

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 1 of 86

- [1- Coming up on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [2- Finnesand's 60th Anniversary](#)
- [3- Upcoming Schedule](#)
- [4- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [6- Lady Cavaliers escape Tigers 3-point arsenal](#)
- [6- Council votes to purchase Wells Fargo building](#)
- [7- Groton's Farrell signs to play football at Northern State](#)
- [8- Groton Area boys sweep Langford Area, but varsity team rallied in the last 90 seconds to win](#)
- [9- February 3rd COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [16- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- American Standard Shower Ad](#)
- [23- News from the Associated Press](#)
- [86- ADT AD](#)

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

"ANGER MAKES YOU SMALLER, WHILE  
FORGIVENESS FORCES YOU TO GROW  
BEYOND WHAT YOU WERE."

-CHERIE CARTER-SCOTT



DoubleHeader

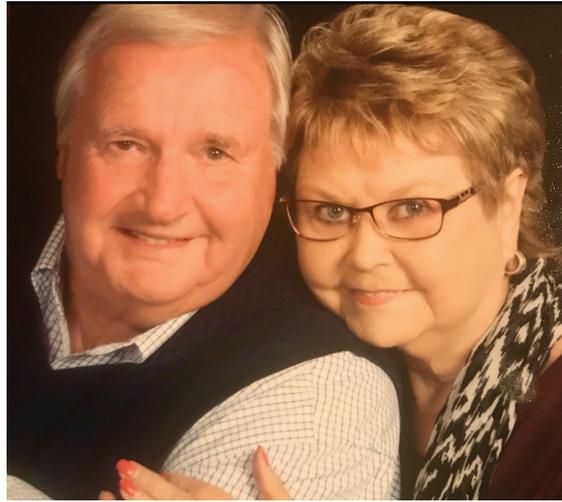


**Faulkton Area at Groton Area**  
**4 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021**  
**Girls JV, Boys JV**  
**Girls Varsity, Boys Varsity**



**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



*Over and Darlene  
Finnesand*  
**60th Anniversary  
on Feb. 11, 2021**

**Greetings may  
be sent to  
505 3rd Ave. W.  
Groton, SD  
57445**

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 3 of 86

## Upcoming Schedule

### 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 (Trent and Heather Traphagen) 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 in Sioux Falls

## #346 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

The downward trend continues, although deaths remain too high, something we're a ways from tapering at this point. There have been 26,590,100 cases thus far in the US, which is 0.5% more than yesterday. There were 121,100 new case reports today. Hospitalizations continue to decline with 92,880. We've been below 100,000 for 4 consecutive days now. And there were 4006 deaths reported today, still a stupid-high number and our ninth worst day. We have lost 450,567 Americans to this virus so far, 0.9% more than yesterday.

We have some positive news about the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. You will remember this is an adenovirus-vectored DNA vaccine given in two doses which is already approved in Europe and several other countries and in clinical trials in the US. Tests are showing a reduction in positive PCR tests for virus in vaccinated people after the second dose of vaccine. The implication of this finding is that the vaccine at least reduces the possibility of viral shedding by a vaccinated person, which means the vaccine appears to reduce transmission. This is a big deal. What's more, while obviously, lots of research remains to be done, it is possible we'll see similar results in people vaccinated with the other vaccines already approved or in the pipeline since they all pretty much target the same antigenic components of this virus. We were finding these trial results pretty exciting already; evidence they not only prevent serious disease, but also reduce transmission, would be thrilling. Yes, further work is needed to confirm these results and to see whether my speculation about spillover effect in the other vaccines holds; but we can call this good news.

Additionally, there is some evidence a longer interval between doses of this Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is actually beneficial. It appears the final efficacy is higher when the second dose is delayed up to three months. This study has not been peer-reviewed, but it looks promising, especially in an environment where we are looking to get more people vaccinated sooner. Creating a delay between doses provides time to get more first doses out. This result is a whole lot less likely to generalize to other vaccines with very different platforms; so there's nothing here to tell us delaying second doses of other vaccines makes sense. I don't think we're prepared to support longer delays with any vaccines for which this has not been tested.

Another vaccine, this one the Russian Sputnik V, has demonstrated 91.6 percent efficacy according to a peer-reviewed study published in *The Lancet* yesterday. This is the vaccine which was approved for use in Russia before there had been clinical trials, which raised some eyebrows across the world (including at my house); but this appears to have worked out. This vaccine looks to be both safe and effective. This is an adenovirus-vectored DNA vaccine which requires two doses and requires normal cold storage, unlike the more fragile mRNA vaccines. I don't see this one coming into use in the US, but one more vaccine on the global market, especially a relatively inexpensive and easy to store one, is a very good thing.

In a briefing a couple of days ago, CDC officials talked about infections in pets. They continue to say there is no evidence pets are a factor in transmission of Covid-19. Dr. Casey Barton Behraves said, "Based on limited information available to date, the risk of animals, including pets, spreading Covid-19 to people is considered to be low." No big shocker there; with the number of households containing pets, we'd have seen something of it by now if there was something to see. Even though this was originally an animal virus, it seems clear the particular animals Americans tend to keep as pets are not great hosts for it. Anyone here have a pet bat? If so, that could still be a problem.

She explained that, except for mink, there have been 187 identified cases of animal infection in 22 countries so far in this pandemic. A number of those have been in primates or in big cats in zoos; there have been only a small number of infections in pets. Except for mink, no animals are known to have died from these infections. Animals viewed as highly susceptible to the virus include, according to Behraves, cats, hamsters, non-human primates, rabbits, mink, and deer.

It is possible for you to infect your pet, so precautions are recommended for people with identified infections when caring for pets. It is suggested you avoid close contacts with your pet and, if possible, have another household member care for the pet while you are infectious. You should also wear a mask around the pet if you are infectious. Further, it's a good idea to keep cats indoors and limit their contact

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 5 of 86

with those outside the household since cats appear to be more susceptible than dogs. And I am hoping this is not necessary, but just in case, I'll pass along one other piece of advice from Behravesh: Don't put disinfectant on your pet or bathe your pet in disinfectant; doing so can make them very sick.

Bonifaz Diaz co-owns a theater company in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala; but it's been shut down since the spring due to the coronavirus. Times are tough for him, but he has a lot of free time now; so he's using that time to ride his bike. He's not riding for exercise though; he's riding for children.

Guatemala had the worst rate of child malnutrition in the Western Hemisphere before the pandemic; since then, the problem has mushroomed. Diaz volunteers for the nonprofit 32 Volcanoes which serves a population, 97 percent of whom have a household income of a dollar a day or less. Nearly half the population of this Western Highlands region suffers from chronic malnutrition, and a lifesaving food in the region is something called Incaparina, an oatmeal-like food packed with nutrients. A one-pound bag of Incaparina contains 24 servings and costs around \$1.15. It is a lifesaver; but the fact is the families being served can't afford to buy even this.

The solution is a barter program of books for food. Here's how it works: People donate books, and the organization lists those available. If you want one of the books, you request it and Diaz bicycles to your house to deliver it. In return, you pay several bags of Incaparina which Diaz hauls back to the nonprofit for distribution to families. A book can feed a family for a month. Diaz discovered early on that people want to help; but they have received the message that they should not go out and risk spreading or catching the virus. As a result, he has devoted himself to delivering books and Incaparina during this pandemic. He has a little cart he can pull behind his bike when he has a lot of food to carry. Since the pandemic began, he has cycled more than 1200 miles and hauled thousands of pounds of food that is keeping nearly 400 children alive, up from just 120 who were being helped before the pandemic. Diaz has carried as much as 125 pounds at once and has traveled as far as 37 miles to make a delivery.

The program is going strong. Two more volunteers have started bicycle deliveries with Diaz, and donations are flooding in. They've begun supplying other nutrient-rich foods like amaranth grain. The goal is to stave off chronic malnutrition, especially before the age of five, because malnutrition in the very young causes damage that is lifelong.

A teacher who loves to order books from the program told the AP she enjoys feeling like a part of this "circle" of giving, saying, "You might not get to those places, but your help can. This small grain of sand to be able to change the country."

And Diaz plans to continue as long as he is needed. He said, "It's an opportunity to serve in which we all benefit." Here's a guy who gets that we are all interdependent, that feeding one is feeding all. And he lives it.

Be well. I'll be back.

## Lady Cavaliers escape Tigers 3-point arsenal

Aberdeen Roncalli escaped with a four-point win over the Groton Area Lady Tigers in basketball action played Tuesday in Groton. It was raining three-pointers for the Tigers and it had the Cavaliers on the run. The Tigers made 10 of 25 three-pointers for 40 percent with Gracie Traphagen making five of nine, Kenzie McInerney was two of seven and Sydney Leicht was three of five. The Tigers were only five of 14 in two-pointers for 36 percent and was one of three from the line.

Aspen Johnson had six of the team's 20 rebounds, Allyssa Locke had three of the team's 10 assists and two of the team's four steals.

Roncalli held an 11-3 lead after the first quarter and 24-20 at half time. The game was tied at 31 at the end of the third quarter and the Tigers had the lead up to five minutes left in the game.

Roncalli won the junior varsity game, 29-18, and the Tigers won the C game, 27-14.

Traphagen and Leicht each had 15 points while McInerney had 10 and Brooke Gengerke had one point.

Madelyn Bragg led the Cavaliers with 19 points, scoring 14 of them in the first half. Morgan Fiedler had 11 points, making two 3-pointers in the fourth quarter. Elissa Hammrich had seven points while Olivia Hansen had four and Jeci Ewart and Allie Morgan each had two points.

- Paul Kosel

## Council votes to purchase Wells Fargo building

The Groton City Council voted Tuesday night to purchase the soon to be vacant Wells Fargo Building in downtown Groton.

The Groton branch of Wells Fargo is scheduled to close in March. The purchase price was \$215,000.

The city has received \$296,008 from the COVID Relief Fund with those funds being used for the building purchase.

City Hall will be moved over to the Wells Fargo building.

## Groton's Farrell signs to play football at Northern State

Aberdeen, S.D. – Northern State University head football coach, Mike Schmidt announced the addition of 44 student-athletes to the 2021 Wolves football roster today. Schmidt's second signing class hails from 12 different states, spanning ten position groups.

The 2021 signing class includes Tristan Abbott (Lacrosse, Wis.), Andrew Aguilar (Chino, Calif.), Brock Baker (Aberdeen, S.D.), Andrew Blazevich (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Wyatt Block (Mankato, Minn.), Michael Bonds (La Cañada, Calif.), Kiefer Chmielewski (Kaukauna, Wis.), Blake Clay (Whittier, Calif.), Bobby Cleary (Slinger, Wis.), Madden Connelly (Sparta, Wis.), Tavy Crump (Kenosha, Wis.), Steven Cuadra (Norco, Calif.), Aidan Enneking (Sussex, Wis.), Jaimen Farrell (Groton, S.D.), Brandon Fodness (Lennox, S.D.), Luke Gunderson (Buffalo, Minn.), Justin Hernandez (Whittier, Calif.), Carter Hogg (Aberdeen, S.D.), Payton Hughes (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Wade James (Bismarck, N.D.), Anthony Kasper (Bolingbrook, Ill.), Tyler Kjetland (Emery, S.D.), Jack Klussendorf (Waukesha, Wis.), Charlie Larson (Rapid City, S.D.), Latavion 'Tay' Lipscomb (Jackson, Miss.), Donnie Lucas (Milwaukee, Wis.), Ja'arie Mack (Joliet, Ill.), Jackson McNeil (Warner, S.D.), Esteban Mendoza (Whittier, Calif.), Ben Moore (Kaukauna, Wis.), Mason Osborn (Phoenix, Ariz.), Victor Owens (Denver, Colo.), Tanner Reddan (Castle Rock, Colo.), Jaden Reed (Minneapolis, Minn.), Sam Sather (Grand Forks, N.D.), Dawson Schmidt (Watertown, S.D.), Luke Schroeder (Green Bay, Wis.), Daniel Sedlacek Jr. (Custer, S.D.), Kaleb Skelly (Spring Lake Park, Minn.), Levi Sleezer (Aurelia, Iowa), Colt Smith (Gretna, Neb.), Jacob Van Landingham (Franklin, Tenn.), Ryan Wojcik (Rapid City, S.D.), and Josh Zaccanti (Geneva, Ill.).

In addition, Northern State Athletics will host a Signing Day Special airing at 5:30 p.m. on YouTube, Facebook, and the NSIC Network. Viewers will hear about the 2021 class from the Northern State staff and get a glimpse at the progress on Dacotah Bank Stadium.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 8 of 86

## Groton Area boys sweep Langford Area, but varsity team rallied in the last 90 seconds to win

Groton Area boys basketball teams had a clean sweep of the Langford Area teams on Tuesday by winning the eighth grade game, the junior varsity and the varsity game.

Groton Area jumped out to an 11-0 lead in the eighth grade game en route to a 58-16 win. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter.

Taylor Diegel led the Tigers with 14 points which included two three-pointers. Turner Thompson had 13 points followed by Keegan Tracy with 10 (2 three-pointers), Carter Simon eight, Logan Pearson six, Blake Pauli had a three-pointer and adding two points each were Kaden McInerney and Ryder Johnson. Everyone scored on the Groton team.

Scoring for Langford Area were Daniel Person, Ryder Smith, Kasen Keogh and Ben Suther with four points apiece.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 40-30. Langford Area scored first with a three-pointer but Groton Area came back to take a 10-5 lead at the end of the first period. Groton went up, 15-7, but the Lions came back and tied the game at half time at 15. The TIGers kept the upper hand and led, 26-20 at the end of the third period and went on to win. The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Jim and Shirley VanDenHemel of Woonsocket, grandparents of Cade and Tate Larson.

Cole Simon led the Tigers with 14 points while Wyatt Hearnen had 12, Logan Ringgenberg had four, Teylor Diegel and Jackson Cogley each made a three-pointer and Fanian Sanchez and Colby Dunker each had two points. Groton Area made six of 11 free throws for 55 percent, was 16 of 31 in field goals shooting for 52 percent, had 13 turnovers and 18 team fouls.

Langford Area was led by Brayden Peterson with 11 followed by Jesse Keough and Braven Hanse (2 3-pointers) with six each, Ben Gustafson had four points and Aden Godel made a three-pointer. The Lions were seven of nine from the line for 78 percent, 10 of 26 in field goal shooting for 38 percent, had seven turnovers and 13 team fouls.

Langford led for nearly the whole game in the varsity match-up, taking 12-3 lead after the first quarter and a 17-12 lead at half time. Groton closed to within one, 21-20, but was unable to get over the hump as the Lions led it, 30-25, at the end of the third period. The TIGers tied the game twice in the fourth quarter at 34 and 36 before taking their first lead with 1:33 left in the game, 38-36. Tate Larson made five of six free throws and Jayden Zak was two for two in the fourth fourth quarter to help push the Tigers over the top. Larson led the Tigers with 18 points followed by Lane Tietz with 13 (1 3-pointer), Jayden Zak had 10 (2 3-pointers) and Jacob Zak had four points (1 3-pointer). Colin Frey led the Lions with 21 points while Bryce Peterson had eight, Benton West three, Zander Widener and Kade Larson each had two points and Jesse Keough added a free throw.

After shooting 17 percent in the first half, the Tigers warmed up in the second half and finished the game making 13 of 42 field goals for 31 percent and was 16 of 26 from the line for 62 percent off of Langford Area's 18 team fouls and had 13 turnovers. Langford was 13 of 40 from the field for 33 percent, was 11 of 20 from the line for 55 percent off of Groton Area's 16 team fouls, and had 10 turnovers.

The varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bierman Farm Service, Jark Real Estate, Harr Motors - Bary Keith, Bahr Spray Foam, Allied Climate Professionals- Kevin Nehls, S.D. Army National Guard, John Sieh Agency, Groton Vet Clinic, Blocker Construction, Thunder Seed with John Wheeting, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc, Groton Ford and S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank.

- Paul Kosel

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 9 of 86

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	451	424	824	16	Moderate	5.00%
Beadle	2614	2517	5542	39	Moderate	4.64%
Bennett	377	363	1132	9	Minimal	0.93%
Bon Homme	1500	1471	1991	25	Minimal	1.56%
Brookings	3440	3278	11034	34	Substantial	3.32%
Brown	4966	4728	11955	80	Substantial	11.35%
Brule	680	663	1794	8	Moderate	7.50%
Buffalo	420	402	868	13	Minimal	16.00%
Butte	957	921	3049	20	Moderate	6.60%
Campbell	125	118	244	4	Moderate	13.64%
Charles Mix	1231	1166	3758	18	Substantial	10.00%
Clark	343	326	910	4	Moderate	0.00%
Clay	1757	1719	4926	16	Substantial	3.20%
Codington	3766	3595	9207	74	Substantial	9.29%
Corson	461	445	971	11	Minimal	13.04%
Custer	728	702	2574	11	Moderate	8.45%
Davison	2905	2800	6160	59	Substantial	4.35%
Day	613	562	1660	27	Substantial	10.53%
Deuel	458	445	1071	8	Moderate	11.63%
Dewey	1388	1353	3699	21	Substantial	6.45%
Douglas	413	395	863	9	Minimal	6.67%
Edmunds	461	437	968	9	Substantial	6.67%
Fall River	508	482	2470	15	Moderate	9.52%
Faulk	338	316	659	13	Moderate	6.67%
Grant	924	847	2094	37	Substantial	18.75%
Gregory	503	465	1177	27	Moderate	0.00%
Haakon	241	231	506	9	Minimal	0.00%
Hamlin	670	615	1665	38	Moderate	8.06%
Hand	319	310	757	5	Minimal	4.55%
Hanson	339	325	668	4	Moderate	22.58%
Harding	91	89	173	1	None	0.00%
Hughes	2215	2127	6175	32	Substantial	2.01%
Hutchinson	759	716	2220	23	Moderate	8.33%

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 10 of 86

Hyde	135	133	387	1	None	0.00%
Jackson	268	252	887	13	None	0.00%
Jerauld	268	246	532	16	Minimal	8.33%
Jones	82	79	208	0	Minimal	7.14%
Kingsbury	608	581	1540	13	Moderate	6.00%
Lake	1146	1089	3068	17	Substantial	5.88%
Lawrence	2758	2680	8132	42	Moderate	7.19%
Lincoln	7486	7234	18984	74	Substantial	10.27%
Lyman	590	574	1817	10	Moderate	7.69%
Marshall	289	274	1103	5	Moderate	4.84%
McCook	719	687	1523	24	Moderate	13.95%
McPherson	236	218	528	4	Moderate	2.52%
Meade	2483	2396	7234	30	Substantial	10.38%
Mellette	241	235	706	2	Minimal	8.70%
Miner	269	241	537	7	Moderate	28.57%
Minnehaha	27109	26173	73229	311	Substantial	8.64%
Moody	604	570	1672	16	Substantial	6.67%
Oglala Lakota	2038	1955	6436	43	Substantial	10.78%
Pennington	12424	11961	37092	171	Substantial	8.97%
Perkins	338	308	745	12	Substantial	27.50%
Potter	350	334	787	3	Moderate	8.70%
Roberts	1111	1054	3932	35	Substantial	9.63%
Sanborn	324	316	654	3	Minimal	3.39%
Spink	770	722	2012	25	Substantial	12.36%
Stanley	318	307	863	2	Moderate	0.00%
Sully	135	129	288	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1213	1170	4027	25	Substantial	4.27%
Tripp	657	635	1416	15	Moderate	6.98%
Turner	1044	974	2550	50	Moderate	2.74%
Union	1879	1765	5796	39	Substantial	9.91%
Walworth	703	668	1749	15	Moderate	3.75%
Yankton	2748	2669	8799	28	Substantial	4.37%
Ziebach	335	323	845	9	Minimal	0.00%
Unassigned	0	0	1886	0		

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 11 of 86

## South Dakota



### AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4220	0
10-19 years	12128	0
20-29 years	19512	4
30-39 years	17876	15
40-49 years	15501	35
50-59 years	15302	102
60-69 years	12426	231
70-79 years	6644	405
80+ years	5030	990

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	56705	845
Male	51934	937

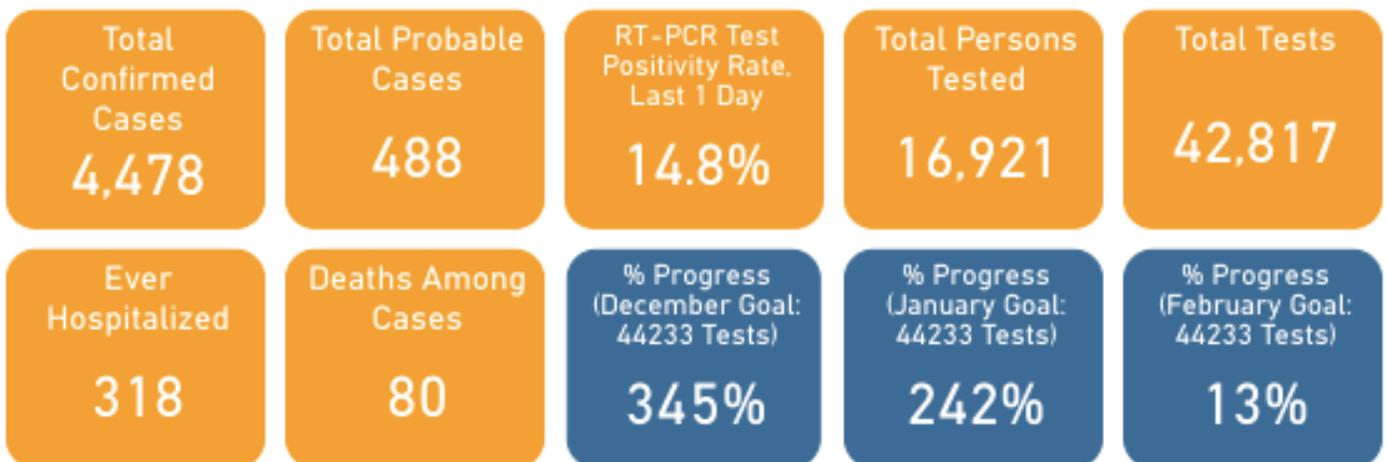
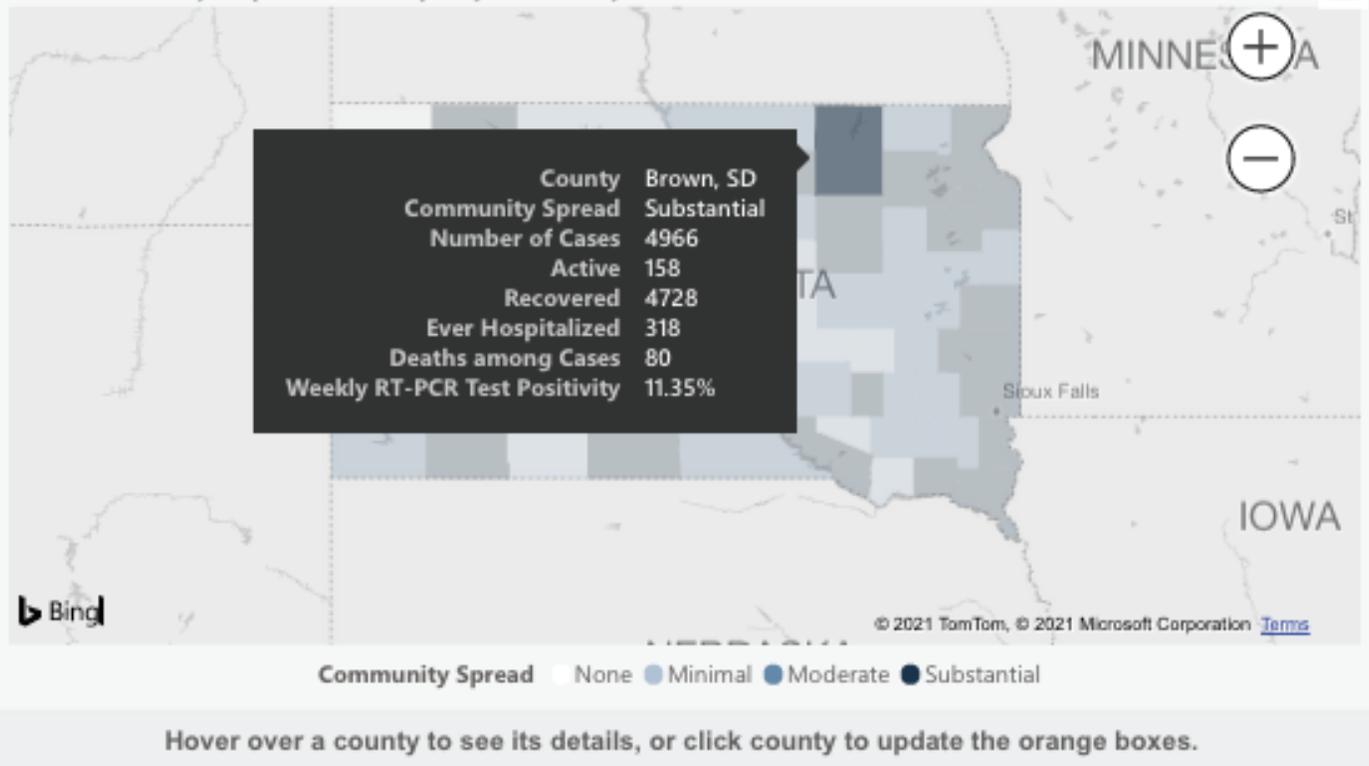
# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 12 of 86

## Brown County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



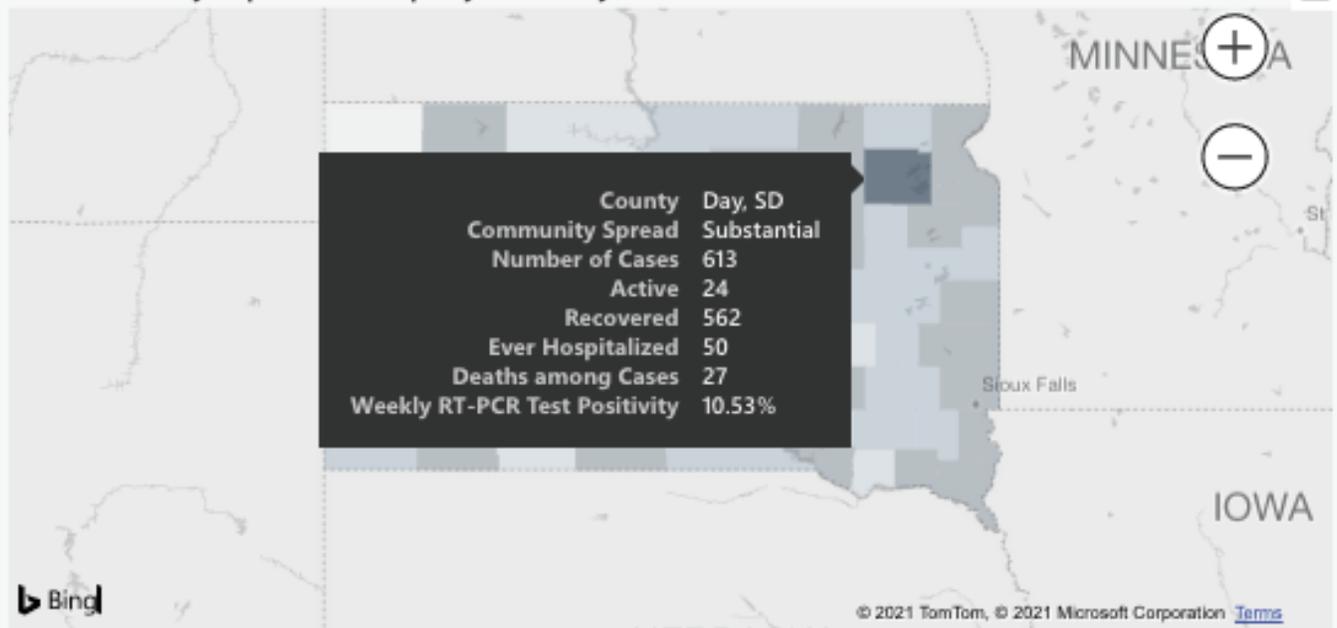
# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 13 of 86

## Day County

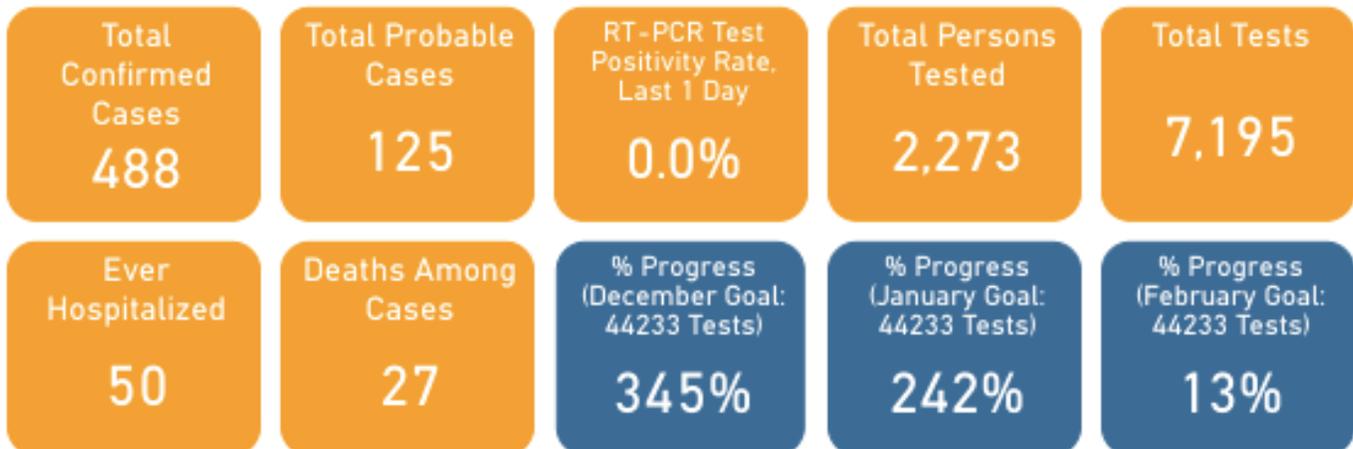


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread None Minimal Moderate Substantial

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



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 14 of 86

## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

104,604

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

73,553

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	55,547
Pfizer	49,057

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	26,175
Moderna - Series Complete	14,686
Pfizer - 1 dose	16,327
Pfizer - Series Complete	16,365

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	208	108	50	158
Beadle	2050	854	598	1,452
Bennett*	180	124	28	152
Bon Homme*	968	376	296	672
Brookings	2791	1,005	893	1,898
Brown	4921	1,947	1,487	3,434
Brule*	604	316	144	460
Buffalo*	43	37	3	40
Butte	552	368	92	460
Campbell	438	80	179	259
Charles Mix*	909	361	274	635
Clark	372	198	87	285
Clay	1736	788	474	1,262
Codington*	3687	1,483	1,102	2,585
Corson*	68	50	9	59
Custer*	764	462	151	613
Davison	2817	765	1,026	1,791
Day*	823	377	223	600
Deuel	486	226	130	356
Dewey*	170	86	42	128
Douglas*	438	172	133	305
Edmunds	381	173	104	277
Fall River*	780	522	129	651
Faulk	238	186	26	212
Grant*	744	240	252	492
Gregory*	540	196	172	368
Haakon*	211	77	67	144

# Groton Daily Independent

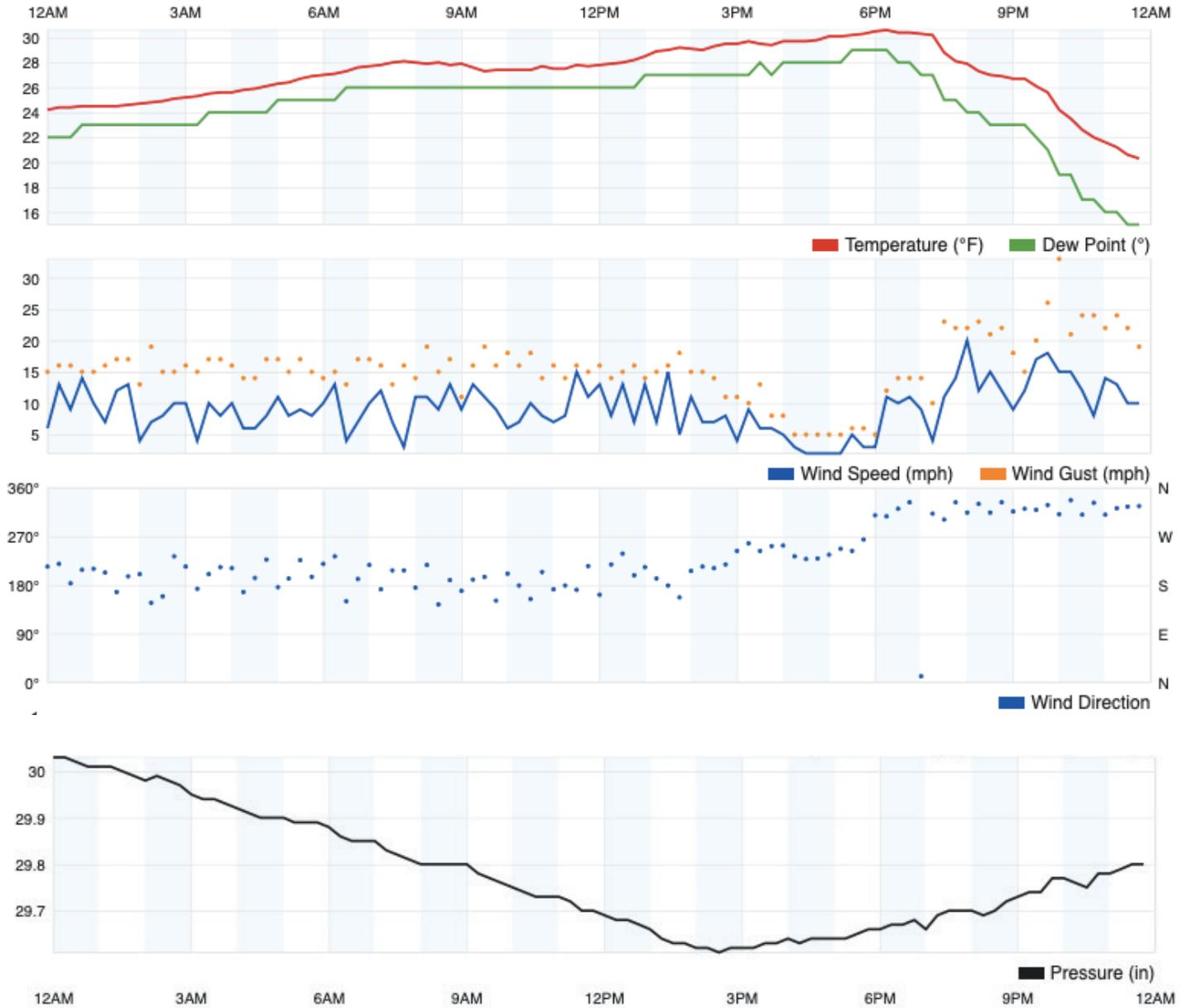
Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 15 of 86

Hamlin	561	227	167	394
Hand	463	197	133	330
Hanson	148	36	56	92
Harding	13	9	2	11
Hughes*	2469	1,299	585	1,884
Hutchinson*	1230	320	455	775
Hyde*	221	43	89	132
Jackson*	135	77	29	106
Jerauld	195	61	67	128
Jones*	190	124	33	157
Kingsbury	675	217	229	446
Lake	1311	563	374	937
Lawrence	2227	1,585	321	1,906
Lincoln	10334	2,936	3,699	6,635
Lyman*	207	125	41	166
Marshall*	447	211	118	329
McCook	766	332	217	549
McPherson	65	27	19	46
Meade*	1633	955	339	1,294
Mellette*	13	7	3	10
Miner	293	147	73	220
Minnehaha	28373	9,203	9,585	18,788
Moody*	464	180	142	322
Oglala Lakota*	44	28	8	36
Pennington*	11324	6,268	2,528	8,796
Perkins*	139	95	22	117
Potter	215	65	75	140
Roberts*	1106	872	117	989
Sanborn	312	160	76	236
Spink	918	418	250	668
Stanley*	353	177	88	265
Sully	93	55	19	74
Todd*	53	35	9	44
Tripp*	681	349	166	515
Turner	1362	546	408	954
Union	613	321	146	467
Walworth*	721	337	192	529
Yankton	3634	1,330	1,152	2,482
Ziebach*	27	15	6	21
Other	2657	973	842	1,815

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 16 of 86

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 17 of 86

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Mostly Sunny and Blustery	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Cold
High: 16 °F	Low: 4 °F	High: 14 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 3 °F

NWS ABERDEEN  FEBRUARY 4

Cooler Air has Returned

 BREEZY

13 to 33°

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		
11 to 28°	-1 to 12°	-4 to 10°
Wind Chill -18 to +6°	-30 to -14°	-36 to -19°

COLDEST OVER NORTHEASTERN SD & WESTERN MINNESOTA

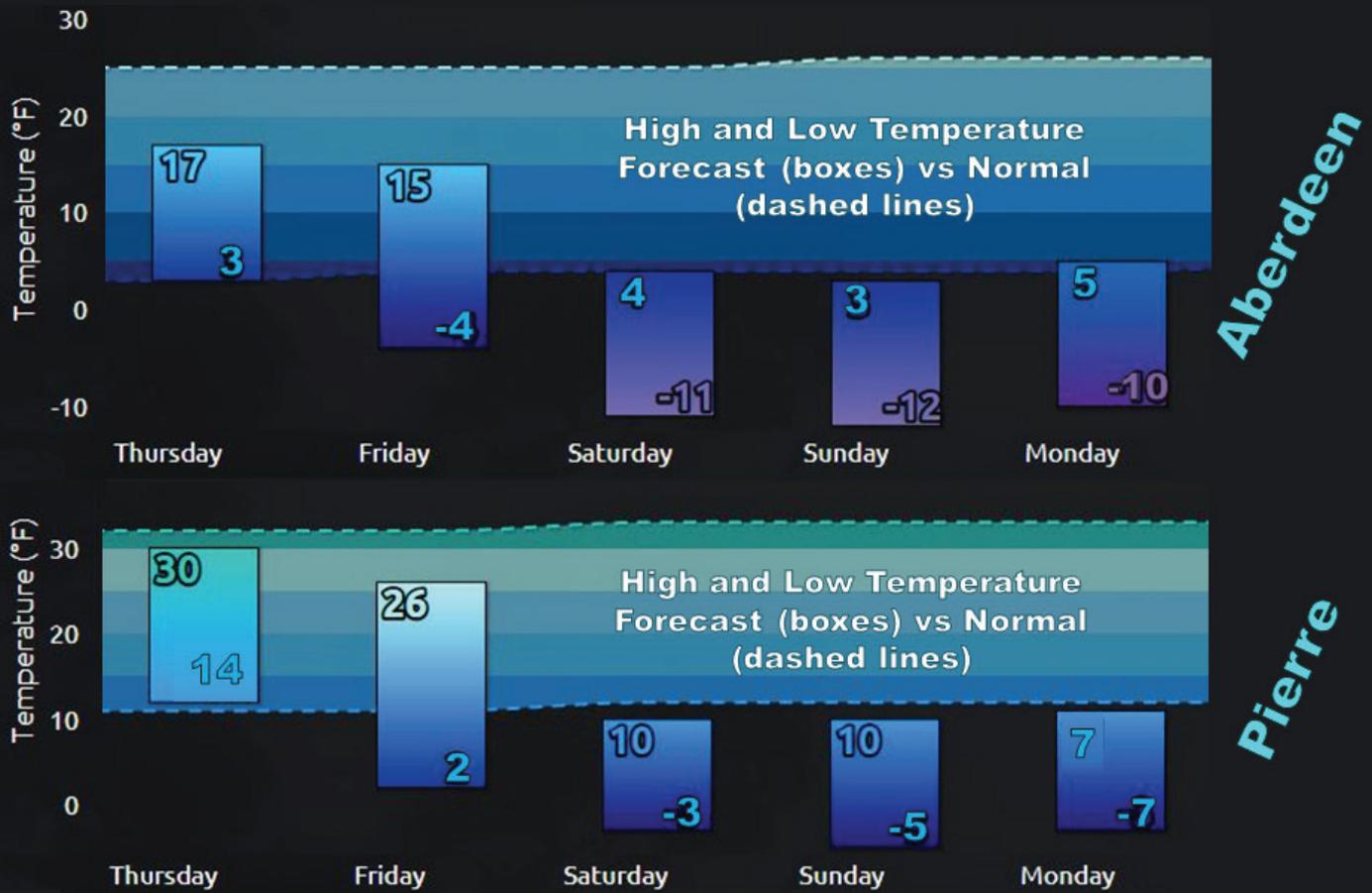
Cooler air will be moving in on breezy northerly winds gusting to around 35 to 40 mph through the day. While much of central South Dakota will experience a sunny sky, clouds will linger over eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. The cold air will remain entrenched across the region, with wind chills falling to around -35 to -20 degrees each morning from Saturday through much of the upcoming work week.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 18 of 86

## Bitterly Cold Air Sat AM – Mon AM

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE Updated: 2/4/2021 5:07 AM Central  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION



Confidence is high that the coldest air of the season will arrive this weekend, with highs in the single digits above and below zero and lows in the single digits to teens below zero. Wind chills will drop even lower, to potentially dangerous levels of between about -15 and -35 F (coldest across northern/northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota).

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 19 of 86

## Today in Weather History

February 4, 1984: A fast-moving blizzard pounded the northeast and east-central with light snow and raging winds. Snow amounts were less than 2 inches region-wide. As the storm progressed, temperatures dropped thirty degrees in three hours as winds gusted to 70 mph. Fierce winds struck quickly, plummeting visibilities to zero and made travel difficult in a matter of minutes. No travel was advised across much of the area. Hundreds of travelers became stranded in the white-out, and the highway crews were pulled off the road to wait for decreasing winds. There were also some spotty power outages.

1924: In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 20.3 inches of snow fell in 24 hours. This ranks as the most snowfall in 24 hours since 1884. This storm caused over \$1 million damage. Streetcar and train service crippled. Snowdrifts of 8 to 10 feet high were common along with much ice on trees and wires. Schools were closed, and several plate glass windows were broken.

1995: A massive nor'easter pounded areas from the southern Mid-Atlantic to northern New England. It would be the only significant storm in the 94-95 winter season. Over 20 inches of snow buried parts of upstate New York. Wind chills dropped as cold as 40 degrees below zero. Behind the storm, arctic air crossing the relatively warm waters of the Great Lakes produced intense lake effect squalls for nearly two weeks from the 4th through the 14th. Snowfall totals for the storm ranged from near two to seven feet. At one point during the storm east of Lake Ontario, snow was falling at the incredible rate of five inches an hour! The heavy snows combined with strong winds to produce white-outs and hazardous driving. Actual storm totals downwind of Lake Erie included: Erie County: West Seneca 39 inches, Orchard Park 36 inches, Cheektowaga 36 inches, Colden 32 inches, and Buffalo Airport 31 inches; Genesee County: Corfu 38 inches; Chautauqua County: Sinclairville 27 inches and Jamestown 15 inches. Downwind of Lake Ontario, storm totals included: Oswego County: Palermo 85 inches, Fulton 60 inches, and Oswego 46 inches; Lewis County: Montague 66 inches, Highmarket 48 inches, and Lowville 36 inches; Cayuga County: Fairhaven 36 inches, Wayne County: Wolcott 22 inches; and Jefferson County: Adams 47 inches.

2011: A winter storm settled four to six inches of snow over northern Texas, including Dallas, just days before the Super Bowl between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Green Bay Packers.

1926 - A hurricane came inland near Daytona Beach, FL. The hurricane caused 2.5 million dollars damage in eastern Florida, including the Jacksonville area. (David Ludlum)

1939 - The temperature at Lewiston, ID, hit 117 degrees to establish an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1943 - On a whim, and flying a single engine AT-6, Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair and Colonel Duckworth were the first to fly into a hurricane. It started regular Air Force flights into hurricanes. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Minnesota spawned a tornado which moved in a southwesterly direction for a distance of thirty miles across Rice County and Goodhue County. Trees were uprooted and tossed about like toys, and a horse lifted by the tornado was observed sailing horizontally through the air. Thunderstorms drenched La Crosse, WI, with 5.26 inches of rain, their second highest 24 hour total of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Hot weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Williston, ND, reported a record high of 108 degrees. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the eastern U.S., and in southeastern Texas. Richland County, SC, was soaked with up to 5.5 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, AZ, experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong thunderstorm winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is normally received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24 hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions. (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from Wisconsin and northern Illinois to New England, with 103 reports of large hail and damaging winds through the day. Thunderstorms in Wisconsin produced hail three inches in diameter near Oshkosh, and wind gusts to 65 mph at Germantown. (The National Weather Summary)

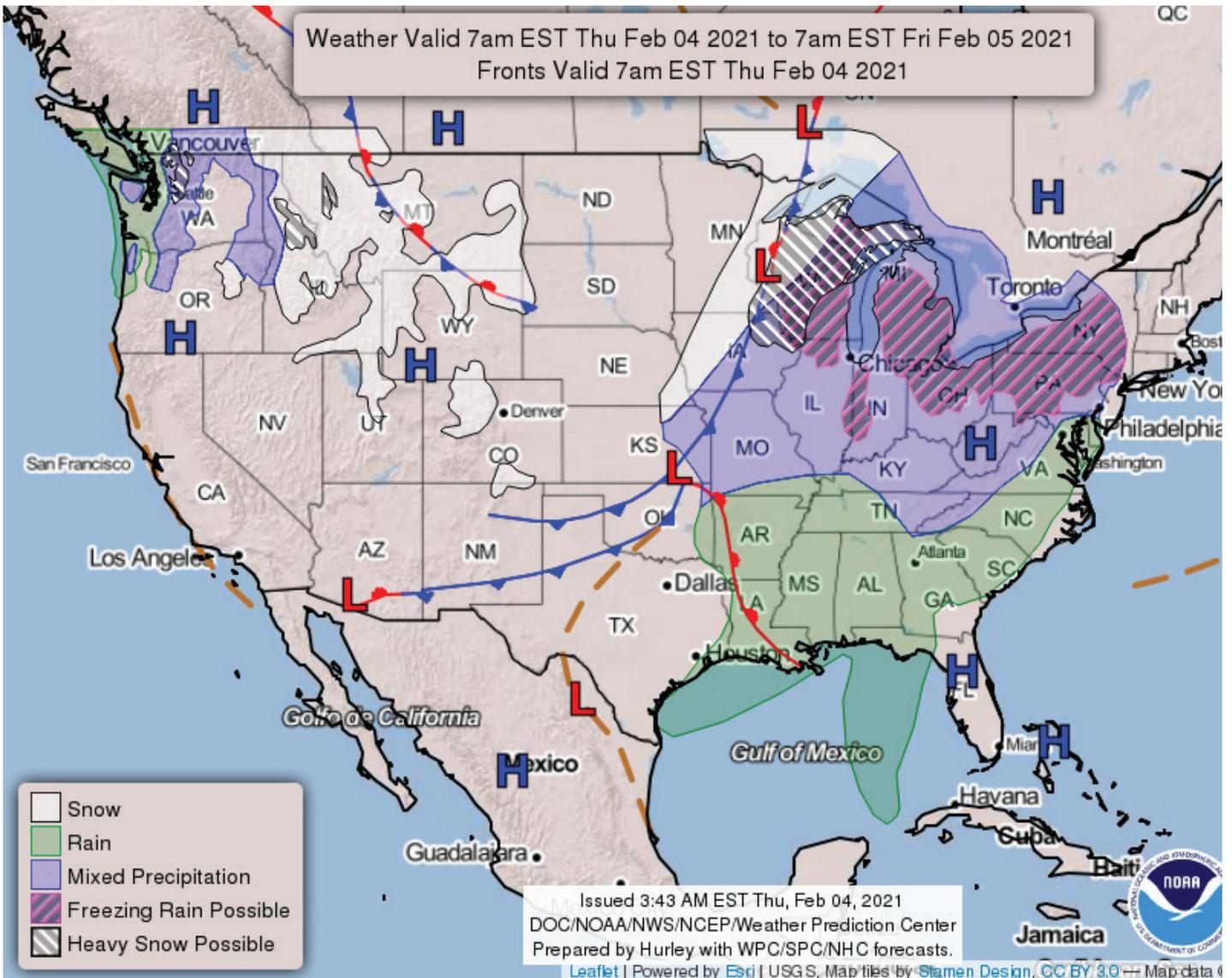
# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 20 of 86

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 31 °F at 6:08 PM**  
**Low Temp: 20 °F at 11:56 PM**  
**Wind: 33 mph at 9:53 PM**  
**Precip:**

**Record High: 55° in 2005**  
**Record Low: -36° in 1893**  
**Average High: 25°F**  
**Average Low: 3°F**  
**Average Precip in Feb.: 0.04**  
**Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.51**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.14**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:45 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49 a.m.**



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 21 of 86



## CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCES

The Bible does not present any proof for the existence of God. It simply declares that God exists and that only a fool denies that fact.

The verse, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" is perhaps one of the best-known verses in the Bible. However, many people today would say, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is a God.'" Atheism has become a religion, and many individuals and countries base their way of life on the denial of any supernatural being.

To prove the existence of God some would ask us to consider "cause and effect" as a reason to believe in a God. Every effect, they argue, demands a cause – so, if there is a creation there had to be a Creator. Hence, God.

Some offer the argument of "being." Man has the idea that a "perfect being" exists somewhere or "is" some place. Where did that come from? Certainly not from ourselves because we know we are imperfect. So, it had to come from a Perfect Being – whoever it is or wherever He may be. Therefore, God is!

Others claim the moral argument. We have a voice inside of us that says, "Thou shalt" and at times, "Thou shalt not." Certainly, these are not man-made, they say, but God-given. So, there must be a "Moral-Ruler" – so, it's got to be Him - God.

Is it wise to try to prove that "God is" with an argument? We can debate that issue forever.

Why not show the difference Christ makes in our lives by words and deeds? No one can deny our experiences. So, let's share them and let our faith in God speak on our behalf.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to live God-honoring lives and show others that You are real by what we do. May our lives speak our faith, not only our words. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good! Psalm 14:1

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 22 of 86

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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 23 of 86

## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

06-07-09-26-31

(six, seven, nine, twenty-six, thirty-one)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

12-35-38-40-43, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 3

(twelve, thirty-five, thirty-eight, forty, forty-three; Star Ball: seven; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.8 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$54 million

Powerball

05-37-40-64-66, Powerball: 5, Power Play: 3

(five, thirty-seven, forty, sixty-four, sixty-six; Powerball: five; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

### Ex-official gets prison time for Iowa grain blending scheme

SIoux CITY, Iowa (AP) — A former official at a large grain warehouse Iowa was sentenced Tuesday to three months in prison for his role in a scheme to blend lower value oats into soybeans and then sell the mixture as soybeans to unsuspecting buyers.

Calvin Diehl, 60, of Aberdeen, South Dakota, was also fined \$7,500. He pleaded guilty in June to one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, the U.S. attorney's office said in a news release.

Diehl was the assisted general manager at the Sioux Center grain cooperative.

Prosecutors said individuals involved in the conspiracy also made false statements and executed false certificates to federal grain inspectors. They layered soybeans on top of oats in both storage bins and trucks to deceive inspectors and customers about the quality and quantity of the grain. They also made false entries and adjustments in reports provided to the company's bank.

After learning of the conspiracy, the Agriculture Department searched grain bins at warehouse sites in Iowa and South Dakota. It found that of the 87,996 bushels of grain at these locations, the bins actually contained only 34,354 bushels of soybeans, even though all had been certified as soybeans.

### GOP states weigh limits on how race and slavery are taught

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Complaining about what he called indoctrination in schools, former President Donald Trump created a commission that promoted "patriotic" education and played down America's role in slavery. But though he's out of the White House and the commission has disbanded, the cause hasn't died. Lawmakers in Republican states are now pressing for similar action.

Proposals in Arkansas, Iowa and Mississippi would prohibit schools from using a New York Times project that focused on slavery's legacy. Georgia colleges and universities have been quizzed about whether they're teaching about white privilege or oppression. And GOP governors are backing overhauls of civic education that mirror Trump's abandoned initiatives.

Republicans behind the latest moves say they're countering left-wing attempts in K-12 schools and higher education to indoctrinate rather than teach students. Teachers, civil rights leaders and policymakers are

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 24 of 86

fighting back, saying students will suffer if states brush over crucial parts of the nation's history.

"The idea of simply saying you're not going to use certain materials because you don't like what they're going to say without input from professionals makes no sense," said James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association.

Statehouse fights over what's taught in public schools are nothing new. Arkansas lost a court battle over a 1981 law that required the teaching of creationism in its classrooms, and in recent years conservatives have waged battles over how evolution, climate change and other topics are taught. But the latest efforts show just how much Trump's rhetoric on race continues to resonate in the mostly rural and white states he won.

The proposals primarily target The New York Times' "1619 Project," which examined slavery and its consequences as the central thread of U.S. history. The project was published in 2019, the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of African slaves. The project was also turned into a popular podcast and materials were developed for schools to use.

A measure pending in Arkansas' Legislature criticizes the project as a "racially divisive and revisionist account of history that threatens the integrity of the Union by denying the true principles on which it was founded."

Republican Rep. Mark Lowery, who sponsored the measure, called slavery a "dark stain," but said the project minimizes the Founding Fathers and cited criticism from some historians about parts of it.

"It should not be taught as history," he said.

Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas has also been a frequent critic of the project.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the lead essay in the project, called it a work of journalism that wasn't intended to replace what's being taught in schools. Born and raised in Iowa, one of the states looking to prohibit the project's use, Hannah-Jones said it's clear the project is being used to whip up political fears.

"It's one thing to not like a particular piece of journalism, it's another thing to seek to prohibit its teaching," she said.

The Pulitzer Center, which partnered with the Times to develop 1619 Project lesson plans, said it's heard from more than 3,800 K-12 teachers and nearly 1,000 college educators who planned to use them. Of those, only about two dozen were from Arkansas.

Jonathan Rogers, a journalism teacher at Iowa City High School, said he's used the project's podcast in his classes.

"(Students) definitely responded to thinking about using different sources or alternative storytelling," Rogers said. "Also, just hearing Black voices is so important when we're talking about diversity and perspectives, whether it's historical events or current events."

Other measures would go even further than targeting the 1619 Project, including a broader bill Lowery said he's reworking that currently calls for banning courses that promote social justice for one racial group. In Oklahoma, one bill would allow teachers to be fired for teaching that the U.S. is fundamentally racist, or other topics deemed divisive.

Critics say that, besides eating away at local control, the proposals show an unwillingness to address the country's shortcomings as well as its successes.

"This country does have a history that we have to reckon with and that sometimes our education system glosses over," said Rep. Emily Virgin, the top Democrat in the Oklahoma House.

After taking office, President Joe Biden revoked the report submitted by the commission Trump formed in response to the 1619 Project. Widely mocked by historians as political propaganda, Trump's 1776 Commission glorified the country's founders and played down the role of slavery.

"American parents are not going to accept indoctrination in our schools, cancel culture at work, or the repression of traditional faith, culture and values in the public square," Trump said when he announced the panel last year.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, a close ally of Trump's, last month proposed \$900,000 to ramp up her state's civics curriculum to emphasize the U.S. as "the most unique nation in the history of the world."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 25 of 86

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves is proposing a \$3 million "Patriotic Education Fund" to combat what he called revisionist history.

"Across the country, young children have suffered from indoctrination in far-left socialist teachings that emphasize America's shortcomings over the exceptional achievements of this country," Reeves said when he announced it.

In Texas, where academics have long clashed with the state's GOP-controlled education board on controversies that include lessons exploring the influence Moses had on the Founding Fathers, Gov. Greg Abbott last week told lawmakers that students must learn "what it means to be an American and what it means to be a Texan." But Abbott hasn't elaborated on what changes he may seek.

It's unclear how far these proposals will go, even in solidly red states. Two Mississippi Senate committees ignored, and killed, the 1619 Project ban.

In Arkansas, Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson has said he believes such issues are usually better addressed locally. He's asked the state's top education official to work on alternative legislation that would allow parents to challenge instructional material at the local level.

The proposed limits especially strike a nerve in Arkansas, where divides over race remain more than six decades after the 1957 integration of Little Rock Central High School. Until 2018, the state commemorated Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's birthday on the same day as Martin Luther King Jr.

One member of the Legislative Black Caucus said she was worried about the proposal's effect on the state's image.

"It will have an economic impact because it will seem as if this state is running from its own history," said Democratic Sen. Linda Chesterfield, a Black retired history teacher.

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Associated Press writers Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City, Ryan Foley in Iowa City, Stephen Groves in Pierre, South Dakota, Paul Weber in Austin, Texas, and Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, contributed to this report

## Lawmakers kill bill to put requirements on tribal secretary

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republican lawmakers on Wednesday dismissed a proposal to require Gov. Kristi Noem's Secretary of Tribal Relations to report to a legislative committee that handles tribal issues.

The relationship between the governor's office and lawmakers who focus on tribal issues has often become contentious, as they wrestled over last year's State of the Tribes address and the governor's handling of the pandemic.

Democrat Rep. Shawn Bordeaux, who chaired the committee last year, made the proposal to require Secretary Dave Flute to attend the committee meetings after he declined invitations last year. The bill also would have required Flute to make an annual report to the committee and would have created an advisory council representing the nine tribes.

"I've seen nothing but chaos from this department and it's really frustrating," Bordeaux said.

But Noem's office defended Flute's absence.

"Anyone who listens to the disrespectful way that certain committee members have treated Secretary Flute at past meetings will understand why this invitation was declined," the governor's spokesman Ian Fury said.

Republican lawmakers said they would prefer to see Noem's administration and the committee find ways to communicate without intervention.

Republican Rep. Kevin Jensen said, "I have a hard time with legislating cooperation."

## House lawmakers kill bill to push joint custody in divorces

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A committee of South Dakota lawmakers on Wednesday rejected a proposal to push judges to equally split the custody of children between divorced parents, after opponents argued it could tie victims of abuse to their former partners.

The issue of custody in divorce proceedings has become a recurring battle in the Legislature, driven by Republican Rep. Tom Pischke after his own contentious divorce and custody fight.

"I know this system," Pischke said. "It doesn't work."

While Pischke helped craft this year's bill, he was not the primary sponsor. Instead, Rep. Tamara St. John, a Republican from Sisseton, introduced the bill, which would have required divorcing parents to prove to a judge that equal custody was not in the best interests of the child.

Proponents argued that children of divorced parents benefit from spending time with both parents. They said there is a nationwide effort to push judges to split custody equally, pointing to a Kentucky law and bills in other state legislatures.

But opponents, including advocates for victims of domestic abuse, said the change to the law would have allowed abusers to continue to exert control over their victims.

Diana Miller, a lobbyist for South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault, called the current statute the "gold standard" of custody law because it tasks judges with caring for the best interests of the child.

Republican legislators who voted against the bill noted that the law would apply to divorce proceedings that are already contested, and that requiring joint custody would become problematic.

Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, a Republican from Sioux Falls, became emotional discussing the difficulty of divorce, but said she opposed the bill because it took the focus away from the well-being of children.

"I don't believe we can legislate parents to get along," she said.

## Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press and Dakotan. January 25, 2021.

Editorial: SD Voter Registration Bill Gets Guttled

Making the voting process more convenient for voters came into sharp focus last year as this nation held an election amid a pandemic. During that time, state and local officials took long looks at the mechanics of the process in order to find ways to better serve the public.

Obviously, one important aspect of the voting process is the very first step: getting people registered to vote.

Simplifying that procedure was the intent of South Dakota Senate Bill 24, a proposal from the office of the Secretary of State to allow for online voting registration. This is not radically new technology, as more than 40 states already provide this service.

But, lawmakers weren't ready for that step forward.

Last Friday, the Senate State Affairs Committee wound up passing SB24, but not before adopting an amendment that essentially gutted the proposal. Instead of providing for online registration, SB24 would now only allow already-registered voters to change their address online.

This was a disappointing decision.

Adding to the frustration is the fact that Friday's committee hearing featured testimony from various entities — including Secretary of State Steve Barnett, AARP and several tribes, according to KELO — in support of the change, while no one offered any testimony against the bill.

Nevertheless, Sen. Jim Bolin (R-Canton) proposed the aforementioned amendment, which turned what could have been a productive upgrade in the voting registration process into little more than a tweak of existing law. The amendment passed 6-3, with Sen. Kyle Schoenfish (R-Scotland) among those opposing it.

Ultimately, the amended version of SB24 passed on an 8-1 vote.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 27 of 86

The fact that the bill was virtually neutered despite the support voiced for it and the total lack of opposition presents a picture of lawmakers perhaps having a slightly different agenda on this issue than the public they serve.

And that may loom as an even greater concern. How many more times will our lawmakers choose to follow their own courses instead of heeding the will of the public? SB24 may have been just a small test of that question, but the first return isn't promising.

However, back to the original point: The actual measure, as amended, does provide a little added convenience for voters already registered, but it would have been much better and much more practical in its original form.

We hope this idea resurfaces again and gets a more open-minded consideration.

END

## Woman injured as deputies pursue stolen pickup

PARKER, S.D. (AP) — A woman was injured when she was struck by a vehicle that sheriff's deputies chased through Lincoln and Turner counties Tuesday.

Three people in the stolen pickup truck were arrested after a five-hour standoff, according to sheriff's officials.

A Lincoln County deputy tried pulling the vehicle over for traffic violations in Harrisburg, but the driver fled and deputies pursued the vehicle into Turner County.

The pickup drove through a field and onto a rural property where the woman was struck on the driveway of a residence. She was taken to the hospital, but there is no word on her injuries.

Once back on the road, a Highway Patrol trooper forced the pickup into a ditch and cornfield where the pursuit ended and the standoff began.

The suspects eventually surrendered. Methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia were found in the pickup, officials said.

At least eight law enforcement agencies were involved in the pursuit and standoff.

## Stuck in DC, Biden team pitches rest of US on big virus aid

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as President Joe Biden gathers with senators and works the phones with Capitol Hill to push for a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, his team is increasingly focused on selling the plan directly to voters.

His administration has done 60-plus interviews with national TV and radio shows. There have been spots on local TV news and briefings last week with more than 50 groups including General Motors, Meals on Wheels America and Planned Parenthood. One of the main goals is to stop people from getting bogged down in the tangle of partisan deal-making and convince them that every penny of the "go big" package is needed.

"The public is not getting caught up in process — what they want is results," said Cedric Richmond, the White House director of public engagement. "People these days are not worried about the inside-the-beltway terminology. They're looking at who's doing what to help."

The president told House Democrats on Wednesday that he views the package's proposal for \$1,400 in direct payments to individuals as a foundational promise to voters. It represents a strategic bet by the White House that voters will suspend their partisan beliefs to evaluate the plan and support its massive scope.

Biden has suggested he may be flexible on the \$1.9 trillion topline figure for the plan and on ways to more narrowly target who gets direct payments. But the \$1,400 amount — on top of \$600 in payments approved in December — appears to be non-negotiable.

"I'm not going to start my administration by breaking a promise to the American people," he said.

The extensive package comes after \$4 trillion in rescue spending that cushioned the financial blow from

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 28 of 86

the pandemic but did little to stop the disease. It includes politically divisive provisions such as a \$15 hourly minimum wage and \$350 billion in aid for state and local governments. Ten Republican senators countered with a \$618 billion package, a third of what Biden is offering.

Most Americans still see the need for government stimulus. A survey released Wednesday by Quinnipiac University found 68% of U.S. adults support Biden's stimulus package and 24% oppose it. But Republicans are divided on the measure, with 47% opposed and 37% favoring it. Nearly all Democrats backed the plan.

Based on his interactions, Richmond sees three elements of the package as the most popular: the direct payments, the \$160 billion for widespread vaccinations — one of the only expenditures that also appears in the Republican proposal, food and nutrition assistance for struggling Americans, and the push to halve the child poverty rate through tax credits and other benefits.

But even Republicans who are supportive of some kind of aid are telling their voters Biden's plan is too expensive — and it's possible people could be turned off if they think stimulus dollars are being wasted.

Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah told KUTV in Salt Lake City that aid to state and local governments, a particular sticking point for Republicans, should be based on "actual need, as opposed to a simple blanket payment of billions of dollars, which in many cases would represent a windfall."

Republicans are betting Biden will pay a price politically if he doesn't take a bipartisan tack. By contrast, Democrats hope Republicans will pay a price if voters don't see them engaging with the fullness of the crisis.

The White House can point to at least one Republican who considers Biden's plan essential: Jeff Williams, the mayor of Arlington, Texas. Williams knows there could be a partisan backlash to supporting Biden's plan. But, on the merits, the term-limited mayor sees no alternative.

The city is gearing up for property tax assessments, and estimates are that revenues could drop 10%, largely because commercial real estate has taken a severe hit as offices, restaurants and hotels have emptied. Williams said he believes Republicans ultimately want to help, too, even if they choke on the high price tag.

"It's the right thing to do," he said. "The gist of this is that you always have those extremists that are there, but most of our Republicans have been supportive of getting fiscal assistance to cities. They can't come up with that dollar amount."

The United States has lost roughly 10 million jobs because of the pandemic, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that without additional aid, the jobs won't return in full until 2024. The Census Bureau estimates 1 in 8 households with children lacks sufficient food.

But the picture is also complicated. The Penn Wharton Budget Model found in a report released Wednesday that 73% of the \$1,400 stimulus checks would go into savings, meaning there would be limited growth in consumer spending, which helps propel the economy.

The report estimates that Biden's plan would spend the equivalent of roughly 8.6% of gross domestic product but only increase growth by 0.6%, since much of the economy -- other than the restaurant, travel and leisure and hospitality sectors -- shows signs of healing.

"When you shovel a lot of money into an economy that is doing pretty darn well, you might do harm," said Efraim Berkovich, director of computational dynamics for the Penn Wharton Budget Model.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the Penn Wharton analysis was flawed because it assumes that the U.S. economy is running near full-capacity, "which would be news to the millions of Americans who are out of work or facing reduced hours and reduced paychecks."

The message from Republicans is that \$1.9 trillion is a lot of money that could be better spent on other priorities such as an infrastructure program. Or, not spent at all.

"We've got to support Americans who are hurting," said Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La. "But picking a number and saying you're going to spend that much just because it sounds right is not fair to the American taxpayer, is not fair to the future American taxpayer."

## Myanmar blocks Facebook as resistance grows to coup

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar's new military government blocked access to Facebook as resistance to Monday's coup surged amid calls for civil disobedience to protest the ousting of the elected government and its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Facebook is especially popular in Myanmar and is how most people access the internet.

The military seized power shortly before a new session of Parliament was to convene on Monday and detained Suu Kyi and other top politicians.

It said it acted because the government had refused to address its complaints that last November's general election, in which Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory, was marred by widespread voting irregularities. The state Election Commission has refuted the allegations.

About 70 recently elected lawmakers defied the new military government on Thursday by convening a symbolic meeting of the Parliament that was prevented from opening. They signed their oaths of office at a government guesthouse in the capital, Naypyitaw, where about 400 of them were detained in the aftermath of the takeover. They have since been told they can return to their home districts.

The unofficial convening was a symbolic gesture to assert that they, not the military, are the country's legitimate lawmakers.

Some expressed their anger and their determination to resist the coup as they left the guesthouse.

"This violates the human rights of the whole citizenry. This is not a coup. This is a treason against the government. I will have to say that this is state treason," said Khin Soe Soe Kyi, a member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

The military declared a one-year state of emergency and put all state powers into the hands of the junta, including legislative functions. It said that at the end of that period it will call an election and turn over power to the winner.

Anti-coup graffiti appeared in Yangon, the country's biggest city, with the slogan "Don't want dictatorship" scrawled on a wall on a busy street.

In Mandalay, a city known for its activist politics, a spirited protest by about 20 people in front of the University of Medicine was broken up by police. Three were arrested.

Medical personnel have declared they won't work for the military government. Health workers are highly respected for their work during the coronavirus pandemic that is taxing the country's dangerously inadequate health system.

For a second night Wednesday, residents of Yangon conducted noise protests, banging pots and pans and honking car horns.

The protests have revived a song associated with a failed 1988 uprising against military dictatorship. Myanmar was under military rule for five decades after a 1962 coup, and Suu Kyi's five years as leader have been its most democratic period since then, despite continued use of repressive colonial-era laws.

Videos posted on social media showed medical personnel and others singing "Kabar Makyay Bu" — or "We Won't Be Satisfied Until the End of the World" — sung to the tune of "Dust in the Wind," a 1977 song by the U.S. rock group Kansas.

Thousands of people in Naypyitaw joined a rally in support of the military coup on Thursday, the latest of a number of events that aim to project an image of popular acceptance of the power grab.

Suu Kyi remains highly popular. Her party said Wednesday that she has been charged with possessing illegally imported walkie-talkies — believed to be used by her bodyguards — that were found in her house.

The charge, which carries a penalty of up to three years in prison, allows her to be held in custody until at least Feb. 15. Ousted President Win Myint is being held on a separate charge. Suu Kyi is believed to under house arrest at her residence.

Facebook users said service disruptions began late Wednesday night.

"Telecom providers in Myanmar have been ordered to temporarily block Facebook. We urge authorities to restore connectivity so that people in Myanmar can communicate with family and friends and access important information," Facebook said in a statement.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 30 of 86

In 2018, Facebook removed several accounts linked to Myanmar's military, including that of Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the officer who led this week's coup, following complaints that they appeared to fuel hatred toward the country's Muslim Rohingya minority. The Rohingya were targeted in a brutal 2017 army counterinsurgency campaign that drove more than 700,000 to neighboring Bangladesh. Critics say the army's actions constituted genocide.

## Prayer breakfast gives Biden fresh chance to call for unity

By ELANA SCHOR and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is expected to address the National Prayer Breakfast, a Washington tradition that calls on political combatants to set aside their differences for one morning.

The breakfast, set for Thursday, has sparked controversy in the past, particularly when President Donald Trump used last year's installment to slam his political opponents and question their faith. Some liberals have viewed the event warily because of the conservative faith-based group that is behind it.

Still, Biden campaigned for the White House as someone who could unify Americans, and the breakfast will give the nation's second Catholic president a chance to talk about his vision of faith. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said the event will be "an inclusive and positive event" that "recognizes the teachings of Jesus but is not limited to Christianity."

Coons also told reporters that Biden's remarks would take a different tack than those of Trump.

"There have been significant changes in tone and focus from President Obama to President Trump to what I hope and expect will be a different tone and focus under President Biden," said Coons, an honorary co-chair of this year's gathering.

Every president has attended the breakfast since Dwight D. Eisenhower made his first appearance in 1953. The event is set to be virtual this year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Coons suggested that Biden would appear via taped remarks.

The breakfast is moving forward at a time when the nation's capital is facing a series of historic crises. Biden is struggling to win significant support from congressional Republicans for a coronavirus response package, raising the likelihood that he will rely only on Democrats to pass the legislation.

Many in Washington are still navigating the aftermath of the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol last month. Trump faces an unprecedented second impeachment trial in the Senate next week over his role in inciting the riot.

Biden's message on Thursday is likely to represent his latest call to return Washington to more traditional footing after four years of Trump's aggressive style. During the 2020 breakfast, Trump singled out Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, who had voted to convict the president during the first impeachment trial. Trump even held up a newspaper with a headline reading "ACQUITTED" over his own picture.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, a GOP co-chair of this year's breakfast, said he hopes to see Biden emphasize the nation's status as "a place for diversity and tolerance" that at the same time allows for respectful disagreement.

Scott, like Coons, pointed to regular faith-based gatherings that draw senators from both ends of the ideological spectrum as a model. "We don't see eye to eye philosophically, politically, but we do embrace each other as brothers of faith," Scott, who is also expected to offer virtual remarks at the breakfast, said in an interview.

The breakfast has drawn pushback from gay and civil rights activists since President Barack Obama's administration, with much of the opposition focused on the Fellowship Foundation, the conservative faith-based organization that has long supported the event. Religious liberals mounted a protest outside Trump's first appearance in 2017, criticizing his limits on refugee admissions to the U.S., and a Russian gun rights activist convicted of acting as an unregistered foreign agent attended the breakfast twice during his administration.

Norman Solomon, co-founder and national director of the progressive activist group RootsAction, warned

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 31 of 86

Biden not to "reach across any aisle to bigotry."

"We don't need any unity with bigotry," Solomon said. "I fear a subtext of this engagement is, 'Can't we all get along.' But that's not appropriate in this case given the well-known right-wing and anti-gay background of the event's sponsors."

Solomon said Democratic presidents have continued a tradition of attending an event where their Republican counterparts often felt more comfortable because they feared being labeled as "anti-religious or nonreligious." He said that Biden, a devout Catholic who attends Mass every week, could better send a unifying message by skipping the event and instead attending one that is truly bipartisan.

"God knows there are many religious leaders and gatherings that are devout and affirm human equality," he said. "This isn't one of them."

Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, agreed that "there are far better ways" than the breakfast for Biden to connect with people on the basis of shared spiritual beliefs.

"We would love to work with the administration to figure out a way to change the sponsorship of an event like this and to make it a place for Americans of all different religious beliefs," Laser said.

Yet Democratic leaders, aware of Biden's devout Catholic faith and calls for healing, have largely refrained from public comment on the event this year. Florida Rep. Val Demings, once on the short list to be Biden's running mate, has delivered the closing prayer at the event in the past and is one of several Democratic members of Congress planning to attend.

Both Laser and Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, a fellow in the faith initiative at the liberal Center for American Progress think tank, pointed to the Christian symbolism seen during last month's Capitol riot as an opening for Biden to offer pluralistic, open language about faith.

"I hope President Biden recognizes we're in a new moment," Graves-Fitzsimmons said, "and that the Christian nationalism threat is a threat to both the sacred religious pluralism of the U.S. and to Christianity."

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## 1 tweet from Rihanna on farmer protests gets India incensed

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — It took just one tweet from Rihanna to anger the Indian government and supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party. The pop star linked a news article in a tweet drawing attention to the massive farmer protests that have gripped India for more than two months.

Now, senior government ministers, Indian celebrities and even the foreign ministry are urging people to come together and denounce outsiders who try to break the country.

"It is unfortunate to see vested interest groups trying to enforce their agenda on these protests, and derail them," India's foreign ministry said Wednesday in a rare statement criticizing "foreign individuals" posting on social media. It did not name Rihanna and others who followed suit.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been hunkering down at the Indian capital's fringes to protest new agricultural laws they say will leave them poorer and at the mercy of corporations. The protests are posing a major challenge to Modi who has billed the laws as necessary to modernize Indian farming.

Their largely peaceful protests turned violent on Jan. 26, India's Republic Day, when a section of the tens of thousands of farmers riding tractors veered from the protest route earlier decided with police and stormed the 17th century Red Fort in a dramatic escalation. Hundreds of police officers were injured and a protester died. Scores of farmers were also injured but officials have not given their numbers.

Farmer leaders condemned the violence but said they would not call off the protest.

Since then, authorities have heavily increased security at protest sites outside New Delhi's border, adding iron spikes and steel barricades to stop demonstrating farmers from entering the capital. The government

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 32 of 86

had also restricted access to mobile internet at protest sites up until Tuesday evening.

The latest controversy started Tuesday when Rihanna tweeted to her more than 101 million followers: "Why aren't we talking about this?!" She linked to a CNN news report about India blocking internet services at the protest sites, a favored tactic of the Modi government to thwart protests.

The Associated Press and multiple other international news agencies have been covering the farmer protests for months.

Soon after Rihanna's tweet, international condemnation from human rights groups and outrage from Indian supporters of Modi's party followed. And the foreign ministry accused "foreign individuals" and celebrities of "sensationalism," without names.

Teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg and the niece of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, Meena Harris, were among those who tweeted their support, triggering a social media storm back in India.

Bollywood entertainers and sports stars, many of whom have long been silent on the farmer protests and often toe the government's line, tweeted in one voice.

They used hashtags #IndiaAgainstPropaganda and #IndiaTogether, echoing the government's stand on the agriculture laws, and asked people outside India not to meddle with their country's affairs.

"No one is talking about it because they are not farmers, they are terrorists who are trying to divide India," actress Kangana Ranaut, a supporter of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, tweeted.

Rihanna's and Thunberg's tweets also prompted responses from almost every senior leader of BJP, including Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Home Minister Amit Shah, who said that "no propaganda can deter India's unity."

The main opposition Congress party leader Shashi Tharoor said the damage done to India's global image by the government's "undemocratic behaviour" could not be restored by making celebrities tweet.

Tharoor in a tweet said Indian government getting "Indian celebrities to react to Western ones is embarrassing."

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram took a swipe at the foreign ministry and called its statement "puerile reaction."

"When will you realize that people concerned with issues of human rights and livelihoods do not recognize national boundaries?," Chidambaram tweeted.

Negotiations between representatives of the government and farmers to end the protests have failed. The government has proposed suspending the laws for 18 months but is not meeting the farmers' demands for a full repeal.

## 'Not like every time:' Beirut blast victims want the truth

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Days after a massive explosion ripped through Beirut's port and disfigured the Lebanese capital, family members of some of the 211 people killed in the blast demanded an international probe.

It was a swift vote of no confidence in the authorities' ability to investigate one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history and one of the nation's most traumatic experiences.

The skepticism was justified. Lebanon, a country wrought by political violence and assassinations, has a history of unfinished prosecutions and buried secrets.

Six months after the Aug. 4 blast, the domestic investigation has been brought to a virtual halt by the same political and confessional rivalries that thwarted past attempts to uncover the truth in major crimes.

What started as an investigation into how nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive fertilizer component, were stored in Beirut port for years with politicians' and security agencies' knowledge has taken a turn, wading into a web of murky international business interests in the explosives trade and global shipping.

Government officials rebuffed an international probe and appointed former military court judge Fadi Sawwan to investigate. He has largely focused on government incompetence amid public anger at a corrupt political class blamed for Lebanon's slide into poverty and upheaval.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 33 of 86

In a rare move, Sawwan charged two former ministers and the current prime minister with negligence, triggering pushback.

The prime minister refused to appear for questioning, calling it "diabolic" to single him out for charges. The ministers challenged the judge and asked Lebanon's highest court to replace him in a move that brought the probe to a halt since Dec. 17. The interior minister said he won't ask security forces to implement arrest warrants targeting political figures.

In early January, the Court of Cassation ruled that Sawwan can resume his investigation while it reviews calls to replace him, keeping the possibility hanging over the probe.

Yet Sawwan hasn't resumed work, raising concerns among victims' families that he may have caved to pressure.

Dozens of family members gathered outside his house Monday, urging him to restart the probe.

"We want to know if they are not letting him," Kayan Tleis, whose 40-year-old brother was killed in the blast, said in reference to politicians. "This should not be like every time."

Lebanon's sectarian-based political factions have had a lock on power in the country for decades and have divvied up posts across the state among themselves. Though rivals, they have a common interest in preventing accountability.

Structural problems undermine the judiciary.

The government and the president name judges, allowing political factions to install loyalists as rewards. Prosecutors stall, preventing cases from reaching courts.

The government also holds enormous sway over the five-member Judicial Council, a special court where it refers security and political crimes. Decisions by the government-appointed judges can't be appealed.

Human Rights Watch said Sawwan's appointment process was opaque and the investigation itself, so far secret, has been tainted with political interference. Two judges named by the justice minister before Sawwan were rejected without an explanation by the government-appointed body in charge of approving the selection.

At least 25 people have been held since August under the investigating judge's powers of unlimited pre-trial detention. He only questioned them once, according to HRW. Most are port staff, including the head of the port authority, a security official and a maintenance engineer, and all face the same litany of charges no matter what their position, said Aya Majzoub, HRW's Lebanon researcher.

Senior political faction leaders have publicly questioned the course of Sawwan's investigation or hinted he may be covering up for their rivals.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah questioned Sawwan's focus on domestic negligence. He urged him to share reports by military, security and foreign agencies.

"Was there something military in the port that led to this explosion? Why not tell the people the truth?" said Nasrallah. Hezbollah has denied claims it stored explosives at the port.

A Hezbollah rival, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, pointed at the Syrian government, suggesting it imported the explosives through Lebanon because its ports were in the line of fire at the height of Syria's civil war in 2013.

"There can't be a probe so long as the judiciary is not independent of Syrian guardianship or from (the president's) people or Syrian allies," Jumblatt told Sky News Arabia.

Some described the 60-year-old Sawwan as "brave," even "suicidal" for taking the post that could endanger his career or his life.

Throughout Lebanon's history, judges have been threatened, intimidated and even killed. Gunmen sprayed four judges with bullets in court in 1999, killing them on the spot during a murder and drug trafficking trial. In 1977, a judge investigating the killing of a Druze leader was kidnapped in his own car and his house hit with a rocket-propelled grenade.

The 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri brought a rare international investigation. Syria, whose forces occupied Lebanon at the time, was considered the prime suspect. The local investigation was scuttled by accusations of political interference.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 34 of 86

World powers, whose pressure forced Syrian troops to withdraw, backed a parallel U.N. fact-finding mission and special tribunal. After a drawn-out, 15-year process, the Special Tribunal in The Hague convicted only one of the four defendants, all Hezbollah operatives, with no explanation of who was ultimately behind the killing, disappointing many.

That tribunal also cost millions of dollars, money that Lebanon — broke and struggling with a historic economic crisis — doesn't have.

Youssef Diab, a Lebanese journalist who covers the courts, said Lebanon doesn't have the resources or technical capacity to handle an investigation of the explosion's scope.

"This is a lot graver than the assassination of Rafik Hariri. A city was destroyed, (211) died, 6,000 wounded and many people have not yet returned home. This is a major crime," he said.

FBI and French investigators conducted a forensic probe after the blast, but their findings remain sealed. Majzoub, of Human Rights Watch, said a U.N. fact-finding mission is needed.

"We can't rest our hope and faith on a broken system that has proven incredibly resilient. We can't expect the very people who are implicated in these crimes and other big crimes in Lebanon to lead reform."

In an investigative report, Lebanese documentary maker Feras Hatoum revealed that the company that bought the ammonium nitrate may have links through shell companies with two Syrian businessmen under U.S. sanctions for their ties to President Bashar Assad. One of them was sanctioned in 2015 for his suspected role in securing explosives for Assad's forces.

"You need authorities to investigate," Hatoum told The Associated Press.

Sawwan has not reached out to him yet, but Youssef Lahoud, a lawyer representing victims' families, said they will include Hatoum's findings in their case. Lahoud said Sawwan has only two clerks and two trainee judges helping him.

Former state prosecutor Hatem Madi, who investigated political violence before he retired in 2013, said many reasons could have caused Sawwan to halt the probe: crossing a red line, receiving threats or pressure, or because he feared the consequences of his findings.

"Most of the big cases are stopped because of reasons of State," Madi said.

## Takeaways from legal filings for Trump's impeachment trial

By ERIC TUCKER, JILL COLVIN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The legal sparring around Donald Trump's impeachment trial is underway, with briefs filed this week laying out radically different positions ahead of next week's Senate trial.

House prosecutors and the former president's defense team are putting forward their arguments about Trump's role in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and on the legality of even holding a trial. They're also debating the First Amendment and a blunt assessment by Democrats that the riot posed a threat to the presidential line of succession.

Takeaways from the arguments of both sides:

### 'SINGULARLY RESPONSIBLE'

Who's responsible for the riot? Democrats say there's only one answer, and it's Trump.

The Democrats contend that Trump was "singularly responsible" for the Jan. 6 attack by "creating a powder keg, striking a match, and then seeking personal advantage from the ensuing havoc." They say it's "impossible" to imagine the riot unfolding as it did without Trump's encouragement, and they even cite as support a fellow Republican, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who said essentially the same thing.

Trump's lawyers, by contrast, suggest he can't be responsible because he never incited anyone to "engage in destructive behavior." They concede there was an illegal breach of the Capitol that resulted in deaths and injuries. But they say the people who are "responsible" — the ones who entered the building and vandalized it — are being investigated and prosecuted.

### FIRST AMENDMENT FAULT LINE

Trump's lawyers don't dispute that he told supporters to "fight like hell" before the Capitol siege. But the defense says that Trump, like any citizen, is protected by the First Amendment to "express his belief

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 35 of 86

that the election results were suspect." He had an opinion that he was entitled to express, they say, and if the First Amendment only protected popular speech, it'd be "no protection at all."

House Democrats don't see it that way. For one thing, they say the First Amendment is meant to protect private citizens from the government, not to allow government officials to abuse their power. And while a private citizen may have a right to advocate for totalitarianism or the overthrow of the government, "no one would seriously suggest" that a president who adopted those same positions should be immune from impeachment.

## LINE OF SUCCESSION

The impeachment managers state that loyalists egged on by Trump directly endangered the safety of lawmakers who fled the House and the Senate as the rioters poured in.

Among those affected were the government's most senior leaders.

Those in the line of succession for the presidency after Trump — then-Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Pro Tempore Chuck Grassley — were all in the Capitol and forced to flee for safety. Trump's conduct not only "endangered the life of every single Member of Congress," the Democrats wrote, but also "jeopardized the peaceful transition of power and line of succession."

The brief details chilling threats to Pence and Pelosi as rioters ransacked the building and "specifically hunted" them. According to the document, which cites media outlets and videos, insurrectionists shouted, "Hang Mike Pence!" and called him a traitor because he'd indicated he would not challenge the electoral count, as Trump wanted. One person is alleged to have said that Pelosi would have been "torn into little pieces" had she been found.

The Democrats also describe the terror felt by lawmakers and staffers during the siege. "Some Members called loved ones for fear that they would not survive the assault by President Trump's insurrectionist mob," the impeachment managers wrote.

## DENY, DENY, DENY

That's the message from Trump's defense team, which used the word "denied" or "denies" a whopping 29 times in its 14-page brief.

Trump's team denies that the impeachment trial can be held because he is no longer in office. They deny that he incited his supporters to violence. And they deny he did anything wrong on Jan. 6, or the weeks leading up to the riot, when he whipped his supporters into a frenzy by convincing them, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that the election had been stolen from him.

When Trump told the crowd, "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," he was merely pressing the "need to fight for election security in general," Trump's lawyers claim. He was not attempting to interfere with the counting of electoral votes, even though he had demanded that Pence do just that.

"It is denied that President Trump ever endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government," they wrote. "It is denied he threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coequal branch Government."

Rather, they say, he "performed admirably in his role as president, at all times doing what he thought was in the best interests of the American people."

There was no widespread fraud in the election, as has been confirmed by a range of election officials across the country and by former Attorney General William Barr. Nearly all the legal challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed.

## HISTORY LESSON

Both sides are at odds over whether a trial is permissible now that Trump has left office — and the seemingly arcane argument could be key to his acquittal.

Trump's lawyers say the case is moot since he is no longer in the White House and the Senate therefore doesn't have jurisdiction to try him in an impeachment case. Many Senate Republicans agree, and 45 of them voted on that basis to end the trial before it began. A two-thirds vote of the Senate would be required for Trump's conviction.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 36 of 86

It is true that no president has faced impeachment proceedings after leaving office, but House managers say there's ample precedent. They cite the case of former Secretary of War William Belknap, who resigned in 1876 just hours before he was impeached over a kickback scheme. The House impeached him anyway, and the Senate then tried him, though he was ultimately acquitted. Democrats also note that Trump was impeached by the House while he was still president.

The framers of the Constitution intended for the impeachment power to sanction current or former officials for acts committed while in office — with no "January exception," Democrats wrote. Not only that, they say, the Constitution explicitly allows the Senate to disqualify from future office a former official it convicts.

That possibility, they suggest, makes the case against Trump — who could mount another White House run in 2024 — anything but moot.

## Defend or rebuke? House GOP faces difficult vote over Greene

By ALAN FRAM, BRIAN SLODYSKO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans will be forced to go on the record, defending or rebuking Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has drawn bipartisan condemnation over her embrace of far-right conspiracy theories, as well as her past endorsement of violence against Democrats.

The politically agonizing vote expected Thursday, which will determine whether the Georgia Republican is stripped of her committee assignments, underscores tension over the best political path forward that has riven the party since Donald Trump lost the White House.

Democrats issued an ultimatum earlier in the week, telling House Republicans to strip Greene of her committee assignments — or they would. Bipartisan pressure built after Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell called Greene's "loony lies" a "cancer" for the party.

But House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., on Wednesday ruled out taking action. Instead, he accused Democrats of a "partisan power grab" for targeting Greene, who once suggested that a Jewish-owned financial firm may have been involved in a plot to spark California wildfires using a space laser.

"If this is not the bottom, I don't know what the hell is," House Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said before a resolution was sent to the House floor to strip Greene of her posts.

McCarthy's decision to back Greene comes at a time when the party has been ideologically adrift after Trump's loss, struggling over whether to embrace his norm-busting divisiveness or the GOP's more traditional, policy-oriented conservative values.

On Wednesday, House Republicans blocked an effort by conservative hardliners to oust the No. 3 House Republican, Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., from her leadership role. Cheney, a daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, had enraged Trump supporters by voting to impeach him over the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

In sticking by both women, McCarthy was attempting to placate both traditional conservatives and populists, like Greene, who emulate Trump. The moves were typical of McCarthy's preference to avoid ruffling feathers as he charts his path to someday becoming House speaker.

"You know what that's going to mean?" he told reporters Wednesday evening. "Two years from now, we're going to win the majority. That's because this conference is more united. We've got the right leadership team behind it."

But the GOP's wings remain concerned that the other is leading them down the wrong path, and to some, Wednesday's outcome seemed more an uneasy truce than a full-on peace treaty.

"This is about the direction of our party and whether or not we're going to be a majority who's dedicated to just one person or we're going to be a united Republican majority," said Rep. Jaime Herrera-Beutler, R-Wash., who with Cheney was among just 10 House Republicans to back impeaching Trump.

Greene has shown support for calls to violence against Democrats, bizarre fictions about faked school shootings and unfounded QAnon theories about Democrats joining in child abuse rings.

The conspiracy theories she's embraced came up during a closed-door Republican caucus meeting on Wednesday, which attendants described as spirited with long lines of speakers at the microphones. Some

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 37 of 86

said Greene apologized to her colleagues, though there were conflicting, vague versions of exactly what she'd said.

"She was contrite. And I think she brought a lot of people over to her side," said conservative Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky.

That's at odds with statements she's made in recent weeks on Twitter, where she has vowed to never back down or apologize and labeled her critics traitors, while using the Democratic push to punish her to raise money for her campaign.

Democrats say it's politically advantageous to tie some Republicans to the far-right Greene. This week, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee launched a \$500,000 ad campaign that attempts to link eight Republicans to her and other adherents of QAnon, which focuses on the false belief that top Democrats are involved in child sex trafficking and cannibalism.

McCarthy condemned Greene's past endorsements of conspiracy theories — after weeks of saying little critical of her — and said the first-term congresswoman had recognized in a private conversation that she must meet "a higher standard" as a lawmaker.

"I hold her to her word, as well as her actions going forward," McCarthy said.

She burst onto the national political scene with enthusiastic support from Trump.

Republicans appointed Greene to the Education and Labor Committee, a decision that drew especially harsh criticism because of her suggestions that mass school shootings in Connecticut and Florida could be hoaxes. Greene is also on the Budget Committee.

McCarthy said Democrats turned down his offer to move Greene onto the House Small Business Committee instead.

It's unusual for party leaders to strip lawmakers of committee assignments, which can help them address their districts' needs and raise campaign contributions.

In 2019, House GOP leaders removed Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, who had a history of racist comments, from the Agriculture and Judiciary panels after he wondered aloud in a New York Times story about when the term "white supremacist" became offensive. He lost the Republican primary for his seat in 2020 and is out of Congress after serving nine terms.

In online videos and through supportive "likes" on social media, Greene has voiced support for racist beliefs, calls for violence against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former President Barack Obama and various false theories.

## 'Eye of the storm': Diverse east London grapples with virus

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Taxicab driver Gary Nerden knows colleagues who got seriously ill from COVID-19. He knows the area of east London where he lives and works has among the highest infection rates in the whole of England. But since he can't afford not to work, he drives around picking up strangers for up to 12 hours a day, relying on a flimsy plastic screen to keep him safe.

"I've got people telling me they won't wear a mask, saying they're exempt," said Nerden, 57. "I've got diabetes, I have to look after myself. I wipe the handles, the seat belt, after every customer, but that's all I can do, really."

Nerden and his wife, a hospital administrative worker, live in the outer London borough of Redbridge, which in mid-January had the country's second-highest rate of residents testing positive for the coronavirus: 1,571 cases per 100,000 people. Official figures estimated that at one point, 1 in 15 people there had COVID-19 — even after the government imposed a third national lockdown to control a fast-spreading, more contagious variant of the virus.

Redbridge and its surrounding areas, which lie on a commuter belt between the capital's northeast and coastal Essex, have been dubbed the "COVID triangle" because they all topped England's worst infection rates in recent weeks. While case rates have come down significantly, local leaders said the situation remained critical and the borough was still "in the eye of the storm."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 38 of 86

They say the area's large number of essential workers in public-facing jobs, combined with dense housing and high levels of poverty, contribute to why the virus has hit it much harder than most places in the U.K. Those factors also make fighting the pandemic there particularly challenging.

"We have some of the most front-line workers here in the community: the taxi drivers, the NHS (National Health Service) workers, the train drivers going into central London, the commuter workers, the cleaners," Redbridge Council leader Jas Athwal said.

"People are taking their chances — is it about feeding my children, or risking myself with COVID? And of course, they need to feed their children," Athwal added. "All that accounts for the excess number of virus infections, the deaths, because people are having to go out to do their job."

Many of those lower-income workers with high exposure to the virus are from ethnic minority backgrounds, who are among the most at-risk — as well as the hardest to persuade to get vaccinated. Redbridge's population is among the most diverse in the country, with large Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and fewer than 40% of residents identifying as white British.

Numerous studies have shown that the pandemic is causing disproportionate serious illness and deaths among ethnic minorities and those from poorer households. In the U.K., Public Health England found that after accounting for factors like age and sex, people of Bangladeshi heritage were dying from COVID-19 at twice the rate of white Britons. Black people and other Asian groups also had a 10% to 50% higher risk of death.

Experts say that is due to a combination of factors. People from minority groups are more likely to live in crowded housing and to take poorly ventilated public transport to go to work. They are also more likely to have long-term conditions like heart disease and diabetes that increase their risk of becoming seriously ill if they catch the virus.

Khayer Chowdhury, a Redbridge councilor of Bangladeshi descent, said many Asian households in the borough are multigenerational families living together under one roof, giving the virus greater opportunity to spread.

"Our diversity makes us unique, but it also makes us vulnerable," he said.

Britain has lost more than 100,000 lives to the coronavirus, the worst death toll in Europe.

"Here in the community, everybody knows somebody who's passed away," Athwal said. "The fear is finally starting to hit home."

Officials say a small but increasing number of people are breaking restrictions, partly because of fatigue with lockdown rules. Enforcement officers have broken up gatherings and "car meets," shutting down and fining clubs and restaurants for hosting parties. On a recent weekday, a large team of police officers patrolled the main shopping street, which bustled with a steady stream of people despite the government's "stay at home" message.

But the bigger challenge is on the vaccination front. Several U.K.-based studies have suggested that vaccine take-up rates for both the coronavirus and other jabs among Black people and minorities are significantly lower than that in the general population. Some researchers say that's caused by longstanding distrust of authorities and disengagement from public health messages, and exacerbated by anti-vaccine posts on social media.

Local resident Salman Khan and his wife said they were not sure they would have the jab if offered, because the pandemic has made them question "whether the government and the news is telling the truth."

Dr. Anil Mehta, a local doctor, said health officials are making every effort to reach the poorest and hardest to reach communities. This week he is offering vaccine shots out at homeless shelters, hoping to inoculate the area's many refugees and those sleeping rough. He said he's also taken up the role of "myth-buster," trying to dispel misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"People believe in all sorts of things — this is affecting fertility, or against Black Lives Matter," Mehta said. "There is a lot of hesitancy, whether they want it, whether they trust us. That's our battle at the moment."

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## **Sitting on billions, Catholic dioceses amassed taxpayer aid**

By REESE DUNKLIN and MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

When the coronavirus forced churches to close their doors and give up Sunday collections, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte turned to the federal government's signature small business relief program for more than \$8 million.

The diocese's headquarters, churches and schools landed the help even though they had roughly \$100 million of their own cash and short-term investments available last spring, financial records show. When the cash catastrophe church leaders feared didn't materialize, those assets topped \$110 million by the summer.

"I am gratified to report the overall good financial health of the diocese despite the many difficulties presented by the Covid-19 pandemic," Bishop Peter Jugis wrote in the diocese's audited financial report released last fall.

As the pandemic began to unfold, scores of Catholic dioceses across the U.S. received aid through the Paycheck Protection Program while sitting on well over \$10 billion in cash, short-term investments or other available funds, an Associated Press investigation has found. And despite the broad economic downturn, these assets have grown in many dioceses.

Yet even with that financial safety net, the 112 dioceses that shared their financial statements, along with the churches and schools they oversee, collected at least \$1.5 billion in taxpayer-backed aid. A majority of these dioceses reported enough money on hand to cover at least six months of operating expenses, even without any new income.

The financial resources of several dioceses rivaled or exceeded those available to publicly traded companies like Shake Shack and Ruth's Chris Steak House, whose early participation in the program triggered outrage. Federal officials responded by emphasizing the money was intended for those who lacked the cushion that cash and other liquidity provide. Many corporations returned the funds.

Overall, the nation's nearly 200 dioceses, where bishops and cardinals govern, and other Catholic institutions received at least \$3 billion. That makes the Roman Catholic Church perhaps the biggest beneficiary of the paycheck program, according to AP's analysis of data the U.S. Small Business Administration released following a public-records lawsuit by news organizations. The agency for months had shared only partial information, making a more precise analysis impossible.

Already one of the largest federal aid efforts ever, the SBA reopened the Paycheck Protection Program last month with a new infusion of nearly \$300 billion. In making the announcement, the agency's administrator at the time, Jovita Carranza, hailed the program for serving "as an economic lifeline to millions of small businesses."

Church officials have said their employees were as worthy of help as workers at Main Street businesses, and that without it they would have had to slash jobs and curtail their charitable mission as demand for food pantries and social services spiked. They point out the program's rules didn't require them to exhaust their stores of cash and other funds before applying.

But new financial statements several dozen dioceses have posted for 2020 show that their available resources remained robust or improved during the pandemic's hard, early months. The pattern held whether a diocese was big or small, urban or rural, East or West, North or South.

In Kentucky, funds available to the Archdiocese of Louisville, its parishes and other organizations grew from at least \$153 million to \$157 million during the fiscal year that ended in June, AP found. Those same offices and organizations received at least \$17 million in paycheck money. "The Archdiocese's operations have not been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak," according to its financial statement.

In Illinois, the Archdiocese of Chicago had more than \$1 billion in cash and investments in its headquarters and cemetery division as of May, while the faithful continued to donate "more than expected," according to a review by the independent ratings agency Moody's Investors Service. Chicago's parishes, schools and ministries accumulated at least \$77 million in paycheck protection funds.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 40 of 86

Up the interstate from Charlotte in North Carolina, the Raleigh Diocese collected at least \$11 million in aid. Yet during the fiscal year that ended in June, overall offerings were down just 5% and the assets available to the diocese, its parishes and schools increased by about \$21 million to more than \$170 million, AP found. In another measure of fiscal health, the diocese didn't make an emergency draw on its \$10 million line of credit.

Catholic leaders in dioceses including Charlotte, Chicago, Louisville and Raleigh said their parishes and schools, like many other businesses and nonprofits, suffered financially when they closed to slow the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

Some dioceses reported that their hardest-hit churches saw income drop by 40% or more before donations began to rebound months later, and schools took hits when fundraisers were canceled and families had trouble paying tuition. As revenues fell, dioceses said, wage cuts and a few dozen layoffs were necessary in some offices.

Catholic researchers at Georgetown University who surveyed the nation's bishops last summer found such measures weren't frequent. In comparison, a survey by the investment bank Goldman Sachs found 42% of small business owners had cut staff or salaries, and that 33% had spent their personal savings to stay open.

Church leaders have questioned why AP focused on their faith following a story last July, when New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan wrote that reporters "invented a story when none existed and sought to bash the Church."

By using a special exemption that the church lobbied to include in the paycheck program, Catholic entities amassed at least \$3 billion — roughly the same as the combined total of recipients from the other faiths that rounded out the top five, AP found. Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Jewish faith-based recipients also totaled at least \$3 billion. Catholics account for about a fifth of the U.S. religious population while members of Protestant and Jewish denominations are nearly half, according to the Pew Research Center.

Catholic institutions also received many times more than other major nonprofits with charitable missions and national reach, such as the United Way, Goodwill Industries and Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Overall, Catholic recipients got roughly twice as much as 40 of the largest, most well-known charities in America combined, AP found.

The complete picture is certainly even more lopsided. So many Catholic entities received help that reporters could not identify them all, even after spending hundreds of hours hand-checking tens of thousands of records in federal data.

The Vatican referred questions about the paycheck program to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which said it does not speak on behalf of dioceses.

Presented with AP's findings, bishops conference spokeswoman Chieko Noguchi responded with a broad statement that the Paycheck Protection Program was "designed to protect the jobs of Americans from all walks of life, regardless of whether they work for for-profit or nonprofit employers, faith-based or secular."

## INTERNAL SKEPTICISM

The AP's assessment of church finances is among the most comprehensive to date. It draws largely from audited financial statements posted online by the central offices of 112 of the country's nearly 200 dioceses.

The church isn't required to share its financials. As a result, the analysis doesn't include cash, short-term assets and lines of credit held by some of the largest dioceses, including those serving New York City and other major metropolitan areas.

The analysis focused on available assets because federal officials cited those metrics when clarifying eligibility for the paycheck program. Therefore, the \$10 billion AP identified doesn't count important financial pillars of the U.S. church. Among those are its thousands of real estate properties and most of the funds that parishes and schools hold. Also excluded is the money — estimated at \$9.5 billion in a 2019 study by the Delaware-based wealth management firm Wilmington Trust — held by charitable foundations created to help dioceses oversee donations.

In addition, dioceses can rely on a well-funded support system that includes help from wealthier dioceses,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 41 of 86

the bishops conference and other Catholic organizations. Canon law, the legal code the Vatican uses to govern the global church, notes that richer dioceses may assist poorer ones, and the AP found instances where they did.

In their financial statements, the 112 dioceses acknowledged having at least \$4.5 billion in liquid or otherwise available assets. To reach its \$10 billion total, AP also included funding that dioceses had opted to designate for special projects instead of general expenses; excess cash that parishes and their affiliates deposit with their diocese's savings and loan; and lines of credit dioceses typically have with outside banks.

Some church officials said AP was misreading their financial books and therefore overstating available assets. They insisted that money their bishop or his advisers had set aside for special projects couldn't be repurposed during an emergency, although financial statements posted by multiple dioceses stated the opposite.

For its analysis, AP consulted experts in church finance and church law. One was the Rev. James Connell, an accountant for 15 years before joining the priesthood and becoming an administrator in the Milwaukee Archdiocese. Connell, also a canon lawyer who is now retired from his position with the archdiocese, said AP's findings convinced him that Catholic entities did not need government aid — especially when thousands of small businesses were permanently closing.

"Was it want or need?" Connell asked. "Need must be present, not simply the want. Justice and love of neighbor must include the common good."

Connell was not alone among the faithful concerned by the church's pursuit of taxpayer money. Parishioners in several cities have questioned church leaders who received government money for Catholic schools they then closed.

Elsewhere, a pastor in a Western state told AP that he refused to apply even after diocesan officials repeatedly pressed him. He spoke on condition of anonymity because of his diocese's policy against talking to reporters and concerns about possible retaliation.

The pastor had been saving, much like leaders of other parishes. When the pandemic hit, he used that money, trimmed expenses and told his diocese's central finance office that he had no plans to seek the aid. Administrators followed up several times, the pastor said, with one high-ranking official questioning why he was "leaving free money on the table."

The pastor said he felt a "sound moral conviction" that the money was meant more for shops and restaurants that, without it, might close forever.

As the weeks passed last spring, the pastor said his church managed just fine. Parishioners were so happy with new online Masses and his other outreach initiatives, he said, they boosted their contributions beyond 2019 levels.

"We didn't need it," the pastor said, "and intentionally wanted to leave the money for those small business owners who did."

## WEATHERING A DOWNTURN

Months after the pandemic first walloped the economy, the 112 dioceses that release financial statements began sharing updates. Among the 47 dioceses that have thus far, the pandemic's impact was far from crippling.

The 47 dioceses that have posted financials for the fiscal year that ended in June had a median 6% increase in the amount of cash, short-term investments and other funds that they and their affiliates could use for unanticipated or general expenses, AP found. In all, 38 dioceses grew those resources, while nine reported declines.

Finances in Raleigh and 10 other dioceses that took government assistance were stable enough that they did not have to dip into millions they had available through outside lines of credit.

"This crisis has tested us," Russell Elmayan, Raleigh's chief financial officer, told the diocese's magazine website in July, "but we are hopeful that the business acumen of our staff and lay counselors, together with the strategic financial reserves built over time, will help our parishes and schools continue to weather

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 42 of 86

this unprecedented event." Raleigh officials did not answer direct questions from AP.

The 47 dioceses acknowledged a smaller amount of readily available assets than AP counted, though by their own accounting that grew as well.

The improving financial outlook is due primarily to parishioners who found ways to continue donating and U.S. stock markets that were rebounding to new highs. But when the markets were first plunging, officials in several dioceses said, they had to stretch available assets because few experts were forecasting a rapid recovery.

In Louisville, Charlotte and other dioceses, church leaders said they offered loans or grants to needy parishes and schools, or offset the monthly charges they assess their parishes. In Raleigh, for example, the headquarters used \$3 million it had set aside for liability insurance and also tapped its internal deposit and loan fund.

Church officials added that the pandemic's full toll will probably be seen in a year or two, because some key sources of revenue are calculated based on income that parishes and schools generate.

"We believe that we will not know all of the long-term negative impacts on parish, school and archdiocesan finances for some time," Louisville Archdiocese spokeswoman Cecelia Price wrote in response to questions.

At the nine dioceses that recorded declines in liquid or other short-term assets, the drops typically were less than 10%, and not always clearly tied to the pandemic.

The financial wherewithal of some larger dioceses is underscored by the fact that, like publicly traded companies, they can raise capital by selling bonds to investors.

One was Chicago, where analysts with the Moody's ratings agency calculated that the \$1 billion in cash and investments held by the archdiocese headquarters and cemeteries division could cover about 631 days of operating expenses.

Church officials in Chicago asserted that those dollars were needed to cover substantial expenses while parishioner donations slumped. Without paycheck support, "parishes and schools would have been forced to cut many jobs, as the archdiocese, given its liabilities, could not have closed such a funding gap," spokeswoman Paula Waters wrote.

Moody's noted in its May report that while giving was down, federal aid had compensated for that and helped leave the archdiocese "well positioned to weather this revenue loss over the next several months." Among the reasons for the optimism: "a unique credit strength" that under church law allows the archbishop to tax parish revenue virtually at will.

In a separate Moody's report on New Orleans, which filed for bankruptcy in May while facing multiple clergy abuse lawsuits, the ratings agency wrote in July that the archdiocese did so while having "significant financial reserves, with spendable cash and investments of over \$160 million."

Moody's said the archdiocese's "very good" liquid assets would let it operate 336 days without additional income. Those assets prompted clergy abuse victims to ask a federal judge to dismiss the bankruptcy filing, arguing the archdiocese's primary reason for seeking the legal protection was to minimize payouts to them.

The archdiocese, along with its parishes and schools, collected more than \$26 million in paycheck money. New Orleans Archdiocesan officials didn't respond to written questions.

## PURSUING AID

Without special treatment, the Catholic Church would not have received nearly so much under the Paycheck Protection Program.

After Congress let nonprofits and religious organizations participate in the first place, Catholic officials lobbied the Trump Administration for a second break. Religious organizations were freed from the so-called affiliation rule that typically disqualifies applicants with more than 500 workers.

Without that break, many dioceses would have missed out because — between their head offices, parishes, schools and other affiliates — their employee count would exceed the limit.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 43 of 86

Among those lobbying, federal records show, was the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Parishes, schools and ministries there collected at least \$80 million in paycheck aid, at a time when the headquarters reported \$658 million in available funds heading into the fiscal year when the coronavirus arrived.

Catholic officials in the U.S. needed the special exception for at least two reasons.

Church law says dioceses, parishes and schools are affiliated, something the Los Angeles Archdiocese acknowledged "proved to be an obstacle" to receiving funds because its parishes operate "under the authority of the diocesan bishop." Dioceses, parishes, schools and other Catholic entities also routinely assert to the Internal Revenue Service that they are affiliated so they can maintain their federal income tax exemption.

While some Catholic officials insisted their affiliates are separate and financially independent, AP found many instances of borrowing and spending among them when dioceses were faced with prior cash crunches. In Philadelphia, for example, the archdiocese received at least \$18 million from three affiliates, including a seminary, to fund a compensation program for clergy sex abuse survivors, according to 2019 financial statements.

Cardinals and bishops have broad authority over parishes and the pastors who run them. Church law requires parishes to submit annual financial reports and bishops may require parishes to deposit surplus money with internal banks administered by the diocese.

"The parishioners cannot hire or fire the pastor; that is for the bishop to do," said Connell, the priest, former accountant and canon lawyer. "Each parish functions as a wholly owned subsidiary or division of a larger corporation, the diocese."

Bishops acknowledged a concerted effort to tap paycheck funds in a survey by Catholic researchers at Georgetown University. When asked what they had done to address the pandemic's financial fallout, 95% said their central offices helped parishes apply for paycheck and other aid — the leading response. That topped encouraging parishioners to donate electronically.

After Congress approved the paycheck program, three high-ranking officials in New Hampshire's Manchester Diocese sent an urgent memo to parishes, schools and affiliated organizations urging them to refrain from layoffs or furloughs until completing their applications. "We are all in this together," the memo read, adding that diocesan officials were working expeditiously to provide "step by step instructions."

Paycheck Protection Program funds came through low-interest bank loans, worth up to \$10 million each, that the federal government would forgive so long as recipients used the money to cover about two months of wages and operating expenses.

After an initial \$659 billion last spring, Congress added another \$284 billion in December. With the renewal came new requirements intended to ensure that funds go to businesses that lost money due to the pandemic. Lawmakers also downsized the headcount for applicants to 300 or fewer employees.

## A QUESTION OF NEED

In other federal small business loan programs, government help is treated as a last resort.

Applicants must show they couldn't get credit elsewhere. And those with enough available funds must pay more of their own way to reduce taxpayer subsidies.

Congress didn't include these tests in the Paycheck Protection Program. To speed approvals, lenders weren't required to do their usual screening and instead relied on applicants' self-certifications of need.

The looser standards helped create a run on the first \$349 billion in paycheck funding. Small business owners complained that they were shut out, yet dozens of companies healthy enough to be traded on stock exchanges scored quick approval.

As blowback built in April, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin warned at a news briefing that there would be "severe consequences" for applicants who improperly tapped the program.

"We want to make sure this money is available to small businesses that need it, people who have invested their entire life savings," Mnuchin said. Program guidelines evolved to stress that participants with access to significant cash probably could not get the assistance "in good faith."

Mnuchin's Treasury Department said it would audit loans exceeding \$2 million, although federal officials

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 44 of 86

have not said whether they would hold religious organizations and other nonprofits to the same standard of need as businesses.

The headquarters and major departments for more than 40 dioceses received more than \$2 million. Every diocese that responded to questions said it would seek to have the government cover the loans, rather than repay the funds.

One diocese receiving a loan over \$2 million was Boston. According to the archdiocese's website, its central ministries office received about \$3 million, while its parishes and schools collected about \$32 million more.

The archdiocese — along with its parishes, schools and cemeteries — had roughly \$200 million in available funds in June 2019, according to its audited financial report. When that fiscal year ended several months into the pandemic, available funds had increased to roughly \$233 million.

Nevertheless, spokesman Terrence Donilon cited "ongoing economic pressure" in saying the archdiocese will seek forgiveness for last year's loans and will apply for additional, new funds during the current round.

Beyond its growing available funds, the archdiocese and its affiliates benefit from other sources of funding. The archdiocese's "Inspiring Hope" campaign, announced in January, has raised at least \$150 million.

And one of its supporting charities — the Catholic Schools Foundation, where Cardinal Sean O'Malley is board chairman — counted more than \$33 million in cash and other funds that could be "used for general operations" as of the beginning of the 2020 fiscal year, according to its financial statement.

Despite these resources, the archdiocese closed a half-dozen schools in May and June, often citing revenue losses due to the pandemic. Paycheck protection data show four of those schools collectively were approved for more than \$700,000.

The shuttered schools included St. Francis of Assisi in Braintree, a middle-class enclave 10 miles south of Boston, which received \$210,000. Parents said they felt blindsided by the closure, announced in June as classes ended.

"It's like a punch to the gut because that was such a home for so many people for so long," said Kate Nedelman Herbst, the mother of two children who attended the elementary school.

Along with more than 2,000 other school supporters, Herbst signed a written protest to O'Malley that noted the archdiocese's robust finances. After O'Malley didn't reply, parents appealed to the Vatican, this time underscoring the collection of Paycheck Protection Program money.

"It is very hard to reconcile the large sums of money raised by the archdiocese in recent years with this wholesale destruction of the church's educational infrastructure," parents wrote.

In December, the Vatican turned down their request to overrule O'Malley. Spokesman Donilon said the decision to close the school "is not being reconsidered."

Today, the three children of Michael Waterman and his wife, Jeanine, are learning at home. And they still can't understand why the archdiocese didn't shift money to help save a school beloved by the faithful.

"What angers us," Michael Waterman said, "is that we feel like, given the amount of money that the Catholic Church has, they absolutely could have remained open."

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Contact AP's global investigative team at [Investigative@ap.org](mailto:Investigative@ap.org).

Contact the reporters at <https://twitter.com/reesedunklin> and <https://twitter.com/mikerezendes>.

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Contributing to this report were Justin Myers, Randy Herschaft, Rodrique Ngowi, Holbrook Mohr, Jason Dearen and James LaPorta.

## Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow

By RAHIM FAIEZ and KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Every morning when Khan Wali Kamran left for work, he was afraid his children might be killed in Kabul's streets before he got home in the evening. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore, and a month ago he sent his four children to live with his parents in his home village.

He's not the only one afraid. Afghanistan is supposed to be moving toward peace after decades of war,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 45 of 86

but to the people of the capital Kabul, turmoil only seems to be getting worse.

Frequent bombings have everyone on edge. It's not just dramatic attacks like one that killed dozens at a university last year. There's also been a string of targeted killings, like the bomb planted on the car of a prominent cleric that detonated Tuesday in the middle of busy morning traffic, killing him and his driver — one of four such bombings that day.

The tensions are increased because it's not clear who is behind the attacks. Some are claimed by the Islamic State group, who took responsibility for the cleric's killing and the killing of a judge Wednesday in eastern Nangarhar province. But many go unclaimed, blamed by the government on the Taliban who have denied responsibility for most attacks, raising suspicions that militias run by prominent warlords both allied with and opposed to the government are creating chaos.

Then there's the surge in crime. Armed robbers brazenly rob shops or even mug people in broad daylight in public parks crowded with people, stripping them of money and phones at gunpoint. Cars stuck in traffic can be ransacked by thieves.

In one case, organized thieves robbed three branches of the same supermarket in different parts of the capital at almost the same time on the same day. Kidnappers are known to snatch children and adult men from the streets, demanding ransoms from their families, anywhere from \$50 to \$5,000. Residents of Kabul have stopped going out after dark.

"We are afraid when we get in our car, go to the office, when we are near our home, in the mosque," Kamran said. "Life has become hell."

Fear so dominates Kamran's world that he asked that The Associated Press not identify the village where he sent his four children, including his youngest, a 2-year-old son. Others who spoke to AP asked to be identified only by one name, afraid of drawing the attention of criminals or armed factions.

Last year, hope was high that a peace deal reached by the Taliban and U.S. government would lead to an end to more than four decades of relentless war and finally bring peace to Afghanistan. But subsequent talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have been excruciatingly slow.

Many Afghans fear that the deteriorating security is a sign that, rather than peace, what is coming is yet another phase in the war, reminiscent of the chaos of the 1990s when warlords' armed factions battled for power. That fighting came after the Soviets withdrew and before the Taliban took power. Now the Americans, who helped oust the Taliban nearly 20 years ago, are pulling out, their numbers down to 2,500 troops after former President Donald Trump accelerated the withdrawal.

Analysts say there are participants on both sides of the conflict who have more to gain from war than peace.

"The war is about power, not even about religion," said Torek Farhadi, a former Afghan government adviser. "Some of the killings are by the Taliban, some by circles in Kabul who stand to lose wealth, power and status should peace come to Afghanistan."

Ferdaws Faramarz, Kabul police spokesman, accused the Taliban of carrying out attacks in order to "create a gap between the people and government."

Afghans say the deep corruption that permeates the government and security agencies has crippled their capacity and made them incapable of keeping Afghans safe.

Despite the billions of dollars spent in Afghanistan since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban, more than 72% of the country's 32 million people live below the poverty level, which is a daily wage of less than \$1.90.

Lawlessness has accelerated in the past few years as gangs and militias grow bolder and poverty worsens. Local TV reported recently that in the past 100 days, more than 177 people in Kabul were killed and 360 wounded in suicide attacks, bomb blasts and crimes, a figure police officials confirmed to the AP was accurate.

Malik, 22, runs a small barbershop in Kabul's posh Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood, where diplomats and powerful government officials live. He used to stay open until 10 p.m., but now he shuts down by 7 most nights, ever since he was robbed last year.

The thieves were heavily armed and showed no fear. While two waited outside, two others entered his

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 46 of 86

shop, demanded the cash and walked out with 30,000 Afghanis, the equivalent of \$380, as well as two mobile phones.

"We were in shock," Malik said, asking to be identified by just one name. He waited for months for police to do something, but no one was arrested and the stolen goods never recovered.

"They just told us we should be careful," Malik said.

Amir, another Kabul resident, said that when he goes to the mosque for prayers, he leaves his money and phone at home. "I know there are robbers everywhere when I step outside my door."

But Amir, a Shiite, is particularly afraid of the Islamic State group, which has targeted the minority community in brutal bombings. Some attacks have been particularly horrific, including one on educational center that killed at least 25, many of them students waiting to take university entrance exams, and another at a maternity hospital last May that killed 24.

IS claimed it carried out 82 attacks in Afghanistan in 2020, killing or wounding 821 people, including 21 assassinations. Most of the victims in its attacks were either security personnel or Shiite Muslims.

But the perpetrators of many of the targeted killings are unknown. Often carried out by sticky bombs planted on the victim's car, assassinations have struck young intellectuals and professionals, including journalists, activists, lawyers, judges.

The violence is taking its toll on Afghans' mental health, said psychologist Sharafuddin Azimi, who estimated tens of thousands of Afghans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

His practice has increased each year, and he said many of his clients are in deep depression, without hope for tomorrow and fearful of death at any time.

"Many of our loved ones, the youth, women, men and children are terrified," he said.

"All the time they expect there can be an explosion ... or they feel somebody is following them and they might get stabbed or shot by a thief and get killed."

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Gannon reported from Islamabad.

## **Biden flexible on who gets aid, tells lawmakers to 'go big'**

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden encouraged Democratic lawmakers to "act fast" on his \$1.9 trillion COVID rescue plan but also signaled he's open to changes, including limiting the proposed \$1,400 direct payments to Americans with lower income levels, which could draw Republican support.

Biden told lawmakers in private comments Wednesday that he's "not married" to an absolute number for the overall package but wants them to "go big" on pandemic relief and "restore the soul of the country."

"Look, we got a lot of people hurting in our country today," Biden said on a private call with House Democrats. "We need to act. We need to act fast."

On the direct payments, Biden said he doesn't want to budge from the \$1,400 promised to Americans. But he said he is willing to "target" the aid, which would mean lowering the income threshold to qualify.

"I'm not going to start my administration by breaking a promise to the American people," he said.

Biden spoke with House Democrats and followed with a meeting of top Senate Democrats at the White House, deepening his public engagement with lawmakers on his American Rescue Plan. Together the virus and economic aid is his first legislative priority and a test of the administration's ability to work with Congress to deliver.

Biden's remarks to the Democratic House caucus were relayed by two people who requested anonymity to discuss the private conference call.

While Biden is trying to build bipartisan support from Republicans, he is also prepared to rely on the Democratic majority in Congress to push the package into law. Democrats moved ahead with preliminary steps, including a House budget vote Wednesday largely along party lines, to approve it on their own, over Republicans objections. A group of 10 Republican senators offered a \$618 billion alternative with slimmer \$1,000 direct payments and zero aid for states and cities, but Biden panned it as insufficient, though private talks with the Republicans continue.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 47 of 86

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"I think we'll get some Republicans," Biden said.

With a rising virus death toll and strained economy, the goal is to have COVID-19 relief approved by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid measures expire. Money for vaccine distributions, direct payments to households, school reopenings and business aid are at stake.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the president fully recognizes the final package may look different than the one he initially proposed.

She said further targeting the \$1,400 payments "means not the size of the check, it means the income level of the people who receive the check." That's under discussion, she said.

As lawmakers in Congress begin drafting the details, Biden is taking care to politically back up his allies while also ensuring that the final product fulfills his promise for bold relief to a battered nation.

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"We have to go big, not small," Biden told the Democrats. "I've got your back, and you've got mine."

As the White House reaches for a bipartisan bill, House and Senate Democrats have launched a lengthy budget process for approving Biden's bill with or without Republican support.

"We want to do it bipartisan, but we must be strong," Schumer said after the 90-minute session at the White House. Democrats are "working with our Republican friends, when we can."

The swift action follows Tuesday's outreach as Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen joined the Democratic senators for a private virtual meeting, both declaring the Republicans' \$618 billion offer was too small.

Both Biden and Yellen recalled the lessons of the government response to the 2009 financial crisis, which some have since said was inadequate as conditions worsened.

Earlier in the week, Biden met with 10 Republican senators who were pitching their \$618 billion alternative, and told them he won't delay aid in hopes of winning GOP support even as talks continue.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell criticized the Democrats for pressing ahead largely on their own as the GOP senators try to provide bipartisan alternatives.

"They've chosen a totally partisan path," McConnell said. "That's unfortunate."

The two sides are far apart. The cornerstone of the GOP plan is \$160 billion for the health care response — vaccine distribution, a "massive expansion" of testing, protective gear and money for rural hospitals, similar to what Biden has proposed for aid specific to the pandemic.

But from there, the two plans drastically diverge. Biden proposes \$170 billion for schools, compared with \$20 billion in the Republican plan. Republicans 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.

The GOP's \$1,000 direct payments would go to fewer people — those earning up to \$40,000 a year, or \$80,000 for couples. Biden's bigger \$1,400 payments would extend to higher income levels, up to \$300,000 for some families.

The Republicans offer \$40 billion for Paycheck Protection Program business aid. But gone are Democratic priorities such as a gradual lifting of the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

The Delaware senators Tom Carper and Chris Coons, both Democrats from Biden's state, were at the White House earlier Wednesday and discussed with the president the need for state and local aid and the possibility of narrowing who qualifies for another round of direct payments.

Coons said he's in conversations with Republicans "about on what terms are they willing to increase the amount significantly for some state and local aid." Without that, he said, it's a "nonstarter."

Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant, potentially giving Biden the votes needed in the 50-50 Senate to reach the 60-vote threshold typically required to advance legislation. Vice President Kamala Harris is the tie-breaker.

But Democrats pushed ahead with votes on a budget resolution that provides groundwork for eventual approval under the reconciliation process. That would allow the bill to pass with a 51-vote Senate majority.

## Takeaways from legal filings for Trump's impeachment trial

By ERIC TUCKER, JILL COLVIN and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The legal sparring around Donald Trump's impeachment trial is underway, with briefs filed this week laying out radically different positions ahead of next week's Senate trial.

House prosecutors and the former president's defense team are putting forward their arguments about Trump's role in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and on the legality of even holding a trial. They're also debating the First Amendment and a blunt assessment by Democrats that the riot posed a threat to the presidential line of succession.

Here are some of the takeaways from the arguments of both sides:

### 'SINGULARLY RESPONSIBLE'

Who's responsible for the riot? Democrats say there's only one answer, and it's Trump.

The Democrats contend that Trump was "singularly responsible" for the Jan. 6 attack by "creating a powder keg, striking a match, and then seeking personal advantage from the ensuing havoc." They say it's "impossible" to imagine the riot unfolding as it did without Trump's encouragement, and they even cite as support a fellow Republican, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, who said essentially the same thing.

Trump's lawyers, by contrast, suggest he can't be responsible because he never incited anyone to "engage in destructive behavior." They concede there was an illegal breach of the Capitol that resulted in deaths and injuries. But they say the people who are "responsible" — the ones who entered the building and vandalized it — are being investigated and prosecuted.

### FIRST AMENDMENT FAULT LINE

Trump's lawyers don't dispute that he told supporters to "fight like hell" before the Capitol siege. But the defense says that Trump, like any citizen, is protected by the First Amendment to "express his belief that the election results were suspect." He had an opinion that he was entitled to express, they say, and if the First Amendment only protected popular speech, it'd be "no protection at all."

House Democrats don't see it that way. For one thing, they say the First Amendment is meant to protect private citizens from the government, not to allow government officials to abuse their power. And while a private citizen may have a right to advocate for totalitarianism or the overthrow of the government, "no one would seriously suggest" that a president who adopted those same positions should be immune from impeachment.

### LINE OF SUCCESSION

The impeachment managers state that loyalists egged on by Trump directly endangered the safety of lawmakers who fled the House and the Senate as the rioters poured in.

Among those affected were the government's most senior leaders.

Those in the line of succession for the presidency after Trump — then-Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Pro Tempore Chuck Grassley — were all in the Capitol and forced to flee for safety. Trump's conduct not only "endangered the life of every single Member of Congress," the Democrats wrote, but also "jeopardized the peaceful transition of power and line of succession."

The brief details chilling threats to Pence and Pelosi as rioters ransacked the building and "specifically hunted" them. According to the document, which cites media outlets and videos, insurrectionists shouted, "Hang Mike Pence!" and called him a traitor because he'd indicated he would not challenge the electoral count, as Trump wanted. One person is alleged to have said that Pelosi would have been "torn into little pieces" had she been found.

The Democrats also describe the terror felt by lawmakers and staffers during the siege. "Some Members called loved ones for fear that they would not survive the assault by President Trump's insurrectionist mob," the impeachment managers wrote.

### DENY, DENY, DENY

That's the message from Trump's defense team, which used the word "denied" or "denies" a whopping 29 times in its 14-page brief.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 49 of 86

Trump's team denies that the impeachment trial can be held because he is no longer in office. They deny that he incited his supporters to violence. And they deny he did anything wrong on Jan. 6, or the weeks leading up to the riot, when he whipped his supporters into a frenzy by convincing them, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that the election had been stolen from him.

When Trump told the crowd, "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," he was merely pressing the "need to fight for election security in general," Trump's lawyers claim. He was not attempting to interfere with the counting of electoral votes, even though he had demanded that Pence do just that.

"It is denied that President Trump ever endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government," they wrote. "It is denied he threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coequal branch Government."

Rather, they say, he "performed admirably in his role as president, at all times doing what he thought was in the best interests of the American people."

There was no widespread fraud in the election, as has been confirmed by a range of election officials across the country and by former Attorney General William Barr. Nearly all the legal challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed.

## HISTORY LESSON

Both sides are at odds over whether a trial is permissible now that Trump has left office — and the seemingly arcane argument could be key to his acquittal.

Trump's lawyers say the case is moot since he is no longer in the White House and the Senate therefore doesn't have jurisdiction to try him in an impeachment case. Many Senate Republicans agree, and 45 of them voted on that basis to end the trial before it began. A two-thirds vote of the Senate would be required for Trump's conviction.

It is true that no president has faced impeachment proceedings after leaving office, but House managers say there's ample precedent. They cite the case of former Secretary of War William Belknap, who resigned in 1876 just hours before he was impeached over a kickback scheme. The House impeached him anyway, and the Senate then tried him, though he was ultimately acquitted. Democrats also note that Trump was impeached by the House while he was still president.

The framers of the Constitution intended for the impeachment power to sanction current or former officials for acts committed while in office — with no "January exception," Democrats wrote. Not only that, they say, the Constitution explicitly allows the Senate to disqualify from future office a former official it convicts.

That possibility, they suggest, makes the case against Trump — who could mount another White House run in 2024 — anything but moot.

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This story has been corrected to show that Belknap was ultimately acquitted, not convicted.

## House GOP keeps Cheney as No. 3 leader, stands by Greene

By ALAN FRAM, BRIAN SLODYSKO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans decided Wednesday to stand by two GOP lawmakers who have polarized the party, voting to retain Rep. Liz Cheney as their No. 3 leader and saying they'd fight a Democratic push to kick Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene off her committees.

In a 145-61 secret-ballot vote, House Republicans overwhelmingly rebuffed a rebellion by hard-right conservatives to toss Cheney, R-Wyo., from leadership after she voted last month to impeach then-President Donald Trump.

Hours earlier, after Democrats slated a House vote for Thursday that would remove Greene from her committees, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy ridiculed them for it. His comments signaled he was dismissing bipartisan demands that the hard-right Georgia Republican be punished for her online embrace of racist and violent views and bizarre conspiracy theories.

The decisions over Greene and Cheney have subjected the GOP to a politically agonizing test of its di-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 50 of 86

rection as it moves beyond the Trump presidency. Since Trump grudgingly vacated the White House last month, the party has been ideologically adrift as it's struggled over whether to embrace his norm-busting divisiveness or the party's more traditional, policy-oriented conservative values.

But as Wednesday's internal showdowns concluded, McCarthy and the House GOP decided against punishing two of their most high-profile women, whose views enrage opposite ends of the party's spectrum. The moves were typical of McCarthy's preference to avoid ruffling feathers as he charts his path to someday becoming House speaker.

"You know what that's going to mean?" he told reporters after the lengthy evening meeting. "Two years from now, we're going to win the majority. That's because this conference is more united. We've got the right leadership team behind it."

But each of the GOP's wings remains concerned that the other is leading them down the wrong path, and to some, the day's outcome seemed more an uneasy truce than a full-on peace treaty.

"This is about the direction of our party and whether or not we're going to be a majority who's dedicated to just one person or we're going to be a united Republican majority," said Rep. Jaime Herrera-Beutler, R-Wash., who with Cheney was among just 10 House Republicans to back impeaching Trump.

Cheney is a daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney and a fixture of the party establishment, and she is viewed as eager to rise even higher in Washington's GOP hierarchy.

Deposing her from the leadership would likely have dealt a devastating blow to her career. It also would have served as a warning shot to traditional conservative Republicans hoping to diminish Trump's hold over the party.

"I won't apologize for the vote," Cheney told her colleagues in the closed-door session, according to a person familiar with the session who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting.

During a break in the session, McCarthy told reporters he'd defended Cheney inside.

"People can have differences of opinion. That's what you can have a discussion about. Liz has a right to vote her conscience," said McCarthy, who'd previously given no clear signal about whether he'd support his lieutenant.

Attendants said Greene and the conspiracy theories she's embraced came up during the closed-door meeting, which participants said was spirited, with long lines of speakers at the microphones. Some said Greene apologized to her colleagues, though there were conflicting, vague versions of exactly what she'd said.

"She was contrite. And I think she brought a lot of people over to her side," said conservative Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky.

The day's action began when the Democratic-led House Rules Committee cleared the way for Thursday's vote punishing Greene. After that meeting, McCarthy released a statement saying Democrats were "choosing to raise the temperature" by attempting a "partisan power grab."

He condemned Greene's past endorsements of conspiracy theories — after weeks of saying little critical of her — and said the first-term congresswoman had recognized in a private conversation that she must meet "a higher standard" as a lawmaker.

"I hold her to her word, as well as her actions going forward," McCarthy said.

Greene has shown support for calls to violence against Democrats, bizarre fictions about faked school shootings and unfounded QAnon theories about Democrats joining in child abuse rings.

Rules Committee Chair Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said lawmakers would send "an awful message" if they took no action on Greene. "If this is not the bottom, I don't know what the hell is," McGovern said.

Around two-thirds of House Republicans voted to back Trump's effort to overturn his November election loss — just hours after his supporters' deadly Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol that led to his impeachment for inciting insurrection.

Yet Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and other GOP senators have lambasted Greene, reflecting worries that her wing of the party cannot win statewide Senate races.

Despite McCarthy's support, a House vote over Greene's committee roles was expected to be a political

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 51 of 86

ordeal for many Republicans. It would force them to go on record defending or punishing the unapologetic, social media-savvy Greene.

She burst onto the national political scene after just a month in office and with enthusiastic support from Trump. Even during the effort to punish her, she has lashed out at Democrats and raised money on the controversy.

Republicans appointed Greene to the Education and Labor Committee, a decision that drew especially harsh criticism because of her suggestions that mass school shootings in Connecticut and Florida could be hoaxes. Greene is also on the Budget Committee.

McCarthy said Democrats turned down his offer to move Greene onto the House Small Business Committee instead.

It's unusual for party leaders to strip lawmakers of committee assignments, which can help them address their districts' needs and raise campaign contributions.

In 2019, House GOP leaders removed Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, who had a history of racist comments, from the Agriculture and Judiciary panels after wondering aloud in a New York Times story about when the term "white supremacist" became offensive. He lost the Republican primary for his seat in 2020 and is out of Congress after serving nine terms.

In online videos and through supportive "likes" on social media, Greene has voiced support for racist beliefs, calls for violence against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former President Barack Obama and other false theories.

The Senate plans to begin its impeachment trial of Trump next week. In a procedural vote, all but five GOP senators voted to scuttle the proceedings, indicating that his conviction is unlikely.

## Slain FBI agents worked to protect children from abusers

By TERRY SPENCER, MIKE SCHNEIDER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — FBI Agent Daniel Alfin gained international attention when he led a team that shutdown a major worldwide child pornography website. Agent Laura Schwartzenberger worked more anonymously, teaching children and adults how to avoid online sexual exploitation

Alfin and Schwartzenberger, gunned down Tuesday while serving a search warrant at a child pornography suspect's South Florida apartment, devoted their careers to capturing criminals who sexually abuse youngsters, often times testing the legal boundaries of computer privacy.

"We are still reeling from the news," said Shelley Allwang, director of the Exploited Children Division at National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. "I feel lucky to have worked with people who had such commitment and resolve."

The suspect was identified Wednesday as 55-year-old David Huber, who lived at the apartment complex. A law enforcement official familiar with the matter said investigators are looking into whether Huber may have been using a camera to monitor the agents' activity before opening fire on them and believe multiple shots were fired through a door. The official could not discuss an ongoing investigation publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Three other agents were wounded, with two of them hospitalized. Both of the hospitalized agents were released Wednesday. The third agent was treated at the scene. Huber apparently killed himself after a standoff.

Florida court records show Huber with only minor traffic violations. He had no listing as a sex offender and no Florida prison record. Records show he owned computer consulting businesses from 2008 until last year. Broward County records show he was divorced in 2016.

Alfin, 36, and an agent for almost 13 years, made headlines seven years ago when he led a team that took down a Naples, Florida, man who was the lead administrator of Playpen, the world's largest-known child pornography website. Steven Chase had created the website on Tor, an open network on the internet where users could communicate anonymously through "hidden service" websites.

Playpen had more than 150,000 users worldwide. Members uploaded and viewed tens of thousands of

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 52 of 86

graphic images of young victims, categorized by age, sex and type of sexual activity involved. The FBI launched an investigation in 2014 after Playpen's IP address was accidentally revealed.

After Chase's arrest in 2015, the FBI kept the website operating for two weeks to identify other users, hiding malware in the images to discover their IP addresses. From that effort, investigators sent more than 1,000 leads to FBI field offices across the country and thousands more to overseas law enforcement agencies.

According to the FBI, 350 arrests were made in the U.S. and 548 internationally, including 25 producers of child pornography and 51 abusers. The operation identified or rescued 55 American children who were sexually abused and 296 internationally. Chase got 30 years.

"It's the same with any criminal violations: As they get smarter, we adapt; we find them," Alfin said at the time. The New York native added, "It's a cat-and-mouse game, except it's not a game. Kids are being abused, and it's our job to stop that." He was married and had one child.

Allwang, who worked with Alfin on the Playpen investigation, said he was humble, collaborative and committed to the mission of stopping child exploitation.

"Dan was unwavering and had steadfast resolve to try and locate and rescue as many children that were being abused as he could," Allwang said. "It was never about ego or credit or anything like that. He was just a really selfless and collaborative individual."

Schwartzenberger, 43, and an agent for 15 years, was part of Rockway Middle School's law studies magnet program, teaching children about the internet's dangers, including sexual exploitation and cyberbullying.

"She would always say, 'I feel that coming here and talking about the hard stuff means that I won't see you guys on my end,'" the Miami school said about the Pueblo, Colorado, native in a statement.

Allwang said Schwartzenberger was "a wonderful collaborator," who always shared any information about her cases that could be helpful to the center.

"Laura was committed to seeing that through and to get that information entered in so those children could be helped," Allwang said.

In 2018, Schwartzenberger, a married mother of two, did a TV interview where she discussed computer "sexploitation," where hackers claim that they have used a person's computer camera to video record them watching pornography or naked. They threaten to send the video to spouses, relatives and friends if the person doesn't pay extortion. Sometimes, they have hacked into the victim's computer and found sexually explicit images.

"It is very traumatizing for the victim," Schwartzenberger told WPEC-TV. "Their reputation is on the line." Attempts to reach the agents' families Wednesday were not immediately successful.

Schneider reported from Orlando, Florida. Balsamo reported from Washington. AP writer Curt Anderson in St. Petersburg, Florida, and AP News Researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

## Canada designates the Proud Boys as a terrorist entity

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The Canadian government designated the Proud Boys group as a terrorist entity on Wednesday, noting they played a pivotal role in the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

The Proud Boys have faced increased scrutiny after seizing on the former Trump administration's policies and the group was a major agitator during earlier protests and the Capitol riot on Jan. 6. The Proud Boys is a far-right, male chauvinist extremist group known for engaging in violent clashes at political rallies. Canada is the first country to designate them as a terrorist entity.

During a September presidential debate, Donald Trump had urged the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" when asked to condemn them by a moderator.

Senior officials speaking on a technical briefing said authorities had been monitoring and collecting evidence about the Proud Boys before the Capitol Hill insurrection, but confirmed that the event provided information that helped with the decision to list the organization.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 53 of 86

Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said they revealed themselves.

"Their intent and their escalation toward violence became quite clear," Blair said.

Enrique Tarrío, the chairman of Proud Boys, called the terrorist designation "ridiculous."

"There is no basis for it. It's infringement of free speech rights. All the Canadian Proud Boys have ever done is go to rallies," Tarrío said in a phone interview.

"They used what happened at the Capitol to push for this."

Tarrío said the Canadian chapters are very quiet compared to their American counterparts. He estimated there are between 1,000 and 1,500 Proud Boys in Canada.

Tarrío was arrested in Washington shortly before the Capitol riot. He was accused of vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during an earlier protest in the nation's capital.

U.S. Federal authorities, meanwhile, arrested Wednesday a man who describes himself as the "Sergeant of Arms" of the Seattle chapter of the Proud Boys after he was charged in connection with the riot at the U.S. Capitol. He is at least the eighth defendant linked to the Proud Boys facing federal charges after thousands of pro-Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol as Congress was meeting to certify Joe Biden's presidential win

Asked whether the U.S. will follow Canada and designate Proud Boys as a terrorist entity, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. has a domestic extremism review underway. "We will wait for that review to conclude before we make any determinations," Psaki said.

The terrorist designation in Canada means the group may have assets seized and face harsher terrorism-related criminal penalties. A government official said just because they are a member doesn't mean they will be charged with a crime, but if they do engage in violent acts they could be charged with terrorist crimes.

Sending money to the organization or buying Proud Boys paraphernalia would also be a crime.

"The group and its members have openly encouraged, planned, and conducted violent activities against those they perceive to be opposed to their ideology and political beliefs," the Canadian government said in briefing materials.

"The group regularly attends Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests as counter-protesters, often engaging in violence targeting BLM supporters. On January 6, 2021, the Proud Boys played a pivotal role in the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol."

The government calls the Proud Boys a neo-fascist organization with semiautonomous chapters located in the United States, Canada, and internationally. It said it engages in political violence and that members espouse misogynistic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and white supremacist ideologies.

"Since 2018 we have seen an escalation towards violence for this group," Blair said.

Blair said four right-wing groups including a white supremacist group called The Base that espoused using violence to accelerate overthrowing the U.S. government and Neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division were also designated as terrorist entities. They are a part of 13 additions to the list which also include three groups linked to al-Qaida, four associated with the Islamic State group and one Kashmiri organization.

The Proud Boys were formed in 2016 by Canadian Gavin McInnes, who co-founded Vice Media. Tarrío said McInnes is no longer a member.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said Trudeau's Liberal government is trying to attach their star to the anti-Trump sentiment prevalent in Canada.

"Since the Proud Boys are identified with Trump, they are an easy target. Had Trump won the election, I'm confident the Liberals would not have gone after the Proud Boys," Wiseman said.

"There is right-wing extremism in Canada but much, much less than in the U.S."

## **Biden flexible on who gets aid, tells lawmakers to 'go big'**

By LISA MASCARO and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden encouraged Democratic lawmakers Wednesday to "act fast" on his \$1.9 trillion COVID rescue plan but also signaled he's open to changes, including limiting the proposed \$1,400 direct payments to Americans with lower income levels, which could draw Republican support.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 54 of 86

Biden told lawmakers in private comments he's "not married" to an absolute number for the overall package but wants them to "go big" on pandemic relief and "restore the soul of the country."

"Look, we got a lot of people hurting in our country today," Biden said on a private call with House Democrats. "We need to act. We need to act fast."

On the direct payments, Biden said he doesn't want to budge from the \$1,400 promised to Americans. But he said he is willing to "target" the aid, which would mean lowering the income threshold to qualify.

"I'm not going to start my administration by breaking a promise to the American people," he said.

Biden spoke with House Democrats and followed with a meeting of top Senate Democrats at the White House, deepening his public engagement with lawmakers on his American Rescue Plan. Together the virus and economic aid is his first legislative priority and a test of the administration's ability to work with Congress to deliver.

Biden's remarks to the Democratic House caucus were relayed by two people who requested anonymity to discuss the private conference call.

While Biden is trying to build bipartisan support from Republicans, he is also prepared to rely on the Democratic majority in Congress to push the package into law. Democrats moved ahead with preliminary steps, including a House budget vote Wednesday largely along party lines, to approve it on their own, over Republicans objections. A group of 10 Republican senators offered a \$618 billion alternative with slimmer \$1,000 direct payments and zero aid for states and cities, but Biden panned it as insufficient, though private talks with the Republicans continue.

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"I think we'll get some Republicans," Biden said.

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White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the president fully recognizes the final package may look different than the one he initially proposed.

She said further targeting the \$1,400 payments "means not the size of the check, it means the income level of the people who receive the check." That's under discussion, she said.

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"We have to go big, not small," Biden told the Democrats. "I've got your back, and you've got mine."

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"We want to do it bipartisan, but we must be strong," Schumer said after the 90-minute session at the White House. Democrats are "working with our Republican friends, when we can."

The swift action follows Tuesday's outreach as Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen joined the Democratic senators for a private virtual meeting, both declaring the Republicans' \$618 billion offer was too small.

Both Biden and Yellen recalled the lessons of the government response to the 2009 financial crisis, which some have since said was inadequate as conditions worsened.

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Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant, potentially giving Biden the votes needed in the 50-50 Senate to reach the 60-vote threshold typically required to advance legislation. Vice President Kamala Harris is the tie-breaker.

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## Wisconsin prosecutors seek Rittenhouse arrest, higher bond

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Prosecutors asked a judge Wednesday for a new arrest warrant for an Illinois teen charged with shooting three people, killing two of them, during a protest over police brutality in Wisconsin after he apparently violated his bail conditions.

Kyle Rittenhouse failed to inform the court of his change of address within 48 hours of moving, Kenosha County prosecutors alleged in a motion filed with Judge Bruce Schroeder. The motion asks Schroeder to issue an arrest warrant and increase Rittenhouse’s bail by \$200,000.

Rittenhouse’s attorney, Mark Richards, countered in his own motion Wednesday that death threats have driven Rittenhouse into an “undisclosed Safe House.” Richards said he offered to give prosecutors the new address in November if they would keep it secret but they refused. He said Rittenhouse has stayed in constant contact with him.

Rittenhouse is charged with multiple counts, including homicide, in connection with the protests in August in Kenosha. The demonstrations began after a white police officer shot Jacob Blake, who is Black, in the back during a domestic disturbance, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.

Prosecutors allege Rittenhouse, who was 17 at the time, responded to a militia’s call on social media to protect Kenosha businesses from protesters. He opened fire with an assault-style rifle on Joseph Rosenbaum, Anthony Huber and Gaike Grosskruetz. Rosenbaum and Huber were killed; Grosskruetz was wounded but survived.

Rittenhouse, who is white, fled to his home in Antioch, Illinois, but turned himself into police there the next day.

He has maintained he acted in self-defense after the three men attacked him. Conservatives have rallied around him as a symbol for gun rights and pushing back against anti-police protesters, although others insist he escalated tensions by walking around the protest with a gun.

Conservatives raised \$2 million to cover his bail and he walked out of jail in November.

Last month Rittenhouse was seen drinking at a bar in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin, and posing for photos with two men as they made “OK” signs with their hands, a symbol used by white supremacists, according to prosecutors. Five men at the bar also serenaded Rittenhouse with a song that has become the anthem

of neo-fascist group the Proud Boys, prosecutors alleged.

Rittenhouse is now 18 but still too young to drink. However, he could consume alcohol in a bar under Wisconsin law because he was with his mother.

The judge ordered him not to have any contact with white supremacists after that episode.

Prosecutors wrote in their motion Wednesday that they learned Rittenhouse was no longer living at his Antioch address after the court mailed him a notice and it was returned as undeliverable on Jan. 28. Kenosha detectives traveled to the address on Tuesday and discovered another man had rented the apartment and had been living there since mid-December.

The prosecutors said in their motion that it's unusual for any homicide defendant to be allowed to roam freely and the court needs to know where Rittenhouse is at all times. They did not say whether they knew where Rittenhouse currently resides, saying only that he has failed to provide the court with a new address.

"He posted no money so he has no financial stake in the bond," they wrote. "He is already facing the most serious possible criminal charges and life in prison, so in comparison, potential future criminal penalties are insignificant."

Richards, Rittenhouse's attorney, argued in his motion that Rittenhouse and his family have received threats in various forms, the most recent of which came on Jan. 25. When Rittenhouse was released from jail in November, police told defense attorneys not to provide the safe house address, Richards said.

An attorney working with Richards, Corey Chirafisi, asked Assistant District Attorney Thomas Binger via email on Nov. 30 if he could keep the safe house address sealed but Binger refused, according to Richards' motion.

"It is noteworthy that the State has only now decided to file a motion to increase bond in this case, despite having corresponded with Attorney Chirafisi regarding the change in Kyle's residence over two months ago," Richards wrote.

Richards stressed that Rittenhouse has made all his court appearances and is in constant contact with him. He provided the safe house address to the judge as part of a separate motion requesting it be sealed.

Follow Todd Richmond on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/trichmond1>

## 5 challenges awaiting Amazon's new CEO

By JOSEPH PISANI and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — In 1995, few could imagine that the modest online bookstore built by Jeff Bezos would turn into a \$1.7 trillion behemoth that sells everything from diapers to sofas, produces movies, owns a grocery chain and provides cloud computing services to businesses all over the globe.

Amazon has become all of that and more, and now it will be up to Andy Jassy to lead the company forward as CEO.

On Tuesday, Amazon announced that Bezos would step aside this summer and assume the role of executive chairman so he can focus on new products and early initiatives being developed at Amazon.

Although Bezos is expected to still play a big role at the company, it is Jassy who will inherit the many challenges born from Amazon's meteoric rise. Here are some of them:

### GROWING SCRUTINY

Regulators around the world are examining Amazon's business practices, specifically the way it looks at information from businesses that sell goods on its site and uses it to create its own Amazon-branded products. Bezos said at a hearing before Congress last summer that even though Amazon had a policy preventing employees from accessing seller data, he couldn't guarantee that the policy wasn't being violated.

Tech giants for decades have enjoyed light-touch regulation and star status in Washington, but calls for greater scrutiny have been growing. The U.S. government has already slapped two Big Tech companies — Google and Facebook — with antitrust lawsuits.

Amazon has been subject to federal and state antitrust investigations. That's in addition to European Union regulators filing antitrust charges in November, accusing Amazon of using its access to data from

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 57 of 86

third-party sellers to gain an unfair advantage over them.

A report by the House Judiciary Committee in October called for a possible breakup of Amazon and others, making it harder for them to acquire other businesses and imposing new rules to safeguard competition.

## WORKER UNREST

The pandemic has exposed how Amazon treats its workers who pack and ship boxes inside vast warehouses. Many have protested a lack of masks and protective equipment while others say the company isn't forthcoming about how many people are getting sick.

Amazon has made changes since it started getting complaints, but its labor issues go well beyond the pandemic.

At a warehouse in Alabama, workers are set to start voting this month if they want to join a union. It's a threat to a company that has been successful at thwarting so far. For its part, Amazon says it pays its workers at least \$15, more than twice the minimum wage.

But regulators are watching. On Tuesday, the same day Bezos said he would step down, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission ordered Amazon to pay nearly \$62 million for taking tips that were supposed to go to its delivery drivers.

More scrutiny is likely now that Amazon is the second-largest private employer, coming just behind Walmart. Last year alone, Amazon hired 500,000 people, bringing its total workforce to nearly 1.3 million.

## GROWING THE CLOUD

Amazon is known as a place to buy books or toothpaste. But it's the behind-the-scenes Amazon Web Services business that's making the most money for the company.

AWS is still the No. 1 provider of cloud computing services, but faces growing competition, especially from Microsoft, which has aggressively sought to sell big contracts to businesses and governments. Last year, Amazon lost a multi-billion dollar contract with the U.S. government to Microsoft. Amazon is fighting that decision in court.

The promotion of Jassy, 53, who hails from AWS, may be an indication of where Amazon sees its future growth. Last year, about 60% of Amazon's total profit came from AWS.

"Jeff Bezos picked the tech guy," said Sucharita Kodali, an e-commerce analyst at Forrester Research. "My hunch is that it was about the future of the company being tech."

Kodali believes the company's biggest growth will come from AWS, since Amazon likely won't be able to make any big retail acquisitions because of regulatory scrutiny. She thinks Amazon's opportunities in cloud computing are limitless and imagines projects like developing facial recognition for government agencies.

Mark Cohen, director of retail studies at Columbia University's Graduate School of Business, believes that both retail and cloud service are both "enormously important" for Amazon, but he believes there's more opportunity for cloud services. Cohen imagines Amazon as the "pervasive government provider" on a national, state and local level.

## RETAIL THREAT

Amazon has a lot of room to grow in e-commerce, but it's facing increasing threats from big retailers like Walmart, which are using their own stores as shipping hubs.

Before the pandemic, Walmart and Target had expanded curbside pickup for shoppers picking up online orders the same day. But with the pandemic, that's accelerating.

Best Buy said late last year it was reducing the amount of floor space set aside for traditional shopping in some of its stores and devoting more to in-store pickup and to support deliveries of online orders. Walmart plans to build warehouses at its stores where self-driving robots will fetch groceries and have them ready for shoppers to pick up in an hour or less. Target has been automating its backrooms to ship online orders as well as fulfill curbside pickup.

But Amazon's lead is unsurmountable — it accounted for about 40% of online purchases in the U.S. last year, with Walmart at a distant second place at 5.8%, eBay at 4.9% and Apple at 3%, according to research firm eMarketer. Nonetheless, analysts say that big box retailers are weaponizing their stores and putting profit pressure on Amazon and forcing them to add even more distribution hubs to compete.

"There is a lot of opportunity for Amazon, but the brick and mortar guys have demonstrated their stores are big time assets," said Charlie O'Shea, a retail analyst at Moody's.

## A LOOMING BEZOS

Another challenge for the new CEO is Bezos himself.

Amazon has made it clear that he won't be going far. Bezos is still the company's biggest shareholder, giving him much power over the company he founded in 1995. And Bezos said he'll focus on new products and initiatives from his perch as executive chair.

Tensions can arise when a CEO moves to the board and still has a hand in the business, said Jason Schloetzer, a business professor at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. The new CEO may want to end some of Bezos' initiatives that Bezos doesn't agree with. Or other executives may keep reporting to Bezos, leaving Jassy out of the loop.

For it to work, Schloetzer said Amazon has to structure the roles so they don't step on each others toes.

Associated Press writers Marcy Gordon in Washington and Matt O'Brien in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

## Study finds COVID-19 vaccine may reduce virus transmission

By DANICA KIRKA and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine shows a hint that it may reduce transmission of the virus and offers strong protection for three months on just a single dose, researchers said Wednesday in an encouraging turn in the campaign to suppress the outbreak.

The preliminary findings from Oxford University, a co-developer of the vaccine, could vindicate the British government's controversial strategy of delaying the second shot for up to 12 weeks so that more people can be quickly given a first dose. Up to now, the recommended time between doses has been four weeks.

The research could also bring scientists closer to an answer to one of the big questions about the vaccination drive: Will the vaccines actually curb the spread of the coronavirus?

It's not clear what implications, if any, the findings might have for the two other major vaccines being used in the West, Pfizer's and Moderna's.

In the United States, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, dismissed the idea of deliberately delaying second shots, saying the U.S. will "go by the science" and data from the clinical trials. The two doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are supposed to be given three and four weeks apart.

Still, the research appears to be good news in the desperate effort to arrest the spread of the virus and also suggests a way to ease vaccine shortages and get shots into more arms more quickly.

The makers of all three vaccines have said that their shots proved to be anywhere from 70% to 95% effective in clinical trials in protecting people from illness caused by the virus. But it was unclear whether the vaccines could also suppress transmission of the virus — that is, whether someone inoculated could still acquire the virus without getting sick and spread it to others.

As a result, experts have been saying that even people who have been vaccinated should continue to wear masks and keep their distance from others.

Volunteers in the British study underwent regular nasal swabs to check for the coronavirus, a proxy to try to answer the transmission question. The level of virus-positive swabs — combining volunteers who had asymptomatic infection with those who had symptoms — was 67% lower in the vaccinated group, the researchers reported.

While not a direct measure, "that's got to have a really beneficial effect on transmission," Oxford lead researcher Sarah Gilbert told a meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences Wednesday.

The researchers also looked at how likely people who have been vaccinated are to get a symptom-free infection. In one subset of volunteers, there were 16 asymptomatic infections among the vaccinated and 31 in an unvaccinated comparison group.

Pfizer and Moderna also are studying the effect of their vaccines on asymptomatic infections.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 59 of 86

Only the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being used in the United States. Britain is using both AstraZeneca's and Pfizer's. AstraZeneca's has also been authorized by the 27-nation European Union. Pfizer has not endorsed the British government's decision to lengthen the time between doses.

Mene Pangalos, executive vice president of biopharmaceuticals research and development at AstraZeneca, said that no patients experienced severe COVID-19 or required hospitalization three weeks after receiving a first dose, and that effectiveness appeared to increase up to 12 weeks after the initial shot.

"Our data suggest you want to be as close to the 12 weeks as you can" for the second dose, Pangalos said.

British Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the study "backs the strategy that we've taken" to make sure more people have gotten at least one shot. Britain's decision has been criticized as risky by other European countries.

Stephen Evans of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said the study's suggestion that a single dose protected people for 12 weeks was "useful but not definitive."

He said that the authors themselves acknowledged their research was not designed to investigate the vaccine's dosing schedule and that their conclusions were based on statistical modeling, not actual patients tracked over time.

"It certainly isn't very strong evidence, but there is also no indication this is the wrong thing to do," Evans said of Britain's strategy.

One of the Oxford researchers, Dr. Andrew Pollard, said scientists also believe the AstraZeneca vaccine will continue to offer protection against new variants of COVID-19, though they are still waiting for data on that. Fast-spreading mutant versions have caused alarm around the world.

"If we do need to update the vaccines, then it is actually a relatively straightforward process. It only takes a matter of months, rather than the huge efforts that everyone went through last year to get the very large-scale trials run," Pollard told the BBC.

Meanwhile, a U.N.-backed program to supply COVID-19 vaccines to the neediest people worldwide is gearing up after a troubled start. The COVAX Facility announced plans Wednesday for an initial distribution of some 100 million doses by the end of March and more than 200 million more by the end of June to dozens of countries.

Nearly all of the doses expected for the first phase are due to come from AstraZeneca and its partner, the Serum Institute of India. The rollout will be contingent on the World Health Organization authorizing the AstraZeneca shot for emergency use, which is expected to happen this month.

Some 190 countries and territories are participating in COVAX, which has seen rich nations scoop up vaccine supplies, sometimes at premium prices.

The pandemic's worldwide death toll has eclipsed 2.2 million, including about 447,000 in the U.S., according to Johns Hopkins University data.

New cases per day in the U.S. and the number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 have dropped sharply in the past few weeks, but deaths are still running at close to all-time highs at an average of around 3,100 a day. Deaths often lag behind the infection curve, because it can take weeks to sicken and die from COVID-19.

As the Super Bowl approaches, Fauci is warning people against inviting others over for Super Bowl parties, urging viewers to "just lay low and cool it" to avoid turning Sunday's big game into a super spreader event.

"You don't want parties with people that you haven't had much contact with," he told NBC's "Today" show. "You just don't know if they're infected."

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Associated Press reporters Jill Lawless, Maria Cheng, Jamey Keaten and Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and contributed to this report.

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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>.

## Wisconsin mother meets baby delivered during COVID-19 coma

CARRIE ANTLFINGER Associated Press

Nearly three months after Kelsey Townsend gave birth to her fourth child, the 32-year-old Wisconsin woman was finally face to face with her.

Lucy, now bright-eyed and alert, flashed her a smile.

"Hi. I love you. I love you so much. Yeah, I've missed you," Kelsey Townsend told her.

Townsend was in a medically-induced coma with COVID-19 when she gave birth to Lucy via cesarean section on Nov. 4, not long after getting to SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital in Madison. She ended up spending 75 days on life and lung support. She finally met Lucy on Jan. 27 — the day Kelsey was discharged from University Hospital in Madison.

"We instantly bonded when we met. She gave me a great big smile and looked at me like she knew exactly who I was and that made me feel just so happy," the Poynette, Wisconsin, woman said.

Dr. Jennifer Krupp, a Maternal Fetal Medicine specialist and the Women's and Newborn Health Medical Director for SSM Health Wisconsin Region, said it has been rare for the hospital to deliver a baby to a mother so sick with COVID-19.

Kelsey Townsend's oxygen saturation was very low when she arrived at the hospital — so low that a fetus' brain and other organs could be damaged — and her skin was tinged grey and blue, Dr. Thomas Littlefield said via email Wednesday, so her baby had to be delivered as soon as possible.

Doctors thought Townsend might need a double lung transplant at the end of December. But then she started improving — so much that she was moved out of the intensive care unit, taken off a ventilator in mid-January and removed from the transplant waiting list.

Townsend's husband, Derek Townsend, described the experience as a "big roller coaster."

"There was many, many nights that I would get phone calls late at night and into the early morning, and the doctors kind of informed me that they've done all that they can to support Kelsey and they're having a hard time stabilizing," he said. "So there was many times that we thought we were going to lose her."

Derek Townsend says even his baby daughter seemed to notice someone was missing when his wife was still hospitalized.

"The past three months with Lucy, you know, her head is always moving and she's always looking. And I told Kelsey that I believe she's just constantly looking for, for her," he said.

The pair contracted COVID-19 despite taking precautions, Derek Townsend said. As he got better, his wife got worse. That's when they went to the hospital.

"Family is everything to me," Kelsey Townsend said. "So I have everything to live for right here and coming home. There was no question that I wouldn't."

## GOP states weigh limits on how race and slavery are taught

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Complaining about what he called indoctrination in schools, former President Donald Trump created a commission that promoted "patriotic" education and played down America's role in slavery. But though he's out of the White House and the commission has disbanded, the cause hasn't died. Lawmakers in Republican states are now pressing for similar action.

Proposals in Arkansas, Iowa and Mississippi would prohibit schools from using a New York Times project that focused on slavery's legacy. Georgia colleges and universities have been quizzed about whether they're teaching about white privilege or oppression. And GOP governors are backing overhauls of civic education that mirror Trump's abandoned initiatives.

Republicans behind the latest moves say they're countering left-wing attempts in K-12 schools and higher education to indoctrinate rather than teach students. Teachers, civil rights leaders and policymakers are fighting back, saying students will suffer if states brush over crucial parts of the nation's history.

"The idea of simply saying you're not going to use certain materials because you don't like what they're

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 61 of 86

going to say without input from professionals makes no sense," said James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association.

Statehouse fights over what's taught in public schools are nothing new. Arkansas lost a court battle over a 1981 law that required the teaching of creationism in its classrooms, and in recent years conservatives have waged battles over how evolution, climate change and other topics are taught. But the latest efforts show just how much Trump's rhetoric on race continues to resonate in the mostly rural and white states he won.

The proposals primarily target The New York Times' "1619 Project," which examined slavery and its consequences as the central thread of U.S. history. The project was published in 2019, the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of African slaves. The project was also turned into a popular podcast and materials were developed for schools to use.

A measure pending in Arkansas' Legislature criticizes the project as a "racially divisive and revisionist account of history that threatens the integrity of the Union by denying the true principles on which it was founded."

Republican Rep. Mark Lowery, who sponsored the measure, called slavery a "dark stain," but said the project minimizes the Founding Fathers and cited criticism from some historians about parts of it.

"It should not be taught as history," he said.

Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas has also been a frequent critic of the project.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the lead essay in the project, called it a work of journalism that wasn't intended to replace what's being taught in schools. Born and raised in Iowa, one of the states looking to prohibit the project's use, Hannah-Jones said it's clear the project is being used to whip up political fears.

"It's one thing to not like a particular piece of journalism, it's another thing to seek to prohibit its teaching," she said.

The Pulitzer Center, which partnered with the Times to develop 1619 Project lesson plans, said it's heard from more than 3,800 K-12 teachers and nearly 1,000 college educators who planned to use them. Of those, only about two dozen were from Arkansas.

Jonathan Rogers, a journalism teacher at Iowa City High School, said he's used the project's podcast in his classes.

"(Students) definitely responded to thinking about using different sources or alternative storytelling," Rogers said. "Also, just hearing Black voices is so important when we're talking about diversity and perspectives, whether it's historical events or current events."

Other measures would go even further than targeting the 1619 Project, including a broader bill Lowery said he's reworking that currently calls for banning courses that promote social justice for one racial group. In Oklahoma, one bill would allow teachers to be fired for teaching that the U.S. is fundamentally racist, or other topics deemed divisive.

Critics say that, besides eating away at local control, the proposals show an unwillingness to address the country's shortcomings as well as its successes.

"This country does have a history that we have to reckon with and that sometimes our education system glosses over," said Rep. Emily Virgin, the top Democrat in the Oklahoma House.

After taking office, President Joe Biden revoked the report submitted by the commission Trump formed in response to the 1619 Project. Widely mocked by historians as political propaganda, Trump's 1776 Commission glorified the country's founders and played down the role of slavery.

"American parents are not going to accept indoctrination in our schools, cancel culture at work, or the repression of traditional faith, culture and values in the public square," Trump said when he announced the panel last year.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, a close ally of Trump's, last month proposed \$900,000 to ramp up her state's civics curriculum to emphasize the U.S. as "the most unique nation in the history of the world." Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves is proposing a \$3 million "Patriotic Education Fund" to combat what he called

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 62 of 86

revisionist history.

"Across the country, young children have suffered from indoctrination in far-left socialist teachings that emphasize America's shortcomings over the exceptional achievements of this country," Reeves said when he announced it.

In Texas, where academics have long clashed with the state's GOP-controlled education board on controversies that include lessons exploring the influence Moses had on the Founding Fathers, Gov. Greg Abbott last week told lawmakers that students must learn "what it means to be an American and what it means to be a Texan." But Abbott hasn't elaborated on what changes he may seek.

It's unclear how far these proposals will go, even in solidly red states. Two Mississippi Senate committees ignored, and killed, the 1619 Project ban.

In Arkansas, Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson has said he believes such issues are usually better addressed locally. He's asked the state's top education official to work on alternative legislation that would allow parents to challenge instructional material at the local level.

The proposed limits especially strike a nerve in Arkansas, where divides over race remain more than six decades after the 1957 integration of Little Rock Central High School. Until 2018, the state commemorated Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's birthday on the same day as Martin Luther King Jr.

One member of the Legislative Black Caucus said she was worried about the proposal's effect on the state's image.

"It will have an economic impact because it will seem as if this state is running from its own history," said Democratic Sen. Linda Chesterfield, a Black retired history teacher.

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Associated Press writers Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City, Ryan Foley in Iowa City, Stephen Groves in Pierre, South Dakota, Paul Weber in Austin, Texas, and Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, contributed to this report

## **Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos may step down without stepping away**

By JOSEPH PISANI and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writers

Even after stepping aside as CEO, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos will likely keep identifying new frontiers for the world's dominant e-commerce company. His successor, meanwhile, gets to deal with escalating efforts to curtail Amazon's power.

Tuesday's announcement that Bezos will hand off the CEO job this summer came as a surprise. But it doesn't mean Amazon is losing the visionary who turned an online bookstore founded in 1995 into a behemoth worth \$1.7 trillion that sometimes seems to do a little bit of everything.

Bezos, 57, has never let Amazon rest on its laurels. In the last year alone, it bought a company developing self-driving taxis; launched an online pharmacy selling inhalers and insulin; and won government approval to put more than 3,200 satellites into space to beam internet service to Earth.

Long-time Amazon executive Andy Jassy will be the new CEO, but Bezos will be the company's executive chairman — corporatespeak for board leaders who, unlike most, stay involved in key operational decisions. Think Robert Iger at Disney, Howard Schultz at Starbucks, or Eric Schmidt at Google after handing off the reins a decade ago.

"Jeff Bezos has held a firm grip on the company for a long time," said Ken Perkins, president of Retail-Metrics LLC, a retail research firm. "I have to believe he will have a say in what is going on and have a big hand in big picture decisions."

Amazon's chief financial officer, Brian Olsavsky, made the move sound like a mere shuffling of chairs.

"It's more of a restructuring of who's doing what," he said during a Tuesday call with reporters.

Investors didn't flinch upon after hearing about Amazon's forthcoming change in command, and instead appear to be more focused the company's blockbuster earnings, which it also announced Tuesday. After see-sawing back and forth Wednesday, Amazon's stock price wound up declining 2% to close at \$3,312.53 — not the type of drop that occurs when Wall Street is worried about a management shake-up.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 63 of 86

"I don't think he's going to be completely hands off," CFRA analyst Tuna Amobi said of Bezos.

In a blog post, Bezos said the CEO job had pulled him away from exploring new ideas and initiatives that could yield growth opportunities. He now intends to focus more on such innovation, along with other ventures, such as his rocket ship company Blue Origin and his newspaper, The Washington Post.

"Being the CEO of Amazon is a deep responsibility, and it's consuming," Bezos wrote. "When you have a responsibility like that, it's hard to put attention on anything else."

The shift will saddle Jassy with some of the responsibilities that Bezos clearly didn't enjoy. Perhaps the most daunting is the increasing scrutiny of Amazon's clout in an online shopping market that has become even more essential to consumers during the past year's pandemic.

The U.S. government already has slapped two other technology powerhouses, Google and Facebook, with antitrust lawsuits. Both regulators and lawmakers have left little doubt that they are taking a hard look at whether similar action is warranted against Amazon and Apple.

European regulators, meanwhile, are taking on Amazon in an antitrust case filed late last year. They accuse the company of mining the data of merchants selling products on its site to gain an unfair advantage over them.

Jassy will likely have to ward off the antitrust threat while also trying to forge his own legacy. A revered company founder can cast a long shadow.

"Amazon's size makes some industries uncomfortable, some governments uncomfortable and Andy Jassy will have to deal with the consequences," Gartner analyst Ed Anderson said. "That will be some of the new era of his leadership."

Jassy, 53, also may face pressure from critics who believe Amazon's success has been built in part by mistreating many of its 1.3 million employees, especially those in the distribution warehouses and delivery trucks who are paid far less than the tech engineers while also facing more hazardous conditions.

"Jeff Bezos' departure as CEO is a chance for Amazon to turn over a new leaf," said Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen, an activist group in Washington. "It should start by paying all its workers a living wage and ensuring they have safe and healthy working conditions."

If Jassy needs a shoulder to lean on, Bezos will likely be there for him, predicted Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a Yale University professor who has closely studied management succession issues. He expects Bezos to orchestrate a "gradual transfer of power with continuity of command and partnership."

Analysts said Bezos appears to have picked a successor who's up for the challenge. Sonnenfeld said he believes the choice may have been made last summer, resulting in the departure of another trusted lieutenant, Jeff Wilke, who had also been widely viewed as a candidate to become Amazon's next CEO.

Jassy is highly respected for building up Amazon's web services division, which runs many of the world's biggest websites. Earnings from that cloud-computing service also helped subsidize the company's online shopping operations as it cut prices so low that it lost money for many years.

"He's proven himself in building the most profitable part of the company," Amobi said. "His challenge is translating that to the broader e-commerce platform."

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Pisani reported from New York and Liedtke reported from San Ramon, California. Associated Press writers Mae Anderson and Anne D'Innocenzio in New York, Marcy Gordon in Washington and Matt O'Brien in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this story.

## **Biden set to boost US refugee admissions after Trump cut**

By MATTHEW LEE and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is preparing to notify Congress and others that it will dramatically increase U.S. admissions of refugees.

Officials and people familiar with the matter say Biden plans to announce this week that he will increase the cap on the number of refugees allowed into the United States to more than eight times the level at which the Trump administration left it.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 64 of 86

Former President Donald Trump had drastically reduced the refugee admissions cap to only 15,000 before he left office. Biden's plan would raise that number to 125,000, an increase of 110,000 over the high ceiling set by former President Barack Obama before he left office.

The officials and others, who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of the formal announcement, said Biden will make his plan public during a visit to the State Department on Thursday.

Biden may also address asylum claims for residents of Hong Kong there, according to one official. He indicated during his campaign that he was interested in providing protection to people persecuted by the Chinese government.

The sources said Biden would not necessarily override the record low cap of 15,000 that Trump set for the current budget year. Instead, the 125,000 figure would be proposed for the budget year beginning Oct. 1. The president is required by law to first consult Congress on his plans before making a determination.

Advocates had said that the backlog of tens of thousands of cases by the Trump administration had made it unlikely Biden's target of resettling 125,000 refugees could be reached this year. It will take time to rebuild the pipeline. More than one-third of U.S. resettlement offices were forced to close over the past four years with the drop in refugee arrivals and hundreds of workers were let go.

But some say Biden should not wait to raise the annual target for admissions.

"We hope that President Biden will substantially raise the refugee admissions goal immediately, as he consistently committed to on the campaign trail," said Sunil Varghese of the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project. "The president has the authority to raise refugee admissions mid-year to address the many humanitarian crises in the world, including those that have emerged or escalated recently, such as the situation facing pro-Democracy protesters in Hong Kong."

Another issue that may be addressed Thursday is a review of vetting procedures, according to the officials and others.

The Trump administration had put in place extreme background checks that had brought the program to a standstill, advocates say.

The Trump administration also narrowed eligibility this year, restricting which refugees are selected for resettlement to certain categories, including people persecuted because of religion and Iraqis whose assistance to the U.S. put them in danger.

Biden is expected to do away with those categories at some point and have the program return to using the long-standing referral system by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that makes selections based on a person's need to be resettled.

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Watson reported from San Diego.

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This story has been corrected to show that Biden's plan is an increase of 110,000, not 10,000, over Obama's highest ceiling.

## With 'Mank' and 'The Crown,' Netflix dominates Globes noms

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a year where the pandemic nearly emptied movie theaters, Netflix dominated nominations to the 78th Golden Globe Awards on Wednesday, with David Fincher's "Mank" leading film nominees with six nods and "The Crown" topping all television series.

The Globes, delayed about two months due to the coronavirus, tried to muster some of the awards' usual buzz on Wednesday in a largely virtual awards season bereft the kind of red-carpet glamour the Globes annually feast on. And perhaps to account for the otherwise lack of it, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association heaped nominations on two lavish period pieces rich in royalty — both the Hollywood variety (the black-and-white "Mank" dramatizes the making of "Citizen Kane") and the British kind.

"Mank," about "Citizen Kane" co-writer Herman Mankiewicz, landed nominations for best film, drama; best actor for Gary Oldman; best director for Fincher, best supporting actress for Amanda Seyfried; best score;

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 65 of 86

and best screenplay for Jack Fincher, the director's father who penned the script before dying in 2003.

"Sometimes you just have to think, what does it mean in the whole big scheme of things with this worldwide, global thing going on," Oldman said from London. "But you know, we want to kind of get back to some kind of normalcy. Life goes on."

Netflix, which topped all studios at the Globes last year, too, led with a commanding 42 nominations, with 22 coming in film categories and 20 in television. No other studio was close.

The day belonged to the streaming services. Disney+ ("The Mandalorian") and HBO Max ("The Flight Attendant") both notched their first Golden Globe nominations. Amazon, with Regina King's "One Night in Miami," about a meeting of four Black icons in 1964, and Steve McQueen's film anthology "Small Axe," landed 10 total nominations — a total matched by the Disney-owned Hulu, including nods for the Catherine the Great series "The Great," with Elle Fanning, and the Andy Samberg time-warp comedy "Palm Springs." Apple TV+, too, scored several nods including the Jason Sudeikis series "Ted Lasso," the Irish animated film "Wolfwalkers" and Bill Murray's performance in Sophia Coppola's father-daughter comedy "On the Rocks."

"The Crown" landed six nominations including best series, drama, and acting nods for Olivia Colman and Josh O'Connor. The final season of "Schitt's Creek" trailed with five nominations, while Netflix's "Ozark" (four nods) and "The Queen's Gambit" (two nods) also added to the streamer's totals. ("Queens Gambit" star Anya Taylor-Joy was nominated for both the hit show and for the Jane Austen adaptation "Emma.")

Aaron Sorkin's "The Trial of the Chicago 7" — also a Netflix release, about the countercultural clash and subsequent trial following the 1968 Democratic National Convention — came in second among movies with five nominations, including nods for best film, drama; best director and best screenplay for Sorkin; supporting actor for Sacha Baron Cohen; and best song.

"On the one hand, it is strange to be celebrating when so many people are suffering but on the other hand, at least for movie lovers, the Golden Globes are a fun thing," said Sorkin by phone. "It'll be a weird ceremony this year. ... Who knows what it's going to look like."

The other nominees for best film in the drama category were Chloe Zhao's itinerant drama "Nomadland," Emerald Fennell's "Promising Young Woman" and Florian Zeller's dementia drama "The Father."

Netflix doesn't report box office figures and both "Nomadland" and "The Father" are yet to open beyond a qualifying run in theaters. So the category's total box office — a historic low of about \$265,000 — is due entirely to "Promising Young Woman," Fennell's acclaimed #MeToo revenge drama.

"It's an opportunity to shine a light on some smaller movies," said Riz Ahmed, nominated for his performance as a heavy metal drummer losing his hearing in "Sound of Metal." "You can always find the opportunity in the obstacle."

A year after fielding no female nominees for best director — or a best film nomination for any movie directed by a woman — the HFPA nominated more female filmmakers than it ever has before. King, Zhao and Fennell were nominated for best director, alongside Sorkin and Fincher. Zhao is the first woman of Asian descent nominated for best director.

"I'm very proud and I love their movies," said Zhao by Zoom on Wednesday, referring to King and Fennell's films. "It's a really exciting time."

By splitting up films between drama and comedy or musical, the Globes gave a boost to an awards season wildcard, "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm." Baron Cohen's "Borat" sequel — one of the few nominees partially shot during the pandemic — was nominated for best picture, comedy or musical, best actor in a comedy for Baron Cohen and best supporting actress for Maria Bakalova.

Celebrating the nominations for both "Borat" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7," Baron Cohen said in a statement: "These two films are different, but they share a common theme—sometimes we have to protest injustice with our own farce."

Should neither win, he said, "I promise to hire Rudy Giuliani to contest the results."

Also nominated for best picture in the comedy or musical category were: "Palm Springs," "The Prom," "Music" and "Hamilton." The film version of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical isn't eligible for the Academy Awards but was for the Globes, which also nominated Miranda's performance.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 66 of 86

As expected, Chadwick Boseman was nominated posthumously his performance in George C. Wolfe's August Wilson adaptation "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," as was his co-star, Viola Davis. Other acting nominees included Andra Day ("The United States vs. Billie Holiday"), Vanessa Kirby ("Pieces of a Woman"), Daniel Kaluuya ("Judas and the Black Messiah"), Leslie Odom, Jr. ("One Night in Miami"), Glenn Close ("Hillbilly Elegy"); James Corden ("The Prom") and the young star of "News of the World," Helena Zengel.

Gauging the awards prospects of most films has been difficult this winter, with none of the usual screenings and events happening in-person, and a number of the films once expected to be lead contenders postponed. But there were still plenty of choices by the press association — an always unpredictable group of 89 voting members — that nevertheless surprised observers Wednesday.

Spike Lee, whose daughter Satchel and son Jackson are Globes ambassadors this year, saw his Vietnam veteran drama "Da 5 Bloods" unexpectedly shut out. Nominations for Jared Leto's performance as a serial killer in the just-released "The Little Things" and for the Sia-directed musical "Music" were so far out of left field that they seemed likely to rank among previous wayward Globes nominees like "The Tourist."

The press association also drew much criticism for an earlier decision to consider Lee Isaac Chung's lauded immigrant drama "Minari," about a Korean-American family in Arkansas in which the characters largely speak Korean, ineligible for its top award. The group instead nominated "Minari" for best foreign language film.

The nominations announcement was also scaled down due to the pandemic. Presenters Sarah Jessica Parker and Taraji P. Henson read nominees not from a teleprompter but holding print-outs and streaming live from what appeared to be their homes.

The Globes are typically the first major show of Hollywood's awards season, which ends with the crowning of the best picture winner at the Oscars. They'll retain that distinction, despite being delayed nearly two months and opting for a bi-coastal ceremony to be hosted by Tina Fey from New York and Amy Poehler from Beverly Hills, Calif. The Oscars are set for April 25.

Film Writer Lindsey Bahr and Entertainment Writers Andrew Dalton and Brooke Lefferts contributed to this report.

## Justice Department drops Yale admissions discrimination suit

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In another reversal of Trump-era policy, the Biden administration on Wednesday dropped its discrimination lawsuit against Yale University that alleged the Ivy League school was illegally discriminating against Asian American and white applicants.

Federal prosecutors said the Justice Department's underlying investigation, aimed at ensuring Yale complies with federal anti-discrimination laws, continues.

The government accused Yale in October of violating civil rights laws because it "discriminates based on race and national origin in its undergraduate admissions process, and that race is the determinative factor in hundreds of admissions decisions each year." The investigation stemmed from a 2016 complaint by the New Jersey-based Asian American Coalition for Education coalition against Yale, Brown and Dartmouth.

Yale said its practices comply with decades of Supreme Court precedent and that it looks at "the whole person" when deciding which applicants to admit.

A department spokesperson said in a statement that it was dropping the suit "in light of all available facts, circumstances, and legal developments" but didn't specify further. The government also notified Yale that it had withdrawn its determination letter that the university discriminated based on race and national origin.

Yale was gratified and pleased by those two developments, spokesperson Karen Peart said.

But Swan Lee, a co-founder of the group behind the complaint, called it "a racist decision because it preserves discrimination in education. It's a setback in our fight against racial discrimination against Asian Americans in education."

The change in administrations brought an end to the suit, but the challenge to college admissions poli-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 67 of 86

cies that take race into account is alive in a case against Harvard's practices. The challengers have lost at each round in the lower courts, but their appeal is expected in the coming weeks at the Supreme Court, where a conservative majority may well be more receptive.

"The challenge to race-based affirmative action in higher education will continue regardless of any change in the Department of Justice," said Edward Blum, the president of Students for Fair Admissions, which filed the lawsuit against Harvard. The department, under President Donald Trump, had backed the challenge in the lower courts.

The Yale investigation also found that the university used race as a factor in multiple steps of the admissions process and that Yale "racially balances its classes."

The Supreme Court has ruled colleges and universities may consider race in admissions decisions but has said that must be done in a narrowly tailored way to promote diversity and should be limited in time. Schools also bear the burden of showing why their consideration of race is appropriate.

"I am totally shocked by the Biden DOJ's hasty decision to drop the Yale lawsuit, only eight days after President Biden signed an executive order claiming to combat anti-Asian discrimination," said Yukong Zhao, the president of the Asian American Coalition for Education.

But the decision was lauded by other civil rights groups, including one run by the Biden administration's incoming assistant attorney general for civil rights.

"It has been proven in the courts that race-conscious admissions programs are lawful, and Black students and other students of color who come from all walks of life can rest a little easier knowing our government is looking to lift them up, not divide and suppress," said David Hinojosa, director of the Educational Opportunities Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. The group's president, Kristen Clarke, is Biden's nominee to run the Justice Department's civil rights division.

Biden's Justice Department is working to undo Trump policies, including "zero tolerance," the immigration policy that was responsible for family separations. Also Wednesday, the Supreme Court agreed to requests from the Biden administration to put off arguments in two challenges to Trump-era policies involving the U.S.-Mexico border wall and asylum-seekers as Biden works to change the policies that had been challenged in court.

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Associated Press writers Mark Sherman, Collin Binkley in Boston, and Dave Collins in Hartford, Connecticut, contributed to this report.

## Slain Capitol Police officer honored: 'We will never forget'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional leaders paid tribute Wednesday to slain U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick in the building he died defending, promising his family and his fellow officers that they will never forget his sacrifice.

Sicknick died after an insurrectionist mob stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, interrupting the electoral count after then-President Donald Trump urged them to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. The U.S. Capitol Police said in a statement that Sicknick, who died the next day, was injured "while physically engaging with protesters," though the cause of his death has not been determined.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Sicknick was a patriot who will be remembered by lawmakers each day as they enter the Capitol. "We will never forget," she promised his family, who attended the ceremony.

The 42-year-old officer was only the fifth person to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, a designation for those who are not elected officials, judges or military leaders. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, along with their spouses, paid their respects during two days of visitation Tuesday and Wednesday, as did members of Congress and his fellow law enforcement officers. Both Biden, who visited Tuesday night, and Harris on Wednesday laid their hands on the urn in remembrance.

After the ceremony, Sicknick's urn was taken out of the building as hundreds of his fellow officers lined the Capitol's east front. They saluted his hearse as it departed for Arlington National Cemetery, where he will be interred.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 68 of 86

The ceremony came a week before a Senate impeachment trial that will issue a verdict on Trump's role in the riots, and as shaken members of Congress grapple with what the violence means for the future of the country and their own security. While lawmakers were largely united in denouncing the riots, and Trump's role in them, the parties are now largely split on how to move forward. At the same time, the building has been cut off from the public, surrounded by large metal fences and defended by the National Guard.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, speaking at the ceremony, talked of the deep scars left by the assault.

"Let us all be a comfort to those who continue to recover from injuries, seen and unseen, from the attack on Jan. 6," Schumer said.

He said Sicknick was the "quiet rock" of his unit who was "caught at the wrong place at the wrong time, on a day when peace was shattered."

Sicknick, of South River, New Jersey, enlisted in the National Guard six months after graduating high school in 1997, then deployed to Saudi Arabia and later Kyrgyzstan. He joined the Capitol Police in 2008. Like many of his fellow officers, he often worked security in the Capitol itself and was known to lawmakers, staff and others who passed through the building's doors each morning.

The day was full of solemn ceremony and of reminders of the violence that occurred a month ago. Some of the evidence remains visible, including shattered windows and dented wood doors. Sicknick's urn was carried through one of the entrances the rioters broke through, and groups of them paraded through the Rotunda where his ashes lay. The lawmakers who attended the ceremony — some of them wiping away tears — evacuated the House and Senate as the rioters closed in.

"Four weeks ago, the Rotunda was strewn with the debris of an insurrectionist mob," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said on the Senate floor Wednesday morning. "Today, it is adorned in solemn thanksgiving for the sacrifice of a hero."

In addition to congressional leaders, guests at the ceremony included Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser. Also in attendance was Wenling Chestnut, widow of slain Capitol Police Officer Jacob Chestnut, one of two Capitol Police officers killed by a gunman in 1998. After viewing the urn, she walked to the side and sobbed quietly into a companion's shoulder.

Chestnut and the other officer who was killed, John Gibson, also lay in honor after their deaths. The only other two people to have been given the same honor are civil rights leader Rosa Parks, who died in 2005, and the Rev. Billy Graham, who died in 2018.

There are still questions about Sicknick's death, which was one of five resulting from the rioting. As the mob forced its way in, Sicknick was hit in the head with a fire extinguisher, two law enforcement officials said. He collapsed later on, was hospitalized and died. The officials could not discuss the ongoing investigation publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

Investigators are also examining whether he may have ingested a chemical substance during the riot that may have contributed to his death, the officials said.

The House impeached Trump for a second time a week after the attack on the charge of "incitement of insurrection." But the Senate is likely to acquit him, with most Republicans arguing that there should not be a trial because Trump has left office and that it is time to move forward.

Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois said on the Senate floor after the ceremony that he will remember Sicknick during the trial, and the loss that his family has endured because of Trump's baseless claims that the election was stolen from him.

"For anyone who makes the argument that when it comes to Jan. 6 it's time for America to get over it, I'm going to remember one police officer who gave his life to protect me and to protect this Capitol," Durbin said.

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Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo, Colleen Long and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

## Ex-Peace Corps volunteers plead with US for help on Tigray

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — More than 350 former Peace Corps volunteers and a trio of former U.S. ambassadors have written to U.S. congressmen urging them to condemn the violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region, warning that "as the fighting ostensibly winds down, we are quite sure that the war will continue on a much more pernicious level."

The letter seen by The Associated Press also asks lawmakers to press for humanitarian aid to all parts of Tigray, urge the United Nations to investigate and advocate for media access to the region "to document human rights abuses."

Communications links remain difficult to parts of the Tigray region of some 6 million people, and only a small number of former volunteers have reached friends there. But "we have avoided explicit discussions on what is occurring due to safety concerns and our acute awareness that the Ethiopian government is monitoring all calls," Isabella Olson, a former volunteer who helped to organize the letter, said in an email to the AP.

Ethiopia's government has not responded to the letter, she said. The concern about monitoring has been echoed by Tigrayans and others in Ethiopia who say they have faced harassment and ethnic profiling since the conflict began.

As the fighting enters its fourth month, international pressure increases on Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country and the anchor of the Horn of Africa, to allow the world to see the effects of the alleged massacres, widespread looting and destruction of health centers, crops and houses of worship. Starvation is now a growing concern.

The fighting began in early November between Ethiopian and allied forces and those of the Tigray region who dominated the government for almost three decades before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018. Each side now views the other as illegitimate.

Ethiopia's government on Wednesday rejected new reports citing Tigray opposition groups as estimating that 52,000 civilians have been killed in the conflict. The government said "we have not found ourselves with significant civilian casualties," but it did not say how many people have died.

The letter from former Peace Corps volunteers and diplomats urges lawmakers to remember that the strongest allies of the U.S. "are not simply constituted of politicians in Addis Ababa. They are also the students, teachers, farmers and healthcare workers that Peace Corps volunteers collaborated with in the urban and rural communities currently embroiled in turmoil."

Tigrayans reached by the AP in recent weeks have reported fear and exhaustion as the fighting continues and few know the fate of relatives elsewhere in the region. Meanwhile, Ethiopian senior officials have asserted to Biden administration staffers that life is returning to normal.

"It just feels like it's not my country anymore," said Danait, a woman who felt her home in the regional capital, Mekele, shake when a nearby church was bombarded weeks ago. "It's been like 90 days, and nothing is back to normal." She gave only her first name out of concern for family members.

## GameStop's stupefying stock rise doesn't hide its reality

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Behind GameStop's stock surge is the grim reality of its prospects: The video game retailer is floundering even as the industry around it is booming.

GameStop has been swept up in a battle between big-moneyed hedge funds betting against it and small investors trying to prop it up. That has caused GameStop's share price to soar despite the shaky financials underneath.

Flailing companies like AMC Entertainment and American Airlines have likewise enjoyed a stock surge, but GameStop has been the primary battleground between the Davids and the Goliaths. Shares rocketed 1,600% in the last three weeks, closing at \$325 per share on Friday and giving GameStop a market cap of nearly \$17 billion. Shares have since cratered. On Tuesday, they fell 60% to close at \$90.

Many investors fully understand the contradiction between GameStop's stock price and its business

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 70 of 86

fundamentals. But for those who imagine it to be the next Tesla or Amazon, the truth is: It's likely not. The company's quarterly report issued in September showed another steep quarterly sales decline as it struggles to adapt to the rise of mobile gaming and digital downloads that have rendered its more than 5,000 stores obsolete, even more so during the pandemic.

And the attention-grabbing media coverage didn't bring shoppers back to the stores in recent weeks. Customer traffic declines accelerated in January, according to new research from analysis firm Placer.ai. For the week ended Jan. 18, the number dropped 20.3% compared to a year ago.

Analysts polled by FactSet have a "sell" rating on the stock and a price target of \$13.44 per share. Some analysts believe a reasonable valuation could settle in around \$20 to \$30 per share at best.

While GameStop's new board member Ryan Cohen, the founder of online pet store Chewy, has raised hopes of a turnaround, it's still going to be an uphill battle.

"It's fascinating to watch. But ultimately you can't escape gravity," said Scott Rostan, CEO of Training The Street, which teaches financial modeling and valuation to college students and MBAs. "Ultimately, the reality is going to set in, and ultimately, the fundamentals are going to have to come to play."

The Grapevine, Texas-based company was founded in 1984 as Babbage's and took over the GameStop name in 2000. It was the destination to grab the latest video games just as they were released. But it also became the place to trade in old games and consoles to get cash or credit to buy new ones.

Sales declined over the past decade with the rapid shift toward downloading games. Annual sales have gone from its peak of \$9.5 billion in fiscal 2012 to an expected \$5.15 billion for the year ended Jan. 30, according to FactSet.

At one GameStop location in Brooklyn, there were bright liquidation notices papered across the front windows. Inside, the shelves were for sale along with a scant mishmash of power cords, anime key chains and picked-over T-shirts.

Most of the games went quickly at a deep discount. Piles of games for the Xbox 360 — the Microsoft gaming console that went out of production about six years ago — could be had for a quarter instead of the \$50 they once commanded.

Carlos Cruz, 33, of New York City, used to visit GameStop once a week to buy new games and trade in old ones. But that stopped a few years ago when he started to download games. Now he goes to GameStop every two months, specifically to get certain exclusives.

"It's easier for me to download the games in the house and not go anywhere," said Cruz, noting that 90% of his games are digital.

Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, Nintendo eShop, and online game platform Steam all let gamers download games. And Amazon is testing the cloud gaming arena with a new streaming service called Luna. Discounters like Walmart, Best Buy and Target have also ramped up their offerings.

Meanwhile, the overall video game market has been exploding, a trend accelerated by the pandemic as Americans stay home. The global gaming industry was expected to hit \$174.9 billion last year and reach \$217.9 billion by 2023, according to analytics firm Newzoo. That's up from Newzoo's forecast issued during the start of the pandemic last year of \$200.8 billion.

There have been some recent bright spots for GameStop. The company posted total sales down 3.1% for the nine-week period ended Jan. 2 but it was able to offset store closures with strong game console demand. Online sales, which accounted for about 30% of overall company sales, soared by more than threefold. And GameStop has reduced its overall debt on its balance sheet by almost \$600 million since early 2019.

In mid-January, GameStop added Cohen and two of his former colleagues from Chewy to its board after Cohen had pressed the company to focus on its online operations. On Wednesday, it named Matt Francis to its new role of chief technology officer, capitalizing on his experience in e-commerce and consumer technology.

"GameStop needs to evolve into a technology company that delights gamers and delivers exceptional digital experiences — not remain a video game retailer that overprioritizes its brick-and-mortar footprint and stumbles around the online ecosystem," said Cohen in a letter to the board of directors last November.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 71 of 86

By the end of the latest fiscal year, GameStop will have closed over 1,000 stores since mid-2019. It's also been adding PC gaming, computers, monitors, game tables and gaming TVs to its mix. But analysts believe any turnaround will take time, and some think Cohen's experience leading an online pet store isn't applicable to the gaming business.

"I think he is a good merchant and a good retailer," said Wedbush analyst Michael Pachter. "But can you digitally download pet food or pet toys? I don't think so."

Cohen, whose investment firm acquired a 12.9% stake in GameStop in recent months, declined to comment. GameStop couldn't be reached for comment.

Analysts say GameStop could take advantage of the lofty stock price and do their own stock offering like American Airlines. The chain could use that money to reinvest in the business.

But given so much uncertainty, the question is: at what price?

"No one knows what the true valuation is," said Alon Y. Kapen, a corporate transaction lawyer at Farrell Fritz. "And you don't know when that window is going to shut."

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Associated Press writer Charles Sheehan in New York contributed to this report.

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## States holding key vaccine discussions in closed meetings

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — As the nation's COVID-19 vaccination campaign accelerates, governors, public health directors and committees advising them are holding key discussions behind closed doors, including debates about who should be eligible for the shots and how best to distribute them.

A review by The Associated Press finds that advisory committees created to help determine how to prioritize limited doses have held closed meetings in at least 13 states that are home to more than 70 million people.

In at least 15 other states, the meetings have been open to the public, the AP found. But even in those states, governors and health departments can modify or override committee recommendations with little or no public explanation. In several others, governors and their staffs make decisions without formal advisory bodies to guide them.

The lack of transparency raises the risk that some decisions will be grounded in politics rather than public health and that well-connected industries could receive special treatment while the concerns of marginalized groups are ignored.

"You don't want to have 'God squads' making these decisions about life and death without any kind of public oversight or public accountability," said Oregon State University professor Courtney Campbell, an expert in bioethics.

In Iowa, the governor moved legislators and other Capitol employees ahead of inmates and correctional officers on the vaccine priority list, despite at least 19 coronavirus deaths among state prisoners and staff. In Oregon, the governor prioritized teachers for shots before the elderly without seeking a recommendation from an advisory committee that has debated other sensitive topics publicly.

Campbell praised the Oregon panel's transparency and commitment to equity but criticized the lack of public deliberation that went into the decision on teachers. "You want to know what groups are prioritized but also what evidence is used scientifically to determine which should go first and their reasoning process," he said.

The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices has recommended that states "promote transparency" as one of four ethical principles in vaccine allocation programs. The committee advised in November that decisions and plans "must be evidence-based, clear, understandable and publicly available," and that public participation in their creation and review should occur to the extent possible.

Public distrust of government has been a major problem throughout the pandemic, and "you want to

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 72 of 86

take those kinds of factors that contribute to public suspicion out of the equation," Campbell said.

When Texas' vaccine panel met last month, the subject of equity surfaced. One member said that obtaining racial and ethnic data on vaccinations would be critical to assessing whether the state's efforts were succeeding.

But the identity of that member — and where that discussion wound up — is unknown. That the topic was mentioned at all is known only because of meeting notes that state health officials provide through open records requests but do not post publicly.

The notes also mentioned worries about elderly residents who are unable to stand in line and concern over dry-ice freezers used to store vaccines. But the three-hour panel meetings that occur most Mondays are not open to the public, leaving the state's 30 million residents in the dark about how decisions are made.

Across the country, officials say they closed the meetings so that health experts, industry representatives and other panel members can have free-wheeling discussions on sensitive topics.

"It's really to kind of foster an open exchange among the panelists and allow them to be frank," said Chris Van Deusen, a spokesman for the Texas Department of State Health Services.

States cite various exemptions to open meetings laws as legal justification to meet in secret, and some eventually release minutes and panel recommendations.

In Minnesota, the state health department says opening meetings would not "provide space for candid conversations and consideration of a variety of viewpoints." In Iowa, the state public health director said its advisory committee met in secret so members could speak without fear of public criticism.

"Because these are internal, advisory working groups, their meetings are not public," a Pennsylvania spokesman said of the state's three vaccine committees.

Some states would not explain their rationale for secrecy.

Several states do not have an advisory panel, including Maryland. A spokesman for Republican Gov. Larry Hogan said state health officials make vaccine allocation decisions based on federal guidelines, but he would not identify those officials. Democratic lawmakers have blasted the confusion surrounding vaccine access, administration and distribution in the state.

Connecticut's advisory panel has been meeting in public after acknowledging that it unintentionally held a closed meeting in December when it voted on a recommendation for how the governor should distribute the first vaccine doses.

When a Missouri official confirmed at a public meeting last week that the state ranked dead last in COVID-19 vaccine distribution, it marked a striking moment of transparency and accountability. Missouri opened its advisory committee meetings last month, only after media outlets questioned why several prior meetings had been held behind closed doors without any public notice.

Last week, members of the public listened and asked questions as the committee discussed several issues, ranging from whether those with Type 2 diabetes should be eligible for the vaccine before those with Type 1 and how to best use shots leftover due to missed appointments.

Public health official Adam Crumbliss outlined strategies to improve Missouri's last-place ranking for vaccine distribution, which he partially blamed on confusion in the final days of the Trump administration and a slow deployment of shots to nursing homes by pharmacy chains.

Iowa Public Health Association Director Lina Tucker Reinders, who was a member of Iowa's advisory panel, said she understood the rationale for closing meetings but would have had no problem if they were public.

She said she was frustrated that Gov. Kim Reynolds ultimately modified the panel's recommendations, including by expanding eligibility for shots from age 75 to 65 before supplies were available and prioritizing state Capitol workers ahead of inmates and prison staff.

"Those are real lives that we are talking about. When you prioritize one group, you de-prioritize another," she said. "That means some people are not going to get the vaccine as timely as what we would prefer. Some of those people are going to get sick, and some of those people are going to die. Those are real consequences and nobody on that committee took that lightly."

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Associated Press writers Paul J. Weber in Austin, Texas; Brian Witte in Annapolis, Maryland; and Mark

Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania contributed to this report.

## Why US hiring could rebound faster than you might expect

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hiring has weakened for six straight months. Nearly 10 million jobs remain lost since the coronavirus struck. And this week, the Congressional Budget Office forecast that employment won't regain its pre-pandemic level until 2024.

And yet a hopeful view is gaining steam that as vaccinations reach a critical mass, perhaps around midyear, and the government provides further stimulus, the economy and the job market will strengthen much faster than they did after previous recessions.

"I am not often optimistic," said Heidi Shierholz, an economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute. "But I am optimistic now."

The brighter outlook rests on three premises. The first is that household finances, as a whole, are much healthier now, with less debt and more savings, than after the Great Recession a decade ago. Once the virus is contained, that cushion of cash could drive pent-up consumer spending. That spending, in turn, would support faster hiring.

The second premise is that the pandemic recession has yet to inflict the type of structural damage to higher-paying sectors of the job market that the Great Recession did. In 2008-2009, 4 million construction and manufacturing jobs — many of them highly skilled, well-paying positions — were lost and never fully recovered. Both those sectors still have fewer jobs than they did in late 2007.

And the third dynamic is that the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department appear more intent on spurring job growth and less concerned about igniting inflation or increasing budget deficits than they were a decade ago. Most policymakers and economists now believe one reason the last recovery was so slow and prolonged was that the government provided too little stimulus.

For now, the economy's rebound has been highly unequal. The unemployment rate for the poorest one-quarter of Americans is roughly four times the rate of the richest one-quarter, Lael Brainard, a Fed governor, said in a recent speech. People of color have been disproportionately hurt by the job losses. And in December, the unemployment rate for women rose for the first time since April, even as it fell for men. In addition, many women, especially working mothers, have had to leave the workforce to care for children and aren't even counted as unemployed.

Yet one consequence of that inequality is that tens of millions of Americans, especially higher-income people, have managed to keep their jobs while working from home. Having spent less, they have built up savings. Once the virus is controlled, many of them will be poised to spend and boost the economy.

"A lot of people have been hit very hard, but there's also a huge swath that hasn't been hit," said Shierholz of the Economic Policy Institute. "They'll be able to get right out and engage in normal economic activity. That is very different from the last recession."

Consider that the value of Americans' homes shrank by \$5.6 trillion during and after the Great Recession, a grueling decline that dragged on until 2012 and left millions poorer. That huge loss of one-quarter of home equity — for most Americans, their main source of wealth — put a brake on consumer spending.

This time, despite a deep recession, home values for the nation as whole have actually risen \$1.3 trillion, or about 4%. The stock market has also soared since April, benefiting mainly a narrow affluent slice of the population but also boosting retirement accounts. On top of that, household savings have doubled since the pandemic, to \$2.3 trillion.

The prospect of a robust rebound in consumer spending has led economists to upgrade their outlooks. Goldman Sachs forecasts 6.6% growth this year, which would be the fastest since the 1984. Goldman assumes that roughly \$1 trillion, out of President Joe Biden's proposed \$1.9 trillion financial aid proposal, becomes law.

Unemployment would fall from the current 6.7% to 4.5% by year's end, Goldman projects. By contrast, after the Great Recession, unemployment exceeded 8% until August 2012 — three years after the

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 74 of 86

recession had officially ended. (The CBO's dimmer outlook assumes that no further government support will be approved.)

There is less certainty about how badly the job market has been damaged by permanent losses at restaurants, airlines, hotels and related sectors. Economists refer to such losses as "scarring," and it can burden the unemployed for years. They often have to learn entirely new skills and search for work without the benefit of the social networks they developed in their old jobs. A significant portion of Americans who were permanently laid off after the Great Recession ended up taking lower-paying jobs with fewer benefits.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has spotlighted this potential threat as one that the Fed is monitoring. Asked at a news conference last week whether widespread scarring has occurred this time, Powell said the "jury is out." But he added: "We haven't seen as much of it as we as we feared. And that's a good thing."

At the same time, he warned that some portion of the jobless won't return to their old jobs.

"It's not easy to change careers completely mid-career," Powell noted. "That just again stresses the urgency that we feel and others feel at fully defeating the pandemic."

During the last recession, construction jobs disappeared because builders had significantly overbuilt new homes. Even as the economy recovered, fewer construction workers were needed. Manufacturing shed jobs because of low-cost international competition and automation.

This time, while restaurants, hotels, bars and entertainment venues have shed millions of jobs, it's not yet clear how many have vanished because of permanent changes. Still, some analysts worry that the proportion of the unemployed who will have no job to return to may be substantial.

"A bunch of jobs won't come back," said David Autor, a labor economist at MIT.

Autor's research has found that in recent decades, the U.S. economy has suffered a "hollowing out" of middle-class jobs, especially in manufacturing and office work, as routine jobs are increasingly performed by machines or software. Now, he worries that major sources of lower-paid jobs in many cities — restaurants, coffee shops, gyms, dry cleaning, hotels — will need fewer employees as working from home enables more Americans to leave big cities and business travel never fully recovers.

So far, at least, research suggests that the job market's scarring has been limited. Eliza Forsythe, a labor economist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and three colleagues who studied unemployed workers and online job openings found that mismatch — the difference between the skills that employers want and the skills job-seekers have — has actually declined during the pandemic.

That's mainly because companies have been slow to post openings for higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs. Even though more professionals are working from home, their employers aren't looking to increase the hiring of remote workers, Forsythe said.

The data also suggests that this time, companies aren't automating large numbers of low- or middle-skilled jobs.

"The people looking for jobs do have the skills employers are looking for," Forsythe said. "It's just that employers aren't looking for enough of them right now."

Threats from automation can be exaggerated. After the last recession, worries abounded that self-driving technology would eliminate huge numbers of taxi- and truck-driving jobs. And the use of robots in ecommerce warehouses has long sparked concerns about job losses in that sector. Yet warehousing and delivery jobs have accelerated since the recession began and have surpassed their pre-pandemic levels.

"We won't have robot waiters when we go back to eat out," Forsythe added. "Those people will be hired back."

No matter the depth of scarring in the job market, policymakers and economists stress that more robust financial support from Congress and the Fed can help the long-term unemployed find work. Businesses have more incentive to train new workers if the economy is thriving. Workers can afford to take classes if they aren't worried about being evicted from their homes. If Congress were to enact far less stimulus than the Biden administration is proposing, the job market might not rebound as vigorously as economists expect.

"I think there is a consensus that without further action, we risk a longer, more painful recession now,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 75 of 86

and longer-term scarring of the economy later," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at her Senate confirmation hearing last month.

That consensus marks a significant change from the aftermath of the last recession, said Adam Ozimek, chief economist at Upwork.

A decade ago, millions of Americans had stopped looking for work. Economists and policymakers assumed many would never return. The loss of many blue collar jobs, even as hiring in software, information technology and the health care industries grew, was seen as creating so-called skills gaps that government stimulus could do little to address.

"There was an excess focus on concepts like the skills gap and structural change that were largely misplaced even then," Ozimek said. "People have learned from that."

Indeed, Powell has acknowledged that the Fed has learned those lessons. He oversaw a shift in the Fed's policy framework last year under which it plans to keep interest rates ultra-low even as the economy fully recovers. The Fed will no longer raise borrowing costs in anticipation of high inflation; rather, it will wait for annual inflation to exceed 2% for some time before it considers a rate hike.

"I'm much more worried about falling short of a complete recovery and losing people's careers and lives that they built because they don't get back to work in time," Powell said last week. "I'm more concerned about that than about the possibility — which exists — of higher inflation."

## Fundraising feat: Capt. Tom's legacy lives in 11-year-old

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The legacy of Capt. Tom Moore, the super fundraiser who died Tuesday of COVID-19, lives on in Imogen Papworth-Heidel — and many others.

The 11-year-old soccer player, who dreams of playing for England, watched Capt. Tom pushing his walker up and down his garden to raise money for the National Health Service and was inspired.

So she decided to help by doing something she's good at: keepy uppies — kicking the ball into the air and passing it from one foot to the other without letting it touch the ground.

Imogen was able to raise 15,000 pounds (\$20,500) for key workers keeping hospitals open, streets safe and trains running while everyone else stays home to stop the spread of coronavirus.

"I wanted to do something to help as well to raise money, so I did this," she told The Associated Press from her home in Framlingham in southeastern England. "I chose to do 7.1 million -- one for every single key worker in the whole of the country."

Capt. Tom, a World War II veteran recovering from a broken hip, set out to raise 1,000 pounds (\$1,400) by walking 100 laps of his back garden before his 100th birthday last April. Three weeks later, he had raised 33 million pounds (\$45 million) for Britain's NHS after his quest cheered a nation in lockdown and triggered donations from around the world.

But he also made a broader impact as his simple challenge — to do whatever you can to help others — persuaded the young it's never too soon to start, and the old that it's never too late.

Take Margaret Payne, 90, who walked up the stairs in her home 282 times to raise 416,000 pounds for the NHS. Payne, from Ardvar in the Scottish Highlands, calculated that the feat was the equivalent of climbing 731 meters (2,398 feet), or the height of Suilven, one of Scotland's best known mountains that she scaled when she was 15.

And then there's Tony Hudgell, a 5-year-old who lost both legs after being abused as a baby, set out to walk 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) and raise 500 pounds for the Evelina London Children's Hospital. After completing the challenge in a series of daily walks he had attracted more than 1 million pounds of donations.

"Captain Sir Tom inspired so many people to take on their own extraordinary challenges, from running marathons to swimming lakes, and he gave us all hope," said Ellie Orton, chief executive of NHS Charities Together, using the honorific Capt. Tom earned when he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

"He showed NHS patients and staff, who were struggling, that people cared, that they were looking out for them and doing what they could to support them."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 76 of 86

In the end, Imogen needed a little help to complete her challenge.

After realizing it might take her a long time on her own, she found other people who did keepy uppies and donated them to her via video so she could reach her target — and every key worker could have their very own.

"People did 6 million keepy uppies in total and I did 1.1 million," she said. "It's just really amazing how many people donated and spent their time actually doing the keepie uppies. I'm really grateful for that."

Unlike many of those inspired by Capt. Tom, Imogen managed to get an audience with her hero. Capt. Tom told Imogen that her challenge was "cool." She melted.

"I probably learnt to keep on going and not to give up halfway through something ... to persevere through it, like going out when it's raining, or it's really, really hot," Imogen said of the experience. "And I now believe that I can do what I want if I know I can do it and I have the right mindset."

She also got more accuracy and control of the ball, which is likely to help that national team goal.

Thanks to Capt. Tom.

"One Good Thing" is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Read the collection of stories at <https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing>

## Russia rejects Western criticism over Navalny's prison term

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian authorities on Wednesday shrugged off the massive rallies against the jailing of top Kremlin foe Alexei Navalny and rejected Western criticism as "hysterics" as activists reported more than 1,400 new arrests in the crackdown on protesters.

A Moscow court on Tuesday ordered Navalny to prison for two years and eight months, finding that he violated the terms of his probation while recuperating in Germany from a nerve-agent poisoning. The ruling immediately ignited new protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg that followed massive rallies over the past two weekends.

Speaking in court, Navalny denounced the accusations against him as fabricated and driven by President Vladimir Putin's "fear and hatred," saying that the Russian leader will go down in history as a "poisoner."

Asked to comment on Navalny's speech, which was shared widely on Russian social media platforms, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov responded that it's not up to him to determine Putin's place in history. Like Putin, Peskov avoids mentioning Navalny by name.

Navalny, a 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner who is Putin's most determined political foe, was arrested Jan. 17 upon returning from his five-month convalescence in Germany from the poisoning which he has blamed on the Kremlin. Russian authorities deny any involvement and claim they have no proof that he was poisoned despite tests by several European labs.

As the court ruling was read, Navalny smiled to his wife, Yulia, who attended the hearing, and traced the outline of a heart on the glass cage where he was being held. "Everything will be fine," he told her as guards led him away.

She thanked supporters on her Instagram, saying "there are so many good, strong and fair people who support Alexei and myself that there is no way to step back and there is nothing to fear."

"We will win anyway," she said.

In addition to imprisoning Navalny, authorities put his brother and several close associates under house arrest. Police also have detained scores of journalists who covered the protests.

On Wednesday, a court sentenced Sergei Smirnov, the editor-in-chief of Mediazona, a top online news outlet focusing on political repression and human rights abuses, to 25 days in jail on charges of making calls for unsanctioned protests for retweeting a post mentioning protests. Smirnov denied the charges, and several leading independent media outlets protested his jailing and demanded his immediate release.

The prison sentence for Navalny and Russia's tough police response to peaceful protests drew harsh

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 77 of 86

criticism from the United States and European Union nations.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Moscow to immediately free Navalny and those who were detained during protests.

"Even as we work with Russia to advance U.S. interests, we will coordinate closely with our allies and partners to hold Russia accountable for failing to uphold the rights of its citizens," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron called Navalny's conviction "unacceptable" and called for his immediate release.

"A political disagreement is never a crime," Macron. "The respect of human rights, like that of democratic freedom, is not negotiable."

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert on Wednesday reiterated the German leader's call for Navalny's immediate release and an end to the police crackdown against anti-government protesters.

Seibert told reporters that the Moscow court's ruling "was far from the principles of rule of law," noting that it was based on Navalny's earlier conviction, which the European Court of Human Rights had deemed "arbitrary" and a breach of Navalny's rights to a fair trial.

"The German government condemns this systematic use of violence against peaceful protesters," he said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday rejected the Western demands as "arrogant and improper," saying that Moscow will not be moved by Western "hysterics" that "go overboard" or mimic "boorish rhetoric."

"Those who mistake our polite manners for weakness make a grave mistake," he added.

He accused the West of "double standards," defending the Russian police response to protests as much milder than some police action against demonstrators in Western countries. Lavrov said he sent EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell videos proving that point ahead of his visit to Moscow later this week.

More than 1,400 people were detained late Tuesday and overnight, including 1,170 in Moscow and more than 250 in St. Petersburg, when demonstrators took to the streets to protest the court's order to send Navalny to prison, according to the independent OVD-INFO group that documents arrests.

Police brutally beat scores of peaceful protesters and used tasers against some in a show of force apparently intended to intimidate the opposition.

Asked about the police violence, Putin's spokesman Peskov told reporters that unsanctioned protests warrant the tough police action.

"Undoubtedly, such activities must be suppressed quite harshly," he said.

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Jim Heintz in Moscow, Angela Charlton in Paris and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

## **EXPLAINER: How Russia has tried to stem pro-Navalny protests**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — A prison sentence for Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and a sweeping crackdown on protesters demanding his release reflect the Kremlin's steely determination to fend off threats to its political monopoly at any cost.

Russia has seen mass protests before, of course — and it has used various tactics to confront them, ranging from offering concessions to violently cracking down. The current wave of demonstrations, however, has spread across Russia's 11-time zones, a marked difference from the past when crowds were mostly limited to Moscow. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in recent weekends in the largest and most extensive outpouring of anger against President Vladimir Putin's rule in years.

The AP looks at the Russian authorities' no-holds-barred response to protests.

### **TOUGH LAWS**

All demonstrations are currently prohibited in Russia as part of coronavirus restrictions, giving authorities wide latitude to crack down, but the government is also making broad use of laws put in place after 2011-2012 anti-Kremlin protests. Those measures made taking part in unsanctioned rallies punishable by heavy fines and prison terms even if they remain peaceful.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 78 of 86

In addition, the Kremlin has also introduced laws that have sought to stifle foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations, including those that have highlighted human rights abuses that the Kremlin wants to keep quiet. Any NGO that receives such funding and engages in vaguely described political activities must register as a "foreign agent," a moniker with heavy stigma in Russia where it sounds synonymous with a spy.

That, along with mounds of new paperwork, made their work more difficult — and make it more challenging for them to document human rights abuses.

## NAVALNY'S TEAM TARGETED

Navalny was jailed immediately after his Jan. 17 return from Germany — where he spent five months recovering from the nerve-agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. Since then, authorities have moved swiftly to silence and isolate his allies.

Last week, a Moscow court put his brother, Oleg, top associate Lyubov Sobol, and several other key allies under house arrest — without access to the internet — for two months as part of a criminal probe into alleged violations of coronavirus regulations during protests. All across Russia, top members of Navalny's team in the regions also faced arrests.

Despite these moves, associates of Navalny who remain free have used social media platforms to organize the protests, designating assembly points and routes of marches and posting advice on how to bypass police cordons and avoid detention.

## POLICE TACTICS

During the Jan. 31 protest in Moscow, authorities imposed an unprecedented lockdown of the city center, closing large swaths to pedestrian traffic, shutting several subway stations, and closing restaurants and stores.

The shutdown was aimed at preventing demonstrators from rallying near the main headquarters of the Federal Security Service and other government buildings.

Police also moved to prevent a massive gathering at any location — an apparent effort to obscure the size of protests and thus the opposition's strength.

Police used security cordons to force protesters to zigzag around the city and then sought to break them into smaller groups before moving to arrest them. The random pattern of arrests — with police caught on video chasing down lone protesters at times — served to scare the public and discourage people from joining the rallies.

Police treatment of peaceful protesters has also become increasingly brutal, with officers beating even those who offered no resistance to arrest and using tasers against some.

On one occasion, a dozen of riot police blocked a taxi after its passenger yelled at them, grabbing the man and beating him and also detaining the driver.

## INTIMIDATION AND THREATS

Russian law enforcement agencies have tried to discourage people from joining protests by warning that if the rallies turn violent, participants could face a prison sentence of up to eight years and those who engage in violence could end up with 15-year sentences.

Authorities also demanded that social platforms block calls for protests and threatened them with fines and potential closure if they fail to obey. Some Russia-owned social networks appeared to at least partly comply with the demand.

In various regions of Russia, high schools and universities reportedly sought to prevent students from joining the protests by threatening them with expulsion. In Moscow and other cities across the country, some teachers lost their jobs after attending the rallies.

In another attempt to discourage young people from joining the protests, the Investigative Committee, the top state investigative agency, said it will check if anyone detained is subject to the draft. While Russia

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 79 of 86

has compulsory military service, many manage to avoid the unpopular draft through various deferments.

## MEDIA SPIN

Nationwide television networks and other state-controlled media have toed the Kremlin line, portraying Navalny as a power-hungry Western stooge.

The state media have sought to cast protesters as spoiled urbanites, out of touch with the masses, and focused on occasional scuffles to claim that the demonstrators engage in violence and provoke the police. They also sought to characterize the police response to rallies — including their avoidance of tear gas, water cannons and stun grenades — as less violent than what authorities in the West have done.

## MASS DETENTIONS

Police detained about 4,000 protesters across Russia on Jan. 23 and more than 5,750 on Jan. 31, according to the OVD-Info group that is monitoring arrests — the largest number of detentions since Putin was first elected in 2000. During the demonstrations after Navalny's sentencing Tuesday, they made more than 1,400 arrests, nearly 1,200 of them in Moscow.

The number of detainees was so high that detention facilities in Moscow ran out of space, and many spent long hours on police buses as the authorities tried to find accommodation for them.

Most of those detained were released after being handed court summons — but they faced fines and jail terms ranging from seven to 15 days. A few dozen accused of violence against police have faced criminal charges that could land them in prison for years.

## UN-backed program seeks rollout of 100M vaccine doses in Q1

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A U.N.-backed program to deploy COVID-19 vaccines to the neediest people worldwide, especially in poor countries, announced plans Wednesday for an initial distribution of 100 million doses by the end of March and 200 million more by July — hoping to catch up with rich countries that are already deep into rollouts.

Leaders of the COVAX Facility, which seeks a fair distribution of vaccines at a time of short supply, said nearly all of the doses expected for the initial-phase rollout are to come from British-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca and its partner, the Serum Institute of India.

Frederik Kristensen, deputy CEO for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation, a co-leader of the program, told a video news conference that the plans come at a "critical moment" in the fight against the virus as new variants emerged and a lopsided vaccine rollout so far — favoring rich countries.

"We are on a path to really start balancing out a global map, which so far has shown how many lower-income countries are yet to start vaccinating a single person, while other, wealthier countries go ahead towards mass vaccination," he said.

Dr. Seth Berkley, the CEO of GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, said COVAX plans for the initial distribution of 336 million doses of the vaccine, which AstraZeneca developed with Oxford University, through June to dozens of countries.

GAVI expects that nearly one-third of those doses — nearly 100 million — will start being delivered to targeted countries by the end of March, officials said.

Another 1.2 million doses of the vaccine from U.S.-based Pfizer and German partner BioNTech are expected to be shared by 18 countries during the first quarter of the year. Those companies have already been selling and distributing their vaccine by the tens of millions to rich countries.

"Of course, we would like more BioNTech vaccines in the first and second quarter. That is what we were offered given the demand and supply that was there," Berkley said.

He acknowledged the AstraZeneca vaccine rollout was 57 million doses fewer than originally planned for the first phase, attributing that to delays for countries to receive emergency use approval from the World Health Organization. He emphasized it was not a result of supply problems, like those in Europe.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 80 of 86

The AstraZeneca vaccine rollout depends on the WHO authorizing the shot for emergency use, which is expected to happen this month. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine already has such approval, but supplying it to poorer nations is a challenge because the vaccine requires storage at extremely cold temperatures.

GAVI also pointed to a number of caveats that could still spoil plans for the rollout, warning it is contingent on issues like regulatory approvals, supplies, logistics, and the readiness to countries poised to receive the vaccines.

Some 190 countries and territories that are participating in COVAX have been awaiting details of the rollout. The participants include "self-financing" upper- and middle-income countries that have put up money and 93 lower-income countries which are expected to benefit.

By the numbers, India is expected to get the lion's share of the 240 million AstraZeneca doses that the Serum Institute is producing for the first phase. Pakistan is to receive over 17 million, while impoverished Malawi is to get nearly 1.5 million doses and Haiti some 876,000.

From a South Korean facility to add another 96 million doses of the AstraZeneca product, Brazil is expected to receive over 10 million doses, Egypt more than 5.1 million, Iran over 4.2 million and Canada - which already has readied a large surplus of vaccines through bilateral deals — more than 1.9 million.

WHO officials have consistently said the way to beat the pandemic is to make sure that everyone is safe from it — not just those in wealthier countries that launched vaccination drives in December.

Henrietta Fore, the executive director of UNICEF, announced a long-term supply deal with the Serum Institute of India for AstraZeneca and U.S. drugmaker Novavax that will include access to up to 1.1 billion doses for 100 countries — at a price of about \$3 per dose for lower- and middle-income countries.

The 18 countries set to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in the initial rollout of 1.2 million doses are Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia, Cabo Verde, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Peru, Philippines, South Korea, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia, and Ukraine, as well as the Palestinian territories.

Ann Lindstrand, who heads an immunization program at the WHO, cited "massive interest" in that vaccine. She said the choice of recipients had to balance issues such as country readiness, a need among high-priority recipients like healthcare workers, and a desire to get vaccines to countries that hadn't received any yet.

COVAX has faced challenges as rich countries scoop up vaccine supplies, sometimes at premium prices, and undercut the WHO's goal of equitable vaccine distribution. Program leaders have faced issues trying to strike deals with pharmaceutical manufacturers, and only a fraction of the 2 billion doses that have been secured for COVAX involve firm deals.

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## Activists wary of broader law enforcement after Capitol riot

By NOREEN NASIR and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — As federal officials grapple with how to confront the national security threat from domestic extremists after the deadly siege of the U.S. Capitol, civil rights groups and communities of color are watching warily for any moves to expand law enforcement power or authority.

They say their communities have felt the brunt of security scrutiny over the last two decades and fear new tools meant to target right-wing extremism or white nationalists risk harming Muslims, Black Americans and other groups, even if unintentionally. Their position underscores the complexity of the national debate surrounding how to balance First Amendment expression protections with law enforcement's need to prevent extremist violence before it occurs.

In particular, many Muslim advocates oppose as unnecessary the creation of any new domestic terror statute, saying there are enough laws on the books to cover violent extremist conduct.

"The answer ought to be to sort of pause. Because the instinct to do something is something I'm really

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 81 of 86

quite afraid of," said Maya Berry, executive director of the Arab American Institute, one of more than 130 civil and human rights organizations that say the FBI already has the tools it needs.

"There's an entire federal code in place that allows you to successfully go after this violence before you need to sort of say, 'Oh, wait, you know, there's this existing gap and we need more power,'" she added.

The debate over how to prevent extremist violence, and whether new domestic terrorism laws are required, has surfaced before, including after rampages that targeted Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue and Latinos in a Texas Walmart. But the Jan. 6 attack, when an overwhelmingly white mob of Donald Trump supporters and members of far-right groups violently breached the Capitol, has refocused attention on white extremism and prompted questions about whether a racial double standard exists in investigating and countering violence.

President Joe Biden moved swiftly to declare domestic extremism an urgent national security concern, tasking the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to coordinate a threat assessment. The Department of Homeland Security issued a terrorism bulletin warning about possible additional violence. Even before the riot, FBI Director Chris Wray said domestic terrorism had been elevated as a priority to the same level as international terrorism, with violence by racially motivated and anti-government extremists accounting for significant lethal violence in recent years.

The debate now is how to address the rise of white supremacist violence while not targeting the same people white supremacists seek to harm. Not only that, law enforcement officials pressured to crack down more on domestic extremists have to do so while staying mindful of broad First Amendment protections that prevent the arrests of people for abhorrent or hateful speech short of threatening violence.

"White violence is consistently perpetuated and then used as justification for increased surveillance or increased state power against communities of color," said 26-year-old Iranian American activist Hoda Katebi, who is Muslim, wears a headscarf and grew up defending herself against harassment and being called a terrorist in the years after Sept. 11, 2001.

The Justice Department has not said publicly if it intends to seek any additional powers, or whether it even needs new ones to deal with domestic extremism. Though there is no federal law that explicitly charges crimes as domestic terrorism, prosecutors have successfully used other statutes to cover conduct that might reasonably be seen as terrorism, including at the Capitol.

There are, however, additional legal tools available for combating international terrorism.

Federal law, for instance, makes it a crime to give support to designated foreign terror groups, affording law enforcement greater flexibility to arrest people who donate money or otherwise aid such an organization, even if they haven't harmed anyone or threatened violence themselves. No comparable law exists for people aligned with U.S.-based extremist groups, which enjoy expansive free speech protections.

The current concern from civil rights groups stems from the way communities of color, notably Black Americans and Muslims, have been affected over the decades by law enforcement scrutiny, though the FBI has significantly tightened its policies in ways that require a credible basis for suspicion to launch an investigation or apply for surveillance of a particular individual.

In a statement, the FBI said it has a dual, but not contradictory, mission of protecting the American people and upholding the Constitution and that it will defer to Congress to work with the Justice Department on assessing whether any additional authorities are needed. It says it will continue to use all the tools it has.

"The FBI investigates and responds to incidents only when an individual's activity crosses the line from ideas and constitutionally protected activity to violence," the statement said.

Still, in the early years of the bureau's history, it targeted "movements that sought to liberate Black people from the continued oppression that they suffered post-slavery and post-Reconstruction," said Janai Nelson, NAACP Legal Defense Fund associate director-counsel.

FBI surveillance of civil rights leaders and infiltration of Black organizations continued into the 1950s and 1960s, most infamously through the COINTELPRO program created to disrupt activities of the Communist Party. Martin Luther King Jr. was monitored by the FBI beginning in 1955 during his involvement with the Montgomery bus boycott.

In the last decade, as protests swept the U.S. after the police killings of Black people, Black Lives Mat-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 82 of 86

ter grew in prominence as a slogan and an organization. The FBI at one point created a domestic threat category called "Black Identity Extremists," though Wray has said the bureau no longer uses the term.

"Surveillance tactics and the eye of our law enforcement have always been trained on communities of color. Particularly Black communities," Nelson said.

Muslim Americans believe they've felt particular scrutiny since 9/11, including after the Patriot Act, legislation that afforded law enforcement new counterterrorism authority, as well as less intrusive initiatives like the Obama-era program designed to counter violent extremism.

Counterterrorism experts defend the Patriot Act and similar investigative tools, including sting operations, as having prevented an untold number of attacks. Yet many Muslims still regard those actions as having unfairly infringed upon the privacy of many Americans.

All the while, the threat of white nationalism continued to grow inside the U.S., prompting debate over a perceived double standard when it comes to the terrorism label, and tough questions for law enforcement about whether it has been sufficiently attuned to a domestic extremism surge that has been recently responsible for greater casualties in the U.S. than international terrorism.

Mindful of the complexity of the debate, one legislative proposal would create not additional law enforcement tools or even a new definition of domestic terrorism, but simply mandate that the FBI and Department of Homeland Security make periodic reports to Congress about the extremist threat.

"Anytime you shine a light on an issue, on an action, you get more accountability and better outcomes," said Rep. Brad Schneider, an Illinois Democrat and a co-sponsor of the measure.

Nasir reported from Chicago and Tucker from Washington.

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

## Fauci warns against Super Bowl parties to avoid virus spread

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's top infectious disease expert doesn't want the Super Bowl to turn into a super spreader.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, says when it comes to Super Bowl parties during the pandemic, people should "just lay low and cool it."

He said during TV interviews Wednesday that now isn't the time to invite people over for watch parties because of the possibility that they're infected with the coronavirus and could sicken others.

Big events like Sunday's game in Tampa, Florida, between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are always a cause for concern over the potential for virus spread, Fauci said.

"You don't want parties with people that you haven't had much contact with," he told NBC's "Today" show. "You just don't know if they're infected, so, as difficult as that is, at least this time around, just lay low and cool it."

The NFL has capped game attendance at 22,000 people because of the pandemic and citywide coronavirus mandates.

## UK says new study vindicates delaying 2nd virus vaccine shot

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's health chief has hailed a new study suggesting that a single dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine provides a high level of protection for 12 weeks, saying it supports the government's contentious strategy of delaying the second shot so it can protect more people quickly with a first dose.

Britain's decision has been criticized as risky by other European countries, but Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Wednesday that the study "backs the strategy that we've taken and it shows the world that

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 83 of 86

the Oxford vaccine works effectively.”

Hancock’s comments came after Oxford University released a study showing the vaccine cut transmission of the virus by two-thirds and prevented severe disease.

Mene Pangalos, executive vice president of biopharmaceuticals research and development at AstraZeneca, said no patients experienced severe COVID-19 or required hospitalization three weeks after receiving a first dose, and that efficacy appeared to increase up to 12 weeks after the initial shot.

“Our data suggest you want to be as close to the 12 weeks as you can” for the second dose, Pangalos said during a news conference.

The study has not been peer-reviewed yet, and it did not address dosing of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the other one currently in use in the U.K. Pfizer recommends that its shots be given 21 days apart and has not endorsed the U.K. government’s decision to lengthen the time between doses.

But the Oxford research was greeted with excitement by U.K. officials under pressure to justify their decision to delay the second dose.

“That reduction in transmission, as well as the fact there is no hospitalizations, the combination of that is very good news. And it categorically supports the strategy we’ve been taking on having a 12-week gap between the doses,” Hancock told Sky News.

Some countries, including France, have authorized the AstraZeneca vaccine only for use in people under 65, saying there is not enough evidence to say whether it works in older adults. Belgium has authorized it only for people 55 and under.

Yet one of the lead researchers on the Oxford vaccine project, Dr. Andrew Pollard, said “we expect it to be highly effective in older adults” and said more data should be available in the next few weeks.

Pangalos noted that the European Medicines Agency had authorized the vaccine for use in all people over age 18.

“How individual countries decide to implement vaccines is ultimately up to them based on the vaccine supplies that they have,” he said.

Vaccine supply is a sensitive issue in the European Union, which is unhappy that AstraZeneca cut back on the number of doses it plans to supply the EU with in the near term. The company said last month that it planned to cut initial deliveries within the EU from 80 million doses to 31 million doses due to reduced yields from its manufacturing plants in Europe.

It has since applied to supply 9 million additional doses to the 27-nation bloc, whose leaders are facing criticism over what is perceived as slow progress in inoculating the population.

Britain has Europe’s deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 108,000 deaths, and is in its third national lockdown as authorities try to contain a new, more transmissible virus variant first identified in southeast England.

Other variants are also a concern. Public health officials in England are going door to door, trying to test all adults in eight targeted communities in an attempt to stop a new strain first identified in South Africa from spreading further.

So far 105 cases of the variant have been identified in the U.K., 11 of them in people with no links to overseas travel. Scientists say there’s no evidence the South African variant is more serious than the original virus but it may be more contagious. There are also concerns that current vaccines may be less effective against that variant because it contains a mutation of the virus’ characteristic spike protein that existing vaccines target.

That is a worry as the U.K. races to vaccinate its own population against the virus. Almost 10 million people have received the first of their two shots, including the bulk of people over 80 and those in nursing homes.

Pollard said Oxford scientists believe the AstraZeneca vaccine will continue to offer protection against new variants of COVID-19, although they are still waiting for data on that.

He said even if the virus adapts “that doesn’t mean that we won’t still have protection against severe disease.”

“If we do need to update the vaccines, then it is actually a relatively straightforward process. It only

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 84 of 86

takes a matter of months, rather than the huge efforts that everyone went through last year to get the very large-scale trials run," he told the BBC.

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>

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 4, the 35th day of 2021. There are 330 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 4, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin began a wartime conference at Yalta.

On this date:

In 1783, Britain's King George III proclaimed a formal cessation of hostilities in the American Revolutionary War.

In 1789, electors chose George Washington to be the first president of the United States.

In 1861, delegates from six southern states that had recently seceded from the Union met in Montgomery, Alabama, to form the Confederate States of America.

In 1913, Rosa Parks, a Black woman whose 1955 refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., city bus to a white man sparked a civil rights revolution, was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee.

In 1944, the Bronze Star Medal, honoring "heroic or meritorious achievement or service," was authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1962, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital was founded in Memphis, Tennessee, by entertainer Danny Thomas.

In 1974, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst, 19, was kidnapped in Berkeley, California, by the radical Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1976, more than 23,000 people died when a severe earthquake struck Guatemala with a magnitude of 7.5, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1983, pop singer-musician Karen Carpenter died in Downey, California, at age 32.

In 1997, a civil jury in Santa Monica, California, found O.J. Simpson liable for the deaths of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman.

In 1999, Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant, was shot and killed in front of his Bronx home by four plainclothes New York City police officers. (The officers were acquitted at trial.)

In 2004, the Massachusetts high court declared that gay couples were entitled to nothing less than marriage, and that Vermont-style civil unions would not suffice.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama appealed to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to focus on his legacy and begin an orderly process to relinquish the power he'd held for 30 years; however, Obama stopped short of calling for Mubarak's immediate resignation. Iraq's prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, said he would return half of his annual salary to the public treasury in a symbolic gesture that appeared calculated to insulate him against anti-government unrest spreading across the Middle East.

Five years ago: In their first one-on-one debate, Hillary Clinton accused Bernie Sanders of subjecting her to an "artful smear" by trying to cast her as beholden to Wall Street interests while Sanders suggested the former secretary of state was a captive of America's political establishment during the Democratic faceoff in Durham, New Hampshire. Infuriating members of Congress, a smirking Martin Shkreli took the Fifth at a Capitol Hill hearing on his practice of jacking up drug prices as CEO of Turing Pharmaceuticals.

One year ago: Thousands of medical workers in Hong Kong were on strike for a second day to demand that the country's border with China be completely closed to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus; the territory reported its first death from the virus and the second known fatality outside China. Address-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 85 of 86

ing a nation and a Congress sharply divided over his impeachment, President Donald Trump delivered a State of the Union address in which he hailed a "Great American Comeback" on his watch; Republican legislators chanted "Four More Years," while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ripped up her copy of Trump's speech as he ended the address. Daniel arap Moi, a former schoolteacher who became Kenya's longest-serving president, died at 95.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jerry Adler is 92. Former Argentinian President Isabel Peron is 90. Actor Gary Conway is 85. Actor John Schuck is 81. Rock musician John Steel (The Animals) is 80. Singer Florence LaRue (The Fifth Dimension) is 79. Former Vice President Dan Quayle is 74. Rock singer Alice Cooper is 73. Actor Michael Beck is 72. Actor Lisa Eichhorn is 69. Football Hall of Famer Lawrence Taylor is 62. Actor Pamelyn Ferdin is 62. Rock singer Tim Booth is 61. Rock musician Henry Bogdan is 60. Country singer Clint Black is 59. Rock musician Noodles (The Offspring) is 58. Actor Gabrielle Anwar is 51. Actor Rob Corddry is 50. Singer David (dah-VEED') Garza is 50. Actor Michael Goorjian is 50. TV personality Nicolle Wallace is 49. Olympic gold medal boxer Oscar De La Hoya is 48. Rock musician Rick Burch (Jimmy Eat World) is 46. Singer Natalie Imbruglia (em-BROO'-lee-ah) is 46. Rapper Cam'ron is 45. Rock singer Gavin DeGraw is 44. Rock singer Zoe Manville is 37. Actor/musician Bashy, AKA Ashley Thomas, is 36. Actor Charlie Barnett is 33. Olympic gold medal gymnast-turned-singer Carly Patterson is 33. Actor Kyla Kenedy (cq) (TV: "Speechless") is 18.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Feb. 04, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 215 ~ 86 of 86

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