in/by your vehicle
- **NO** skating behind the scenery or in front of vehicles at any time for the safety of everyone
- 6:30 performance: make sure your headlights/automatic lights are turned off

### Due to COVID-19 procedures, we will be limiting people in the warming house, please note the following:

- \*Have your child report to the warming house, no earlier than 2 acts before his/her group
- \*Have your child's skates on prior to entering the warming house

### **Tune your vehicle radio to station FM 92.3!**

Stay warm and enjoy the show without having to roll your windows down.

### Order of Program

National Anthem	Alexis Hanten (Senior)
Introduction of the 2020 Carnival of Silver Skates Queen	Nicole Marzahn
Introduction of 2020 Snow Queens	Tiara DeHoet (Senior) and Lydia Meier (Junior)
Coronation of the 2020 Queen of Silver Skates (afternoon performance only)	
Queen Candidates:	
Seniors: Tessa Erdmann, Alexis Hanten, Hailey Monson, Erin Unzen and Grace Wiedrick	
Juniors: Kennedy Anderson, Brooklyn Imrie, Julianna Kosel, and Tina Zoellner	

### "Faith, Hope, Love"

- Snowflakes/Kindergarten** "We're All in this Together"  
Kinzee Burro, Zoe Burro, Brielle Dunbar, Maci Dunbar, Kinsey Frost, Sophia Gilchrist, Ellie Lassle, Jorie Locken, Presley Olson, Ava Strom, Sunny Washenberger, and Nova Washenberger  
Instructors: Ashlyn Sperry and Anna Fjeldheim
- 4<sup>th</sup> grade** "Falling for Ya"  
Aubrey Craig, Sam Crank, Abby Fjeldheim, Tenley Frost, Luke Gauer, Tevan Hanson, Adeline Kotzer, Peyton Schuring, Aurora Washenberger, and Kyrie Yeigh  
Instructor: Alexis Hanten
- Specialty Act** "House of the Rising Sun"  
Guest Skater, Katherine Pfaff, Watertown Figure Skate Club

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4. **11<sup>th</sup> grade** "Hold My Hand"  
Kennedy Anderson, Brooklyn Imrie, Julianna Kosel, and Tina Zoellner  
Instructor: Aubray Harry
5. **2<sup>nd</sup> grade** "Shake it Off"  
Brynlee Dunker, Ambrielle Feist, Danielle Franken, Caelynn Pullan, Maycee Moody, Mya Moody, Zoe Olson, Victoria Schuster, and Taylynn Traphagen  
Instructors: KayLynn Overacker and Marlee Tollifson
6. **Boys group (Snowflake-1<sup>st</sup> grade)** "When I Am Older"  
Boe Burro, Colton Pullan, Stetson Foertsch, Saylor Gilchrist, and Jack Schuelke  
Instructor: Tessa Erdmann and Erin Unzen
7. **Specialty Act** "Rise Up"  
Brenna Imrie and Claire Schuelke
8. **3<sup>rd</sup> grade** "Love Gets Me Every Time"  
Emilee Burro, Rachel Dobbins, Sophia Flieths, Andi Gauer, and Rowan Patterson  
Instructor: Carter Barse and Hailey Monson
9. **5<sup>th</sup> grade** "You Can't Hurry Love"  
Camille Craig, Raelynn Feist, Sydney Locke, Chesney Weber, and Journey Zieroth  
Instructors: Katie Anderson and Coralea Wolter
10. **Specialty Act** "Sisters"  
Alexis Hanten and Teagan Hanten



11. **Specialty Act** "The Night We Met"  
Hailey Monson
12. **1<sup>st</sup> grade** "Faith"  
Shealee Gilchrist, Rowan Hanson, Ryan Hanson, Devan Locke, Avery Roettele, Harper Schuring, and Kaylee Sippel  
Instructors: Brooklyn Imrie and Kennedy Anderson

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**13. 9<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“Faithfully”**

Cadence Feist, Anna Fjeldheim, Carly Guthmiller, Sara Menzia, Hannah Monson, Emma Schinkel, and Ashlyn Sperry

Instructors: Jasmine Schinkel

**14. 6<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“Symphony”**

Caroline Bahr, Avery Crank, Teagan Hanten, Addison Hoffman, Brenna Imrie, Emerlee Jones, Claire Schuelke, McKenna Tietz, and Taryn Traphagen

Instructor: Lindsey Tietz

**15. Specialty Act**

**“Driver’s License”**

Guest Skater, Katherine Pfaff, Watertown Figure Skate Club

**16. 10<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“I Will Follow Him”**

Carter Barse, Brenna Carda, Shallyn Foertsch, KayLynn Overacker, and Marlee Tollifson

Instructors: Katie Anderson and Coralea Wolter

**17. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“I Want to Break Free”**

Mia Crank, Emma Davies, Rylee Dunker, and Emily Overacker

Instructor: Shonna Harry

**18. 12<sup>th</sup> grade**

**“Footloose”**

Tessa Erdmann, Alexis Hanten, Hailey Monson, Erin Unzen, and Grace Wiedrick

Instructor: Julie Erdmann

**19. Finale**

**All groups and instructors**



## Guest Skater

A special thank you to this year's guest skater...

### Katherine Pfaff



We are excited to welcome Katherine Pfaff as our guest skater again this year.

Katherine Pfaff is 16 years old and a sophomore at Watertown High School. She is a member of the Watertown Figure skate club and has been skating for 12 years.

She recently tested and passed the Novice Moves in the Field and Intermediate Free Solo Dance levels. She is also Intermediate Free skate. Katherine's goals are to reach Senior level in all three disciplines before graduating high school.

In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her friends and in the summer swimming and tubing at Lake Kampeska. She is on the golf team at school.

Katherine is the daughter of Scott and Ann Pfaff.

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you for attending the 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Carnival of Silver Skates performance! This wonderful Groton area program continues to grow, thanks to the great cooperation of many community members, including:

Those volunteers serving on the 2021 Carnival of Silver Skates Executive Board:

Lindsey Tietz, Chairperson; Tina Kosel, Co-chairperson; Katie Anderson, Secretary; Dawn Imrie, Treasurer; Deb Schuelke, Costume Chair; Coralea Wolter, Skate Instruction Chair; Sarah Hanten, Communications Chair; Amanda Sperry, Member at Large, and Jaymie Overacker, City Relations Chair.

Instructors for this year's Carnival: Katie Anderson, Kennedy Anderson, Carter Barse, Julie Erdmann, Tessa Erdmann, Anna Fjeldheim, Alexis Hanten, Aubray Harry, Shonna Harry, Brooklyn Imrie, Hailey Monson, KayLynn Overacker, Jasmine Schinkel, Ashlyn Sperry, Lindsey Tietz, Marlee Tollifson, Erin Unzen, and Coralea Wolter.

The countless others who have helped make "Faith, Hope, Love" a reality.

## Special Thanks to:

Emcee  
Presenting of the US Flag  
National Anthem performer  
Sound system & radio transmission technical assistance  
Admission collectors  
Spotlight technicians  
Costume assistants  
Costume seamstress  
Queen's gift  
Distributing notes to students  
Use of facilities for costume hand-out  
Emergency services  
2021 Friends of the Carnival  
Announcements on local TV channel  
Rink & facility maintenance, snow removal, etc.  
2021 Photographer & Queen's photo  
2021 Carnival apparel  
Warming house supervisors  
Publicity promoters

Madeline Schuelke and Cody Swanson  
2021 Senior Skaters  
Alexis Hanten  
Cody Hanten and Coralea Wolter  
Craig and Tasha Dunker, Ryan and Sarah Fjeldheim  
Ryan Olson and Jesse Overacker  
Brenna Imrie, Dawn Imrie, Claire Schuelke  
Grace Wiedrick, Eh Tha You Say, Karen Wolter  
Lori's Pharmacy  
Groton Area Schools  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
Groton Rescue Squad  
Katie Anderson and Karen Babcock  
James Valley Telecommunications  
City of Groton  
J. Simon Photography  
BK Custom T's & More  
Tina Kosel and Tammy Locke  
Groton Daily Independent, Dakota Press, Hub City Radio,  
James Valley Telecommunications, Aberdeen American  
News, Lori's, POET, City of Groton, Dacotah Bank

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## Admission Costs:

Volunteers will be collecting admission fees during the

### AFTERNOON PERFORMANCE ONLY:

\$3.00 for those 13 and older

\$2.00 for those six to twelve

Free for children five and under

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## Looking ahead to future Carnivals...

### Skaters, we want you!

Please watch for registration information to come out early next fall. Registration forms are due the beginning of September. If you were not involved this year, but would like to receive registration information by mail or e-mail next fall, please contact Lindsey at 397-7707 or [lindsey.tietz@k12.sd.us](mailto:lindsey.tietz@k12.sd.us) You can also reach Lindsey by friending the Carnival of Silver Skates Facebook page (Silver Skates). Skaters from four years old (must have turned four by September 1<sup>st</sup>) through high school are welcome!

## Let's make next year's 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Carnival special again...

The Carnival of Silver Skates Annual Meeting will be  
Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 at the Warming House.

Parents of all skaters are encouraged to attend.

An election of officers for the 2022 Carnival will be held. The Carnival of Silver Skates Executive Board includes: co-chairs, secretary, treasurer, costume chair, skating instruction chair, communications chair, and city relations chair.

Contact Lindsey (397-7707) with any questions.

Please plan to attend the meeting and get involved!

### Don't forget costume turn-in!

TODAY following the evening performance or

Monday, Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> 4:00 – 6:00 PM at the Warming House.

Please do **NOT** wash any part of the costume. Please return your entire costume, including the hanger, in its original condition. If you absolutely cannot turn in your costume at one of these scheduled times, you **MUST** contact Deb Schuelke (397-7745) **PRIOR to the costume turn-in** to make alternative arrangements. Failure to deliver the costume by the alternative date/time, will result in a forfeiture of your costume deposit.

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## #340 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Most of tonight's numbers are well up. I'm not too upset over day-to-day fluctuations, but I'd rather they were down. There were 167,000 new cases reported today, bringing us up to 25,788,800, which is a 0.7% increase from yesterday's total. We're on-track to surpass 26 million within a couple of days; tomorrow's unlikely but theoretically possible; however, Saturday's a certainty. Hospitalizations are down again—eighteenth straight day—to 107,444. And we're up to 432,814 total American deaths thus far in this pandemic, which is 1.0% more than yesterday. There were 4387 deaths reported today, our second-worst day ever. I expect more awful days to come.

December was our deadliest month of this pandemic with, by my reckoning, 78,091 deaths reported in the US. Yesterday, January left that mark in the dust with a few days yet to go; as of last night, 82,390 deaths had been reported this month. We'll see what February brings, but the new CDC ensemble forecast now projects we will have around 500,000 deaths, give or take 20,000, by February 20. That's a whole lot—and a whole lot more than we've lost so far. Much of that die is already cast: The people dying in the next three weeks are probably already infected now for the most part. We can still do something about the dying after that. I recommend we all throw our backs into that project.

Here's an interesting case of corporate cooperation between rivals: French pharmaceutical company, Sanofi, whose vaccine developed in partnership with British company, GlaxoSmithKline has run into snags, has entered into an agreement with Pfizer/BioNTech to produce more than 100 million doses of their vaccine this summer. Sanofi will fill and pack vials of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for distribution in Europe. The company statement said, "We are very conscious that the earlier vaccine doses are available, the more lives can potentially be saved. . . . We have made the decision to support BioNTech and Pfizer in manufacturing their COVID-19 vaccine in order to help address global needs, given that we have the technology and facilities to do so."

They go on to make clear they are continuing to work on developing their own vaccine candidates. After their candidate developed with GlaxoSmithKline elicited insufficient responses in the elderly, they have reformulated it and will begin phase 2 trials next month. Their mRNA candidate developed with the US company Translate Bio, begins phase 1 trials in the next few months. But in the meanwhile, they're going to pitch in where they can. Chief executive, Paul Hudson, told Le Figaro, "Since we are running several months late on our main vaccine we asked ourselves how we could make ourselves useful right now." I guess they found a way. Admirable.

Attitudes are moving on vaccines, and the direction is a good one. In December, the percentage of people who want to be vaccinated as soon as possible or who have already received vaccine was 34 percent; this week, that number is up to 47 percent. Another 31 percent were taking a wait-and-see approach, and 20 percent said they would get vaccine only if required or not at all. The primary factor moving attitudes is knowing someone who received the vaccine, so I would expect these numbers could show improvement as more of us get vaccinated. The most effective messages on vaccines come from people's doctors or scientists, so maybe all is not lost. The main pockets of resistance seem to be in communities who have good reason to view cutting-edge medical advances with suspicion, including Black and Latino people; rural people are also more reluctant than city-dwellers.

The federal government is also working to increase the number of people available and authorized to administer vaccines by temporarily licensing more people. To that end, the Department of Health and Human Services will be permitting recently-retired or inactive doctors and nurses to administer vaccine and also to permit anyone licensed to administer in one state to cross state lines to administer—normally there are licensing issues when going to another state. Every little bit helps.

The CDC website indicates AstraZeneca has finally completed enrollment of some 32,000 volunteers and 26,000 have received their second dose in its US phase 3 clinical trial for its vaccine candidate. You may recall this is a DNA vaccine which uses a nonreplicating viral vector, a harmless adenovirus, to convey the DNA into host cells. It's been approved in many countries, but due to hold-ups in the phase 3 clinical trial in the US, has been delayed here. With current infection rates, it is believed we could be seeing an

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emergency use authorization (EUA) by the end of March. This would put more doses on the market.

Also on the vaccine front, I have good news and bad news, both from Novavax, makers of a protein subunit vaccine candidate now in clinical trials around the world. The (really, really) good news is that, in a 15,000-person trial in the UK, the efficacy rate was just short of 90 percent, in a league with the two mRNA vaccines currently in use. The company has about 16,000 of 30,000 volunteers enrolled in a phase 3 clinical trial in the US and Mexico, so they should have data on that in coming months. The worse news is that a small (4400-person) trial in South Africa found only 49.4 percent efficacy. They sequenced the virus involved in 27 of the 44 cases seen, and 25 of those 27 were caused by that new B.1.351 variant. This is the first evidence we have in the real world about how any vaccine performs against this variant, and the news isn't great. Ugh. Further, about a third of those cases seen in this small trial had previously been infected by the earlier variant, which tells us prior infection is not thoroughly protective against this new variant either.

Before we get too depressed, we should put this in the context that the vaccine is not ineffective against B.1.351; it is less effective. We were willing to take anything with 50 percent or greater efficacy from the start. And we do not know just what happened in those who became ill—how ill they were. I wish we had data on whether the cases seen were severe: This would be a lot less scary if we find these folks got sick, but not life-threateningly so. I should also note that concurrent HIV infection played a role here; in people who were not HIV-positive, the candidate showed 60 percent efficacy, which is considerably better than the overall.

The company is already looking at modifications of its formulation to cover this variant, as are the other companies working on vaccines. It is looking increasingly like at some point we're going to need a booster for this and for any other variants that pop up between now and whenever. It is also looking increasingly like we really must get a robust genomic surveillance program underway post haste and get this pandemic under control fast. We are, to the best of our knowledge, still running a bit ahead of this variant, but there's no telling how long our luck will hold. I'm going to be honest: I have found in my lifetime that persistent hard work and attention to the details have gained me more than luck ever did. It's probably time we did the hard things and quit hoping for a miracle.

The reason I say this is that South African variant, B.1.351, has now officially made landfall in the US. Officials in South Carolina announced today that two cases have been identified in the state. Worse, neither case has a history of travel and the two individuals do not know one another; so it is almost certain the variant has been circulating in the community after being introduced undetected. And this is what you get when you're not looking: Things sneak up on you.

Because you're probably not sick of reading about these new viral variants yet, I wanted to be sure to mention one more thing tonight. There's another wrinkle: whether the mutations seen in the variants affect the sensitivity of diagnostic and screening tests. The FDA is asking test developers to monitor this. Dr. Timothy Stenzel, director of the agency's Office of In Vitro Diagnostics and Radiological Health, said in a briefing, "We are starting to see mutations to impact tests. There may be a performance difference going forward." Great.

Fred Rogers used to advise that, when things look bad, we should "look for the helpers." If you've been wondering how you can be one of those helpers during this difficult time, I have a suggestion. For those who can't really afford to donate money to this or that or those who can't devote hours every week or who don't have any particular skills which appear to be in demand, how about volunteering at a vaccination clinic? There's simply no way states and counties have the money to pay for all the staffing needed in a vaccination effort this massive; so there's plenty of room for folks with even one day to give.

Now if you do happen to have particular skills, there's a place for you. People are needed to prepare, draw up, and administer the vaccine; to monitor the temperature of the vaccine being held; to monitor recipients for allergic reactions before they leave. States are drawing on nursing and medical students, dentists, veterinarians, active professionals, and retired professionals. The loosening of restrictions on who can administer vaccine that came from the Department of HHS yesterday are aimed at expanding the pool of available workers. If, on the other hand, you don't have health care skills, there's still a place for you. People are also needed to perform administrative and traffic flow tasks: registering patients, directing traf-

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fic, directing people from station to station, answering questions, managing paper, even sanitizing chairs.

If you are not a person at high risk, please consider finding just one day (or more if you can) to help protect your friends and neighbors—and by extension yourself and your loved ones. The clinic sites are providing full PPE to minimize your risk of exposure. Your city, county, and/or state health department website may have information on how to volunteer, so check them out. Thousands of Americans have already stepped up, but this is an ongoing, long-term project, and help will continue to be needed for months to come. You can be part of the solution. And if you are high risk and getting vaccinated soon, consider pitching in once your protection is established; there will still be a need then. I think you will be glad you did. As Kate Moore, a physician assistant who volunteered, told the Washington Post, “This has been one of the most rewarding and joyful things I have done in my career. Everyone is so excited to be vaccinated and is so appreciative of the opportunity.” Who doesn’t want to feel both useful and appreciated?

I’ve seen a summary of analysis done by a Duke University team—can’t get access to the paper—which has found moratoria on evictions and utility shutoffs had positive public health effects during this pandemic. Their figures show that a moratorium on eviction may have reduced the number of cases by 14 percent and the number of deaths by 40 percent; stopping utility shutoffs appears to have reduced the number of cases by nine percent and the number of deaths by 15 percent. I’m not sure whether this has been peer-reviewed, but it certainly is interesting. Maybe helping folks stay in their homes isn’t just bleeding-heart stuff; quite possibly it’s keeping us all safer.

The vaccination program is well underway in every state, and the work has progressed across the country, even when there have been difficulties. There’s probably plenty of blame to go around for the problems; however some of those difficulties are not due to poor coordination or mismanagement. Some of them are well out of our control. Like a snowstorm.

The Josephine County, Oregon, Public Health Facebook page tells the story of such a snowstorm. In their recounting, public health staff and volunteers had conducted a mass vaccination event at a high school in Cave Junction, some 30 miles through the foothills of the Siskiyou Mountains from their home base in Grants Pass. On the way home after wrapping up the clinic, about 20 of them were stranded by a storm. The problem is they had with them leftover doses of vaccine for whom they had identified recipients in Grants Pass—and the team with their doses wasn’t in Grants Pass and was not going to be before the doses expired.

Now it’s not at all unusual for a vaccination clinic to end with doses left over, and it is important to recognize that the shelf-life on these vaccines is short. Once you enter a vial for the first dose, you have something like six hours to use the rest of it—or just throw it away. Once vaccine has been out of refrigeration, there is a time limit before it has to be used. And after thawing, there is another time limit. That makes the logistics of using every single dose a bit tricky. One approach frequently employed is the one this team used; once they knew how much they had left over, they got in touch with folks back home to line up recipients so none would be wasted. The plan was to be home in plenty of time to administer those last precious doses to the lucky folks who’d signed up; it’s only 30 miles, after all.

Except there they were: stuck on a highway in the middle of nowhere in a snowstorm. I’ll make my apologies to Oregon—I’m sure this is a region of soaring beauty—but in a snowstorm when you’re holding fast-fading and hard-to-come-by vaccine, this was effectively the middle of nowhere. Except: For this quick-thinking crew, the middle of nowhere actually turned out to be somewhere after all, and that somewhere was an impromptu vaccination clinic. Since they had a county ambulance that had come along for the day to stand by for that rare allergic reaction and which was also stuck with them in the storm, they had everything they needed. So these intrepid workers “began walking from car to car [in a snowstorm] offering stranded motorists a chance at receiving the vaccine.” Right then and there. In their cars. In the middle of a snowstorm.

All doses were administered. None were wasted. And yes, they took a selfie in the snow with their vaccination supplies, posting it on the Facebook page too. Again from that post, “JCPH Director Mike Weber said it was one of the coolest operations he’s been part of.” I’ll just bet it was. What a team!

Be well. We’ll talk again.



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**SOUTH DAKOTA HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

February 01, 2021

10:30 a.m. CT

Pierre, South Dakota

**Board will participate via Zoom.**

**Office will be open to the public, meeting audio will be live-streamed.**

Call the meeting to order and establish a quorum

**Board Members:**

Criag Cassens, Chair- Faulkton

Mark Murphy- Aberdeen Central

Marty Weismantel- Groton Area

Michael Talley- RC Central

Randy Soma, Vice Chair- Brookings

Barry Mann- Wakpala

Dr. Jerry Rasmussen- Dakota Valley

Tom Culver- Avon

ITEM #1 – Approve the agenda.

ITEM #2 – Public Forum

ITEM #3 – Consider changes to Girls and Boys Basketball Playoffs

- If fewer than four teams are actively participating in a Region, a Super-Region shall be formed to play for four spots in the SoDak 16.
- Super Regions, if formed, shall be formed as Region 1 and 2, Region 3 and 4, Region 5 and 6, and/or Region 7 and 8.

ITEM #4 – Consider change in ticket prices for 2021 State Basketball from \$15 for adults/\$10 for students to \$10 for adults/\$6 for students to reflect the change from day to session ticketing.

ITEM #5 – Consider report and recommendations by the SDHSAA COVID-19 Task Force regarding athletics and fine arts activities.

ITEM #6 – Executive Session per SDCL 1-25-2.1(Appeals Hearing on an Official's Ethics Complaint)

ITEM #7– Action resulting from Executive Session

ITEM #8– Adjourn

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Daniel Swartos

SDHSAA Executive Director

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## Democratic Leaders Column from Jamie Smith and Troy Heinert— Week 3

PIERRE, SD (January 28, 2021) – Greetings from Pierre, where the third week of session ends with Democrats working hard to improve the lives of our neighbors in South Dakota. Contentious bills like HB1076, which would prevent people from amending the gender listed on their birth certificates, have had Democrats defending the rights of our constituents. Other bills like SB24, providing for an online voter registration system, should have had bipartisan support, but ended up fundamentally impaired by one Republican legislator.

“It’s discouraging and disappointing to see these same discriminatory bills pop up year after year,” said House Minority Leader, Jamie Smith. “The lack of empathy for folks in our state who have rights, but then see these attempts to chip away at them is heartbreaking. It’s bad for our communities, it’s detrimental to our business climate, and it does nothing to advance the real work we’re here to do for all people in South Dakota.”

Representative Erin Healy (D-Sioux Falls) spoke about HB1076 at the weekly legislative press conference saying “We have inclusive companies like Amazon, as well as sports tournaments looking to come to South Dakota and thinking twice about it due to these bills that reflect poorly on our state. They are unvetted bills that are unconstitutional and just end up costing us both money and valuable time in the legislature.”

At this week’s press conference, Democrats introduced SB125, to require the wearing of face coverings in the state under certain conditions, in response to COVID-19. Reynold Nesiba (D-Sioux Falls) is the bill’s prime sponsor who stressed that this is a measured, temporary bill with no penalty.

“We’re South Dakotans – we take care of our neighbors, and right now is always the right time to do the right thing,” said Nesiba. “It’s hard at the local level for our leaders to enact mask requirements because they are impeded by the lack of leadership in our executive branch. From the data we’ve seen from Brookings and Sioux Falls, we know masks work. This bill proposes mitigation efforts somewhere between total lockdowns and doing nothing. We’re looking forward to this discussion.”

“We need to lead by example to get this pandemic under control” says Senate Minority Leader, Troy Heinert. “All of our reservations have mask mandates, practice social distancing, and have limited access to our lands. This has been a good model of staying ahead of it. We’ve also done good work with vaccine distribution and taking care of our families. If we continue on the road we’re on in the rest of the state, we know what waits ahead, and this bill moves us in the right direction for the people of South Dakota.”

Doing what’s right for the people of South Dakota is a priority for Democrats, which is why they supported SB24 in its original form to provide for a system of online voter registration. This bill was brought by the Republican Secretary of State, supported by the State Board of Elections, and the Republican Governor. It received no opponent testimony in committee. Yet, it was amended to only allow changes of information—not actual voter registration—and will proceed to the House side of the legislature in amended form.

“There’s no question that online voter registration is coming,” says Heinert. “The question is how long do our citizens who could benefit from this system have to wait? In our state and on our reservations many people have to travel great distances to get to the nearest courthouse. It would also help our new citizens by allowing them to type in their information, reducing errors on handwritten forms. Getting more people involved with elections is a good thing, and this shouldn’t be a partisan issue.”

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Other bills Democrats hope to see bipartisan support on are SB89, recognizing Juneteenth as an official non-working state holiday, and SB104 that will phase out the sales tax on food over four years and SB153 that will require quarterly disclosure on state aircraft usage. On Monday, SB68 will be on the Senate floor. It would provide for the creation and funding of Oceti Sakowin community-based schools.

Democrats are here to work for the people, to work for you. We want to hear from you! Please contact us to share your questions or concerns about the current session. Our caucus meetings have always been open to the public each day right before floor session. We are observing COVID mitigation practices in place in the Capitol. If you are visiting, plan to allow extra time for screening at the entrance and wear a mask to keep you and others safe. Your voice matters to us, and we believe that together, we can create a South Dakota that works for all of us.

Representative Jamie Smith, [Jamie.Smith@sdlegislature.gov](mailto:Jamie.Smith@sdlegislature.gov)  
Senator Troy Heinert, [Troy.Heinert@sdlegislature.gov](mailto:Troy.Heinert@sdlegislature.gov)

Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated January 28, 2021; 3:49 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	450	419	816	14	Moderate	10.00%
Beadle	2602	2502	5483	39	Substantial	8.89%
Bennett	376	361	1120	9	Minimal	4.30%
Bon Homme	1501	1467	1978	25	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3404	3214	10846	34	Substantial	7.00%
Brown	4899	4657	11819	79	Substantial	9.01%
Brule	678	655	1772	8	Substantial	5.88%
Buffalo	418	402	858	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	953	913	3010	20	Substantial	7.07%
Campbell	124	114	235	4	Minimal	22.73%
Charles Mix	1220	1148	3727	18	Substantial	4.69%
Clark	335	325	905	4	Moderate	7.69%
Clay	1750	1700	4882	16	Substantial	8.82%
Codington	3726	3549	9098	74	Substantial	8.09%
Corson	460	442	963	11	Minimal	9.09%
Custer	725	698	2548	11	Substantial	13.33%
Davison	2888	2777	6086	59	Substantial	7.28%
Day	604	548	1627	27	Substantial	6.82%
Deuel	457	433	1055	8	Moderate	0.00%
Dewey	1389	1350	3664	19	Substantial	11.11%
Douglas	411	388	854	9	Moderate	8.82%
Edmunds	457	423	952	9	Substantial	6.38%
Fall River	503	475	2450	14	Substantial	7.32%
Faulk	336	313	648	13	Moderate	7.69%
Grant	909	823	2068	37	Substantial	27.18%
Gregory	498	463	1163	27	Moderate	17.07%
Haakon	240	230	502	9	Minimal	10.00%
Hamlin	665	609	1641	38	Substantial	9.09%
Hand	320	308	743	5	Minimal	3.85%
Hanson	333	323	658	4	Minimal	4.35%
Harding	90	89	167	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2201	2089	6087	31	Substantial	7.79%
Hutchinson	755	701	2178	23	Substantial	6.45%



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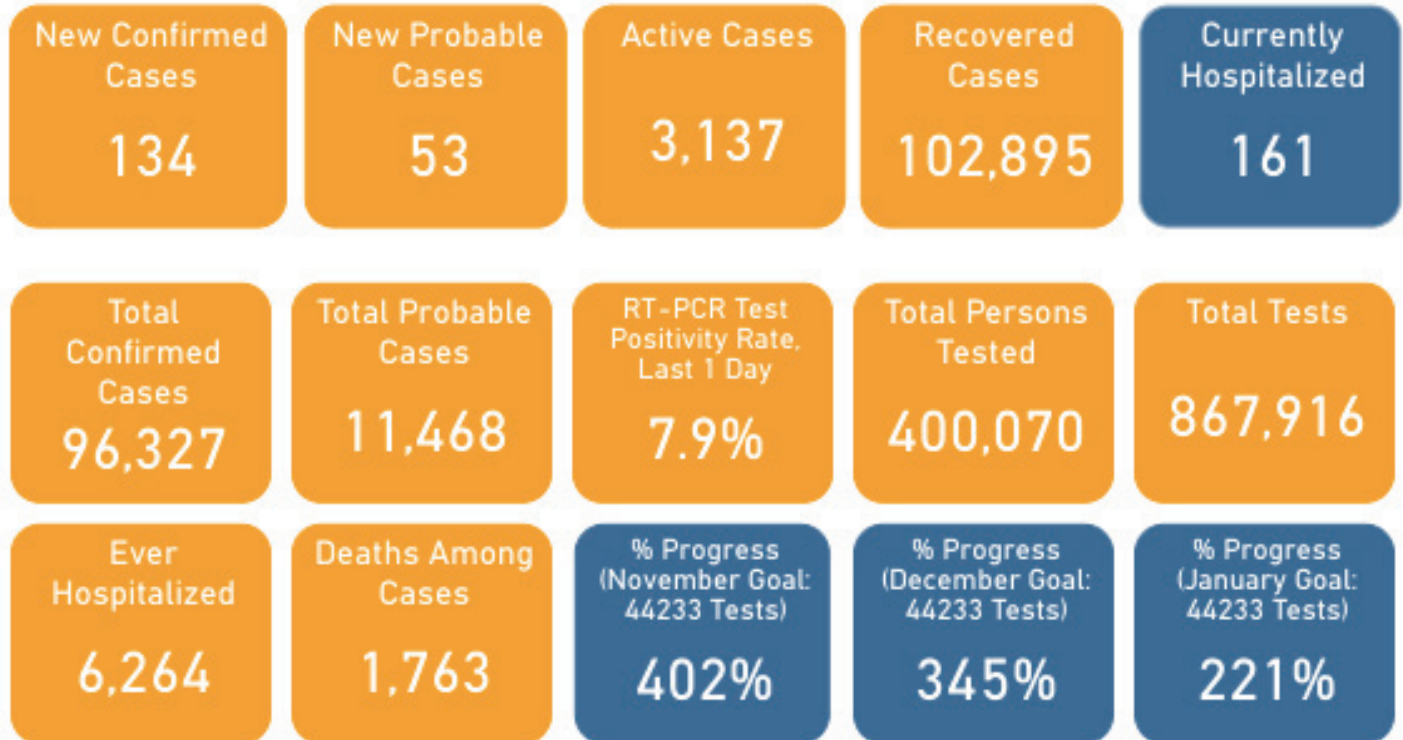
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Hyde	134	133	385	1	None	0.00%
Jackson	268	252	883	13	Minimal	0.00%
Jerauld	266	246	529	16	None	0.00%
Jones	82	75	202	0	Moderate	14.29%
Kingsbury	604	565	1510	13	Substantial	16.07%
Lake	1136	1067	3018	18	Substantial	7.37%
Lawrence	2744	2659	8039	41	Substantial	6.82%
Lincoln	7422	7131	18709	74	Substantial	13.52%
Lyman	588	558	1807	10	Substantial	7.37%
Marshall	286	269	1080	5	Moderate	7.14%
McCook	715	683	1504	23	Moderate	11.36%
McPherson	234	207	529	4	Substantial	3.28%
Meade	2462	2355	7150	28	Substantial	12.25%
Mellette	238	231	696	2	Moderate	19.23%
Miner	262	234	529	7	Moderate	22.22%
Minnehaha	26895	25826	72389	310	Substantial	10.99%
Moody	602	558	1647	16	Substantial	16.67%
Oglala Lakota	2036	1940	6394	42	Substantial	13.16%
Pennington	12310	11794	36650	168	Substantial	12.43%
Perkins	333	294	731	11	Substantial	28.21%
Potter	343	327	776	3	Moderate	5.56%
Roberts	1105	1041	3904	34	Substantial	13.27%
Sanborn	323	310	642	3	Moderate	0.00%
Spink	760	702	1988	25	Substantial	8.33%
Stanley	316	302	853	2	Moderate	3.03%
Sully	135	122	280	3	Moderate	14.29%
Todd	1211	1165	4002	25	Moderate	6.12%
Tripp	654	632	1404	15	Moderate	8.89%
Turner	1042	965	2512	50	Substantial	11.11%
Union	1851	1726	5772	38	Substantial	15.57%
Walworth	700	660	1731	14	Substantial	16.46%
Yankton	2727	2642	8676	28	Substantial	5.57%
Ziebach	334	316	829	9	Moderate	8.33%
Unassigned	0	0	1922	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	4160	0
10-19 years	12007	0
20-29 years	19425	4
30-39 years	17731	15
40-49 years	15357	35
50-59 years	15192	95
60-69 years	12329	229
70-79 years	6584	402
80+ years	5010	983

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	56273	832
Male	51522	931

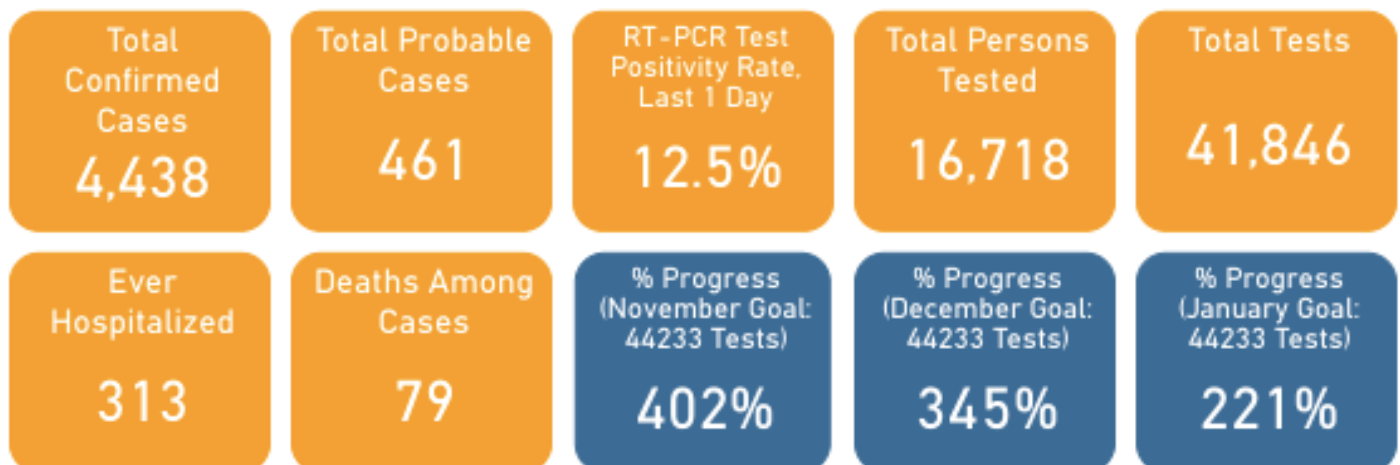
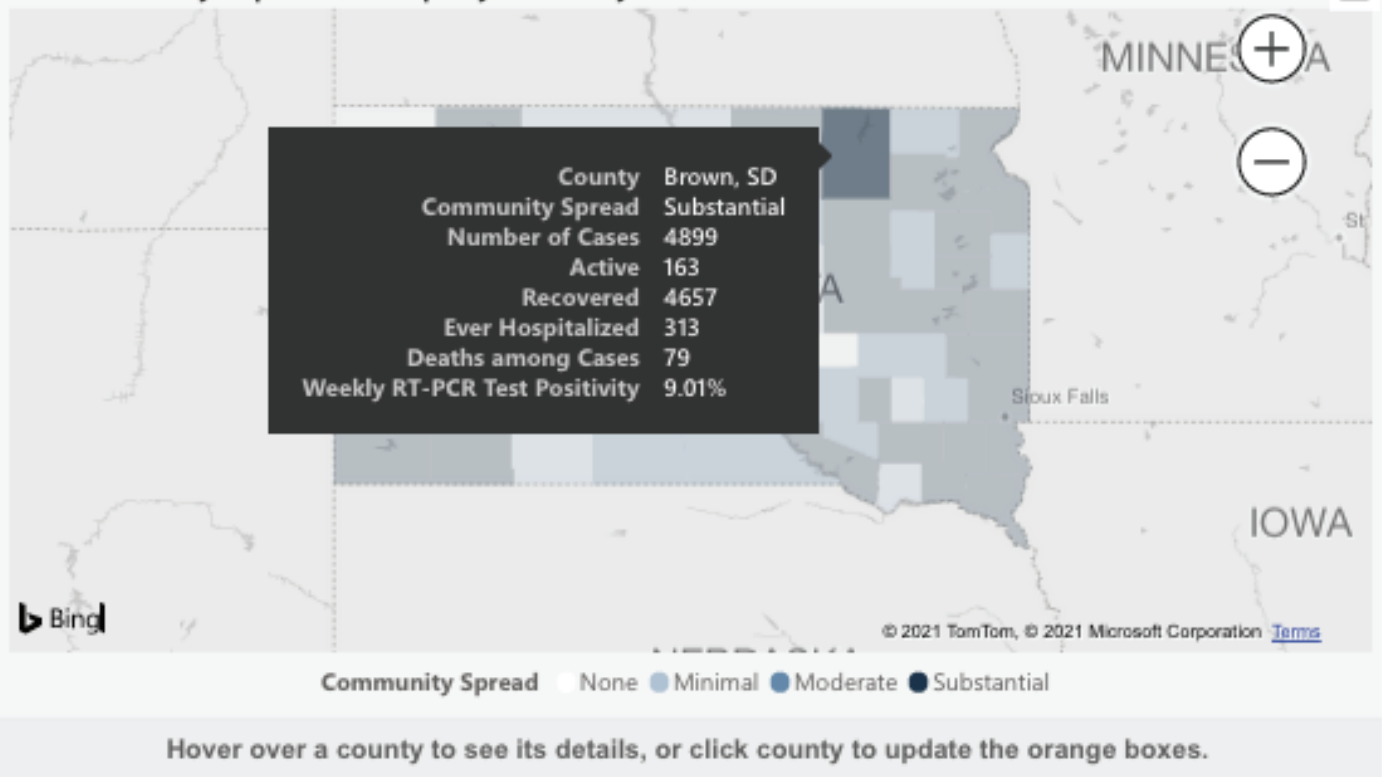
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## Brown County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



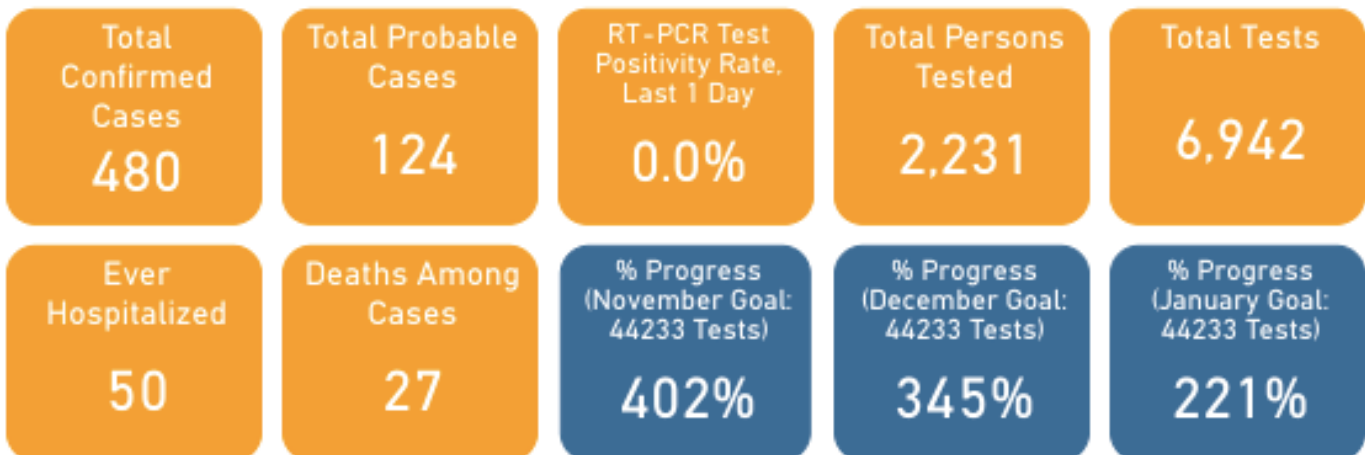
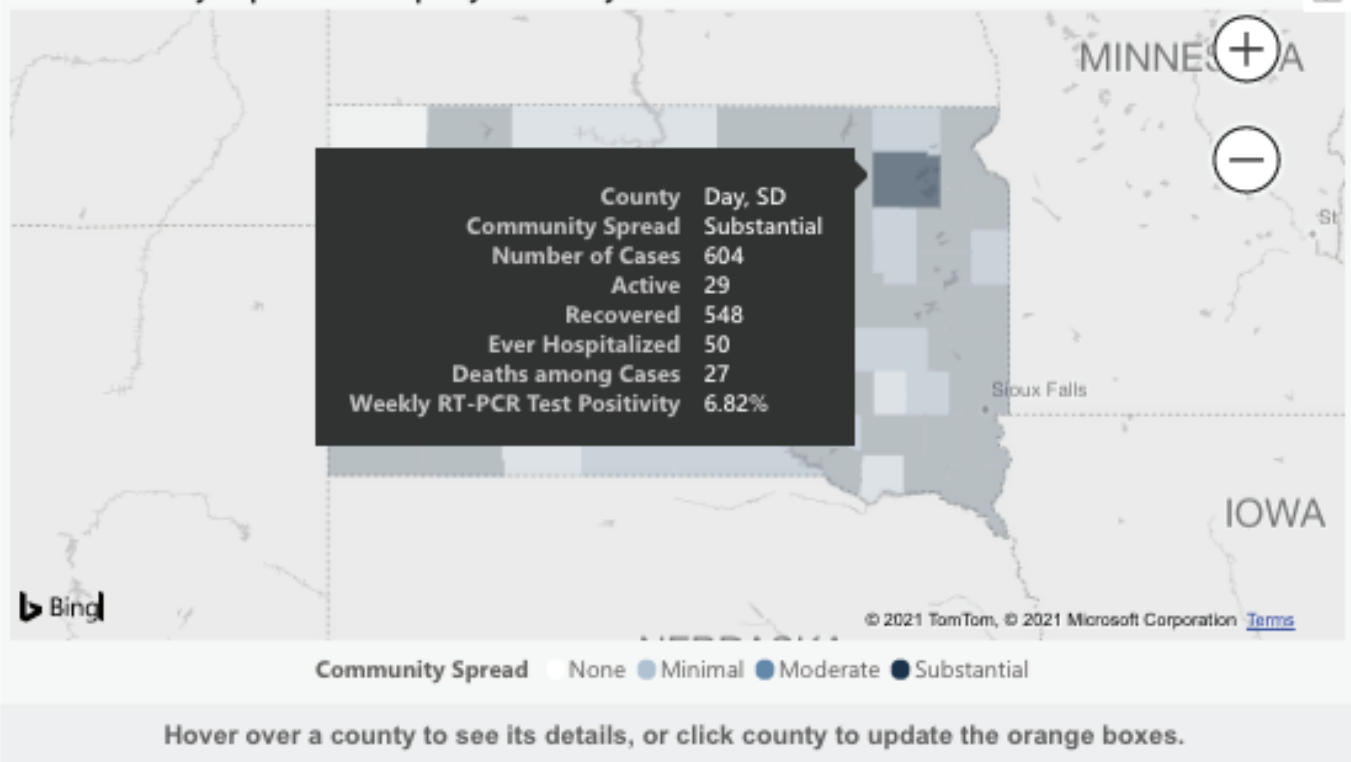
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## Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

87,884

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

63,248

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	46,617
Pfizer	41,267

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	25,623
Moderna - Series Complete	10,497
Pfizer - 1 dose	12,989
Pfizer - Series Complete	14,139

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	149	61	44	105
Beadle	1521	629	446	1,075
Bennett*	164	124	20	144
Bon Homme*	798	270	264	534
Brookings	2394	946	724	1,670
Brown	4366	1,766	1,300	3,066
Brule*	480	326	77	403
Buffalo*	16	12	2	14
Butte	370	318	26	344
Campbell	323	133	95	228
Charles Mix*	714	216	249	465
Clark	308	242	33	275
Clay	1392	812	290	1,102
Codington*	2906	1,370	768	2,138
Corson*	53	47	3	50
Custer*	563	407	78	485
Davison	2341	733	804	1,537
Day*	650	334	158	492
Deuel	349	197	76	273
Dewey*	123	115	4	119
Douglas*	358	166	96	262
Edmunds	336	140	98	238
Fall River*	623	459	82	541
Faulk	215	179	18	197
Grant*	668	284	192	476
Gregory*	487	187	150	337
Haakon*	191	77	57	134

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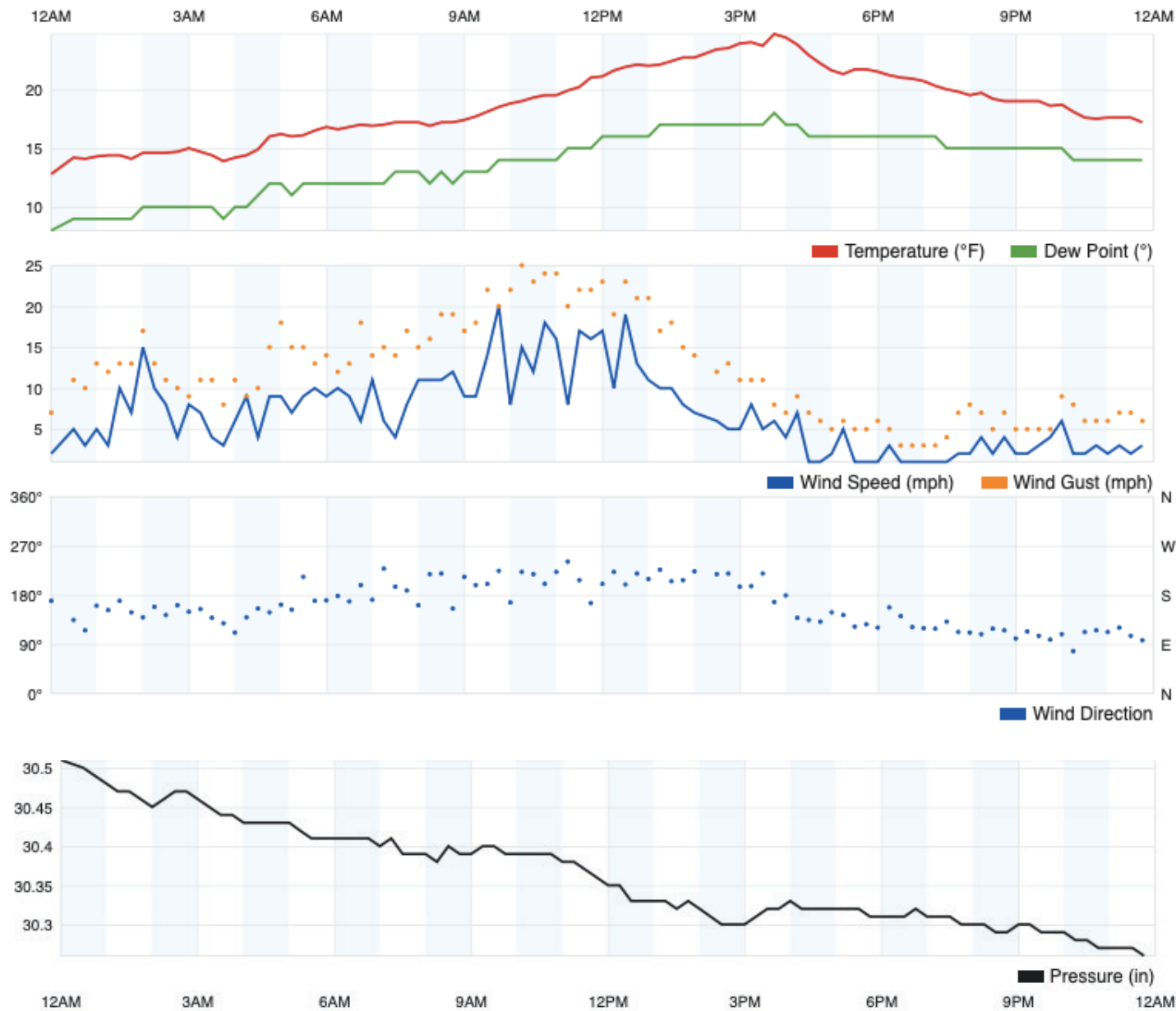
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Hamlin	479	221	129	350
Hand	389	145	122	267
Hanson	126	24	51	75
Harding	5	5	0	5
Hughes*	2015	1,041	487	1,528
Hutchinson*	1069	321	374	695
Hyde*	117	93	12	105
Jackson*	105	89	8	97
Jerauld	179	57	61	118
Jones*	155	117	19	136
Kingsbury	584	180	202	382
Lake	1099	407	346	753
Lawrence	1611	1,395	108	1,503
Lincoln	9133	2,779	3,177	5,956
Lyman*	168	116	26	142
Marshall*	393	173	110	283
McCook	520	280	120	400
McPherson	57	19	19	38
Meade*	1294	826	234	1,060
Mellette*	12	8	2	10
Miner	198	140	29	169
Minnehaha	25079	8,181	8,449	16,630
Moody*	436	168	134	302
Oglala Lakota*	34	24	5	29
Pennington*	9065	6,077	1,494	7,571
Perkins*	99	63	18	81
Potter	168	108	30	138
Roberts*	881	731	75	806
Sanborn	249	127	61	188
Spink	773	485	144	629
Stanley*	288	128	80	208
Sully	64	30	17	47
Todd*	37	29	4	33
Tripp*	612	406	103	509
Turner	1128	558	285	843
Union	492	270	111	381
Walworth*	576	352	112	464
Yankton	2958	930	1,014	1,944
Ziebach*	17	17	0	17
Other	2362	942	710	1,652

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




# Broton Daily Independent

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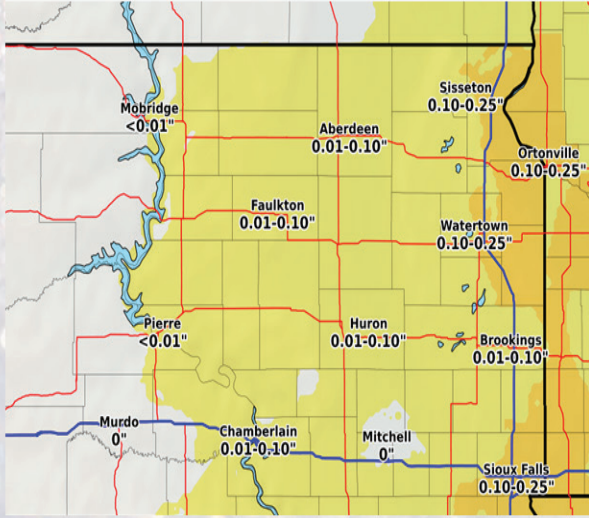
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Scattered Flurries and Patchy Fog	Cloudy then Chance Flurries and Patchy Fog	Chance Freezing Drizzle and Patchy Fog	Slight Chance Wintry Mix then Mostly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 30 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 31 °F	Low: 18 °F	High: 31 °F

## WINTRY WEATHER SATURDAY

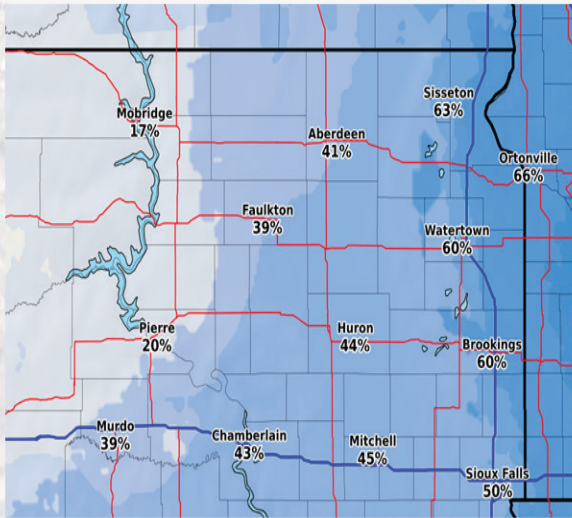


- Storm system passing off to our south will bring a round of wintry weather to portions of northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota
- Persistent freezing drizzle will begin late Friday night and linger through late Saturday evening with the potential to changeover to snow
- Continue to monitor the forecast, plan ahead, prepare for travel impacts!

### Forecast Ice Accumulations Late Fri-Late Sat



### Potential for 0.1"+ of snow Saturday Night



Visit [www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr) for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 1/28/2021 8:26 PM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Weather conditions are expected to deteriorate by late Friday night as a storm system begins to pull out into the Plains and passes off just to our south the first half of the weekend. Areas of freezing drizzle will develop late Friday night and persist through Saturday night before changing over to snow by early Sunday. Ice accumulations of up to a tenth of an inch or more will be possible across northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota. Areas along the SD/MN border will also see the best chance for light snow accumulations.



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## Today in Weather History

January 29, 2008: Arctic air combined with strong northwest winds of 20 to 40 mph to bring extreme wind chills to much of north central and northeast South Dakota. The extreme wind chills began in the morning hours of January 29th across all of the area. The wind chills improved across north central South Dakota by the evening and improved across northeast South Dakota during the morning hours of January 30th. The extreme wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero across the area. The extreme cold caused school delays and activity cancellations along with much discomfort to people and livestock. On Monday January 28th, the day before the extreme cold, a southerly flow brought very mild temperatures with some record highs set at several locations. Highs were in the 40s to the mid-50s across central and northeast South Dakota. When the Arctic front came through on January 28th, temperatures fell dramatically through the evening and early morning with below zero temperatures by Tuesday morning, January 29th. In fact, most locations across the area had a 40 to 55 degree temperature change from the 28th to the 29th.

1921: A small but intense windstorm resulted in the "Great Olympic Blowdown" in the Pacific Northwest. Hurricane force winds, funneled along the mountains, downed vast expanses of Douglas fir trees, and the storm destroyed eight billion board feet of timber. Winds at North Head WA gusted to 113 mph. On January 31, 1921, the International News Services reported from Aberdeen, Washington, "It is reported that thousands of dollars in damage was done to buildings and storms in Aberdeen and Hoquiam. The wind velocity was estimated at from 125 to 150 miles an hour. Four steel smokestack reaching almost 200 feet into the air were the first to collapse before the terrific onslaught of the gale. The giant chimneys crashed down on dwellings crushing them like houses of cardboard."

1947: On this date through the 30th, a fierce winter storm buried southern Wisconsin under two feet of snow. Strong northeasterly winds piled drifts up to 10 feet high in the Milwaukee area, shutting down the city for two days.

2002: A major three-day winter storm blasted parts of Kansas and Missouri. A catastrophic ice storm occurred south of the snow area, with two inches of ice and snow accumulating in the Kansas City, Missouri area. Thousands of trees were felled by the storm, blocking roads, felling utility lines and causing fires. Two "Bicentennial Trees" which were estimated at being over 200 years old were badly damaged from this storm. After the 31st, 325,000 people were reportedly without power in Kansas City alone.

2008: A sharp cold front moved across Illinois during the day, producing a drastic temperature drop. Temperatures fell 20 to 40 degrees in just a couple hours, with areas from Springfield, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri seeing temperatures fall as much as 50 degrees between noon and 6 pm. Temperatures in the mid-60s in central Illinois at midday on the 29th had fallen to near zero by the next morning.

1780 - On the coldest morning of a severe winter the mercury dipped to 16 degrees below zero at New York City, and reached 20 degrees below zero at Hartford CT. New York Harbor was frozen for five weeks, allowing a heavy cannon to be taken across the ice to fortify the British on Staten Island. (The Weather Channel)

1921 - A small but intense windstorm resulted in the "Great Olympic Blowdown" in the Pacific Northwest. Hurricane force winds, funneled along the mountains, downed vast expanses of Douglas fir trees, and the storm destroyed eight billion board feet of timber. Winds at North Head WA gusted to 113 mph. (David Ludlum)

1983 - A series of Pacific coast storms finally came to an end. The storms, attributed in part to the ocean current, "El Nino," produced ocean swells 15 to 20 feet high which ravaged the beaches of southern California. Much of the damage was to homes of movies stars in the exclusive Malibu Colony. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A strong storm moving out of the Central Rockies spread snow across the north central states, with up to eight inches of snow in Wisconsin, and produced wind gusts to 64 mph at Goodland KS. A thunderstorm produced three inches of snow in forty-five minutes at Owing Mills MD. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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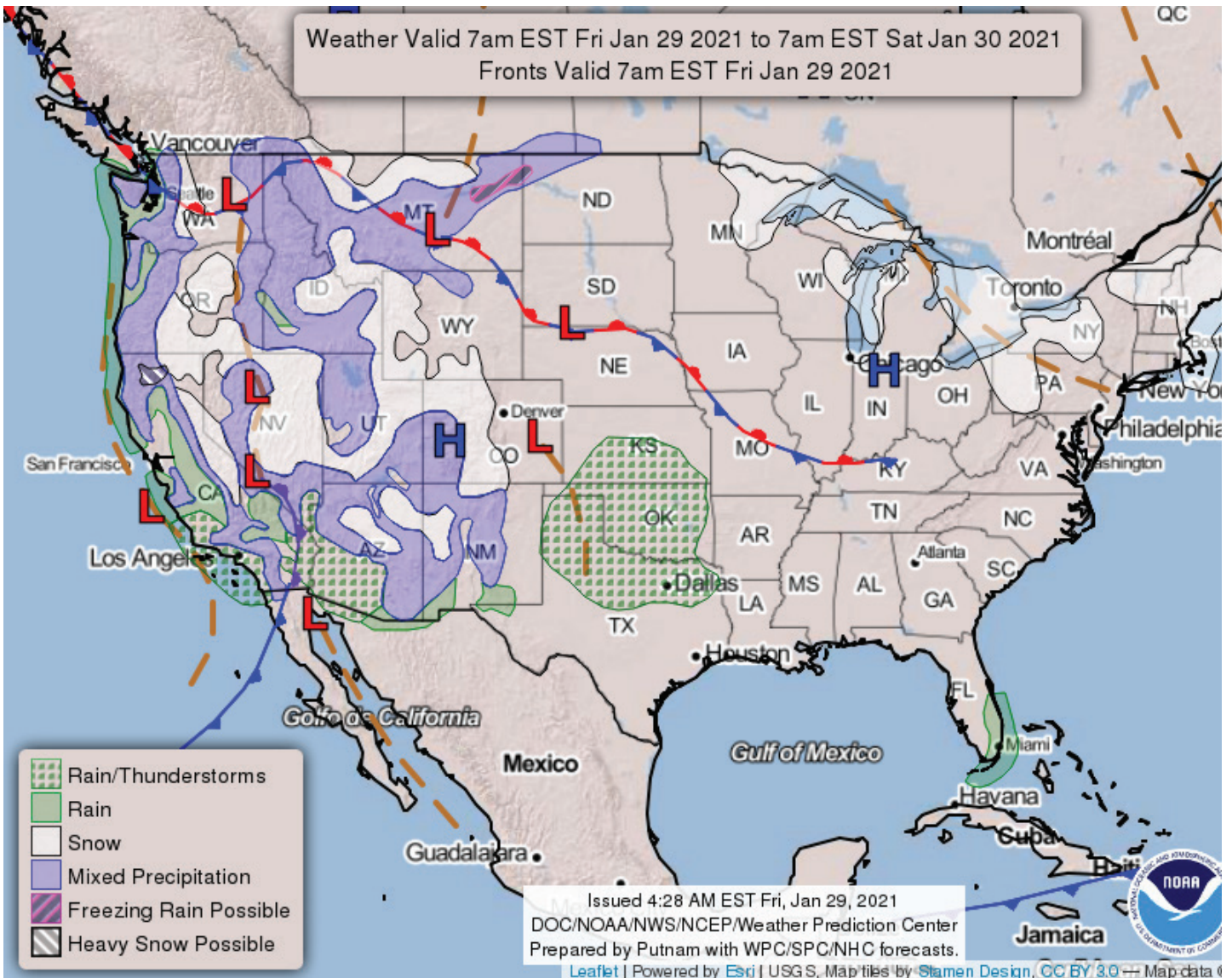
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 25 °F at 3:49 PM**  
**Low Temp: 13 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 9:20 AM**  
**Precip:**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 58° in 1931**  
**Record Low: -32° in 1951**  
**Average High: 24°F**  
**Average Low: 2°F**  
**Average Precip in Jan.: 0.43**  
**Precip to date in Jan.: 0.14**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.43**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.14**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:37 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57 a.m.**



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## THE FLAW OF FLATTERY

An old English fable contains a truth well worth repeating.

A crow swooped low over the lunch of a peasant and stole a piece of cheese. A wise fox, watching the crow with jealousy, wanted the cheese for himself.

"O Crow," he said in his most flattering voice, "how beautiful are your wings. How brightly shine your searching eyes. How graceful is your strong, flexible neck. Your chest is the chest of a soaring eagle. Your talons are no match for all the beasts of the field. O that such a bird would lack only a voice."

The crow was thrilled and excited over the flattery. Chuckling to herself, she decided to surprise the fox with her voice. When she opened her mouth, the cheese fell to the ground, and the fox snapped it up and walked away.

A wise man once said, "Flattery is a trap; evil men are caught in it. But the good men stay away and sing for joy."

Flattery is different from encouragement. We give "courage" to those who are struggling with life's problems when we recognize their efforts. We give hope to one who has fallen when we offer a hand to pick them up. We give peace when we smile at one with sadness in their eyes.

Flattery is different. It praises someone for something that is not true or honest because we want to make them feel good about mediocrity - even failure. In the end, it destroys the one we want to help. The Psalmist said, "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips."

False praise, though well-intended, is destructive and deceitful.

Prayer: Lord, may we offer hope to the struggling, help to the weak, encouraging words to the faltering, and recognition to those who do good things! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things, Psalm 12:3

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News from the  Associated Press

## Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 62, Sisseton 59

Avon 51, Gregory 50

Belle Fourche 52, Harding County 48

Burke 80, Boyd County, Neb. 39

Castlewood 69, Lake Preston 59

Clark/Willow Lake 56, Deuel 37

DeSmet 71, Colman-Egan 33

Douglas 65, Custer 55

Dupree 63, Philip 55

Elkton-Lake Benton 74, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 51

Estelline/Hendricks 64, Arlington 56

Ethan 63, Mitchell Christian 41

Faulkton 59, Leola/Frederick 50

Freeman Academy/Marion 74, Irene-Wakonda 50

Hamlin 63, Webster 38

Lemmon 61, McIntosh 49

Lennox 64, Parkston 42

Milbank 63, Redfield 48

Mitchell 64, Brookings 42

Rapid City Central 72, Spearfish 44

Sioux Falls Christian 92, Dakota Valley 72

Sioux Falls Washington 65, Sioux Falls Lincoln 45

Sully Buttes 63, Hitchcock-Tulare 41

Tiospa Zina Tribal 86, Miller 61

Tri-Valley 49, Elk Point-Jefferson 41

Vermillion 68, Dell Rapids 66

Viborg-Hurley 66, Centerville 43

Wall 54, Hill City 45

Watertown 61, West Central 53

Waubay/Summit 66, Great Plains Lutheran 62

White River 81, Platte-Geddes 64

Yankton 51, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 46

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 51, Bon Homme 36

Burke 58, Boyd County, Neb. 46

Clark/Willow Lake 63, Deuel 38

Custer 58, Douglas 32

Dell Rapids St. Mary 55, Alcester-Hudson 38

Ethan 60, Mitchell Christian 20

Faulkton 55, Leola/Frederick 19

Florence 54, Sisseton 45

Garretson 65, Parker 39

Harding County 59, New England, N.D. 37

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Highmore-Harrold 62, Wolsey-Wessington 46  
Hitchcock-Tulare 43, Sully Buttes 40  
Irene-Wakonda 52, Freeman Academy/Marion 8  
Lower Brule 55, Mobridge-Pollock 49  
North Central Co-Op 44, Potter County 34  
Philip 54, Dupree 51  
Rapid City Central 55, Spearfish 46  
Rapid City Christian 60, Hot Springs 31  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 42, Wessington Springs 31  
Sioux Falls Christian 65, Dakota Valley 63  
Sioux Falls Washington 55, Sioux Falls Lincoln 26  
St. Thomas More 61, Sturgis Brown 22  
Tri-Valley 46, Elk Point-Jefferson 43  
Vermillion 56, Dell Rapids 33  
Viborg-Hurley 62, Centerville 50  
Waubay/Summit 59, Great Plains Lutheran 50  
White River 77, Colome 20

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

## Judge orders polygamous sect to sell South Dakota compound

PRINGLE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota judge ordered a secretive polygamous sect to sell its compound in the Black Hills to pay for a lawsuit settlement.

Court documents show that a sheriff has been ordered to sell the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' property near Pringle in Custer County.

The sect still owes nearly \$1.7 million to three men as part of a 2017 settlement in federal court. Two of the men were allegedly detained and unlawfully jailed in Arizona after a dispute over access to a property that the sect had leased to the men.

The 140-acre (57-hectare) property includes nine parcels of land, KELO-TV reported. It will be sold as one during an auction Feb. 25 at the Custer County Courthouse, said Sheriff Marty Mechaley. The compound sits along a gravel road and is shielded from view by tall pine trees, a privacy fence and a guard tower.

The FLDS is an offshoot of mainstream Mormonism whose members believe polygamy brings exaltation in heaven. Polygamy is a legacy of the early teachings of the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the faith abandoned the practice in 1890 and prohibits it today.

Seth Jeffs, who authorities have said led the FLDS compound in South Dakota, is the brother of Warren Jeffs, who is considered by the group to be a prophet who speaks for God. Warren Jeffs is serving a life sentence in Texas for sexually assaulting underage girls he considered to be his brides.

In recent years, the group has lost hundreds of members and control of the sister cities of Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona, amid a major leadership void started by Warren Jeffs' imprisonment.

Seth Jeffs took a plea deal in a multimillion-dollar food-stamp fraud case in 2016. His brother Lyle Jeffs was sentenced in 2017 to prison for his role in carrying out the scheme.

This story has been corrected to reflect that a South Dakota judge ordered the sale. It was not the result of a foreclosure, as KELO-TV had originally reported.

## South Dakota Republicans scoff at mask mandate proposal

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Republicans who control the South Dakota Legislature shrugged off a Democratic proposal for a statewide mask requirement to slow the spread of the coronavirus, saying Thursday that they'd rather stay the course and allow individuals to decide for themselves whether to wear one in public.

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House Republicans haven't even passed rules to wear masks on the close-quartered chamber floor. "I'm not in favor of a mask mandate and I don't think that would have legs in the House," said Rep. Kent Peterson, the House majority leader.

Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba, of Sioux Falls, proposed requiring people statewide to wear masks. Several studies have found that coronavirus infections spread slower in communities that have mask mandates than in others that don't. And there is growing evidence, including from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that wearing masks helps prevent infections from spreading.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem, though, has steadfastly refused to issue a mask order during the pandemic, instead relying on people to take personal responsibility for their safety.

Nikki Gronli, the vice chair of the state's Democratic Party, said Nesiba's bill mirrors Sioux Falls' ordinance, the Argus Leader reported. She said since Sioux Falls passed its mandate in November, it has seen a sharp decline in positive cases and hospitalizations.

The city reported 1,002 active cases on Wednesday, down 48 from the previous day. The three-day average of new cases is down nearly 33% since Jan. 14.

Top Republicans in the House and Senate, though, have praised Noem's mask stance.

"South Dakota was well-positioned from the outset to weather COVID as best we could, but the governor chose to flaunt our advantages of population and geography and promoted zero personal responsibility," Nesiba said. "Our economy has endured, thanks to our great local business owners and workers. What we need from the state is real leadership to prevent this virus from spreading."

Brookings, Vermillion, Yankton, Huron and seven of the state's nine reservations also have mask mandates.

South Dakota health officials on Thursday reported 24 new deaths due to the coronavirus, for a total of 58 fatalities in the last two days and 1,763 overall. The death count is the fifth highest per capita in the country, at about 200 deaths per 100,000 people, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University researchers.

Officials listed 187 new cases since Wednesday, pushing the state's pandemic total to 107,795.

## Noem refuses to say whether Biden victory was free and fair

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem refused to acknowledge Thursday that Democrat Joe Biden defeated her close Republican ally Donald Trump in a free and fair election, instead using the opportunity to criticize Biden's actions since taking office.

In her first public comments specifically addressing the election results since Congress certified Biden's victory hours after a mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol, Noem refused to say whether she erred by saying in November that election systems were "rigged" and casting doubt on the fairness of the election.

Instead, she said at a news conference, "I think that we deserve fair and transparent elections. I think there's a lot of people who have doubts about that."

Noem has condemned the violence at the Capitol, but last week she declined to hold Trump accountable for having a role in it.

The state's three members of Congress, all Republicans, rejected Trump's false accusations and voted to certify the election. Noem hasn't done so, though, despite a lack of any credible evidence that the election wasn't fair. Even Trump administration officials said it was secure, including William Barr, who was attorney general at the time. And Trump's allegations have been refuted by a variety of judges, state elections officials and an arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

Noem acknowledged that Trump had a chance to argue his case in courts and the allegations were rejected. She also attended Biden's inauguration earlier this month and said she wanted to work with his administration to help South Dakota.

But her refusal to say whether the election was fair has also benefitted her own campaign and positions her to inherit or keep voters still loyal to Trump. She recently said she isn't interested in running for president

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in 2024, but political strategists say her actions suggest otherwise and she is still considered a contender.

Noem's rise to national prominence came as she touted her efforts to avoid business closures and mask mandates during the pandemic. She has faced scrutiny for those decisions, especially after the state's COVID-19 death rate became the highest in the Midwest after a surge of cases that peaked in November.

Noem defended her decision to not issue a mask mandate after legislative Democrats, who are in the minority in the state Legislature, introduced a bill that would have required people to wear masks in public statewide. Noem said she has not seen any evidence that mask mandates work.

"We have followed the science of the virus and what we know about it, the data and the facts on the ground," she said.

Several studies have found that coronavirus infections spread slower in communities that have mask mandates compared to others that don't. And a growing amount of scientific evidence, including from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shows that wearing masks helps prevent infections from spreading.

But state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat who sponsored the mask mandate proposal, said the state has lost "way too many" people to Noem's refusal to issue a mask requirement.

His bill isn't expected to pass and may not even proceed as far as a vote by the full Senate. Republican legislative leaders have said they would oppose the mask requirement and that they appreciated the governor's approach of relying on personal responsibility.

Follow Stephen Groves on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/stephengroves>

## Sheriff's officials suspend 2-year search for missing girl

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The search for a 9-year-old girl missing for nearly two years has finally come to an end in western South Dakota, the Pennington County Sheriff's Office said Thursday.

The widespread search for Serenity Dennard, who ran away from a children's home in Rockerville, involved more than 1,500 people from 66 different agencies who logged about 6,000 miles searching for the girl, according to sheriff's officials.

Trained dogs and their handlers searched the region where Serenity disappeared Feb. 3, 2019 on 220 occasions. The Rapid City/Pennington County Water Rescue Team divers were brought out numerous times and the area was searched by air seven times.

Investigators looked into 275 leads after Serenity ran away from the Black Hills Children's Home. Authorities say 538 people were interviewed or contacted during the investigation, which included assistance from the FBI and other law enforcement agencies. Six search warrants were executed.

Absent of any new information, the sheriff's office says the search for Serenity has been suspended. The investigation will remain open.

## As Biden seeks a turn on environment, Trump rules to linger

By JOHN FLESHER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

Longtime safeguards for U.S. bird populations took a hit under former President Donald Trump, whose administration made it harder to prosecute industry-caused deaths — such as the 2019 destruction of a sprawling Virginia seabird nesting ground — and chipped away protections for endangered species.

President Joe Biden wasted little time seeking to turn things around. Hours after taking office, he ordered a review of his predecessor's decision to weaken enforcement of the century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It was among more than 100 business-friendly Trump actions on the environment that Biden wants reconsidered and possibly revised or scrapped.

A White House statement Wednesday described them as "harmful rollbacks of standards that protect our air, water, and communities." And the president targeted oil and gas leasing on federal land and subsidies for those industries in his bid to slow climate change, while promising stepped-up land and water conservation.

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Despite the quick start, it will take months or years to reverse policies set in motion by Trump's team — including those involving the bird treaty rollback, which happened as North American populations continued a decline that has reached 3 billion — a one-third overall drop — since 1970.

Many rules Trump went after originated with former President Barack Obama and took him years to undo, continuing a decades-old, back-and-forth between Democratic and Republican administrations with starkly differing approaches to environmental regulation.

"You have the worst-case scenario of partisan ping pong," said Clint Woods, a former Environmental Protection Agency deputy assistant administrator under Trump.

Environmental activists are pressing for fast action. They say returning to the pre-Trump status quo is no longer enough as hundreds of millions of birds die annually at the hands of industry, global temperatures rise and poor communities remain vulnerable to air and water pollution.

Biden faces similar challenges as he inherits Trump's actions across the environmental spectrum — from removal of endangered species protections for gray wolves, to loosened energy standards for washers and dryers and reversal of the Obama administration's proposed ban on chlorpyrifos, a crop pesticide some scientists say could harm children.

Business groups lobbied for Trump's deregulatory approach. Critics said it crippled bedrock environmental protection laws, slashed agency funding and slackened enforcement.

"There's a huge amount of work to be done," said Erik Olson, a senior strategic director with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "The Trump administration not only did their best to roll back rules, but tried to eviscerate the basic infrastructure of the agencies. They brought in people who viewed it as their job to keep agencies from carrying out their missions."

Mandy Gunasekara, EPA chief of staff for part of Trump's term, said Biden's early acts signaled a turn-around from the Republican administration's efforts to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Those include canceling a permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline and halting energy leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"In the real world where people are breathing air and drinking the water and living on once-contaminated land, we made considerable progress," Gunasekara said. "Instead of trying to wipe the slate clean, they should build off the good work we've done."

One cause for optimism, environmental advocates said, is that most of Biden's initial appointees to key posts are former insiders. Gina McCarthy, the national climate adviser, served as Obama's EPA chief. Michael Regan, tapped to lead EPA, was an air quality specialist there.

"This is a team of experts as opposed to a team of novices," said Ann Mesnikoff, federal legislative director for the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center.

Some Trump actions were taken through decrees and documents that can be rescinded or revised. Biden staffers will comb through a flurry of measures from Trump's last days that haven't taken effect and could be pulled back, such as the bird death rule.

But some policies can be undone only through multi-year grinds involving scientific research, public comment periods and lobbying from advocacy groups.

Among them: last year's weakening of the National Environmental Policy Act, a Nixon-era law requiring federal agencies to consider how projects such as oil pipelines could harm natural surroundings. Trump's revision shortened reviews and exempted some projects.

Restoring the law's reach is "an essential tool for achieving climate goals and equity for vulnerable communities" — both Biden priorities, said Oday Salim, an assistant professor of environmental law at the University of Michigan.

Other Trump rollbacks include a reduction of water bodies protected from pollution under the Clean Water Act and changes in how the EPA evaluates science and calculates benefits from pollution reductions. Biden called for action on those two EPA rules as soon as possible.

Courts already intervened to halt some Trump rules and policies, including attempts to open vast western lands to energy development, grazing and mining. An appeals court last week tossed a redo of an



Obama-era plan to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants.

The Trump administration lost or withdrew proposed rule changes in almost 80% of 109 court challenges tracked by the Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University law school. Past administrations have lost or backed down in 30% of cases, said adjunct professor Bethany Davis Noll, who helped compile the data.

Yet the federal judiciary became more conservative under Trump, who appointed nearly 30% of active judges, according to the Pew Research Center. Six of the Supreme Court's justices are Republican appointees.

Environmental advocates acknowledge the hurdles but want an aggressive response to Trump's actions, particularly those undermining policies that had survived under both parties.

The law protecting migratory birds is one.

Under Trump, the government stopped pursuing punishments for accidental but preventable bird deaths, such as when they collide with power lines or drown in oil waste pits. Enforcement cases against companies dropped from almost 60 cases annually on average to zero.

Virginia's Democratic governor blamed the change for the 2019 destruction of a nesting ground for 25,000 shorebirds to make way for a road and tunnel, after federal officials said conservation measures were no longer required.

A judge later rejected the Interior Department's justification for the bird policy change. So the department adopted a regulation doing the same thing.

Although Biden's administration could withdraw it, bird advocates want even stronger protection than before, which would require a time-consuming new rule.

"We have to think smarter, we have to think broader than the Obama administration to accomplish conservation and environmental protection," said Sarah Greenberger, former senior advisor in Obama's Interior Department and now an Audubon Society vice president.

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Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan, and Brown from Billings, Montana. Contributing to this story were AP writers Christina Larson in Washington, D.C., Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, and Janet McConnaughey in New Orleans.

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On Twitter follow John Flesher: @JohnFlesher and Matthew Brown: @MatthewBrownAP

## **Raven Aerostar and Persistent Systems Network Constellation of Stratospheric Balloons in Comms Demo**

NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan 28, 2021--

Persistent Systems, LLC ("Persistent"), a leader in mobile ad hoc networking solutions, together with lighter-than-air platform provider Raven Aerostar (a division of Raven Industries, Inc.; NASDAQ: RAVN), today announced that the companies have successfully conducted a demonstration of how a stratospheric constellation of communications and sensor nodes could be established using Persistent's Wave Relay® mobile ad hoc network (MANET) and used over a battlefield.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210128005672/en/>

Persistent Systems + Raven Aerostar (Photo: Business Wire)

The event, which took place in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, linked Persistent's ground-based Auto-Tracking Antenna System to two Raven Aerostar Lightning Balloon Systems — extending Wave Relay® MANET coverage over 200 miles via a low-SWaP MPU5 tactical networking device riding on both balloons. These networked balloons allowed users to:

Track the position of other MPU5 devices on the ground; Provide network connectivity for sensors; and Create voice communications coverage throughout the flight path area. "Utilizing multiple stratospheric balloon systems, users were able to get a long-range network capability in addition to high throughput," said Scott Wickersham, Division Vice President of Raven Aerostar. "This is a scalable concept which can

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be extended with both the Raven Lightning and Thunderhead Balloon Systems to include a wide range of ground subscribers well beyond the traditional line-of-sight, point-to-point concept."

Additionally, Raven Aerostar enhanced Thunderstorm, its command and control software, to seamlessly integrate with the MPU5 Application Programming Interface (API) in order to interact with the balloon systems and payloads. This enables a real-time ability to identify and track the balloons, sensors, and other users in the network using apps like TAK and Google Earth. The network also spanned beyond line-of-sight (BLOS) communications by leveraging Persistent's Cloud Relay™ solution.

"You could see how this constellation of stratospheric balloons, airborne, and ground-based networking devices—plus tracking antenna—has applications for the recovery of downed pilots and operations in GPS-denied environments," said Adrien Robenhymer, Vice President of Business Development for Air Force and Intelligence Community at Persistent. "The system can also provide wide-area communication coverage in austere environments, or add intelligence payloads for collaborative and distributed sensing, or do it all at once."

The MPU5 is a flexible tactical networking solution with multiple RF bands and antenna configurations. Its lower size, weight, and power (SWaP) considerations reduce the need for amplifiers and extra batteries, extending the air endurance of the lighter-than-air platform.

"You can pull in multiple platforms for a private, robust coverage area with different airborne sensors all working in tandem. At the same time, you can also add dozens and dozens of operators on the ground into the same network without it being overworked," said Robenhymer. "Which opens up a whole realm of new mission possibilities."

## **A new stage: Dr Martens valued at \$5 billion in share sale**

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Dr. Martens boots have been valued by rebellious youth through the decades. From Wednesday, the maker of the famous air-cushioned boots with the distinctive yellow stitching will be valued at some \$5 billion when it sells shares publicly.

Born in the aftermath of World War II in the shattered remains of Germany and via a journey that saw it become an emblem of youth culture, the Dr. Martens footwear company is set to list on the London Stock Exchange for the first time next week.

Shares in the company will go on public sale on Wednesday in a flotation that values the shoe brand at around 3.7 billion pounds (\$5 billion). Around 35% of the business will be available for investors to buy and sell.

"The successful transformation of Dr. Martens is a great story, and what is even more exciting is the huge potential ahead," Chief Executive Kenny Wilson said.

The company aims to use the anticipated proceeds from the sale to expand the brand, which is currently owned by private equity firm Permira.

Dr Martens boots are sold in more than 60 countries, and customers buy around 11 million pairs every year. The brand still sees room for expansion.

The Dr. Martens boots and shoes have their roots in post-war Munich in 1945 when Dr. Klaus Maertens, a 25-year-old soldier, was convalescing from a broken foot. Looking for an alternative to the traditional hard leather sole, he came up with an air-cushioned alternative that he showed to an old university friend and mechanical engineer, Dr. Herbert Funk.

By adapting disused military supplies, the pair began producing their novel shoes two years later and within a decade they had a booming business, though the big buyers at first were mainly older women.

In 1960, British firm Griggs bought an exclusive license to the shoes and made adjustments that still exist, including the distinctive yellow stitching. The first eight-holed 1460 Dr. Martens boot coincided with a radical transformation of youth culture.

From the Swinging Sixties, through the worlds of glam and punk rock in the 1970s and Britpop in the 1990s, the boots were adopted by different groups around the world. They were also popular with factory

workers for their comfort.

Dr. Martens started losing its popularity around the turn of the century and the company was facing bankruptcy before the fashion world warmed to the brand once again.

From Wednesday, fans can do more than just don the famous boot.

## WHO team visits Wuhan hospital that had early COVID patients

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — A World Health Organization team visited a hospital on Friday where China says the first COVID-19 patients were treated more than a year ago as part of the experts' long-awaited fact-finding mission on the origins of the coronavirus.

The WHO team members and Chinese officials earlier had their first in-person meetings at a hotel ahead of field visits in and around the central city of Wuhan in the coming days.

"First face to face meeting with our colleagues. Correction: facemask to facemask given the medical restrictions," Dutch virologist Marion Koopmans tweeted in the morning.

She said they were discussing their program of visits and Chinese team leader "prof. Wannian" was joking about some technical glitches, an apparent reference to top Chinese epidemiologist Liang Wannian, who has been a leader of China's response team.

"Nice to see our colleagues after lengthy Zoom meetings," Koopman tweeted. The visiting researchers held video meetings during 14 days of quarantine after their arrival in China. They came out of quarantine on Thursday.

Members of the team left the hotel by car, and a short time later entered the gates of the Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine. According to China's official account of its response to the initial outbreak, Dr. Zhang Jixian first reported cases of what was then known as "pneumonia of unknown origin" at the hospital on Dec. 27, 2019.

WHO said earlier on Twitter that the team requested "detailed underlying data" and planned to speak with early responders and some of the first COVID-19 patients. It also planned to visit markets such as the Huanan Seafood Market linked to many of the first cases, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and laboratories at facilities such as the Wuhan Center for Disease Control.

The team's mission has become politically charged, as China seeks to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak.

"All hypotheses are on the table as the team follows the science in their work to understand the origins of the COVID19 virus," WHO tweeted.

Confirmation of the origins of the virus is likely to take years. Pinning down an outbreak's animal source typically requires exhaustive research including taking animal samples, genetic analysis and epidemiological studies.

One possibility is that a wildlife poacher might have passed the virus to traders who carried it to Wuhan. The Chinese government has promoted theories, with little evidence, that the outbreak might have started with imports of frozen seafood tainted with the virus, a notion roundly rejected by international scientists and agencies.

A possible focus for investigators is the virology institute in the city. One of China's top virus research labs, it built an archive of genetic information about bat coronaviruses after the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS.

The first clusters of COVID-19 were detected in Wuhan in late 2019. China has since reported more than 89,000 cases and 4,600 deaths, with new cases largely concentrated in its frigid northeast, where local lockdowns and travel restrictions were being imposed to contain the outbreaks.

New cases of local transmission continue to fall, with just 36 announced on Friday, as far fewer Chinese than usual appear willing to travel for Lunar New Year.

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Associated Press photographer Ng Han Guan in Wuhan, China, and video journalist Sam McNeil in Beijing

contributed to this report.

## **Biden faces scrutiny over reliance on executive orders**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

President Joe Biden and aides are showing touches of prickliness over growing scrutiny of his heavy reliance on executive orders in his first days in office.

The president in just over a week has already signed more than three dozen executive orders and directives aimed at addressing the coronavirus pandemic as well as a gamut of other issues including environmental regulations, immigration policies and racial justice.

Biden has also sought to use the orders to erase foundational policy initiatives by former President Donald Trump, such as halting construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall and reversing a Trump-era Pentagon policy that largely barred transgender people from serving in the military.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Thursday that Biden's early reliance on executive action is at odds with the Democrat's pledge as a candidate to be a consensus builder. The New York Times editorial board ran an opinion piece headlined "Ease up on the Executive Actions, Joe."

Biden on Thursday framed his latest executive actions as an effort to "undo the damage Trump has done" by fiat rather than "initiating any new law." During a brief exchange with reporters in the Oval Office after signing two more executive orders, he noted he was working simultaneously to push his \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 aid package through Congress. After being asked by a reporter if he was open to splitting up the relief package, the president responded: "No one requires me to do anything."

Earlier in the day, White House communications director Kate Bedingfield bristled at the criticism of Biden's executive orders in a series of tweets, adding, "Of course we are also pursuing our agenda through legislation. It's why we are working so hard to get the American Rescue Plan passed, for starters."

In his Senate floor speech Thursday morning, McConnell offered a misleading broadside that Biden as a candidate had declared "you can't legislate by executive action unless you are a dictator."

In fact, Biden at an October ABC News town hall had said there are certain "things you can't do by executive order unless you're a dictator" during an exchange about how quickly he'd push his plan to raise taxes on corporations and wealthy Americans.

Biden and aides, including top White House economists, have said that they believe executive action is a pale substitute for legislative action. At the same time, they've defended the heavy use of executive action at the start of the administration as a necessary stopgap to address the worst public health crisis in more than a century and reverse some of Trump's policies.

"There are steps, including overturning some of the harmful, detrimental and, yes, immoral actions of the prior administration that he felt he could not wait to overturn, and that's exactly what he did," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

While Biden has used executive action more frequently out of the gate than recent White House predecessors, he's not alone in being a heavy user of presidential fiat -- or being criticized by the opposition party for doing so.

Bill Clinton had 364 orders over two terms, George W. Bush signed 291 over his eight years in office and Barack Obama issued 276. Trump in his one term signed 220 orders.

McConnell on Thursday scoffed that Biden in his first week in the White House "signed more than 30 unilateral actions and working Americans are getting short shrift." He similarly criticized Obama for "imposing his will unilaterally" through executive orders and memoranda.

But McConnell was far more understanding of Trump's decision to use executive orders to get around Congress at various points in the Republican's presidency.

For example, in August, after coronavirus relief negotiations collapsed, Trump signed a series of executive orders that called for deferring payroll taxes for Americans earning less than \$100,000 per year, pausing student loan payments, continuing eviction moratoriums and extending, albeit smaller, enhanced

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unemployment benefits that had expired.

"Since Democrats have sabotaged backroom talks with absurd demands that would not help working people, I support President Trump exploring his options to get unemployment benefits and other relief to the people who need them the most," McConnell said.

## Dubai blamed for virus cases abroad; questions swirl at home

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — After opening itself to New Year's revelers, Dubai is now being blamed by several countries for spreading the coronavirus abroad, even as questions swirl about the city-state's ability to handle reported record spikes in virus cases.

The government's Dubai Media Office says the sheikhdom is doing all it can to handle the pandemic, though it has repeatedly declined to answer questions from The Associated Press about its hospital capacity.

"After a year of managing the pandemic, we can confidently say the current situation is under control and we have our plans to surge any capacity in the health care system should a need rise," it said.

However, Nasser al-Shaikh, Dubai's former finance chief, offered a different assessment Thursday on Twitter and asked authorities to take control of a spiraling caseload.

"The leadership bases its decisions on recommendations from the team, the wrong recommendations which put human souls in danger and negatively affect our society," he wrote, adding that "our economy requires accountability."

Dubai, known for its long-haul carrier Emirates, the world's tallest building and its beaches and bars, in July became one of the first travel destinations to describe itself as open for business. The move staunched the bleeding of its crucial tourism and real estate sectors after lockdowns and curfews cratered its economy.

As tourism restarted, daily reported coronavirus case numbers slowly grew but mostly remained stable through the fall.

But then came New Year's Eve — a major draw for travelers from countries otherwise shut down over the virus who partied without face masks in bars and on yachts. For the last 17 days, the United Arab Emirates as a whole has reported record daily coronavirus case numbers as lines at Dubai testing facilities grow.

In Israel, more than 900 travelers returning from Dubai have been infected with the coronavirus, according to the military, which conducts contact tracing. The returnees created a chain of infections numbering more than 4,000 people, the Israeli military told the AP.

Tens of thousands of Israelis had flocked to the UAE since the two countries normalized relations in September. Israeli Health Ministry expert Dr. Sharon Alroy-Preis was quoted by Channel 13 TV as complaining in a call with other officials that a few weeks of travel had been more deadly than decades of no relations with the Arab nation.

Since late December, Israel has required those coming from the UAE to go into a two-week quarantine. Israel later shut down its main international airport through the end of the month over rising cases.

In the United Kingdom, tabloids have splashed shots of bikini-clad British influencers partying in Dubai while the country struggled through lockdowns trying to control the virus. Britain in mid-January closed a travel corridor to Dubai that had allowed travelers to skip quarantine over what was described as a significant acceleration in the number of imported cases from the UAE.

"International travel, right now, should not be happening unless it's absolutely necessary," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the BBC this week. "No parties in Paris or weekends in Dubai. That is not on and in most cases, it's against the law."

Meanwhile, mutated strains of the coronavirus have been linked back to Dubai. The U.K. instituted a travel ban Friday barring direct flights to the UAE over the spread of a South African variant of the coronavirus.

Denmark already discovered one traveler coming from Dubai who tested positive for the South African variant, the first such discovery there. Like Britain, Danish celebrities similarly traveled to Dubai for the New Year.

In the Philippines, health authorities say they discovered a British strain infecting a Filipino who made a

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business trip to Dubai on Dec. 27. He returned to the Philippines on Jan. 7 and tested positive.

He "had no exposure to a confirmed case prior to their departure to Dubai," the Philippines Department of Health said. In the time since, Filipino authorities have discovered at least 16 other cases of the British variant, including two coming from Lebanon.

As daily reported coronavirus cases near 4,000, Dubai has fired the head of its government health agency without explanation. It stopped live entertainment at bars, halted nonessential surgeries, limited wedding sizes and ordered gyms to increase space between those working out. It also now requires coronavirus testing for all those flying into its airport.

The UAE had pinned its hopes on mass vaccinations, with Abu Dhabi distributing a Chinese vaccine by Sinopharm and Dubai offering Pfizer-BioNTech's inoculation. The UAE says it has given 2.8 million doses so far, ranking it among the top countries in the world.

However, people including al-Shaikh now question Dubai's capacity to handle the increasing cases. Hospitals contacted by the AP largely referred questions back to Dubai's government, which repeatedly declined to comment. Dubai's Saudi German Hospital responded saying it was "hoping to read the real news," without elaborating.

Dr. Santosh Kumar Sharma, the medical director of Dubai's NMC Royal Hospital, told the AP "the number of cases (is) ever rising," with over half its beds occupied by coronavirus patients.

The World Health Organization said that before the pandemic, the UAE had nearly 13,250 hospital beds for a country of over 9 million people. It said Dubai and the UAE's northern emirates built field hospitals amid the pandemic with some 5,000 beds, with Abu Dhabi building more.

But Dubai closed its 3,000-bed field hospital in July — the same day it reopened for tourism. Both Dubai and the UAE's Health Ministry now advertise for nurses on Instagram.

"The sad thing is that great efforts have been made since January 2020 for us to come and undermine them with our own hands," al-Shaikh wrote. "What makes things worse is the lack of transparency."

Yet that came after the UAE's autocratic government told those worried earlier this week to "refrain from questioning the efforts of all those who have worked to contain this pandemic."

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Associated Press writers Josef Federman in Jerusalem and Isabel DeBre in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

## **Tanzania's leader denies COVID. Now countrymen push back.**

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Tanzania's president says God has eliminated COVID-19 in his country. His own church now begs to differ.

From the local Catholic authority warning this week of a new wave of coronavirus infections, to government institutions now requiring staffers to take precautions, populist President John Magufuli is being openly questioned as the African continent fights a strong resurgence in cases and deaths.

"We are not an island," the Catholic secretariat of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference said in a widely shared statement this week. It urged followers, which include the president, to pray but also to adopt measures long practiced in the rest of the world, including avoiding public gatherings and close personal contact. The church's newspaper on Friday stressed in a large front-page headline: "There is corona."

Tanzania has tried to be an island since April, when the East African country of 60 million people stopped updating its number of virus infections at 509 cases. Some health officials who questioned Magufuli's stance that COVID-19 had been defeated were fired. The government promoted international tourism, eager to avoid the economic pain of neighbors who imposed lockdowns and curfews.

The president even praised Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for not wearing a face mask during a visit this month, calling it another sign that Tanzania is free of the virus.

But pandemic concerns have returned to the spotlight in Tanzania as the world focuses on the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines.

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While other African countries seek millions of doses, Magufuli this week accused people who had been vaccinated overseas of bringing the virus back into Tanzania. He also questioned whether the vaccines work.

"If the white man was able to come up with vaccinations, then vaccinations for AIDS would have been brought, tuberculosis would be a thing of the past, vaccines for malaria and cancer would have been found," he said on Wednesday.

"Be firm," he added. "Vaccines are inappropriate." He urged the health ministry not to rush into vaccinations without being satisfied about their safety. He offered no evidence for his claims.

African health officials were already worried about misinformation campaigns around COVID-19 vaccines as the first doses begin arriving on the continent of 1.3 billion people. Magufuli's stance contrasts sharply with other African heads of state like President Wavel Ramkalawan of the Seychelles, who publicly received his first vaccine shot this month and urged citizens to do the same.

Asked about Tanzania on Thursday, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director John Nkengasong told reporters that "if we do not fight this as a collective on the continent, we will be doomed."

The World Health Organization's Africa chief, Matshidiso Moeti, told reporters that "we are re-initiating communication at the highest level of leadership" in Tanzania and seeking the government's collaboration "for the sake of the people of the country and neighboring countries, as well as for the sake of the world."

She urged Tanzania to prepare for COVID-19 vaccines, and to share its virus data with the WHO.

Some Tanzanians, from longtime critics of the president to civil society leaders, have issued a new round of exasperated warnings against trying to ignore a global pandemic.

"Tanzanians have the right to vaccination against COVID," opposition leader Zitto Kabwe tweeted after the president's comments, saying a government that doesn't protect its citizens lacks legitimacy. He and others had watched as people took few to no virus precautions during a deeply flawed election that returned Magufuli to power last year.

Others worry that Tanzania is hurting itself and its economy, warning of travel bans against its citizens, the loss of tourism revenue and dangerous health implications for years.

"By denying the pandemic, Tanzania may well have put itself at the back of a very long waiting list" for vaccines, Aidan Eyakuze, who leads the Twaweza East Africa initiative promoting government transparency, wrote this month for The Citizen local newspaper.

While Magufuli shows little sign of changing his stance on COVID-19, his own colleagues appear to be moving ahead to tackle infections.

Government institutions are issuing circulars requiring employees to cut down on meetings and communicate with management remotely. The finance minister has thanked God for protecting the country but now tells colleagues to listen to science as well.

The health ministry did not respond to a request for comment — but it recently raised prices for coronavirus testing. Many health workers remain hesitant to speak openly.

In Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam, the president's outlook had some supporters, or at least some concern about what it might mean if his COVID-19 denial is proven false.

"If the virus is present in our country, then we live in fear as this will mean that we stop working," said Twalib Mwanjala, a motorcycle taxi driver. "Most Tanzanians are low-income earners."

Another resident, Waziri Juma, added: "Coronavirus has not yet gotten into Tanzania, and we do not have corona. If the country had the virus, then the relevant ministry would issue a statement. But for now, people should stop being fearful and work hard."

AP journalist Tom Odula in Nairobi, Kenya contributed.

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>

**EXPLAINER: Behind the Kremlin's response to Navalny rallies**

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By DARIA LIVTINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Rattled by nationwide protests over jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Russian authorities are moving rapidly to block any new ones — from piling legal pressure on his allies to launching a campaign to discredit the demonstrations.

Unprecedented mass rallies across Russia on Jan. 23 demanding Navalny's release from jail resulted in thousands of arrests, and dozens of criminal investigations were opened. Scores of his associates and top allies have been jailed, with some facing criminal charges that carry prison terms.

President Vladimir Putin likened organizers of the protests to "terrorists," and lawmakers charged that Navalny was a Western stooge and betrayed his country to benefit Russia's adversaries.

Navalny's team admits the pressure is unprecedented, but says it won't give in and is calling for another demonstration Sunday.

A look at the unrest and the Kremlin's strategy:

## WHAT LED TO THE PROTESTS?

Navalny, Putin's fiercest critic, returned to Russia on Jan. 17 after five months in Germany, where he was recovering from a poisoning with a nerve agent that he blames on the Kremlin and that Russian officials deny.

The 44-year-old Navalny was arrested at the airport upon arrival and jailed for 30 days, pending a court hearing into whether to send him to prison for alleged probation violations of a past conviction — which he claims was politically motivated. A court Thursday refused to release Navalny, rejecting his appeal of his arrest.

Navalny is famous for his video investigations of official corruption. After his arrest, his team released a report on his YouTube channel about a \$1.3 billion seaside compound allegedly built for Putin, featuring lavish Italian furnishings and even expensive toilet brushes. It has gotten over 100 million views. The Kremlin and even Putin — who never mentions Navalny by name — denied it was built for him.

Navalny's team called for mass protests demanding his release on Jan. 23, and tens of thousands of people took to the streets in more than 100 Russian cities in the largest and the most widespread outpouring of anger toward the Kremlin in years. Rallies took place despite their lacking authorization, something that previously deterred a big turnout because of the threat of arrests.

## WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE BY AUTHORITIES?

Days before the protests, scores of Navalny's associates were detained. Warnings that his team was encouraging minors to take to the streets started spreading among parents. Navalny's team rejected the accusations.

At the protests themselves, over 4,000 people were detained, according to OVD-Info, a human rights group that monitors political arrests. It said it was the most in its nine-year history of keeping records in the Putin era. In some cities, rallies were dispersed aggressively, and human rights advocates said there were instances of violence. About 20 criminal investigations were opened on a wide range of charges.

On Wednesday, Moscow police carried out a series of raids on apartments and offices belonging to Navalny associates and opposition figures, including his own apartment. The searches were conducted as part of investigations into alleged violations of coronavirus regulations during the protests, a charge that carries up to two years in prison.

Five people — including Navalny's brother Oleg and top ally Lyubov Sobol — have been detained for 48 hours in the case.

Russia's Investigative Committee also accused Navalny strategist Leonid Volkov of encouraging minors to participate in unauthorized protests. Volkov, who left Russia two years ago, faces a possible prison term if he returns. The case against him was opened a day after he wrote a Facebook post urging minors not to protest.

"We haven't faced this kind of pressure before," Ivan Zhdanov, head of Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption, told the AP.

## WHAT ABOUT OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS?



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For years, Russia's opposition has consisted of fractured groups that often disagree with each other, although there have been instances of unity in recent years: In 2019, a campaign to allow opposition candidates to run for Moscow city council saw a dozen different politicians rally together and galvanize mass protests every weekend for several weeks.

Navalny's case drew unanimous support from various opposition politicians, even those who usually disagree with him. They attended the Jan. 23 rally, issued statements demanding his release and shared the video about "Putin's palace" on social media.

"The pressure on someone who is an opponent to the sitting government, of course, affects everyone, and we need to defend each and every one and try to help somehow," Moscow politician Yulia Galyamina, who rose to prominence in the 2019 campaign and faced prison herself for protest violations, told The Associated Press.

Some activists have gotten caught in the crossfire. Moscow police detained a member of the Civil Society movement, raided his home and that of another member in the Navalny investigations. The home of Galyamina's spokesman also was raided.

## DOES THE KREMLIN SEE THE PROTESTS AS A THREAT?

Officials dismissed last week's protests as small. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a "negligible number" of people turned out to the rallies, compared with the number of people who vote for Putin.

At the same time, state-controlled TV, which usually ignores opposition protests, dedicated long segments to the rallies, focusing on instances of violence by demonstrators and emphasizing police restraint.

Navalny's team said Wednesday on the messaging app Telegram that the raids this week are a sign of Putin's "crazy fear" of mass rallies.

Analysts believe the government takes the protests very seriously. Tatyana Stanovaya, founder of R.Politik, a political think-tank, says the leadership to some extent understands that there have been reasons for the public's frustration since an unpopular 2018 pension reform, in which retirement ages were raised. But the Kremlin also believes the unrest that Navalny is fomenting is being backed by foreign adversaries.

"On one hand, there is public frustration, on the other hand, there's ... opposition that in the Kremlin is perceived as an instrument of foreign intelligence agencies. This combination can work to toughen the authorities' line," Stanovaya told AP. "I think we're already seeing it."

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Both analysts and Navalny allies believe the crackdown will continue and probably escalate as the standoff between the politician and the authorities continues.

"I've been working with Navalny for 10 years, and year after year this repression machine against us has never slowed down — it has only picked up speed," Sobol told reporters a day before her arrest.

Other Navalny allies remain undeterred. "We hope that this will anger the people even further ahead of the rallies on Jan. 31, and even more people will turn up," Zhdanov said.

It is crucially important for authorities to keep the situation under control ahead of September's parliamentary election, political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter Abbas Gallyamov said on Facebook.

The election will determine who controls the State Duma in 2024, when Putin's current term expires and he can seek reelection to another six years in office, thanks to constitutional reforms last year.

"In the midst of worsening living conditions and growing demand for changes, a person is already inclined to refuse their support to the authorities. To add insult to injury, protesters appear, showing the discontented that they're not alone," Gallyamov said. "Intensifying street protest could cost the authorities an electoral catastrophe. To avoid it, any means are good."

## Cicely Tyson, purposeful and pioneering actor, dead at 96

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Cicely Tyson, the pioneering Black actor who gained an Oscar nomination for her role as the sharecropper's wife in "Sounder," won a Tony Award in 2013 at age 88 and touched TV viewers' hearts in "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," died Thursday at age 96.

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Tyson's death was announced by her family, via her manager Larry Thompson, who did not immediately provide additional details.

"With heavy heart, the family of Miss Cicely Tyson announces her peaceful transition this afternoon. At this time, please allow the family their privacy," according to a statement issued through Thompson.

A onetime model, Tyson began her screen career with bit parts but gained fame in the early 1970s when Black women were finally starting to get starring roles. Tyson refused to take parts simply for the paycheck, remaining choosy.

"I'm very selective as I've been my whole career about what I do. Unfortunately, I'm not the kind of person who works only for money. It has to have some real substance for me to do it," she told The Associated Press in 2013.

Tributes from two former presidents and from across the worlds of Hollywood and Broadway poured in, with many praising her careful approach to her career and activism. "She took pride in knowing that whenever her face was on camera, she would be playing a character who was a human being — flawed but resilient; perfect not despite but because of their imperfections," wrote former President Barack Obama, who awarded Tyson the Medal of Freedom in 2016.

Former President Bill Clinton wrote online that Tyson "brought complex characters to life with dignity and heart, and humanity and depth, always remaining true to herself." "She used her career to illuminate the humanity in Black people. The roles she played reflected her values," wrote Oprah Winfrey.

Tyson's memoir, "Just As I Am," was published this week.

Besides her Oscar nomination, she won two Emmys for playing the 110-year-old former slave in the 1974 television drama "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman." A new generation of moviegoers saw her in the 2011 hit "The Help."

In 2018, she was given an honorary Oscar statuette at the annual Governors Awards. "I come from lowly status. I grew up in an area that was called the slums at the time," Tyson said at the time. "I still cannot imagine that I have met with presidents, kings, queens. How did I get here? I marvel at it."

Writing in "Blacks in American Film and Television," Donald Bogle described Tyson as "a striking figure: slender and intense with near-perfect bone structure, magnificent smooth skin, dark penetrating eyes, and a regal air that made her seem a woman of convictions and commitment. (Audiences) sensed... her power and range."

"Sounder," based on the William H. Hunter novel, was the film that confirmed her stardom in 1972. Tyson was cast as the Depression-era loving wife of a sharecropper (Paul Winfield) who is confined in jail for stealing a piece of meat for his family. She is forced to care for their children and attend to the crops.

The New York Times reviewer wrote: "She passes all of her easy beauty by to give us, at long last, some sense of the profound beauty of millions of Black women."

Her performance evoked rave reviews, and Tyson won an Academy Award nomination as best actress of 1972.

In an interview on the Turner Classic Movies cable channel, she recalled that she had been asked to test for a smaller role in the film and said she wanted to play the mother, Rebecca. She was told, "You're too young, you're too pretty, you're too sexy, you're too this, you're too that, and I said, 'I am an actress.'"

In 2013, at the age of 88, Tyson won the Tony for best leading actress in a play for the revival of Horton Foote's "The Trip to Bountiful." It was the actor's first time back on Broadway in three decades and she refused to turn meekly away when the teleprompter told to finish her acceptance speech.

"Please wrap it up," it says. Well, that's exactly what you did with me: You wrapped me up in your arms after 30 years," she told the crowd. She had prepared no speech ("I think it's presumptuous," she told the AP later. "I burned up half my time wondering what I was going to say.")

She reprised her winning role in the play for a Lifetime Television movie, which was screened at the White House. She returned to Broadway in 2015 opposite James Earl Jones for a revival of "The Gin Game."

Her fame transcended all media. Apple CEO Tim Cook took to Twitter to praise Tyson as a "pioneer with purpose. Cicely Tyson's talent redefined theater, film and television. Her courage, resilience and grace

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changed the entertainment landscape for generations to come." Rihanna called her "a true legend." Neil deGrasse Tyson called her "a force of nature unto herself" and Shonda Rhimes said "her power and grace will be with us forever."

In the 1974 television drama "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," based on a novel by Ernest J. Gaines, Tyson is seen aging from a young woman in slavery to a 110-year-old who campaigned for the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

In the touching climax, she laboriously walks up to a "whites only" water fountain and takes a drink as white officers look on.

"It's important that they see and hear history from Miss Jane's point of view," Tyson told The New York Times. "And I think they will be more ready to accept it from her than from someone younger"

New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael offered her praise: "She's an actress, all right, and as tough-minded and honorable in her methods as any we've got."

At the Emmy Awards, "Pittman" won multiple awards, including two honors for Tyson, best lead actress in a drama and best actress in a special.

"People ask me what I prefer doing — film, stage, television? I say, 'I would have done "Jane Pittman" in the basement or in a storefront.' It's the role that determines where I go," she told the AP.

Tyson made her movie debut in the late 1950s with small roles in such films as "Odds Against Tomorrow," "The Last Angry Man," and "The Comedians." She played the romantic interest to Sammy Davis Jr.'s jazz musician in "A Man Called Adam."

She gained wider notice with a recurring role in the 1963 drama series "East Side, West Side," which starred George C. Scott as a social worker. Tyson played his secretary, making her the first Black woman to have a continuing role in a dramatic television series.

She played a role in the 1968 drama "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" that was hailed by a reviewer as "an absolute embodiment of the slogan 'Black is beautiful.'" In "Roots," the 1977 miniseries that became one of the biggest events in TV history, she played Binta, mother of the protagonist, Kunta Kinte, played by LeVar Burton.

She also appeared on Broadway in the 1960s in "The Cool World," "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" and other plays. Off-Broadway, she appeared with such future stars as Maya Angelou, Godfrey Cambridge and James Earl Jones in a 1961 production of French playwright Jean Genet's "The Blacks."

She won a Drama Desk award in 1962 for a role in the off-Broadway "Moon on a Rainbow Shawl."

After her "Sounder" and "Miss Jane Pittman" successes, Tyson continued to seek TV roles that had messages, and she succeeded with "Roots" and "King" (about Martin Luther King) and "The Rosa Parks Story."

She complained to an interviewer: "We Black actresses have played so many prostitutes and drug addicts and house maids, always negative. I won't play that kind of characterless role any more, even if I have to go back to starving."

She continued with such films as "The Blue Bird," "Concorde — Airport '79," "Fried Green Tomatoes," "The Grass Harp" and Tyler Perry's "Diary of a Mad Black Woman."

She won a supporting actress Emmy in 1994 for "Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All." She was nominated for Emmys several other times, including for "Roots," "King," "The Marva Collins Story" "Sweet Justice" and "A Lesson Before Dying."

In recent years, she was part of a panel discussion for "Cherish the Day," an eight-episode OWN anthology series created and produced by Ava DuVernay. She played the mother of Viola Davis' character on "How to Get Away with Murder."

Tyson's parents moved from the island of Nevis in the Caribbean to New York, where Cicely (her name was spelled early on as Cecily and Sicely) was born in 1924, the youngest of three children. When her parents separated, her mother went on welfare. At 9 Cicely sold shopping bags on the streets of East Harlem.

When she graduated from high school, she found work as a secretary at the Red Cross. Her striking looks prompted friends to advise her to take up modeling and that led to acting schools, theater, movies and television.

"My mother told me I could no longer live in her house because I was determined to be an actress," she told an interviewer in 1990. "I said 'OK,' and I moved out."

Tyson was married once, to jazz great Miles Davis. The wedding was held in 1981 at Bill Cosby's home in Massachusetts, attended by show business notables. They divorced in 1988.

Tyson was never hard to spot. She tried to say no to wearing a terrifically large hat to Aretha Franklin's 2018 funeral, only to be overruled by her designer. The hat would become a viral highlight.

"I never thought in my career that I would be upstaged by a hat! And I did not want to wear it," Tyson said later. "I said, 'I can't wear that hat, I will be blocking the view of the people behind me, they won't be able to see and they'll call me all kinds of names.' He just looked at me and said, 'Put the hat on.'"

She came around, telling the AP she thought of the hat as homage to Franklin's appearance at Obama's inauguration.

AP National Writer Hillel Italie contributed to this report.

## Out of sight, cleaners perform critical work in COVID ICUs

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Clad head to toe in protective gear, doctors and nurses cluster around the patient, fighting to keep the coronavirus-stricken man alive.

Just behind them, unnoticed and unheard, a worker in the same protective gear goes about an entirely different task: disinfecting surfaces, collecting waste in biohazard bags, unobtrusively inching past beds and life-support machinery to mop the floor.

The cleaners of coronavirus intensive care units run a daily gauntlet of infection risks to ensure that ICUs run smoothly, and they are critical to preventing the spread of disease in hospitals. But their status as unskilled laborers in a behind-the-scenes role has left them out of the public eye.

While medical staffers are lauded worldwide for their lifesaving work during the pandemic, cleaners are rarely mentioned.

They feel "like the smallest cog in the wheel, like nobody considers us," one said shortly before starting the painstaking process of donning protective gear to enter an ICU at the Sotiria Thoracic Diseases Hospital in Athens, Greece's main COVID-19 treatment center.

She and her colleagues said they are treated well by the medical staff, and they praised the team spirit within the hospital. Cleaners have also been included with medical workers in the first wave of coronavirus vaccinations. But beyond the hospital gates, she said, the prevailing attitude toward cleaners is "I didn't see you, I don't know you."

Some people's scorn for cleaners is so great that the 50-year-old mother of two asked to be identified only by her initials, AB, as some relatives are unaware of her job.

"They'll perceive it as something inferior, the fact that I'm a cleaner," she said. Some relatives would also question the risk of working in a COVID-19 ICU and the danger of transmitting the virus to her family, so she has avoided telling them what she does for a living.

Georgia Tsiolou, who like AB started work in Sotiria in January 2020, a few months before the pandemic hit Greece, said authorities often speak of hiring more medical staff and offering bonuses and long-term contracts for nurses and doctors. But "for us, there is nothing."

Because they are all on one-year contracts, the cleaners don't know if they will have a job after December.

"People talk only about doctors and nurses. Of course it's good that they talk about the doctors and the nurses, as they are the ones fighting the biggest battle" against the pandemic, said colleague Anna Athanassiou, 55. "But along with them, there is us. We might not know how to heal a person, but we help a lot in our way, with our work. We're a chain. Our work, I consider, is absolutely necessary."

Medical experts agree, stressing how vital cleaning is.

"I can't separate it from medical work or nursing work. It is equally important," said Antonia Koutsoukou, professor of intensive care pneumonology, citing the control of infections, a major issue in hospitals and

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particularly in ICUs. Koutsoukou is the director of the Athens University respiratory diseases clinic at Sotiria. At the start of the pandemic, the hospital's infectious disease experts trained the cleaners in how to use protective gear. Now the experienced cleaners teach new recruits.

For the ICU's newest cleaner, Theodoros Grivakos, wearing the gear was a struggle. It includes a mask, goggles and visor, a hooded suit, double gloves taped to wrists and plastic coverings taped over feet.

"I freaked out a bit," the 28-year-old admitted halfway through his first ICU shift. "I was getting dressed. I was dizzy. I felt pressure. I didn't feel well."

An electrical engineering graduate, Grivakos took the cleaning job when he couldn't find work in his chosen field. After he was initially assigned to the hospital's outdoor park-like areas, the sudden switch to the ICU came as a shock.

Working in an ICU, which is "an environment with increased stress and emotional pressure," is unlike any other job, Koutsoukou said.

Cleaners work in close proximity with patients who could die suddenly, she said. "So they are also called on to arm themselves with a great deal of emotional fortitude and composure, and understand the importance of their own role in the care of the severely ill."

Some of the cleaners said they were unprepared for the psychological toll of the job, particularly as the isolation of COVID-19 patients, who cannot receive visitors, often led them to form bonds with hospital staff, cleaners included.

"It's very emotional when you're in there. It's difficult," Tsiolou said.

The start of the pandemic was particularly tough. Faced with a new virus that doctors knew little about, the cleaners were terrified of getting sick or carrying the virus home. Many kept away from their families or reduced contact to a bare minimum.

For some, the fear and stress proved too much.

"There were many people who were being called on to come to work, and they wouldn't come because they were afraid," Tsiolou said. Many of her colleagues quit, leaving cleaners short-staffed.

Those who stayed despite the risks say they hope for some recognition of their critical role.

"People always think our sector is inferior," said Athanassiou, who said she was saddened by the public's indifference. But the medical staff, she said, understood.

"They know that we too are the same as them," she said. "We're in exactly the same danger, we're no different."

Grivakos compared attitudes toward cleaners with ancient Greece's treatment of helots, a subjugated population of Sparta.

"They don't talk about the (cleaning) staff because (we) are helots," he said. "(We) are expendable, because one year you're here, and the next you might not be."

## **Dangerous Liaison: New Zealand virus quarantine flaw exposed**

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The woman who took a flight back to New Zealand was supposed to avoid all physical contact with others for 14 days as she went into mandatory quarantine. The man working at the quarantine hotel was supposed to be the last line of defense.

But the two started passing notes to each other, including one written on the back of a face mask. Then she ordered a bottle of wine, which he delivered to her room. When he didn't return 20 minutes later, a security manager sent to investigate found the pair together in what authorities are describing as an inappropriate encounter, one in which physical distancing wasn't maintained.

The incident earlier this month, which came to light Friday, has highlighted a very human weak point in New Zealand's coronavirus elimination procedures, in a country which has stamped out community spread of the virus. It is similar to lapses in Australia that may have contributed to a major outbreak last year in Melbourne.

"We're dealing with human beings," said COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins. "We ask everybody

to adhere to the standards that we put in place. I cannot control the actions of every individual.”

Hipkins said the pair’s behavior was totally unacceptable and he’d asked for a thorough inquiry.

Brigadier Jim Bliss, the head of managed isolation and quarantine, said the worker was immediately sent home and told to self-isolate. He was later fired. The returning traveler, meanwhile, was given a formal written warning by the police. Authorities breathed a sigh of relief after both returned negative coronavirus tests.

“The actions of the two people involved in this incident are incredibly irresponsible and extremely disappointing,” Bliss said. “There is absolutely no room for complacency.”

Bliss said the actions of the staffer at the Grand Millennium Auckland hotel weren’t reflective of the 4,000 people working at quarantine hotels who each day “selflessly put themselves between us and this virus.” He said an investigation is underway to consider whether additional security measures are needed.

The identities of the two people involved have not been disclosed by authorities.

New Zealand’s successful response has resulted in just 25 people dying from the virus in a nation of 5 million. The only new cases are those originating from returning travelers, 100,000 of whom have flown in over the past year. Authorities and people around the country remain highly tuned to any breaches at the border.

## Ohio town unknowingly hosted alleged Capitol attack plotters

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and DAN SEWELL Associated Press

WOODSTOCK, Ohio (AP) — In this don’t blink-or-you’ll-miss-it, one-stoptlight town, dozens of residents still fly “Trump 2020” and “Make America Great Again” flags.

But it’s a now-shuttered bar that brought the FBI and other investigators to Woodstock, Ohio, around 40 miles (65 kilometers) northwest of the state capital of Columbus, this month. Bedsheets and drapes cover the windows of The Jolly Roger Bar and Grill, except for a sliver where an “OPEN” sign flickers in red, white and blue.

It is here, federal authorities allege, that Army veteran Jessica Watkins tended bar and recruited members for a local militia group she has said in social media posts that she founded in 2019 and affiliated it with the Oath Keepers — an extremist, militaristic group believed to have thousands of members nationally.

In a criminal complaint filed Jan. 19 and a federal indictment Wednesday, Watkins and a member of her militia, ex-Marine Donovan Ray Crowl, are charged, along with a Virginia man, with helping to plan and coordinate the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

While many of the initial images from the Capitol assault included colorful characters such as the horns-wearing self-proclaimed “QAnon Shaman,” other, more disturbing images emerged, showing military-like formations of rioters dressed in olive drab, wearing helmets, goggles and items ready for an assault.

“We have a good group,” federal authorities say Watkins transmitted that day. “We have about 30-40 of us. We are sticking together and sticking to the plan.”

A couple blocks from the Jolly Roger, congregants at the Free Will Baptist Church have been trying to wrap their heads around it, said Keith Pack, a church deacon.

“Just shocked that it would be in the small town of Woodstock,” said Pack, who lives near the town of fewer than 300 people.

Freddy Cruz, a Southern Poverty Law Center research analyst, agreed “it’s shocking” that people from a place such as Woodstock would emerge into the spotlight through a bold insurrection that claimed five lives while hoping to overturn Republican Donald Trump’s election loss.

While shocking, Cruz added, it shouldn’t have been.

“It’s quite concerning. I think the general media and the federal institutions have dropped the ball in taking these groups seriously,” Cruz said. He said many anti-government groups have been very active for years, carrying out military-like training for a second Civil War in apocalyptic fantasies fueled by conspiracy narratives that Trump did little to discourage.

In November, Watkins sent a text message to several people interested in joining her local militia group,

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encouraging them to participate in "a week-long basic Basic Training class," in early January, according to court records. The classes were to be held an hour north of Columbus, Watkins said, presumably in Woodstock, or a nearby town.

"I need you fighting fit by innauguration," the 38-year-old told another interested member. "It's a military style basic, here in Ohio, with a Marine Drill Sergeant running it."

In the indictment Wednesday that includes charges of conspiracy and obstructing Congress that carry up to 20 years in prison with conviction, federal authorities cite social media comments and photos allegedly from Watkins that crowed about the "Historical Events we created today."

Another voice is heard exhorting her: "Get it, Jess ... everything we (expletive) trained for."

Records show Watkins served honorably in the Army under a different name, including duty in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003. Court records in Rochester, New York, showed she changed her name to Jessica Marie Watkins in 2004. She also lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina, serving as a first responder with emergency medical training, before settling in Woodstock about three years ago.

She and her boyfriend Montana Siniff owned the two-story building where they lived and started the Jolly Roger. A Facebook page for the Jerry Morgan & Certified Outlaw Band indicates they played the Jolly Roger in 2019. The Jolly Roger's own Facebook page has been suspended.

Phil Garland, president of Woodstock's village council and a resident for some 20 years, was blindsided by the news.

"It's a small town, but if you weren't necessarily born and raised there, there is a lot going on and you're not going to know about it," Garland said.

The Champaign County village, settled by New Englanders in the early 19th century and named after Woodstock, Vermont, used to be dominated by mostly retired, lifelong residents. But around 10 years ago, things began to change as elders died off and younger people moved in for affordability and convenience to Columbus and Dayton. Census figures show it's nearly 98% white, and a solidly conservative town where putting out a lawn sign for a Democratic candidate could result in it being stolen or destroyed.

But Garland said the village is friendly "for the most part."

Pack, the church deacon, said there is a lot of speculation about Watkins and Crowl, but to him, it's mainly rumors and he didn't want repeat rumors.

Watkins' boyfriend didn't return a call for comment this week.

Her militia group is believed to be small. At least three members peacefully protested the presidential election outside Ohio's Statehouse in November.

"While we were made aware of this group, we are unaware of any criminal allegations or investigations regarding their activity while at the Ohio Statehouse," Kristen Castle, a spokesperson for the Ohio Department of Public Safety. She said she couldn't comment about any ongoing investigation or intelligence gathering.

Rick Campbell, who served in the Vietnam War, has had a hard time processing what took place some 15 miles (24 kilometers) away from their Marysville, Ohio, Veterans of Foreign Wars post.

"This isn't patriotism, what they did," Campbell, 73, said. "Those radicals don't represent what I represented in the military."

The FBI said a search of Watkins' home found personal protection equipment and communication devices, homemade weapons and instructions for making plastic explosives.

U.S. Magistrate Sharon Ovington in Dayton denied bail for Crowl, 50, citing information that he wanted to go to a home with nine firearms and said she didn't see a way to ensure public safety with him at large. Crowl's court-appointed attorney didn't respond to two messages for comment.

Both remain jailed in Dayton. No attorney for Watkins was listed in court filings.

The Dayton Daily News reported that when asked in her initial court appearance whether she understood the charges against her, Watkins replied: "I understand them but I don't understand how I got them."

Just five days before the Capitol riot, Watkins posted on social media photos of herself in the Jolly Roger, complaining it was empty on a Saturday and, referring to Ohio Republican Gov. Mike DeWine's

anti-pandemic restrictions on bars, said "Thanks for nothing DeWine."  
She added: "Guess I am going to pack for DC. See you there."

Sewell reported from Cincinnati. Farnoush Amiri is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

AP News Researchers Rhonda Shafner and Jennifer Farrar in New York contributed to this report, along with Freddy Brewster, a student at the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, through a partnership with The Associated Press.

Follow Dan Sewell at <https://www.twitter.com/dansewell> and Farnoush Amiri at <https://twitter.com/FarnoushAmiri>.

## Democrats to 'act big' on \$1.9T aid; GOP wants plan split

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats in Congress and the White House have rejected a Republican pitch to split President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue plan into smaller chunks, with lawmakers appearing primed to muscle the sweeping economic and virus aid forward without GOP help.

Despite Biden's calls for unity, Democrats said the stubbornly high unemployment numbers and battered U.S. economy leave them unwilling to waste time courting Republican support that might not materialize. They also don't want to curb the size and scope of a package that they say will provide desperately needed money to distribute the vaccine, reopen schools and send cash to American households and businesses.

Biden has been appealing directly to Republican and Democratic lawmakers while signaling his priority to press ahead.

"We've got a lot to do, and the first thing we've got to do is get this COVID package passed," Biden said Thursday in the Oval Office.

The standoff over Biden's first legislative priority is turning the new rescue plan into a political test — of his new administration, of Democratic control of Congress and of the role of Republicans in a post-Trump political landscape.

Success would give Biden a signature accomplishment in his first 100 days in office, unleashing \$400 billion to expand vaccinations and to reopen schools, \$1,400 direct payments to households, and other priorities, including a gradual increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Failure would be a high-profile setback early in his presidency.

Democrats in the House and Senate are operating as though they know they are borrowed time. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi are laying the groundwork to start the go-it-alone approach as soon as next week.

They are drafting a budget reconciliation bill that would start the process to pass the relief package with a simple 51-vote Senate majority — rather than the 60-vote threshold typically needed in the Senate to advance legislation. The goal would be passage by March, when jobless benefits, housing assistance and other aid is set to expire.

Schumer said he drew from Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's advice to "act big" to weather the COVID-19 economic crisis.

"Everywhere you look, alarm bells are ringing," Schumer said from the Senate floor.

Senate Republicans in a bipartisan group warned their colleagues in a "frank" conversation late Wednesday that Biden and Democrats are making a mistake by loading up the aid bill with other priorities and jamming it through Congress without their support, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private session.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, a former White House budget director under George W. Bush, wants a deeper accounting of what funds remain from the \$900 billion coronavirus aid package from December.



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"Literally, the money has not gone out the door," he said. "I'm not sure I understand why there's a grave emergency right now."

Biden spoke directly with Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, who is leading the bipartisan effort with Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., that is racing to strike a compromise.

Collins said she and the president had a "good conversation."

"We both expressed our shared belief that it is possible for the Senate to work in a bipartisan way to get things done for the people of this country," she said.

The emerging debate is highly reminiscent of the partisan divide over the 2009 financial rescue in the early months of the Obama administration, when Biden was vice president, echoing those battles over the appropriate level of government intervention.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said that although Biden wants a bipartisan package, the administration is opposed to breaking it up to win Republican support.

"We're open for business and open to hear from members of Congress on that," she said, noting that lawmakers are not "wallflowers."

But, she said, "we're not going to do this in a piecemeal way or break apart a big package that's meant to address the crisis we're facing."

On Thursday, more than 120 economists and policymakers signed a letter in support of Biden's package, saying the \$900 billion that Congress approved in December before he took office was "too little and too late to address the enormity of the deteriorating situation."

Employers shed workers in December, retail sales have slumped and COVID-19 deaths kept rising. More than 430,000 people in the U.S. have died from the coronavirus as of Thursday.

At the same time, the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits remained at a historically high 847,000 last week, and a new report said the U.S. economy shrunk by an alarming 3.5% last year.

"The risks of going too small dramatically outweigh the risks of going too big," said Gene Sperling, a former director of the White House National Economic Council, who signed the letter.

The government reported Thursday that the economy showed dangerous signs of stalling in the final three months of last year, ultimately shrinking in size by 3.5% for the whole of 2020 — the sharpest downturn since the demobilization that followed the end of World War II.

The decline was not as severe as initially feared, largely because the government has steered roughly \$4 trillion in aid, an unprecedented emergency expenditure, to keep millions of Americans housed, fed, employed and able to pay down debt and build savings amid the crisis.

Republican allies touted the 4% annualized growth during the last quarter, with economic analyst Stephen Moore calling the gains "amazing."

Republicans have also raised concerns about adding to the deficit, which skyrocketed in the Trump administration.

Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, the third-ranking party leader, said Biden should stick to the call for unity he outlined in his inaugural address, particularly with the evenly split Senate. "If there's ever been a mandate to move to the middle, it's this," he said. "It's not let's just go off the cliff."

But Democrats argue that low interest rates make the debt manageable and that the possibility of returning to work will do more to improve people's well-being.

The days and weeks ahead, against the backdrop of Trump's impeachment trial on a charge of inciting an insurrection with the U.S. Capitol siege, will set the tone, tenor and parameters of what will be possible in Washington.

## Republicans condemned Trump. Now they're seeking his help.

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

Just two weeks ago, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy declared Donald Trump culpable in the deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol. By Thursday, he was seeking his political support.

A private meeting between the two men at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort signaled a remarkable turnaround

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in the former president's stature among elected Republicans. In the immediate aftermath of the insurrection Trump inspired, the idea that he would enjoy any sort of kingmaker role in his post-presidency seemed highly unlikely.

But following an initial wave of condemnation, Republicans appear to be warming toward Trump, fully aware that his supporters are poised to punish anyone who displays disloyalty. With that in mind, party leaders are working to keep Trump in the fold as they focus on retaking the House and Senate in 2022.

"United and ready to win in '22," McCarthy tweeted after their meeting. Both he and Trump issued statements outlining their pledge to work together to help Republicans win back control of the House and Senate in 2022.

The realignment with Trump comes as those who have crossed him continue to feel the burn. Trump ally Matt Gaetz, R-Florida, spent the day in Wyoming trying to take down Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House Republican, who voted for Trump's impeachment. Amid the backlash, Senate Republicans largely made clear this week that they have no intention of convicting Trump.

While Trump tries to exert influence, he's undeniably diminished.

Before he incited his supporters to storm the Capitol, Trump was expected to spend his post-presidency gleefully settling scores with Republicans rivals, launching a Twitter-fueled takedown of his successor and mulling over running again for a second term. Now, he is largely isolated and silenced by social media platforms as President Joe Biden attempts to dismantle his agenda executive order by executive order.

He has not been seen in public since he disappeared behind the well-manicured hedges at Mar-a-Lago last Wednesday, a half-hour before his presidency ended. He has spent his days consulting with aides and defense lawyers as he prepares for his historic second impeachment trial.

Things are very different now. Last time, Trump had an army of defenders that included a team of Washington lawyers, a presidential communications shop, a taxpayer-funded White House counsel's office and the steadfast backing of top Republicans, including the Republican National Committee.

This time, Trump is still scrambling to pull together a legal team, with the trial less than two weeks out.

"I think he's at a significant disadvantage," said criminal defense attorney Alan Dershowitz, who was part of Trump's legal team in 2020 but is among the long list of lawyers sitting this one out.

Yet even the impeachment trial, once seen as an opportunity for Senate Republicans to purge Trump from the party by barring him from ever running for office again, is now being used as a rallying cry to reunite the party against Democrats. Instead of debating whether he is guilty of "willfully inciting violence against the government of the United States," Republicans have instead attacked the process, arguing that it is unconstitutional to try a president who has already left the White House.

"At a time when our country needs to come together, Democrats in Congress are rehashing the same strategy that they employed for the last four years: politically motivated overreach that will only divide us further," Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel said in a statement that came after heated internal divisions over whether the group should publicly criticize Trump for inciting the riot.

In an interview, McDaniel declined to criticize the five Republican senators who voted this week to move forward with the trial. But she said "it's more important to look at the 45 that said this is ridiculous."

Aside from the trial, Trump has gradually begun to return to the public conversation, firing off press releases from the political committee he created before leaving the White House.

"He's decompressing. He's got a legal team he's trying to organize, and he just needs to keep doing what he's doing," said Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a close congressional ally who has been helping Trump stand up a legal team after numerous firms punted.

"I think there's an adjustment," said Matt Schlapp, chair of the American Conservative Union and another Trump ally.

Jason Miller, an adviser to Trump, insisted that it was "too early" to discuss the president's impeachment strategy and the post-presidential political operation that is expected to include former White House political director Brian Jack and Trump's former campaign manager Bill Stepien.

"We've had discussions about where we want to get active with regard to the 2022 midterms and how

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we help Republicans win back the Senate and the House," Miller said, but Trump has yet to decide whether he will get involved in primary races to challenge Republicans who voted to impeach him.

After those members faced intense backlash from Trump supporters, Senate Republicans voted overwhelmingly Tuesday for an attempt to dismiss his second impeachment trial.

"I think that's pretty clear that Republican voters are adamantly opposed to impeachment and Republicans who vote for impeachment do so at their own peril," Miller said.

Despite the Capitol riot, polls show Trump remains deeply popular among Republican voters — many of whom now consider themselves more closely aligned with him than the party.

"It's not Trump so much they're trying to hug. It's Trump's base they're trying to hug," said Alex Conant, a Republican strategist. "I think Trump's departure left a huge vacuum. He was the one thing that united Republicans more than anything. I mean, the Republican Party became the Trump Party for four years. And without him leading it, there's an obvious power vacuum, and I think you're seeing that play out now in Congress."

The question is whether Trump's influence will endure. The internal divisions his team is fomenting could ultimately undermine the party's quest to retake Congress. And it's unclear whether he can transfer his personal popularity to other candidates when he's not on the ballot. Republicans lost control of the House in 2018 and gave up the Senate this month despite a last-minute appeal from Trump.

Graham, who declared just this month that he's done with Trump — "All I can say is count me out. Enough is enough." — has since stressed the importance of keeping the party together.

"I want to make sure that the Republican Party can grow and come back, and we're going to need Trump and Trump needs us," he told reporters.

As for Republicans who vote to convict Trump, "I guess it depends on what state you're in and what phase in your career you are," he quipped.

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Associated Press writers Eric Tucker in Washington and Steve Peoples in New York contributed to this report.

## **For some Muslims, hope, uncertainty after travel ban lifted**

By MARIAM FAM and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

Mohammed Al Zabidi celebrated in 2017 when he learned he had been selected in the U.S. green card lottery, which picks people at random from a large pool of applicants. It was a chance to escape his war-torn homeland of Yemen and pursue his dreams in the United States.

"I won! I won!" Al Zabidi cheered. He borrowed money to finance his trip, bought clothes for his new life in America and packed souvenirs for friends there. With no U.S. Embassy in Yemen, he made a grueling journey to Djibouti for his visa interview.

But there, after he had been initially approved, his luck ran out: "CANCELLED WITHOUT PREJUDICE," read the bold, black, all-caps stamp on the unused visa in his passport with a Trump administration travel ban on several Muslim-majority nations, including his, in place.

"My family pinned their hopes on me. ... My mother wept; this saddened me the most," he said.

President Joe Biden's repeal of the ban on Inauguration Day brought a sigh of relief from citizens in the countries covered by the measure. But amid the celebrations are tales of dreams broken, families separated, savings used up and milestones missed, from births to graduations. And for some, there are worries about whether their opportunities may be gone forever.

The lottery system requires winners be vetted and have their visas in hand by Sept. 30 of the year they are chosen, or they lose out. So Al Zabidi is left wondering whether he'll ever make it to the States to start working there and repay what he borrowed.

"Can we get our visas back? Can we be compensated?" he said. "We don't know."

Many of those whose lives were upended must now navigate questions about backlogs, paid fees and travel restrictions due to the pandemic. Advocates for immigration and the rights of Muslims in the U.S. hail Biden's decision, but also point to the work ahead to get lives back on track and roll back the ban's legacy.

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"The ban advanced the narrative that Muslims, Africans and other communities of color do not belong in America, that we are dangerous threats," said Mary Bauer, legal director of Muslim Advocates. "Ending the ban was just the first step towards changing that narrative. Next, the Biden administration must clear away other administrative immigration obstacles that are preventing families from reuniting."

More than 40,000 were refused visas because of the ban, according to U.S. State Department figures. They included not only lottery winners but people trying to visit family, those traveling for business or personal reasons and students accepted to U.S. universities.

Biden has commissioned a report to address a number of issues, including a proposal ensuring reconsideration of immigrant visa applications denied due to the ban. The proposal will consider whether to reopen denied applications. He also called for a plan to expedite consideration of those applications.

Many who were affected by the ban are also being blocked by an April order by former President Donald Trump halting the issuance of green cards to protect the U.S. labor market amid the pandemic.

Biden has not indicated whether he will lift it, and ending the travel ban will mean little if he doesn't, said Rafael Urena, a California attorney.

"Most of my clients don't have any reason to celebrate because they are still stuck," Urena said.

They include Mania Darbani, whose 71-year-old mother in Iran was denied a tourist visa to visit her in Los Angeles. In recent days she checked and was told she still can't go, because of the pandemic order.

"I'm so exhausted by this situation," said Darbani, 36. "I want to ask President Biden to lift all travel bans and help us. Just please, please, help us."

Many people are concerned about long wait times for visas, said Manar Waheed, senior legislative and advocacy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union.

"There are embassies closed all over the world because of COVID, so there's that piece of it," Waheed said. "But also we've seen so many parts of our immigration system stalled and truly eviscerated by the Trump administration, so it is about building those systems back up."

What is variously known as the "Muslim ban" or the "travel ban" was first imposed in 2017, then retooled amid legal challenges, until a version was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2018. It affected various categories of travelers and immigrants from Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Syria and Libya, plus North Koreans and some Venezuelan government officials and their families. In 2020, immigration curbs affecting several other nations were added.

Trump and others have defended it on national security grounds, arguing it would make the U.S. safer from terrorism. Supporters of the policy rejected the argument that it was rooted in anti-Muslim bias, saying it was aimed at protecting the country.

In reversing the ban, the new administration says it intends instead to strengthen information-sharing with other countries and apply a rigorous, individualized vetting system for visa applicants.

It's not clear whether it'll come too late for Anwar Alsaedi, also from Yemen, who had hoped to provide his two children with a better future. He rejoiced in 2017 when he was picked for the lottery's "diversity visa" interview only to be deemed ineligible due to the ban.

"Our country is embroiled in wars and crises and we've lost everything," Alsaedi said. "Making it to America is a big dream."

Some whose dreams were dashed ended up seeking them elsewhere.

Moayed Kossa, a Syrian pharmacy university graduate who hoped to start a cosmetics company bearing his family name, had landed a scholarship to study business administration in the U.S. after his country's civil war drove the family to flee to Jordan. Just days before he was to travel, the U.S. Embassy in Amman summoned him and cancelled his visa.

He ended up studying in Italy instead, and he's not sure if he will apply again for a U.S. visa even though his brother now lives there.

"It is not always easy," Kossa said, "to try to open a door that was closed."

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Associated Press writer Julie Watson in San Diego contributed to this report.

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## Asia Today: Sri Lanka vaccinates 1st health workers, troops

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka on Friday began inoculating frontline health workers, military troops and police officers against COVID-19 amid warnings about infections among medical workers.

Sri Lanka on Thursday received 500,000 doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford University vaccine donated by India and manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

The government says 150,000 frontline health workers and 115,000 selected military and police will be the first recipients.

The Indian Ocean island nation's regulatory body approved the vaccine last week as doctors were warning that front-line health workers should be quickly inoculated to prevent the medical system from collapsing due to infections among medical staff.

The vaccination takes place at six state-run hospitals in the capital Colombo and suburbs and two hospitals run by the army for four days. The health ministry said it will expand to other parts of the country by next week. The ministry has planned up to 4,000 vaccination centers countrywide.

Most of Sri Lanka's COVID-19 cases and deaths have occurred since October when clusters centered on a garment factory and a fish market emerged in the capital Colombo and its suburbs. It's had 61,585 cases with 297 fatalities since March and adds between 300 to 900 new cases every day.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

— Singapore will give financial payouts in the rare cases of vaccine injury to ease the minds of those taking COVID-19 vaccines. The health ministry said more than 113,000 people had received their first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine and 432 of them reported side effects. Injection site pain and swelling, fever, head and body aches, and fatigue were among the side effects reported. The ministry said three people suffered severe allergic reactions but all recovered swiftly. Anaphylaxis is a known but rare side effect of the vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, and the ministry said those with a history of anaphylaxis are precluded from receiving the dose. The ministry said it has drawn up a financial assistance package for rare cases of vaccine injury. This include a one-time payout of up to 10,000 Singapore dollars (\$7,515) for hospitalization due to life-threatening side effects, and 225,000 Singapore dollars (\$169,000) for death or permanent severe disability. Vaccination is free and voluntary in the tiny island-state, which has recorded 59,391 coronavirus cases and 29 deaths.

— Japan's minister in charge of the coronavirus vaccine rollout warned the public against scams in which callers ask for bank payments to reserve inoculation slots. Taro Kono, minister for administrative affairs, stressed the vaccines, set to start next month, are free. "We want to make sure our message is getting relayed," Kono told reporters Friday, acknowledging such attempts may grow. Local government offices have been deluged with inquiries about fraudulent vaccine-related telephone calls wanting cash or personal information, he said. Cajoling people to send money has been so common in Japan they're called, "It's me, it's me scams," because perpetrators pretend to be the victims' children. Cases of COVID-19 infections have been growing recently, with 380,000 cases of infection and more than 5,000 deaths.

## Liquid nitrogen leak at Georgia poultry plant kills 6

JEFF AMY undefined

GAINESVILLE, Ga, (AP) — A liquid nitrogen leak at a northeast Georgia poultry plant killed six people Thursday and sent 11 others to the hospital, officials said.

At least three of those injured at the Foundation Food Group plant in Gainesville were reported in critical condition.

Poultry plants rely on refrigeration systems that can include liquid nitrogen. Sheriff's deputies, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the state fire marshal were investigating the deaths

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and cause of the leak.

"It will be a lengthy process," Hall County Sheriff Gerald Couch said. "It's not something that's quick."

Foundation Food Group Vice President for Human Resources Nicholas Ancrum called the leak a tragic accident and said early indications are that a nitrogen line ruptured in the facility.

When leaked into the air, liquid nitrogen vaporizes into an odorless gas that's capable of displacing oxygen. That means leaks in enclosed spaces can become deadly by pushing away breathable air, according to the U.S. Chemical Safety Board.

Gainesville is the hub of Georgia's poultry industry, which is the largest in the country. Thousands of employees work across multiple processing plants around the city and much of the workforce, like in many meat processing plants nationwide, is Latino.

Workers who had fled the plant were gathered outside when firefighters responded to the leak Thursday morning, Hall County Fire Department Division Chief Zach Brackett said.

"Once the units arrived, they found a large contingent of employees that had evacuated, along with multiple victims that were in that crowd that were also experiencing medical emergencies around the facility," Brackett said.

Beth Downs, a spokesperson for Northeast Georgia Health System, said five people died at the plant and one person died in the emergency room.

Hall County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Derreck Booth said officials were trying to notify family members of the deceased. No names were released. Ancrum said maintenance personnel, supervisors and managers were among the victims.

"Every team member is equally important to us, and our hearts go out to their families and communities who have suffered such a devastating loss," Ancrum said.

Mexico's Foreign Relations Department said Thursday that two of the six people who died in a liquid nitrogen leak at a northeast Georgia poultry plant were Mexican citizens.

The plant was known as Prime Pak Foods until January, when it became part of Foundation Food Group, a privately held company that Ancrum said has four Gainesville-area locations. The plant takes raw chicken and processes it into products like chicken fingers and individual chicken cuts for restaurants and food service operations, partially cooking them and then freezing them for later use.

Previous safety violations at the plant show no problems with the refrigeration system. The plant has been cited by OSHA for violations four times in the past 10 years, online records show. The most serious of those was in September 2015, when 28 violations were initially cited, including citations for failing to make sure machines were properly safeguarded when being maintained to prevent injuries. Two other citations in 2017 involved employees who had fingers amputated by machinery.

Four in every 100 meat processing workers suffered a recordable workplace injury in 2019, according to the most recent federal statistics. That number has been trending downward. A total of 12 food processing workers died in the workplace nationwide in 2019.

Fourteen American workers died from asphyxiation linked to nitrogen in 12 workplace accidents recorded between 2012 and 2020, according to OSHA.

Eleven people injured in the Gainesville leak were treated for respiratory symptoms at the hospital, including three who were in critical condition, health system spokesperson Sean Couch said. He said five were in fair condition and three were treated and released.

At least four firefighters were injured and taken to the hospital with what Brackett described as respiratory complaints. One firefighter remained hospitalized late Thursday.

"He's doing well and he should be going home tomorrow," Brackett said.

Brackett said the remainder of the plant's 130 workers were taken by bus to a nearby church where hospital workers examined them for injuries.

Students were kept safe inside a nearby elementary school during the emergency, though the leak was contained and not airborne, Hall County school officials said. The shelter in place order was lifted Thursday afternoon.

Associated Press writers Kate Brumback contributed from Atlanta and Russ Bynum contributed from Savannah, Georgia.

## **NY data show nursing home deaths undercounted by thousands**

By MARINA VILLENEUVE, BERNARD CONDON and MATT SEDENSKY Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration confirmed Thursday that thousands more nursing home residents died of COVID-19 than the state's official tallies had previously acknowledged, dealing a potential blow to his image as a pandemic hero.

The surprise development, after months of the state refusing to divulge its true numbers, showed that at least 12,743 long-term care residents died of the virus as of Jan. 19, far greater than the official tally of 8,505 on that day, cementing New York's toll as one of the highest in the nation.

Those numbers are consistent with a report released just hours earlier by Attorney General Letitia James charging that the nursing home death count could be off by about 50%, largely because New York is one of the only states to count just those who died on facility grounds, not those who later died in the hospital.

"While we cannot bring back the individuals we lost to this crisis, this report seeks to offer transparency that the public deserves," James said in a statement.

The 76-page report from a fellow Democratic official undercut Cuomo's frequent argument that the criticism of his handling of the virus in nursing homes was part of a political "blame game," and it was a vindication for thousands of families who believed their loved ones were being omitted from counts to advance the governor's image as a pandemic hero.

"It's important to me that my mom was counted," said Vivian Zayas, whose 78-year-old mother died in April after contracting COVID-19 at a nursing home in West Islip, New York. "Families like mine knew these numbers were not correct."

Cuomo's office referred all questions to the state health department. Several hours after the report, State Department of Health Commissioner Howard Zucker released a lengthy statement attempting to refute James' report but which essentially confirmed its central finding.

Zucker's figure of 12,743 nursing home resident deaths included for the first time 3,829 confirmed COVID-19 fatalities of those residents who had been transported to hospitals.

Those figures could be even higher, but the health department said its audit was ongoing, didn't break out deaths presumed but not confirmed to be caused by the virus, and omitted those in assisted living or other types of long-term care facilities.

Zucker, however, still took issue with James' characterization of his department's official tally as an "undercount." He said "DOH was always clear that the data on its website pertains to in-facility fatalities."

James has for months been examining discrepancies between the number of deaths being reported by the state's Department of Health, and the number of deaths reported by the homes themselves.

Her investigators looked at a sample of 62 of the state's roughly 600 nursing homes. They reported 1,914 deaths of residents from COVID-19, while the state Department of Health logged only 1,229 deaths at those same facilities.

Thursday's release backed up the findings of an Associated Press investigation last year that concluded that the state could be understating deaths by as much as 65%.

State Sen. Gustavo Rivera, a Democrat who has blasted the Cuomo administration for its incomplete death count, said he was "sadly unsurprised" by the report.

"Families who lost loved ones deserve honest answers," Rivera said. "For their sake, I hope that this report will help us unveil the truth and put policies in place to prevent such tragedies in the future."

Cuomo, who last fall released a book touting his leadership in dealing with the virus, has not been shy about using New York's lower nursing home death count to make the argument that his state is doing better than others in caring for those in such facilities.

"There's also no doubt that we're in this hyper-political environment so everybody wants to point fingers,"

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Cuomo told CBS "This Morning" in October. "New York, actually, we're number 46 out of 50 in terms of percentage of deaths in nursing homes ... it's not a predominantly New York problem."

The attorney general's report also took aim at New York's controversial March 25 policy that sought to create more space in hospitals by releasing recovering COVID-19 patients into nursing homes, which critics contended was a driving factor in causing nursing home outbreaks.

James' report said those admissions "may have contributed to increased risk of nursing home resident infection and subsequent fatalities," noting that at least 4,000 nursing home residents with COVID-19 died after that guidance. But James' report said the issue would require further study to conclusively prove such a link.

New York's health department released a much-criticized report last summer that claimed the March 25 policy, which was reversed in May, was "not a significant factor" in deaths.

James' review also found that a lack of infection controls at nursing homes put residents at increased risk of harm, that homes with lower federal scores for staffing had higher fatality rates, and that a broad measure Cuomo signed in April shielding nursing homes and other health care providers from lawsuits may have actually encouraged homes to hold back on hiring and training.

"As the pandemic and our investigations continue," she wrote, "it is imperative that we understand why the residents of nursing homes in New York unnecessarily suffered at such an alarming rate."

## Democrats to 'act big' on \$1.9T aid; GOP wants plan split

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats in Congress and the White House rejected a Republican pitch to split President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue plan into smaller chunks on Thursday, with lawmakers appearing primed to muscle the sweeping economic and virus aid forward without GOP help.

Despite Biden's calls for unity, Democrats said the stubbornly high unemployment numbers and battered U.S. economy leave them unwilling to waste time courting Republican support that might not materialize. They also don't want to curb the size and scope of a package that they say will provide desperately needed money to distribute the vaccine, reopen schools and send cash to American households and businesses.

Biden has been appealing directly to Republican and Democratic lawmakers while signaling his priority to press ahead.

"We've got a lot to do, and the first thing we've got to do is get this COVID package passed," Biden said Thursday in the Oval Office.

The standoff over Biden's first legislative priority is turning the new rescue plan into a political test — of his new administration, of Democratic control of Congress and of the role of Republicans in a post-Trump political landscape.

Success would give Biden a signature accomplishment in his first 100 days in office, unleashing \$400 billion to expand vaccinations and to reopen schools, \$1,400 direct payments to households, and other priorities, including a gradual increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Failure would be a high-profile setback early in his presidency.

Democrats in the House and Senate are operating as though they know they are borrowed time. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi are laying the groundwork to start the go-it-alone approach as soon as next week.

They are drafting a budget reconciliation bill that would start the process to pass the relief package with a simple 51-vote Senate majority — rather than the 60-vote threshold typically needed in the Senate to advance legislation. The goal would be passage by March, when jobless benefits, housing assistance and other aid is set to expire.

Schumer said he drew from Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's advice to "act big" to weather the COVID-19 economic crisis.

"Everywhere you look, alarm bells are ringing," Schumer said from the Senate floor.

Senate Republicans in a bipartisan group warned their colleagues in a "frank" conversation late Wednes-



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day that Biden and Democrats are making a mistake by loading up the aid bill with other priorities and jamming it through Congress without their support, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private session.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, a former White House budget director under George W. Bush, wants a deeper accounting of what funds remain from the \$900 billion coronavirus aid package from December.

"Literally, the money has not gone out the door," he said. "I'm not sure I understand why there's a grave emergency right now."

Biden spoke directly with Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, who is leading the bipartisan effort with Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., that is racing to strike a compromise.

Collins said she and the president had a "good conversation."

"We both expressed our shared belief that it is possible for the Senate to work in a bipartisan way to get things done for the people of this country," she said.

The emerging debate is highly reminiscent of the partisan divide over the 2009 financial rescue in the early months of the Obama administration, when Biden was vice president, echoing those battles over the appropriate level of government intervention.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said that although Biden wants a bipartisan package, the administration is opposed to breaking it up to win Republican support.

"We're open for business and open to hear from members of Congress on that," she said, noting that lawmakers are not "wallflowers."

But, she said, "we're not going to do this in a piecemeal way or break apart a big package that's meant to address the crisis we're facing."

On Thursday, more than 120 economists and policymakers signed a letter in support of Biden's package, saying the \$900 billion that Congress approved in December before he took office was "too little and too late to address the enormity of the deteriorating situation."

Employers shed workers in December, retail sales have slumped and COVID-19 deaths kept rising. More than 430,000 people in the U.S. have died from the coronavirus as of Thursday.

At the same time, the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits remained at a historically high 847,000 last week, and a new report said the U.S. economy shrunk by an alarming 3.5% last year.

"The risks of going too small dramatically outweigh the risks of going too big," said Gene Sperling, a former director of the White House National Economic Council, who signed the letter.

The government reported Thursday that the economy showed dangerous signs of stalling in the final three months of last year, ultimately shrinking in size by 3.5% for the whole of 2020 — the sharpest downturn since the demobilization that followed the end of World War II.

The decline was not as severe as initially feared, largely because the government has steered roughly \$4 trillion in aid, an unprecedented emergency expenditure, to keep millions of Americans housed, fed, employed and able to pay down debt and build savings amid the crisis.

Republican allies touted the 4% annualized growth during the last quarter, with economic analyst Stephen Moore calling the gains "amazing."

Republicans have also raised concerns about adding to the deficit, which skyrocketed in the Trump administration.

Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, the third-ranking party leader, said Biden should stick to the call for unity he outlined in his inaugural address, particularly with the evenly split Senate. "If there's ever been a mandate to move to the middle, it's this," he said. "It's not let's just go off the cliff."

But Democrats argue that low interest rates make the debt manageable and that the possibility of returning to work will do more to improve people's well-being.

The days and weeks ahead, against the backdrop of Trump's impeachment trial on a charge of inciting an insurrection with the U.S. Capitol siege, will set the tone, tenor and parameters of what will be possible in Washington.

## Biden opens 'Obamacare' window for uninsured as COVID rages

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered government health insurance markets to reopen for a special sign-up window, offering uninsured Americans a haven as the spread of COVID-19 remains dangerously high and vaccines aren't yet widely available.

Biden signed an executive order directing the HealthCare.gov insurance markets to take new applications for subsidized benefits, something Donald Trump's administration had refused to do. He also instructed his administration to consider reversing other Trump health care policies, including curbs on abortion counseling and the imposition of work requirements for low-income people getting Medicaid.

"There's nothing new that we're doing here other than restoring the Affordable Care Act and restoring Medicaid to the way it was before Trump became president," Biden said as he signed the directives in the Oval Office. He declared he was reversing "my predecessor's attack on women's health."

The actions were only the first steps by Biden, who has promised to build out former President Barack Obama's health care law to achieve a goal of coverage for all. While Biden rejects the idea of a government-run system that Sen. Bernie Sanders has pushed for in his "Medicare for All" proposal, his more centrist approach will require congressional buy-in. But opposition to "Obamacare" runs deep among Republicans.

The most concrete short-term impact of Biden's orders will come from reopening HealthCare.gov insurance markets as coverage has shrunk in the economic turmoil of the coronavirus pandemic. That's an executive action and no legislation is required.

The new "special enrollment period" will begin Feb. 15 and run through May 15, the White House said. It will be coupled with a promotional campaign and a call for states that run their own insurance markets to match the federal sign-up opportunity.

The Biden administration has ample resources for marketing, said Karen Pollitz, a health insurance expert with the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. The foundation estimates that the Trump administration left unspent about \$1.2 billion in user fees collected from insurers to help pay for running the marketplaces.

"The reason it wasn't spent is the Trump administration spent its time in office cutting services that support consumer enrollment," Pollitz said. "All the while the user fee revenue was coming in, (but) they were not allowed to spend it on anything other than marketplace operations."

Created under the Obama-era Affordable Care Act, the marketplaces offer taxpayer-subsidized coverage regardless of a person's medical history or preexisting conditions, including COVID-19.

Biden also ordered the immediate reversal of a federal policy that bars taxpayer funding for international health care nonprofits that promote or provide abortions. Known as the Mexico City Policy, it can be switched on or off depending on whether Democrats or Republicans control the White House. Abortion rights supporters call it the "global gag rule."

The new president's signing of a growing stack of executive orders is bringing increasing criticism from Republicans and also from some of his allies, especially after Democrats lambasted Trump when he acted on his own. Biden's team says he's looking to Congress for major legislation but feels that certain actions are crucial in the meantime.

Some directives he issued Thursday could take months to carry out.

He instructed the Department of Health and Human Services to consider rescinding Trump regulations that bar federally funded family planning clinics from referring women for abortions.

HHS will also reexamine a Trump administration policy that allows states to impose work requirements as a condition for low-income people to get Medicaid health insurance. Work requirements have been blocked by federal courts, which found that they led to thousands of people losing coverage and violated Medicaid's legal charge to provide medical services. The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the issue.

And Biden directed HHS to review Trump policies that could undermine protections for people with health problems, such as a rule that facilitated the sale of short-term health insurance plans that don't have to cover preexisting medical conditions.

Such changes cannot happen overnight. Rescinding a federal regulation requires a new regulation, which

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has to follow an established legal process that involves considering different sides of an issue.

Former Trump health policy adviser Brian Blase said the Biden administration has to take care it doesn't throw out some policies intended to help solidly middle-class people who don't qualify for financial assistance under Obama's law.

"Obamacare plans are generally only attractive to people who receive large subsidies to buy them," said Blase. He cited a Trump policy that allows employers to provide tax-free money for workers to buy individual plans.

The abortion-related actions brought Biden immediate praise from women's rights groups, as well as condemnation from social and religious conservatives. Under President Trump, abortion opponents had free rein to try to rewrite federal policy, but now the political pendulum has swung back. Trump's abortion counseling restrictions led Planned Parenthood affiliates to leave the federal family planning program.

Biden campaigned on repealing longstanding federal prohibitions against taxpayer funding for most abortions, but that was not part of Thursday's orders. A change of that magnitude to a group of laws known as the Hyde Amendment would require congressional approval.

Biden's nominee for health secretary, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, has not yet been confirmed by the Senate, but the White House said that will not stop health agencies from immediately going to work on the president's directives.

The idea of reopening Obamacare's health insurance markets in the pandemic has had broad support from consumer, medical, and business organizations. The main insurer trade group, America's Health Insurance Plans, applauded Biden's move.

As the number of uninsured Americans grew because of job losses in the pandemic, the Trump administration resisted calls to reopen HealthCare.gov. Failure to repeal and replace Obamacare was one of the former president's most bitter disappointments. His administration continued trying to find ways to limit the program or unravel it entirely. A Supreme Court decision on Trump's final legal challenge to the Affordable Care Act is expected this year.

Experts agree that number of uninsured people has risen because of layoffs in the coronavirus economy, but authoritative estimates await government studies due later this year. While some estimates cite 5 million to 10 million newly uninsured people, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says its analysis suggests a smaller number.

Nonetheless, the CBO projects that nearly 32 million Americans are uninsured and of those, about 2 in 3 are eligible for some kind of subsidized coverage.

The Obama-era health care law covers more than 23 million people through a mix of subsidized private insurance sold in all states, and expanded Medicaid adopted by 38 states.

## **Corky Lee, known for photographing Asian America, dies at 73**

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Corky Lee, a photojournalist who spent five decades spotlighting the often ignored Asian and Pacific Islander American communities, has died. He was 73.

Lee died Wednesday in New York City's Queens borough of complications from COVID-19, his family said in a statement.

"His passion was to rediscover, document and champion through his images the plight of all Americans but most especially that of Asian and Pacific Islanders," his family said.

The self-described "undisputed unofficial Asian American Photographer Laureate," Lee used his eye to pursue what he saw as "photographic justice." Almost always sporting a camera around his neck, he was present at many seminal moments impacting Asian America over a 50-year career.

He was born Young Kwok Lee in New York City to Chinese immigrant parents. He was the first child in his family to go to college, graduating from City University of New York's Queens College.

A self-taught freelance photographer, Lee aimed his camera lens on a slew of subjects from anti-Vietnam war protests to police brutality. Over the years, his photos appeared in The New York Times, Time maga-

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zine, the New York Post, New York Daily News, The Associated Press and Asian American outlets. Most recently, he was documenting anti-Asian racism brought on by the pandemic.

Lee was there when Asian Americans took to the streets to protest the lack of jail time for the killers of Vincent Chin. The 27-year-old Chin was beaten to death in Detroit in 1982, a time when Japan was being blamed for the U.S. auto industry's decline. The two laid-off white autoworkers who killed Chin — who was Chinese — assumed he was Japanese. They were convicted of manslaughter but got just three years of probation.

In 2017, Lee organized a vigil outside the Nevada home of one of Chin's attackers.

Several of Lee's photos were prominently featured in the recent PBS docu-series, "Asian Americans." One of the series' producers and a longtime friend, Renee Tajima-Pena, met Lee 40 years ago in New York. Even back then, he seemed to be everywhere, relentlessly trying to document Asian American events or just their daily lives.

"He considered his camera to be a sword wielded against stereotypes and injustice," Tajima-Pena said in an email. "And so Corky's left us with a lot of ammunition, because his photos years and decades later continues to arm us and tell our story as Asian Americans through our own lens."

He was a fixture at the Museum of Chinese in America, where some of his photos are part of the museum's permanent collection. He also showed up to photograph events big or small, said Herb Tam, the museum's curator and director of exhibitions. But Lee wasn't afraid to challenge the museum and its staff on what he thought they could do better and what stories they should feature.

"He was very demanding and rigorous as a friend of the museum. He was our toughest critic," Tam said. "We took him seriously for sure. ... I think we're better for it."

An event that had an indelible influence on Lee's desire for more Asian representation was the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. In previous interviews, Lee spoke of being in junior high and coming across a picture from the 1869 completion of the railroad in Utah. The iconic "Champagne Photo" featured almost no Chinese workers, even though they made up the majority of the labor.

In 2002, Lee gathered some of those laborers' descendants in the same spot for a reenactment. More than a nice gesture, Lee felt the anniversary photograph was restoring Asians into the history of the country they helped build. He went on to recreate the photo on more than one anniversary.

Lee also believed in paying it forward to Asian American journalists coming after him. He was a founding member of the New York chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association. He is credited with helping raise more than \$100,000 in scholarship funds through annual photo auctions.

"AAJA is heartbroken over the loss of our beloved Corky Lee, a trailblazer whose career has been instrumental to our collective understanding and appreciation of the history, triumphs and struggles of Asian America," AAJA President Michelle Ye Hee Lee said in a statement.

A private funeral service will be held at Wah Wing Sang Funeral Home in New York.

Lee is survived by his brother John.

Even while dealing with the virus, Lee couldn't put the camera down, according to Tajima-Pena. A couple weeks before his death, he shared a picture of all the flowers he had received while hospitalized in the ICU.

"He was already a fixture during the 1970s," she wrote, "and never stopped photographing."

## Novavax COVID-19 vaccine works, but less so against variants

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Novavax Inc. said Thursday that its COVID-19 vaccine appears 89% effective based on early findings from a British study and that it also seems to work — though not as well — against new mutated versions of the virus circulating in that country and South Africa.

The announcement comes amid worry about whether a variety of vaccines being rolled out around the world will be strong enough to protect against worrisome new variants — and as the world desperately needs new types of shots to boost scarce supplies.

The study of 15,000 people in Britain is still underway. But an interim analysis found 62 participants so

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far have been diagnosed with COVID-19 – only six of them in the group that got vaccine and the rest who received dummy shots.

The infections occurred at a time when Britain was experiencing a jump in COVID-19 caused by a more contagious variant. A preliminary analysis found over half of the trial participants who became infected had the mutated version. The numbers are very small, but Novavax said they suggest the vaccine is nearly 96% effective against the older coronavirus and nearly 86% effective against the new variant. The findings are based on cases that occurred at least a week after the second dose.

“Both those numbers are dramatic demonstrations of the ability of our vaccine to develop a very potent immune response,” Novavax CEO Stanley Erck said in a call with investors late Thursday.

Scientists have been even more worried about a variant first discovered in South Africa that carries different mutations. Results from a smaller Novavax study in that country suggests the vaccine does work but not nearly as well as it does against the variant from Britain.

The South African study included some volunteers with HIV. Among the HIV-negative volunteers, the vaccine appears 60% effective. Including volunteers with HIV, overall the protection was 49%, the company said. While genetic testing still is underway, so far about 90% of the COVID-19 illnesses found in the South African study appear due to the new mutant.

“These are good results. There is reason to be optimistic” about the 60% effectiveness, said Glenda Gray, head of the South African Medical Research Council. Even against the new variant that now causes more than 90% of new cases in that country, “we’re still seeing vaccine efficacy,” she said.

More concerning is what the study showed about a totally different question — the chances of people getting COVID-19 a second time, said the leader of the South African study, Shabir Madhi of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Tests suggested that nearly a third of study participants had been previously infected, yet rates of new infections in the placebo group were similar.

“Past infection with early variants of the virus in South Africa does not protect” against infection with the new one, he said. “There doesn’t seem to be any protection derived.”

Novavax said it needs some additional data before it can seek British authorization for the vaccine’s use, sometime in the next month or so. A larger study in the U.S. and Mexico has enrolled slightly over half of the needed 30,000 volunteers. Novavax said it’s not clear if the Food and Drug Administration will need data from that study, too, before deciding whether to allow U.S. use.

Meanwhile, it is starting to develop a version of the vaccine that could more specifically target the mutations found in South Africa, in case health authorities eventually decide that updated dosing is needed.

Vaccines against COVID-19 train the body to recognize the new coronavirus, mostly the spike protein that coats it. But the Novavax candidate is made differently than the first shots being used. Called a recombinant protein vaccine, the Maryland company uses genetic engineering to grow harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in insect cells. Scientists extract and purify the protein and then mix in an immune-boosting chemical.

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AP Medical Writer Marilyn Marchione contributed.

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## State lawmakers are pushing to curb governors’ virus powers

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Irritated by the sweeping use of executive orders during the COVID-19 crisis, state lawmakers around the U.S. are moving to curb the authority of governors and top health officials to impose emergency restrictions such as mask rules and business shutdowns.

The push is underway in such states as Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky, Indiana and Pennsylvania, where legislators are seeking a constitutional amendment to strip the governor of many of his

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emergency powers.

Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Wayne Langerholc said the amendment would "make it unequivocally clear that our General Assembly is a co-equal branch ... that we are not a monarchy and that our voices matter."

Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf and some of his counterparts around the country have argued that they need authority to act quickly and decisively against the fast-changing threat.

The coronavirus has killed an estimated 430,000 Americans and is going through its most lethal phase yet, despite the rollout of vaccines, with new and more contagious variants from abroad turning up in the U.S.

State legislatures generally took on lesser roles after the pandemic hit, with many suspending work or adjourning. It has been governors or their top health officials who have set many of the policies — imposing mask mandates, limiting public gatherings and shutting down dine-in restaurants, gyms, hair salons and other businesses.

Lawmakers in more than half the states have filed bills this year to limit gubernatorial powers during the pandemic and other emergencies, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Most legislatures began their sessions this month.

Kentucky's Republican-led Legislature could consider as soon as next week whether to override Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear's vetoes of several bills that would rein in his emergency powers.

Wisconsin's GOP-controlled Senate voted earlier this week to repeal Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' emergency health order, which would end the state's mask mandate. The Republican-controlled Assembly called off a similar vote Thursday in the face of criticism from health, school and business leaders and concern that it could jeopardize more than \$49 million in federal aid.

Wisconsin Republicans have argued that Evers exceeded his authority by issuing multiple emergency declarations during the pandemic, which enabled him to extend the mask mandate beyond the 60 days allowed under the law without getting the Legislature's approval.

Evers contends that the changing nature of the pandemic warranted new emergency declarations.

The amendment Pennsylvania Republicans are seeking to place on the May ballot also would put a cap on the governor's disaster declarations — 21 days, unless lawmakers vote to extend them. The Legislature also could halt them at any time with a two-thirds vote.

Wolf has said that prematurely ending his disaster declaration would itself be "disastrous" for the state and that requiring repeated legislative approval "could slow down or halt emergency response when aid is most needed."

In Michigan, House Republicans have threatened to withhold billions of dollars for schools unless Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer cedes her administration's power to prohibit in-person instruction and sports to local health departments. Whitmer called the move "cruel and reckless."

Whitmer was the target of an alleged kidnapping plot last fall by anti-government extremists upset over her coronavirus restrictions.

Though legislative resistance to executive coronavirus orders has fallen largely along partisan lines in some states, lawmakers elsewhere are pushing back against governors of their own parties.

Republicans in the Arizona Senate want to end the broad emergency powers that GOP Gov. Doug Ducey has used to limit large gatherings and business capacities.

Ohio Sen. Rob McColley introduced a bill this week that could rescind emergency health orders issued by Gov. Mike DeWine, a fellow Republican. It would create a committee to retroactively review them. DeWine vetoed a similar bill last year.

McColley said the Legislature needs to take action "when the relatively unfettered power of the executive branch during a time of emergency has lasted as long as it has."

In Indiana, Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb's executive orders have also stirred opposition from his own party. GOP-sponsored legislation would require lawmakers to be called into session to extend a governor's emergency order beyond 60 days.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster is supporting legislation that would give lawmakers greater opportunity to pass judgment on his emergency declarations.

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Under current law, McMaster can issue a declaration for just 15 days before the General Assembly has to weigh in. The Republican governor has skirted that by issuing 22 different declarations, with incremental changes, every two weeks or so.

McMaster has said his goal wasn't to avoid legislative oversight; he said he couldn't wait for lawmakers to meet when they were trying to stay apart during the pandemic.

Democrats who control the Maryland General Assembly are pressing for more transparency from Republican Gov. Larry Hogan's administration. One idea would require him to go through a state board or alert a legislative panel before making emergency coronavirus purchases.

Hogan spent millions of dollars last year on a confidential deal to acquire COVID-19 testing supplies from South Korea that didn't initially meet federal requirements.

A separate GOP-sponsored bill seeks to limit Hogan's power by capping the number of times he could extend a state of emergency without legislative input. Hogan has denounced it as "about probably the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life."

Lawmakers are also seeking to rein in the emergency powers of local officials, especially in states such as Missouri, where the Republican governor has deferred most decisions on shutdowns and masks to cities and counties.

St. Louis County, the state's biggest jurisdiction, has imposed a variety of restrictions, including periodic prohibitions and capacity limits on indoor dining at restaurants.

Jeff Fitter, the owner of Super Smokers BBQ, said his profits were cut in half last year. He is supporting a bill that would limit local emergency health orders to 14 days unless authorized for longer by the Legislature. It also would give tax breaks to businesses affected by occupancy limits imposed by cities and counties.

"One person, one pen, shouldn't be the difference between my business surviving or its demise," Fitter said. "That should be something that is ran through a legislative body."

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Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri in Columbus, Ohio; Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina; Marc Levy and Mark Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Brian Witte, in Annapolis, Maryland, contributed to this report.

## **EXPLAINER: Why GameStop's stock surge is shaking Wall Street**

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It's not just you. What's going on with GameStop's stock doesn't make sense to a lot of people.

The struggling video game retailer's stock has been making stupefying moves this month, wild enough to raise concerns from professional investors on Wall Street to the hallways of regulators and the White House in Washington.

The frenzy hit new heights Thursday when several trading platforms limited their customers from making certain trades with GameStop.

It's all forcing hard questions about whether the stock market is in a dangerous bubble and whether a new generation of traders should be allowed to take full advantage of all the tools and free trades available on their phones, regardless of how reckless they may seem to outsiders. At the same time, champions of the 99% are cheering louder from the sidelines, saying the moves mean that hedge funds, Wall Street and the 1% are finally getting their comeuppance.

Here's a look at how we got here:

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### WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH GAMESTOP'S STOCK?

It's been maniacal this month. After sitting around \$18 three Fridays ago, it doubled in four days. It kept shooting higher, before nearly doubling on Tuesday and then more than doubling again on Wednesday to \$347.51. On Thursday, it gave back a chunk of those gains and finished the day at \$193.60, down 44%. But it's still up an amazing 928% through the first few weeks of 2021.

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## AND THE COMPANY ITSELF?

It's still struggling. GameStop, based in Grapevine, Texas, sells video games at more than 5,000 stores, and the pandemic has been keeping customers away. More worrisome is the long-term shift by customers away from brick-and-mortar stores and toward buying games online.

Enthusiasm has grown for GameStop's prospects after the company said earlier this month that a co-founder of Chewy, the online seller of pet supplies, was joining its board. Investors see Ryan Cohen helping GameStop's digital transformation. But analysts still expect GameStop to keep losing money in its next fiscal year.

## REDDIT IS INVOLVED, RIGHT?

Yes, particularly those in a group called "WallStreetBets." Their discussions are full of ideas for the next big trade to jump on, self deprecation and an appreciation of both winning and losing bets, as long as they're bold. They've recently been encouraging each other to keep buying GameStop and push it ever higher, or "to the moon."

## THAT ALONE PUSHED THE STOCK UP MORE THAN 1,000%?

No. A big reason for that is how deeply hated GameStop's stock was by hedge funds and other professional investors on Wall Street. Many were betting on GameStop's stock to fall by "shorting" it.

## WHAT'S A SHORT?

It's how investors can make money off a stock falling. In a short sale, they borrow a share of GameStop and then sell it. Later, if the stock price does as they expect, they can buy the stock at a lower price and keep the difference. GameStop is one of the most heavily shorted stocks on Wall Street.

## WHAT'S A SHORT SQUEEZE?

It's what happened with GameStop's stock. When a stock is very heavily shorted, a rise in its price can force short sellers to get out of their bets. To do that, they have to buy the stock, which pushes the stock even higher and can create a feedback loop. As GameStop's short sellers have gotten squeezed this month, smaller and first-time investors have been egging each other on to to keep the momentum going.

## DO THESE SMALLER INVESTORS BELIEVE IN GAMESTOP'S BUSINESS?

There's been a flavor of that in the discussions. But lately it's been more about inflicting pain on short sellers, hedge funds and other big financial firms. Many talk about it in terms of evening the ledger with the financial elite, who benefited from years of gains as other people fell further behind.

Buying GameStop "isn't about greed," one user wrote on Reddit, after citing all the recessions "they" caused and the times "they" got bailed out with taxpayers' dollars. "It's about taking back what's ours, what we've already paid for."

"This is for making us work on Thanksgiving night all the way through black friday at 9.50 an hour," another user wrote on Reddit .

## WHAT'S THIS ABOUT OPTIONS AND MARGIN TRADING?

They're ways that investors can make a big profit with relatively small payments up front, if the stock moves in the right way. Many of the traders pushing up GameStop are smaller-pocketed or novice investors.

When they buy stocks "on margin," they're using borrowed money, which can supercharge their gains and losses. With options, an investor can buy the right to buy the stock at a later date at a certain price. If the stock hits that target, investors can reap a bigger return than if they simply bought a share. But if it doesn't, it can mean a total loss.

## WHERE DOES WALL STREET SEE GAMESTOP'S STOCK ENDING UP?

Much, much lower. Over the long term, a stock's price tends to track with the company's profits, and



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GameStop's prospects for earnings remain cloudy. Many Wall Street analysts have price targets for GameStop at \$15 or below.

## IS IT JUST GAMESTOP SWEPT UP IN THIS?

No. Other heavily shorted stocks have been seeing a surge of interest recently as investors look for the next GameStop. American Airlines, BlackBerry and other formerly downtrodden stocks have had extreme swings in price this week.

## WHAT ABOUT THE BROADER MARKET?

Critics used to dismiss the moonshots for GameStop and others as a sideshow, saying the excess was confined to a few corners of the market. But Wednesday's broader-market tumble gives some caution. Sharp losses for short sellers may have pushed them to sell some of their other stock holdings to raise cash, and several investors say that contributed to Wednesday's 2.6% slide for the S&P 500. It was the worst day for the market since October.

## DID ANYONE SEE THIS COMING?

Maybe not to this degree. But brokerages have been making it ever-easier for novices to get into the market and trade. Commissions have dropped to zero, and people can trade on their phones. As each barrier to trading has fallen, consumer advocates cheered the broadening playing field. But they also warned it's possible to have too much of a good thing. Too-easy trading could encourage people to make too many trades that are too risky for them.

## CAN REGULATORS DO ANYTHING ABOUT THIS?

The Securities and Exchange Commission has said it's noticed all the volatility in the market and is taking a closer look. It's the SEC's job to protect investors, and the expectation across Wall Street is that investors holding GameStop at these lofty prices are likely to be hurt when its price falls.

What sets this case apart is all the communication going on between investors on Reddit, as they goad each other to push GameStop higher, said Chester Spatt, a former chief economist at the SEC and a finance professor Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business. But he said it's difficult to declare it a clear case of market manipulation.

In the end, there may be no way to prevent people from pushing a stock too high and potentially burning themselves. Instead, Spatt said it may be better first to properly educate all these novice investors about the risks of bubbles and overzealous trading.

"A lot of people now feel like they're empowered, and they don't have to go through the traditional players" of Wall Street to invest, Spatt said. "And in fairness, they didn't do that great going through the traditional players."

## Ohio police chief forced out in wake of Andre Hill killing

By ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press/Report For America  
COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The police chief of Ohio's capital and largest city was forced out Thursday after the mayor who hired him said he'd lost confidence in the chief's ability to make needed changes to the department, weeks after the police killing of Andre Hill.

The removal of Police Chief Thomas Quinlan by Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther comes amid a larger community debate over the shootings of several Black children and men by police and heavy-handed police tactics during last year's protests over police brutality and racial injustice.

"It became clear to me that Chief Quinlan could not successfully implement the reform and change I expect and that the community demands," Ginther said in a statement. "Columbus residents have lost faith in him and in Division's ability to change on its own."

Quinlan, who is white, is a 30-year department veteran who was selected for the top job by Ginther in

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December 2019. He was chosen over Perry Tarrant, a former assistant police chief in Seattle, who is Black. At the time, Ginther said Quinlan must address racism within the department's ranks, including further diversifying the department.

Ginther, a Democrat, said a new national search will be conducted for the next chief.

Quinlan said Thursday he had hoped to stay in the position but respected the decision. He said he accomplished a lot as chief.

"We implemented dozens of reforms geared toward accountability, transparency, and strengthening public trust," Quinlan said. "Someone else will now carry those priorities forward, and I will help and support them in any way I can."

In late December, Columbus officer Adam Coy was fired after shooting Hill three days before Christmas as Hill walked out of a garage holding a cellphone. Anger over the killing grew as bodycam video showed that multiple responding officers failed to help Hill as he lay moaning on a garage floor.

Quinlan has said the 47-year-old Hill would be alive if not for officers' inactions, and promised an investigation of all involved.

"We can't effectively police if we don't have the trust and the partnerships that we need to move forward, so we cannot tolerate any type of individual officer bringing discredit upon the division, or policing as a profession," Quinlan said in an interview with The Associated Press earlier this month.

Scott Woods, a local community activist who had previously called for Quinlan's resignation, was happy to hear the news but remained concerned the decision was strictly performative.

"This is a step in the right direction. An enormous step. But it's only a step in a process that is a mile long," Woods told the AP on Thursday afternoon. "I think it sends a message but whether that message is received by the right people is up for question."

The disconnect between police and residents in Columbus was on full display in late May when Columbus Democrat U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty, along with a county commissioner and the president of Columbus City Council, were pepper-sprayed at a protest over the police killing of George Floyd. All three of them are Black.

In response, the city banned the use of chemical spray on peaceful protesters. Ginther set up a hotline for people to report complaints about police brutality during protests. The city later hired a law firm to investigate violations of city policy and an investigator for criminal violations. Council President Shannon Hardin, a Democrat, said Thursday he supported the removal of Quinlan.

The mayor has frequently called out police over shootings and aggressive actions and championed the city's first-ever civilian police review board.

"The people of Columbus elected and reelected me to provide civilian oversight and to change and reform the division of police," he told the AP earlier this month. "And so that's exactly what I'm going to do."

One of Ginther's first steps was to create a commission to study changes to the police department. Among its 80 recommendations was the review board, approved by voters in November.

Ginther said Thursday he'll appoint members to that board soon and continue seeking change in the agency.

The Columbus Division of Police — like many big-city agencies — is juggling calls for internal change even as it battles unprecedented street violence. Columbus saw a record 174 homicides last year and so far is averaging just short of one a day this year.

## Checked by reality, some QAnon supporters seek a way out

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Ceally Smith spent a year down the rabbit hole of QAnon, devoting more and more time to researching and discussing the conspiracy theory online. Eventually it consumed her, and she wanted out.

She broke up with the boyfriend who recruited her into the movement, took six months off social media, and turned to therapy and yoga.

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"I was like: I can't live this way. I'm a single mom, working, going to school and doing the best for my children," said Smith, 32, of Kansas City, Missouri. "I personally didn't have the bandwidth to do this and show up for my children. Even if it was all true, I just couldn't do it anymore."

More than a week after Donald Trump departed the White House, shattering their hopes that he would expose the worldwide cabal, some QAnon adherents have concocted ever more elaborate stories to keep their faith alive. But others like Smith are turning to therapy and online support groups to talk about the damage done when beliefs collide with reality.

The QAnon conspiracy theory emerged on fringe internet message boards in 2017. At root, the movement claims Trump is waging a secret battle against the "deep state" and a sect of powerful devil-worshipping pedophiles who dominate Hollywood, big business, the media and government.

It is named after Q, an anonymous poster who believers claim has top-secret government clearance and whose posts are taken as predictions about "the plan" and the coming "storm" and "great awakening" in which evil will be defeated.

It's not clear exactly how many people believe some or all of the narrative, but backers of the movement were vocal in their support for Trump and helped fuel the insurrectionists who overran the U.S. Capitol this month. QAnon is also growing in popularity overseas.

Former believers interviewed by The Associated Press liken the process of leaving QAnon to kicking a drug addiction. QAnon, they say, offers simple explanations for a complicated world and creates an online community that provides escape and even friendship.

Smith's then-boyfriend introduced her to QAnon. It was all he could talk about, she said. At first she was skeptical, but she became convinced after the death of financier Jeffrey Epstein while in federal custody facing pedophilia charges. Officials debunked theories that he was murdered, but to Smith and other QAnon supporters, his suicide while facing child sex charges was too much to accept.

Soon, Smith was spending more time on fringe websites and on social media, reading and posting about the conspiracy theory. She said she fell for QAnon content that presented no evidence, no counter arguments, and yet was all too convincing.

"We as a society need to start teaching our kids to ask: Where is this information coming from? Can I trust it?" she said. "Anyone can cut and paste anything."

After a year, Smith wanted out, suffocated by dark prophesies that were taking up more and more of her time, leaving her terrified.

Her then-boyfriend saw her decision to move on from QAnon as a betrayal. She said she no longer believes in the theory, and wanted to share her story in the hopes it would help others.

"I was one of those people too," she said of QAnon and its grip. "I came out on the other end because I wanted to feel better."

Another ex-believer, Jitarth Jadeja, created a Reddit forum called QAnon Casualties to help others like him, as well as the relatives of people still consumed by the theory. Membership has doubled in recent weeks to more than 114,000 members. Three new moderators had to be added just to keep up.

"They are our friends and family," said Jadeja, of Sydney, Australia. "It's not about who is right or who is wrong. I'm here to preach empathy, for the normal people, the good people who got brainwashed by this death cult."

His advice to those fleeing QAnon? Get off social media, take deep breaths, and pour that energy and internet time into local volunteering.

Michael Frink is a Mississippi computer engineer who now moderates a QAnon recovery channel on the social media platform Telegram. He said that while mocking the group has never been more popular online, it will only further alienate people.

Frink said he never believed in the QAnon theory but sympathizes with those who did.

"I think after the inauguration a lot of them realized they've been taken for a ride," he said. "These are human beings. If you have a loved one who is in it: make sure they know they are loved."

QAnon supporters are likely to respond in three general ways as reality undermines their beliefs, according to Ziv Cohen, a forensic psychiatrist and expert on extremist beliefs at Weill Cornell Medical College

of Cornell University.

Those who only dabbled in the conspiracy theory may shrug and move on, Cohen said. At the other extreme, some militant believers may migrate to radical anti-government groups and plot potentially violent crimes. Indeed, some QAnon believers have already done so.

In the middle, he said, are the many followers who looked to QAnon "to help them make sense of the world, to help them feel a sense of control." These people may simply revise QAnon's elastic narrative to fit reality, rather than face up to being hoodwinked.

"This isn't about critical thinking, of having a hypothesis and using facts to support it," Cohen said of QAnon believers. "They have a need for these beliefs, and if you take that away, because the storm did not happen, they could just move the goal posts."

Some now say Trump's loss was always part of the plan, or that he secretly remains president, or even that Joe Biden's inauguration was created using special effects or body doubles. They insist that Trump will prevail, and powerful figures in politics, business and the media will be tried and possibly executed on live television, according to recent social media posts.

"Everyone will be arrested soon. Confirmed information," read a post viewed 130,000 times this week on Great Awakening, a popular QAnon channel on Telegram. "From the very beginning I said it would happen."

But a different tone is emerging in the spaces created for those who have heard enough.

"Hi my name is Joe," one man wrote on a Q recovery channel in Telegram. "And I'm a recovering QAnoner."

## Journalists booted from Marjorie Taylor Greene town hall

By BEN NADLER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Two journalists were kicked out of a public town hall event and threatened with arrest for trying to ask a question of Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has come under heavy criticism for supporting social media posts that advocated violence against Democratic officials.

The journalists from WRCB-TV were invited to attend the Wednesday event in Dalton, Georgia, and were given credentials for it, Callie Starnes, WRCB-TV's news director, told The Associated Press.

"Once we arrived we were told we were not allowed to speak to guests or the congresswoman," the reporter, Meredith Aldis, said on the station's broadcast Wednesday night.

In a video posted online by the Chattanooga, Tennessee-based news station, the reporter can be heard starting to ask Greene a question when the congresswoman stops her and says, "I'm talking to my constituents."

A staffer from Greene's office then approaches the reporter and tells her to leave, before he calls over a sheriff's deputy.

The deputy accuses the reporter of "criminally trespassing" and says: "If you don't leave you're going to go to jail."

Starnes said Aldis was asking Greene about her social media posts and calls for her to be expelled from Congress because of them.

The Whitfield County Sheriff's Office declined to comment and directed questions to Greene's office.

Nick Dyer, a spokesman for Greene, said in an email: "This was a town hall for constituents. Not a press conference. Every attendee (besides media) was allowed to ask a question and Congresswoman Greene answered every question."

Greene, who was sworn in to office earlier this month, represents northwest Georgia's 14th Congressional District. Throughout her campaign last year, she sought to tightly control news media coverage, often not allowing certain news organizations to attend events and giving interviews only sparingly.

A die-hard supporter of former President Donald Trump, Greene has a long history of incendiary social media posts — including ones in which she expressed racist views and support for QAnon conspiracy theories, which focus on the debunked belief that top Democrats are involved in child sex trafficking, Satan worship and cannibalism. Most of her pronouncements were reported publicly before she won her Republican primary in August and the general election in November.

Greene has also spread false claims about the integrity of November's presidential election — repeating Trump's baseless allegations of fraud — and railed against public health requirements implemented to slow the spread of the coronavirus. And in social media posts reported by Media Matters for America, a liberal watchdog group, Greene pushed conspiracy theories or "liked" posts that challenged the veracity of mass shootings at schools in Newtown, Connecticut, and Parkland, Florida.

A report from CNN published earlier this week surfaced social media activity where Greene showed support for Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI, including posts that called for the death of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former President Barack Obama.

Greene tweeted a response, saying: "Many posts have been liked. Many posts have been shared. Some did not represent my views."

That's led to another round of strong condemnation from Democrats and even some fellow Republicans.

Pelosi excoriated House Republican leaders Thursday for appointing Greene to the chamber's education committee, saying that Greene had "mocked the killing of little children," a reference to the shooting at a Newtown elementary school.

A spokesman for House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy said in a statement to Axios that the posts were "deeply disturbing" and said McCarthy would "have a conversation" with Greene about them.

## **Virus variant from South Africa detected in US for 1st time**

By MICHELLE LIU and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A new variant of the coronavirus emerged Thursday in the United States, posing yet another public health challenge in a country already losing more than 3,000 people to COVID-19 every day.

The mutated version of the virus, first identified in South Africa, was found in two cases in South Carolina. Public health officials said it's almost certain that there are more infections that have not been identified yet. They are also concerned that this version spreads more easily and that vaccines could be less effective against it.

The two cases were discovered in adults in different regions of the state and do not appear to be connected. Neither of the people infected has traveled recently, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control said Thursday.

"That's frightening," because it means there could be more undetected cases within the state, said Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, an infectious diseases physician at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. "It's probably more widespread."

The arrival of the variant shows that "the fight against this deadly virus is far from over," Dr. Brannon Traxler, South Carolina's interim public health director, said in a statement. "While more COVID-19 vaccines are on the way, supplies are still limited. Every one of us must recommit to the fight by recognizing that we are all on the front lines now. We are all in this together."

Viruses constantly mutate, and coronavirus variants are circulating around the globe, but scientists are primarily concerned with the emergence of three that researchers believe may spread more easily. Other variants first reported in the United Kingdom and Brazil were previously confirmed in the U.S.

As the variants bring a potential for greater infection risks in the U.S., pandemic-weary lawmakers in several states are pushing back against mask mandates, business closures and other protective restrictions ordered by governors.

States including Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky and Indiana are weighing proposals to limit their governors' abilities to impose emergency restrictions. Wisconsin's Republican-controlled Assembly had been expected to vote to repeal Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' mask mandate, but lawmakers abruptly called off the vote Thursday in the face of broad criticism and out of concern it would jeopardize more than \$49 million in federal aid. Pennsylvania lawmakers are considering a constitutional amendment to strip the governor of many of his emergency powers.

Governors argue that they need authority to act swiftly in a crisis, and limitations could slow critical

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emergency responses.

Meanwhile, Nebraska health officials said the state could be days away from lifting restrictions on indoor gatherings, citing a low percentage of COVID-19 hospitalizations. Other states seeing declining infections are also loosening limitations on restaurants and other businesses, though experts have warned the public to stay vigilant about masks and social distancing or risk further surges.

In South Carolina, the state health agency said the variant was found in one person from the state's coastal region and another in its northeastern corner. The state gave little other information, citing privacy concerns, though Traxler said neither of the people was contagious any longer.

"Both were tested very early in the month, and my understanding is that both are doing well," Traxler said.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, a Republican, loosened most of the state's remaining pandemic restrictions in the fall. Spokesman Brian Symmes said McMaster does not plan to order new restrictions based on the discovery of the variant.

"This is important information for South Carolinians to have," McMaster said in a tweet, "but it isn't a reason for panic."

Scientists last week reported preliminary signs that some of the recent mutations may modestly curb the effectiveness of two vaccines, although they stressed that the shots still protect against the disease. There are also signs that some of the new mutations may undermine tests for the virus and reduce the effectiveness of certain treatments.

The coronavirus has already sickened millions and killed roughly 430,000 people in the United States.

While the rollout of vaccines has been slow, President Joe Biden has pledged to deliver 100 million injections in his first 100 days in office — and suggested it's possible the U.S. could reach 1.5 million shots a day.

While some European countries do extensive genetic testing to detect these variants, the U.S. has done little of this detective work. But scientists have been quickly trying to do more, which has revealed the more contagious variants.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported at least 315 cases of the U.K.-discovered variant in the United States. Those reports have come from at least 28 states, and health officials believe it could become the dominant strain in the U.S. by March. That variant has been reported in at least 70 countries.

The first U.S. case of the variant found in Brazil was announced earlier this week by health officials in Minnesota. It was a person who recently traveled to that South American nation. That version of the virus has popped up in more than a half-dozen countries.

The variant first found in South Africa was detected in October. Since then, it has been found in at least 30 other countries.

Some tests suggest the South African and Brazilian variants may be less susceptible to antibody drugs or antibody-rich blood from COVID-19 survivors, both of which help people fight off the virus.

Health officials also worry that if the virus changes enough, people might get COVID-19 a second time.

Biden on Monday reinstated COVID-19 travel restrictions on most non-U.S. travelers from Brazil, the U.K. and South Africa. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that Americans avoid travel.

Stobbe reported from New York.

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

## Christianity on display at Capitol riot sparks new debate

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Christian imagery and rhetoric on view during this month's Capitol insurrection are sparking renewed debate about the societal effects of melding Christian faith with an exclusionary breed of nationalism.

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The rioters who breached the Capitol on Jan. 6, leading to federal charges against more than 130 people so far, included several people carrying signs with Christian messages, and video showed one man in a fur hat and horns leading others in a prayer inside the Senate chamber. They also included multiple current or former members of the U.S. military or law enforcement, as well as a West Virginia state lawmaker.

The rise of what's often called Christian nationalism has long prompted pushback from leaders in multiple denominations, with the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty forming the Christians Against Christian Nationalism coalition in 2019. But in the immediate wake of the insurrection, other Christian leaders spoke out to denounce what they saw as the misuse of their faith to justify a violent attack on a seat of government.

Russell Moore, president of the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, said that when he saw a "Jesus Saves" sign displayed near a gallows built by rioters, "I was enraged to a degree that I haven't been enraged in memory. This is not only dangerous and unpatriotic but also blasphemous, presenting a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ that isn't the gospel and is instead its exact reverse."

Dwight McKissic, a leading Black Southern Baptist pastor who has publicly criticized the denomination's leaders' handling of racial justice, urged them in a tweet to also "denounce this flagrant display of White Christian Nationalism" by insurrectionists.

To tamp down what both liberal and conservative clerics view as a misappropriation of their faith, however, they must first tackle the challenge of defining Christian nationalism for a broad audience. Christians Against Christian Nationalism describes it as an ideology that "demands Christianity be privileged by the state and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian."

During a virtual panel the coalition held this week, one prominent leader underscored that love of country and God can coexist without making a person a Christian nationalist.

It is "very important to understand we are not condemning being patriotic," said the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, who leads the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Christians "can still be active participants in the public square" while staying true to their faith, she added.

The Rev. Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, sounded a similar note in an interview, citing the corrosive effects of "a convergence of a nationalist identity and a Christian identity."

"Certainly I love our country, and as the son of immigrant parents I am deeply grateful for the hope this nation represents," Kim said. "But as a Christian, my highest allegiance is to Christ."

Yet some supporters of former President Donald Trump say that denunciations of Christian nationalism are a way of attacking them politically. Former Rep. Allen West, now chairman of the Texas GOP, said on a Tuesday panel with several other religious conservatives sponsored by the group My Faith Votes that the term is used against those who "don't conform to a progressive, socialist ideological agenda."

Another wrinkle in efforts to steer Christians away from an overtly nationalist projection of their faith is QAnon, the conspiracy theory whose believers were front and center at the Jan. 6 rally in support of Trump's baseless claims of widespread election fraud as well as the riot that followed.

In the video shot by a New Yorker reporter during the siege, the fur-hatted Jacob Chansley — known as the "QAnon shaman" for his alignment with the conspiracy theory as well as his self-described spiritual leanings — delivered a prayer thanking God "for allowing the United States of America to be reborn." While Chansley spoke, other rioters fell silent in apparent participation.

Robert Jones, CEO of the independent nonprofit Public Religion Research Institute, said QAnon centers on a "very apocalyptic, good-versus-evil" set of false assumptions that connect Trump's party to godliness and Democrats to heathendom.

"The fact that we saw QAnon, white supremacy and white Christianity all carried together in a violent attack on the Capitol means that particularly white Christians have got some real soul-searching to do," said Jones, author of two books on white Christianity in America.

Christian author Jemar Tisby said via email that the elements of Christianity present at the riot signal that "violent nationalists have developed ways to deploy such religious symbols in service of their malevolent ends."

"Christians who want to divest of Christian Nationalism may find themselves leaving their churches be-

cause the ideology is so deeply ingrained that meaningful change is not on the horizon," said Tisby, CEO of The Witness, a Black Christian organization.

In the meantime, Moore said he has begun speaking with pastors about quelling QAnon's potential influence within congregations and plans to do more to provide resources to that end.

"One of the barriers to speaking to these conspiracy theories is many pastors and leaders rightly recognize this stuff as crazy, so they assume it doesn't need to be spoken to," he said. "But we live in a crazy time."

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

## Facebook panel overturns 4 content takedowns in first ruling

BY KELVIN CHAN and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Business News

LONDON (AP) — Facebook's quasi-independent oversight board issued its first rulings on Thursday, overturning four out of five decisions by the social network to take down questionable content.

But critics called the announcement largely irrelevant given the flood of misinformation, extremism and racism that remains on Facebook despite the company's efforts over the past years.

"The whole thing is kind of like putting new windows on a house in which the roof has caved in," said Gautam Hans, a Vanderbilt University expert on civil liberties and intellectual property. "The (oversight board) can't do very much — it selects a tiny percentage of potential cases — to fix a company with so many systemic and in my opinion unfixable problems."

Nonetheless, Hans said he respects the effort and believes "there are some clear distinctions" between what the oversight board thinks the standards should be and what the company does.

The social media giant set up the oversight panel to rule on thorny issues about content on its platforms, in response to furious criticism about its inability to respond swiftly and effectively to misinformation, hate speech and nefarious influence campaigns.

Facebook regularly takes down thousands of posts and accounts, and about 150,000 of those cases have appealed to the oversight board since it launched in October. The board is prioritizing the review of cases that have the potential to affect many users around the world.

In its initial batch of rulings, the board ordered Facebook to restore posts by users that the company said broke standards on adult nudity, hate speech, or dangerous individuals.

One case, in which a Brazilian user's Instagram post about breast cancer was automatically removed because it included images of female nipples, should have been allowed because the platform makes an exception for breast cancer awareness, the board said.

A Myanmar user's Burmese-language Facebook post about Muslims that included two widely shared photos of a dead Syrian toddler was offensive but did not rise to the level of hate speech, it ruled.

The human rights group Muslim Advocates lambasted the decision, saying the board "bent over backwards to excuse hate in Myanmar — a county where Facebook has been complicit in a genocide against Muslims."

"It is clear that the Oversight Board is here to launder responsibility for (Facebook CEO Mark) Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg," said Eric Naing, spokesperson for Muslim Advocates. "Instead of taking meaningful action to curb dangerous hate speech on the platform, Facebook punted responsibility to a third party board that used laughable technicalities to protect anti-Muslim hate content that contributes to genocide."

Facebook admitted in 2018 that it did not do enough to prevent its platform from being used to incite violence in Myanmar.

In addition, a post with a quote falsely attributed to Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, was cleared after the user told the board the intent was to compare the sentiment in the quote with Donald Trump's presidency.

The board said a fourth post in French about COVID-19 that had been taken down because it breached standards on misinformation should be restored, saying it didn't pose imminent harm. Among other things, the post called hydroxychloroquine combined with azithromycin a "harmless drug" that is being used to



"save lives." Claims that hydroxychloroquine is effective in treating the coronavirus have been widely debunked by top health officials after several studies found it ineffective in serious cases of COVID-19.

The decisions are binding, meaning CEO Mark Zuckerberg can't do anything to change them.

The board agreed only with Facebook's decision to take down a post with a slur used to describe Azerbaijanis, stemming from last year's conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Still to come is the panel's most high profile case - the decision to indefinitely suspend former President Donald Trump's account. It will be the biggest test yet for the panel, which faces criticism that Facebook set it up primarily to stave off regulation or even an eventual breakup of the company as it faces antitrust scrutiny.

Co-chair Michael McConnell said the panel had started working on the Trump case but was only at an "extremely early stage."

"All this has happened extremely recently so they're at the very beginning of their work," he told an online press briefing.

The oversight board will start accepting public comments on the Trump case on Friday.

Facebook took down Trump's account after he encouraged his supporters to not accept the election result and they stormed the U.S. Capitol in a deadly assault on Jan. 6. But the company referred the matter to the oversight board for what it called an "independent judgment" on upholding the decision.

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Ortutay reported from Oakland, California.

For all of AP's tech coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/technology>

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Follow Kelvin Chan at <https://www.twitter.com/chanman>

## Navalny defiant as Russian court rejects his bid for freedom

By DARIA LITVINOVA and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian court on Thursday rejected an appeal by opposition leader Alexei Navalny for his release from jail, while authorities detained several of his allies and warned social media companies about promoting more protests after tens of thousands rallied across the country last weekend demanding his freedom.

Appearing in court by video link from jail, Navalny denounced the criminal proceedings against him as part of a government campaign to intimidate the opposition.

"You won't succeed in scaring tens of millions of people who have been robbed by that government," he said. "Yes, you have the power now to put me in handcuffs, but it's not going to last forever."

The 44-year-old Navalny, the best-known critic of President Vladimir Putin's government, was arrested Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusations.

Navalny was arrested and jailed for 30 days after Russia's prison service alleged he had violated the probation terms of his suspended sentence from a 2014 money-laundering conviction that he has rejected as politically motivated. He also faces accusations in two separate criminal probes.

Before the Moscow Region Court rejected his appeal, defense lawyers argued that while recovering in Germany from the poisoning, Navalny could not register with authorities as required by the terms of his probation. His lawyers also said Navalny's due process rights were repeatedly violated during his arrest.

Navalny described his jailing following an earlier hearing held at a police station as a mockery of justice.

"It was demonstrative lawlessness intended to scare me and all others," he told the Moscow court.

Navalny's supporters are organizing another round of rallies for Sunday. Police on Wednesday searched Navalny's apartment, a rented accommodation where his wife, Yulia, has been living and the residences of several of his associates and supporters.

Also detained were Navalny's brother, Oleg; his top ally, Lyubov Sobol; Oleg Stepanov, head of Navalny's

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Moscow office; Dr. Anastasia Vasilyeva from the Navalny-backed Alliance of Doctors; and Maria Alyokhina from the Pussy Riot punk collective. They were detained for 48 hours as part of a criminal probe into alleged violations of coronavirus regulations during Saturday's protests.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the searches and detentions were a legitimate part of police efforts to investigate the alleged violations during the events.

"Law enforcement agencies are doing their job," Peskov said on a conference call with reporters. "There were numerous violations of Russian laws, and law enforcement agencies are at work."

Demonstrations calling for Navalny's release took place in more than 100 Russian cities Saturday, in a strong show of rising anger toward the Kremlin. Nearly 4,000 people were reportedly detained at those protests and some were given fines and jail terms.

At Thursday's court hearing, Navalny thanked his supporters and said, "They are the last barrier preventing our country from sliding into the degradation."

In a later post on Instagram, he urged the Russians to abandon their fear and take to the streets to pressure Putin and his entourage.

"Come out and don't be afraid of anything," Navalny said. "No one wants to live in the country where lawlessness and corruption run amok. The majority is on our side, let's wake them up."

Moscow police said 267 people were convicted of violations during the weekend demonstrations in the capital, and 110 of them were given short jail terms. It issued a notice to the public not to join Sunday's protests, warning that officers would act resolutely to disperse unsanctioned rallies and bring participants to justice.

Also Thursday, Russian prosecutors issued warnings to Facebook, Google, Twitter, TikTok and Russian social networks, demanding that they block calls for more protests.

"The state doesn't want the social networks to become a platform for promoting such illegal actions," Peskov said.

Asked if a refusal to remove such content could prompt Russian authorities to block the platforms, Peskov said it would be up to relevant government agencies to consider a response.

"All pros and cons will be weighed and, if necessary, measures envisaged by the law will be taken," he said.

Earlier this week, Russian state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said it would fine Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube and two Russian social networks for their failure to block calls on minors to join Saturday's protests.

A spokesperson for Facebook responded to the AP's request for comment by saying that "there are times when we push back on government requests to remove content which doesn't break our rules and is clear political speech."

"We took this step in Russia to allow for speech on last week's protests," the spokesperson added in a statement to AP.

Google and TikTok haven't responded to requests for comment about the Russian authorities' action and Twitter refused to comment to The Associated Press on Thursday.

Russia's Investigative Committee said it opened a criminal investigation of Navalny's top strategist, Leonid Volkov, accusing him of encouraging minors to participate in unauthorized rallies. Volkov, who currently stays abroad, rejected the charges.

"The streets must speak now. There is nothing else left," Volkov tweeted after Navalny's appeal for his release was rejected, repeating the call for Russians to turn out in force Sunday.

In a challenge to Putin two days after Navalny's arrest, his organization released an extensive video report on a palatial seaside compound allegedly built for the president and equipped with fancy amenities, such as a mysterious "aqua-discotheque" that has drawn a stream of sarcastic jokes on the web. The video has been viewed over 99 million times, further stoking discontent.

"If just 2% of the audience will take to the streets, it will be enough to bring all visitors of the 'aqua-discotheque' to their senses," Navalny said on Instagram.

Navalny fell into a coma Aug. 20 while on a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow. He was transferred

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to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities have refused to open a full-fledged criminal inquiry, citing a lack of evidence that he was poisoned.

Navalny's arrest and the harsh police actions at the protests have brought wide criticism from the West and calls for his release.

Associated Press business writer Kelvin Chan in London contributed.

## General Motors sets goal of going largely electric by 2035

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

General Motors has set a goal of making the vast majority of the vehicles it produces electric by 2035, and the entire company carbon neutral, including operations, five years after that.

The Detroit automaker's push into electric vehicles has gone into overdrive this year.

GM has already announced that it will invest \$27 billion in electric and autonomous vehicles in the next five years, a 35% increase over plans made before the pandemic. It will offer 30 all-electric models worldwide by the middle of the decade. By the end of 2025, 40% of its U.S. models will be battery electric vehicles. The company plans to include crossovers, SUVs, sedans and trucks in its electric vehicle lineup.

GM said Thursday that it will source 100% renewable energy to power its U.S. sites by 2030 and global sites by 2035. That's five years faster than its previously announced global goal.

And it has a goal of making all new light-duty vehicles, the vast majority of its fleet, fully electric within 14 years. The company will concentrate on offering zero-emissions vehicles in different price ranges. It's also working with others, including the Environmental Defense Fund, to build out the necessary infrastructure to power its electric vehicles and to promote their use.

To account for carbon emissions that it cannot eliminate, GM expects to invest in carbon credits or offsets.

The 112-year-old auto giant unveiled a new corporate logo this month to signify its new direction as it openly pivots to electric vehicles. It wants to be seen as a clean vehicle company, rather than a builder of cloud-spewing gas-powered pickups and SUVs.

GM scrapped its old square blue logo for a lower case gm surrounded by rounded corners and an 'm' that looks like an electrical plug.

It also announced a new partnership with Microsoft this month with hopes of accelerating its rollout of electric, self-driving cars.

GM's push for carbon neutrality comes a day after President Joe Biden signed executive orders that include moving to an all-electric federal vehicle fleet. His goal is to transform the nation's heavily fossil-fuel powered economy into a clean-burning one.

So far, Wall Street has cheered the shift by GM which says the industry has reached a history-changing inflection point for mass adoption of electric vehicles.

Its shares this year have outpaced even high-flying Tesla, rising more than 20% to date. Shares rose almost 2% Thursday.

## VIRUS TODAY: Lawmakers call for race data on vaccine access

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Thursday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— Democratic lawmakers are urging federal health officials to address racial disparity in vaccine access nationwide in a letter sent to the acting Health and Human Services secretary, Norris Cochran IV. Data from some states has shown hard-hit nonwhite Americans who are eligible to get the vaccine are not receiving it in proportion to their share of the population. In the letter, Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Sens.

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Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey, all of Massachusetts, say the agency must work with states, municipalities and private labs to collect and publish demographic data about vaccine recipients. Without that information, policymakers and health workers cannot efficiently identify vaccine disparities in the hardest-hit communities, the lawmakers say.

— New York may have undercounted COVID-19 deaths of nursing home residents by as much as 50%, the state's attorney general said in a report. Attorney General Letitia James has been examining discrepancies for months between the number of deaths being reported by the state's Department of Health, and the number of deaths reported by the homes themselves. Her investigators looked at a sample of 62 of the state's roughly 600 nursing homes. They reported 1,914 deaths of residents from COVID-19, while the state Department of Health logged only 1,229 deaths at those same facilities. If that same pattern exists statewide, James' report said, it would mean the state is underreporting deaths by nearly 56%.

— State lawmakers around the U.S. are moving to curb the authority of governors and top health officials to impose emergency restrictions such as mask rules and business shutdowns. Many legislators are resentful of the way governors have issued sweeping executive orders. They are pushing back in states such as Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Pennsylvania. Some governors say they need authority to act quickly and decisively against the fast-changing threat.

**THE NUMBERS:** According to data through Jan. 27 from Johns Hopkins University, the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. did not increase over the past two weeks, going from 244,872.7 on Jan. 13 to 162,067.1 on Jan. 27. The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. did not increase over the past two weeks, going from 3,356.9 on Jan. 13 to 3,287.3 on Jan. 27.

**QUOTABLE:** "We think, 'Well, OK, it's like men's shirts, right? I'll just have another place to make it.' It's just not that easy." Dr. Paul Offit of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, a vaccine adviser to the U.S. government, on the slow and steady process of scaling up vaccine production.

**ICYMI:** A new coronavirus variant identified in South Africa has been found in the United States for the first time. South Carolina officials say two such cases have been diagnosed in the state. Viruses mutate constantly, and many variants of the coronavirus are circulating around the globe, but scientists are primarily concerned with three that appear to spread more easily. Other variants first reported in the United Kingdom and Brazil were already confirmed in the U.S. Researchers predicted it was only a matter of time before the variant identified in South Africa reached the United States as well.

**ON THE HORIZON:** In North Carolina's largest city, Megen Morris, Tyler Bone and Nic White are on a mission to help homeless people, a population that has grown during the pandemic and economic downturn. Once a month, they bring racks loaded with clothes into Charlotte's largest homeless encampment and invite residents to shop their free store. The idea behind the racks is to give residents of "tent city" the feeling of browsing a normal store and spare them having to dig through piles of secondhand apparel. Through donations collected in drop-boxes and online, they're providing not just clothes but much-needed goods from batteries to books.

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

## Blair House guest quarters a temporary home for VP Harris

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris can't beat the work commute.

She's living temporarily at Blair House, the president's official guest residence on Pennsylvania Avenue across from the White House, while some repair work is done at the official vice presidential home a few miles away on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory.

Asked what her first job would be, as she strolled the Inauguration Day parade route with her husband, Doug Emhoff, Harris told a reporter, "Walking to work."

Harris moved into Blair House the day after the Jan. 20 inauguration, said spokesperson Symone Sanders. Vice presidents have lived in a white, 19th century Victorian house on the grounds of the Naval Observa-

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tory since the late 1970s, starting with Walter Mondale. But the home needs a touch-up, and officials said it's best for the work to be done while the house is unoccupied. Mike Pence, Harris' predecessor, cleared out at the end of the Trump administration earlier this month.

So Harris moved into Blair House, where President Harry Truman lived from 1948-1952 during major renovations to the White House.

Blair House is on a part of Pennsylvania Avenue that is under constant surveillance by the U.S. Secret Service, which provides security for the president and vice president wherever they are. The agency declined to comment on Harris' living arrangements.

Matthew Costello, the White House Historical Association's senior historian, took note of the house's secure location — along with a notable bonus for Harris, who is the first woman, first Black person and first Indian American to be elected vice president.

"You can't beat that commute," Costello quipped.

It takes Harris mere minutes to get to her offices across the street in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and in the White House, compared with the roughly 2-mile (3.2 kilometer) trip from the Naval Observatory by motorcade.

It was unclear how long Harris will stay at Blair House. Chimney liners in the Naval Observatory residence are being replaced and other unspecified maintenance is underway. No timetable for completing the work was given.

In the meantime, Harris, her husband and any guests can explore Blair House, which has been expanded through the addition of three adjoining properties.

The complex has approximately 109 rooms, including 15 guest rooms — each with a full bathroom — three formal dining rooms, two large conference rooms, two kitchens, a beauty salon, an exercise room and a laundry facility. It has a staff of 18 full-time employees.

The original Blair House was built in 1824 by Joseph Lovell, the Army surgeon general, and later sold to journalist Francis Preston Blair. The Blair family sold the house to the U.S. government in the early 1940s, and it was turned into the president's official guest house.

By that time, the White House had become overcrowded with guests, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advisers, politicians, foreign dignitaries and others as the country prepared for World War II. All of those guests were lobbying to meet with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill even wandered White House halls in the wee hours in search of Roosevelt, according to Costello, making first lady Eleanor Roosevelt unhappy.

The State Department began renting Blair House in 1942, and by the end of the year had purchased the house and its contents for a total of \$183,000.

Foreign dignitaries and soon-to-be U.S. presidents have enjoyed the accommodations.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden slept at Blair House on the eve of his Jan. 20 inauguration. Former President George W. Bush and his wife, Laura, stayed there in 2018 when they returned to the nation's capital for funeral services for Bush's father, former President George H.W. Bush.

A couple miles north on Massachusetts Avenue, the official vice presidential residence on the gated grounds of the Naval Observatory was built in 1893, originally for the superintendent. But the house turned out to be so appealing that the chief of naval operations booted the superintendent and moved in himself, according to the White House website.

Vice presidents and their families traditionally had lived in their own homes. But after the cost of securing their private residences ballooned, Congress agreed in 1974 to spruce up the house on the Naval Observatory grounds for the vice president.

Three years passed before a vice president actually moved in.

Vice President Gerald Ford became president after Richard Nixon resigned during Watergate before Ford could use the home. Nelson Rockefeller used it only for entertaining.

Mondale was the first vice president to settle into the home, which has also been used by the families of George H.W. Bush, Dan Quayle, Al Gore, Dick Cheney, Biden and Pence.

Follow Darlene Superville on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/dsupervilleap>

## **Pelosi denounces GOP leaders over Georgia lawmaker's posts**

By WILL WEISSERT and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Nancy Pelosi intensified pressure Thursday on House Republican leaders for their handling of a controversial GOP freshman, denouncing them for placing a lawmaker who Pelosi says has “mocked the killing of little children” on the chamber’s education committee.

Pelosi’s comments focused on Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., whose views were in the spotlight even before she joined the House this month. Greene supported Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI. One suggested shooting Pelosi in the head. In response to a post raising the prospect of hanging former President Barack Obama, Greene responded that the “stage is being set.”

On Thursday, Pelosi referred to social media posts reported by Media Matters for America, a liberal watchdog group, in which Greene pushed conspiracy theories or “liked” posts that challenged the veracity of mass shootings at schools in Newtown, Connecticut, and Parkland, Florida.

“Assigning her to the education committee, when she has mocked the killing of little children” at those schools, “what could they be thinking, or is thinking too generous a word for what they might be doing,” Pelosi said of Republican leaders. “It’s absolutely appalling.”

While some Republicans have condemned Greene’s postings, they were hardly a surprise. The Georgia Republican has expressed support for QAnon conspiracy theories, which focus on the debunked belief that top Democrats are involved in child sex trafficking, Satan worship and cannibalism. Facebook videos surfaced last year showing she’d expressed racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim views. Top Republicans denounced her at the time, hoping to block her from capturing the GOP nomination for her reliably red congressional district in northwest Georgia.

The opposition faded, however, when Greene won the primary and was essentially guaranteed a seat in Congress. By the time she was sworn into office, Greene had ridden with President Donald Trump on Air Force One during his final days in office.

Republican leaders are now confronting a conundrum of their own making. The party largely embraced Greene after she won the primary, making it harder for them to distance themselves from her, especially when many of her views were already well known.

The dynamic raises questions about the GOP’s ability — or interest — in moving past Trump-style politics after the former president spent years advancing conspiracy theories of his own.

“Trump didn’t hijack the party, the party became Donald Trump,” said Stuart Stevens, co-founder of the Lincoln Project, a conservative group that staunchly opposes Trump. “They’re radicals.”

CNN reported on Greene’s Facebook posts, which have since been deleted. She tweeted responses before the story was published that didn’t dispute their authenticity or disavow them, saying instead: “Many posts have been liked. Many posts have been shared. Some did not represent my views.”

Still, there’s greater pressure on political leaders to address extremism after a pro-Trump mob staged a deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. California Democratic Rep. Jimmy Gomez announced Wednesday night that he was readying a resolution to expel Greene from Congress because of her past social media activity.

In a statement to Axios, a spokesman for House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy called the posts “deeply disturbing” and said McCarthy “plans to have a conversation with the Congresswoman about them.”

It’s unclear when that conversation may happen. McCarthy flew to Florida on Thursday to meet with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel called the posts “disgusting,” adding that they have “no place in our party” and “should be looked into.”

But McDaniel also spoke to a QAnon issue that goes beyond Greene.

“I think it’s really important, after what’s just happened in our country, that we have some self reflection on the violence that’s continuing to erupt,” McDaniel said in an interview. “I think QAnon is beyond fringe.”

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I think it's dangerous. We should be looking at that and making sure we don't mince words and when we say that we can't support groups that are initiating violence."

On Wednesday night, a reporter from WRCB-TV attempted to ask Greene about her social media posts during a public town hall in Dalton, Georgia. The reporter was kicked out of the event and threatened with arrest by a sheriff's deputy.

The Whitfield County Sheriff's Office declined to comment and directed questions to Greene's office. A spokesperson for Greene's office said in a statement: "This was a town hall for constituents. Not a press conference."

The FBI has called QAnon a domestic terrorism threat and the Department of Homeland Security issued a national terrorism bulletin Wednesday warning of the potential for lingering violence from extremists enraged by President Joe Biden's election and emboldened by the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Greene's situation is somewhat reminiscent of former Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, who was stripped of all his committee assignments by his own party's House leadership after expressing support for white supremacists in 2019. National GOP groups shunned King in the party's Iowa primary and he was defeated, but he steadfastly maintained that he was adhering to his constituents' beliefs more than most of the rest of his party.

Greene's online agitation goes beyond past Facebook posts — including making a video that falsely suggested the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting that killed 58 people was staged to advance gun control legislation.

Since winning her congressional seat, Greene has sought to capitalize on her growing national notoriety with conservatives, spending more than \$206,000 to lure in new donors through Parler, a social media site favored by Trump supporters and right-wing extremists.

The site was effectively booted from the internet following the mayhem at the Capitol after Amazon, which hosted the site, decided Parler wasn't doing enough to police users who incited violence. Before its removal, Greene's spending super-charged her presence on Parler, with some of her posts reaching millions of users, according to an analysis of data by The Associated Press.

She frequently attacked Democrats and railed against coronavirus pandemic safety measures, like mask-wearing. Greene also called on Congress to overturn the results of Biden's election.

"I'm tired of seeing weak-kneed Republicans play defense. I will go on the attack," Greene said in a Nov. 18 post. "It's our 1776 moment!" she posted the day before the mob overran the Capitol.

"You have members of Congress who do not feel safe at work right now because of the violent attempted coup," said Melissa Ryan, CEO of consultancy group Card Strategies, which researches online disinformation and right-wing extremism. "And then you have politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene who are not just stoking the fear, but using it as a fundraising tool."

Greene is now texting supporters, seeking to raise money for her attempt to "impeach Biden." The fine print of her solicitations, however, shows that any funds she takes in will instead be routed to her campaign account.

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Associated Press writers Steve Peoples, Jill Colvin and Ben Nadler and data journalist Larry Fenn contributed to this report.

## Democratic lawmakers push for race data in vaccinations

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Democratic lawmakers are urging federal health officials to address racial disparity in vaccine access nationwide, as data from some states show hard-hit nonwhite Americans who are eligible to receive it are not getting COVID-19 vaccinations in proportion to their share of the population.

In a letter Thursday to acting Health and Human Services Secretary Norris Cochran IV, the lawmakers said the agency must work with states, municipalities and private labs to collect and publish demographic data of vaccine recipients.

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Without that information, policymakers and health workers cannot efficiently identify vaccine disparities in the hardest-hit communities, said the letter, signed by Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey, all from Massachusetts.

"It is critical that the Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and immigrant communities that have been most impacted by this virus and have been more likely to contract, be hospitalized, and die from the disease have access to the vaccine," said the letter, first shared with The Associated Press.

The appeal comes as the U.S. recorded nearly 26 million COVID-19 cases and more than 429,000 deaths since the onset of the pandemic nearly a year ago. The virus has taken a particularly severe toll on Black populations in the U.S. Along with Hispanic and Native American people, Black Americans are dying from COVID-19 at nearly three times the rate of white Americans.

The lawmakers said the recent distribution of the approved vaccines "is a sign of hope that much needed recovery from this pandemic is near." But, they said, an inadequate vaccine deployment campaign could make things worse for communities that have shouldered the greatest burden.

A spokesperson for HHS did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday. However, reducing racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 vaccination and treatment is a priority for President Joe Biden, who has appointed a White House official to oversee that part of the government's overall response.

Pressley, who made early calls for racial case data last year, said communities of color cannot afford to wait longer for vaccine demographic data to become available.

"We've learned consistently throughout history that in the face of any public health crisis, communities of color disproportionately suffer — and this pandemic is no exception," Pressley said in a statement to the AP.

"That which gets measured gets done, and the first step towards ensuring we are able to effectively address these disparities and direct lifesaving resources to our hardest-hit communities is for our government to collect and publish anonymized demographic data, including race and ethnicity, of vaccine recipients," she said.

Dr. Uché Blackstock, CEO of Advancing Health Equity, said the data is crucial to help inform efforts to reach vulnerable populations and communities of color that distrust the medical community because of racism and structural inequities that have long existed in America.

"We're going to see a widening and exacerbation of the racial health inequities that were here before the pandemic and worsened during the pandemic if our communities cannot access the vaccine," said Blackstock, an emergency physician based in Brooklyn, New York.

"We could see years taken off the lives of Black Americans in this country and a worsening of life expectancy that will probably take generations to recover from," Blackstock said. "There needs to be a plan and unfortunately I don't see that happening with the urgency that it should."

A lack of transparency on who is receiving the vaccine will only foment greater distrust of health officials, the lawmakers said in the letter.

Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, who chairs the COVID-19 equity task force appointed by Biden, has pointed to gaps in data as one of the issues she's trying to resolve.

During a White House briefing on Wednesday, Nunez-Smith said federal officials were calling for states to "get better, more consistent data" on the already administered vaccinations.

"We are 100% committed to making sure that when it's your turn, that you have access to the vaccine, and we know that access in many communities that have been hard hit might be a challenge," Nunez-Smith said.

According to a December survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 53% of white Americans said they would get vaccinated, compared with 24% of Black Americans and 34% of Hispanics. Due to an insufficient sample size, the survey could not analyze results among Native Americans or other racial and ethnic groups that make up a smaller proportion of the U.S. population.

Nationwide, health officials in 18 states included ways to measure equity in their vaccine distribution plans last fall. But as issues in the vaccine supply chain emerged, some states have had to slow or rework distribution plans.



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Still, many are keeping racial equity in the forefront.

An advisory committee in Oregon that provides recommendations to the governor and public health authorities is set to vote Thursday on whether to prioritize people of color, target those with chronic medical conditions or focus on some combination of groups at higher risk from the coronavirus.

Morrison reported from New York. Associated Press writer Kat Stafford in Detroit contributed to this report.

Morrison and Stafford are members of AP's Race & Ethnicity team.

## US economy shrank 3.5% in 2020 after growing 4% last quarter

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stuck in the grip of a viral pandemic, the U.S. economy grew at a 4% annual rate in the final three months of 2020 and shrank last year by the largest amount in 74 years.

For 2020 as a whole, a year when the coronavirus inflicted the worst economic freeze since the end of World War II, the economy contracted 3.5% and clouded the outlook for the coming year. The economic damage followed the eruption of the pandemic 10 months ago and the deep recession it triggered, with tens of millions of Americans left jobless.

Thursday's report from the government estimated that the nation's gross domestic product — its total output of goods and services — slowed sharply in the October-December quarter from a record 33.4% surge in the July-September quarter. That gain had followed a record-shattering 31.4% annual plunge in the April-June quarter, when the economy sank into a free-fall.

The outlook for 2021 remains hazy. Economists warn that a sustained recovery won't likely take hold until vaccines are distributed and administered nationwide and government-enacted rescue aid spreads through the economy — a process likely to take months. In the meantime, millions of Americans continue to struggle.

On Thursday, for example, the government reported that while applications for unemployment benefits declined last week, they remained at a historically high 847,000, evidence that companies keep cutting jobs as the pandemic continues to rage. Before the virus erupted in the United States in March, weekly applications for jobless aid had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession.

Even as the economy shrank last year, the stock market managed to rise sharply, with the S&P 500 index gaining 16%. The disparity between the two reflected a time-tested adage: The stock market is a forward-looking indicator, with investors focused on prospects for future corporate profits and economic health rather than on the current state of the economy. So even as the economy was sinking last year, investors looked ahead to hopes for vaccines and government aid and to solid company profits, especially among tech companies, which drove last year's gains.

The pandemic's blow to the economy early last spring ended the longest U.S. economic expansion on record — nearly 11 years. The damage from the virus caused GDP to contract at a 5% annual rate in last year's January-March quarter. Since then, thousands of businesses have closed, nearly 10 million people remain out of work and more than 400,000 Americans have died from the virus.

The government's report Thursday was its first of three estimates of growth last quarter; the figure will be revised twice in the coming weeks. The report showed that consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of the economy, slowed sharply last quarter to a 2.5% annual gain from a 41% surge in the July-September quarter.

Last quarter's economy was instead driven in part by business investment and housing, which has been a star performer during the past year, reflecting record-low mortgage rates and a demand for more household space. Housing grew at a sizzling 33.5% annual rate, business investment at a 13.8% rate. Government spending, though, shrank at a 1.2% rate last quarter. State and local governments have started to resort to layoffs in response to falling tax revenue.

The estimated drop in GDP for 2020 was the first such decline since a 2.5% fall in 2009, during the

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recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis. That was the deepest annual setback since the economy shrank 11.6% in 1946, when the economy was demobilizing after World War II.

The GDP report showed that former President Donald Trump ended his presidency with GDP averaging annual gains of 1% during his four years. That was lower than the 1.6% annual GDP gains during the Obama administration, a period that also included a recession.

In the coming months, as vaccines become widely distributed and administered, growth is expected to revive. But until then, many Americans will struggle as consumers and businesses hunker down and hold back on spending even though the economy will likely keep growing. Gregory Daco, chief economist at Oxford Economics, said he expects growth to weaken in the current quarter to a roughly 2% annual rate.

But Daco foresees a brightening outlook for the rest of this year. His view assumes a widespread use of vaccines, increased government aid from Congress' approval of at least part of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package and pent-up spending from a savings buildup among higher-income families during the pandemic. A \$900 billion rescue aid package that the government enacted late last year is also providing some support.

"The vaccine rollout is essential," Daco said. "Without an improving health situation, we are not going to get any improvement in the economic situation."

Daco said he thinks an economic rebound will produce annual growth this year of 5%. Earlier this week, the International Monetary Fund forecast that the U.S. economy will grow 5.1% this year and 2.5% in 2022.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve took note of the economic threats. It kept its benchmark interest rate at a record low near zero and stressed that it would keep pursuing its low-rate policies until a recovery is well underway. The Fed acknowledged that the economy has faltered in recent months, with hiring weakening especially in industries affected by the raging pandemic, notably restaurants, bars, hotels and others involved in face-to-face public contact.

Hiring in the United States has slowed for six straight months, and employers shed jobs in December for the first time since April. The job market has sputtered as the pandemic and colder weather have discouraged Americans from traveling, shopping, dining out or visiting entertainment venues. Retail sales have declined for three straight months.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, predicts that about 5 million lost U.S. jobs will never return, forcing the unemployed in such industries as restaurants and bars to find work in other sectors.

And many economists warn that without further government financial support, the economy risks succumbing to another recession. They note that much of the aid for individuals from the \$900 billion package that was enacted late last year is set to expire in mid-March.

## **WHO team in Wuhan departs quarantine for COVID origins study**

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — A World Health Organization team emerged from quarantine in the Chinese city of Wuhan on Thursday to start field work in a fact-finding mission on the origins of the virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researchers, who were required to isolate for 14 days after arriving in China, left their quarantine hotel with their luggage — including at least four yoga mats — in the midafternoon and headed to another hotel.

The mission has become politically charged, as China seeks to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak. A major question is where the Chinese side will allow the researchers to go and whom they will be able to talk to.

Yellow barriers blocked the entrance to the hotel, keeping the media at a distance. Before the researchers boarded their bus, workers wearing protective outfits and face shields could be seen loading their luggage, including two musical instruments and a dumbbell.

Hotel staff waved goodbye to the researchers, who were wearing face masks. The bus driver wore a full-body white protective suit. They drove about 30 minutes to a lakeside Hilton resort-like hotel.

Former WHO official Keiji Fukuda, who is not part of the team in Wuhan, has cautioned against expecting

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any breakthroughs, saying it may take years before any firm conclusions can be made about the virus's origin.

"This is now well over a year past when it all started," he said earlier this month. "So much of the physical evidence is going to be gone. The memories of people are imprecise and probably the physical layouts of many places are going to be different than they were."

Among the places they might visit are the Huanan Seafood Market, which was linked to many of the first cases, as well as research institutes and hospitals that treated patients at the height of the outbreak.

WHO, which is based in Geneva, Switzerland, said late Thursday on Twitter that its team plans to visit hospitals, markets like the Huanan Seafood Market linked to many of the first cases, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and laboratories at facilities like the Wuhan Center for Disease Control.

"All hypotheses are on the table as the team follows the science in their work to understand the origins of the COVID19 virus," WHO tweeted. It said the team had already requested "detailed underlying data" and planned to speak with early responders and some of the first COVID-19 patients.

"As members start their field visits on Friday, they should receive the support, access and the data they need," WHO tweeted. The first face-to-face meetings with Chinese scientists are set to take place on Friday, before the team starts the field visits in and around Wuhan, it said.

One possible source of the virus is bats in caves in rural Yunnan province, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) southwest of Wuhan.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the experts would have talks, visits and inspections in China to carry out virus-tracing exchanges and cooperation. He did not provide any details.

The mission only came about after considerable wrangling between the two sides that led to a rare complaint from the WHO that China was taking too long to make the final arrangements.

China, which has strongly opposed an independent investigation it could not fully control, said the matter was complicated and that Chinese medical staff were preoccupied with new virus clusters in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities.

While the WHO was criticized early on, especially by the U.S., for not being critical enough of the Chinese response, it recently accused China and other countries of moving too slowly at the start of the outbreak, drawing a rare admission from the Chinese side that it could have done better.

Overall, though, China has staunchly defended its response, possibly out of concern over the reputational or even financial costs if it were found lacking.

Chinese officials and state media have also tried to cast doubt on whether the virus even started in China. Most experts believe it came from bats, possibly in southwest China or neighboring areas of Southeast Asia, before being passed to another animal and then to humans.

The origins search will try to determine where and exactly how that happened.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki expressed concern Wednesday about what she called "misinformation" coming out of China, adding that the U.S. supports a robust international investigation.

"It's imperative that we get to the bottom of the early days of the pandemic in China," she said.

Zhao responded that any negative speculation and politicized interpretation of the mission is inappropriate.

"We hope the U.S. can work with the Chinese side in a responsible manner, respect facts and science, and respect the hard work of the international expert team in tracing the origin of the virus," he said, "so that they can conduct scientific research on the virus tracing without any political interference."

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Associated Press photographer Ng Han Guan and AP Writer Jamie Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

## As Biden seeks a turn on environment, Trump rules to linger

By JOHN FLESHER and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

Longtime safeguards for U.S. bird populations took a hit under former President Donald Trump, whose administration made it harder to prosecute industry-caused deaths — such as the 2019 destruction of a

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sprawling Virginia seabird nesting ground — and chipped away protections for endangered species.

President Joe Biden wasted little time seeking to turn things around. Hours after taking office, he ordered a review of his predecessor's decision to weaken enforcement of the century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It was among more than 100 business-friendly Trump actions on the environment that Biden wants reconsidered and possibly revised or scrapped.

A White House statement Wednesday described them as "harmful rollbacks of standards that protect our air, water, and communities." And the president targeted oil and gas leasing on federal land and subsidies for those industries in his bid to slow climate change, while promising stepped-up land and water conservation.

Despite the quick start, it will take months or years to reverse policies set in motion by Trump's team — including those involving the bird treaty rollback, which happened as North American populations continued a decline that has reached 3 billion — a one-third overall drop — since 1970.

Many rules Trump went after originated with former President Barack Obama and took him years to undo, continuing a decades-old, back-and-forth between Democratic and Republican administrations with starkly differing approaches to environmental regulation.

"You have the worst-case scenario of partisan ping pong," said Clint Woods, a former Environmental Protection Agency deputy assistant administrator under Trump.

Environmental activists are pressing for fast action. They say returning to the pre-Trump status quo is no longer enough as hundreds of millions of birds die annually at the hands of industry, global temperatures rise and poor communities remain vulnerable to air and water pollution.

Biden faces similar challenges as he inherits Trump's actions across the environmental spectrum — from removal of endangered species protections for gray wolves, to loosened energy standards for washers and dryers and reversal of the Obama administration's proposed ban on chlorpyrifos, a crop pesticide some scientists say could harm children.

Business groups lobbied for Trump's deregulatory approach. Critics said it crippled bedrock environmental protection laws, slashed agency funding and slackened enforcement.

"There's a huge amount of work to be done," said Erik Olson, a senior strategic director with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "The Trump administration not only did their best to roll back rules, but tried to eviscerate the basic infrastructure of the agencies. They brought in people who viewed it as their job to keep agencies from carrying out their missions."

Mandy Gunasekara, EPA chief of staff for part of Trump's term, said Biden's early acts signaled a turn-around from the Republican administration's efforts to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Those include canceling a permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline and halting energy leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"In the real world where people are breathing air and drinking the water and living on once-contaminated land, we made considerable progress," Gunasekara said. "Instead of trying to wipe the slate clean, they should build off the good work we've done."

One cause for optimism, environmental advocates said, is that most of Biden's initial appointees to key posts are former insiders. Gina McCarthy, the national climate adviser, served as Obama's EPA chief. Michael Regan, tapped to lead EPA, was an air quality specialist there.

"This is a team of experts as opposed to a team of novices," said Ann Mesnikoff, federal legislative director for the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center.

Some Trump actions were taken through decrees and documents that can be rescinded or revised. Biden staffers will comb through a flurry of measures from Trump's last days that haven't taken effect and could be pulled back, such as the bird death rule.

But some policies can be undone only through multi-year grinds involving scientific research, public comment periods and lobbying from advocacy groups.

Among them: last year's weakening of the National Environmental Policy Act, a Nixon-era law requiring federal agencies to consider how projects such as oil pipelines could harm natural surroundings. Trump's

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revision shortened reviews and exempted some projects.

Restoring the law's reach is "an essential tool for achieving climate goals and equity for vulnerable communities" — both Biden priorities, said Oday Salim, an assistant professor of environmental law at the University of Michigan.

Other Trump rollbacks include a reduction of water bodies protected from pollution under the Clean Water Act and changes in how the EPA evaluates science and calculates benefits from pollution reductions. Biden called for action on those two EPA rules as soon as possible.

Courts already intervened to halt some Trump rules and policies, including attempts to open vast western lands to energy development, grazing and mining. An appeals court last week tossed a redo of an Obama-era plan to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants.

The Trump administration lost or withdrew proposed rule changes in almost 80% of 109 court challenges tracked by the Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University law school. Past administrations have lost or backed down in 30% of cases, said adjunct professor Bethany Davis Noll, who helped compile the data.

Yet the federal judiciary became more conservative under Trump, who appointed nearly 30% of active judges, according to the Pew Research Center. Six of the Supreme Court's justices are Republican appointees.

Environmental advocates acknowledge the hurdles but want an aggressive response to Trump's actions, particularly those undermining policies that had survived under both parties.

The law protecting migratory birds is one.

Under Trump, the government stopped pursuing punishments for accidental but preventable bird deaths, such as when they collide with power lines or drown in oil waste pits. Enforcement cases against companies dropped from almost 60 cases annually on average to zero.

Virginia's Democratic governor blamed the change for the 2019 destruction of a nesting ground for 25,000 shorebirds to make way for a road and tunnel, after federal officials said conservation measures were no longer required.

A judge later rejected the Interior Department's justification for the bird policy change. So the department adopted a regulation doing the same thing.

Although Biden's administration could withdraw it, bird advocates want even stronger protection than before, which would require a time-consuming new rule.

"We have to think smarter, we have to think broader than the Obama administration to accomplish conservation and environmental protection," said Sarah Greenberger, former senior advisor in Obama's Interior Department and now an Audubon Society vice president.

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Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan, and Brown from Billings, Montana. Contributing to this story were AP writers Christina Larson in Washington, D.C., Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, and Janet McConnaughey in New Orleans.

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On Twitter follow John Flesher: @JohnFlesher and Matthew Brown: @MatthewBrownAP

## US jobless claims drop; still at 847,000 as pandemic rages

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell but remained at a historically high 847,000 last week, a sign that layoffs keep coming as the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage.

Last week's claims dropped by 67,000, from 914,000 the week before, the Labor Department said Thursday. Before the virus hit the United States hard last March, weekly applications for jobless aid had never topped 700,000.

Tempering last week's bigger-than-expected drop in claims: The four-week moving average — which smooths out week to week gyrations — rose by more than 16,000 last week to 868,000, highest since

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September.

Overall, nearly 4.8 million Americans received traditional state unemployment benefits the week of Jan. 16. That is down from nearly 5 million the week before and far below a staggering peak of nearly 25 million in May when the virus brought economic activity to a near halt. The drop suggests that some of the unemployed are finding new jobs and that others have exhausted state benefits.

There is optimism that COVID-19 vaccines will end the health crisis and help stabilize the economy, but that effort is moving forward haltingly and right now, the job market is stressed.

The United States is now recording just under 150,000 new coronavirus cases a day. That is down from nearly 250,000 a day early this month but still more than twice the levels seen from March until a resurgence in cases in late October. More than 425,000 Americans have died from the pandemic and health experts are warning the U.S. will hit 500,000 deaths.

The virus has forced state and local governments to restrict operations of restaurants, bars and other businesses and has discouraged Americans from venturing out of their homes.

Since February, the United States has lost 9.8 million jobs, including 140,000 in December.

Americans who lost work because of the pandemic can get aid from extended relief programs, which now offer up to 50 weeks of benefits, or from a new program that targets contractors and the self-employed. Altogether, 18.3 million people were receiving some type of unemployment benefit the week that ended Jan. 9, the latest period for which data is available.

A new government financial aid package provides, among other things, a \$300-a-week federal unemployment benefit on top of regular state jobless aid. The new benefit runs through mid-March.

Once vaccines become more widely distributed, economists expect growth to accelerate in the second half of the year as Americans unleash pent-up demand for travel, dining out and visiting movie theaters and concert halls. Such spending could boost hiring.

But for now, the economy is floundering. Retail sales have fallen for three straight months. Restrictions on restaurants, bars and some stores, along with a reluctance of most Americans to shop, travel and eat out, have led to sharp spending cutbacks.

The Ultimate Kronos Group, a company that provides time-tracking software to small businesses, said the number of shifts worked by its clients dropped 2.5% in the second to last week of January from a month earlier. The drop was biggest — 4.3% — in the Southeast. "As we near the end of January, it's clear that the national labor recovery is still struggling to return from the slow holiday season," said David Gilbertson, vice president at UKG.

The data firm Womply reports that as of Jan. 21 spending at local businesses is down 23% from a year earlier and that 26% are closed, including 30% of restaurants and 42% of bars. Hotels report a 51% drop in revenue.

President Joe Biden has unveiled a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan that would provide, among other things, \$1,400 checks for most Americans, which, on top of the \$600 checks already being distributed, would bring the total to \$2,000 per adult.

The new plan would also make available \$400 a week in federal benefits for jobless Americans and extend a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September. Biden's proposal will require congressional approval, and congressional Republicans are already balking at its size.

"Additional fiscal stimulus and broader vaccine diffusion should support an improved labor market in the spring," economists Nancy Vanden Houten and Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics wrote in a research note. "But claims are expected to remain high in the near term as the pandemic continues to restrict activity, with new strains of the virus a concern."

AP Economics Writer Christopher Rugaber contributed to this report.

## 2 of 3 officers at Blake shooting in Wisconsin back on duty

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — Two police officers who were on the scene when a white officer shot and partially

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paralyzed a Black man in Wisconsin, triggering several nights of violent protests, have returned to duty, according to police officials.

The update announced Wednesday comes as Officer Rusten Sheskey, who shot Jacob Blake seven times on Aug. 23 in Kenosha, remains on administrative leave while a police review board examines the case.

Sheskey was placed on administrative leave following Blake's shooting along with Officers Vincent Arenas and Brittany Meronek. Arenas and Meronek returned to duty Jan. 20, according to a police statement issued Wednesday.

"Officers Arenas and Meronek were not charged with a crime and after review by the Kenosha County District Attorney and an independent investigator, former Madison Police Chief Noble Wray, the actions taken by the officers were reasonable and justified," the statement said.

Hundreds of people were arrested and multiple businesses were destroyed during protests following Blake's shooting. Kyle Rittenhouse, a white teenager from Antioch, Illinois, is accused of fatally shooting two men and wounding a third during one night of violence.

The officers were trying to arrest Blake on an outstanding warrant when a pocketknife fell from his pants during a scuffle. Blake said he picked it up before heading to a vehicle to drive away with two of his children in the back seat. He said he was prepared to surrender once he put the knife in the vehicle.

Sheskey told investigators that he feared that Blake was going to stab him, so he opened fire. Blake family attorney Ben Crump, however, has questioned whether Blake threatened Sheskey with a knife, saying "nowhere does the video footage show a knife extended and aimed to establish the requisite intent."

Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley on Jan. 5 declined to file charges against Sheskey, concluding he couldn't disprove the officer's contention that he acted in self-defense.

## **EXPLAINER: Why it's hard to make vaccines and boost supplies**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

With demand for COVID-19 vaccines outpacing the world's supplies, a frustrated public and policymakers want to know: How can we get more? A lot more. Right away.

The problem: "It's not like adding more water to the soup," said vaccine specialist Maria Elena Bottazzi of Baylor College of Medicine.

Makers of COVID-19 vaccines need everything to go right as they scale up production to hundreds of millions of doses — and any little hiccup could cause a delay. Some of their ingredients have never before been produced at the sheer volume needed.

And seemingly simple suggestions that other factories switch to brewing new kinds of vaccines can't happen overnight. Just this week, French drugmaker Sanofi took the unusual step of announcing it would help bottle and package some vaccine produced by competitor Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. But those doses won't start arriving until summer — and Sanofi has the space in a factory in Germany only because its own vaccine is delayed, bad news for the world's overall supply.

"We think, 'Well, OK, it's like men's shirts, right? I'll just have another place to make it,'" said Dr. Paul Offit of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, a vaccine adviser to the U.S. government. "It's just not that easy."

### **DIFFERENT VACCINES, DIFFERENT RECIPES**

The multiple types of COVID-19 vaccines being used in different countries all train the body to recognize the new coronavirus, mostly the spike protein that coats it. But they require different technologies, raw materials, equipment and expertise to do so.

The two vaccines authorized in the U.S. so far, from Pfizer and Moderna, are made by putting a piece of genetic code called mRNA — the instructions for that spike protein — inside a little ball of fat.

Making small amounts of mRNA in a research lab is easy but "prior to this, nobody made a billion doses or 100 million or even a million doses of mRNA," said Dr. Drew Weissman of the University of Pennsylvania, who helped pioneer mRNA technology.

Scaling up doesn't just mean multiplying ingredients to fit a bigger vat. Creating mRNA involves a chemical reaction between genetic building blocks and enzymes, and Weissman said the enzymes don't work

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as efficiently in larger volumes.

AstraZeneca's vaccine, already used in Britain and several other countries, and one expected soon from Johnson & Johnson, are made with a cold virus that sneaks the spike protein gene into the body. It's a very different form of manufacturing: living cells in giant bioreactors grow that cold virus, which is extracted and purified.

"If the cells get old or tired or start changing, you might get less," Weissman said. "There's a lot more variability and a lot more things you have to check."

An old-fashioned variety — "inactivated" vaccines like one made by China's Sinovac — require even more steps and stiffer biosecurity because they're made with killed coronavirus.

One thing all vaccines have in common: They must be made under strict rules that require specially inspected facilities and frequent testing of each step, a time-consuming necessity to be confident in the quality of each batch.

## WHAT ABOUT THE SUPPLY CHAIN?

Production depends on enough raw materials. Pfizer and Moderna insist they have reliable suppliers.

Even so, a U.S. government spokesman said logistics experts are working directly with vaccine makers to anticipate and solve any bottlenecks that arise.

Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel acknowledges that challenges remain.

With shifts running 24/7, if on any given day "there's one raw material missing, we cannot start making products and that capacity will be lost forever because we cannot make it up," he recently told investors.

Pfizer has temporarily slowed deliveries in Europe for several weeks, so it could upgrade its factory in Belgium to handle more production.

And sometimes the batches fall short. AstraZeneca told an outraged European Union that it, too, will deliver fewer doses than originally promised right away. The reason cited: Lower than expected "yields," or output, at some European manufacturing sites.

More than in other industries, when brewing with biological ingredients, "there are things that can go wrong and will go wrong," said Norman Baylor, a former Food and Drug Administration vaccine chief who called yield variability common.

## HOW MUCH IS ON THE WAY?

That varies by country. Moderna and Pfizer each are on track to deliver 100 million doses to the U.S. by the end of March and another 100 million in the second quarter of the year. Looking even further ahead, President Joe Biden has announced plans to buy still more over the summer, reaching enough to eventually vaccinate 300 million Americans.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla told a Bloomberg conference this week that his company will actually wind up providing 120 million doses by the end of March — not by speedier production but because health workers now are allowed to squeeze an extra dose out of every vial.

But getting six doses instead of five requires using specialized syringes, and there are questions about the global supply. A Health and Human Services spokesman said the U.S. is sending kits that include the special syringes with each Pfizer shipment.

Pfizer also said its factory upgrade in Belgium is short-term pain for longer-term gain, as the changes will help increase worldwide production to 2 billion doses this year instead of the originally anticipated 1.3 billion.

Moderna likewise recently announced it will be able to supply 600 million doses of vaccine in 2021, up from 500 million, and that it was expanding capacity in hopes of getting to 1 billion.

But possibly the easiest way to get more doses is if other vaccines in the pipeline are proven to work. U.S. data on whether Johnson & Johnson's one-dose shot protects is expected soon, and another company, Novavax, also is in final-stage testing.

## OTHER OPTIONS

For months, the chief vaccine companies lined up "contract manufacturers" in the U.S. and Europe to help them crank out doses and then undergo the final bottling steps. Moderna, for example, is working with Switzerland's Lonza.



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Beyond rich nations, the Serum Institute of India has a contract to manufacture a billion doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine. It's the world's largest vaccine maker and is expected to be a key supplier for developing countries.

But some homegrown efforts to boost supplies appear hobbled. Two Brazilian research institutes plan to make millions of doses of the AstraZeneca and Sinovac vaccines but have been set back by unexplained delays in shipments of key ingredients from China.

And Bottazzi said the world simultaneously has to keep up production of vaccines against polio, measles, meningitis and other diseases that still threaten even in the midst of the pandemic.

Penn's Weissman urged patience, saying that as each vaccine maker gets more experience, "I think every month they're going to be making more vaccine than the prior month."

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## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Jan. 29, the 29th day of 2021. There are 336 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 29, 1979, President Jimmy Carter formally welcomed Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping) to the White House, following the establishment of diplomatic relations.

On this date:

In 1820, King George III died at Windsor Castle at age 81; he was succeeded by his son, who became King George IV.

In 1845, Edgar Allan Poe's famous narrative poem "The Raven" ("Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary...") was first published in the New York Evening Mirror.

In 1919, the ratification of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which launched Prohibition, was certified by Acting Secretary of State Frank L. Polk.

In 1936, the first inductees of baseball's Hall of Fame, including Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth, were named in Cooperstown, New York.

In 1963, the first charter members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame were named in Canton, Ohio (they were enshrined when the Hall opened in September 1963). Poet Robert Frost died in Boston at age 88.

In 1966, the musical comedy "Sweet Charity" starring Gwen Verdon opened on Broadway.

In 1975, a bomb exploded inside the U.S. State Department in Washington, causing considerable damage, but injuring no one; the radical group Weather Underground claimed responsibility.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan announced in a nationally broadcast message that he and Vice President George H.W. Bush would seek re-election in the fall.

In 1998, a bomb rocked an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, killing security guard Robert Sanderson and critically injuring nurse Emily Lyons. (The bomber, Eric Rudolph, was captured in May 2003 and is serving a life sentence.)

In 2002, in his first State of the Union address, President George W. Bush said terrorists were still threatening America — and he warned of "an axis of evil" consisting of North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

In 2006, ABC "World News Tonight" co-anchor Bob Woodruff and a cameraman were seriously injured in a roadside bombing in Iraq.

In 2015, Rod McKuen, whose music, verse and spoken-word recordings made him one of the best-selling poets in history, died at 81.

Ten years ago: With protests raging, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak named his intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, as his first-ever vice president. Kim Clijsters finally won her first Australian Open title and the fourth major of her career, as she beat Li Na 3-6, 6-3, 6-3. Avant-garde composer Milton Babbitt, 94,

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died in Princeton, N.J.

Five years ago: The Obama administration confirmed for the first time that Hillary Clinton's home server contained closely guarded government secrets. An avalanche in the Canadian province of British Columbia left five people riding snowmobiles dead. Two American endurance athletes, Daniel Cartica of Chicago and Becca Pizzi of Belmont, Massachusetts, won the World Marathon Challenge by completing seven marathons in seven days on seven continents. French movie director Jacques Rivette, 87, died in Paris.

One year ago: A charter flight evacuating 195 Americans, including diplomats and their families, left the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the new viral outbreak; they would undergo three days of testing and monitoring at a California military base. World health officials expressed concern that the virus was starting to spread between people outside China. President Donald Trump's lawyers asserted at his Senate trial that a trade of U.S. military aid for political favors – even if proven – could not be grounds for his impeachment. Trump signed into law the new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, a major rewrite of the rules of trade with Canada and Mexico.

Today's Birthdays: Writer-composer-lyricist Leslie Bricusse is 90. Feminist author Germaine Greer is 82. Actor Katharine Ross is 81. Feminist author Robin Morgan is 80. Actor Tom Selleck is 76. R&B singer Bette LaVette is 75. Actor Marc Singer is 73. Actor Ann Jillian is 71. Rock musician Louie Perez (Los Lobos) is 68. R&B singer Charlie Wilson is 68. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey is 67. Actor Terry Kinney is 67. Country singer Irlene Mandrell is 65. Actor Diane Delano is 64. Actor Judy Norton (TV: "The Waltons") is 63. Rock musician Johnny Spampinato is 62. Olympic gold-medal diver Greg Louganis is 61. Rock musician David Baynton-Power (James) is 60. Rock musician Eddie Jackson (Queensryche) is 60. Actor Nicholas Turturro is 59. Rock singer-musician Roddy Frame (Aztec Camera) is 57. Actor-director Edward Burns is 53. Actor Sam Trammell is 52. Actor Heather Graham is 51. Former House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., is 51. Actor Sharif Atkins is 46. Actor Sara Gilbert is 46. Actor Kelly Packard is 46. Actor Justin Hartley is 44. Actor Sam Jaeger is 44. Writer and TV personality Jedediah Bila is 42. Actor Andrew Keegan is 42. Actor Jason James Richter is 41. Blues musician Jonny Lang is 40. Pop-rock singer Adam Lambert (TV: "American Idol") is 39. Country singer Eric Paslay is 38.