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Two Friends of the Silver Skates were recognized during the afternoon performance. Karyn Babcock painted the skate that is north of the building and Katie Anderson for your work on redoing the scenery. Pictured left to right are Silver Skates Chairman Lindsey Tietz, Karyn Babcock, Dawn Imrie, Deb Schuelke, Coralee Wolter, Tina Kosel, Amanda Sperry, Katie Anderson and Sarah Hanten. (Photo

lifted from GDILIVE.COM)



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Safety rules set for spring sports, All-State Chorus, Orchestra on hold

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association won't decide until its March board meeting whether to hold All-State Chorus and Orchestra this year.

At a special meeting of the board on Monday, SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos explained that All-State Chorus and Orchestra presents a unique problem during a pandemic because it involves so many students.

The combined event, scheduled for April 19-20 in Sioux Falls, includes approximately 1,200 students from more than 100 communities. About 150 take part in orchestra with the rest participating in chorus.

"This is going to be a tough one," Swartos said as he went through safety recommendations from a task force made up of medical and education professionals.

While no final decision will be made until the board's March 3 meeting, the board saw two options. One option called for social distancing of quartets, directors to monitor mask use and social distancing and 90-minute rehearsal intervals with no audience present.

Option two would be to cancel All-State Chorus and hold All-State Orchestra using 30-minute rehearsals in various locations to allow for an exchange of air in the Premier Center. Students would get ticket vouchers for attendance.

"Those on the medical side (of the task force) were quite leery of holding," Swartos said. If any of the events get canceled, Swartos said he runs the risk of being labeled as being against the arts.

"We have to be able to justify what we're doing," Swartos said. "We're going to hold off as long as we can making a decision on these things."

All-State Band and All-State Jazz Band were approved by the board.

All-State Band will be held May 26-27 in Mitchell with four bands of 50 students each. Two bands will play on May 26 and two will play the next day. Masks and bell covers will be required for participants and seating will be blocked off for social distancing.

"We feel really confident that the event will go off without any problem," said SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Brooks Bowman

All-State Jazz Band includes less than 50 musicians in three groups, Bowman said. The event will be held May 6-8 in Mitchell with minimal changes and mitigation strategies.

The board approved rule modifications for track and field, golf and tennis. Each sport has mandatory and optional rule modifications.

In track and field, mandatory modifications included no awards ceremonies, no common distribution of water, cleaning frequently touched areas and restricting spectators to areas where they would not have access to athletes.

Optional modifications include face coverings for athletes, isolating athletes from spectators and limiting team camps to only team members. Meet management could consider limiting entries. Social distancing should be followed at all field events and in common gathering areas.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director John Krogstrand said there would be more specific recommendations coming to the board at its March meeting concerning safety recommendations for the State Track Meet.

Mandatory rule modifications for golf include the use of no-touch scorecards if available, social distancing, no awards ceremonies, no common distribution of water and cleaning frequently touched areas. Optional modifications include uninterrupted putting, wearing of face coverings and limiting galleries to paths, with social distancing.

Mandatory rule modifications in tennis include using numbered sets of tennis balls and cleaning balls with Lysol or Clorox, social distancing when possible, avoiding handshakes, using racquets or feet to move balls to the opponent's side and cleaning frequently touched areas. Optional rule modifications include wearing face coverings and athletes bringing their own water bottles.

—30—

Super regions ensure equity for basketball playoffs

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — With some schools not allowing activities because of the pandemic, Monday the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association made a change to the format of the girls' and boys' basketball playoffs.

If fewer than four teams are actively participating in any region, a super region will be formed to play the four spots needed in the SoDak 16. In the event this happens, the board's action would combine regions one and two, regions three and four, regions five and six and regions seven and eight.

The action stems from Region 7 Class A basketball where only three teams—Winner, Lakota Tech and Bennett County—are participating. Region 7 teams not taking part in the season include Little Wound, Pine Ridge, Red Cloud, St. Francis and Todd County.

Lakota Tech Athletic Director James Knutson said it made more sense to connect Region 7 to Region 6 since three teams weren't playing in that region.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the change was being made to make sure each team needs to play to enter the SoDak 16. If Region 7 was left as it is, two teams would play to get into the SoDak 16 and the top team would get a bye.

"For equity's sake, we didn't want someone getting a bye into the SoDak 16," Swartos said.

The change was approved unanimously by the board.

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda
February 2, 2021 – 7:00pm
Groton Community Center

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. Department Reports
5. Agreement of Sale for 120 N Main Street
6. SD Governmental HR & FO School in Pierre – June 8th-11th
7. Dohman Addition to the City of Groton in the SE¼-Sec. 24-T123N-R61W of the 5th P.M, Brown County, SD
8. First Amendment to Revenue Obligation Loan Agreement
9. Amendment No. 2 Water System Engineering Report
10. Begin accepting applications for summer employment
11. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
12. Adjournment

Governor Noem Signs Two Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Monday, Governor Kristi Noem signed two bills into law.

[Senate Bill 40](#) revises certain references to the Internal Revenue Code.

[Senate Bill 46](#) allows for the consideration of certain instruction to count towards the minimum number of hours required in a school term during a declared state of emergency.

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Upcoming Schedule

Tuesday, Feb. 2

Boys Basketball at Langford (8th at 5 p.m. (No 7th grade game), JV (Jim and Shirley VanDenHemel) 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 (Agtegra) at 4 p.m., Boys JV (Marilyn and Jerry Hearnen) 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 (Charla Imrie) at 1 p.m., JV (Jim and Shirley VanDenHemel) 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 (Rich and Tami Zimney) at 1 p.m., JV boys at 2 p.m., Varsity Girls at 3 p.m. followed by Varsity Boys.

Monday, Feb. 15

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

Thursday, Feb. 18

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

Friday, Feb. 19

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

Saturday, Feb. 20

Regional Wrestling Tournament in Groton, 10 a.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 23: GBB Region

Thursday, Feb. 25: GBB Region

Friday, Feb. 26

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

Tuesday, March 2: BBB Region

Thursday, March 4: GBB SoDAK 16

Friday, March 5: BBB Region

Tuesday, March 9: BBB SoDAK 16

March 11-13: State Girls Basketball Tournament in Watertown

March 18-20: State Boys Basketball Tournament

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#344 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

First, a correction: Last night, I wrote, "With no significant disruptive events (like a holiday weekend) on the immediate horizon, . . ." A reader reminded me this morning about the upcoming Super Bowl Sunday with the parties lots of folks have planned. The reader's right. I'd forgotten that. Look for a bump from it.

Still looking good today. We now have a total of 26,346,100 reported cases in the US, which is 0.5% more than yesterday. There were 135,400 new cases reported today. Hospitalizations are still dropping, now at 95,013. And there were 1909 deaths reported today, bringing us to 443,166, which is 0.4% more than yesterday.

We knew these vaccines were good. Here's a very nice piece of evidence: It's been roughly six weeks since vaccinations began, and reports of cases in nursing homes have declined for four consecutive weeks. How much? According to data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, there were 32,500 nursing home cases reported the week ending on December 20 and just 17,584 reported the week ending January 17. Now case reports have been decreasing across the nation during those weeks, but we know vaccines have been prioritized to nursing homes (3.5 million doses administered to residents and employees so far) and we see the decline in cases is much sharper in nursing homes than in the rest of the country. Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, told the New York Times, "That combination really does make me think this is not just broad national patterns, but that vaccines probably are playing a role." This was welcome Monday morning news.

More good news: The US is now averaging 1.3 million doses of vaccine administered per day; this is compared with fewer than one million daily two weeks ago. The administration says it looks like we're on track to hit 1.5 million daily relatively soon. This is a significant turnaround and is most welcome. We have 327 million people to vaccinate, which is 654 million doses, at least until we get a one-dose candidate authorized. And honestly, any new candidate that gets authorized is going to have a major effect on the number of doses available. We just need to keep ramping up the vaccination program so those doses get into people as fast as they come off the assembly line. No time to waste; the variants are coming.

Have you been reading the reports that some members of Congress have tested positive for Covid-19, even some who've had both doses of vaccine. We're hearing about some other people here and there with the same problem. So what's up with that? Don't these vaccines work?

Yes. Yes, they do work. But they don't work the minute they're injected; it takes a few weeks to get up to immunological speed. If you get exposed before those few weeks pass, you could be infected from that exposure. Vaccines also don't work retroactively, so if you were infected before you received the vaccine, you might just now be getting tested and discover you're infected. We are also not sure the vaccines prevent infection entirely, just that they keep you from getting sick. As far as I've heard, none of these folks is actually sick; they're just testing positive. So that wouldn't be out of line with what we know. Way too soon to freak out about these positive tests.

I listened to a long conversation between the Editor in Chief of JAMA (the Journal of the American Medical Association) and Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center and professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, as well as Maurice R. Hilleman Professor of Vaccinology at the Perelman School of Medicine and one of the world's leading experts in vaccinology, and Bob Wachter, professor and chair of the Department of Medicine, Holly Smith Distinguished Professor in Science and Medicine, and Benioff Endowed Chair in Hospital Medicine at UCSF. Their conversation focused on Covid-19 vaccination and the pandemic.

They talked about the pros and cons of extending the time between doses of these two-dose vaccines and about how complicated these tiered systems of priorities for receiving vaccine can get—and how much that may get in the way of just getting vaccinations done. And then they got into the nuts and bolts of what it means to get some minimum number of people vaccinated. Offit thinks it is likely these vaccines with their high efficacy rates at least reduce asymptomatic shedding by vaccinated persons, so while we need to keep the precautions going, that makes it more likely vaccination is going to slow down transmis-

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sion considerably as more and more people get vaccinated, even well before we hit actual herd immunity.

So we have maybe 70 million previously-infected and recovered individuals (most reasonable estimates place the number in that ballpark); these folks have some level of protection. Now, we don't think they're as well protected from these natural infections as they would be from vaccines, but they have some protection, and this comes to about 20 percent of the population. Now if we immunize 65 million people (20 percent of whom will have had prior infections, so around 50 million of them will be newly-immunized), we're up around 120 million people with a level of protection. And these guys are thinking that's going to be enough to start putting a good dent in this pandemic—not to stop it, but to slow it down. That's going to require somewhere around 1.3 million doses per day for Biden's first 100 days; you will recall he set a goal of getting 100 million doses out in his first 100 days and we're running well ahead of that. Offit would like to see us get up to two or even three million doses per day, and he seems to see that as feasible.

Wachter pointed out that we are finally closing the gap between supply and number of people vaccinated, which he views as essential. He thinks we will soon reach the point where supply is our limiting factor rather than our ability to get the vaccine out and administered; but he also points out we have one company nearing EUA (Janssen/J&J, likely early March), which eases the supply constraint, and another company (Novavax) getting closer, which would help further. This could mean, if we can just continue to build out our infrastructure for getting vaccine into people using whatever resources that takes, we have a shot at getting this knocked back considerably in the reasonably near future.

We know age is a significant factor in risk. Forty percent of deaths occurred in nursing homes, which are populated by a largely elderly population, and elderly in the community are also at lesser, but still great risk. Then we need to consider people of color who have been dying in far larger numbers than their proportion in the population accounts for, but most of those deaths have been in people over 55 years of age. So let's look at over-55s: People over 55 are about 25 percent of the population; collectively, they account for 92 percent of the deaths so far in this pandemic. So this is the population we must get vaccinated as quickly as possible in order to see more equity in burden of disease and a significant reduction in hospitalization and mortality—and those are the first goals everyone is chasing. Now that's around 80 million people, which is a whole lot; but it buys us a reduction in mortality by more than 90 percent. That would be a big thing.

Wachter said, "So it's not inconceivable that we get there by, you know, by April or May and you have decreased the deaths down to about 10%, not zero. But you see the curve, even though you have not reached herd immunity and there's still Covid in the community, you've seen those curves plateau and really begin to come down." I will point out, however, that this presupposes we continue to run ahead of these new variants which are so much more highly transmissible than the old D614G we've been dealing with. A combination of doubling down on precautions and rapid vaccinations may just buy us the time we need—with some luck and some persistence.

They also addressed vaccine efficacy, making an important point I addressed a few days ago. I've seen others making that point since, but doing it more clearly than I did, I think. That point is that in all of these clinical trials the end point is symptomatic infection—mild, moderate, any symptoms. This means vaccine efficacy addresses just this, and 95 percent efficacy means five percent of participants developed symptoms at some level. A really important point is that the vaccines already authorized (Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech) and the one close to EUA (Janssen/J&J) were virtually 100 percent effective in preventing death and close to 100 percent effective in preventing hospitalization several weeks after the second (or only for J&J) dose. These numbers are incredibly impressive. So these are in the important respects equivalent vaccines; they are all exceptionally effective in preventing hospitalization and death. So if your vaccination group is called, don't worry much about which vaccine you're getting; just take it. More than one expert has made just this point: If you're offered a vaccine tomorrow, don't ask which one it is so you can think about it; just take it.

Those who've been with us for a while may remember the story of British centenarian and former Army officer, Tom Moore, popularly known in England as Captain Tom. This is the guy who decided to walk 100 laps of his yard while in lockdown last spring to celebrate his upcoming one hundredth birthday and

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to raise money for the National Health Service. His quest caught the popular imagination, and he ended up beating his 1000-pound (\$1370) goal by raising a bit more—some \$45 million—for the cause. If you missed that, you can read the original story in my Update #112 posted on June 16 <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/>. I have a bad-news update on Captain Tom: It seems Moore has been hospitalized with Covid-19. He has apparently suffered from pneumonia for a few weeks, which delayed his vaccination, and he had a confirmed diagnosis last week. He is not in ICU, but he's sick enough to be hospitalized. I'll just send out good wishes for a speedy recovery and provide an update on his condition as time goes on.

Now I'd like to leave you with the story of a Los Angeles dog-owner with a corgi. Guy has a Ph.D., good job in some rather esoteric data science field, six-figure income. Everything's great. Then a few years ago he lost his job. Apparently his particular field is one with few positions that come open, and he had a hard time finding another. Despite his best efforts, that next job didn't come along, and eventually he lost his home. He and the dog moved into a group home, then a single-room occupancy hotel in a pretty sketchy neighborhood. He drove for Uber while he worked on growing his job skills; but then he couldn't make enough to cover his car payments anymore and lost his car. Then he rented cars from Uber so he could keep driving, which decreased his take-home considerably. So he worked longer hours to make up the difference, but then had less time to do anything about the job skills. Meanwhile, he was looking for short-term emergency housing; but he couldn't qualify with most organizations because most of them don't allow dogs. And so by the fall of 2019, he was at the end of his rope. That's how he ended up posting on Craigslist looking someone to foster his dog for a few months until he could get on his feet.

A friend who knew Ted and Sandy Rogers had lost their own beloved corgi a few months before and thought it might help them to give this guy a hand, alerted them to the ad. Apparently they agreed, and so they began to care for a dog who'd been pretty traumatized by all the instability in his life and slowly, as the owner visited each Sunday to see his dog, for the traumatized man too.

A writer for the Los Angeles Times, Nita Lelyveld, heard about the situation and did a story, asking readers to get in touch if they could help him find a stable home or a job. People responded. Some just sent notes of encouragement, some donated to a GoFundMe campaign, and others had job leads and offers to help with housing. A real estate investor offered a studio apartment rent-free for a year, a place where the man could live with his corgi. He said, "It was something I could do, so why not? It's all well and good to talk about solving your problems and moving ahead. But you can't do that without a stable base." Just like that, there's the stable base—and a way to be reunited with the dog.

Then there were the job opportunities. And the \$4000 in donations to tide him over until a job landed. The dog's owner was once again employed in a well-paying job and able to afford housing before the free apartment ran out. Then Sandy's job evaporated when the office for whom she'd been doing accounts for years closed up in the pandemic. She's still looking, but apparently the Rogers are hanging in there and were feeling ready for a new corgi of their own. Turns out though that, with the pandemic there have been a lot of adoptions, making rescue dogs are hard to come by; so they had to wait until one was located in Wyoming. The corgi's owner, now stable, paid the expenses of getting their new dog to them from Wyoming because that's how you pay it forward—and because he feels they rescued him as much as they did his corgi. The Rogers and the corgi owner all still text one another every day. Meanwhile Lelyveld, I guess buoyed up by her own success in connecting assistance to those who need it, has put out a new appeal to readers for help finding Sandy's next job. I like a good story, especially one with a happy ending. I hope there's one more happy ending coming along in this one. Good people deserve good things.

I'm going to close tonight with a fervent wish for heavily overcast skies in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, tomorrow morning. Be well. We'll talk again when we know how things turned out with Phil and his shadow.

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SD Weekly COVID-19 Report

	Current	Last 7 days	2 weeks ago
Positive	108315	1130	1524
Total Tests	877016	18809	22080
Persons Tested	402883	5362	5657
Hospitalized	6294	93	119
Currently Hospitalized	126	161	203
Avera	10	5	7
Sanford	1	3	3
Deaths	1778	73	38
Recovered	103709	1912	2418
Active Cases	2828	-850	-935
Vaccinations	101048	23,698	20,229
Vac. Completed	29686	11466	8391
Female Deaths	842	27	22
Male Deaths	936	46	16
0-19	0	0	0
20s	4	0	0
30s	15	1	0
40s	35	1	2
50s	99	8	2
60s	231	11	6
70s	404	19	12
80+	990	33	16

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	Current	Last Week	2 Weeks	Deaths
Aurora	14	21	21	16
Beadle	60	66	79	39
Brookings	135	179	243	34
Brown	170	171	236	80
Clark	10	8	4	4
Clay	26	55	83	16
Codington	101	124	171	74
Davison	52	88	102	59
Day	29	26	28	27
Edmunds	19	34	49	9
Faulk	10	10	4	13
Grant	48	55	33	37
Hanson	6	6	13	4
Hughes	62	99	92	33
Lawrence	44	53	93	41
Lincoln	190	248	298	74
Marshall	12	13	14	5
McCook	7	13	18	23
McPherson	21	28	27	4
Minnehaha	665	866	1055	311
Pennington	320	404	545	171
Potter	12	18	26	3
Roberts	23	39	55	35
Spink	25	29	33	25
Walworth	23	44	54	15

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	451	421	820	16	Moderate	5.00%
Beadle	2610	2511	5531	39	Moderate	4.64%
Bennett	377	363	1126	9	Minimal	0.93%
Bon Homme	1500	1470	1990	25	Minimal	1.56%
Brookings	3423	3254	10958	34	Substantial	3.32%
Brown	4940	4690	11923	80	Substantial	11.35%
Brule	680	660	1790	8	Moderate	7.50%
Buffalo	420	402	866	13	Minimal	16.00%
Butte	956	917	3038	20	Moderate	6.60%
Campbell	126	116	242	4	Moderate	13.64%
Charles Mix	1229	1149	3735	18	Substantial	10.00%
Clark	339	325	908	4	Moderate	0.00%
Clay	1755	1713	4906	16	Substantial	3.20%
Codington	3754	3579	9180	74	Substantial	9.29%
Corson	461	443	967	11	Minimal	13.04%
Custer	726	701	2565	11	Moderate	8.45%
Davison	2902	2791	6137	59	Substantial	4.35%
Day	610	554	1648	27	Substantial	10.53%
Deuel	458	440	1067	8	Moderate	11.63%
Dewey	1389	1356	3683	20	Substantial	6.45%
Douglas	413	393	858	9	Minimal	6.67%
Edmunds	460	432	966	9	Substantial	6.67%
Fall River	505	478	2467	14	Moderate	9.52%
Faulk	337	314	657	13	Moderate	6.67%
Grant	920	835	2091	37	Substantial	18.75%
Gregory	500	463	1168	27	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	240	230	505	9	Minimal	0.00%
Hamlin	669	614	1655	38	Moderate	8.06%
Hand	320	309	754	5	Minimal	4.55%
Hanson	335	325	666	4	Moderate	22.58%
Harding	90	89	173	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2209	2114	6132	33	Substantial	2.01%
Hutchinson	757	709	2209	23	Moderate	8.33%

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Hyde	134	133	388	1	None	0.00%
Jackson	268	252	885	13	None	0.00%
Jerauld	267	246	533	16	Minimal	8.33%
Jones	82	77	206	0	Minimal	7.14%
Kingsbury	607	572	1527	13	Moderate	6.00%
Lake	1141	1077	3048	17	Substantial	5.88%
Lawrence	2752	2667	8091	41	Moderate	7.19%
Lincoln	7458	7194	18866	74	Substantial	10.27%
Lyman	590	566	1811	10	Moderate	7.69%
Marshall	287	270	1098	5	Moderate	4.84%
McCook	718	688	1514	23	Moderate	13.95%
McPherson	235	210	529	4	Moderate	2.52%
Meade	2478	2381	7203	30	Substantial	10.38%
Mellette	239	233	705	2	Minimal	8.70%
Miner	270	237	533	7	Moderate	28.57%
Minnehaha	27015	26039	72923	311	Substantial	8.64%
Moody	602	565	1661	16	Substantial	6.67%
Oglala Lakota	2038	1949	6426	43	Substantial	10.78%
Pennington	12379	11888	36965	171	Substantial	8.97%
Perkins	338	303	739	12	Substantial	27.50%
Potter	345	330	785	3	Moderate	8.70%
Roberts	1109	1051	3920	35	Substantial	9.63%
Sanborn	324	314	651	3	Minimal	3.39%
Spink	763	713	2010	25	Substantial	12.36%
Stanley	317	304	861	2	Moderate	0.00%
Sully	135	126	283	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1212	1166	4021	25	Substantial	4.27%
Tripp	655	633	1414	15	Moderate	6.98%
Turner	1042	971	2541	50	Moderate	2.74%
Union	1870	1748	5791	38	Substantial	9.91%
Walworth	702	664	1744	15	Moderate	3.75%
Yankton	2747	2659	8788	28	Substantial	4.37%
Ziebach	335	323	840	9	Minimal	0.00%
Unassigned	0	0	1887	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	4201	0
10-19 years	12081	0
20-29 years	19473	4
30-39 years	17828	15
40-49 years	15444	35
50-59 years	15252	99
60-69 years	12390	231
70-79 years	6623	404
80+ years	5023	990

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	56533	842
Male	51782	936

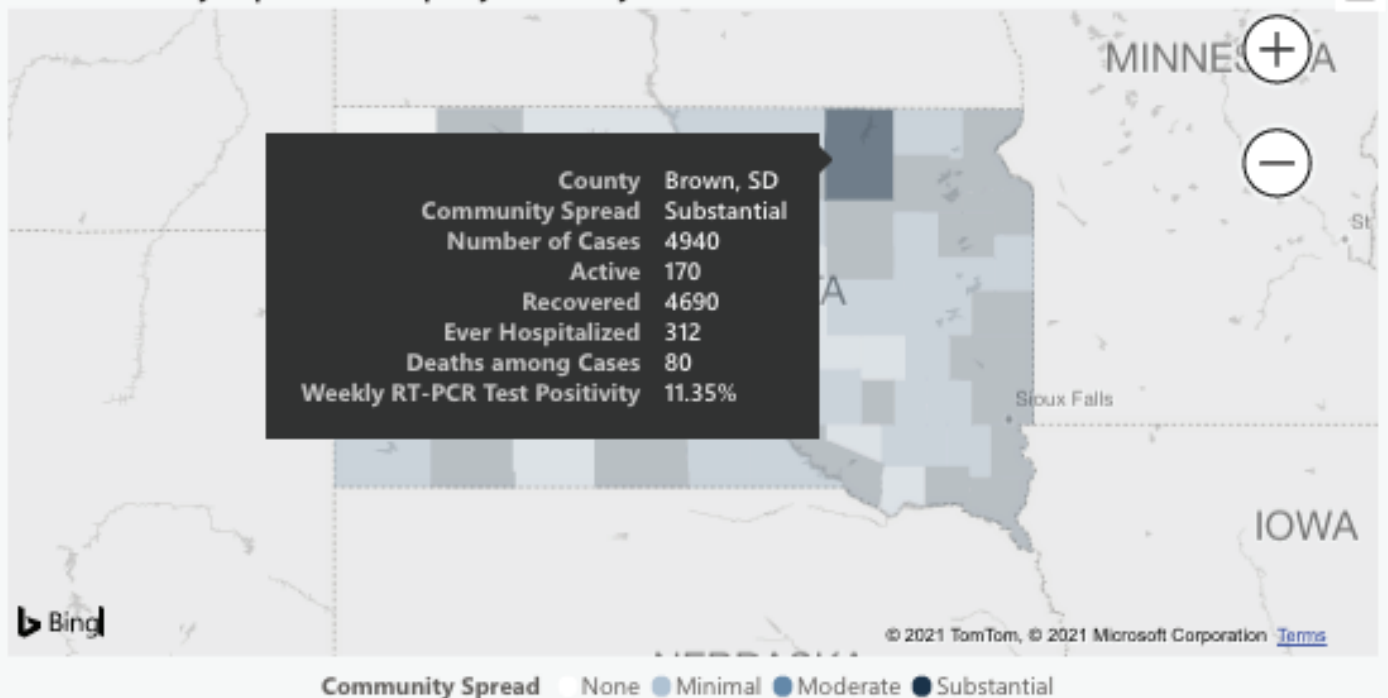
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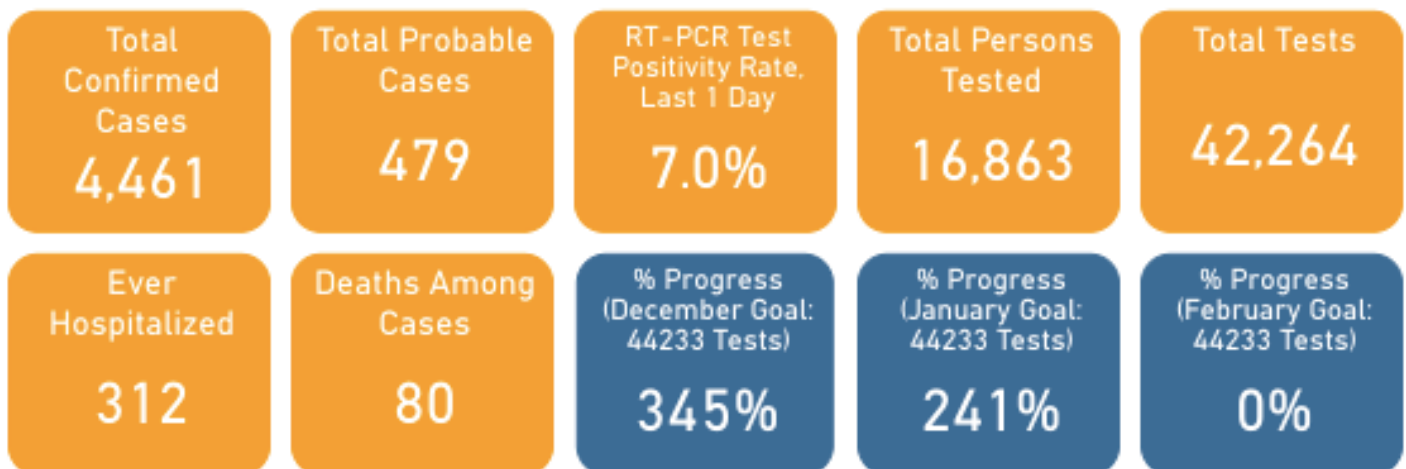
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



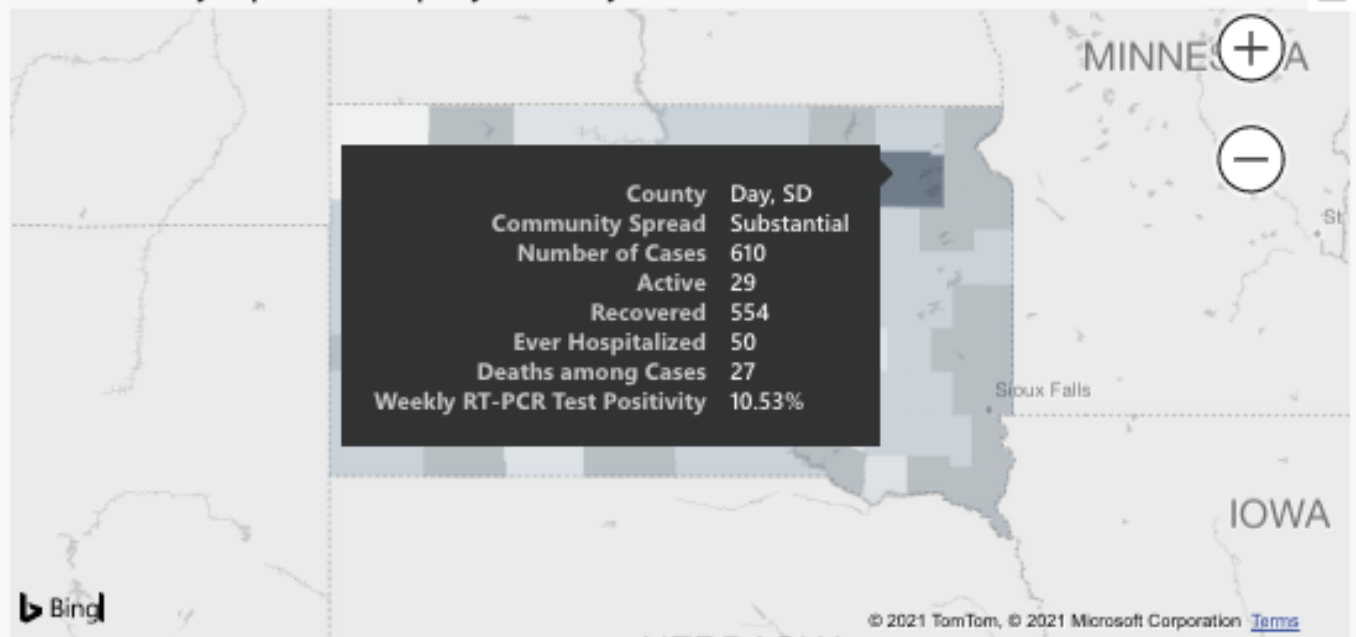
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Day County

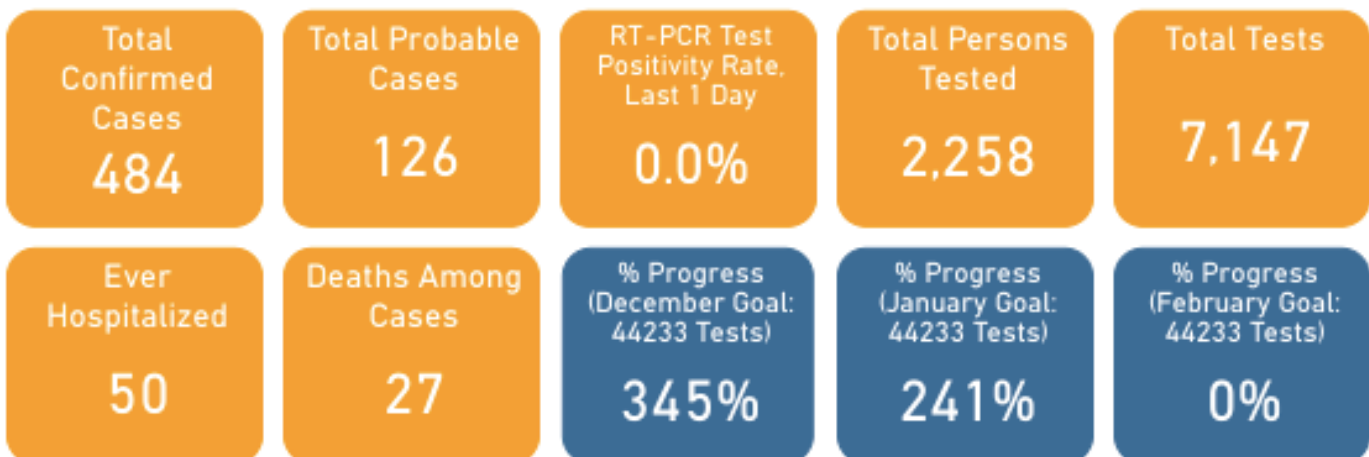


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

101,048

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

71,362

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	53,593
Pfizer	47,455

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	26,503
Moderna - Series Complete	13,545
Pfizer - 1 dose	15,173
Pfizer - Series Complete	16,141

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	202	106	48	154
Beadle	2039	851	594	1,445
Bennett*	180	124	28	152
Bon Homme*	957	373	292	665
Brookings	2776	1,000	888	1,888
Brown	4837	1,955	1,441	3,396
Brule*	579	313	133	446
Buffalo*	43	37	3	40
Butte	500	340	80	420
Campbell	438	80	179	259
Charles Mix*	796	250	273	523
Clark	368	200	84	284
Clay	1647	875	386	1,261
Codington*	3488	1,588	950	2,538
Corson*	67	49	9	58
Custer*	734	478	128	606
Davison	2810	768	1,021	1,789
Day*	815	375	220	595
Deuel	481	225	128	353
Dewey*	157	99	29	128
Douglas*	424	162	131	293
Edmunds	379	173	103	276
Fall River*	772	516	128	644
Faulk	237	187	25	212
Grant*	739	239	250	489
Gregory*	537	195	171	366
Haakon*	199	81	59	140

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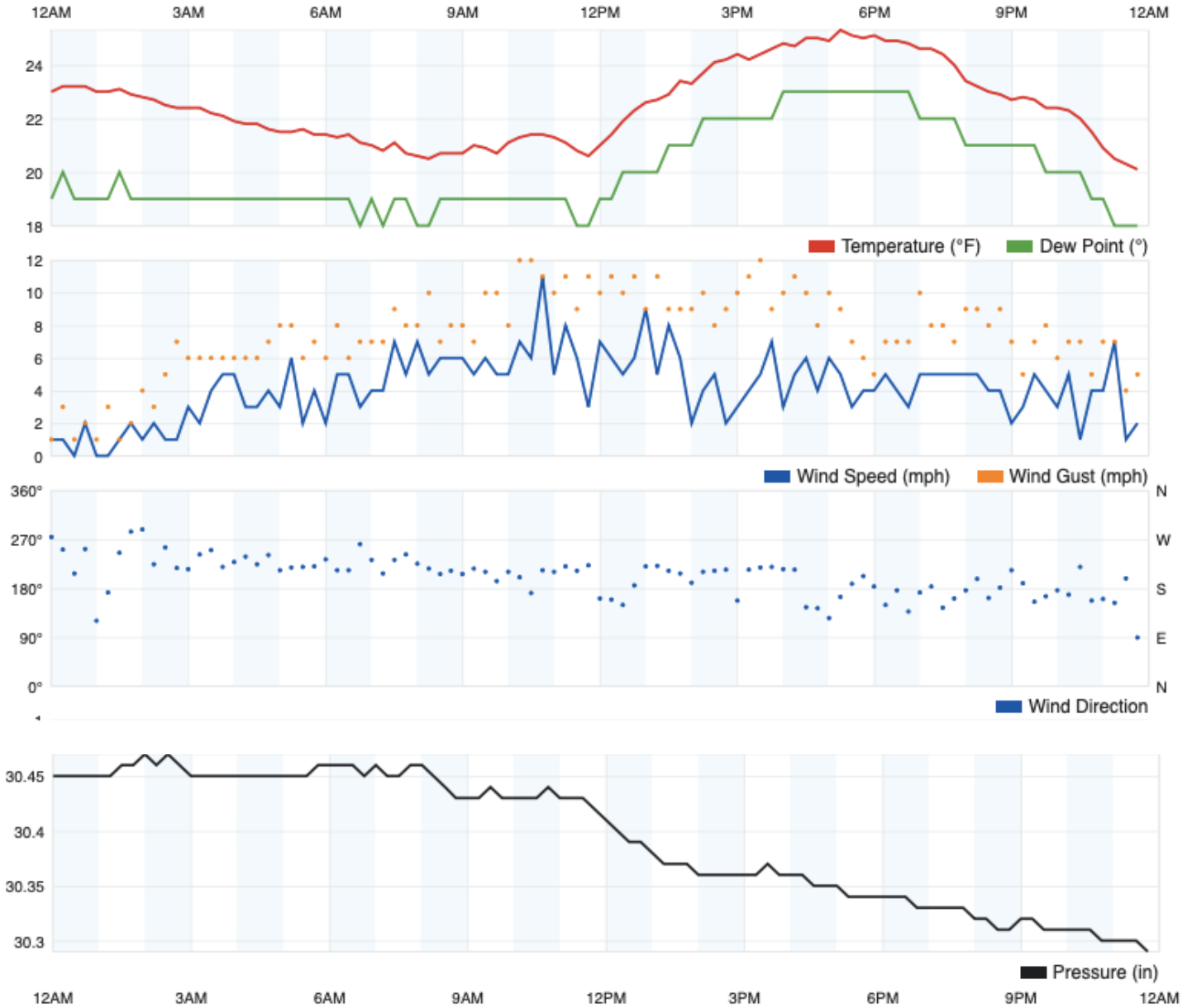
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Hamlin	551	233	159	392
Hand	418	160	129	289
Hanson	146	38	54	92
Harding	12	8	2	10
Hughes*	2435	1,293	571	1,864
Hutchinson*	1201	297	452	749
Hyde*	128	104	12	116
Jackson*	130	80	25	105
Jerauld	195	61	67	128
Jones*	182	126	28	154
Kingsbury	671	215	228	443
Lake	1220	478	371	849
Lawrence	2119	1,513	303	1,816
Lincoln	10066	2,716	3,675	6,391
Lyman*	201	125	38	163
Marshall*	443	209	117	326
McCook	733	341	196	537
McPherson	65	27	19	46
Meade*	1494	924	285	1,209
Mellette*	13	7	3	10
Miner	290	146	72	218
Minnehaha	27493	8,609	9,442	18,051
Moody*	458	176	141	317
Oglala Lakota*	42	28	7	35
Pennington*	10537	6,347	2,095	8,442
Perkins*	139	95	22	117
Potter	215	65	75	140
Roberts*	1053	835	109	944
Sanborn	312	160	76	236
Spink	912	416	248	664
Stanley*	347	177	85	262
Sully	91	57	17	74
Todd*	50	36	7	43
Tripp*	636	392	122	514
Turner	1340	534	403	937
Union	603	311	146	457
Walworth*	718	338	190	528
Yankton	3567	1,385	1,091	2,476
Ziebach*	24	18	3	21
Other	2597	957	820	1,777

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

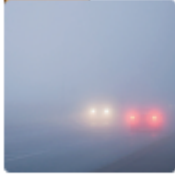


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Dense...

Today



Areas Dense Freezing Fog and Areas Dense Fog

High: 32 °F

Tonight



Areas Freezing Fog and Areas Fog

Low: 25 °F

Wednesday



Patchy Fog then Mostly Cloudy

High: 38 °F

Wednesday Night



Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow and Blustery

Low: 12 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny and Blustery

High: 19 °F

Today's Weather

30s

A few upper 20s over far eastern SD & western MN. Low 40s possible west of the Missouri River.



Patchy to areas of fog. Visibilities improving mid-late morning, before diminishing again this evening.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 2/2/2021 5:48 AM Central



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Today in Weather History

February 2, 1960: Heavy icing from freezing rain accumulations from the afternoon of the 2nd to the afternoon of the 3rd occurred mainly across the eastern half of the state. Severe damage to power lines and telephone service happened in the Watertown and Wessington Springs area. Ice coatings of up to 3 inches thick and has an estimated weight of nine pounds per foot of wire formed around the telephone and some power lines over a wide area of the eastern counties. A 300-foot tower high collapsed at Wessington Springs, and in some areas, utility wires were entirely down for stretches of 2 to 3 miles. Some 170 long-distance telephone circuits were knocked out in larger cities, and 19 towns from Bonesteel to Watertown on the north were without phone service for two to three days after the storm. Many highways were treacherous, and numerous vehicles collided or slid off the road into the ditch. Many schools were also closed.

February 2, 2003: Widespread freezing rain developed across parts of central and into northeast South Dakota through the late-night hours producing significant icing of a quarter to a half-inch by the late morning hours. No significant tree damage or power outages occurred. Although travel was significantly disrupted with many accidents and vehicles sliding off the road. The freezing rain changed over to snow during the mid-morning hours and became heavy with 6 to 9 inches of snow accumulating before it ended in the late evening. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Ree Heights, Miller, and Faulkton, 7 inches at Clear Lake, 8 inches at Bryant, and 9 inches at Milbank.

February 2, 2011: Blizzard conditions developed along and east of the Sisseton Hills late on February 2nd and continued into the mid-morning hours of February 3rd. Strong southwest winds of 30 to 40 mph gusting to around 55 mph picked up the existing snow cover causing blizzard conditions which wreaked havoc along Interstate-29. Whiteout conditions and massive drifting brought traffic to a halt along a stretch of Interstate-29 from north of Wilmot to Sisseton. One-hundred fifty to two-hundred vehicles were stranded along this stretch. A full-scale rescue operation ensued during the night and continued into the next day. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to the North Dakota border as it took most of the day to clean up all of the stalled vehicles. There were also many accidents along the stretch of the interstate with people stranded for up to twelve hours. No injuries occurred as a result of this incident. The Roberts County Emergency Manager was stranded and conducted emergency operations from his vehicle. Interstate-29 reopened the evening of the 3rd.

1898: The naming of hurricanes after women was always the center of controversy. In the Southern Hemisphere near Australia, tropical cyclones were once called Willy-Willies. An Australian Meteorologist, Clement Wragge, is credited for giving girls names to tropical cyclones by the end of the 19th Century. On this date, Wragge's weather journal showed a Willy-Willy named "Eline."

1952: An area of low pressure moved out of the Gulf of Mexico and across southern Florida during the evening and late-night hours on February 2, 1952. It produced 60 mph winds and two to four inches of rain on February 2 and 3. The low pressure remains the only tropical storm to impact the United States in February.

1996: An Arctic outbreak that lasted from late January through early February produced nearly 400 hundred record lows, 15 all-time low readings, and over 50 new record lows for February. Four states recorded their all-time record low temperatures, including Tower, Minnesota on this date with a reading of 60 degrees below zero, canceling Tower's annual Icebox Days festival because it is too cold. Locations that reported their all-time record low or tied included: Cresco, IA: -36°, Osage, IA: -34°, Charles City, IA tied their all-time record low with -32° and Lancaster, WI tied their all-time record low with -31°. International Falls, MN, and Glasgow, MT set records for February with -45° and -38°, respectively. The temperature at Embarrass, MN, plummeted to -53°. Rochester, MN, dipped to -34° for its coldest temperature in 45 years. Green Bay, WI only reached -16° for the high temperature for the day, their coldest high temperature on record in February. The place to be this day was in Orlando, FL, where it was a balmy 85 degrees.

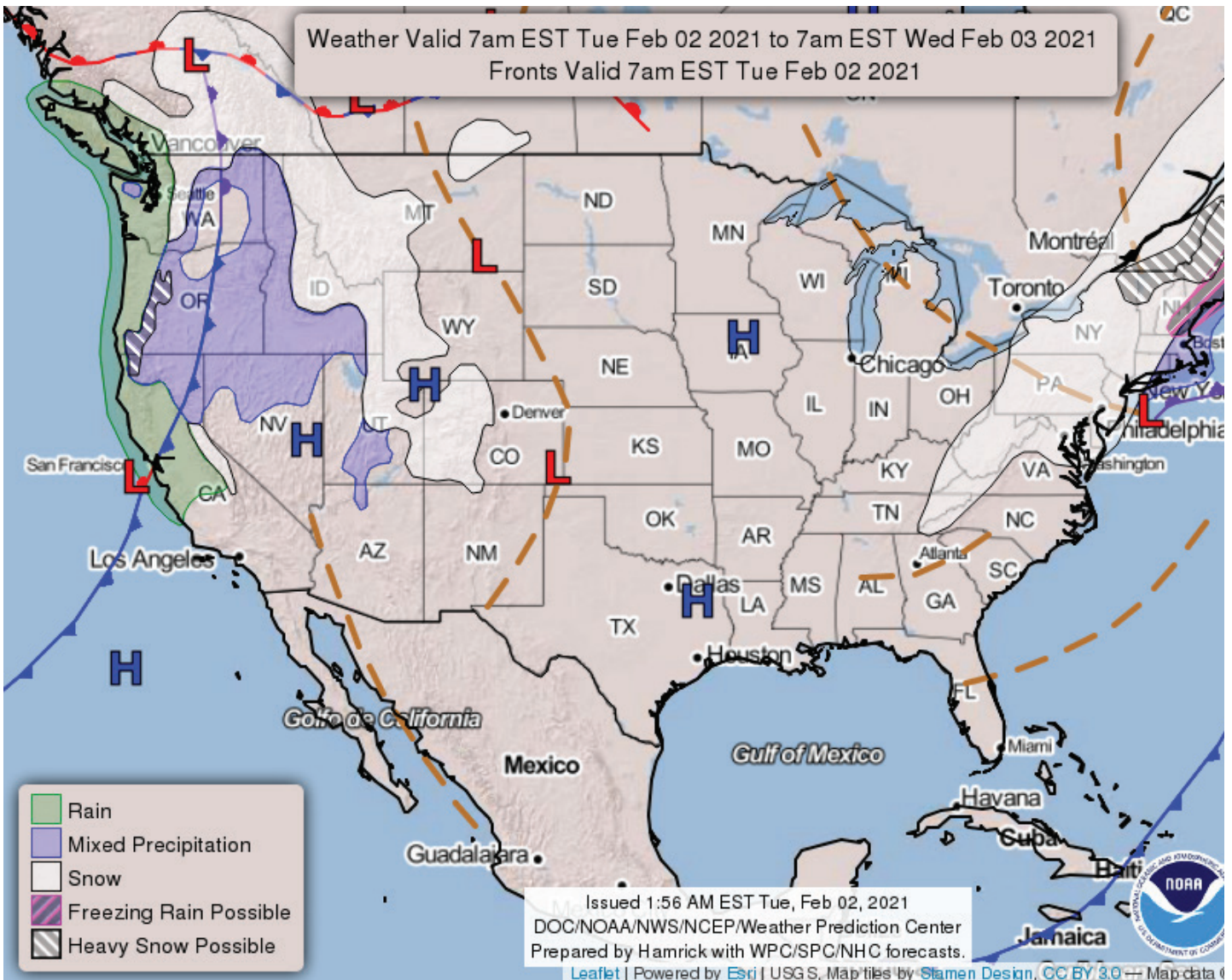
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 25 °F at 5:07 PM
Low Temp: 20 °F at 11:52 PM
Wind: 12 mph at 10:02 AM
Precip:

Record High: 60° in 1991
Record Low: -39° in 1917
Average High: 24°F
Average Low: 3°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.01
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.48
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:43 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:52 a.m.



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OUR EVER-PRESENT GOD

"Sorrow," begins a French proverb, "comes swiftly on horseback, but leaves slowly on foot." Few would disagree that our moments of happiness are usually as brief as a heartbeat and sorrow often lasts as long as the darkest night.

Once when he was in deep distress, David cried, "How long, O Lord, will You forget me? Forever? How long will You look the other way?" We all suffer greatly when someone we deeply love is no longer available or does not respond to our cry for help.

Betty was suffering from measles. Her infected eyes could not stand the sunlight that was streaming into her room. As her mother closed the curtains and turned out the light, she asked, "Are you afraid?" "No," said Betty, "as long as I can touch you."

David asked a critical question that every believer in God often asks: "How long, O Lord, will You forget me?" And when he did not get an immediate answer, he cried as we would, "How long will You look the other way?" And finally, "How long must I struggle?"

Our Lord may be out of sight, but we are never beyond His reach! David felt that God had abandoned him, had turned away from him. He felt as we often do - God has lost interest in my problem. But David did not quit or give up. He did what he knew would work. With an abiding faith, he prayed, "I will continue to trust in Your unfailing love."

His faith was larger than all his fears. He knew God would deliver him as He had in the past. When we doubt our future, we need to look at our past and see how God works.

Prayer: When we become impatient, Father, remind us of David's steadfast faith and Your unfailing love, and know that You are somewhere at work. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: How long, O Lord, will You forget me? Forever? How long will You look the other way? Psalm 13:1

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News from the Associated Press

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Chester 53, Colman-Egan 44

Corsica/Stickney 72, Bon Homme 43

Dell Rapids St. Mary 64, Garretson 51

Florence/Henry 62, Webster 32

Great Plains Lutheran 64, Estelline/Hendricks 56

Howard 72, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 34

Waverly-South Shore 51, Northwestern 36

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Colome 61, Lyman 40

Dell Rapids 63, Baltic 43

Dupree 58, Bison 39

Elkton-Lake Benton 54, Iroquois 31

Estelline/Hendricks 53, Great Plains Lutheran 31

Gregory 47, Bon Homme 41

Howard 57, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 23

Ipswich 45, Northwestern 31

Leola/Frederick 48, Britton-Hecla 29

Mobridge-Pollock 63, Lemmon 58

Timber Lake 54, Faith 44

Waubay/Summit 60, Langford 41

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

Bill to disclose Noem's travel security costs faces backlash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota lawmaker said fellow Republicans are pressuring her to withdraw a bill that would require Gov. Kristi Noem to disclose taxpayer funds used for her travel security on the campaign trail.

Rep. Taffy Howard, the Rapid City Republican who introduced the bill, said she has faced backlash including text message attacks and fellow Republicans rescinding support after hearing from the governor's office.

Noem, a close ally of President Donald Trump, traveled frequently on his behalf last year and also made appearances for the two Republicans running in Georgia's Senate runoff elections in January. Noem has denied having presidential aspirations, but has also made moves to keep herself in the conversation of 2024 nominees. She has said she intends to run for a second term as governor next year.

Her administration has refused to disclose to media outlets how much it costs to send Highway Patrol troopers with the governor as she has traveled the country campaigning for Trump and fundraising for her campaign. The governor's office has cited South Dakota law exempting security details from open records to deny the requests.

Howard wants to change that law, arguing it would not compromise safety to know how much is spent on her travel security.

"I just think it's important the taxpayers know where every dollar goes," she said.

But Howard said that two fellow Republicans who co-sponsored the bill withdrew their support after being "called down to the second floor," legislative parlance for being summoned to the governor's office

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that sits a flight of stairs down from the Legislature's third floor.

Both Reps. Rhonda Milstead and Marli Wiese, Republicans who withdrew their names from supporting the bill, declined to comment.

Howard also found herself the subject of a texted meme that pasted her image alongside Democrats Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer and Kamala Harris.

Howard called the attempt to associate her with Democrats "ridiculous." It was not clear who originated the meme or text messages. The governor's office declined to comment on the bill and on whether staffers pressured lawmakers on Howard's bill.

After the attacks, Howard said she received notes of encouragement from people across the state. But in the Legislature, she has so far found little support outside of an unlikely alliance between fiscally conservative Republicans and Democrats.

"This is truly a non-partisan bill. This is about transparency," said House Minority Leader Jamie Smith, a Democrat from Sioux Falls.

The governor at a news conference last week said she does not comment on security when asked about the bill.

"I don't believe any governor ever has in this state, and we will continue to follow that legislation," she said.

It came to light that the South Dakota Highway Patrol sends officers with the governor on out-of-state travel after a man was arrested at an October Trump rally with Noem in Maine.

Noem raises almost \$1M in 4th quarter

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem, who has said she'll seek a second term as governor next year, reported raising nearly \$1 million in the fourth quarter.

In a report filed Friday, the Republican reported raising about \$966,000 to end the year, and spent just under \$400,000. Her largest expenditure was \$185,000 for political consulting. Most of the money came from out-of-state donors after she campaigned throughout the country for former president Donald Trump and other Republicans.

Roughly 80% of donors listed on Noem's report were from other states besides South Dakota, the Argus Leader reported. Donors who give \$100 or less are not required to be listed. Among listed donations from individuals, about \$176,000 came from South Dakota residents, while nearly \$428,000 came from residents of other states.

Noem also received \$152,000 from campaign committees across the country. The largest donation came from House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, who is from California. He gave \$100,000 from his House campaign fund.

Noem's report showed a year-end balance of about \$1.4 million.

Trump urged Noem to challenge Sen. John Thune in a primary, but she has said she won't. Trump was angry at Thune's remarks on his election loss.

Noem narrowly defeated Democrat Billie Sutton in 2018.

South Dakota senate kills Oceti Sakowin school bill

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A proposal to allow four schools that would teach Oceti Sakowin language and culture failed to pass the South Dakota Senate Monday.

The bill's failure to pass the Senate represented a setback for Native educators and parents who had worked in recent years to start the schools aimed at addressing a disproportionate drop-out rate among Native Americans and what they described as a legacy of "oppression" in government-run schools. A similar proposal passed unanimously in the Senate last year, but failed to clear the House.

The bill faced opposition by groups representing school districts that said the proposal was in essence charter schools that would drain funds from the districts. They also argued that magnet schools that teach

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Lakota, Dakota or Nakota language could be created by the school districts.

Several lawmakers who voted against the bill said they applauded the effort to improve education for Native American students, but felt the bill would create problems for existing schools.

But that argument left Senate Minority Leader Troy Heinert, the Democrat who brought the proposal, visibly frustrated as it failed.

"When we give them a viable option that we know works, they say, 'that's not good enough,'" he said.

Heinert indicated he may ask the Senate to reconsider the bill, but proponents would have to change the minds of a handful of lawmakers.

Sage Fast Dog, an educator who runs a private school that teaches the Oceti Sakowin curriculum in Mission on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, was frustrated at the defeat, but said he would keep pushing to reshape education.

"We'll still call out this broken system all the time," he said. "We're not done."

Girl's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Sportswriters Association high school girl's poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points.

Class AA

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------|----|---|
| 1. Aberdeen Central (15) | 12-0 | 88 | 1 |
| 2. Washington (3) | 7-2 | 74 | 2 |
| 3. Harrisburg (1) | 12-1 | 65 | 3 |
| 4. Brandon Valley | 9-3 | 28 | 4 |
| 5. Mitchell | 10-2 | 27 | 5 |

Others receiving votes: Sioux Falls O'Gorman 3.

Class A

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|----|----|
| 1. St. Thomas More (19) | 13-0 | 95 | 1 |
| 2. SF Christian | 12-1 | 66 | 4 |
| (tie) Winner | 12-1 | 66 | 3 |
| 4. West Central | 11-2 | 39 | 2 |
| 5. Hamlin | 10-2 | 18 | RV |

Others receiving votes: Aberdeen Roncalli 1.

Class B

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|----|---|
| 1. Corsica-Stickney(12) | 13-2 | 86 | 1 |
| 2. Castlewood (5) | 10-0 | 77 | 2 |
| 3. White River (2) | 11-0 | 64 | 3 |
| 4. Ethan | 11-2 | 35 | 5 |
| 5. Hanson | 11-2 | 10 | 4 |

(tie) Viborg-Hurley 11-2 10 RV

Others receiving votes: Waverly-South Shore 3.

Boy's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Sportswriters Association high school boy's poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, records, total points and last week's ranking.

Class AA

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------|----|---|
| 1. Washington (19) | 10-0 | 95 | 1 |
| 2. Yankton | 12-2 | 75 | 2 |
| 3. Mitchell | 10-1 | 58 | 3 |
| 4. Harrisburg | 9-2 | 35 | 5 |

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5. Roosevelt 7-5 18 4

Others receiving votes: Rapid City Central 3, Brandon Valley 1.

Class A

1. Vermillion (17) 12-0 92 2

2. SF Christian (2) 12-2 73 4

3. Dakota Valley 12-1 55 1

4. Sioux Valley 12-1 46 3

5. Dell Rapids 9-3 9 5

Others receiving votes: St. Thomas More 7, Winner 3.

Class B

1. De Smet (19) 12-1 95 1

2. Howard 12-1 75 3

3. Canistota 11-1 52 4

4. Platte-Geddes 10-2 37 2

5. Dell Rapids St. Mary 10-3 17 5

Others receiving votes: Viborg-Hurley 7, White River 2.

The Sioux Falls School District installs AtmosAir coronavirus deterring indoor air quality technology

SIoux FALLS, S.D., Feb. 1, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- The Sioux Falls School District, Mechanical Sales Inc. SD, and AtmosAir Solutions, a leading global indoor air quality solutions provider, announced the recent installation of bi-polar ionization in all of the district's 23 elementary schools, five middle schools, five high schools, and Southeast Technical College facilities in Sioux Falls.

AtmosAir's bi-polar ionization is an active continuous disinfection technology that combats coronavirus in the air and on surfaces through the use of ions that bind with pathogens and render them harmless, which will add an important safety layer for Sioux Falls' education spaces.

The goal is to make all Sioux Falls schools safer for students, faculty and staff by creating a healthier indoor environment. The installation project was completed the first week of January 2021. Mechanical Sales Inc. SD of Sioux Falls is the local AtmosAir representative and managed the installation of the systems.

"Air quality has long been a consideration of the Sioux Falls School District," said Director of Operational Services for the District Jeff Kreiter. "The COVID-19 virus heightened our awareness of the need for a superior air filtration system. Thanks to federal funding made available to schools, we were able to install this technology in every building in the Sioux Falls School District. This investment is one that will not only neutralize coronavirus, but the flu virus, and many other airborne concerns out there. Our highest priority is the health and safety of all students and staff. This system adds one more layer to their protection."

"Clean, healthy air in schools is of crucial importance to students, faculty, staff and their families, as well as the greater Sioux Falls community," said Steve Levine, President, AtmosAir Solutions. "We are proud to partner with the Sioux Falls School District to add this important extra layer of protection against the coronavirus and other potential contaminants for the long term."

According to Levine AtmosAir's continuous disinfection, bi-polar ionization technology has been proven to be more 99% effective in neutralizing coronavirus in the air and on surfaces. Tests performed by Microchem Laboratory, one of the world's preeminent laboratories for testing sanitizing products registered by the EPA and FDA, confirmed that the presence of coronavirus was reduced by 99.92 percent within 30 minutes of exposure to AtmosAir's BPI technology.

AtmosAir Solutions BPI devices are in use in hundreds of K-12 schools throughout the country, in addition to a range of colleges and universities, including USC, Northwestern, Arizona State, UCLA and NYU.

You can see how the technology works here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-b7vDnFv6k>.

About Sioux Falls School District

The Sioux Falls School District (SFSFD) is widely recognized for accomplishments in student achievement

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and innovative educational strategies. SFSD serves a diverse population of more than 24,000 students. The vision of SFSD is to embrace the opportunity for all children to learn about the world's cultures from curriculum and through the shared experiences of their classmates. Students in the SFSD consistently score above state and national averages on standardized exams with many students recognized as National Merit Scholars and Advanced Placement Scholars. The District also features gifted education, National Honor Society, state and nationally recognized academic teams, as well as a host of state and nationally recognized co-curricular programs. Visit sf.k12.sd.us to learn more.

About AtmosAir Solutions

AtmosAir Solutions of Fairfield, CT provides clean green indoor air technology for commercial buildings, health care, hospitals, assisted living, hotels, cruise lines, universities and sports facilities. The company's patented bi-polar ionization technology is over 99% effective in neutralizing coronavirus. Tests performed by Microchem Laboratory, one of the world's preeminent laboratories for testing sanitizing products registered by the EPA and FDA, confirmed that the presence of coronavirus was reduced by 99.92 percent within 30 minutes of exposure to AtmosAir's bi-polar ion technology. AtmosAir's clean air technology improves wellness, makes buildings more sustainable, reduces their operational costs and its proven air purification technology is a continuous disinfectant, removing airborne and surface contaminants from indoor spaces. With more than 7,500 installations worldwide, AtmosAir Solutions' patented bi-polar ionization technology suppresses airborne and surface microbials and pathogens, including viruses, bacteria and mold, and reduces odors as well as unhealthy and irritating volatile organic compounds (VOCs). More information can be found at www.atmosair.com

About Mechanical Sales Inc. SD

Mechanical Sales Inc. SD is a Sioux Falls based manufacturer representative that provides support to building owners, engineers, and mechanical contractors for implementing projects utilizing cutting edge systems from several industry leading manufacturers including AtmosAir. More information can be found at www.mechsales.com

View original content to download multimedia: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/the-sioux-falls-school-district-installs-atmosair-coronavirus-deterring-indoor-air-quality-technology-301219162.html>

SOURCE AtmosAir Solutions

Midwest Economy: January state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for January:

Arkansas: The overall index increased to 76.9 from December's 62.3. Components were: new orders at 80.9, production or sales at 77.0, delivery lead time at 78.4, inventories at 83.7, and employment at 64.5. "Since bottoming in May of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by 4,000 jobs for a 2.8% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will continue well into 2021 for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Iowa: Iowa's overall index remained above growth neutral as the overall reading climbed to 71.5 from 64.7 in December. Components were: new orders at 79.4, production or sales at 75.8, delivery lead time at 74.0, employment at 65.6, and inventories at 70.8. "Since bottoming in April of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by almost 14,000 jobs for a 6.4% gain," Goss said. "Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will continue well into 2021 for the state's manufacturing sector."

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Kansas: The state's overall index rose to 62.0 from 55.3 in December. Components were: new orders at 72.8, production or sales at 81.3, delivery lead time at 63.3, employment at 53.3, and inventories at 39.3. "Since bottoming in April of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by only 800 jobs for a 0.5% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will accelerate in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Minnesota: The overall index dipped to 66.9 from 67.6 in December. Components were: new orders at 83.2, production or sales at 69.3, delivery lead time at 68.9, inventories at 55.6, and employment at 57.4. "Since bottoming in May of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by 10,500 jobs for a 3.2% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will continue in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Missouri: The overall index dropped to 62.5 from 67.2 in December. Components were: new orders at 73.0, production or sales at 81.5, delivery lead time at 63.8, inventories at 40.7, and employment at 53.6. "Since bottoming in April of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by almost 29,000 jobs for a 11.9% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will slow to a still healthy pace in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Nebraska: The overall index rose to 69.2 from 67.0 in December. Components were: new orders at 74.7, production or sales at 83.6, delivery lead time at 70.1, inventories at 59.4, and employment at 58.4. "Since bottoming in June of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by 2,000 jobs for a 2.1% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will continue in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index soared to 75.6 from 62.8 in December. Components were: new orders at 76.1, production or sales at 85.4, delivery lead time at 79.9, employment at 62.2, and inventories at 74.4. "Since bottoming in November of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has added no new jobs. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that growth will expand, but at a very modest pace in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The state's overall index climbed to 65.4 from December's 55.9. Components were: new orders at 73.7, production or sales at 82.4, delivery lead time at 66.5, inventories at 48.8, and employment at 55.7. "Since bottoming in September of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by only 900 jobs for a 0.7% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will improve in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

South Dakota: The overall index sank to 62.2 from 76.3 in December. Components were: new orders at 72.9, production or sales at 81.4, delivery lead time at 63.5, inventories at 40.0, and employment at 53.5. "Since bottoming in August of last year, manufacturing employment in the state has expanded by 1,200 jobs for a 2.9% gain. Creighton's surveys over the past several months indicate that this rate of growth will continue in the months ahead for the state's manufacturing sector," Goss said.

Midwest economy improving, but pandemic still taking a bite

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy is continuing to show signs of improvement in nine Midwest and Plains states, according to a new monthly survey, but business leaders say the coronavirus pandemic is taking a bite out of their business.

January's overall index of the Creighton University Mid-America Business Conditions suggests improved growth, coming in at a strong 67.3 from December's 64.1.

Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

The region lost 1.5 million, or 10.9%, of nonfarm jobs through April following the onset of the pandemic, said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey. The region has since regained 841,000 of the jobs lost, Goss said, and the latest survey numbers "indicate that the region is adding jobs and economic activity at a healthy pace, and that growth will remain healthy well into 2021."

The survey's confidence index, which looks ahead six months, jumped to 53.6 in January from December's weak 45.8.

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Even with the rosier outlook, the employment index fell to 57.2 from December's 57.7. Despite adding jobs in January, three-quarters of supply managers said their businesses were affected by COVID-19 worker absences.

Supply managers were asked this month to identify the pandemic's affect on their firms' business prospects. Six of 10 said shutdowns had a negative affect, when about 43% reported cancellation of business meetings. Almost one-third reported difficulties in international buying.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Despite pandemic, Black Hills Stock Show is on

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Black Hills Stock Show is underway in South Dakota with new events and new safety protocols to guard against the coronavirus.

The Rapid City Journal reports that some other big livestock shows have been canceled due to the pandemic, but organizers of the Black Hills show moved ahead.

Ron Jeffries, general manager of the show, said inquiries were coming in from farther away than usual, especially from people interested in the youth livestock show and horse sale. Jeffries said masks and hand sanitizer are being provided to participants. Some events in the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center also have set aside sections for socially distanced seating.

New events this year include a sheep and goat show for youth, the stock show's first ever virtual Longhorn sale, and a wool judging event with collegiate teams from five states.

Jeffries said vendor numbers and ticket sales were slightly down as the event began. The event runs through next Sunday.

Study: Russia's Sputnik V vaccine appears safe, effective

By MARIA CHENG and DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian scientists say the country's Sputnik V vaccine appears safe and effective against COVID-19, according to early results of an advanced study published in a British medical journal.

The news is a boost for the shot that is increasingly being purchased by nations around the world who are desperate to stop the devastation caused by the pandemic.

Researchers say based on their trial, which involved about 20,000 people in Russia last fall, the vaccine is about 91% effective and that the shot also appeared to prevent people from becoming severely ill with COVID-19. The study was published online Tuesday in the journal, *Lancet*.

Scientists not linked to the research acknowledged that the speed at which the Russia vaccine was made and rolled out was criticized for "unseemly haste, corner cutting and an absence of transparency."

"But the outcome reported here is clear," British scientists Ian Jones and Polly Roy wrote in an accompanying commentary. "Another vaccine can now join the fight to reduce the incidence of COVID-19."

The Sputnik V vaccine was approved by the Russian government with much fanfare on Aug. 11. President Vladimir Putin personally broke the news on national television and said that one of his daughters had already been vaccinated with it. At the time, the vaccine had only been tested in several dozens of people.

Some early results were published in September, but participants had only been followed for about 42 days and there was no comparison group.

The latest study is based on research involving about 20,000 people over age 18 at 25 hospitals in Moscow between September and November, of whom three-quarters got two doses of the Russian vaccine 21 days apart and the remainder got placebo shots.

The most commonly reported side effects were flu-like symptoms, pain at the injection site and fatigue. Serious side effects were rare in both groups and four deaths were reported in the study, although none were considered to be the result of the vaccine.

The study included more than 2,100 people over age 60 and the vaccine appeared to be about 92% effective in them. The research is ongoing but in December, Russia's Health Ministry said it would cut the

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size of the study from the expected 40,000 to about 31,000 volunteers that have already enrolled. Developers of the vaccine cited ethical concerns about using placebo shots.

The Russian vaccine uses a modified version of the common cold-causing adenovirus to carry genes for the spike protein in the coronavirus as a way to prime the body to react if COVID-19 comes along. That's a similar technology to the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. But unlike that two-dose vaccine, the Russians used a slightly different adenovirus for the second booster shot.

Some experts say that approach may explain why the Russian vaccine seems to have produced a better immune response than the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has a reported efficacy rate of about 60 to 70%.

"This aims to drive higher immune responses to the target 'spike' by using two slightly different jabs," said Alexander Edwards, an associate professor in biomedical technology at Britain's University of Reading.

He said if you have two identical shots, it's possible the immune system doesn't get as big a boost from the second injection.

He added that, because the Russian vaccine is made using a tested technology, it should be possible to scale up manufacturing.

Sputnik V began being rolled out in a large-scale vaccination campaign in Russia in December, with doctors and teachers the first in line to get the shot. Last month, Putin ordered the effort to be expanded and for mass immunizations to start.

In early January, the Russian Direct Investment Fund that bankrolled the jab said that over 1 million Russians have already been vaccinated with the domestically developed shot. Some Russian media questioned the number and suggested that the rollout has been much slower, with many Russian regions reporting small numbers of vaccinations.

Outside Russia, Sputnik V has received authorization in over a dozen countries, according to the fund — including former Soviet republics of Belarus, Armenia and Turkmenistan; Latin American nations including Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela; some African nations as well as Serbia, Iran, Palestine and UAE.

In the European Union, the shot has received initial authorization in Hungary and is still subject to final approval by the country's National Public Health Center.

Batches of the vaccine have already been supplied to six countries. In all, more than 50 countries submitted applications for 2.4 billion doses, a RDIF spokesman told The Associated Press.

Algeria will begin producing the Sputnik V vaccine "within the coming weeks," according to Kamel Mansouri, the head of Algeria's national agency for pharmaceuticals.

The first batch of 50,000 doses of Sputnik V was flown to Algeria from Russia on Thursday, a tenth of what had been previously announced by the North African government. A cargo of 50,000 AstraZeneca doses arrived on Monday.

Mansouri said Algeria and Russia were in advanced discussions over Sputnik V and the vaccine would be manufactured at the government-owned SAIDAL facility.

"It is time that Algeria, a country that imports vaccine, be able to produce it on site to respond to the needs of the vaccination campaign, and to export in a second phase," he said Tuesday on national television.

Cheng reported from Toronto. Associated Press writer Lori Hinnant in Paris contributed to this report.

A gloomy Groundhog Day: Punxsutawney Phil says more winter

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. (AP) — There will be six more weeks of winter, Punxsutawney Phil predicted as he emerged from his burrow on a snowy Tuesday morning to perform his Groundhog Day duties.

Members of Phil's "inner circle" woke up the furry critter at 7:25 a.m. at Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to see whether he would see his shadow or not.

Shortly after this year's prediction was revealed, one of the members of the inner circle shared a message he said Phil had told him earlier in the day: "After winter, you're looking forward to one of the most beautiful and brightest springs you've ever seen."

Another member of the "inner circle" noted the uniqueness of the past year.

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"People have been referencing Groundhog Day. It has felt like at times we're all living the same day over and over again," one of the members said. "Groundhog Day also shows us that the monotony ends. The cycle will be broken."

"Today actually is Groundhog Day, there's only one," he added. "There is quite literally a new day coming over the horizon."

The spectacle that is Groundhog Day still went on, but because of the coronavirus pandemic, revelers weren't able to see Phil and celebrate in person: This year, it was all virtual.

A livestream, which had more than 15,000 viewers at one point, played footage from previous Groundhog Day's ahead of the big reveal.

Then of course, the prognosticator of prognosticators — assisted by his Inner Circle — emerged at dawn. The lore goes that if he sees his shadow as he did this year, there will be six more weeks of winter. If he doesn't, spring comes early.

The livestream from Gobbler's Knob, a tiny hill just outside Punxsutawney about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, is made possible by the Pennsylvania Tourism Office's Holi-stay PA. The event there — always Feb. 2 — dates back to 1887.

Phil this year, like many years in the past, gave his forecast during a major snowstorm that hit the entire Northeast.

The annual event has its origin in a German legend about a furry rodent. Records dating to the late 1800s show Phil has predicted longer winters more than 100 times. The 2020 forecast called for an early spring — however, Phil didn't say anything about a pandemic.

Punxsutawney Phil may be the most famous groundhog seer but he's certainly not the only one. There are two other high-profile "imposters," as the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club calls them, in the region.

Staten Island Chuck will be asked for his prophesy Tuesday around 8 a.m. at the Staten Island Zoo in New York. That event will be streamed on Facebook since the zoo is closed.

Also without fanfare, Chuckles, Connecticut's official state groundhog, will make a prediction from home: the Lutz Children's Museum in Manchester. That will also be streamed on Facebook. Chuckles X died in September, and it remains to be seen whether an anointed Chuckles XI will emerge Tuesday.

Sprawling winter storm hits more of Northeast, dumping snow

BOSTON (AP) — Parts of northern New England were waiting their turn to be pummeled by a heavy winter storm Tuesday, while residents of the New York City region were digging out from under piles of snow that shut down public transport, canceled flights and closed coronavirus vaccination sites.

The National Weather Service said a foot (31 centimeters) or more could be on the ground in New England by the time the snow finally tapers off in the northernmost states by Wednesday evening.

Lara Pagano, a meteorologist with the weather service office in College Park, Maryland, noted that while several areas in the Mid-Atlantic have seen measurable snowfall for a few consecutive days, that hasn't shattered such records. For example, she said the most consecutive days with measured snowfall for Washington is four, while the mark is five for New York City and six for Philadelphia.

"While this storm has been a prolonged event, it's not a record-setter in that sense, but it does rank up there pretty high of course," she said.

The sprawling, lumbering storm already walloped the eastern United States on Monday, as the as snow piled up. More than 16 inches (40 centimeters) of snow dropped on Manhattan's Central Park, and as much as 30 inches (76 centimeters) was reported in northern New Jersey.

High tide caused flooding early Tuesday in coastal areas of Massachusetts, where the storm had already disrupted the second phase of the state's vaccine rollout as a Boston site that was supposed to open Monday for residents ages 75 and older did not; some other mass vaccination sites remained open. The state was expected to get 12 to 18 inches (31 to 61 centimeters) of heavy, wet snow and winds up to 55 mph (88 kph) along the coast, according to Gov. Charlie Baker.

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In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont said the storm forced the postponement of about 10,000 shots and delayed the state's weekly resupply of vaccine, now expected Tuesday. He urged providers that called off vaccination appointments to extend their hours if needed to reschedule the shots by the end of the week.

A state of emergency imposed by New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy remained in effect Tuesday and the state's six mega sites for COVID-19 vaccines were still closed as plow operators faced snow showers and blowing snow. The New Jersey State Police reported as of 7 p.m. Monday, troopers had responded to 661 crashes and come to the aid of 1,050 motorists since 6 p.m. Sunday.

There was also concern about coastal flooding in New Jersey due to the storm. In a video posted on Facebook by Union Beach Police, Keyport Police Chief Shannon Torres and Capt. Michael Ferm were shown rescuing a man who was showing signs of hypothermia in his car from floodwaters.

In Virginia, four firefighters were taken to hospitals with injuries that were not life threatening after their firetruck overturned Sunday on snow-covered roads in Henrico County, The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

In Pennsylvania, authorities said a 67-year-old woman with Alzheimer's disease who reportedly wandered away from her home was found dead of hypothermia on an Allentown street Monday morning. About 60 miles (97 kilometers) north in Plains Township, a shooting after an argument over snow removal killed a married couple, and the suspect was later found dead at his nearby home of a wound believed to have been self-inflicted, officials in Luzerne County said.

A preliminary investigation indicates the people involved had a long-running conflict, but "this morning, the dispute was exacerbated by a disagreement over snow disposal," District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said.

Biden meets Republicans on virus aid, but no quick deal

By LISA MASCARO, JOSH BOAK and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden told Republican senators during a two-hour meeting he's unwilling to settle on an insufficient coronavirus aid package after they pitched their slimmed down \$618 billion proposal that's a fraction of the \$1.9 trillion he is seeking.

No compromise was reached in the lengthy session Monday night, Biden's first with lawmakers at the White House, and Democrats in Congress pushed ahead with groundwork for approving his COVID-19 relief plan with or without Republican votes. Despite the Republican group's appeal for bipartisanship, as part of Biden's efforts to unify the country, the president made it clear he won't delay aid in hopes of winning GOP support.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that while there were areas of agreement, "the president also reiterated his view that Congress must respond boldly and urgently, and noted many areas which the Republican senators' proposal does not address."

She said, "He will not slow down work on this urgent crisis response, and will not settle for a package that fails to meet the moment."

The two sides are far apart, with the Republican group of 10 senators focused primarily on the health care crisis and smaller \$1,000 direct aid to Americans, and Biden leading Democrats toward a more sweeping rescue package to shore up households, local governments and a partly shuttered economy.

The goal is to have COVID-19 relief approved by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires, testing the ability of the new administration and Congress to deliver, with political risks for all sides from failure.

Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine called the meeting a "frank and very useful" conversation, noting that the president also filled in some details on his proposal.

"All of us are concerned about struggling families, teetering small businesses and an overwhelmed health care system," said Collins, flanked by other senators outside the White House.

Republicans are tapping into bipartisan urgency to improve the nation's vaccine distribution and vastly expand virus testing with \$160 billion in aid. That is similar to what Biden has proposed. But from there, the two plans drastically diverge.

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The GOP's \$1,000 direct payments would go to fewer households than the \$1,400 Biden has proposed, and the Republicans offer only a fraction of what he wants to reopen schools.

They also would give nothing to states, money that Democrats argue is just as important, with \$350 billion in Biden's plan to keep police, fire and other workers on the job. Gone are Democratic priorities such as a gradual lifting of the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Wary Democrats pushed ahead at the Capitol, unwilling to take too much time in courting GOP support that may not materialize or in delivering too meager a package that they believe doesn't address the scope of the nation's health crisis and economic problems.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned that history is filled with "the costs of small thinking."

House and Senate Democrats released a separate budget resolution Monday a step toward approving Biden's package with a reconciliation process that wouldn't depend on Republican support for passage.

"The cost of inaction is high and growing, and the time for decisive action is now," Schumer and Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement.

The accelerating talks came as the Congressional Budget Office delivered mixed economic forecasts Monday with robust growth expected at a 4.5% annual rate but employment rates not to return to pre-pandemic levels for several years.

The overture from the coalition of 10 GOP senators, mostly centrists, was an attempt to show that at least some in the Republican ranks want to work with Biden's new administration, rather than simply operating as the opposition in the minority in Congress.

Asked if Biden had shown a willingness to reduce his \$1.9 trillion top line, Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, said, "He didn't say that, nor did we say we're willing to come up" from the GOP plan. He said it's "too early" to say if a deal can be reached.

But in echoes of the 2009 financial crisis, Democrats warn against too small a package as they believe happened during the Obama administration's attempt to pull the nation toward recovery.

Psaki said earlier Monday there is "obviously a big gap" between the \$1.9 trillion package Biden has proposed and the \$618 billion counteroffer.

An invitation to the GOP senators to meet with Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House came hours after the lawmakers sent Biden a letter on Sunday urging him to negotiate rather than try to ram through his relief package solely on Democratic votes.

The cornerstone of the GOP plan is \$160 billion for the health care response — vaccine distribution, a "massive expansion" of testing, protective gear and funds for rural hospitals, according to a draft. It also includes \$20 billion to reopen schools compared to \$170 billion in Biden's plan. The Republicans offer \$40 billion for Paycheck Protection Program business aid.

Under the GOP proposal, \$1,000 direct payments would go to individuals earning up to \$40,000 a year, or \$80,000 for couples. The proposal would begin to phase out the benefit after that, with no payments for individuals earning more than \$50,000, or \$100,000 for couples. That's less than Biden's proposal of \$1,400 direct payments at higher incomes levels, up to \$300,000 for some households.

The meeting, though private, was Biden's most public involvement in the negotiations.

Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant, potentially giving Biden the votes needed in the 50-50 Senate where Harris is the tie-breaker. Or he can push it through the budget reconciliation process, which would allow the bill to pass with a 51-vote majority in the Senate, rather than the 60 votes typically needed to advance legislation.

The White House remains committed to exploring avenues for bipartisanship even as it prepares for Democrats to move alone on a COVID-19 relief bill, according to a senior administration official granted anonymity to discuss the private thinking.

At the same time, the White House may be willing to adjust its ask, perhaps shifting some less virus-oriented aspects into a package that is set to go next before Congress, the official said.

Biden has leaned on his resume of decades in the Senate and as vice president to bring the parties together, but less than two weeks into his presidency he has shown frustration with the pace of negotiations

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as applications for jobless benefits remain stubbornly high and the COVID-19 death toll nears 450,000 Americans.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Alexandra Jaffe, Darlene Superville and Aamer Madhani contributed to this report.

The Latest: Spain cancels San Fermin bull-running festival

By The Associated Press undefined

MADRID -- The northern Spanish region of Navarra has announced the cancellation of the famed annual San Fermín bull-running festival in Pamplona for a second year in a row of because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"An international festival like San Fermín, in which millions of people come to Navarra, is not going to be possible," said regional President María Chivite on Tuesday.

The nine-day festival in July is easily Spain's most international event. The festival was popularized by Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel "The Sun Also Rises" and up to last year's cancellation had last been called off during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

Last year, many residents of Pamplona dressed up in the traditional white clothes and red scarves to mark the July 6 festival start but there were none of the usual popular street parties.

Spain has seen least 59,000 confirmed virus deaths.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— In January, the U.S. endured its deadliest month yet in the pandemic, but some hopeful signs are emerging

— President Joe Biden meets Republican lawmakers but says he's not interested in trimming his massive COVID-19 relief bill because Americans need the help

— Japan extends a state of emergency amid uncertainty over vaccine supplies and the hosting of the Tokyo Olympics this summer.

— Major snowstorm pummels northeastern U.S., forces the cancellation of thousands of COVID-19 vaccine shots

— Vaccine skepticism lurks in Tuskegee, Alabama, a city known for a racist syphilis study

— AP PHOTOS: China's Year of the Ox vendors face mountains of uncertainty

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PARIS — Algeria will begin producing Russia's Sputnik V vaccine "within the coming weeks," according to the head of Algeria's national agency for pharmaceuticals.

The first batch of 50,000 doses of Sputnik V was flown to Algeria from Russia on Thursday, a tenth of what had been previously announced by the North African government. A cargo of 50,000 Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine doses arrived on Monday.

The head of the national agency for pharmaceuticals, Kamel Mansouri, said Algeria and Russia were in advanced discussions over Sputnik V and the vaccine would be manufactured at the government-owned SAIDAL facility.

"It is time that Algeria, a country that imports vaccine, be able to produce it on site to respond to the needs of the vaccination campaign, and to export in a second phase," he said Tuesday on national television.

BRUSSELS — Belgian health authorities say face covers like bandannas or scarves will no longer be authorized but the use of medical-grade FFP2 masks will not be made mandatory in the country to combat

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the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking at a news conference Tuesday, virologist Yves Van Laethem said these protections were tolerated last year when masks were short in supply but can't be used anymore because their filtering capacity is not stringent enough.

Van Laethem said that homemade masks that properly cover one's mouth and nose remain authorized. He said FFP2 masks are not recommended for the general population, notably because they are expensive, uncomfortable and not reusable.

Infection numbers have plateaued in Belgium over the past 10 weeks, with new daily cases between 2,000 and 2,500.

Belgium has vaccinated 280,000 people so far, 3% of the population over 18. It has been hard-hit by the pandemic, with over 21,000 confirmed virus deaths.

VIENNA — Austria is toughening entry requirements in an effort to prevent the spread of contagious coronavirus variants.

Interior Minister Karl Nehammer said Tuesday that the country will require weekly tests for cross-border commuters, who also will have to register under a "pre-travel clearance system," the Austria Press Agency reported. New arrivals also won't be able to cut their 10-day quarantine short by testing negative.

Nehammer also said checks by police and health officials in Austrian ski resorts will be stepped up after authorities discovered scores of visitors in illegally booked accommodations.

On Friday, police in St. Anton checked 44 properties and filed complaints against 96 people, among them Britons, Danes, Swedes, Romanians, Germans, Australians, Poles and Irish citizens. While ski slopes are open to locals in Austria, hotels are closed to tourists.

Austria plans to loosen some coronavirus restrictions next week, opening schools, museums, hairdressers and nonessential shops.

HELSINKI — Estonia says it will let passengers arriving into the country with proof of a COVID-19 vaccination skip its travel quarantine requirement.

Health officials of the Baltic country say that proof isn't restricted only to vaccine suppliers approved in the European Union but proof from any of the global vaccine suppliers would be accepted. The move takes effect Tuesday.

However, Estonia's Health Board said the certificate of vaccination from foreign citizens has to meet certain criteria, including language. Vaccination certificates must be in either in Estonian, Russian — which is widely spoken in Estonia — or English.

Hanna Sepp, head of the Health Board's infectious diseases unit, told the Estonian public broadcaster ERR that the certificate has to indicate the disease against which the person has been vaccinated, when the vaccine was formulated and which manufacturer's vaccine was used. It also has to include data on the issuer of the vaccine and the vaccine batch number.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Children in classes up to fourth grade will return to school Feb. 8 in Denmark after the country has seen a steady reduction in new COVID-19 infections in recent weeks.

Health Minister Magnus Heunicke said it was "a careful reopening," adding the Scandinavian country is still dealing with the virus variant first reported in Britain that has been spreading in Denmark despite overall declining number of new infections.

Staff at schools will undergo regular testing and parents will be required to wear facemasks on school sites.

Denmark has recorded 2,145 deaths and 198,960 cases.

PRAGUE — The economy in the Czech Republic experienced a record decline in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic.

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The preliminary figures from the Czech Statistics Office released on Tuesday show that the Czech economy contracted by 5.6% last year compared with the previous year.

It is the worst result for the economy since the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

In the last quarter of 2020, the economy expanded by 0.3% compared with the previous quarter, mainly due to demand for Czech goods from abroad. The office said local household consumption and investments were down throughout the year.

The export-oriented Czech economy relies heavily on car production, an industry badly hit by the pandemic.

BERLIN — The German language's English language import of the year for 2020 is -- surprise! -- "lockdown."

A jury of academics on Tuesday announced that the word, which has been ubiquitous in German since the coronavirus pandemic hit Europe nearly a year ago, has been chosen as "Anglicism of the year." Previous winners include "fake news" in 2016.

The runners-up were a string of pandemic-related terms that also have become established in German: "social distancing," "superspreader," "homeoffice," "homeschooling" and "shutdown."

The jury cited the "central role" that "lockdown" played in discussions of measures to combat the pandemic and its "quick integration" into Germans' vocabulary. It pointed to the appearance of offshoots such as "lockdownbedingt" (because of the lockdown) and "lockdownaehnlich" (similar to a lockdown).

Germany is currently in its second lockdown. Infection figures in the country have fallen, but it's unclear whether restrictions will be loosened in mid-February, when it is currently due to end.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Sri Lanka has reported the first death of a doctor due to COVID-19.

Health authorities said the 31-year-old doctor at a government hospital on the outskirts of Colombo died Tuesday while receiving treatment in an Intensive Care Unit.

Sri Lanka's first COVID-19 patient was detected last March, and since then 332 people have died of the coronavirus out of 64,982 confirmed cases.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The deadliest month yet of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. drew to a close with certain signs of progress: COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are plummeting, while vaccinations are picking up speed.

The question is whether the nation can stay ahead of the fast-spreading mutations of the virus.

The U.S. death toll has climbed past 443,000, with over 95,000 lives lost in January alone. Deaths are running at about 3,150 per day on average, down slightly by about 200 from their peak in mid-January.

But as the calendar turned to February on Monday, the number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 fell below 100,000 for the first time in two months. New cases of infection are averaging about 148,000 day, falling from almost a quarter-million in mid-January. And cases are trending downward in all 50 states.

SEATTLE — Authorities in Washington state are warning hospitals and other facilities giving coronavirus vaccinations not to give special access to some people, saying they will risk having their supplies of doses cut.

The state Health Department said in a statement Monday that "VIP scheduling, reserving doses for inequitable or exclusive access, and similar practices are banned and will not be tolerated."

The Seattle Times has reported that three medical systems in the region gave special vaccine access to big donors or foundation members. Two of the hospital organizations acknowledged they made a mistake in prioritizing influential people.

The Health Department's announcement says that if a vaccine provider is found to be giving out shots in an inequitable manner "we may reduce or stop allocations to that provider."

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government says it won't conduct immigration enforcement arrests at coro-

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navirus vaccination sites around the country.

In a statement Monday, the Department of Homeland Security said vaccine sites will be considered "sensitive locations" and will not be targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents except in "extraordinary circumstances."

DHS says it encourages everyone "regardless of immigration status" to get vaccinated when they are eligible under local rules.

ICE has previously included health care facilities as well as churches among the sensitive locations where arrests would generally not be carried out.

WASHINGTON — The White House is tamping down expectations for a potential boost in vaccine distribution if Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 shot is approved by federal regulators.

Andy Slavitt, the White House's deputy COVID-19 coordinator, told reporters that the single-dose shot would undoubtedly help the Biden administration meet its goal of 300 million vaccinated Americans by the end of summer. But he says: "The expectation should not be that there's an immediate, dramatic shift."

The pharmaceutical company reported strong results for the efficacy of its vaccine on Friday and is expected to file for emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration in the coming days.

Johnson & Johnson is contracted to provide 100 million doses by the end of the second quarter.

Slavitt says he did not anticipate an even distribution, but that most doses "would come towards the end of that contract."

WASHINGTON — White House coronavirus adviser Andy Slavitt says the government awarded a \$231-million contract to scale up production of a COVID-19 home test recently authorized by U.S. regulators.

For months, health experts have stressed the need for fast, widespread home testing so that people can screen themselves and avoid contact with others if they have an infection. But the vast majority of tests still require a nasal swab performed by a health worker that must be processed at high-tech laboratories.

The test kit from Australian manufacturer Ellume allows users to swab themselves at home and check their status in about 20 minutes. It's one of only three tests that consumers can use themselves, and the only one available without a doctor's prescription.

Ellume said Monday it would use the contract to construct a U.S. manufacturing plant and deliver 8.5 million tests for federal use. It did not specify a timeframe for delivery.

Also on Monday at the White House coronavirus briefing, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are down in recent weeks, but three mutations that are causing concern have been detected in the U.S.

Pakistan orders man acquitted in Pearl murder off death row

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Pakistani-British man acquitted of the 2002 gruesome beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl off death row and moved to a so-called government "safe house."

Ahmad Saeed Omar Sheikh, who has been on death row for 18 years, will be under guard and will not be allowed to leave the safe house, but he will be able to have his wife and children visit him.

"It is not complete freedom. It is a step toward freedom," said Sheikh's father, Ahmad Saeed Sheikh, who attended the hearing.

The Pakistan government has been scrambling to keep Sheikh in jail since a Supreme Court order last Thursday upheld his acquittal in the Wall Street Journal reporter's death, triggering outrage by Pearl's family and the U.S. administration.

In a final effort to overturn the acquittal, Pakistan's government as well as the Pearl family filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, asking it to review the decision to exonerate Sheikh of Pearl's murder. The family's lawyer, Faisal Siddiqi, however, said such a review had a slim chance of success because the same

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Supreme Court judges who ordered Sheikh's acquittal sit on the review panel.

The U.S. government has said that it would seek Sheikh's extradition if his acquittal is upheld. Sheikh has been indicted in the United States on Pearl's murder as well as in a 1994 kidnapping of an American citizen in Indian-ruled sector of the divided region of Kashmir. The American was eventually freed.

Sheikh was arrested by India after the 1994 kidnappings, but was among four terror suspects freed by India on Dec. 31, 1999, in exchange for the hostages on an Indian Airlines aircraft that was hijacked and taken from Nepal to then Taliban-controlled Afghan city of Kandahar.

The order sending Sheikh to a safe house would seem to be a concession to the federal government, as well as the government of southern Sindh province where Karachi is the capital. The Sindh government has refused successive orders to release Sheikh, even courting contempt charges from lower courts.

Sheikh's lawyer, Mehmood A. Sheikh, told The Associated Press that the order to send his client to the safe house was given to allow the Sindh government time to argue against his release under Pakistan's anti-terrorism law, in connection to Sheikh's affiliation with terrorist organizations .

"They have never argued or charged them with belonging to a terrorist organization," said the lawyer. He said the next court hearing about his client's continued detention would not be for another two weeks. The lawyer and Sheikh are not related.

In the government-run safe house, Sheikh will be under a 24-hour guard — often by military personnel — and will not be allowed to leave the house. Locations of such safe houses are usually kept secret; Pakistan's security establishment has several such facilities across the country.

Pearl disappeared on Jan. 23, 2002, in the port city of Karachi where he was investigating links between Pakistani militant groups and Richard C. Reid, dubbed the "shoe bomber" after his attempt to blow up a flight from Paris to Miami with explosives hidden in his shoes. Sheikh was convicted of helping lure Pearl to a meeting in the port city of Karachi, during which he was kidnapped.

Pearl's body was discovered in a shallow grave soon after a video of his beheading was delivered to the U.S. Consulate in Karachi.

The Pentagon in 2007 released a transcript in which Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, said he had killed Pearl.

"I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew Daniel Pearl," the transcript quoted Mohammed as saying. Mohammad first disclosed his role while he was held in CIA custody and subjected to waterboarding, sleep deprivation and other forms of torture. He remains in the U.S. prison in Guantanamo Bay and has never been charged with the journalist's death.

Sheikh had long denied any involvement in Pearl's death, but Pakistan's Supreme Court last month heard that he acknowledged writing a letter in 2019 admitting a minor role — raising hopes for some that he might remain behind bars.

In a series of tweets over the weekend, Pearl's family urged followers to "call your lawmakers in Pakistan, in the U.S., the world to support Danny's parents," to keep Sheikh behind bars.

Siddiqi, the Pearl family lawyer, said the original murder trial back in 2002 charged all four as one, which complicated the case and allowed the court to free all if there was doubt about the guilt of even one of the suspects. Siddiqi said at the time the prosecutor was under considerable pressure and threats from militants forced the trial to eventually be held within the prison grounds for safety reasons.

Though the U.S. has said it's ready to prosecute Sheikh, there are hurdles to his extradition. Pakistan, like the U.S., has a double jeopardy rule that prevents a person from being tried for the same offense twice. The U.S. also does not have an extradition treaty with Pakistan, although Islamabad has in the past bypassed legalities to send suspects to the U.S., including Mohammad, the alleged 9/11 mastermind.

Last week's ruling that exonerated Sheikh also exonerated another three men accused in Pearl's murder who had been serving life sentences. They too were ordered on Tuesday to be held in a safe house.

Pakistan has previously sent many suspects in high-profile cases to safe houses. In 2018, a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, who was acquitted of blasphemy charges after spending eight years on death row, was held in a safe house until her acquittal was reviewed and she eventually was able to leave Pakistan

for safety in Canada in 2019.

Kremlin foe Navalny faces court that may jail him for years

By DARIA LITVINOVA and VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny faced a court hearing Tuesday that could end with him being sent to prison for years and fuel more protests against the Kremlin.

The 44-year-old Navalny, an anti-corruption investigator who is the most prominent critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities deny the charge and claim, despite tests by several European labs, that they have no proof he was poisoned.

Russia's penitentiary service alleges that Navalny violated the probation conditions of his suspended sentence from a 2014 money laundering conviction that he has rejected as politically motivated. It has asked the Simonovsky District Court in Moscow to turn his 3 1/2-year suspended sentence into one that he must serve in prison.

Navalny and his lawyers have argued that while he was recovering in Germany from the poisoning, he couldn't register with Russian authorities in person as required by his probation. Navalny also insisted that his due process rights were crudely violated during his arrest and described his jailing as a travesty of justice.

"I came back to Moscow after I completed the course of treatment," Navalny said during Tuesday's hearing. "What else could I have done?"

Navalny's jailing has triggered massive protests across Russia over the past two weekends, in which tens of thousands took to the streets to demand his release, chanting slogans against Putin. Police detained over 5,750 people during Sunday's rallies, including more than 1,900 in Moscow, the biggest number the nation has seen since Soviet times. Most were released after being handed court summons, and face fines or jail terms of seven to 15 days. Several people faced criminal charges over alleged violence against police.

Navalny's team called for another demonstration Tuesday outside the Moscow court building, but police were out in force there, cordoning off the nearby streets and making random arrests. More than 230 people were detained, according to the OVD-Info group that monitors arrests.

Some Navalny supporters still managed to approach the court building. A young woman climbed a large pile of snow across the street from the courthouse and held up a poster saying "Freedom to Navalny." Less than a minute later, a police officer took her away.

After his arrest, Navalny's team released a two-hour YouTube video featuring an opulent Black Sea residence allegedly built for Putin. The video has been viewed over 100 million times, fueling discontent as ordinary Russians struggle with an economic downturn, the coronavirus pandemic and widespread corruption during Putin's years in office.

Putin insisted last week that neither he nor his relatives own any of the properties mentioned in the video, and his long time confidant, construction magnate Arkady Rotenberg, claimed that he owns it.

As part of efforts to squelch the protests, the authorities have targeted Navalny's associates and activists across the country. His brother Oleg, top ally Lyubov Sobol and several others were put under house arrest for two months and face criminal charges of violating coronavirus restrictions.

The jailing of Navalny and the crackdown on protests have stoked international outrage, with Western officials calling for his release and condemning the arrests of demonstrators.

"Sweden and the EU are concerned about the situation with democracy, civil society and human rights in Russia," Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, the current chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said during talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow.

The diplomat said Navalny's poisoning and the response by Russian authorities to the street protests will be part of the discussion.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who will visit Moscow later this week, has criticized the detentions and the disproportionate use of force against protesters, emphasizing that Russia must comply with its

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international commitments on human rights.

Russia has dismissed U.S. and EU officials' criticism as meddling in its domestic affairs and said that Navalny's current situation is a procedural matter for the court, not an issue for the government.

More than a dozen Western diplomats attended Tuesday's court hearing, and Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Maria Zakharova charged that their presence was part of efforts by the West to contain Russia, adding that it could be an attempt to exert "psychological pressure" on the judge.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Russia is ready for dialogue about Navalny, but sternly warned that it wouldn't take Western criticism into account.

"We are ready to patiently explain everything, but we aren't going to react to mentor-style statements or take them into account," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Hundreds of Myanmar lawmakers under house arrest after coup

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Hundreds of members of Myanmar's Parliament were under house arrest Tuesday, confined to their government housing complex and guarded by soldiers a day after the military seized power in a coup and detained senior politicians including the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

One of the detained lawmakers said he and about 400 others spent a sleepless night, worried they might be taken away, but were otherwise OK. They were able to speak with one another inside the compound and communicate to the outside by phone, but were not allowed to leave the housing complex in Naypyitaw, the capital. He said Suu Kyi was not being held with them.

"We had to stay awake and be alert," the lawmaker told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity out of concern for his safety. He said police were inside the complex, where members of Suu Kyi's party and various smaller parties were being held, and soldiers were outside it.

The coup came the morning lawmakers had gathered in the capital for the opening of a new parliamentary session. The military said the seizure was necessary in part because the government had not acted on the military's claims of fraud in November's elections — in which Suu Kyi's ruling party won a majority of the parliamentary seats up for grabs — and claimed the takeover was legal under the constitution. But the move was widely condemned abroad.

The coup highlights the extent to which the generals have ultimately maintained control in Myanmar, despite more than a decade of talk about democratic reforms. Western countries had greeted the move toward democracy enthusiastically, removing sanctions they had in place for years.

The takeover now presents a test for the international community. U.S. President Joe Biden called the military's actions "a direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law" and threatened new sanctions. The U.N. Security Council is expected to meet about the military's actions on Tuesday.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party released a statement Tuesday calling for the military to honor the results of the election and release all of those detained — as have the leaders of many other countries.

"The commander-in-chief seizing the power of the nation is against the constitution and it also neglects the sovereign power of people," the party said in a statement on one of its Facebook pages.

An announcement read on military-owned Myawaddy TV on Monday said Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing would be in charge of the country for one year. Later in the day, his office announced a new Cabinet composed of current and former generals and former advisers to a previous government headed by former Gen. Thein Sein.

It wasn't yet clear how Myanmar's people will react to the seizure. On Tuesday in Yangon, the country's biggest city, the streets were quieter than usual, but markets were open, street vendors were still cooking food and taxis and buses were still running.

There were no outward signs of heavy security — but an unease has set in. People were removing the once ubiquitous red flags of Suu Kyi's party from their homes and businesses.

In 1988 and 2007, public uprisings against the military ended in bloodshed.

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Bo Bo Oo, a National League for Democracy lawmaker and former political prisoner, said the party was not currently planning street protests, but is exploring legal options in an effort to take power back from the military.

"We are working to settle the problem peacefully," he said. "Right now we are not planning for a big protest. But we have to practice some form of civil disobedience."

He said he believed he could be arrested at any time.

"For many years the Burmese people have worked hard for democracy. It's been such a long journey," he said, using an alternate name for Myanmar's people. "And now this is one of the worst moments in our country's history."

The takeover also marks a shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate who had lived under house arrest for years as she tried to push her country toward democracy and then became its de facto leader after her party won elections in 2015.

Suu Kyi had been a fierce critic of the army during her years in detention. But after her shift from democracy icon to politician, she worked with the generals, who despite allowing elections maintained control of key ministries and guaranteed themselves enough seats in Parliament to have veto power over any constitutional changes.

While the 75-year-old has remained popular at home, Suu Kyi's deference to the generals — going so far as to defend their crackdown on Rohingya Muslims that the United States and others have labeled genocide — has left her reputation tarnished abroad.

This story has been corrected to show that one of the reasons the military gave for taking power was the government's failure to delay the opening of Parliament. It did not mention its failure to delay the election.

China arrests suspects in fake COVID-19 vaccine ring

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Chinese police have arrested more than 80 suspected members of a criminal group that was manufacturing and selling fake COVID-19 vaccines, including to other countries.

Police in Beijing and in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces broke up the group led by a suspect surnamed Kong that was producing the fake vaccines, which consisted of a simple saline solution, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The vaccines were sold in China and to other countries, although it was unclear which ones. The group had been active since last September, according to state media.

"China has already reported the situation to the relevant countries," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing Tuesday.

"The Chinese government highly values vaccine safety and will continue to take efforts to strictly prosecute any counterfeits, fake sales and illegal business, and other related actions that involve vaccines," Wang said. "At the same time, China will strengthen our law enforcement cooperation with the relevant countries, to earnestly prevent the spread of this type of illegal and criminal action." He did not offer further details.

China has a long history of vaccine scandals resulting from manufacturing issues as well as business practices. In 2016, police arrested two people who were in charge of a ring that sold millions of improperly stored vaccines across the country.

In response to recent scandals, China reformed vaccine safety regulations and increased criminal penalties for those caught making counterfeits.

Domestically, many Chinese citizens did not trust homegrown vaccines and surveys previously showed that trust in vaccines fell after scandals like the one in 2016. However, since the pandemic has struck, confidence has been high. A total of 74% of respondents in a recent survey published in Chinese business magazine Caixin said they would take a COVID-19 vaccine if it was available.

China has at least seven COVID-19 vaccines in the last stage of clinical trials, and has one that has been approved for domestic use, made by state-owned Sinopharm.

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Chinese vaccine makers have seized the opportunity provided by the pandemic to go global, with Sino-pharm and other Chinese companies making deals or donating their vaccines in at least 27 countries around the world.

Domestically, China has given more than 24 million doses of its homegrown vaccine candidates, as part of a mass vaccination campaign. It has so far refrained from giving the vaccine to the most elderly, instead targeting key groups such as medical workers and workers who work in food-related industries, as well as adults between the ages of 18 and 59.

Associated Press researcher Liu Zheng in Beijing contributed to this report.

Biden expands quick bid to undo Trump's immigration policies

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The Biden administration on Tuesday announced steps to address harm to thousands of families that were separated at the U.S.-Mexico border, expanding efforts to quickly undo relentless changes to immigration policy over the last four years.

President Joe Biden planned to sign orders on family separation, border security and legal immigration, bringing to nine the number of executive actions on immigration during his first two weeks in office. Details were thin, but the moves aim to reverse many of former President Donald Trump's policies to deter immigration, both legal and illegal.

Alejandro Mayorkas, whose nomination as Homeland Security secretary awaits Senate confirmation, will lead a task force on family separation, focused largely on reuniting parents and children who remain apart. It is unclear how many, but about 5,500 children have been identified in court documents as having been separated during Trump's presidency, including about 600 whose parents have yet to be found by a court-appointed committee.

"The task force will report regularly to the President and recommend steps to prevent such tragedies from occurring again," the Biden administration said in a statement.

The review of border security includes a policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexican border cities for hearings in U.S. immigration court. It is a step toward fulfilling a campaign pledge to end the Remain in Mexico policy, known officially as Migrant Protection Protocols, which enrolled nearly 70,000 asylum-seekers since it began in January 2019.

The White House said it will "create a humane asylum system" by rescinding or reconsidering Trump policies that caused "chaos, cruelty and confusion." It warned that it will take time, which may cause grumbling among some pro-immigration advocates.

"The situation at the border will not transform overnight, due in large part to the damage done over the last four years," the White House said in a statement. "But the President is committed to an approach that keeps our country safe, strong, and prosperous and that also aligns with our values."

Roberta Jacobson, a top Biden aide on border issues, asked Spanish-language media on Friday to discourage audiences from coming to the U.S. border. "It is not the moment," she said in Spanish, adding that the journey was "very dangerous, and we are in the middle of creating a new system."

The White House will also do a "top-to-bottom review of recent regulations, policies, and guidance that have set up barriers to our legal immigration system." It will include a review of Trump's "public charge rule," which makes it more difficult for people who use government benefits to obtain green cards.

The moves demonstrate that, just as Trump remade immigration policies from the White House, Biden can undo them with the stroke of a pen — some more easily than others. On his first day in office, Biden halted work on a border wall with Mexico, lifted a travel ban on several predominantly Muslim countries and reversed plans to exclude people in the country illegally from the 2020 census. He also ordered efforts to preserve the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA, which has shielded hundreds of thousands of people who came to the U.S. as children from deportation.

More lasting changes must pass Congress, a daunting job that Trump and his predecessors Barack

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Obama and George W. Bush failed to achieve. Also on his first day in office, Biden proposed legislation to give legal status and a path to citizenship to everyone in the country who doesn't have it — an estimated 11 million people.

Biden promised far-reaching changes on immigration during his campaign, but it was unclear how quickly he would tackle the lightning-rod issue. His first-day actions delighted and surprised many pro-immigration advocates who are now being asked for patience.

It is unclear when Biden will lift bans on many temporary work visas and green cards that took effect after the coronavirus pandemic struck or when he will stop allowing authorities to immediately expel people at the border on public health grounds without an opportunity to seek asylum.

Esther Olavarria, deputy director of the White House Domestic Policy Council for immigration, said at a U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting last month that an executive order aimed at "restoring sanity at the U.S.-Mexico border" would end the Remain in Mexico policy and agreements that the Trump administration struck with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras for the U.S. to reject asylum applicants and instead send them to those Central American countries with an opportunity to seek protection there.

Olavarria told the mayors to expect an order that restores the U.S. refugee resettlement program after dramatic cuts under Trump but that measure was not included in Tuesday's announcements.

EXPLAINER: How Nobel Peace Prize nominations come about

By JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Belarusian opposition figures, Hong Kong-pro-democracy activists, the global Black Lives Matter movement, a jailed Russian opposition leader and an American voting rights champion are among this year's nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize.

There is no shortage of causes or candidates for the Norwegian Nobel Committee to consider for what arguably remains the world's most prestigious prize. But getting a nomination isn't the same being in the running for the award.

Here's a look at the Nobel nomination process:

WHO CAN NOMINATE CANDIDATES FOR THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE?

Heads of state or politicians serving at a national level, university professors, directors of foreign policy institutes, past Nobel Prize recipients and members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee are among those deemed qualified to submit a nomination for the prize.

A nomination for oneself will not be considered, according to the committee.

The nominations aren't announced by the committee, but those doing the nominating may choose to make it public, raising publicity both for the nominee and the proposer.

"There is huge benefit in being nominated, but then comes the 'quality criteria,'" Henrik Urdal of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, a body that is independent of the Nobel committee, told The Associated Press.

WHAT IS THE NOMINATION PROCESS?

The deadline for nominations was Sunday at midnight Oslo time. Once all nominations have come in, the very secretive board will sift through the written nominations and validate them. They need to check people's affiliations and whether the nomination meets the criteria. The committee also can add names themselves, Urdal said.

That all takes time and it won't likely be until the end of February or early March that the committee will say how many people or organizations have been nominated.

HOW ABOUT THE 2020 PRIZE?

The U.N. World Food Program won the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. It was among 318 candidates nominated, both people and organizations, but those names are being kept secret for 50 years by the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

WHO ARE AMONG THE 2021 NOMINEES?

Some of those who have proposed nominees for this year have publicly announced their choices.

For that reason, we know that among the 2021 nominees are exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviat-

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Iana Tsikhanouskaya and two other Belarus democracy activists, Veronika Tsepikalo and Maria Kolesnikova; the Black Lives Matter movement; Alexei Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic; Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate who has become a leading voting rights advocate; and former White House adviser Jared Kushner and his deputy, Avi Berkowitz, who negotiated a series of Mideast agreements known as the Abraham Accords.

Groups nominated in 2021 include the World Health Organization for its role in addressing the coronavirus pandemic; NATO; Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF; and Polish judges defending civil rights.

WHY WERE THOSE PEOPLE OR GROUPS NOMINATED?

In his nomination statement, Norwegian lawmaker Petter Eide said the Black Lives Matter movement's "calls for systemic change have spread around the world, forcing other countries to grapple with racism within their own societies."

Another Norwegian lawmaker, Ola Elvestuen, tapped Navalny, an opposition leader who returned to Russia in January after spending five months in Germany recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning. He called him "the clearest voice for human rights and democracy in Russia now."

Abrams was nominated by Norwegian lawmaker Lars Haltbrekken who said "Abrams' work follows in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s footsteps in the fight for equality before the law and for civil rights." Nothing the political divisions in the United States, Haltbrekken said "the Peace Prize should point out a direction for what kind of working methods one should use if one is dissatisfied with the society one lives in."

Norwegian lawmaker Geir Sigbjørn Toskedal named the three Belarusian women "for their fight for fair elections and inspiration for peaceful opposition to the illegitimate regime in Belarus."

A professor emeritus of Harvard Law School, attorney Alan Dershowitz, named Kushner and Berkowitz for negotiating deals between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. He said they fulfilled "the daunting criteria set out by Alfred Nobel in his will."

WHO WAS NOMINATED BEFORE BUT DIDN'T GET IT?

Urdal said well-known figures are often nominated but don't win: "It is not something new."

Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler was nominated in 1939 by Swedish lawmaker E.G.C. Brandt, who said later that was meant as satire.

Most recently Kushner's father-in-law, former President Donald Trump, was nominated for the 2020 award but didn't get it. Neither did Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist known worldwide for pressing for tougher action on curbing climate change.

WHEN WILL THE 2021 WINNER BE ANNOUNCED?

The committees announce their decisions for all the Nobel prizes over a series of days in October. The peace prize and other Nobel awards are presented to the winners on Dec. 10, the anniversary of founder Alfred Nobel's death. In 2020, the Nobel prizes came with a 10-million krona (\$1.1 million) cash award — which often is shared — along with diplomas and gold medals.

Read all AP stories on the Nobels at <https://apnews.com/nobel-prizes>.

Israel's Labor party looks to new leader for revival

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Last week, Israel's Labor party appeared headed for extinction, with polls indicating it wouldn't win enough votes in upcoming elections to enter parliament. But following the election of progressive lawmaker Merav Michaeli as its new leader, the party is showing signs of life.

Labor, home of the country's founding leaders and for decades its ruling party, has begun to climb in opinion polls, and Michaeli is determined to once again make it a major force in Israeli politics.

Michaeli, a firebrand feminist, promotes a message that has rarely been heard in Israeli politics in recent years. She seeks social justice, equality for all Israelis and peace with the Palestinians. Yet she also won't rule out sitting in a coalition with right-wing parties, likely hindering her agenda, if that realizes the shared

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goal of ousting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"You can disagree with me ideologically but what is clear is that I am here and I fight for equality and peace," Michaeli told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "I believe that Labor is not dead, it is essential for Israel's future."

Her election appears to have given Labor a jolt of momentum. But with many traditional voters having left the party, she has her work cut out for her ahead of March elections. Israel's center-left camp is fractured and right-wing parties, led by Netanyahu's Likud, remain dominant.

Opinion polls in recent days have projected that Labor under Michaeli will win five seats in Israel's 120-seat Knesset. That could jump in the coming days if, as expected, smaller parties with little chance of making it into parliament withdraw from the race ahead of a Thursday deadline. Although the projections are far below Labor's glory days, even a modest showing could make Michaeli a kingmaker in a coalition of midsize parties opposed to Netanyahu.

Labor guided Israel to independence in 1948 and led the country for its first three decades, embedding social democratic values most evident today in its universal health care, especially amid the pandemic. Although it led Israel during the 1967 Mideast war and built the first settlements in the occupied West Bank, Labor later signed the landmark Oslo peace accords with the Palestinians and today favors a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Yet it has struggled to remain relevant over the past two decades as peacemaking with the Palestinians ground to a halt, other options in the center-left emerged and much of the electorate appears to have embraced Netanyahu's hard-line ideology.

Michaeli took over Labor after a trying year when it entered parliament with historically low support. The party was torn apart after its former leader joined Netanyahu's government despite pledges not to, driving away lifelong voters. Michaeli chose to remain in the opposition and says she will never sit in a coalition under Netanyahu for a slew of reasons, among them his three corruption indictments.

She believes her decision to stay out of the government, combined with her message of social justice, will bring voters back.

"The fact that I have managed to lift up Labor, it's still early, but I think people have more faith that it's possible," she said.

Michaeli, 54, has long been a recognizable figure in Israel, working for years as a journalist and women's rights activist before entering politics in 2013 as a Labor lawmaker. She is widely known for her alternative views. She shuns marriage, although she is in a long-term relationship with a popular late-night TV host, and says she has never wanted children in a society sprung from the biblical commandment to procreate. She is known for her signature all black looks, which she has said are meant to downplay her body and sexuality.

When she withdrew to the opposition, she promised: "We won't let the Labor party die." Now at the helm, she will be tested on whether she can fulfill that pledge and stabilize a party that has had six leaders since Netanyahu took power in 2009.

Yossi Beilin, a former longtime Labor minister whose son challenged Michaeli in the leadership race, welcomed her election.

"The eulogies were premature," he said. "Merav is intelligent and ideological and she proved herself in the Knesset and wasn't tempted to join the last government," he said.

While never having served as a Cabinet minister, Michaeli has been an active lawmaker and a leading progressive voice in the Knesset, supporting women's rights, LGBT causes and the rights of workers in addition to seeking peace with the Palestinians.

Her first step as leader was to withdraw the party from the current caretaker government, prompting the two Labor ministers to leave the party. She has pledged equal representation for women in the party list. And she intends to woo back Labor's traditional voter base, which largely fled to other less established parties.

Michaeli attributed the center-left's decline to years of "incitement and delegitimization" by Netanyahu

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and the right. But she said some mistakes were self-inflicted, like the party repeatedly joining right-wing governments whose values were contradictory to its own.

"They became enablers of right-wing governments and then it's clear that the party loses its credibility and its ability to be an alternative and that must be rebuilt," she said.

Tal Schneider, political correspondent for the Times of Israel, said Michaeli has shown the political prowess needed to push the party in a new direction. But she said Michaeli's win doesn't change the disarray in Israel's center-left camp.

"The problem is deeper," she said. "But there is no doubt that she saved the party from extinction."

Biden tries to show US as democracy beacon post-Capitol riot

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Less than two weeks in office, President Joe Biden is facing two critical tests of whether the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol has damaged America's standing as a beacon for democracy.

Protests in Russia and a military coup in Myanmar come as American credibility on the world stage has plummeted after last month's storming of the Capitol by a pro-Donald Trump mob looking to stop the certification of Biden's election victory.

That adds to the weight on Biden as he seeks to fulfill a campaign pledge to dramatically reposition the U.S. as a global leader following four years of a Trump foreign policy driven by an "America First" mantra. That policy was marked by the frequent disparagement of democratic allies and the occasional embrace of authoritarian leaders.

Biden's top diplomat, Antony Blinken, acknowledged the difficulty.

"I think there's no doubt that the attack on our own democracy on Jan. 6 creates an even greater challenge for us to be carrying the banner of democracy and freedom and human rights around the world because, for sure, people in other countries are saying to us, 'Well, why don't you look at yourselves first?'" the secretary of state said in an interview with NBC News.

Blinken added, "The difference, though, between us and so many other countries is that when we are challenged, including when we challenge ourselves — we're doing it in full daylight with full transparency."

Biden, in the early days of his presidency, has sought to send the message in a series of calls with foreign leaders that America is back.

He's reassured Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that the U.S. has its support in an ongoing territorial dispute with China over islets in the East China Sea. He's sought to reset the relationship with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who was belittled by Trump as "dishonest & weak." And he's told Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador that the U.S. would send \$4 billion to help development in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala — nations whose hardships have spawned tides of migration through Mexico toward the United States.

"The United States remains a country in the world that is looked to for leadership," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters. "It's going to take some time, but he's certainly committed to doing that."

But the crises in Myanmar and Russia present Biden with difficult tests of his promise to reestablish global leadership that are likely to be far more complicated than mending fences with traditional allies.

Biden on Monday threatened to slap new sanctions on Myanmar after a coup that saw the military arrest the civilian leaders of its government, calling the episode "a direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law."

In his first call with Russian President Vladimir Putin as counterparts last week, Biden raised concerns about the detention of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and the crackdown on supporters backing his arrest. The mass arrests have only accelerated in the days since the two leaders spoke as protests have continued across the country.

"For Putin, he looks at the Capitol riot and sees it as more evidence of his worldview, a continuation of the degradation of liberalism in the world," said Michael McFaul, who served as U.S. ambassador to Russia in the Obama administration. "The Biden election doesn't mean much to him about his theory about liberal democracy. Whereas Putin's opponents are very encouraged by the election of President Biden because

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it shows that American democratic institutions were resilient.”

To that end, Navalny’s supporters wrote to Biden over the weekend urging him to take meaningful action with sanctions against members of Putin’s inner circle to demonstrate that he’s serious about reclaiming the U.S. role as a champion of democracy.

“Their argument is, If you just sanction a bunch of no-name, low-level colonels ... that’s exactly who Putin is expecting,” McFaul said. “They want the Biden administration to sanction the economic actors in the Putin regime, and they’ve made it easy for the Biden administration in they’ve named them all in their seven-page letter.”

Rep. Adam Schiff, a California Democrat and chair of the House Intelligence Committee, drew a line from Trump to the coup in Myanmar. Trump had made baseless accusations of widespread voter fraud that were rejected by multiple courts as well as Trump’s own Justice Department.

An announcement read on Myanmar’s military-owned Myawaddy TV explained that the seizure was necessary because the government had not acted on the military’s unsubstantiated claims of fraud in the Southeast Asian nation’s recent elections and because it allowed the election to go ahead despite the coronavirus pandemic.

“When America speaks and acts, the world watches, and when our leaders propagates conspiracy theories and subvert democracy here at home, it sets a dangerous example for the rest of the world,” Schiff said.

Adversaries such as China, Iran and Venezuela pointed to the Capitol riot as evidence of the fragility of U.S. democracy. Even some allies said the scene was unsettling and has caused them to reconsider the United States’ position as the self-proclaimed beacon of democracy.

“After something like this, I believe it would be very difficult for the world to see the United States as a symbol of democracy,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelinskiy said in an interview with “Axios on HBO.”

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Trump lawyer: Impeachment case ‘undemocratic,’ ill-advised

By ERIC TUCKER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are using the upcoming Senate impeachment trial of Donald Trump as a political “weapon” to bar the former president from seeking office again and are pursuing a case that is “undemocratic” and unconstitutional, one of his lawyers said Monday night.

Trump faces trial next week on accusations that he incited a harrowing and deadly siege at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, when a mob of loyalists in town for a rally supporting the president overran the police and stormed the building. The House passed a single article of impeachment against Trump one week before he left office, A trial would allow Democrats to present evidence against Trump and hold him publicly accountable for the attack.

However, whether a Senate trial is constitutional is a point of contention because Trump is no longer in office and, if convicted, cannot be removed from an office he doesn’t occupy. Democrats point to an 1876 impeachment of a secretary of war who had already resigned and to opinions by many legal scholars. The Senate could vote to bar Trump from holding federal office if he were convicted, which is a goal Democrats support.

On the eve of expected legal briefs from lawyers for both sides, Trump attorney David Schoen’s appearance on Fox News forecast some of the arguments he plans to make at the trial, calling the case needlessly divisive as well as unconstitutional and undemocratic.

“It’s also the most ill-advised legislative action that I’ve seen in my lifetime,” Schoen said.

Trump is the first president in American history to be impeached twice. He was acquitted at a Senate trial last year over his contacts with his Ukrainian counterpart. Impeachment, Schoen said, “is the weapon they’ve tried to use against him.”

The new case was an effort to bar Trump from ever running for office again, Schoen said, “and that’s about as undemocratic as you can get.”

Schoen, a criminal defense and civil rights lawyer, and Bruce Castor, a former county prosecutor in

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Pennsylvania, were announced as Trump's legal team on Sunday evening, one day after it was revealed that the former president had parted ways with another set of attorneys in what one person described as a mutual decision.

In an interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Schoen said he did not plan to argue that Trump lost the election because of fraud, as Trump has repeatedly insisted, and would instead argue that the trial itself is unconstitutional since Trump has already left office and that his words were protected by the First Amendment and did not incite a riot.

House Democrats plan to lay out what happened on Jan. 6 in graphic detail — an effort to get through to Senate Republicans who have largely avoided talking about the attack itself and Trump's role in it, instead focusing on the process of the impeachment trial. They are expected to play videos and verbally recount the violence of the day in hopes of stirring the Republicans, most of whom fled the Senate that day as the rioters broke in.

The nine House impeachment managers who will argue the case also are expected to lay out how they believe Trump's actions over the previous several months led up to it and eventually incited the insurrectionists to act.

Their arguments will include a look at Trump's "prolonged effort" to persuade his supporters to believe his false claims that the election was stolen — and describe how his pleas for them to come to Washington and his words immediately before the attack directly caused it.

The mob that broke into the Capitol as the House and the Senate tallied electoral votes not only ransacked the building but repeatedly called out for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and for Vice President Mike Pence, who was in the building to preside over the count.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

'We are facing extinction': Black farmers in steep decline

By ROXANA HEGEMAN Associated Press

BELLE PLAINE, Kan. (AP) — After Gil Alexander's death left no active Black farmers in a historic Kansas community once home to hundreds, Alexander's nephew and his wife gave up their jobs in Arizona to try and save the family farm.

But Lateef and Carrie Dowdell encountered steep hurdles after arriving in northwestern Kansas in 2017. The bank swiftly foreclosed on the land, and the U.S. Agriculture Department told them their lack of farming experience meant the agency couldn't provide any help.

"I definitely feel it was discrimination," Lateef Dowdell said. "All they really wanted to do really is focus on the farmers that were assisting Gil as far as sharecropping. But as far as helping me, no."

Agricultural communities across the country have seen a steep decline in Black farmers for generations, and nowhere is more illustrative of that than Nicodemus, where Alexander grew wheat and other crops. Nicodemus was the most famous of the Midwestern settlements where former slaves known as "exodusters" migrated more than a century ago, hopeful that farming their own land would help them escape racism and poverty.

Black farmers made up 14% of the U.S. farming population in 1910 but today account for just 1.4%.

Dowdell was only able to keep Alexander's house and the original 120-acre homestead that was not part of the bank loan. He now runs a restaurant in nearby Hill City, and the acreage he was able to keep sits idle as grassland.

"Once Gil passed, it just didn't seem like they cared anymore," Lateef Dowdell said. "They just wanted to get the land and move on."

It was not that long ago that Black farmers in Nicodemus owned farms of 1,000-plus acres, dwarfing the average 50-acre farms operated by their peers in the South.

Most family farms across the country have been hit in recent years by such things as market volatility, poor weather and consolidations spurred by technological advances. On top of that, many Black farmers

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say racial bias at all levels of government has effectively pushed them off their land.

They say they have less access to credit and technical support than their white counterparts, keeping them from obtaining funds to operate their farms, modernize equipment or buy more land. Even some minority farmers who received USDA loans say the money arrived too late or came with unusual conditions about how they could spend it.

For decades, the department's Farm Service Agency had relied on local loan authorities in its oftentimes all-white county committees to make loan decisions. Those local county committees now have more of an advisory role but remain influential.

"They do not want Black farmers to have any farm ground whatsoever. Farm ground gives you power, not a lot, but it gives you some power," said Rod Bradshaw, a 67-year-old Black farmer who raises wheat, cattle and milo on 2,000 acres near Jetmore, Kansas.

The descendants of Nicodemus settlers who still own farmland have mostly leased their land out to white farmers, unable or unwilling to obtain farm operating loans or purchase farm equipment. Many other farmers who passed away could not leave their land to their families because of the debt.

"There has been a lot of Black land lost in Kansas in these last 21 years — and it is devastating," JohnElla Holmes, a Nicodemus resident and executive director of the Kansas Black Farmers Association.

The class-action Pigford lawsuit that the government settled in 1999 for \$1.25 billion was supposed to help farmers who claimed they were unfairly denied loans and other government assistance. But few Black farmers in Kansas got any relief under the settlement, Holmes said.

When the state's Black Farmers Association was formed 21 years ago in the wake the Pigford settlement, the group had 53 members, she said. Today, only about 13 remain scattered across Kansas.

In the late 1800s nearly 100 Black farming families settled around Morton City, one of a half-dozen Black settlements spread across Kansas that have been obliterated over time. Bradshaw said he is the only descendant of those Morton City settlers still farming his own ground.

Bradshaw, who has been farming since buying his first ground in 1976, has made several discrimination complaints with Agriculture Department over the years, and his claim seeking relief under the Pigford lawsuit was denied.

The Agriculture Department during the Trump administration defended its handling of discrimination complaints, saying in an email to The Associated Press that its Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights oversees efforts to ensure programs are free of unlawful discrimination.

During the Trump administration, the Agriculture Department never filled the position of assistant secretary for civil rights. However, the agency said that the vacancy didn't hamper its ability to ensure farm programs are free of unlawful discrimination. It received more than 3,700 such complaints since 2017 and processed about 1,300 during that time, the department said.

USDA also noted in the email that last year it awarded more than \$19 million in grants for training, outreach and technical assistance to socially disadvantaged ranchers.

Many Black farmers say it's still not enough. They're hoping that now that Democrats control both houses of Congress, they'll revive legislation aimed at remedying historical inequities in farming. The Justice for Black Farmers Act, which was introduced in November, seeks to protect remaining Black farmers from losing their land, provide land grants and reform USDA's civil rights process.

"Nicodemus is a clear picture that we are facing extinction as active farmers in this country," said John Boyd Jr., a Virginia farmer who is president of the National Black Farmers Association. "So here today in 2021 that there is not one Black farmer that is tilling his own soil and pulling his plow and disc harrowing the ground is disheartening."

Marilyn Manson denies Evan Rachel Wood's abuse allegations

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rocker Marilyn Manson was dropped by his record label on Monday after actor Evan Rachel Wood accused her ex-fiancé of sexual and other physical abuse, alleging she was "manipu-

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lated into submission" during their relationship.

Manson called the allegations "horrible distortions of reality."

Wood, who stars on HBO's "Westworld," had spoken frequently in recent years about being abused in a relationship but did not name the person until she posted Monday on Instagram.

"The name of my abuser is Brian Warner, also known to the world as Marilyn Manson," Wood said. "He started grooming me when I was a teenager and horrifically abused me for years."

Manson's label, Loma Vista Recordings, said in a statement that after the "disturbing allegations," it will "cease to further promote his current album" and has "also decided not to work with Marilyn Manson on any future projects."

Wood and Manson's relationship became public in 2007 when he was 38 and she was 19, and they were briefly engaged in 2010 before breaking up.

Wood, now 33, said in her post that Manson left her "brainwashed and manipulated into submission."

"I am done living in fear of retaliation, slander, or blackmail. I am here to expose this dangerous man and call out the many industries that have enabled him, before he ruins any more lives," the post added. She concluded, "I stand with the many victims who will no longer be silent."

Manson responded with his own Instagram post Monday night.

"Obviously my art and life have long been magnets for controversy, but these recent claims about me are horrible distortions of reality," his post said. "My intimate relationships have always been entirely consensual with like-minded partners. Regardless of how — and why — others are now choosing to misrepresent the past, that is the truth."

It was not immediately clear whether Wood has gone to authorities with any of her allegations, and a representative did not immediately respond when asked via email whether she had.

In 2018, Los Angeles County prosecutors declined to file charges against Manson over allegations of assault, battery and sexual assault dating to 2011, saying they were limited by statutes of limitations and a lack of corroboration. The accuser in that case was identified only as a social acquaintance of Manson.

He denied the allegations through his attorney at the time.

In 2017, Wood was one of thousands of women who identified themselves as victims of sexual harassment or assault amid the #MeToo movement.

"Being raped once made it easier to be raped again. I instinctually shut down. My body remembered, so it protected me. I disappeared. #metoo," Wood wrote at the time as part of a series of tweets on her experience.

In 2018, she testified about her abuse to a House Judiciary subcommittee as she sought to have a Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights passed in all 50 states.

"My experience with domestic violence was this: Toxic mental, physical and sexual abuse which started slow but escalated over time," she told the committee.

Wood began acting as a child, gaining fame and a Golden Globe nomination for playing a troubled adolescent in 2003's "Thirteen."

For three seasons she has played Dolores Abernathy, a sentient android, on HBO's "Westworld" and has been nominated for a Golden Globe and an Emmy Award for the role.

Manson, 52, became a household name in the mid-1990s with a series of hit rock albums and used a stage persona designed to shock and stoke controversy.

The Associated Press does not normally name people who say they were victims of sexual assault but is naming Wood because of her decision to speak out publicly.

Associated Press Writers Mark Kennedy and Mesfin Fekadu contributed to this story.

Biden meets Republicans on virus aid, but no quick deal

By LISA MASCARO, JOSH BOAK and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden told Republican senators during a two-hour meeting Monday night he's unwilling to settle on an insufficient coronavirus aid package after they pitched their slimmed down \$618 billion proposal that's a fraction of the \$1.9 trillion he is seeking.

No compromise was reached in the lengthy session, Biden's first with lawmakers at the White House, and Democrats in Congress pushed ahead with groundwork for approving his COVID relief plan with or without Republican votes. Despite the Republican group's appeal for bipartisanship, as part of Biden's efforts to unify the country, the president made it clear he won't delay aid in hopes of winning GOP support.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that while there were areas of agreement, "the president also reiterated his view that Congress must respond boldly and urgently, and noted many areas which the Republican senators' proposal does not address."

She said, "He will not slow down work on this urgent crisis response, and will not settle for a package that fails to meet the moment."

The two sides are far apart, with the Republican group of 10 senators focused primarily on the health care crisis and smaller \$1,000 direct aid to Americans, and Biden leading Democrats toward a more sweeping rescue package, three times the size, to shore up households, local governments and a partly shuttered economy.

On a fast track, the goal is to have COVID relief approved by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires, testing the ability of the new administration and Congress to deliver, with political risks for all sides from failure.

Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine called the meeting a "frank and very useful" conversation, noting that the president also filled in some details on his proposal.

"All of us are concerned about struggling families, teetering small businesses and an overwhelmed health care system," said Collins, flanked by other senators outside the White House.

Republicans are tapping into bipartisan urgency to improve the nation's vaccine distribution and vastly expand virus testing with \$160 billion in aid. That is similar to what Biden has proposed. But from there, the two plans drastically diverge.

The GOP's \$1,000 direct payments would go to fewer households than the \$1,400 Biden has proposed, and the Republicans offer only a fraction of what he wants to reopen schools.

They also would give nothing to states, money that Democrats argue is just as important, with \$350 billion in Biden's plan to keep police, fire and other workers on the job.

Gone are Democratic priorities such as a gradual lifting of the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Wary Democrats pushed ahead at the Capitol, unwilling to take too much time in courting GOP support that may not materialize or in delivering too meager a package that they believe doesn't address the scope of the nation's health crisis and economic problems.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned that history is filled with "the costs of small thinking."

House and Senate Democrats released a separate budget resolution Monday a step toward approving Biden's package with a reconciliation process that wouldn't depend on Republican support for passage.

"The cost of inaction is high and growing, and the time for decisive action is now," Schumer and Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement.

The accelerating talks came as the Congressional Budget Office delivered mixed economic forecasts Monday with robust growth expected at a 4.5% annual rate but employment rates not to return to pre-pandemic levels for several years.

The overture from the coalition of 10 GOP senators, mostly centrists, was an attempt to show that at least some in the Republican ranks want to work with Biden's new administration, rather than simply operating as the opposition in the minority in Congress.

Asked if Biden had shown a willingness to reduce his \$1.9 trillion top line, Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, said, "He didn't say that, nor did we say we're willing to come up" from the GOP plan. He said

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it's "too early" to say if a deal can be reached.

But in echoes of the 2009 financial crisis, Democrats warn against too small a package as they believe happened during the Obama administration's attempt to pull the nation toward recovery.

Psaki said earlier Monday there is "obviously a big gap" between the \$1.9 trillion package Biden has proposed and the \$618 billion counteroffer.

An invitation to the GOP senators to meet with Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House came hours after the lawmakers sent Biden a letter on Sunday urging him to negotiate rather than try to ram through his relief package solely on Democratic votes.

The cornerstone of the GOP plan is \$160 billion for the health care response — vaccine distribution, a "massive expansion" of testing, protective gear and funds for rural hospitals, according to a draft.

It also includes \$20 billion to reopen schools compared to \$170 billion in Biden's plan. The Republicans offer \$40 billion for Paycheck Protection Program business aid.

Under the GOP proposal, \$1,000 direct payments would go to individuals earning up to \$40,000 a year, or \$80,000 for couples. The proposal would begin to phase out the benefit after that, with no payments for individuals earning more than \$50,000, or \$100,000 for couples. That's less than Biden's proposal of \$1,400 direct payments at higher incomes levels, up to \$300,000 for some households.

The meeting, though private, was Biden's most public involvement in the negotiations.

Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant for Biden, potentially giving him the votes needed in the 50-50 Senate where Harris is the tie-breaker. Or he can push it through the budget reconciliation process, which would allow the bill to pass with a 51-vote majority in the Senate, rather than the 60 votes typically needed to advance legislation.

The White House remains committed to exploring avenues for bipartisanship even as it prepares for Democrats to move alone on a COVID relief bill, according to a senior administration official granted anonymity to discuss the private thinking.

At the same time, the White House may be willing to adjust its ask, perhaps shifting some less virus-oriented aspects into a package that is set to go next before Congress, the official said.

Biden himself has been on the phone to some of the Republicans, the official said.

Besides Collins and Cassidy, the GOP senators meeting with Biden were Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, Todd Young of Indiana, Jerry Moran of Kansas, Rob Portman of Ohio, Thom Tillis of North Carolina. Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota joined by phone.

Biden has leaned on his resume of decades in the Senate and as vice president to bring the parties together, but less than two weeks into his presidency he has shown frustration with the pace of negotiations as applications for jobless benefits remain stubbornly high and the COVID death toll nears 450,000 Americans.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Alexandra Jaffe, Darlene Superville and Aamer Madhani contributed to this report.

GOP's McConnell blasts 'loony lies' by Ga. Rep. Greene

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell denounced newly elected Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene on Monday, calling the far-right Georgia Republican's embrace of conspiracy theories and "loony lies" a "cancer for the Republican Party."

"Somebody who's suggested that perhaps no airplane hit the Pentagon on 9/11, that horrifying school shootings were pre-staged, and that the Clintons crashed JFK Jr.'s airplane is not living in reality," said McConnell, R-Ky., referring to a handful of conspiracy theories that Greene has publicized in the past. "This has nothing to do with the challenges facing American families or the robust debates on substance that can strengthen our party."

McConnell's explicit condemnation adds to pressure on House Republicans to take action against Greene

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even as she is claiming renewed support from former President Donald Trump. It comes as House Democrats moved Monday to strip Greene of her committee assignments if Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., refuses to do so himself.

"It is my hope and expectation that Republicans will do the right thing and hold Rep. Greene accountable, and we will not need to consider this resolution," said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md. "But we are prepared to do so if necessary."

Thus far, however, GOP leaders in the House have been reluctant to criticize Trump supporters, like Greene, out of concern that they could alienate the former president's most ardent voters, underscoring a bitter divide over how the out-of-power party should navigate the two years until the next congressional elections.

Greene responded to McConnell late Monday with a broadside on Twitter, suggesting that "the real cancer for the Republican Party is weak Republicans who only know how to lose gracefully."

"This is why we are losing our country," she wrote.

McConnell's statement criticizing Greene was first reported by The Hill newspaper.

Democrats' willingness to act against a member of the opposing party underscores their desire to confront far-right politicians, like Greene, who are closely aligned with some of former Trump's fringe supporters, including extremist groups that were involved in the violent Capitol insurrection.

"If Republicans won't police their own, the House must step in," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., who is sponsoring the measure to remove Greene from her posts on the House education and budget committees.

Greene's views were in the spotlight even before she joined the House last month.

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 in her reliably red congressional district in northwest Georgia.

But after she won her primary, they largely accepted her. Since then, even more of her past comments, postings and videos have been unearthed, though many were deleted recently after drawing attention.

She "liked" Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI. One suggested shooting House Speaker Nancy 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."

In an undated video posted online, Greene floated a conspiracy theory that falsely suggests that the 2017 mass shooting that killed 58 people at a country music festival in Las Vegas could have been a false flag operation to build support for gun control legislation.

"How do you get avid gun owners and people that support the Second Amendment to give up their guns and go along with anti-gun legislation?" Greene said in the video. "You make them scared, you make them victims and you change their mindset and then possibly you can pass anti-gun legislation. Is that what happened in Las Vegas?"

She also "liked" a Facebook post that challenged the veracity of a 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Another video captured her confronting Parkland, Florida, school shooting survivor David Hogg.

After her election, she seized on Trump's false claims that the election was stolen and cheered on his supporters the day before the Capitol was stormed.

"It's our 1776 moment!" she posted on the conservative-friendly social media platform Parler.

Last week, Pelosi pressed House Republicans to take action.

"Assigning her to the education committee, when she has mocked the killing of little children" in Newtown, "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."

In a tweet over the weekend, Greene sounded a defiant tone. She also said she had spoken to Trump

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and was "grateful for his support."

"I will never back down and will stand up against the never ending blood thirsty mob," she tweeted.

McCarthy is supposed to meet privately with Greene this week. A spokesperson for the Republican leader declined to comment Monday.

Although it's not certain he will take action against Greene, McCarthy has punished members of the House Republican caucus before. Former Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, was stripped of all his committee assignments after expressing support for white supremacists in 2019.

Wasserman Schultz acknowledged Monday that it had long been left up to leaders to remove members of Congress of their own party of their committee assignments. But she said Republicans' reluctance to take action left Democrats with little choice.

"Rep. Greene's appalling behavior both before her election and during her term has helped fuel domestic terrorism, endangered lives of her colleagues and brought shame on the entire House of Representatives," Wasserman Schultz said. "Based on her actions and statements and her belligerent refusal to disavow them, she should not be permitted to participate in the important work of these two influential committees."

Wall Street's GameStop bug may have mutated; silver surges

NEW YORK (AP) — The erratic trading in shares of underdog companies like GameStop that turned markets combustible last week appears to have migrated to commodities, sending silver prices surging to an eight-year high.

Silver futures jumped more than 9% on Monday to \$29.42 per ounce with #silversqueeze trending on Twitter. That exuberance spread to companies that mine precious metals, especially silver. Shares of Pan American Silver surged about 12%, First Majestic Silver rose 22% and Hecla Mining spiked 28%.

Last week, there were messages on the Reddit forum WallStreet Bets and other places on social media encouraging small investors to buy silver. The metal shot up Monday, but many of the online investors said it wasn't them bidding up the price.

An online army of Reddit traders banded together for the past week to snap up thousands of shares of GameStop, AMC and other struggling chains, stocks that have been heavily shorted (bets that the stock will fall) by a number of hedge funds. In the process, they've done heavy damage to those hedge funds in a stunning reversal of financial power on Wall Street.

Some of these smaller traders believe the hedge funds that were pillaged last week are behind the surge in silver. Communications on messaging boards claim hedge funds have now become active on Reddit anonymously, attempting to drive them out of GameStop bets and into silver, but only after hedge funds had taken huge positions.

"IT'S A TRAP!" one Redditor warned, though no one really seemed certain.

Meanwhile, GameStop shares dropped 28% to \$233 but the stock price has been tremendously volatile of late. Last week a 44% drop on Thursday was followed by a 68% jump Friday.

The number of GameStop shares that have been shorted (bets that the stock will fall), were slashed by more than half in recent days, according to a report Monday by the analytics firm S3 Partners.

Last week's turmoil caused hedge funds to pull back on their investments by the sharpest degree since February 2009, during the market collapse caused by the financial crisis, according to Goldman Sachs, which provides services such as clearing and consulting to hedge funds.

Goldman says hedge funds have been getting out of both short sales, where they're betting a stock will fall, and more traditional investments that bank on rising prices "in every sector," according to a Goldman Sachs report Monday.

Even so, hedge funds' exposure to the stock market remains close to record levels. That means there's still risk for more sell-offs by hedge funds.

The narrative has burst from financial pages, reaching even the White House, where President Joe Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen were peppered with questions about it last week.

On Monday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki was asked about GameStop and said that the inci-

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dent/market volatility raises "an important set of policy issues."

"We think congressional attention to these issues is appropriate," Psaki adds.

The story has also moved out of Reddit chatrooms and into places where silver actually trades hands. Coin dealers are being overwhelmed by orders Monday.

The Silver Mountain, a Netherlands-based bullion dealer, said on its website that, "Due to extreme market volatility we cannot accept any new orders at this moment," adding it hoped to reopen by the afternoon.

Jonathan Lemire contributed to this story from Washington.

'A long two days': Major storm pummels Northeast with snow

By JENNIFER PELTZ and KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A sprawling, lumbering winter storm walloped the Eastern U.S. on Monday, shutting down coronavirus vaccination sites, closing schools and halting transit as snow piled up from the Appalachians to New England, with the heaviest accumulations yet to come in some places.

With flakes falling since Sunday evening, the National Weather Service said more than 13 inches (33 centimeters) of snow had fallen in Manhattan's Central Park as of 1 p.m., and as much as 16 inches (41 centimeters) was reported in northern New Jersey. Although the heaviest parts of the storm had moved through the metropolitan area by Monday evening, lighter snow showers were expected to continue virtually all day Tuesday, forecaster James Tomasini said.

"We're looking at a long two days here," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at a virtual news conference.

Parts of New England also braced for a foot (31 centimeters) or more by the time the snow finally tapers off in the northernmost states by Wednesday evening, the weather service said. At least three deaths that appeared to be related to the storm were reported, in Pennsylvania.

In Pennsylvania, authorities said a 67-year-old woman with Alzheimer's disease who reportedly wandered away from her home was found dead of hypothermia on an Allentown street Monday morning. About 60 miles (97 kilometers) north in Plains Township, a shooting after an argument over snow removal killed a married couple, and the suspect was later found dead at his nearby home of a wound believed to have been self-inflicted, officials in Luzerne County said.

A preliminary investigation indicates the people involved had a long-running conflict, but "this morning, the dispute was exacerbated by a disagreement over snow disposal," District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said.

In Virginia, four firefighters were taken to hospitals with injuries that were not life threatening after their firetruck overturned Sunday on snow-covered roads in Henrico County, The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

Across the Northeast, many coronavirus vaccination sites closed Monday.

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont said the storm forced the postponement of about 10,000 shots and delayed the state's weekly resupply of vaccine, now expected Tuesday. He urged providers that called off vaccination appointments to extend their hours if needed to reschedule the shots by the end of the week.

The storm disrupted the second phase of Massachusetts' vaccine rollout as a Boston site that was supposed to open Monday for residents ages 75 and over did not; some other mass vaccination sites were open. The state was expected to get 12 to 18 inches (31 to 61 centimeters) of heavy, wet snow and wind gusts of up to 55 mph (88 km/h) along the coast, according to Gov. Charlie Baker.

"We're used to dealing with snow this time of year, but it's important for folks to take this one seriously due to the heavy snowfall, the high winds, and the speed with which this snow is going to fall when it starts to come down," Baker said at a press conference.

In a school year when many students are already learning from home, in-person classes were canceled in many places.

"I'd like to think there is still some virtual learning going on, with a little bit of time for sledding along the way," Lamont quipped.

New York City mom Alyssa Burnham was happy for her son to have "a break from his regular routine."

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Now that snow days have blurred into remote-learning days, "it's fun for him to just get out here and be a kid," she said as he played in the snow.

The New York City area had scattered power outages by early evening, affecting about 3,200 homes and businesses in the city and its New York suburbs, 4,000 in New Jersey and 1,200 in Connecticut.

Hundreds of flights and many trains and were canceled, and aboveground New York City subway service stopped at 2 p.m.

In recent days, a storm system blanketed parts of the Midwest, with some areas getting the most snow in several years. Ohio and Washington, D.C., also got snow.

The snow and cold in Washington led President Joe Biden to postpone a visit to the State Department that had been planned for Monday.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the administration had been in contact with governors states affected by the weather.

Associated Press writers around the eastern U.S. contributed.

A decade after junta's end, Myanmar military back in control

By ELAINE KURTENBACH and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The man installed by army leaders as Myanmar's president after Monday's military coup is best known abroad for his role in the crackdown on 2007 pro-democracy protests and for his ties to still-powerful military leaders.

Myint Swe was the army-appointed vice president when he was named on Monday to take over after the military arrested civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of her party.

Immediately after he was named president, Myint Swe handed power to the country's top military commander, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.

Under Myanmar's 2008 constitution, the president can hand power to the military commander in cases of emergency. That is one of many ways the military is assured of keeping ultimate control of the country.

Min Aung Hlaing, 64, has been commander of the armed forces since 2011 and is due to retire soon. That would clear the way for him to take a civilian leadership role if the junta holds elections in a year's time as promised. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party's humiliating loss in last November's elections would likely have precluded that. The military justified the coup by saying the government failed to address claims of election fraud.

"It seems there's been the realization that Min Aung Hlaing's retirement is coming and he expected to move into a senior role," said Gerard McCarthy, a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute. "The fact that the USDP couldn't deliver that sparked a realization that the system itself isn't designed to create the outcomes that they expected."

The U.S. government in 2019 put Min Aung Hlaing on a blacklist on grounds of engaging in "serious human rights abuse" for leading army troops in security operations in Myanmar's northwestern Rakhine region.

International human rights investigators say the military conducted what amounted to ethnic cleansing operations that prompted some 700,000 members of the Rohingya minority to flee, burning people out of their homes and committing other atrocities. In 2017, Myint Swe led an investigation that denied such allegations, saying the military acted "lawfully."

In 2019, the U.S. Treasury Department froze Min Aung Hlaing's U.S.-based assets and banned doing business with him and three other Myanmar military leaders. Earlier, it banned him from visiting the United States. Min Aung Hlaing also was among more than a dozen Myanmar officials removed from Facebook in 2018. His Twitter account also was closed.

Myint Swe, now elevated to president, formerly was among military leaders included in an earlier Treasury Department list of sanctioned Myanmar officials and business figures. That designation was removed in 2016 as the U.S. government sought to support the country's economic development after nearly a half decade of reforms.

Myint Swe, 69, is a close ally of former junta leader Than Shwe, who stepped down to allow the transition to a quasi-civilian government beginning in 2011.

That transition eventually allowed Myanmar to escape the international sanctions that had isolated the regime for years, hindering foreign investment. It also enabled Myanmar's leaders to counterbalance Chinese influence with support from other governments. But with the coup, Beijing may well end up with still more sway over the country's economy.

Myint Swe is a former chief minister of Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, and for years headed its regional military command. During the 2007 monk-led popular protests known internationally as the Saffron Revolution, he took charge of restoring order in Yangon after weeks of unrest in a crackdown that killed dozens of people. Hundreds were arrested.

Though he has not had a very high international profile, Myint Swe has played a key role in the military and politics. In 2002, he participated in the arrest of family members of former dictator Ne Win, Myanmar media reports say.

Myint Swe arrested former Gen. Khin Nyunt at Yangon Airport during the 2004 purge of the former prime minister and his supporters. Soon afterward, Myint Swe assumed command of the former military regime's sprawling military intelligence apparatus.

Milko reported from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Famed San Francisco private eye Palladino dies after attack

By JANIE HAR and JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Jack Palladino, the flamboyant private investigator whose clients ranged from presidents and corporate whistleblowers to scandal-plagued celebrities, Hollywood moguls and sometimes suspected drug traffickers, died Monday at age 76.

Palladino suffered a devastating brain injury Thursday after a pair of would-be robbers tried to grab his camera outside his home in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district.

He held on to the camera but fell and struck his head, and the photos he took before his attackers fled were used by police to track down two suspects. They were charged with assault with a deadly weapon and other crimes.

"He would have loved knowing that," his wife, Sandra Sutherland, told The Associated Press on Monday. She added that she had told her husband while he lay unconscious in the hospital: "Guess what, Jack, they got the bastards, and it was all your doing."

In a career spanning more than 40 years, Palladino worked for a who's who of the famous and the sometimes infamous, alternately hailed as a hero or denounced as a villain, depending on who his client was at the time.

He was hired by Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign to put a lid on women who were coming forward to claim they had had sex with the future president.

He was also the investigator for the family of a 14-year-old boy who won a multimillion-dollar settlement from Michael Jackson after accusing the entertainer of molesting him. Jackson was never charged with a crime in that case.

Two of his most prominent clients were former tobacco company executive and whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand and former automotive executive John DeLorean.

In the Wigand case, Palladino uncovered a deliberate campaign by Big Tobacco to smear the former executive for Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corp. after his allegations became public that tobacco products were spiked with chemicals to make them more addictive. Palladino also went on to play himself in "The Insider," the 1999 film about the case.

For DeLorean, he discovered that the former General Motors executive had been set up by authorities, who had charged him with trafficking millions of dollars in cocaine in what they said was a failed effort to prop up his failing DeLorean Motor Co. DeLorean was acquitted.

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"Jack was a pillar of the legal and professional community. He was a firm believer in due process, First Amendment rights, particularly freedom of speech and freedom of the press," Palladino's lawyer, Mel Honowitz, said in an emotional statement confirming Palladino's death.

Although he still took the occasional case, Palladino had largely retired a year ago, his wife said, adding that the two were looking forward to traveling and pursuing photography, which was a passion for both of them.

The couple married in 1977, the same year they founded Palladino & Sutherland Investigations.

While many in their business keep a low profile, they did anything but. They publicly took on high-profile cases while the media sometimes compared them to Nick and Nora Charles, the fictional, wisecracking, high-society husband-and-wife detective team in the Dashiell Hammett potboiler, "The Thin Man."

Their clients included everyone from the Black Panthers and Hells Angels to celebrities like Courtney Love, Robin Williams and Kevin Costner. They once recovered a truckload of stolen equipment for the Grateful Dead, and Palladino spent years investigating the mass suicide of the Jonestown cult in Guyana.

Some celebrity clients, like Williams and Costner, were the targets of fan or tabloid abuse. In Love's case, she was being linked to unfounded allegations that she played a role in the suicide of her husband, Kurt Cobain.

"I am somebody you call in when the house is on fire, not when there's smoke in the kitchen," Palladino told the San Francisco Examiner in 1999. "You ask me to deal with that fire, to save you, to do whatever has to be done to the fire — where did it come from, where is it going, is it ever going to happen again?"

Over the years, some people, including the women who brought accusations against Clinton, complained that Palladino sometimes threatened and harassed them, their families and friends.

Although he would acknowledge he wasn't afraid to ask tough questions, Palladino denied ever crossing the line either ethically or legally.

All he was ever after was the truth, he said, adding that he was better at getting it than most other private eyes.

"I'm not a self-effacing individual," he told the Examiner. "I am a driven, arrogant person who holds himself and everyone around him to incredibly high standards."

John Arthur Palladino was born in Boston on July 9, 1944, the son of a pipe fitter.

After graduating from Cornell University with a degree in English, he studied law at the University of California, Berkeley, passing the state Bar exam in 1978. But by then, he had already found that his true passion was investigations.

While still a student in 1971, he had himself incarcerated in New York's Nassau County as part of an undercover operation exposing rampant crime in the county's jails. In 1974, the family of newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst hired him to help investigate members of the Symbionese Liberation Army, the ragtag band of young revolutionaries that had kidnapped her.

"I was planning to be a lawyer," he once told People magazine of his law school years. "I didn't know in those days that investigations would make everything else seem dull, unchallenging and uninvolved."

Rogers reported from Los Angeles.

US billionaire buys SpaceX flight to orbit with 3 others

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A U.S. billionaire who made a fortune in tech and fighter jets is buying an entire SpaceX flight and plans to take three "everyday" people with him to circle the globe this year.

Besides fulfilling his dream of flying in space, Jared Isaacman announced Monday that he aims to use the private trip to raise \$200 million for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, half coming from his own pockets.

A female health care worker for St. Jude already has been selected for the mission. Anyone donating to St. Jude in February will be entered into a random drawing for seat No. 3. The fourth seat will go to

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a business owner who uses Shift4 Payments, Isaacman's credit card processing company in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

"I truly want us to live in a world 50 or 100 years from now where people are jumping in their rockets like the Jetsons and there are families bouncing around on the moon with their kid in a spacesuit," Isaacman, who turns 38 next week, told The Associated Press.

"I also think if we are going to live in that world, we better conquer childhood cancer along the way."

He's bought a Super Bowl ad to publicize the mission, dubbed Inspiration4 and targeted for an October launch from Florida. The other passengers aboard the SpaceX Dragon capsule — what Isaacman calls a diverse group "from everyday walks of life" — will be announced next month. SpaceX founder and chief executive Elon Musk expects the flight to last two to four days.

Isaacman's trip is the latest deal announced for private space travel — and it's No. 1 on the runway for an orbital trip.

"This is an important milestone toward enabling access to space for everyone," Musk said during a press conference Monday from SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, California. While expensive, these initial private flights will drive down costs over time, he noted.

Last week, a Houston company revealed the names of three businessmen who are paying \$55 million apiece to fly to the International Space Station next January aboard a SpaceX Dragon. And a Japanese businessman has a deal with SpaceX to fly to the moon. In the past, space tourists had to hitch rides to the space station on Russian rockets.

Isaacman would not divulge how much he's paying SpaceX, except to say that the anticipated donation to St. Jude "vastly exceeds the cost of the mission."

While a former NASA astronaut will accompany the three businessmen, Isaacman will serve as his own spacecraft commander. The appeal, he said, is learning all about SpaceX's Dragon and Falcon 9 rocket. The capsules are designed to fly autonomously, but a pilot can override the system in an emergency.

A "space geek" since kindergarten, Isaacman dropped out of high school when he was 16, got a GED certificate and started a business in his parents' basement that became the genesis for Shift4. He set a speed record flying around the world in 2009 while raising money for the Make-A-Wish program, and later established Draken International, the world's largest private fleet of fighter jets.

Isaacman's \$100 million commitment to St. Jude in Memphis, Tennessee, is the largest ever by a single individual and one of the largest overall.

"We're pinching ourselves every single day," said Rick Shadyac, president of St. Jude's fundraising organization.

Besides SpaceX training, Isaacman intends to take his crew on a mountain expedition to mimic his most uncomfortable experience so far — tenting on the side of a mountain in bitter winter conditions.

"We're all going to get to know each other ... really well before launch," he said.

He's acutely aware of the need for things to go well.

"If something does go wrong, it will set back every other person's ambition to go and become a commercial astronaut," he told the AP over the weekend from his home in Easton, Pennsylvania.

Isaacman said he signed with Musk's company because it's the clear leader in commercial spaceflight, with two astronaut flights already completed. Boeing has yet to fly astronauts to the space station for NASA. While Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin expect to start flying customers later this year, their craft will just briefly skim the surface of space.

Isaacman had put out spaceflight feelers for years. He traveled to Kazakhstan in 2008 to see a Russian Soyuz blast off with a tourist on board, then a few years later attended one of NASA's last space shuttle launches. SpaceX invited him to the company's second astronaut launch for NASA in November.

While Isaacman and wife, Monica, managed to keep his space trip hush-hush over the months, their daughters couldn't. The girls, ages 7 and 4, overheard their parents discussing the flight last year and told their teachers, who called to ask if it was true dad was an astronaut.

"My wife said, 'No, of course not, you know how these kids make things up.' But I mean the reality is my kids weren't that far off with that one."

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.

Spacewalkers complete 4 years of power upgrades for station

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A pair of spacewalking astronauts completed a four-year effort to modernize the International Space Station's power grid on Monday, installing one last battery.

Over the weekend, flight controllers in Houston used the space station's big robot arm to replace the last pair of old-style batteries with a single better-quality one. NASA's Mike Hopkins and Victor Glover put the finishing touches on this newest lithium-ion battery to complete a series of spacewalks that began in 2017.

Although the spacewalk got started late, Hopkins and Glover hustled through the battery work in under an hour. They also made quick work of camera installations and squeezed in some extra chores.

The astronauts gazed down at Earth and soaked in one last sunset before reentering the space station. "Yeah, enjoy the view. You guys did a great job today. You guys rocked it," Mission Control said as the five-hour spacewalk concluded well ahead of schedule.

The space station is now equipped with 24 lithium-ion batteries to store power collected by the solar panels. The big, boxy batteries, surpassing 400 pounds (180 kilograms) each, provide electricity for the orbiting lab when it's on the night side of Earth. They're so powerful that only half as many are needed as the old nickel-hydrogen batteries they replaced.

The upgrade took longer than expected after one of the new batteries failed after it was installed two years ago and had to be replaced. In all, 14 spacewalks were needed to complete the battery work.

NASA expects these batteries to last the rest of the space station's operating life.

Besides battery work, Hopkins and Glover installed a new camera on the U.S. Destiny lab and replaced parts in the camera system outside the station's Japanese lab, named Kibo, or Hope in English.

During a spacewalk last Wednesday, the two astronauts made improvements to the European lab, Columbus.

Two more spacewalks will be conducted in about a month to get ready for additional solar panels set for delivery later this year.

Seven astronauts currently live on the space station: four Americans, two Russians and one Japanese.

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Hate groups migrate online, making tracking more difficult

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

During one of the most politically divisive years in recent memory, the number of active hate groups in the U.S. actually declined as far-right extremists migrated further to online networks, a move that has made it harder to track adherents of white nationalist and neo-Nazi ideologies.

In its annual report, released Monday, the Southern Poverty Law Center said it identified 838 active hate groups operating across the U.S. in 2020. That's a decrease from the 940 documented in 2019 and the record-high of 1,020 in 2018, said the law center, which tracks racism, xenophobia and anti-government militias.

"It is important to understand that the number of hate groups is merely one metric for measuring the level of hate and racism in America, and that the decline in groups should not be interpreted as a reduction in bigoted beliefs and actions motivated by hate," said the report, first shared exclusively with The Associated Press.

The Montgomery, Alabama-based law center said many hate groups have moved to social media platforms and use of encrypted apps, while others have been banned altogether from mainstream social

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media networks.

Still, the law center said, online platforms allow individuals to interact with hate and anti-government groups without becoming members, maintain connections with likeminded people, and take part in real-world actions, such as last month's siege on the U.S. Capitol.

White nationalist organizations, a subset of the hate groups listed in the report, declined last year from 155 to 128. Those groups had seen huge growth the previous two years after being energized by Donald Trump's campaign and presidency, the report said.

The number of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-LGBTQ hate groups remained largely stable, while their in-person organizing was hampered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bottom line, the levels of hate and bigotry in America have not diminished, said SPLC President and CEO Margaret Huang.

"What's important is that we start to reckon with all the reasons why those groups have persisted for so long and been able to get so much influence in the last White House, that they actually feel emboldened," Huang told the AP.

Last month, as President Joe Biden's administration began settling in, the Department of Homeland Security issued an early national terrorism bulletin in response to a growing threat from home-grown extremists, including anti-government militias and white supremacists. The extremists are coalescing under a broader, more loosely affiliated movement of people who reject democratic institutions and multiculturalism, Huang said.

The SPLC's report comes out nearly a month after a mostly white mob of Trump supporters and members of far-right groups violently breached the U.S. Capitol building. At least five deaths have been linked to the assault, including a Capitol police officer. Some in the mob waved Confederate battle flags and wore clothing with neo-Nazi symbolism.

Federal authorities have made more than 160 arrests and sought hundreds more for criminal charges related to the deadly Jan. 6 assault. Authorities have also linked roughly 30 defendants to a group or movement, according to an AP review of court records.

That includes seven defendants linked to QAnon, a once-fringe internet conspiracy movement that recently grew into a powerful force in mainstream conservative politics; six linked to the Proud Boys, a misogynistic, anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic group with ties to white supremacism; four linked to the Oath Keepers, a paramilitary organization that recruits current and former military, law enforcement and first-responder personnel; four linked to the Three Percenters, an anti-government militia movement; and two leaders of "Super Happy Fun America," a group with ties to white nationalists known for organizing a so-called "straight pride" parade in downtown Boston in 2019.

Bipartisan critics of Trump have blamed him for inciting the attack on the Capitol, which some far-right groups have declared a success and are using as a recruitment tool to grow membership, according to the SPLC.

The final year of the Trump presidency, marked by a wide-ranging reckoning over systemic racism, also propelled racist conspiracy theories and white nationalist ideology into the political mainstream, the law center said.

According to an SPLC survey conducted in August, 29% of respondents said they personally know someone who believes that white people are the superior race. The poll also found that 51% of Americans thought the looting and vandalism that occurred across the country around Black Lives Matter demonstrations was a bigger problem than excessive force by police.

Protests over the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd last May spurred a push to make the November election a referendum on white supremacy. Nestled in Trump's baseless claims of widespread voter fraud was a reality that turnout among Black and Hispanic voters played a significant role in handing victory to Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman and first person of Black and South Asian heritage to hold that office.

During his inaugural address, Biden issued a strong repudiation of white supremacy and domestic ter-

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rorism, which is rare for such consequential speeches.

The SPLC made several recommendations for the new administration in its latest report. It called for establishing offices within the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department and the FBI to monitor, investigate and prosecute cases of domestic terrorism. It also urged improving federal hate crime data collection, training, and prevention; and for enacting federal legislation that shifts funding away from punishment models and toward preventing violent extremism.

People who support or express hatred and bigotry are not always card-carrying members of far-right groups. But that doesn't mean they can't be activated into violence, said Christian Picciolini, a former far-right extremist and founder of the Free Radicals Project, a group that helps people disengage from hate organizations.

It also doesn't mean that they can't be reached and deradicalized, he said.

"We have to have kind of a dual approach to stop what's happening now, but also to make sure that we are not creating a problem for us in the future, to understand how the propaganda is spread that is recruiting these people," Picciolini said.

"Right now, it's in a very self-service format online," he added. "We're facing a really big problem."

Morrison reported from New York. AP writer Michael Kunzelman contributed from College Park, Maryland.

Morrison is a member of the AP's Race & Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

'Saved by the Bell' star Dustin Diamond dies of cancer at 44

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

"Saved by the Bell" star Dustin Diamond died Monday after a three-week fight with cancer, according to his representative. He was 44.

"Dustin did not suffer. He did not have to lie submerged in pain. For that, we are grateful," the actor's spokesman, Roger Paul, said in a statement.

Diamond, best known for playing the quirky, nerdy Screech on the hit '90s sitcom, was hospitalized last month in Florida and his team disclosed later that he had cancer. Diamond had carcinoma.

Former co-star Mario Lopez took to Twitter to say farewell: "Dustin, you will be missed, my man. The fragility of this life is something never to be taken for granted." Another co-star, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, called Diamond "a true comedic genius," adding "I will miss those raw, brilliant sparks that only he was able to produce."

"Saved by the Bell" aired from 1989 to 1993, and its related shows included "Saved by the Bell: The College Years," "Good Morning, Miss Bliss" and "Saved by the Bell: The New Class," which Diamond starred in. A sequel was launched on Peacock last fall featuring many from the original cast, including Gosselaar, Lopez, Elizabeth Berkley and Tiffani Thiessen. Diamond was not included.

"God speed, Dustin," Thiessen wrote on Instagram. Josh Gad on Twitter said Diamond was "a defining part of our collective pop cultural touchstones."

He starred in a handful of reality television series including the 5th season of "Celebrity Fit Club," "The Weakest Link" and "Celebrity Boxing 2." In December 2013, Diamond appeared on an episode of OWN's "Where Are They Now?" and became a house member in the 12th season of "Celebrity Big Brother."

Diamond was sued several times for delinquent taxes and in foreclosure proceedings for missing mortgage payments. He has appeared on reality TV shows, made a sex tape and produced a tell-all documentary on Lifetime TV called "The Unauthorized Saved by the Bell Story." In 2015, he was sentenced to serve four months in jail for his part in a Wisconsin barroom stabbing.

"Dustin was a humorous and high-spirited individual whose greatest passion was to make others laugh. He was able to sense and feel other peoples' emotions to such a length that he was able to feel them too — a strength and a flaw, all in one," wrote Paul.

Myanmar, Russia pose early tests for Biden's foreign policy

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A military coup in Myanmar and a mass crackdown on dissidents in Russia are presenting early tests for the Biden administration as it tries to reestablish American primacy as a worldwide pro-democracy leader.

Having taken office with a pledge to restore ironclad U.S. support for human rights, freedom of speech and political openness, President Joe Biden is being confronted with two serious challenges in two disparate parts of the world that had either been neglected or the subject of inconsistent messaging during the Trump era.

After investing decades of time, energy and money into promoting democracy in both Myanmar and Russia, the U.S. now faces challenges in each that could affect the global balance of power, with the Myanmar turmoil potentially strengthening China's hand.

And, while neither situation can be directly tied to domestic political uncertainty in the United States, experts believe foreign governments might be taking cues from the vestiges of America's perceived rudeness in the final months of President Donald Trump's term.

"It is not always about us," said Dan Fried, a former senior U.S. diplomat for Europe. "Each has its own dynamic, but they certainly take cues from us. What links the two is that during the campaign, the Biden team talked about support for democracy being a North Star — a guiding point for democracy."

Biden's aides have rejected suggestions that the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol fueled by Trump will hurt U.S. influence in the long run. But they have acknowledged it as a factor as Biden tries to reassert American moral leadership after four years of Trump's perceived diffidence.

"The United States remains a country in the world that is looked to for ... leadership, and it's going to take some time, but he's certainly committed to doing that," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said of Biden on Monday.

She spoke after Biden released a statement saying he would be looking at reimposing sanctions on Myanmar, also known as Burma, that had been lifted after the country's partial return to democracy during the Obama administration.

"The United States removed sanctions on Burma over the past decade based on progress toward democracy," Biden said. "The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action. The United States will stand up for democracy wherever it is under attack."

In Myanmar, the army took control of the government after a brief experiment with limited democracy, detaining former opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and giving China an even bigger potential opening into a neighboring country where the West had exerted great effort to blunt Beijing's significant influence.

"This is a setback for Myanmar and for democratic governance across Asia," said Danny Russel, a former assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, who is now vice president for International Security and Diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "It's part of an unfortunate slide toward authoritarianism and it's quite worrying. It sets an appalling example for other countries."

"It's certainly an early crisis for the Biden administration, and it's really crystalized the contrast between its support for democracy and the Chinese support for authoritarianism," he said.

Tensions in Myanmar have been building for some time but have been largely under the radar of a Washington preoccupied with the coronavirus after decades of public and private pressure on Yangon to institute democratic reforms.

In Russia, despite Trump's political machinations, the situation has been at a slow boil for some years after attempts to draw Moscow into the democratic fold beginning with the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union. Confronting the Russians will be more difficult.

There, President Vladimir Putin is using an iron fist to try to quell demonstrations in support of opposition figure Alexei Navalny, flying in the face of warnings from Washington and Europe.

"It's a challenge for Biden, but they're not challenging him directly," said Fried, who is now with the At-

lantic Council. He said that sanctions might not be effective in the long run but that they will get attention. "They could do more," he said. "It would be appropriate, and it would send a message to Russian society that the Americans aren't stupid, that they know what's going on."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in an interview aired on Monday that new sanctions against Russia are being considered, not only for the Navalny crackdown but also for a major cyberattack, election interference and purported bounties offered to the Taliban for targeting American troops in Afghanistan.

"We're looking into all of these things," Blinken told NBC News. "All of them are under review. And depending on the findings of those reviews, we will take steps to stand up for our interests and stand against Russian aggressive actions."

Oregon 1st state to decriminalize possession of drugs

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Police in Oregon can no longer arrest someone for possession of small amounts of heroin, methamphetamine, LSD, oxycodone and other drugs as a ballot measure that decriminalized them took effect on Monday.

Instead, those found in possession would face a \$100 fine or a health assessment that could lead to addiction counseling. Backers of the ballot measure, which Oregon voters passed by a wide margin in November, hailed it as a revolutionary move for the United States.

"Today, the first domino of our cruel and inhumane war on drugs has fallen, setting off what we expect to be a cascade of other efforts centering health over criminalization," said Cassandra Frederique, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, which spearheaded the ballot initiative.

Ballot Measure 110's backers said treatment needs to be the priority and that criminalizing drug possession was not working. Besides facing the prospect of being locked up, having a criminal record makes it difficult to find housing and jobs and can haunt a person for a lifetime.

Two dozen district attorneys had opposed the measure, saying it was reckless and would lead to an increase in the acceptability of dangerous drugs.

Instead of facing arrest, those found by law enforcement with personal-use amounts of drugs would face a civil citation, "like a traffic ticket," and not a criminal citation, said Matt Sutton, spokesman for the Drug Policy Alliance.

Under the new system, addiction recovery centers will be tasked with "triaging the acute needs of people who use drugs and assessing and addressing any on-going needs thorough intensive case management and linkage to care and services."

The addiction recovery centers will be funded by millions of dollars of tax revenue from Oregon's legalized marijuana industry. That diverts some funds from other programs and entities that already receive it, like schools.

The ballot measure capped the amount of pot tax revenue that schools; mental health alcoholism and drug services; the state police; and cities and counties receive at \$45 million annually, with the rest going to a "Drug Treatment and Recovery Services Fund."

The fund will be awash in money if the sales trend for marijuana continues as expected.

In the 2020 fiscal year, marijuana tax revenues peaked at \$133 million, a 30% increase over the previous year, and a 545% increase over 2016, when pot taxes began being collected from legal, registered recreational marijuana enterprises around the state.

The other recipients of pot tax revenues are now saying that, after assessment and related treatment options are set up, the distribution of those revenues will deserve another look. A leading lawmaker agrees.

"In the future, as Oregon's treatment programs reach full funding, the state should evaluate what other services would benefit from our continually growing marijuana tax revenues," Oregon Education Association President John Larson said in an email.

Larson said a "balanced approach to budgeting" will support communities and students. The OEA union represents about 44,000 educators.

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State Sen. Floyd Prozanski, chair of the Senate Committee On Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation, said he expects Oregon's cannabis tax revenues to increase exponentially if recreational marijuana in the United States is legalized. He expects that to happen within four years.

That would make the Drug Treatment and Recovery Services Fund "oversaturated with revenue" as out-of-state consumers legally buy Oregon's potent marijuana, Prozanski said in a telephone interview.

"It would be foolish for us as a Legislature to think that the voters would want us to put hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars into a program that would be, at that point, I would think, having a gold standard" in addiction recovery services, the Democrat said.

But Sutton noted that besides traditional treatment services, the fund would also be spent on housing and job assistance to provide long-term stability for people struggling with addiction.

"I can't imagine a situation where this fund becomes oversaturated anytime soon," Sutton said.

Oregon is a pioneer in liberalizing drug laws. It was the first state, in 1973, to decriminalize marijuana possession. In 2014, Oregon voters passed a ballot measure legalizing recreational use of marijuana. But Sutton said there are no plans to pursue legalization and a regulated market of hard drugs in Oregon.

Addiction recovery centers must be available by Oct. 1. One center must be established within each existing coordinated care organization service area.

After decriminalization, about 3,700 fewer Oregonians per year will be convicted of felony or misdemeanor possession of controlled substances, according to estimates by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. The measure will also likely lead to significant reductions in racial and ethnic disparities in convictions and arrests, the state commission said.

Drugs specified by the measure include LSD, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, methadone, oxycodone, and MDMA — commonly known as ecstasy.

While this approach is new in the United States, several countries, including Portugal, the Netherlands and Switzerland, have already decriminalized possession of small amounts of hard drugs, according to the United Nations.

Portugal's 2000 decriminalization brought no surge in drug use. Drug deaths fell while the number of people treated for drug addiction in the country rose 20% from 2001 to 2008 and then stabilized, Portuguese officials have said.

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>.

Pandemic's deadliest month in US ends with signs of progress

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and MICHELLE SMITH Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The deadliest month yet of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. drew to a close with certain signs of progress: COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are plummeting, while vaccinations are picking up speed.

The question is whether the nation can stay ahead of the fast-spreading mutations of the virus.

The U.S. death toll has climbed past 440,000, with over 95,000 lives lost in January alone. Deaths are running at about 3,150 per day on average, down slightly by about 200 from their peak in mid-January.

But as the calendar turned to February on Monday, the number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 fell below 100,000 for the first time in two months. New cases of infection are averaging about 148,000 day, falling from almost a quarter-million in mid-January. And cases are trending downward in all 50 states.

"While the recent decline in cases and hospital admissions are encouraging, they are counterbalanced by the stark reality that in January we recorded the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in any month since the pandemic began," said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Deaths do not move in perfect lockstep up or down with the infection curve. They are a lagging indicator, because it can take a few weeks for people to get sick and die from COVID-19.

Dr. Philip Landrigan, an epidemiologist at Boston College, said vaccines are a factor in the sharp drop in

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cases but are not the primary cause. Instead, he said, the crisis has become increasingly “depoliticized” in recent weeks as more people come to grips with the threat and how they can help slow the spread of the virus.

“I don’t think you can underestimate the importance of this culture change. I think it’s critically important,” he said.

After a slow start, the vaccination drive that began in mid-December is picking up the pace. More than 32.2 million doses have been administered in the U.S., according to the CDC. That is up from 16.5 million on the day President Joe Biden took office, Jan. 20.

The number of shots dispensed in the week and a half since Biden’s inauguration has been running at around 1.3 million per day on average, well over the president’s oft-stated goal of 1 million per day. More than 5.9 million Americans have received the required two doses, the CDC said.

However, the CDC reported Monday that many nursing home workers are not getting their shots when doses are first offered.

Researchers looked at more than 11,000 nursing homes and other such facilities that had at least one vaccination clinic between mid-December and mid-January. While 78% of residents got at least one shot, only 37.5% of staff members did. Surveys suggest some nursing home workers are skeptical of the shots’ effectiveness and don’t think viruses spread easily from them to the people they care for.

Three mutated variants of the virus from Britain, South Africa and Brazil have been detected in the U.S. The British one spreads more easily and is believed to be deadlier, but the South Africa one is prompting even more concern because of early indications that vaccines may not be as protective against it.

The more the virus spreads, the more opportunities it has to mutate.

Walensky urged Americans to get vaccinated as soon as shots become available to them, and stressed it’s no time to relax basic precautions such as wearing masks.

Meanwhile, a snowstorm Monday forced the closing of many vaccination sites in the Northeast, including in New York City and Connecticut.

And a plan to reopen Chicago schools to roughly 62,000 students for the first time since March remained in doubt. Last-minute negotiations over COVID-19 safety measures with the teachers’ union stalled, increasing the possibility of a strike or lockout if educators do not show up for work.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Marilynn Marchione, Sophia Tareen, Bill Kole and Mike Stobbe contributed to this report.

Biden and GOP senators offer competing COVID-19 relief plans

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and a group of 10 Senate Republicans have offered competing proposals to help the United States respond to the coronavirus pandemic and provide economic relief to businesses and families.

The president is meeting with the senators on Monday at the White House in what press secretary Jen Psaki described as “an exchange of ideas” and not a forum for Biden to “make or accept an offer.” Meanwhile, Democratic leaders in Congress are laying the groundwork for taking up Biden’s proposal in the coming weeks.

The topline numbers are this: Biden’s plan calls for an additional \$1.9 trillion in federal spending. The 10 GOP senators are calling for about \$618 billion in federal spending.

The aid would come on top of the \$900 billion coronavirus package that Congress passed in December and the \$2.2 trillion package passed in March.

A look at the major differences:

AID TO INDIVIDUALS

Biden is proposing \$1,400 checks for individuals earning less than \$75,000. The amount would be \$2,800 for couples earning less than \$150,000.

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The 10 GOP senators seek \$1,000 checks. They would go to individuals earning less than \$40,000 a year and would begin phasing out with a hard cap at \$50,000 a year. The payment would increase to \$2,000 for couples earning up to \$80,000 and phase out with a hard cap at \$100,000 a year.

AID TO STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Biden's framework would send \$350 billion to state and local governments to allay service cuts and keep police, fire and other public-sector workers on the job.

The Republican senators did not include any direct relief to state and local governments in their proposal. There has been strong resistance in the GOP to such assistance, with many arguing it would reward states for poor fiscal management.

AID TO SCHOOLS

Biden proposes \$170 billion for education. Most of that money would go to schools for students in kindergarten through 12th grade to offset expenses necessary to reopen safely. About \$35 billion would target universities and community colleges.

The plan from Republicans pitches \$20 billion for schools serving students in kindergarten through 12th grade as part of an initiative to get children back to school.

MINIMUM WAGE HIKE

Biden's plan includes a gradual increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The plan from GOP senators does not address the federal minimum wage, which now stands at \$7.25 an hour.

CHILD CARE

Biden is proposing \$40 billion in federal spending for child care. Within that amount, \$25 billion would go to an "emergency stabilization fund" to help child care providers offset expenses necessary to reopen or stay open. An additional \$15 billion would go to a long-standing block grant program that subsidizes child care expenses for low-income families with children under age 13. Biden is also calling for increasing tax credits to help cover the cost of child care.

The 10 GOP senators are calling for a \$20 billion boost to that block grant program.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Biden wants a \$400 per week unemployment insurance benefit, a \$100 increase from current law, though September. His plan would also expand eligibility to include self-employed workers, such as ride-share drivers who don't typically qualify for unemployment insurance benefits.

The GOP plan also extends unemployment benefits, but at \$300 per week through June 30.

VACCINES AND TESTING

Both proposals provide \$160 billion to boost vaccinations and COVID-19 testing, essentially allowing the country to launch vaccination centers, purchase more rapid tests, expand lab capacity and buy personal protective equipment for first responders.

CBO projects 4.6% growth in Biden's first year, jobs lag

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

The U.S. economy is projected to grow at a robust 4.6% annual rate this year, but employment isn't expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024, the Congressional Budget Office said Monday.

The 10-year outlook said the economic recovery from the coronavirus got a boost from an unprecedented wave of government spending to combat the outbreak, such that growth could pass its maximum sustainable level in early 2025 before returning to a long-run average of 1.7%. Based on the CBO's projections, economic growth would be the strongest since 1999.

While the growth estimates suggest a quick snapback in gross domestic product, the CBO projection shows that hiring will occur at a lag as consumer spending returns and employers become more comfortable with adding workers. CBO projected an average of 521,000 jobs will be added monthly this year, a pace that would fall to 145,000 in 2022.

Congress has spent \$4 trillion to keep the economy stable since the pandemic shuttered schools, offices, restaurants, gyms and other businesses, leading to roughly 10 million job losses and an economic decline of 3.5% last year.

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The CBO estimates factored in the roughly \$900 billion approved in December, but they excluded President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion plan because the projections are based on current law.

Biden's supporters can point to the CBO's projection of a three-year recovery in hiring as a need for more aid. But Republican lawmakers can simultaneously argue that less money is needed to boost the economy because the CBO estimates that the total economy will return to its pre-pandemic size in the middle of this year.

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, said the CBO estimate suggests that Biden's proposal appears to be excessive relative to the needs of the economy.

"The president is exactly right to focus on the need to contain the virus, and his American Rescue Plan includes many important elements," she said. "But many of his proposals are larger than necessary and could be better targeted."

White House officials have repeatedly said the risks of going too small in response to the pandemic are greater than going too big with aid.

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said the CBO projection "is not a measure of how each American family is doing," adding that the administration's "focus is on what the American people need to get through this crisis." The proposal allocates funds for vaccinations, school reopenings, expanded jobless aid, \$1,400 in direct payments, aid to state and local governments and tax credits for children and childcare.

The advocacy group Invest in America, which supports the Biden plan, held a conference call where economists said the CBO report shows the need for stimulus to increase hiring.

There's no reason to suffer through high unemployment just because the Republicans think it's prudent to shrink the number," said Gabriel Mathy, assistant professor of economics at American University.

A group of 10 Republican lawmakers has countered the Biden plan with a \$618 billion proposal that focuses on vaccinations, testing and direct payments to individuals earning less than \$50,000 and couples earning less than \$100,000. Biden is meeting with the lawmakers on Monday, possibly determining whether an aid package can be supported by members of both parties.

The CBO cautioned that its projections are highly uncertain, in large part because of the pace of the vaccinations and the risk of new variations of the coronavirus. A faster vaccination process — the goal of both aid proposals — would help hiring and growth.

A separate measure of economic growth in the CBO report that compares the fourth-quarters says growth would be 3.7% this year, a partial reflection of some of the gains that have already occurred in the middle of last year.

Report: Many US nursing home staff decline first COVID shots

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

A little more than a third of nursing home workers have been getting COVID-19 vaccines when the shots are first offered, U.S. health officials said Monday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gave a national accounting of a problem that's been reported anecdotally — many nursing home workers are not getting the shots.

The CDC looked at more than 11,000 nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities that had at least one vaccination clinic between the middle of December and the middle of January. The researchers found that while 78% of residents got at least one shot, only 37.5% of staff members did.

Data previously showed that people who work in nursing homes and long-term care facilities get flu vaccines at lower rates than other health-care workers. Surveys suggest that long-term care workers are skeptical the shots work and don't think viruses spread easily from them to the people they care for.

The problem was discussed last week during a meeting of an expert panel that advises the CDC on vaccine policy. At the meeting, the CDC's Dr. Amanda Cohn said more staffers get vaccinated when a second or third clinic is held at a home.

"Continuing to capture those staff who did not accept vaccine early will be really important as we try

eliminate outbreaks and protect both staff and residents in long-term care facilities," Cohn said.

The government tasked CVS and Walgreens with administering the shots to long-term care homes in nearly every state. Each vaccine requires two shots a few weeks apart, and CVS and Walgreens say they have wrapped up first-dose clinics in nursing homes. The chains plan three visits to each location.

The CDC released a second report Monday that offered a larger national look at who has been getting the vaccine.

The CDC study found that of the people who got at least one shot between mid-December and mid-January, 63% were women, and 55% were age 50 or older. It also found 60% were White, 11.5% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 5% Black, 2% American Indian/Alaska Native, and most of the others multiracial.

The report echoed previously released data from states.

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Biden threatens sanctions on Myanmar after military coup

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday threatened new sanctions on Myanmar after its military staged a coup and arrested the civilian leaders of its government, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Biden assailed the country's army for the coup, calling it a "direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and rule of law." The coup in Myanmar, also known as Burma, has also been roundly condemned internationally.

"The United States removed sanctions on Burma over the past decade based on progress toward democracy," Biden said in a statement. "The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action. The United States will stand up for democracy wherever it is under attack."

Myanmar has been a Western democracy promotion project for decades and had been a symbol of some success. But over the past several years, there have been growing concerns about its backsliding into authoritarianism. Disappointment with Suu Kyi, the former opposition leader, has run high, especially over her resistance to reining in repression of Rohingya Muslims in the country's west.

Myanmar had been emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962, and Monday's events were a shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her work promoting democracy and human rights.

She had lived under house arrest for years as she tried to push her country toward democracy and then became its de facto leader after her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015.

Tampa Bay makes best of Super Bowl week amid sour economy

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — There have been four previous Super Bowls in Tampa, some amid war and economic distress, but none have faced the challenges this year's event encounters because of the coronavirus pandemic and its fallout.

Tickets for Sunday's game are limited to about a third of the capacity of Raymond James Stadium. There will be no tailgating. While the usual fan festival and other side attractions are happening, masks and social distancing are required. Most player appearances will be remote.

Last year's pre-pandemic Super Bowl in the Miami area generated an estimated \$572 million in new spending in the three main South Florida counties, according to that game's host committee. This year, the Tampa Bay region probably won't generate even half that, said Sean Snaith, director of the University of Central Florida's Institute for Economic Forecasting.

The usual economic take for a Super Bowl is somewhere between \$300 million and \$500 million for the

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host regions, he said.

For example, large corporate and sponsor events will be limited if they are held at all, he said. Bars and restaurants are open but with some restrictions on seating and an emphasis on social distancing.

"A lot of things you associate with a Super Bowl aren't going to happen," Snaith said. "That's going to have an impact economically. The circumstances put kind of a wet blanket on it."

Tourist development tax collections in Hillsborough County, where Tampa is located, show the hit the area has taken during the pandemic. This is a tax on short-term rentals, such as hotels.

Before the pandemic, tax collections for sales in January to February were at an increase of about 30% in comparison to 2019 during the same time period, according to county data.

After the pandemic hit, tourist tax collections for sales in March to November decreased by almost 49% in comparison to 2019 during the same time period.

Hillsborough lost at least \$11.1 million in tourist tax collections for sales from January to November, if not more when compared to numbers from 2019 for the same time period.

Across the bay, Pinellas County experienced a similar tax downturn, losing at least \$17.9 million in tourist tax collections for sales from January to November.

Yet leaders in the Tampa Bay area are putting a brave face on hosting the game, which was initially supposed to be held in the Los Angeles area until stadium construction there hit a snag that led the NFL to look elsewhere. L.A. is getting next year's game.

The region is thrilled that the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, led by quarterback Tom Brady in his first year with the team, will face with the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs and their young star quarterback Patrick Mahomes. People have already been lining up at sporting goods stores to buy team merchandise.

Beyond that, officials say it's hard to put a price tag on the publicity the Super Bowl will generate for the entire region, its beaches and other attractions. Disney World and the other Orlando theme parks aren't far away, either.

Rob Higgins, president and CEO of the Tampa Bay Super Bowl host committee, said the region is looking at the Super Bowl as an unparalleled marketing opportunity.

Higgins said the event will mark the most hotel rooms occupied since the pandemic started in the region — some estimates say perhaps as many as 100,000 guest room nights — and that flights to Tampa are starting to fill up.

"We have an opportunity to tell our story," he said, noting that the last Super Bowl in Tampa was in 2009, during the Great Recession. "This is really a platform to share how far we've come as a community."

Still, it's costly to put together a Super Bowl and its related events. Officials estimate local governments and entities such as the Visit Tampa Bay tourist promotion organization are spending at least \$7.5 million, not counting in-kind services.

Hotel occupancy in the Tampa area was about 53% during the first three weeks of January this year, said Visit Tampa Bay CEO Santiago Corrada. Last year during the same time, it was 74%.

"We have suffered over the last 11 to 12 months. We also have been very resilient," Corrada said. "Every month has seen a slow and steady increase in occupancy."

It's been a strange sports year or so for Tampa Bay during the coronavirus pandemic. It was extremely successful by any measure for the region's teams, except not having home games during the title runs and fans in the seats.

First, the NHL's Lightning won the Stanley Cup, but the championship was played in Edmonton, Canada. Tampa didn't get to host any of those games. Same with baseball's Tampa Bay Rays, who lost the World Series to the Los Angeles Dodgers — in Arlington, Texas.

To top that off, the NBA's Toronto Raptors are playing their home games initially at Tampa's Amalie Arena because of coronavirus restrictions in Canada. Again, no fans allowed inside at least for now.

Now it's Brady and the Buccaneers' turn in Tampa's own Super Bowl that won't be the same as the previous 54 title games. No team has ever before played a Super Bowl in its home stadium.

Put all of this down as economic opportunities lost.

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Associated Press writer Anila Yoganathan contributed to this story.

This version corrects the date of the game.

EXPLAINER: Why did the military stage a coup in Myanmar?

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A coup in Myanmar has left the military in control under a one-year state of emergency, while the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior politicians have been detained. Here's a look at what could be behind the military's actions.

WHY NOW?

Monday was supposed to be the first day of a new session of Parliament following November elections that Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide — and that the military-backed party did poorly in. The military has claimed widespread irregularities on voter lists could have led to fraud in that vote, though the election commission said there was no evidence to support those claims.

But the announcement on military-owned Myawaddy TV of the takeover cited the government's failure to act on the allegations as part of the reason for the move. It also said the government's failure to postpone the elections despite the coronavirus pandemic was behind it.

The military maintains its actions are legally justified, and the announcement cited an article in the constitution that allows the military to take over in times of emergency, though Suu Kyi's party's spokesman and many outsiders have said it's effectively a coup.

Some experts expressed puzzlement that the military would move to upset the status quo — in which the generals continue to hold tremendous power despite progress toward democracy in recent years.

But some noted the looming retirement of Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who has been commander of the armed forces since 2011 and who was put in charge on Monday.

"There's internal military politics around that, which is very opaque," said Kim Jolliffe, a researcher on Myanmar civilian and military relations. "This might be reflecting those dynamics and might be somewhat of a coup internally and his way of maintaining power within the military."

WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE MYANMAR?

Television signals were cut across the country, as was phone and internet access in Naypyitaw, the capital, while passenger flights were grounded. Phone service in other parts of the country was also reported down, though people were still able to use the internet in many areas.

Barbed wire road blocks were set up across Yangon, the largest city, and military units began to appear outside government buildings such as City Hall.

Residents flocked to ATMs and food stalls, while some shops and homes removed the symbols of Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, that typically adorn the streets and walls of the city.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR SUU KYI?

Suu Kyi spent years under house arrest and received the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar. But her reputation outside of the country soured after she went on the international stage to defend a crackdown on Rohingya Muslims — a campaign the U.S. and others have labeled genocide.

Former U.S. diplomat Bill Richardson questioned Suu Kyi's ability to lead given that defense.

"Because of Suu Kyi's failure to promote democratic values as Myanmar's de facto leader, she should step aside and let other Myanmar democratic leaders take the reins with international backing and support," Richardson said in a statement.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Governments and international organizations condemned the takeover, saying it sets back the limited

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democratic reforms Myanmar has made.

"This is an extremely crushing blow to efforts to present Myanmar as a democracy," said Linda Lakhdhir, a legal adviser at Human Rights Watch. "Its creditability on the world stage has taken a massive hit."

Watchdog groups fear a further crackdown on human rights defenders, journalists, and activists is coming. Even before the current military takeover critics of the military often faced legal action.

The coup will also be a test for the international community, which had isolated Myanmar during the decades it was under strict military rule but then enthusiastically embraced it as it moved toward democracy in recent years.

In a statement condemning the military's actions, U.S. President Joe Biden threatened to impose new sanctions on Myanmar — a possibility others have raised.

Myanmar's military leaders "must immediately free the democratic leaders of Myanmar and remove themselves from government," said Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez, the incoming chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "If not, the United States and other countries should impose strict economic sanctions, as well as other measures" against the military and its leaders, he said.

Myanmar's military takes power in coup, detains Suu Kyi

NAYPYITAW, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's military staged a coup Monday and detained senior politicians including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi — a sharp reversal of the significant, if uneven, progress toward democracy the Southeast Asian nation has made following five decades of military rule.

An announcement read on military-owned Myawaddy TV said Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing would be in charge of the country for one year. It said the seizure was necessary because the government had not acted on the military's claims of fraud in November's elections — in which Suu Kyi's ruling party won a majority of the parliamentary seats up for grabs — and because it allowed the election to go ahead despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The takeover came the morning the country's new parliamentary session was to begin and follows days of concern that a coup was coming. The military maintains its actions are legally justified — citing a section of the constitution it drafted that allows it to take control in times of national emergency — though Suu Kyi's party spokesman as well as many international observers have said it amounts to a coup.

It was a dramatic backslide for Myanmar, which was emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962. It was also a shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate who had lived under house arrest for years as she tried to push her country toward democracy and then became its de facto leader after her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015.

While Suu Kyi had been a fierce antagonist of the army while under house arrest, since her release and return to politics, she has had to work with the country's generals, who never fully gave up power. While the 75-year-old has remained wildly popular at home, Suu Kyi's deference to the generals — going so far as to defend their crackdown on Rohingya Muslims that the United States and others have labeled genocide — has left her reputation internationally in tatters.

The coup now presents a test for the international community, which had ostracized Myanmar while it was under military rule and then enthusiastically embraced Suu Kyi's government as a sign the country was finally on the path to democracy. U.S. President Joe Biden threatened new sanctions, which the country had previously faced.

For some, Monday's takeover was seen as confirmation that the military holds ultimate power despite the veneer of democracy. New York-based Human Rights Watch has previously described the clause in the constitution that the military invoked as a "coup mechanism in waiting."

The embarrassingly poor showing of the military-backed party in the November vote may have been the spark.

Larry Jagan, an independent analyst, said the takeover was just a "pretext for the military to reassert their full influence over the political infrastructure of the country and to determine the future, at least in the short term," adding that the generals do not want Suu Kyi to be a part of that future.

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The first signs that the military was planning to seize power were reports that Suu Kyi and Win Myint, the country's president, had been detained before dawn.

Myo Nyunt, a spokesman for Suu Kyi's party, told the online news service The Irrawaddy that in addition to Suu Kyi and the president, members of the party's Central Executive Committee, many of its lawmakers and other senior leaders had also been taken into custody.

Television signals were cut across the country, as was phone and internet access in Naypyitaw, the capital, while passenger flights were grounded. Phone service in other parts of the country was also reported down, though people were still able to use the internet in many areas.

As word of the military's actions spread in Yangon, the country's biggest city, there was a growing sense of unease among residents who earlier in the day had packed into tea shops for breakfast and went about their morning shopping.

By midday, people were removing the bright red flags of Suu Kyi's party that once adorned their homes and businesses. Lines formed at ATMs as people waited to take out cash, efforts that were being complicated by internet disruptions. Workers at some businesses decided to go home.

Suu Kyi's party released a statement on one of its Facebook pages saying the military's actions were unjustified and went against the constitution and the will of voters. The statement urged people to oppose Monday's "coup" and any return to "military dictatorship." It was not possible to confirm who posted the message as party members were not answering phone calls.

The military's actions also received international condemnation and many countries called for the release of the detained leaders.

U.S. President Biden called the military's actions "a direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law" and said Washington would not hesitate to restore sanctions.

"The United States will stand up for democracy wherever it is under attack," he said in a statement.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the developments a "serious blow to democratic reforms," according to his spokesman. The Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on the military's actions — probably on Tuesday, according to Britain, which currently holds the council presidency.

The U.N. high commissioner for human rights said in a statement that, in addition to politicians, the people detained included human rights defenders, journalists and activists.

In addition to announcing that the commander in chief would be in charge, the military TV report said Vice President Myint Swe would be elevated to acting president. Myint Swe is a former general best known for leading a brutal crackdown on Buddhist monks in 2007. He is a close ally of Than Shwe, the junta leader who ruled Myanmar for nearly two decades.

In a later announcement, the military said an election would be held in a year and the military would hand power to the winner.

The military justified its move by citing a clause in the 2008 constitution, implemented during military rule, that says in cases of national emergency, the government's executive, legislative and judicial powers can be handed to the military commander-in-chief.

It is just one of many parts of the charter that ensured the military could maintain ultimate control over the country. The military is allowed to appoint its members to 25% of seats in Parliament and it controls of several key ministries involved in security and defense.

In November polls, Suu Kyi's party captured 396 out of 476 seats up for actual election in the lower and upper houses of Parliament.

The military has charged that there was massive fraud in the election — particularly with regard to voter lists — though it has not offered any convincing evidence. The state Union Election Commission last week rejected its allegations.

Concerns of a takeover grew last week when a military spokesman declined to rule out the possibility of a coup when asked by a reporter to do so at a news conference on Tuesday.

Then on Wednesday, the military chief told senior officers in a speech that the constitution could be revoked if the laws were not being properly enforced. An unusual deployment of armored vehicles in the

streets of several large cities also stoked fears.

On Saturday and Sunday, however, the military denied it had threatened a coup, accusing unnamed organizations and media of misrepresenting its position.

More protests called in Moscow to demand Navalny's release

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Moscow braced for more protests seeking the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who faces a court hearing Tuesday after two weekends of nationwide rallies and thousands of arrests in the largest outpouring of discontent in Russia in years.

Tens of thousands filled the streets across the vast country Sunday, chanting slogans against President Vladimir Putin and demanding freedom for Navalny, who was jailed last month and faces years in prison. Over 5,400 protesters were detained by authorities, according to a human rights group.

One of those taken into custody for several hours was Navalny's wife, Yulia, who was ordered Monday to pay a fine of about \$265 for participating in an unauthorized rally.

While state-run media dismissed the demonstrations as small and claimed that they showed the failure of the opposition, Navalny's team said the turnout demonstrated "overwhelming nationwide support" for the Kremlin's fiercest critic. His allies called for protesters to come to the Moscow courthouse on Tuesday.

"Without your help, we won't be able to resist the lawlessness of the authorities," his politician's team said in a social media post.

Mass protests engulfed dozens of Russian cities for the second weekend in a row despite efforts by authorities to stifle the unrest triggered by the jailing of 44-year-old Navalny.

He 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 reject the accusation. He faces a prison term for alleged probation violations from a 2014 money-laundering conviction that is widely seen as politically motivated.

Last month, Russia's prison service filed a motion to replace his 3 1/2-year suspended sentence from the conviction with one he must serve. The Prosecutor General's office backed the motion Monday, alleging Navalny engaged in "unlawful conduct" during the probation period.

After his arrest, Navalny's team released a two-hour YouTube video alleging that an opulent Black Sea residence was built for Putin. The video has been viewed over 100 million times, further stoking Russians' discontent amid an economic downturn. The Kremlin says Putin is not connected to the residence, and the president addressed the allegations himself last week, saying neither he nor his relatives own any of the properties mentioned in the video.

The rallies following Navalny's arrest appear to have rattled the Kremlin. To try to quell the protests, the authorities have jailed Navalny's associates and activists across the country. His brother Oleg, top ally Lyubov Sobol and three others were put under house arrest for two months and face criminal charges of violating coronavirus restrictions.

On Tuesday, Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh was also put under house for two months in connection with the same charge. Yarmysh was ordered to serve nine days in jail last month for violating protest regulations and was supposed to be released Saturday, but was arrested again.

At least 40 criminal investigations have been opened in 18 Russian regions in connection with the protests, said Pavel Chikov, head of the human rights organization Agora.

Police cracked down hard on the demonstrators Sunday, detaining over 5,400 of them, according to OVD-Info, a legal aid group that monitors arrests at protests. The group said that was the biggest number in its nine-year history of keeping records in the Putin era.

At least 51 protesters were beaten by police while being detained, OVD-Info said. Videos of the protests showed riot police striking people with truncheons and throwing them to the ground. Media reported some police used stun guns on protesters.

When asked about the mass detentions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the protests were "un-

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lawful" and charged that "there was a fairly large number of hooligans, provocateurs with more or less aggressive behavior toward law enforcement officers."

"In response to provocations, the police act harshly and within the law," Peskov said.

State media also highlighted "aggressive actions" by protesters in their coverage, which said the rallies Sunday drew far fewer people than the previous one on Jan. 23. Many reports underscored "polite" actions by police officers, and state TV channel Russia 1 even showed video statements of people thanking law enforcement officers in connection with the rallies.

The jailing of Navalny and the crackdown on protests prompted international outrage, with Western officials calling for his release and condemning the arrests of demonstrators.

The German government urged the immediate release of the arrested protesters, as well as Navalny. It "condemns the use of force by Russian security forces and the once again disproportionate action against peacefully demonstrating citizens," government spokeswoman Martina Fietz said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted that Washington "condemns the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protesters and journalists by Russian authorities for a second week straight." He also urged the release of Navalny and those detained "for exercising their human rights."

The Russian Foreign Ministry rejected Blinken's call as "crude interference in Russia's internal affairs" and accused Washington of trying to destabilize the situation by backing the protests.

More protests called in Moscow to demand Navalny's release

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ACLU, for first time, elects Black person as its president

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Deborah Archer, a professor at New York University School of Law with expertise in civil rights and racial justice, has become the first Black person in the 101-year history of the American Civil Liberties Union to be elected its president.

The ACLU announced Monday that Archer was elected over the weekend in a virtual meeting of the organization's 69-member board of directors. She succeeds Susan Herman, a professor at Brooklyn Law School who had served as president since 2008.

As the ACLU's eighth president since 1920, Archer will act as chair of its board of the directors, overseeing organizational matters and the setting of civil liberties policies. The fight against racial injustice is expected to be a top priority.

The ACLU's day-to-day operations are managed by its executive director — a post currently held by Anthony Romero.

During former President Donald Trump's four years in office, the ACLU filed an unprecedented 413 lawsuits and other legal actions against his administration, challenging policies related to immigrant rights, voting rights, LGBT rights, racial justice and other issues.

The campaign against Trump's administration — promoted in a catchy "See You In Court" ad campaign

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— fueled huge increases in donations and membership. According to Romero, the ACLU national office and its state affiliates received about \$175 million in donations in the three months after Trump's election, helping to finance a major expansion of staff.

"The ACLU has proven itself as an invaluable voice in the fight for civil rights in the last four years of the Trump era, and we are better positioned than ever to face the work ahead," Archer said.

Early in her career, after graduating from Yale Law School, she was a legal fellow at the ACLU in 1997-98. She has been a member of the ACLU's board since 2009, and a general counsel and member of the board's executive committee since 2017.

At NYU Law School, Archer is a professor of clinical law and director of its Civil Rights Clinic. She has served as chair of the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board, which investigates alleged police misconduct, and also was assistant counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

"There is no one better equipped, who best personifies or is more capable to helm the future battles for civil rights, civil liberties, and systemic equality than Deborah Archer," Romero said.

Romero is hopeful that the newly installed administration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will be more attentive to the ACLU's major concerns than the Trump administration was, but he expects daunting challenges ahead.

"President Trump may be gone but his toxic legacy on civil rights and civil liberties is still very much with us," Romero said. "It will take years to clean up."

"At the top of our agenda is the effort to redouble this nation's longstanding but frayed commitment to civil rights and racial justice," he added. "The country needs a president who will be transformational when it comes to these issues."

Other ACLU priorities, Romero said, include voting rights, a rollback of the Trump administration's get-tough immigration policies, and joining in efforts to thwart anti-abortion legislation surfacing in many Republican-governed states.

Music helping Tony Bennett battle Alzheimer's disease

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Tony Bennett has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease but it hasn't quieted his legendary voice.

The singer's wife and son reveal in the latest edition of AARP The Magazine that Bennett was first diagnosed with the irreversible neurological disorder in 2016. The magazine says he endures "increasingly rarer moments of clarity and awareness."

Still, he continues to rehearse and twice a week goes through his 90-minute set with his longtime pianist, Lee Musiker. The magazine says he sings with perfect pitch and apparent ease.

A beloved interpreter of American standards, Bennett's chart-topping career spans seven decades. "He's not the old Tony anymore," his wife, Susan, told the magazine. "But when he sings, he's the old Tony."

Bennett, 94, gained his first pop success in the early 1950s and enjoyed a career revival in the 1990s and became popular with younger audiences in part because of an appearance on "MTV Unplugged." He continued recording and touring constantly, and his 2014 collaboration with Lady Gaga, "Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga: Cheek to Cheek," debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's dementia and one in 10 people age 65 and older has Alzheimer's dementia.

Vaccine skepticism lurks in town famous for syphilis study

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

TUSKEGEE, Ala. (AP) — Lucenia Dunn spent the early days of the coronavirus pandemic encouraging people to wear masks and keep a safe distance from each other in Tuskegee, a mostly Black city where the government once used unsuspecting African American men as guinea pigs in a study of a sexually

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transmitted disease.

Now, the onetime mayor of the town immortalized as the home of the infamous "Tuskegee syphilis study" is wary of getting inoculated against COVID-19. Among other things, she's suspicious of the government promoting a vaccine that was developed in record time when it can't seem to conduct adequate virus testing or consistently provide quality rural health care.

"I'm not doing this vaccine right now. That doesn't mean I'm never going to do it. But I know enough to withhold getting it until we see all that is involved," said Dunn, who is Black.

The coronavirus immunization campaign is off to a shaky start in Tuskegee and other parts of Macon County. Area leaders point to a resistance among residents spurred by a distrust of government promises and decades of failed health programs. Many people in this city of 8,500 have relatives who were subjected to unethical government experimentation during the syphilis study.

"It does have an impact on decisions. Being in this community, growing up in this community, I would be very untruthful if I didn't say that," said Frank Lee, emergency management director in Macon County. Lee is Black.

Health experts have stressed both the vaccines' safety and efficacy. They have noted that while the vaccines were developed with record-breaking speed, they were based on decades of prior research. Vaccines used in the U.S. have shown no signs of serious side effects in studies of tens of thousands of people. And with more than 26 million vaccinations administered in the U.S. alone so far, no red flags have been reported.

Tuskegee is not a complete outlier. A recent survey conducted by the communications firm Edelman revealed that as of November, only 59% of people in the U.S. were willing to get vaccinated within a year with just 33% happy to do so as soon as possible.

But skepticism seems to run deeper here.

When Alabama and the rest of the South were still segregated by race, government medical workers starting in 1932 withheld treatment for unsuspecting men infected with syphilis in Tuskegee and surrounding Macon County so physicians could track the disease. The study, which involved about 600 men, ended in 1972 only after it was revealed by The Associated Press.

A lawsuit filed on behalf of the men by Black Tuskegee attorney Fred Gray resulted in a \$9 million settlement, and then-President Bill Clinton formally apologized on behalf of the U.S. government in 1997. But the damage left a legacy of distrust that extends far beyond Tuskegee: A December survey showed 40% of Black people nationwide said they wouldn't get the coronavirus vaccine. Such hesitancy is more entrenched than among white people, even though Black Americans have been hit disproportionately hard by the virus.

The Chicago-based Black nationalist group Nation of Islam is warning away members nationwide with an online presentation titled "Beyond Tuskegee: Why Black People Must Not Take The Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine."

Gray, now 90 and still practicing law in Tuskegee, rejects such comparisons. The syphilis study and the COVID-19 vaccine are completely different, he said. He believes that enough that he himself has gotten the vaccine and is publicly encouraging others to do the same.

Georgette Moon is on a similar mission. Hoping to both protect herself and encourage skittish friends, the former city council member recently bared an arm and let a public health nurse immunize her. Now, Moon said, if only more fellow Black residents could overcome their lingering fears and get the vaccine.

"The study is a huge factor," Moon said. "I've had very qualified, well-educated people tell me they are not going to take it right now."

The Macon County health department, which is administering two-step Moderna vaccines in its modern building near downtown, could perform as many as 160 immunizations a day, officials said. But a maximum of 140 people received the vaccine on any single date during the first six days of appointments, with a total of 527 people immunized during the period. Health care workers, emergency responders and long-term care residents are currently eligible for shots in Alabama, along with people 75 and older.

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There are some signs of hope. State statistics show a slow uptick in the number of people coming in for vaccinations, and word seems to be filtering through the community that it's OK to be vaccinated.

Down the street from the county clinic, the Veterans Affairs hospital in Tuskegee is vaccinating veterans 65 and older. While only 40% of the VA workers in the area have been vaccinated, officials said, more people are agreeing to the shots than during the initial wave.

"They know people who have had the vaccine, they hear more about it, they become more comfortable with it," said Dr. April Truett, an infectious disease physician at the hospital.

The Rev. John Curry Jr. said he and his wife took the shots after the health department said they could get appointments without a long wait. The pastor of the oldest Black church in town, Curry said he is encouraging congregants to get the vaccine.

Yet he said he also understands the power of lingering distrust in a town that will forever be linked to the syphilis study, one of the most reviled episodes of U.S. public health history.

"It's a blemish on Tuskegee," he said. "It hangs on the minds of people."

US watchdog: Taliban attacks increased in Afghan capital

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Taliban attacks in the Afghan capital of Kabul are on the rise, with increasing targeted killings of government officials, civil-society leaders and journalists, a report by a U.S. watchdog said Monday.

It comes as the Biden administration plans to take a new look at the peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban signed last February under President Donald Trump.

The report said Taliban-initiated attacks across Afghanistan during the last quarter of 2020 were slightly lower than in the previous quarter, but exceeded those of the same period in 2019, according to numbers provided by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

"Enemy attacks in Kabul were higher than during the previous quarter," the report quoted U.S. forces. "They were much higher than in the same quarter last year."

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, known as SIGAR, monitors the billions of dollars the U.S. spends in war-ravaged Afghanistan.

The Taliban unleashed a wave of attacks in Afghanistan in December, including strikes in northern Baghlan and southern Uruzgan provinces over a two-day period that killed at least 19 members of the Afghan security forces. In Kabul, a roadside bomb struck a vehicle, wounding two, and a lawyer was shot in a targeted killing.

Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, reported 2,586 civilian casualties from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31 last year, including 810 killed and 1,776 wounded, according to the SIGAR report.

The report said the proportion of casualties caused by improvised explosive devices increased by nearly 17% in this quarter, correlating with an increase in magnetically attached IEDs or "sticky bomb" attacks, the report said.

Despite the ongoing violence, casualties across Afghanistan in the last quarter of 2020 decreased by 14%, compared to the previous quarter. The quarter saw an exceptionally high number of casualties for the winter months, however, when fighting normally subsides.

The U.S. has been the prime backer of the Afghan government since it invaded the country soon after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and overthrew the Taliban, who were running the country and harboring al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. The U.S. is still spending about \$4 billion a year to assist Afghan security forces.

The U.S. military said earlier this month that it had met its goal of reducing the number of troops in Afghanistan to about 2,500. Senior U.S. commanders are skeptical of the Taliban's stated commitment to peace, though they have said they can accomplish their mission in Afghanistan at that troop level.

"As the footprint of U.S. agencies continues to shrink, it will become more important that the U.S. and other donors perform aggressive and effective oversight of its dollars and programs," said Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction John F. Sopko.

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Corruption is rampant among Afghan government ministries, driving a wedge between the government and much of the population, frustrating international donors, and contributing to a poverty level in the country of more than 72%, according to the World Bank.

Also, recent international aid agency reports said that more than half of Afghans are in dire need of assistance just to survive 2021. The relentless corruption has alienated most Afghans caught between a war and relentless poverty, despite billions of dollars in international aid. By the end of 2020, Afghanistan's unemployment rate was projected to rise to 37.9%, up from 23.9% in 2019, said the report.

Taliban representatives and the Afghan government earlier this month resumed peace talks in Qatar, the Gulf Arab state where the insurgents maintain an office. The stop-and-go talks are aimed at ending decades of conflict but frustration and fear have grown over the recent spike in violence, and both sides blame one another.

U.S. airstrikes increased in the last quarter of 2020 as U.S. forces provided defensive support to Afghan security forces, according to the U.S. military. It reiterated that since the signing of the U.S.-Taliban deal, U.S. forces have ceased offensive strikes against the Taliban.

The White House said that President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told his Afghan counterpart in a phone call last week that the new administration will "review" the February agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban.

Pentagon chief spokesman John Kirby said last week that the U.S. stands by its commitment under the deal for a full troop withdrawal, but the agreement also calls for the Taliban to cut ties with al-Qaida and reduce violence.

The authorized goal strength of Afghan defense forces has been adjusted downward to 208,000 personnel, the SIGAR report said. It had been roughly 227,000 for many years.

Afghan special forces conducted the highest number of ground operations in the last quarter of 2020 in more than a year, NATO said. The 1,152 ground operations were nearly double the number conducted during the same period last year, reflecting a 4% increase compared to the previous quarter.

Trump names 2 lawyers to impeachment defense team

By ERIC TUCKER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump announced a new impeachment legal defense team just one day after it was revealed that he had parted ways with an earlier set of attorneys with just over a week to go before his Senate trial.

The two representing Trump will be defense lawyer David Schoen, a frequent television legal commentator, and Bruce Castor, a former district attorney in Pennsylvania who has faced criticism for his decision to not charge actor Bill Cosby in a sex crimes case.

Both attorneys issued statements through Trump's office on Sunday saying that they were honored to take the job.

"The strength of our Constitution is about to be tested like never before in our history. It is strong and resilient. A document written for the ages, and it will triumph over partisanship yet again, and always," said Castor, who served as district attorney for Montgomery County, outside of Philadelphia, from 2000 to 2008.

The announcement was intended to promote a sense of stability surrounding the Trump defense team as his impeachment trial nears. The former president has struggled to hire and retain attorneys willing to represent him against charges that he incited the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol, which happened when a mob of loyalists stormed Congress as lawmakers met Jan. 6 to certify Joe Biden's electoral victory.

That's a contrast from his first impeachment trial, when Trump's high-profile team of attorneys included Alan Dershowitz, one of the best-known criminal defense lawyers in the country, as well as White House counsel Pat Cipollone, and Jay Sekulow, who has argued cases before the Supreme Court.

Trump's team had initially announced that Butch Bowers, a South Carolina lawyer, would lead his legal team after an introduction from Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham. But that team unraveled over the weekend due to differences over legal strategy.

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One person familiar with their thinking said Bowers and another South Carolina lawyer, Deborah Barbier, left the team because Trump wanted them to use a defense that relied on allegations of election fraud, and the lawyers were not willing to do so. The person was not authorized to speak publicly about the situation and requested anonymity.

Republicans and aides to Trump, the first president to be impeached twice in American history, have made clear that they intend to make a simple argument in the trial: Trump's trial, scheduled for the week of Feb. 8, is unconstitutional because he is no longer in office.

"The Democrats' efforts to impeach a president who has already left office is totally unconstitutional and so bad for our country," Trump adviser Jason Miller has said.

Many legal scholars, however, say there is no bar to an impeachment trial despite Trump having left the White House. One argument is that state constitutions that predate the U.S. Constitution allowed impeachment after officials left office. The Constitution's drafters also did not specifically bar the practice.

Castor, a Republican who was the elected district attorney of Pennsylvania's third-most populated county, decided against charging Cosby in a 2004 sexual encounter. He ran for the job again in 2015, and his judgment in the Cosby case was a key issue used against him by the Democrat who defeated him.

Castor has said that he personally thought Cosby should have been arrested, but that the evidence wasn't strong enough to prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt.

In 2004, Castor ran for state attorney general unsuccessfully. In 2016, he became the top lieutenant to the state's embattled attorney general — Kathleen Kane, a Democrat — as she faced charges of leaking protected investigative information to smear a rival and lying to a grand jury about it. She was convicted, leaving Castor as the state's acting attorney general for a few days.

Schoen met with financier Jeffrey Epstein about joining his defense team on sex trafficking charges just days before Epstein killed himself in a New York jail.

In an interview with the Atlanta Jewish Times last year, Schoen said he had also been approached by Trump associate Roger Stone before Stone's trial about being part of the team and that he was later retained to handle his appeal. Trump commuted Stone's sentence and then pardoned him. Schoen maintained in the interview that the case against Stone was "very unfair and politicized."

Neither Schoen nor Castor returned phone messages seeking comment Sunday evening.

Associated Press writers Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

In early going, Biden floods the zone with decrees

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Modern American presidents have found that a good way to get off to a fast start in office is to issue decrees like an ancient king.

With a pen as their scepter, they "hereby proclaim." They "order," "direct," "revoke" and "declare," rendering commandments in regal language drawn from the deep past. President Joe Biden is flooding the zone with them, achieving head-snapping changes in national policy that he would have no hope of getting from Congress quickly, if at all.

Easy come, though, can also mean easy go. As President Donald Trump discovered with his hard-charging and often ill-fated executive actions, courts can be quick to shoot them down. Congress can effectively override them and at most they're only good until a contrarian president takes over and whipsaws off in another direction again.

Can transgender troops have a life in the armed forces? Not openly under Trump. Under Biden, yes they can. Under who comes next, who knows?

For now, though, the lumbering government is seeing change at light speed.

In Biden's opening days, he put the U.S. back into the Paris climate accord, ended Trump's restrictions on travel from some Muslim-majority countries, froze further construction of Trump's border wall, protected

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immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children, and reversed Trump's rollback of energy efficiency and pollution standards. That's just a sampling.

Altogether, Biden has brought a transformation both in tone and substance in the earliest days of his presidency. After the bellowing, never-self-questioning Trump, almost anyone would.

Twitter is a dead zone now for seeing what's on a president's mind in the moment. Things are being heard from the Oval Office that are foreign to our ears in recent times: "Correct me if I'm wrong." "How can I say it politely?" "I misspoke." Wearing a mask is mandated on federal property and encouraged everywhere; meantime the gags have come off the government's top public health scientists.

But Biden's expressions of humility and his common courtesies only go so far. When it comes to dismantling a predecessor's legacy with the stroke of a pen and the words "I have hereunto set my hand," Biden is off to a fierce start and, like many before him, testing the limits of what a president can do by decree.

"A lot of what he has done has been unwinding what Trump had done," said Kenneth Mayer, a University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist and expert on presidential powers and executive actions. "Virtually all presidents push the envelope and do things that expand the scope of executive authority."

President Barack Obama struck a multinational nuclear deal with Iran and shaped and joined the Paris accord without Congress signing on, using the recognized authority of presidents to make international deals but leaving those moves vulnerable without the assent of lawmakers. Trump withdrew the U.S. from both.

Unable to get Congress to pass immigration legislation, Obama unilaterally shielded young immigrants from deportation, leaving nothing in law to guarantee their protections would last.

For most of his first year in office, until his tax cuts passed in late 2017, Trump chalked up no major legislative achievements despite having Republican control of Congress at the time. He did not score many big wins in law after, either, beyond budget agreements. But he was relentless with executive actions.

"Every president looks for those opportunities," Mayer said. "What Trump did was take the brakes off and do things that previous presidents had not done. He was enamored of his own powers. He was unusually aggressive and didn't respect the norm-based limits of what presidents ought to do.

"A lot of it was really quite sloppy," he added. "Shockingly incompetent."

Trump's orders to restrict entry from some Muslim countries were repeatedly blocked by federal judges until a weakened version passed muster at the Supreme Court. He declared a national emergency when no nationally recognized one existed at the southern border, allowing him to redirect some money already approved by Congress, but for other purposes, to his border wall.

Then there were the federal lands and waters that past presidents had acted to protect from development. Trump had his eye on them.

"For over 100 years, it was the accepted meaning of declaring national monuments that it was a one-way door," Mayer said. "You couldn't undeclare a national monument." But that custom shattered in 2017 with Trump's executive action to review or shrink the protected status of vast acres of national monument lands.

Biden moved to counter that with an order of his own. But his rollout of executive actions several months in the making has not been entirely smooth.

In Texas, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order barring the government from enforcing a 100-day deportation moratorium on most deportations, ruling the new administration had failed to provide "any concrete, reasonable justification" for it.

Biden has acknowledged the limits of his early course of unilateralism as he gears up for heavy lifts with Congress on pandemic relief and his ambitious legislative agenda. Merely ruling by "executive fiat," he said, would "get us virtually nowhere."

Republicans growled about Biden's busy signature pen, voicing the standard complaint about presidential overreach that comes from whichever party is out of power in the White House.

Biden was a bit testy about the pushback when he was asked if Congress might require him to send the pandemic relief package in chunks instead of as a whole. "No one requires me to do anything," he said with a monarchical flourish.

Biden burst out of the gate with several dozen executive actions. It remains to be seen whether he'll

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surpass the unilateralism of Trump, who signed an average of 55 executive orders a year, the most in any single term since Jimmy Carter, who averaged 80 a year.

On this front, the king among presidents is Franklin Roosevelt, who signed 307 a year on average and paired that activism with towering legislation steering the country through depression and war.

If executive action is often fleeting, legislation is anything but.

Although there's no permanence in anything Washington does, hard-won legislation typically sinks deep roots. So it has been with "Obamacare," the law Republicans swore to upend from the start but never could.

Trump's first executive order, on the day of his inauguration, was directed squarely at unraveling the Affordable Care Act. But presidential decree could not take away what Congress had ordained, and neither could repeated efforts by Republican lawmakers to vote it out of existence.

Biden had an executive order on that matter, too. On Thursday he ordered the law's health insurance markets to reopen for a special sign-up window, giving the uninsured a chance to find coverage in a raging pandemic after the Trump administration had refused to take that step.

He ordered his administration in the same document to examine other Trump health care policies that he may nullify, like certain work requirements for Medicaid and curbs on abortion counselling.

It's all an effort to "to undo the damage Trump has done," Biden said, and to restore things "which by fiat he changed."

Now, across the range of public policy, fiat chases fiat.

Biden to meet with GOP lawmakers to discuss virus relief

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to meet Monday afternoon with a group of 10 Republican senators who have proposed spending about one-third of the \$1.9 trillion he is seeking in coronavirus aid, though congressional Democrats are poised to move ahead without Republican support.

An invitation to the White House came hours after the lawmakers sent Biden a letter Sunday urging him to negotiate rather than try to ram through his relief package solely on Democratic votes. The House and Senate are on track to vote as soon as this week on a budget resolution, which would lay the groundwork for passing an aid package under rules requiring only a simple majority vote in the closely divided Senate.

The goal is for passage by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. The meeting to be hosted by Biden would amount to the most public involvement for the president in the negotiations for the next round of virus relief. Democratic and Republican lawmakers are far apart in their proposals for assistance.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Sunday that Biden had spoken with the leader of the group, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. Though Biden is wanting "a full exchange of views," Psaki reiterated that the president remains in favor of moving forward with a far-reaching relief package.

"With the virus posing a grave threat to the country, and economic conditions grim for so many, the need for action is urgent, and the scale of what must be done is large," Psaki said.

In challenging Biden to fulfill his pledge of unity, the group said in its letter that its counterproposal will include \$160 billion for vaccines, testing, treatment and personal protective equipment and call for more targeted relief than Biden's plan to issue \$1,400 stimulus checks for most Americans.

Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant for Biden in the 50-50 Senate where Vice President Kamala Harris is the tie-breaker. If all Democrats were to back an eventual compromise bill, the legislation would reach the 60-vote threshold necessary to overcome potential blocking efforts and pass under regular Senate procedures.

"In the spirit of bipartisanship and unity, we have developed a COVID-19 relief framework that builds on prior COVID assistance laws, all of which passed with bipartisan support," the Republican senators wrote. "Our proposal reflects many of your stated priorities, and with your support, we believe that this plan could be approved quickly by Congress with bipartisan support."

The plea for Biden to give bipartisan negotiations more time comes as the president has shown signs of

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impatience as the more liberal wing of his party considers passing the relief package through a process known as budget reconciliation. That would allow the bill to advance with only the backing of his Democratic majority.

The Republicans did not provide many details of their proposal. One of the signatories, Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, said that it would cost about \$600 billion.

"If you can't find bipartisan compromise on COVID-19, I don't know where you can find it," said Ohio Sen. Rob Portman, who also signed the letter.

But even as Biden extended the invitation to the Republican lawmakers, Psaki said that \$1,400 relief checks, substantial funding for reopening schools, aid to small businesses and hurting families, and more "is badly needed."

"As leading economists have said, the danger now is not in doing too much: it is in doing too little," Psaki said. "Americans of both parties are looking to their leaders to meet the moment."

Biden also spoke on Sunday with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who are facing a growing push from the more liberal Democratic members to move forward with Biden's legislation with or without Republican support.

The other GOP senators invited to meet with Biden are Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, Todd Young of Indiana, Jerry Moran of Kansas, Mike Rounds of South Dakota, and Thom Tillis of North Carolina.

Brian Deese, the top White House economic adviser who is leading the administration's outreach to Congress, said earlier Sunday that administration officials were reviewing the letter. He did not immediately commit to a Biden meeting with the lawmakers.

But Cedric Richmond, a senior Biden adviser, said the president "is very willing to meet with anyone to advance the agenda." When asked about the senators' plan, Richmond said, "This is about seriousness of purpose."

Deese indicated the White House could be open to negotiating on further limiting who would receive stimulus checks. Portman suggested the checks should go to individuals who make no more than \$50,000 per year and families capped at \$100,000 per year.

Under the Biden plan, families with incomes up to \$300,000 could receive some stimulus money.

"That is certainly a place that we're willing to sit down and think about, are there ways to make the entire package more effective?" Deese said.

As a candidate, Biden predicted his decades in the Senate and his eight years as Barack Obama's vice president gave him credibility as a deal-maker and would help him bring Republicans and Democrats to consensus on the most important matters facing the country.

But less than two weeks into his presidency, Biden showed frustration with the pace of negotiations at a time when the economy exhibited further evidence of wear from the pandemic. Last week, 847,000 Americans applied for unemployment benefits, a sign that layoffs remain high as the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage.

"I support passing COVID relief with support from Republicans if we can get it. But the COVID relief has to pass — no ifs, ands or buts," Biden said on Friday.

In the letter, the Republican lawmakers reminded Biden that in his inaugural address, he proclaimed that the challenges facing the nation require "the most elusive of things in a democracy: Unity."

Cassidy separately criticized the current Biden plan as "chock-full of handouts and payoffs to Democratic constituency groups."

"You want the patina of bipartisanship ... so that's not unity," Cassidy said.

Jared Bernstein, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said Biden remains willing to negotiate but that officials needed to see more details from Republicans. At the same time, Bernstein pressed the administration's argument that doing too little to stimulate the economy could have enormous impact on the economy in the near- and long-term.

"Look, the American people really couldn't care less about budget process, whether it's regular order,

bipartisanship, whether it's filibuster, whether it's reconciliation," Bernstein said. "They need relief, and they need it now."

Portman and Deese were on CNN's "State of the Union," and Deese also was interviewed on NBC's "Meet the Press." Cassidy and Bernstein appeared on "Fox News Sunday" and Richmond was on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Trump names 2 lawyers to impeachment defense team

By ERIC TUCKER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former president Donald Trump announced a new impeachment legal defense team Sunday, one day after it was revealed that he had parted ways with an earlier set of attorneys with just over a week to go before his Senate trial.

The two representing Trump will be defense lawyer David Schoen, a frequent television legal commentator, and Bruce Castor, a former district attorney in Pennsylvania who has faced criticism for his decision to not charge actor Bill Cosby in a sex crimes case.

Both attorneys issued statements through Trump's office saying that they were honored to take the job. "The strength of our Constitution is about to be tested like never before in our history. It is strong and resilient. A document written for the ages, and it will triumph over partisanship yet again, and always," said Castor, who served as district attorney for Montgomery County, outside of Philadelphia, from 2000 to 2008.

The announcement Sunday was intended to promote a sense of stability surrounding the Trump defense team as his impeachment trial nears. The former president has struggled to hire and retain attorneys willing to represent him against charges that he incited the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol, which happened when a mob of loyalists stormed Congress as lawmakers met Jan. 6 to certify Joe Biden's electoral victory.

That's a contrast from his first impeachment trial, when Trump's high-profile team of attorneys included Alan Dershowitz, one of the best-known criminal defense lawyers in the country, as well as White House counsel Pat Cipollone, and Jay Sekulow, who has argued cases before the Supreme Court.

Trump's team had initially announced that Butch Bowers, a South Carolina lawyer, would lead his legal team after an introduction from Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham. But that team unraveled over the weekend due to differences over legal strategy.

One person familiar with their thinking said Bowers and another South Carolina lawyer, Deborah Barbier, left the team because Trump wanted them to use a defense that relied on allegations of election fraud, and the lawyers were not willing to do so. The person was not authorized to speak publicly about the situation and requested anonymity.

Republicans and aides to Trump, the first president to be impeached twice in American history, have made clear that they intend to make a simple argument in the trial: Trump's trial, scheduled for the week of Feb. 8, is unconstitutional because he is no longer in office.

"The Democrats' efforts to impeach a president who has already left office is totally unconstitutional and so bad for our country," Trump adviser Jason Miller has said.

Many legal scholars, however, say there is no bar to an impeachment trial despite Trump having left the White House. One argument is that state constitutions that predate the U.S. Constitution allowed impeachment after officials left office. The Constitution's drafters also did not specifically bar the practice.

Castor, a Republican who was the elected district attorney of Pennsylvania's third-most populated county, decided against charging Cosby in a 2004 sexual encounter. He ran for the job again in 2015, and his judgment in the Cosby case was a key issue used against him by the Democrat who defeated him.

Castor has said that he personally thought Cosby should have been arrested, but that the evidence wasn't strong enough to prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt.

In 2004, Castor ran for state attorney general unsuccessfully. In 2016, he became the top lieutenant to the state's embattled attorney general — Kathleen Kane, a Democrat — as she faced charges of leaking protected investigative information to smear a rival and lying to a grand jury about it. She was convicted, leaving Castor as the state's acting attorney general for a few days.

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Schoen met with financier Jeffrey Epstein about joining his defense team on sex trafficking charges just days before Epstein killed himself in a New York jail.

In an interview with the Atlanta Jewish Times last year, Schoen said he had also been approached by Trump associate Roger Stone before Stone's trial about being part of the team and that he was later retained to handle his appeal. Trump commuted Stone's sentence and then pardoned him. Schoen maintained in the interview that the case against Stone was "very unfair and politicized."

Neither Schoen nor Castor returned phone messages seeking comment Sunday evening.

Associated Press writers Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Michael Balsamo in Washington contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 2, the 33rd day of 2021. There are 332 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 2, 1990, in a dramatic concession to South Africa's Black majority, President F.W. de Klerk lifted a ban on the African National Congress and promised to free Nelson Mandela.

On this date:

In 1653, New Amsterdam — now New York City — was incorporated.

In 1876, the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs was formed in New York.

In 1913, New York City's rebuilt Grand Central Terminal officially opened to the public at one minute past midnight.

In 1914, Charles Chaplin made his movie debut as the comedy short "Making a Living" was released by Keystone Film Co.

In 1922, the James Joyce novel "Ulysses" was published in Paris on Joyce's 40th birthday.

In 1925, the legendary Alaska Serum Run ended as the last of a series of dog mushers brought a life-saving treatment to Nome, the scene of a diphtheria epidemic, six days after the drug left Nenana.

In 1943, the remainder of Nazi forces from the Battle of Stalingrad surrendered in a major victory for the Soviets in World War II.

In 1980, NBC News reported the FBI had conducted a sting operation targeting members of Congress using phony Arab businessmen in what became known as "Abscam," a codename protested by Arab-Americans.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan pressed his case for additional aid to the Nicaraguan Contras a day ahead of a vote by the U.S. House of Representatives. (The three major broadcast TV networks declined to carry the speech, which was covered by CNN; a divided House voted to reject Reagan's request for \$36.2 million in new aid.)

In 2002, inside the World Economic Forum in New York, foreign economic leaders criticized the United States for protectionist policies while outside, thousands of protesters demonstrated against global capitalism.

In 2006, House Republicans elected John Boehner (BAY'-nur) of Ohio as their new majority leader to replace the indicted Tom DeLay. Tornadoes tore through New Orleans neighborhoods that had been hit hard by Hurricane Katrina five months earlier.

In 2014, Academy Award-winning actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, 46, was found dead in his New York apartment from a combination of heroin, cocaine and other drugs.

Ten years ago: Supporters of President Hosni Mubarak charged into Cairo's central square on horses and camels brandishing whips while others rained firebombs from rooftops in what appeared to be an orchestrated assault against protesters trying to topple Egypt's leader of 30 years.

Five years ago: Health officials reported that a person in Texas had become infected with the Zika virus

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through sex in the first case of the illness being transmitted within the United States. A suicide bomber detonated an explosive aboard a Somali Airbus, forcing it to make an emergency landing at Mogadishu's international airport; only the bomber was killed. Bob Elliott, half of the enduring television and radio comedy team Bob and Ray, died in Maine at age 92.

One year ago: The Philippines reported that a 44-year-old Chinese man from Wuhan had died in a Manila hospital from the new coronavirus; it was the first death from the virus to be recorded outside of China. The United States recorded its ninth known case, a woman in the San Francisco area who'd recently traveled to Wuhan. Authorities in parts of China extended the Lunar New Year holiday break well into February to try to keep people at home. Quarterback Patrick Mahomes led the Kansas City Chiefs to three touchdowns over the final 6 minutes, 13 seconds to lift them to a 31-20 victory over the San Francisco 49ers in the Super Bowl. Novak Djokovic won his eighth Australian Open championship and 17th Grand Slam title overall by coming back to beat Dominic Thiem 6-4, 4-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian Tom Smothers is 84. Rock singer-guitarist Graham Nash is 79. Television executive Barry Diller is 79. Actor Bo Hopkins is 77. Country singer Howard Bellamy (The Bellamy Brothers) is 75. TV chef Ina (EE'-nuh) Garten is 73. Actor Jack McGee is 72. Actor Brent Spiner (SPY'-nur) is 72. Rock musician Ross Valory (Journey) is 72. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, is 69. The former president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye (goon-hay), is 69. Model Christie Brinkley is 67. Actor Michael Talbott is 66. Actor Kim Zimmer is 66. Actor Michael T. Weiss is 59. Actor-comedian Adam Ferrara is 55. Rock musician Robert DeLeo (Army of Anyone; Stone Temple Pilots) is 55. Actor Jennifer Westfeldt is 51. Rapper T-Mo is 49. Actor Marissa Jaret Winokur is 48. Actor Lori Beth Denberg is 45. Singer Shakira is 44. Actor Rich Sommer is 43. Country singer Blaine Larsen is 35. Actor Zosia (ZAH'-shuh) Mamet is 33.

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