Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 1 of 99

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 2 of 99

Executive Director of South Dakota Democratic Party will leave position at the end of February

Sioux Falls, SD (Feb. 9, 2021) – The South Dakota Democratic Party announces the resignation of Executive Director Pam Cole. The leadership of the party wishes her well in her new pursuits.

"Pam joined us as a time when we needed someone committed to helping us rebuild from scratch the day-to-day operations of the party. We're thankful for her hard work and tenacity as she organized, put in place procedures, and hired and trained new staff. We wish Pam all the best and welcome her continued involvement in the party."
– Randy Seiler, Chair

Pam is a past South Dakota State Senator representing District 7 from 2009 to 2011. She continued to be involved in the Democratic Party as a volunteer up until the time she joined the party as Executive Director. Her last day in the role will be Friday, February 26, 2021.

"The past year has provided many challenges and opportunities for me to meet and work with Democrats throughout the state in a grassroots effort to rebuild our party. Although it has been a privilege, unfortunately I must resign the position for personal reasons. I wish every success to the South Dakota Democratic Party and all future Democratic candidates and their efforts." – Pam Cole, Executive Director

The search for a new executive director will begin immediately and staff members will continue to handle the daily work of the party. Cole notified the Executive Board Monday evening, and the State Central Committee was notified after via email.

"Pam's efforts and passion for the party got us through a challenging time and put us on the right path going forward. I'm grateful for her dedication and wish her well in her future pursuits. I know she'll continue to be a valuable and involved leader in our party." – Troy Heinert, Senate Minority Leader

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 3 of 99

Students visit Pierre for CTSO Legislative Shadow Day

PIERRE, S.D. – February is National Career and Technical Education Month. As part of the celebration, 34 student leaders came to Pierre Feb. 3, for the South Dakota Career and Technical Student Organizations' Legislative Shadow Day. Students shadowed legislators at committee meetings and observed House and Senate floor sessions (list of attending students attached).

"Career and technical education provides students hands-on learning opportunities, which can set them on the path to high-demand careers," said Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson. "Career and technical student organizations take classroom learning a step further, giving students the chance to connect with peers across the state, develop leadership skills, and learn the importance of community service."

Students representing the following CTSOs attended this year's event: Educators Rising; Future Business Leaders of America; Family, Career and Community Leaders of America; FFA; SD HOSA, a group for students interested in health sciences; and SkillsUSA, an association of trade, technology, and health occupation students.

By participating in CTSOs, students can apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom through competitive events; develop leadership and employability skills; and serve their communities.

Career and technical education seeks to equip students with core academic skills and the ability to apply those skills for careers and life. CTE emphasizes employability skills like critical thinking, responsibility, and technical skills related to specific career pathways.

Caitlynn Barse of Groton was one of those attending.

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 4 of 99

Gov. Noem to Deliver Special Address to South Dakota Legislature

Governor Kristi Noem will deliver a special address to the South Dakota legislature on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 2 pm CT/1 pm MT. The speech will take place in the chamber of the South Dakota House of Representatives. Governor Noem's speech will focus on revised revenue projections.

WHAT: Gov. Noem to deliver Special Address
WHEN: Tuesday, February 9, 2021 – 2:00 pm CT/1:00 pm MT
WHERE: South Dakota State Capitol – House of Representatives
STREAM LINKS: Facebook.com/govnoem OR SD.Net

Junior high teams beat Webster Area

Groton Area hosted Webster Area in junior high boys basketball on Monday.

The seventh graders won thanks to a 15-point rally in the third quarter with final score of 39-31. Ryder Johnson led the Tigers with 19 points while Keegen Tracy had 10, Gage Sippel six and Karter Moody and JD Schwan each had two points.

The eighth graders won their game, 30-24. Taylor Diegel led the Tigers with 16 points while Carter Simon had five and adding two points apiece were Blake Pauli, Logan Pearson, Payton Mitchell and Keegan Tracy with Ryder Johnson adding one.

Dangerous health insurance bill in South Dakota legislature

The Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota (IIASD) warned consumers today of a legislative bill that dangerously removes all consumer protections for certain health insurance-type plans. The bill, SB87, exempts agricultural-based organization health plans from all legal protections found in South Dakota insurance laws and regulations as well as those found in the federal ACA law.

Carolyn Hofer, spokesperson for IIASD, said "Unlike other health insurance plans sold in South Dakota, these plans will be allowed to underwrite applicants for preexisting conditions and have the potential to drive up health insurance premiums for everyone due to their option to cover only healthier people". People with certain preexisting conditions can be denied coverage under these plans and if accepted, will certainly be charged a much higher premium."

Farm Bureau, who is a promoter of this bill, supports similar legislation which was previously passed in Tennessee. According to data provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures, Tennessee has had their health insurance premiums for Silver ACA plans increase by 52% in 2018.

Among the many legal protections excluded for these plans under SB87 include mental health benefits, coverage for mammograms, autism coverage, and coverage for newborn and adopted children. Furthermore, financial oversight to assure adequate finances to pay future claims is lacking for these health plans.

SB87 is currently under consideration by the South Dakota House of Representatives. IIASD urges citizens to contact their representatives and urge them to VOTE NO on SB87.

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 6 of 99

Upcoming Schedule

Tuesday, Feb. 9
Girls Basketball hosts Tiospa Zina. JV game (Ed and Connie Stauch) at 6 p.m. followed by varsity.

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).

Tuesday, Feb. 16: Girls Basketball hosts Warner with JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

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.

Monday, Feb. 22: Boys Basketball hosts Warner with JV at 6:30 p.m. followed by varsity.

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

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 8 of 99

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 9 of 99

Capital Area United Way and Delta Dental Mobile Program Provide Dental Care to 52 Local Children

PIERRE, S.D. – A healthy smile allows children to exude confidence, while a pain free mouth also ensures they are able to focus on learning instead of discomfort. In an effort to continue supporting community members who need it most, the Capital Area United Way, through a partnership with the Delta Dental Mobile Program, provided dental care to 52 local children the last week in January.

The Delta Dental Mobile Program provides oral health services to children who have not visited a dentist in at least two years, due to numerous reasons, including lack of insurance or transportation. A wide range of dental care is available, such as exams, X-rays, cleanings, preventive treatments, cavity fillings, crowns, and extractions. Kids are also provided a toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, and demonstration on how to better care for their teeth at home. Services are available to children who are just getting their first tooth all the way through age 21 and these services are provided at no cost to the child or family.

During the Delta Dental Mobile visit in late January, the bus provided $26,956 worth of dental care to 52 children. Over 85% of the patients were between the ages of 3-12 years old. Sixty restorative procedures were completed during the week and included cavity fillings, crowns, and extractions. To help prevent cavities in their molars, 174 sealants were placed.

The Capital Area United Way hopes each of those 52 children went home last week feeling more confident, experiencing less oral pain, ready to take better care of their teeth, and smiling ear to ear.

The Capital Area United Way is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supporting 17 nonprofit agencies in our community. Established in 1989, Capital Area United Way has worked within the Pierre and Fort Pierre area to raise funds for nonprofit organizations providing impactful programs for our communities. To learn more, visit capareaunitedway.org or follow us on Facebook and Instagram @capareaunitedway.

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 10 of 99

Click on ad below for more details

#351 in a series
Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

This was another day of lower numbers. Tomorrow will tell us more about the pattern as we move away from the weekend, but things are looking pretty good. We are now at 27,131,600 cases reported in the US in this pandemic, which is 0.3% more than we had reported yesterday. There were 90,600 new cases reported today—lowest number since November 1, over three months ago. I want to put into perspective that this is 20 percent higher than the worst day last summer, but still, this is real progress.

Hospitalizations also continue to decline. They have been steadily doing so for over a month now. We're at 81,439. Consider that a month ago yesterday we hit our peak at 132,464 and the number of hospitalized people stayed above 100,000 for two solid months. As of today, we've been below 100,000 for 9 days. That takes a whole lot of pressure off the system and gives sorely tried health care workers something of a break. We can hope that continues.

Deaths are also low today at 1458. I think the holiday surge is pretty much through now, so these could reasonably be expected to continue to decline. We are, however, at 464,779 deaths in the US, and I don't see any way we avoid hitting a half-million. That's not so great.

We knew we were seriously undercounting Covid-19 cases, but it turns out we're undercounting even diagnosed Covid-19 cases. That's because five states, California, Nevada, Colorado, Missouri, and Maryland, do not report cases diagnosed with the rapid antigen tests, only those confirmed with fancy PCR tests. That means they're not reporting some cases we know are Covid-19. The undercounting probably isn't a big deal now when not so many of these antigen tests are in use, but it's likely to get worse as the numbers of antigen tests performed rises. This is going to make it most difficult to spot trends like increasing case numbers going forward.

I'll mention today marks the first death of a Member of Congress to this virus, Congressman Ron Wright from Texas. (I will note here the earlier loss of a congressman-elect, Luke Letlow of Louisiana, just days before he was to be sworn in.) The Congressman had been treated for cancer in recent months. Wherever you are on the political spectrum—or even if you dislike the entire political enterprise—this is a sad thing—just one more family left to grieve someone they loved.

Here's a piece of bad news: Use of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in South Africa has been halted because of evidence developed in a clinical trial that the vaccine has very little effect in preventing mild to moderate illness caused by the B.1.351 variant which has become prevalent there. None of these troubling data have been published or peer-reviewed, but this is a blow. This follows reports we discussed several days ago that people who were infected with earlier variants can be reinfected with this new one, so there clearly is some antigenic mismatch between the older and this newer variant—not at all a good thing. There is still a reasonable possibility the vaccine would protect against severe disease; there is reason from blood samples of vaccinated individuals to think it may. It will also help to remember that the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine protected very well in a South African population with predominantly B.1.351 variant circulating against severe disease and hospitalization; we must also keep in mind that the Janssen vaccine has the same kind of platform and the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. The number of cases seen before the trial was stopped is too low to permit drawing conclusions on that point. The participants who've been vaccinated so far in the trial were mostly young, so they are at low risk for severe disease anyway; but this doesn't tell us anything about the larger population. There will be a continuation of vaccination for 100,000 people in order to study the impact of the vaccine on severe disease and hospitalization; if those data are promising, the situation will be reevaluated. That means it is possible the vaccine will be employed in South Africa anyway, but it is simply too early to make predictions. The news certainly could have been better.

We've known for a while—and have discussed—that the other front-runner vaccines, Moderna, Pfizer/BioNTech, Janssen/Johnson & Johnson, and Novavax, all appear to be protective against this variant, particularly against severe disease, even though the protection is somewhat reduced. That means we're not out of ideas for vaccination, but losing one possibility makes it that much more difficult to get people

protected across the world.

In further bad news, the B.1.1.7 viral variant which first surfaced in the UK is rapidly becoming more dominant in the US, outcompeting other variants. A team from a number of institutions sequenced viral genomes sampled in the US in December and January and report in findings available in preprint (not yet peer-reviewed) there have been several independent introductions of the variant to the US beginning in late November with spread to at least 30 states by last month. While it is still at "a relatively low frequency in the U.S.," the growth rate is daunting, "at least 35-45%, increased and doubling every week and a half." With significantly increased transmissibility, the virus according to these authors "is almost certainly destined to become the dominant SARS-CoV-2 lineage by March, 2021 across many U.S. states." The states sampled currently showing highest numbers of cases with the variant are Florida and California. This highlights the need for stepped up precautions against spread and an aggressive vaccination strategy. It is still possible to run ahead of this variant with vaccination, but we are in a race. Reducing transmissions while we get our population vaccinated is critical.

And vaccination rates are rising. The President set a goal at his inauguration of one million doses per day for his first 100 days in office and then about a week later revised that estimate upward to set a goal of 1.5 million per day. On Saturday, we vaccinated two million people. Now, I don't know that we can sustain that number right this minute, but we've brought our average up to 1.4 million, and that even after a truly dismal start. So we are definitely moving in the right direction.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and advisor to the White House, predicted today that the vaccine supply will continue to increase into the spring. And if the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson candidate is approved in a few weeks, as is anticipated, this one-dose vaccine would substantially improve the supply, even though it does not appear the company is going to be immediately cranking out the kind of production we've seen from the two authorized vaccines.

I'll add here that 10 percent of the US population has received at least one dose of a vaccine as of today's reporting, according to the CDC. That's not enough, but it's a huge leap from where we were two or three weeks ago. A higher percentage of distributed doses has been administered, which is a sign we're getting a handle on our vaccination programs. I know there are still problems, primarily in states that didn't make both vaccination appointments at once—people are having trouble scheduling that second dose not because there is a shortage of vaccine, but because appointments are filling up on the schedules. I know from friends who are assisting senior citizens that one of the big issues is the need to schedule online. Many older Americans aren't so computer-savvy and are struggling to get those scheduled. Still, we are making progress. At last.

Scott Gottlieb, a former commissioner of the FDA, said on Twitter today that he expects by April, vaccine will be available to all adults who want it. We really need to work on the demand side of that equation because there's no way in April we have enough people vaccinated; this is the point at which (or before which) we need to work hard on persuasive efforts with the vaccine-reluctant. We cannot get this pandemic under control without a substantial share of the population protected; and until we get it under control, the possibility persists of a new mutation that is capable of immune escape. Nobody wants that. Nobody.

In something of a silver lining to our cloud, we should note that influenza cases and deaths plummeted this year. This is undoubtedly due to the precautions we are taking against the spread of Covid-19; since both are respiratory diseases, the same precautions prevent transmission of both. While it doesn't hold a candle to this virus, influenza sickens and kills plenty of Americans in the average year. Dr. Fauci did not miss this opportunity to point out in a Fox News interview that, "This is a very good testimony to the efficacy of wearing masks, avoiding congregate settings and keeping distance. We did that during this last fall/early winter, and the level of influenza in the community is remarkably low regarding comparisons to other years." Indeed, he's right as he generally is.

In further good news, an analysis of cases reported between the weeks ending December 20 and January 24 published today by the US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services indicates new case reports from nursing homes have dropped more than 50 percent over that time. The American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living did a separate analysis which indicates that cases

dropped twice as fast in homes with early vaccination clinics as they did in others. This is pretty stark. If you were wondering whether vaccination could help to stem this pandemic, here you go.

I'll note that two Sumatran tigers at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo in Indiana have been diagnosed. One was showing symptoms last week, so they were tested. We knew that cats, especially big cats, are more susceptible than many other animals, although they generally do pretty well when infected. There are no recorded deaths of cats, big or small, from this virus. The source of the infection is being investigated and precautions are being taken.

Speaking of animals, I want to introduce you to Garip, a female swan who lives in Turkey on the farm of Recep Mirzan, a retired postal worker. Thirty-seven years ago Mirzan was driving with a group of friends when they came upon a swan with a broken wing; Mirzan took her home to protect her from predators, and she stayed. She follows him around the farm, lives mostly unpenned, and has never made any attempt to leave. She goes on walks with him and walks with him as he does his chores. He named her Garip, a word which is used to describe those who are down on their luck—seems apt. A widower who has not had children, Mirzan views Garip the way many of us view our children.

The swan provides Mirzan with companionship, but she gets something out of the deal too. The average lifespan for a swan in the wild is around 12 years, and with some protection, they can live as long as 30 years. No telling how old Garip was when she came to Mirzan, but it's been 37 years since then, and she's still going strong. This is yet another example where helping cuts both ways.

Stay healthy. I'll be back.

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 14 of 99

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 15 of 99

Weekly COVID-19 Report

	Current	Feb. 8	Feb. 1	Jan. 25
Positive	109,283	968	1130	1524
Total Tests	894,240	17,224	18809	22080
Persons Tested	407,796	4913	5362	5657
Hospitalized	6377	93	93	119
Currently Hospitalized	112	126	161	203
Avera	9	10	5	7
Sanford	3	1	3	3
Deaths	1,809	31	73	38
Recovered	105,166	1,457	1912	2418
Active Cases	2308	-520	-850	-935
Vaccinations	125,321	24,273	23,698	20,229
Vac. Completed	39,017	9,331	11466	8391
Female Deaths	857	15	27	22
Male Deaths	952	16	46	16
0-19	0	0	0	0
20s	4	0	0	0
30s	15	0	1	0
40s	34	-1	1	2
50s	106	7	8	2
60s	239	8	11	6
70s	410	6	19	12
80+	1001	11	33	16

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 16 of 99

Weekly COVID-19 Report

	Active	Last Week	Feb. 1	Jan. 25	Deaths
Aurora	17	14	21	21	15
Beadle	59	60	66	79	39
Brookings	121	135	179	243	35
Brown	160	170	171	236	79
Clark	20	10	8	4	4
Clay	22	26	55	83	15
Codington	98	101	124	171	75
Davison	42	52	88	102	59
Day	26	29	26	28	28
Edmunds	17	19	34	49	11
Faulk	12	10	10	4	13
Grant	37	48	55	33	37
Hanson	12	6	6	13	4
Hughes	42	62	99	92	33
Lawrence	32	44	53	93	44
Lincoln	150	190	248	298	75
Marshall	6	12	13	14	5
McCook	10	7	13	18	24
McPherson	11	21	28	27	4
Minnehaha	551	665	866	1055	319
Pennington	258	320	404	545	177
Potter	15	12	18	26	3
Roberts	19	23	39	55	35
Spink	35	25	29	33	25
Walworth	19	23	44	54	15

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	450	428	834	15	Minimal	0.00%
Beadle	2624	2526	5585	39	Moderate	11.97%
Bennett	378	363	1139	9	Minimal	0.00%
Bon Homme	1499	1473	2002	24	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3478	3322	11185	35	Substantial	2.76%
Brown	5017	4778	12078	79	Substantial	10.56%
Brule	680	665	1807	9	Minimal	0.00%
Buffalo	419	403	881	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	961	926	3080	20	Moderate	3.16%
Campbell	126	120	244	4	Minimal	7.69%
Charles Mix	1233	1190	3780	18	Substantial	14.29%
Clark	355	331	914	4	Substantial	5.56%
Clay	1763	1726	4961	15	Moderate	5.37%
Codington	3795	3622	9254	75	Substantial	7.98%
Corson	461	445	984	11	Minimal	4.55%
Custer	731	709	2602	12	Moderate	9.84%
Davison	2913	2812	6209	59	Moderate	2.99%
Day	625	571	1681	28	Substantial	20.45%
Deuel	460	446	1077	8	Minimal	0.00%
Dewey	1390	1356	3721	21	Moderate	2.04%
Douglas	416	399	871	9	Minimal	3.45%
Edmunds	468	440	981	11	Moderate	0.00%
Fall River	512	488	2495	15	Moderate	6.85%
Faulk	345	320	667	13	Moderate	9.09%
Grant	930	856	2104	37	Substantial	17.74%
Gregory	514	467	1186	27	Moderate	6.90%
Haakon	244	231	513	9	Minimal	7.69%
Hamlin	673	616	1682	38	Moderate	12.12%
Hand	323	311	763	6	Minimal	0.00%
Hanson	342	326	675	4	Moderate	13.04%
Harding	91	89	175	1	Minimal	20.00%
Hughes	2222	2147	6237	33	Substantial	1.04%
Hutchinson	767	723	2231	24	Moderate	7.32%

Hyde	135	133	393	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	271	253	892	14	Minimal	8.33%
Jerauld	268	246	535	16	Minimal	9.09%
Jones	82	81	208	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	611	585	1558	13	Moderate	3.28%
Lake	1152	1099	3099	17	Moderate	2.15%
Lawrence	2766	2690	8188	44	Moderate	3.98%
Lincoln	7527	7302	19215	75	Substantial	7.99%
Lyman	591	577	1824	10	Minimal	0.00%
Marshall	289	278	1111	5	Minimal	0.00%
McCook	725	691	1539	24	Moderate	10.26%
McPherson	236	221	530	4	Minimal	0.92%
Meade	2498	2418	7314	31	Moderate	8.62%
Mellette	241	236	707	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	269	245	545	7	Minimal	0.00%
Minnehaha	27264	26394	74003	319	Substantial	8.31%
Moody	604	576	1685	16	Minimal	6.06%
Oglala Lakota	2042	1963	6485	44	Moderate	2.20%
Pennington	12501	12066	37533	177	Substantial	7.70%
Perkins	339	314	756	12	Moderate	0.00%
Potter	355	337	793	3	Moderate	28.00%
Roberts	1117	1063	3961	35	Substantial	6.60%
Sanborn	325	318	657	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	787	727	2045	25	Substantial	10.23%
Stanley	320	309	876	2	Moderate	3.85%
Sully	135	131	290	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1214	1176	4042	26	Moderate	8.96%
Tripp	659	636	1429	15	Moderate	1.23%
Turner	1046	987	2577	50	Moderate	5.88%
Union	1904	1800	5852	39	Substantial	12.96%
Walworth	709	675	1763	15	Moderate	11.48%
Yankton	2759	2687	8861	28	Moderate	1.75%
Ziebach	337	327	850	9	Minimal	7.14%
Unassigned	0	0	1799	0		

South Dakota

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
43	11	2,308	105,166	112

Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
97,449	11,834	6.8%	407,796	894,240

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)
6,377	1,809	345%	242%	39%

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4277	0
10-19 years	12227	0
20-29 years	19589	4
30-39 years	17981	15
40-49 years	15592	34
50-59 years	15393	106
60-69 years	12493	239
70-79 years	6684	410
80+ years	5047	1001

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

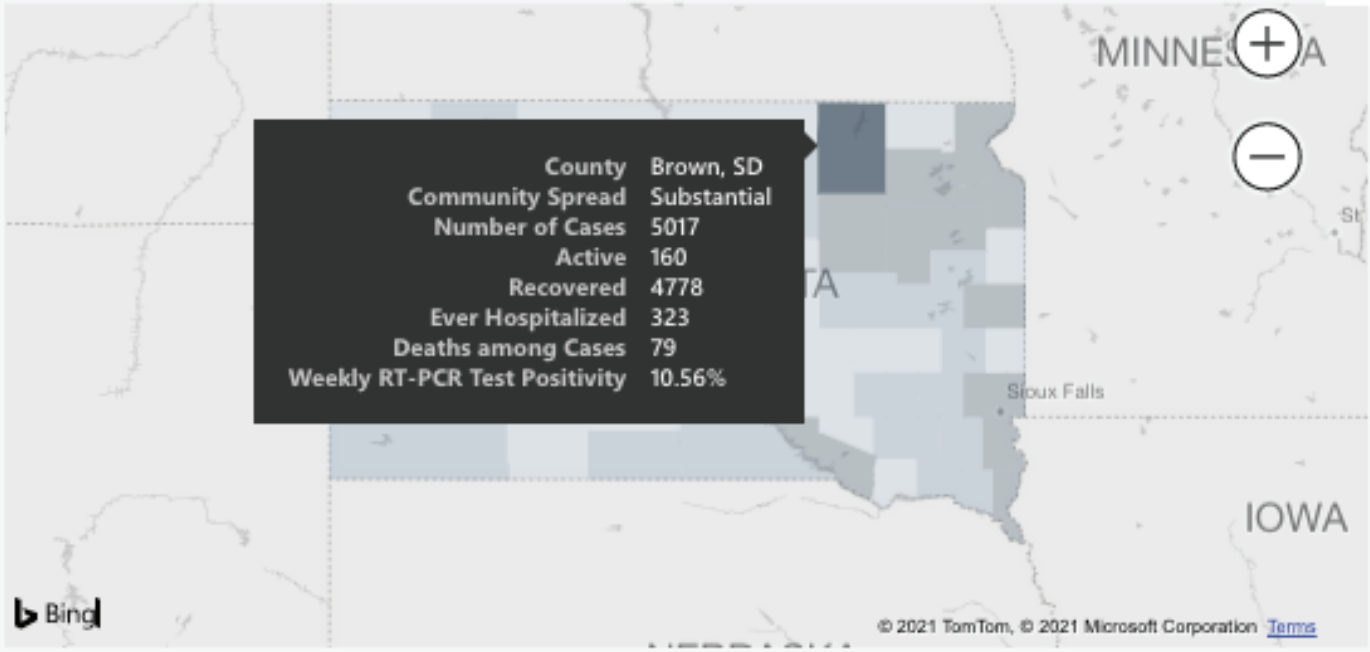
Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57013	857
Male	52270	952

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 20 of 99

Brown County

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
1	0	160	4,778	112

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread Minimal Moderate Substantial

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

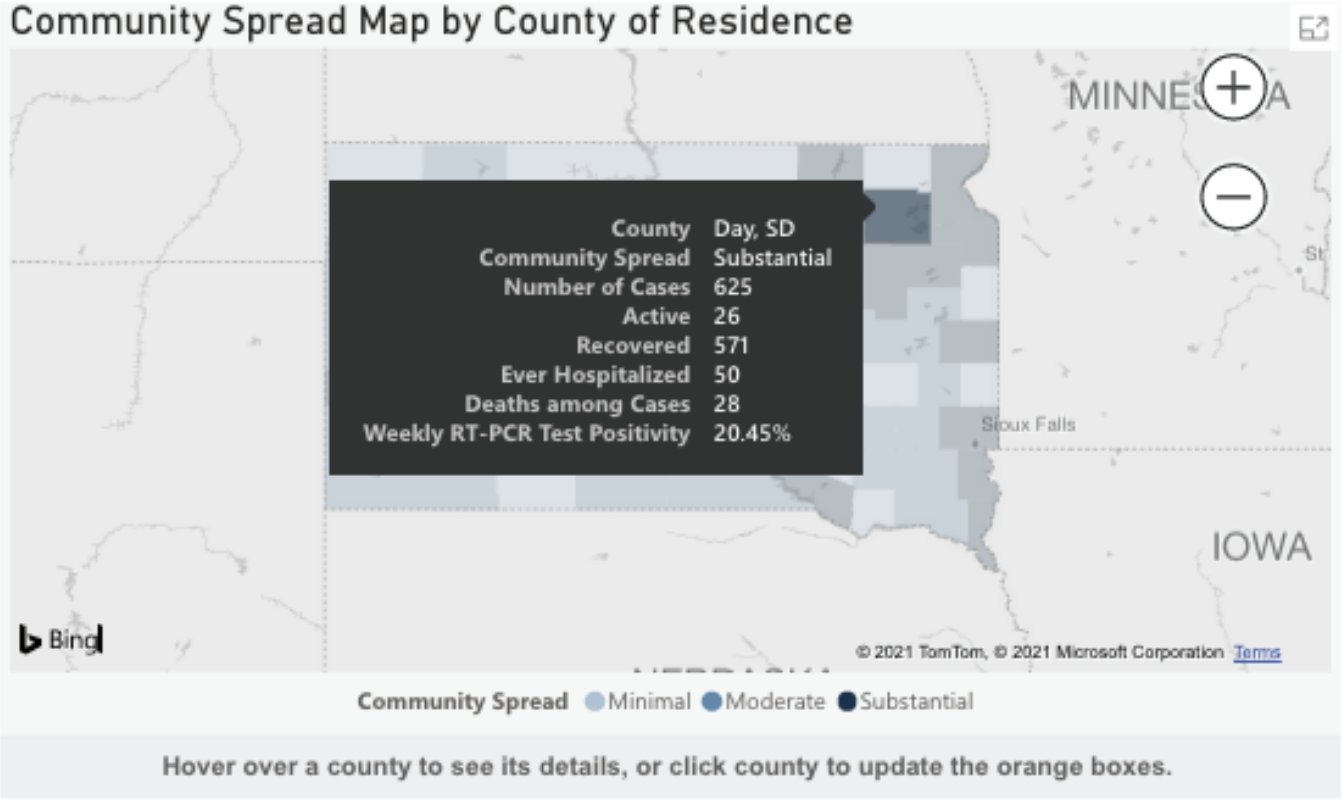
Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
4,502	515	1.4%	17,095	43,350

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)
323	79	345%	242%	39%

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 21 of 99

Day County

New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Currently Hospitalized
1	1	26	571	112



Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases	RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
494	131	12.5%	2,306	7,284

Ever Hospitalized	Deaths Among Cases	% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)	% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)
50	28	345%	242%	39%

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 22 of 99

Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

125,321

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

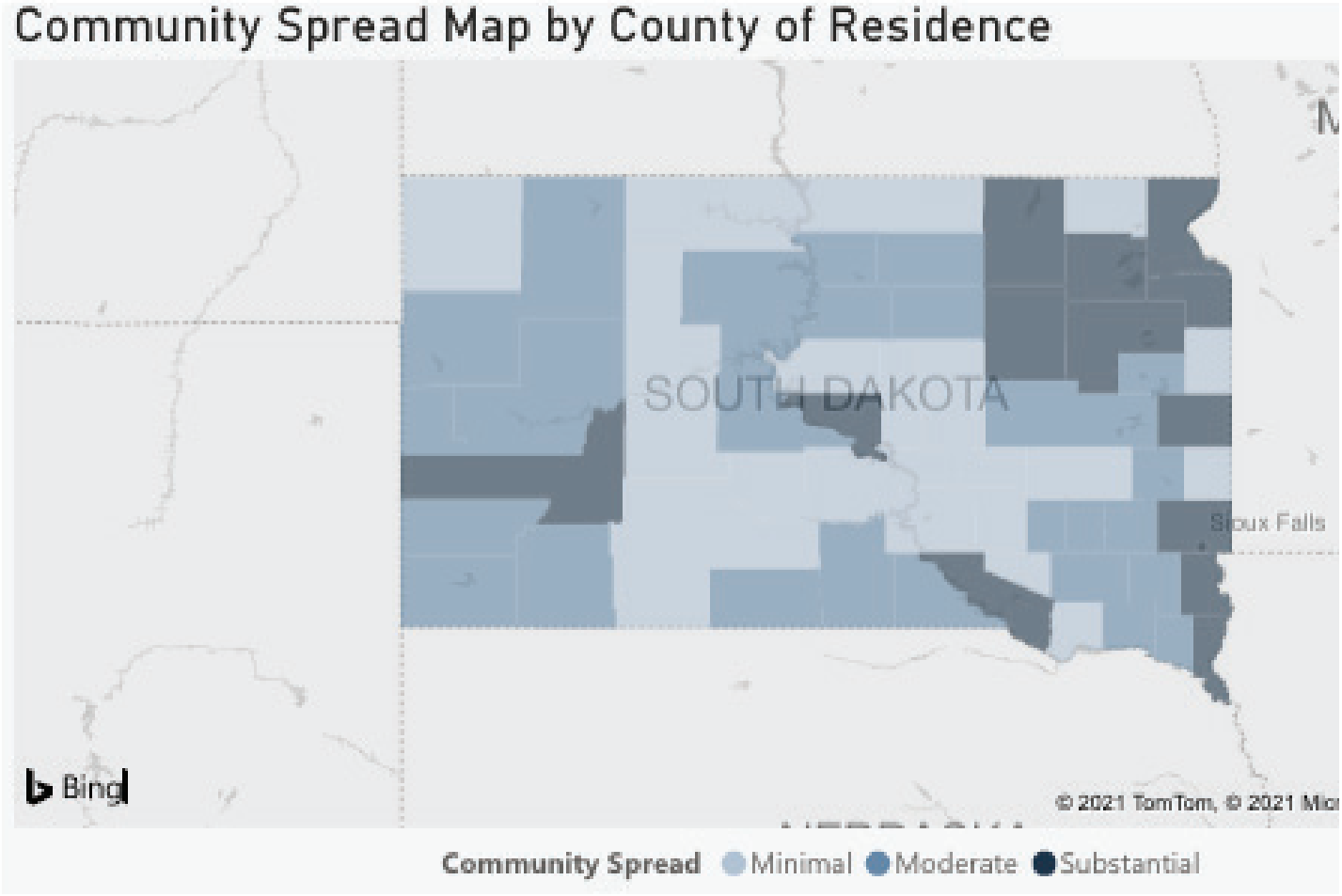
86,304

Manufacturer	Number of Doses
Moderna	66,272
Pfizer	59,049

Doses	Number of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	25,346
Moderna - Series Complete	20,463
Pfizer - 1 dose	21,941
Pfizer - Series Complete	18,554

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	322	140	91	**231**
Beadle	2375	1,143	616	**1,759**
Bennett*	205	123	41	**164**
Bon Homme*	1166	322	422	**744**
Brookings	3436	1,460	988	**2,448**
Brown	5547	1,771	1,888	**3,659**
Brule*	763	369	197	**566**
Buffalo*	83	75	4	**79**
Butte	665	387	139	**526**
Campbell	474	110	182	**292**
Charles Mix*	1098	372	363	**735**
Clark	458	234	112	**346**
Clay	2052	752	650	**1,402**
Codington*	4073	1,619	1,227	**2,846**
Corson*	83	57	13	**70**
Custer*	945	481	232	**713**
Davison	3651	1,009	1,321	**2,330**
Day*	953	425	264	**689**
Deuel	556	270	143	**413**
Dewey*	194	84	55	**139**
Douglas*	537	145	196	**341**
Edmunds	422	182	120	**302**
Fall River*	1074	488	293	**781**
Faulk	288	216	36	**252**
Grant*	982	262	360	**622**
Gregory*	657	207	225	**432**
Haakon*	242	88	77	**165**

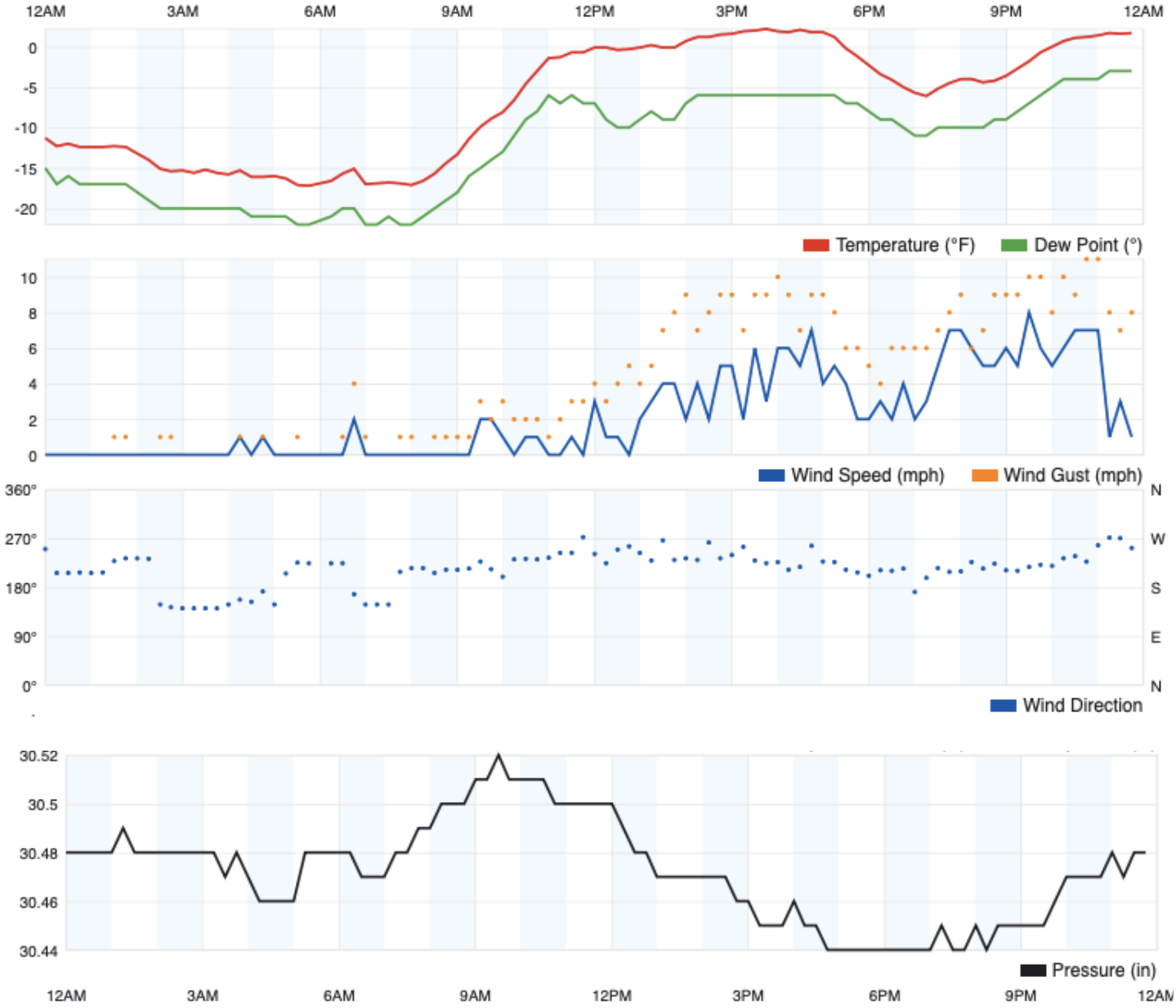
Hamlin	673	305	184	**489**
Hand	517	185	166	**351**
Hanson	182	56	63	**119**
Harding	25	19	3	**22**
Hughes*	2886	1,266	810	**2,076**
Hutchinson*	1400	360	520	**880**
Hyde*	242	60	91	**151**
Jackson*	162	92	35	**127**
Jerauld	240	106	67	**173**
Jones*	265	101	82	**183**
Kingsbury	803	305	249	**554**
Lake	1427	629	399	**1,028**
Lawrence	2570	1,644	463	**2,107**
Lincoln	12059	3,219	4,420	**7,639**
Lyman*	267	159	54	**213**
Marshall*	603	317	143	**460**
McCook	845	327	259	**586**
McPherson	80	40	20	**60**
Meade*	2137	1,199	469	**1,668**
Mellette*	17	5	6	**11**
Miner	338	138	100	**238**
Minnehaha	33837	11,419	11,209	**22,628**
Moody*	598	196	201	**397**
Oglala Lakota*	57	37	10	**47**
Pennington*	13790	6,706	3,542	**10,248**
Perkins*	178	106	36	**142**
Potter	295	73	111	**184**
Roberts*	1481	995	243	**1,238**
Sanborn	386	218	84	**302**
Spink	1253	329	462	**791**
Stanley*	415	175	120	**295**
Sully	121	73	24	**97**
Todd*	75	27	24	**51**
Tripp*	853	363	245	**608**
Turner	1554	488	533	**1,021**
Union	825	319	253	**572**
Walworth*	767	325	221	**546**
Yankton	4686	1,250	1,718	**2,968**
Ziebach*	32	14	9	**23**
Other	3079	851	1,114	**1,965**


Community Spread Map by County of Residence
SOUTH DAKOTA
Sioux Falls
Bing
© 2021 TomTom, © 2021 Mic
Community Spread
Minimal
Moderate
Substantial

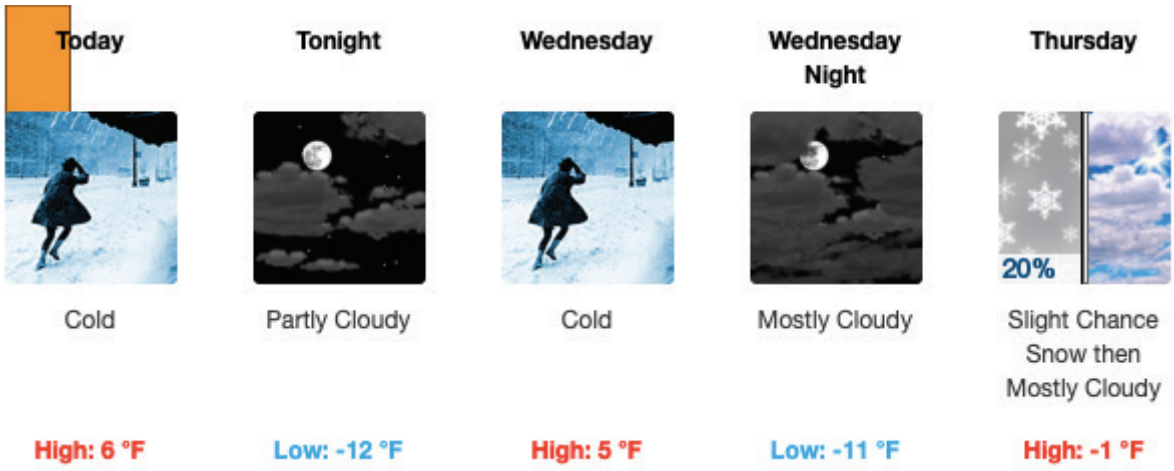
Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 25 of 99

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 26 of 99

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

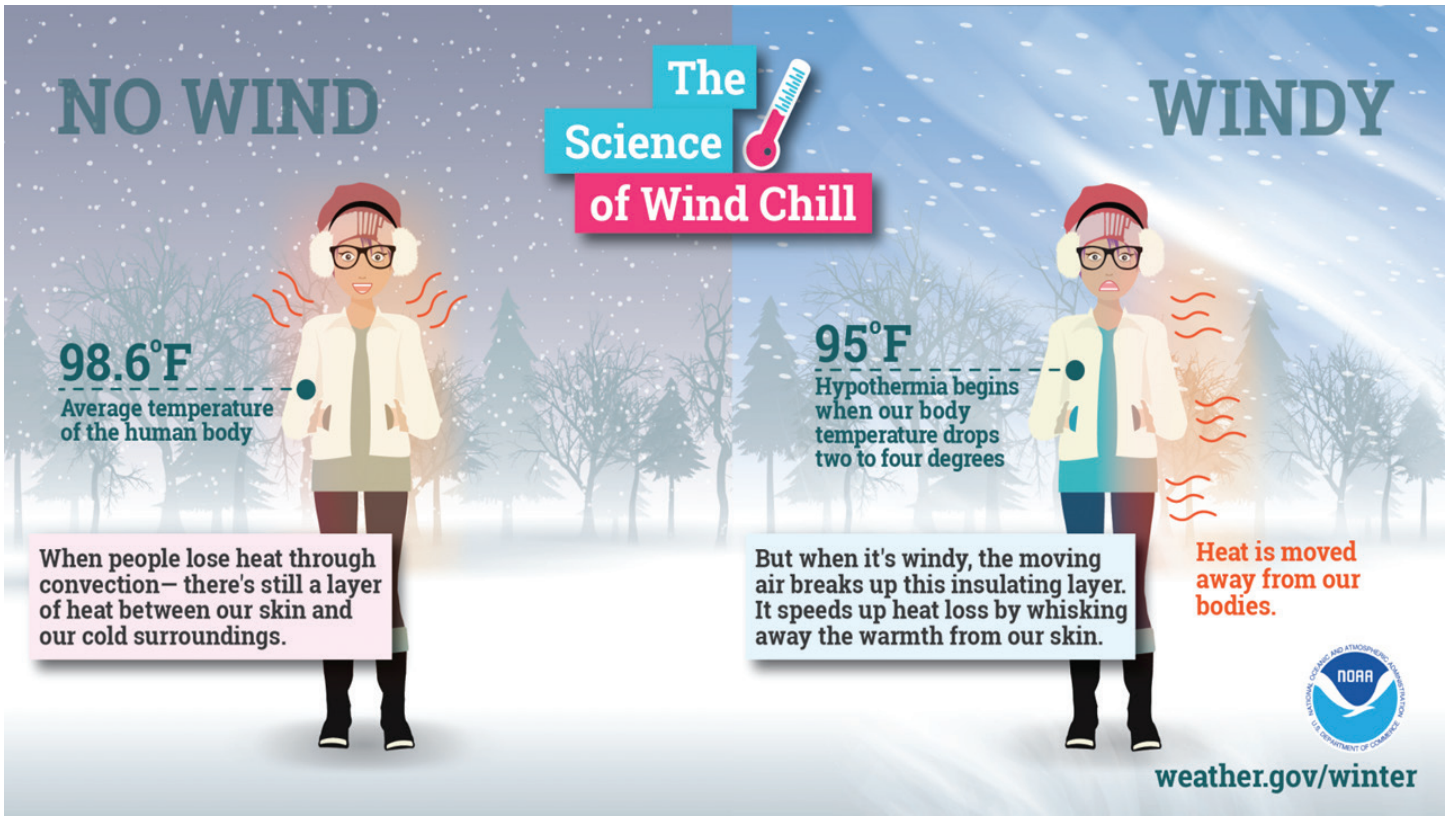


Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 27 of 99



An arctic air mass will remain firmly in place over the forecast area through the rest of the work week, with continued bitterly cold wind chills, and a chance for flurries or light snow from time to time. #sdwx #mnwx

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 28 of 99



Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 29 of 99

Today in Weather History

February 9, 1899: Extreme cold blanketed most locations east of the Rocky Mountains during the first half of February. For South Dakota, the minimum temperature was the lowest that has been experienced for many years, at least, and probably since its settlement. The week ending the 13th of February, the Weather Bureau stated: "With respect to temperature, this week is probably the most remarkable in the history of the Weather Bureau, over the greater part of the country east of the Rocky Mountains a large number of stations reporting the lowest temperatures recorded since their establishment. Over the whole region, extending from the eastern Rocky Mountain slope to the Atlantic coast and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes, the average daily deficiency exceeded 20 degrees and ranged from 30 degrees to 35 degrees over an extensive area embracing the central valleys and portions of the Lake Region."

The cold weather that culminated in the extremes, in South Dakota, began on January 26th and continued with little abatement over most of the state, until February 12th. During the first twelve days of February the daily average temperatures, at the Weather Bureau stations ranged from zero to 27 degrees below zero.

Some low-temperature readings from February 8th through the 12th include:

-29 in Spearfish on the 11th
-30 in Yankton on the 11th
-34 in Rapid City on the 11th
-36 in Chamberlain on the 9th
-37 in Ipswich on the 8th
-39 in Mellette on the 11th
-39 in Pierre on the 12th
-40 in DeSmet on the 10th
-42 in Gann Valley on the 8th
-42 Sioux Falls on the 9th
-34 in Milbank on the 9th
-35 in Aberdeen on the 8th and 12th
-36 in Waubay on the 8th
-38 in Watertown on the 11th
-39 in Mitchell on the 11th
-39 in Wessington Springs on the 9th
-40 in Highmore on the 12th
-40 in Redfield on the 9th

February 9, 1994: Widespread record cold occurred across central, north central, and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. Record lows were set at Aberdeen, Mobridge, Pierre, Sisseton, Timber Lake, and Wheaton. Overnight lows were in the 30s to 40s below zero across the entire area. Aberdeen fell to 45 degrees below zero or one degree off the all-time record low of 46 degrees below zero. Mobridge dropped to 38 degrees below zero and Pierre fell to 35 degrees below zero. Watertown came just one degree short of their daytime record with 35 degrees below zero.

1870: The U.S. Congress authorized the War Department to take weather observations at key marine ports, assigning this function to the Army Signal Service. The intention was to provide advanced warning of storm systems that could adversely affect marine interests. This service was the forerunner to the current National Weather Service.

1899: One of the most significant cold outbreaks to ever impact the United States occurred in early to mid-February. From the 8th-11th the statewide average temperature across Iowa was 14.6 degrees below zero making it the coldest four-day stretch on record in the state. On the 8th Sioux City experienced their coldest day on record with a daily average temperature of 24 degrees below zero, then on the 11th, they reached their second-coldest temperature on record with a low of minus 31. Overall the coldest readings were obtained on the morning of the 9th when reported low temperatures included -21 at Keokuk, -23 at Des Moines, -33 at New Hampton, -35 at Le Mars, -38 at Estherville, and -40 at Sibley. The cold across the middle of the country was so extreme and persistent that ice floes down the Mississippi River all the way into the deep south, emerging into the Gulf of Mexico near New Orleans on February 17th. This has happened only one other time: February 13, 1784. The temperature dropped to 63 degrees below zero at Norway House, Manitoba Canada setting the province's low-temperature record.

1994: A devastating ice storm struck Mississippi, Louisiana and extreme northwest Alabama. Freezing rain began falling over North Mississippi during the early morning hours and continued until midday on the 10th. Ice accumulated 3 to 6 inches thick on exposed objects in the affected area. Due to the weight of the ice, power lines, trees and tree limbs were downed. Nearly one million people were without power after the storm, some for a month.

Groton Daily Independent

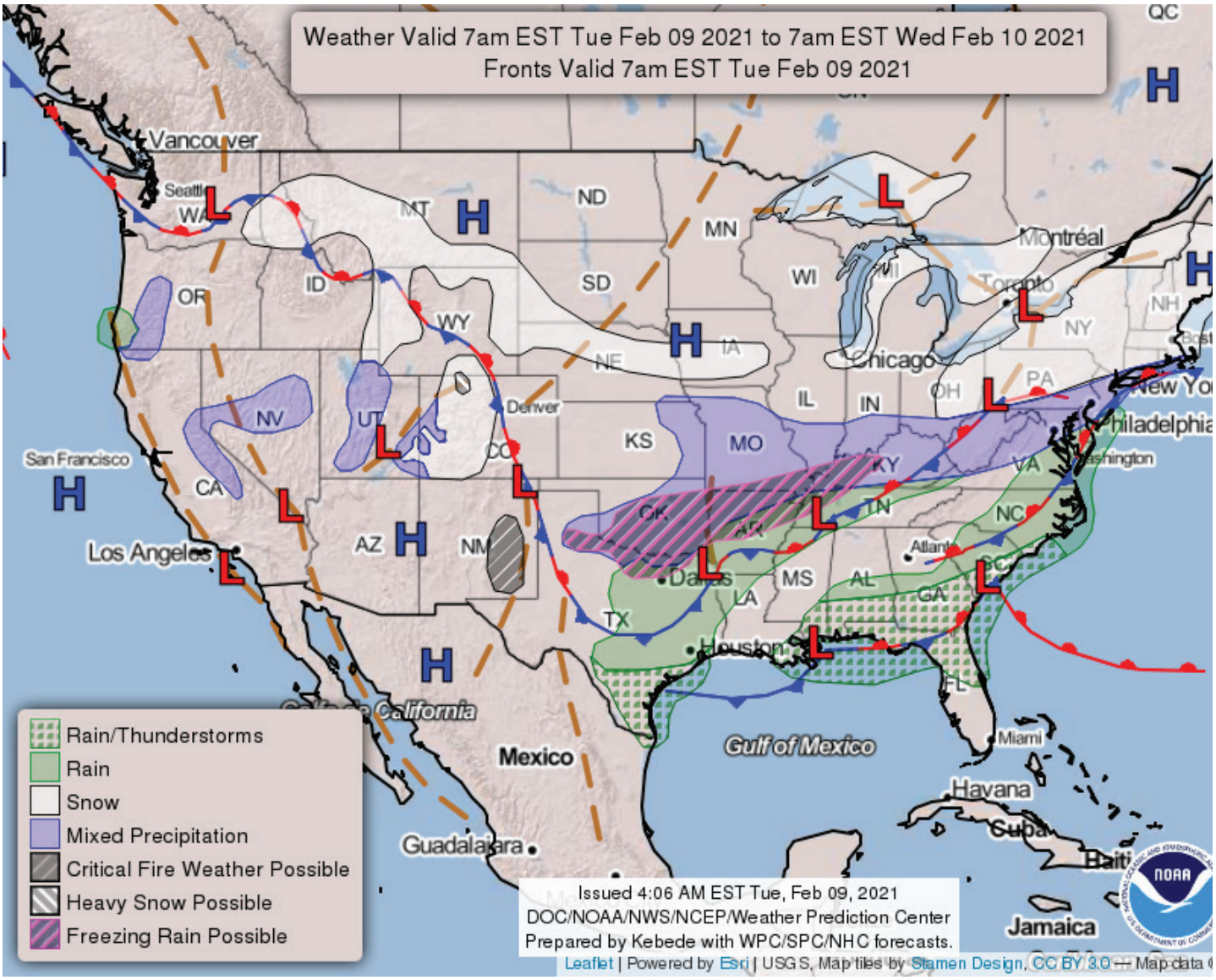
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 30 of 99

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 2 °F at 3:42 PM
Low Temp: -17 °F at 5:33 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 10:40 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 53° in 1977, 1987
Record Low: -45° in 1994
Average High: 26°F
Average Low: 5°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.12
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.59
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:53 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 31 of 99

WHERE TO FIND SECURITY

David had no fear of being honest. He faced life with an openness that allowed him to vent his feelings, state his fears, express his desires, and claim God's promises.

"Keep me safe, O God!" is the way David begins Psalm 16. And then immediately states that he, at that moment in his life and without hesitation or doubt, came to Him for help: "In you I take refuge." He did not say that he took refuge in God in the past or that he planned on taking refuge in God in the future. Indeed not. Something was threatening him at that very moment and, in trust, he immediately went to God for help.

Sometimes we wait before we go to God with our needs. We believe that we are capable of handling our fears and failures by ourselves. We often think that we can cover up our mistakes and faults. But there is nothing in us or about us or has come from us that is beyond God's love, mercy, and power. He knows who we are, sees us as we are, understands what we are going through, and is waiting for our call for help.

The word keep as used in this psalm can also be interpreted to mean watch over – as a shepherd watches over his flock, or as a guard who is accountable and responsible to watch over the prisoners he is charged to control and contain.

David knew the "job description" of a shepherd first-hand. If anything happened to the sheep, the shepherd would be held accountable and responsible. He also knew, as a king, that if prisoners escaped, an entire kingdom could be damaged or destroyed. David knew whom to call on for help. David also knew Who to trust!

Prayer: Help us, Father, to place all of our confidence in Your love and power when we face the unknown. Give us peace in Your ability to protect us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge. Psalm 16:1

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 32 of 99

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Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 33 of 99

News from the Associated Press

Virginia woman's body found off Pennsylvania highway

NEW COLUMBIA, Pa. (AP) — A Virginia woman found dead on an interstate ramp in Pennsylvania was the victim of a homicide, officials said.

The Pennsylvania State Police on Monday did not release how Rebecca Landrith, 47, died or where in Virginia she had lived.

Her body was found Sunday along an Interstate 80 eastbound ramp in Pennsylvania's Union County. She was wearing maternity jeans and a purple shirt with a black leather jacket.

The section of highway was closed for several hours because of the investigation.

Landrith had recently travelled through parts of the Midwest, state police said, and she had ties to several states, including South Dakota and Utah.

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press
BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=
Baltic 48, Colman-Egan 21
DeSmet 77, Castlewood 52
Dell Rapids St. Mary 79, Arlington 41
Ethan 79, Wagner 75
Lemmon 63, Bowman County, N.D. 48
Potter County 82, Stanley County 51
Tiospa Zina Tribal 76, Webster 42
Tri-Valley 47, Lennox 39
GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=
Baltic 73, Colman-Egan 68
Bison 57, McIntosh 33
Castlewood 54, DeSmet 47
Chamberlain 55, Lyman 27
Dell Rapids St. Mary 42, Arlington 39
Ethan 52, Wagner 39
Flandreau 56, Madison 45
Hill City 53, Lakota Tech 46
Lemmon 55, Grant County, N.D. 53
Menno 63, Bridgewater-Emery 45
Potter County 53, Stanley County 15
Sundance, Wyo. 30, Lead-Deadwood 27
Viborg-Hurley 55, Canistota 44
Waubay/Summit 47, Wilmot 32

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

Corps wants delay on hearing to shut down Dakota Access line

By DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Monday asked a federal judge to delay a hearing on a temporary shutdown of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, citing the changeover in personnel with the new administration.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg asked the Corps to outline its plans after an appeals court two weeks ago backed Boasberg's order for an extensive environmental review on the project and essentially confirmed that the pipeline was operating without a key permit. The hearing on the permit issue is scheduled for Wednesday.

Boasberg last summer revoked the easement that allows for the river crossing and ordered the pipeline shuttered until its environmental soundness was proven. However, the shutdown never happened because an appeals court ruled that Boasberg had not justified it.

The Corps said in its motion filed Monday that more time is needed to brief the new administration officials who will be required "to learn the background of and familiarize themselves with this lengthy and detailed litigation." Biden has yet to address possible leadership changes in several government agencies.

Matthew Marinelli, attorney for the Corps, did not return an email message sent Monday night by The Associated Press.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which more than four years ago sued the Corps for granting permits that led Donald Trump to approve pipeline construction, and three other tribes serving as plaintiffs agree with the request for a 58-day delay — even though the tribes and other opponents have called for an immediate shutdown.

A letter sent Monday asking President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris to stop the flow of oil was signed by numerous activists and leaders representing environmental groups, Native Americans, politics, entertainment and one prominent sports figure, quarterback and NFL MVP Aaron Rodgers of the Green Bay Packers.

"The administration has to make a choice. Will it honor the treaties and the law, or will it allow the continued operation of an illegal and risky pipeline," Jan Hasselman, the EarthJustice attorney representing Standing Rock and other tribes, said Monday night. "President Biden must reverse Trump's illegal actions authorizing DAPL."

Residents gather in South Dakota to lament loss of pipeline

PHILIP, S.D. (AP) — Residents and business owners upset by the loss of the Keystone XL pipeline gathered in southwestern South Dakota on Monday and appealed to three Republican congressman to help restart the project.

One of President Joe Biden's first moves was to revoke Keystone XL's presidential permit and shut down construction of the long-disputed pipeline that was to carry oil from Canada to Texas. While the decision was celebrated by some tribal residents, environmental activists and others, many view it as a dagger to small-town business.

The 1200-mile (1931.21-kilometer) pipeline was designed to run from the Alberta tar sands in Canada to Nebraska. It would enter South Dakota at a spot 32 miles northwest of Buffalo and run southeast through Harding, Butte, Perkins, Pennington, Haakon, Jones, Lyman, Meade and Tripp counties before exiting the state about 20 miles southeast of Colome.

Many residents from those counties spoke Monday in Philip. Jeff Birkeland is CEO of West Central Electric Cooperative, which would have served pump stations across the XL route in Haakon and Jones Counties. He talked about the pipeline creating an estimated $100 million in annual property tax revenue for state government and local tax entities, KCCR radio reported.

"You look at our numbers, we've lost $90 million in revenue. Take that times 11 just for the cost in the basin. It's big," Birkeland said.

Trisha Burns and her husband ranch and operate a wellness center in Philip. She said the loss of the pipeline is taking a personal as well as financial toll. She cited one family who thought they finally found stability after moving to Philip for a pipeline job. They rented a house and bought furniture rather than sleeping on portable mattresses.

"They had a Christmas tree for the first time in years," Burns said. "And they get the call, and they're done. She said, 'I can't even give you notice.'"

South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson organized the meeting and was joined by North Dakota Rep. Kelly Armstrong, who's sponsoring legislation to restart the pipeline, and Washington state Rep. Dan Newhouse, chairman of a congressional caucus of western states. Johnson said the first-hand accounts by residents who will be hurt by Biden's order should help put the project back in play.

"It is so often that stories hold more weight than data," Johnson said, adding that he hopes their words will hit home with at least six Democrats who will need to support Armstrong's bill.

South Dakota judge rejects amendment legalizing marijuana

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota judge on Monday struck down a voter-approved constitutional amendment that legalized recreational marijuana after Gov. Kristi Noem's administration challenged it.

Circuit Judge Christina Klinger ruled the measure approved by voters in November violated the state's requirement that constitutional amendments deal with just one subject and would have created broad changes to state government.

"Amendment A is a revision as it has far-reaching effects on the basic nature of South Dakota's governmental system," she wrote in her ruling.

Brendan Johnson, who sponsored the amendment and represented a pro-marijuana group in court, said it was preparing an appeal to South Dakota's Supreme Court.

Two law enforcement officers, Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. Rick Miller and Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom, sued to block legalization by challenging its constitutionality. Miller was effectively acting on behalf of South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who had opposed the effort to legalize pot.

Klinger was appointed as a circuit court judge by Noem in 2019.

"Today's decision protects and safeguards our constitution," Noem said in a statement. "I'm confident that South Dakota Supreme Court, if asked to weigh in as well, will come to the same conclusion."

Thom also praised the ruling, saying it "solidifies the protections" of a 2018 constitutional amendment that required further amendments to stick to one subject.

In her ruling, Klinger said that marijuana legalization would have touched on business licensing, taxation and hemp cultivation. The amendment would have given the state's Department of Revenue power to administer recreational marijuana, but Klinger ruled that by doing so, it overstepped the authority of the executive and legislative branches of government.

Lawyers defending legalization had cast the lawsuit as an effort to overturn the results of a fair election. About 54 percent of voters approved recreational marijuana in November.

Possessing small amounts of marijuana would have become legal on July 1, but that will not happen unless a higher court overturns the ruling.

Marijuana has become broadly accepted around the United States, with a Gallup Poll in November showing 68% of Americans favored legalization. South Dakota was among four states that month to approve recreational marijuana, along with New Jersey, Arizona and Montana. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have done so.

Supporters have argued that legalization creates jobs and raises tax money for governments that badly need it. Opponents have argued that marijuana leads to use of harder drugs, and may also lead to more impaired driving and other crimes.

Girl's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press \

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

Class AA

1. Aberdeen Central (14)	14-0	84	1
2. Washington (3)	9-2	70	2

3. Harrisburg (1) 13-1 62 3
4. Brandon Valley 11-3 34 4
5. Mitchell 13-2 18 5
Others receiving votes: O'Gorman 1, Stevens 1.
Class A
1. St. Thomas More (18) 15-0 90 1
2. Winner 13-2 59 T2
3. West Central 14-2 47 4
4. Hamlin 13-2 46 5
5. SF Christian 13-2 28 T2
Others receiving votes: None.
Class B
1. Corsica-Stickney(11) 15-2 79 1
2. Castlewood (5) 12-0 73 2
3. White River (2) 14-0 63 3
4. Ethan 14-2 36 4
5. Viborg-Hurley 12-2 16 T5
Others receiving votes: Hanson 2, Herreid-Selby Area 1.

Boy's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press
SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Sportswriters Association high school boy's poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, records, total points and last week's ranking.
Class AA
1. Washington (18) 11-0 90 1
2. Harrisburg 11-2 72 4
3. Yankton 12-3 50 2
3. Mitchell 12-2 31 3
5. Roosevelt 9-5 25 5
Others receiving votes: Brandon Valley 2.
Class A
1. Vermillion (17) 13-0 89 1
2. SF Christian (2) 13-2 72 2
3. Dakota Valley 13-1 53 3
4. Sioux Valley 14-1 38 4
5. Winner 14-1 10 NR
Others receiving votes: Chamberlain 3, St. Thomas More 2, Dell Rapids 2, Flandreau 1.
Class B
1. De Smet (18) 13-1 90 1
2. Howard 15-1 72 2
3. Viborg-Hurley 11-3 36 NR
4. Canistota 13-2 52 3
4. Platte-Geddes 10-2 25 5
Others receiving votes: Dell Rapids St. Mary 23, White River 1.

Prosecutor says officer was justified in shooting armed teen

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Rapid city police officer who shot and seriously wounded an armed teenager will not be charged, an eastern South Dakota prosecutor said Monday.
Minnehaha County State's Attorney Daniel Haggar, who was asked to review the investigation into the Dec.

25 shooting, said the officer acted in "an objectively reasonable manner" and the shooting was justified.

Authorities say the shooting happened after a routine traffic stop in Rapid City. A 15-year-old boy eventually exited the vehicle with a 12-gauge shotgun in one hand and a bottle of liquor in the other hand. Investigators say the suspect ignored commands to put down the gun and instead pointed it at the officer, at which time the officer fired.

The teen suffered a life-threatening injury and was eventually flown to the Denver Children's Hospital. The summary of the shooting said charges against the juvenile are pending. Authorities say they recovered methamphetamine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia from the scene.

Noem's push for scholarship endowment gets early support

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem's proposal to put $50 million toward a need-based scholarship endowment cleared its first test in the Legislature on Monday.

South Dakota is the only state without a significant scholarship endowment for low-income students. Noem wants to create a $200 million fund by combining the state money with $150 million from private donors. Lawmakers have an extraordinary amount of one-time funds after the state used federal coronavirus relief funding to cover the state's pandemic-related expenses.

The governor's chief of staff, Tony Venhuizen, described the scholarship allotment as an "investment" that would benefit the state's students long into the future.

Barry Dunn, the president of South Dakota State University, said the school has seen declines in students who rely on need-based federal grants as such grants have failed to keep up with tuition increases. He connected the drop-off to the declining rates of enrolment at state universities over the past decade.

The fund would generate about $8 million every year to be distributed to public universities, private colleges and tribal colleges.

A committee of senators unanimously recommended the bill's passage after it was proposed by Republican legislative leaders.

Republican Sen. Casey Crabtree called the vote "the easiest decision we'll make all year."

Noem has said the scholarships would require recipients to work in the state for three years after graduation or be required to repay the money.

She has secured a $50 million donation from First Premier Bank and T. Denny Sanford, a South Dakota philanthropist. Sanford has committed to giving the state another $50 million, and her office is trying to the rest of the money.

House Majority Leader Kent Peterson said the endowment would be called the "Freedom Scholarship."

"This scholarship will give some of the kids the freedom they would not have gotten if it weren't for this," he said.

South Dakota Legislature reports 1st case of the coronavirus

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers were attempting to contain the spread of the coronavirus on Monday after the first reported case in the Legislature this session.

Legislators were informed by email Sunday that Republican Rep. Aaron Aylward had tested positive over the weekend. House Speaker Spencer Gosch said that a number of lawmakers were staying away from the Capitol while they awaited the results of testing.

Gosch declined to confirm that Aylward had tested positive, but said that the member who was confirmed to have COVID-19 had minor symptoms.

The Legislature will hit the halfway mark of its 9-week session this week. Gosch said that the session was progressing "well" so far and legislative leaders had worked to act on bills quickly in anticipation that an outbreak could create a disruption.

The House is encouraging lawmakers and the public to wear masks, but that recommendation often goes

unheeded. On the Senate side of the Capitol, masks are required for the public and expected for senators.

While the state saw one of the nation's worst virus waves late last year, cases have continued to drop through January and February. Over 10% of the population has received at least one dose of a vaccine.

Said Gosch, "We'll continue to move forward and monitor the situation."

Mary Wilson, longest-reigning original Supreme, dies at 76

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Mary Wilson, the longest-reigning original Supreme, has died at 76 years old.

Wilson died Monday night at her home in Las Vegas and the cause was not immediately clear, said publicist Jay Schwartz.

Wilson, Diana Ross and Florence Ballard made up the first successful configuration of The Supremes. Ballard was replaced by Cindy Birdsong in 1967, and Wilson stayed with the group until it was officially disbanded by Motown in 1977.

The group's first No. 1, million-selling song, "Where Did Our Love Go," was released June 17, 1964. Touring at the time, Wilson said there was a moment when she realized they had a hit song.

"I remember that instead of going home on the bus, we flew," she told The Associated Press in 2014. "That was our first plane ride. We flew home. We had really hit big."

It would be the first of five consecutive No. 1s, with "Baby Love," "Come See About Me," Stop! In the Name of Love" and "Back in My Arms Again" following in quick succession. The Supremes also recorded the hit songs "You Can't Hurry Love," "Up the Ladder to the Roof," and "Love Child."

"I just woke up to this news," Ross tweeted on Tuesday, offering her condolences to Wilson's family. "I am reminded that each day is a gift," she added, writing "I have so many wonderful memories of our time together."

Motown founder Berry Gordy said he was "extremely shocked and saddened to hear of the passing of a major member of the Motown family, Mary Wilson of the Supremes." His statement Monday night, according to Variety, said "The Supremes were always known as the 'sweethearts of Motown.'"

In Florida city, hackers try to poison the drinking water

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

A hacker gained unauthorized entry to the system controlling the water treatment plant of a Florida city of 15,000 and tried to taint the water supply with a caustic chemical, exposing a danger cybersecurity experts say has grown as systems become both more computerized and accessible via the internet.

The hacker who breached the system at the city of Oldsmar's water treatment plant on Friday using a remote access program shared by plant workers briefly increased the amount of sodium hydroxide by a factor of one hundred (from 100 parts per million to 11,100 parts per million), Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said during a news conference Monday.

Sodium hydroxide, also called lye, is used to treat water acidity but the compound is also found in cleaning supplies such as soaps and drain cleaners. It can cause irritation, burns and other complications in larger quantities.

Fortunately, a supervisor saw the chemical being tampered with — as a mouse controlled by the intruder moved across the screen changing settings — and was able to intervene and immediately reverse it, Gualtieri said. Oldsmar is about 15 miles (25 kilometers) northwest of Tampa.

Gualtieri said the public was never in danger.

But he did say the intruder took "the sodium hydroxide up to dangerous levels."

Oldsmar officials have since disabled the remote-access system, and say other safeguards were in place to prevent the increased chemical from getting into the water. Officials warned other city leaders in the region — which was hosting the Super Bowl — about the incident and suggested they check their systems.

Experts say municipal water and other systems have the potential to be easy targets for hackers because local governments' computer infrastructure tends to be underfunded.

Robert M. Lee, CEO of Dragos Security, and a specialist in industrial control system vulnerabilities, said

remote access to industrial control systems such as those running water treatment plants has become increasingly common.

"As industries become more digitally connected we will continue to see more states and criminals target these sites for the impact they have on society," Lee said.

The leading cybersecurity firm FireEye attributed an uptick in hacking attempts it has seen in the last year mostly to novices seeking to learn about remotely accessible industrial systems. Many victims appear to have been selected arbitrarily and no serious damage was caused in any of the cases -- in part because of safety mechanisms and professional monitoring, FireEye analyst Daniel Kapellmann Zafra said in a statement.

"While the (Oldsmar) incident does not appear to be particularly complex, it highlights the need to strengthen the cybersecurity capabilities across the water and wastewater industry," he said.

What concerns experts most is the potential for state-backed hackers intent on doing serious harm targeting water supplies, power grids and other vital services.

In May, Israel's cyber chief s aid the country had thwarted a major cyber attack a month earlier against its water systems, an assault widely attributed to its archenemy Iran. Had Israel not detected the attack in real time, he said chlorine or other chemicals could have entered the water, leading to a "disastrous" outcome.

Tarah Wheeler, a Harvard Cybersecurity Fellow, said communities should take every precaution possible when using remote access technology on something as critical as a water supply.

"The systems administrators in charge of major civilian infrastructure like a water treatment facility should be securing that plant like they're securing the water in their own kitchens," Wheeler told the Associated Press via email. "Sometimes when people set up local networks, they don't understand the danger of an improperly configured and secured series of internet-connected devices."

A plant worker first noticed the unusual activity at around 8 a.m. Friday when someone briefly accessed the system but thought little of it because co-workers regularly accessed the system remotely, Gualtieri told reporters. But at about 1:30 p.m., someone accessed it again, took control of the mouse, directed it to the software that controls water treatment and increased the amount of sodium hydroxide.

The sheriff said the intruder was active for three to five minutes. When they exited, the plant operator immediately restored the proper chemical mix, he said.

Other safeguards in place — including manual monitoring — likely would have caught the change in the 24 to 36 hours it took before it reached the water supply, the sheriff said.

Investigators said it wasn't immediately clear where the attack came from — whether the hacker was domestic or foreign. The FBI, along with the Secret Service and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office are investigating the case.

Russian state-backed hackers have in recent years penetrated some U.S. industrial control systems, including the power grid and manufacturing plants while Iranian hackers were caught seizing control of a suburban New York dam in 2013. In no case was damage inflicted but officials say they believe the foreign adversaries have planted software boobytraps that could be activated in an armed conflict.

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Bajak reported from Boston.

Trump's trial starting: 'Grievous crime' or just 'theater'?

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial is an undertaking like no other in U.S. history, the defeated former president charged by the House with inciting the violent mob attack on the U.S. Capitol to overturn the election in what prosecutors argue is the "most grievous constitutional crime."

Trump's lawyers insist as the Senate trial opens Tuesday that he is not guilty on the sole charge of "incitement of insurrection," his fiery words just a figure of speech, even as he encouraged a rally crowd to

"fight like hell" for his presidency. The Capitol siege on Jan. 6 stunned the world as rioters stormed the building to try to stop the certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

No witnesses are expected to be called, in part because the senators sworn as jurors, forced to flee for safety, will be presented with graphic videos recorded that day. Holed up at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, Trump has declined a request to testify.

The first president to face charges after leaving office and the first to be twice impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors while in office, Trump continues to challenge the nation's civic norms and traditions even in defeat. Security remains extremely tight at the Capitol. While acquittal is likely, the trial will test the nation's attitude toward his brand of presidential power, the Democrats' resolve in pursuing him, and the loyalty of Trump's Republican allies defending him.

"In trying to make sense of a second Trump trial, the public should keep in mind that Donald Trump was the first president ever to refuse to accept his defeat," said Timothy Naftali, a clinical associate professor at New York University and an expert on Richard Nixon's impeachment saga, which ended with Nixon's resignation rather than his impeachment.

"This trial is one way of having that difficult national conversation about the difference between dissent and insurrection," Naftali said.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that Biden will be busy with the business of the presidency and won't spend much time watching the televised proceedings. "He'll leave it to his former colleagues in the Senate," she said.

In filings, lawyers for the former president lobbed a wide-ranging attack against the House case, dismissing the trial as "political theater" on the same Senate floor invaded by the mob.

Trump's defenders are preparing to challenge both the constitutionality of the trial and any suggestion that he was to blame for the insurrection. They suggest that Trump was simply exercising his First Amendment rights when he encouraged his supporters to protest at the Capitol, and they argue the Senate is not entitled to try Trump now that he has left office.

House impeachment managers, in their own filings, asserted that Trump had "betrayed the American people" and there is no valid excuse or defense.

"His incitement of insurrection against the United States government — which disrupted the peaceful transfer of power — is the most grievous constitutional crime ever committed by a president," the Democrats said.

With senators gathered as the court of impeachment, the trial will begin Tuesday with a debate and vote on whether it's constitutionally permissible to prosecute the former president, an argument that could resonate with Republicans keen on voting to acquit Trump without being seen as condoning his behavior.

Under an agreement between Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican leader Mitch McConnell, the opening arguments would begin at noon Wednesday, with up to 16 hours per side for presentations.

After that there are hours for deliberations, witnesses and closing arguments. The trial was set to break Friday evening for the Jewish Sabbath, but Trump's defense team withdrew the request, concerned about the delay, and now the trial can continue into the weekend and next week.

A presidential impeachment trial has been conducted only three times before, leading to acquittals for Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and then Trump last year.

Typically senators sit at their desks for such occasions, but the COVID-19 crisis has upended even this tradition. Instead, senators will be allowed to spread out, in the "marble room" just off the Senate floor, where proceedings will be shown on TV, and in the public galleries above the chamber, to accommodate social distancing, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

Trump's second impeachment trial is expected to diverge from the lengthy, complicated affair of a year ago. In that case, Trump was charged with having privately pressured Ukraine to dig up dirt on Biden, then a Democratic rival for the presidency.

This time, Trump's "stop the steal" rally rhetoric and the storming of the Capitol played out for the world to see. The trial could be over in half the time.

The Democratic-led House impeached the president swiftly, one week after the most violent attack on Congress in more than 200 years. Five people died, including a woman shot by police inside the building and a police officer who died the next day of his injuries.

House prosecutors are expected to rely on videos from the siege, along with Trump's incendiary rhetoric refusing to concede the election, to make their case. His new defense team has said it plans to counter with its own cache of videos of Democratic politicians making fiery speeches.

Initially repulsed by the graphic images of the attack, a number of Republican senators have cooled their criticism as the intervening weeks have provided some distance.

Senators were sworn in as jurors late last month, shortly after Biden was inaugurated, but the trial was delayed as Democrats focused on confirming the new president's initial Cabinet picks and Republicans sought to stall.

At the time, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky forced a vote to set aside the trial as unconstitutional because Trump is no longer in office. The 45 Republican votes in favor of Paul's measure suggest the near impossibility of reaching a conviction in a Senate where Democrats hold 50 seats but a two-thirds vote — or 67 senators — would be needed to convict Trump.

Only five Republicans joined with Democrats to reject Paul's motion: Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

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Associated Press writer Hope Yen contributed to this report.

WHO team: Coronavirus unlikely to have leaked from China lab

By EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — The coronavirus is unlikely to have leaked from a Chinese lab and is more likely to have jumped to humans from an animal, a World Health Organization team has concluded, an expert said Tuesday as the group wrapped up a visit to explore the origins of the virus.

The Wuhan Institute of Virology in central China has collected extensive virus samples, leading to allegations that it may have caused the original outbreak by leaking the virus into the surrounding community. China has strongly rejected that possibility and has promoted other theories for the virus's origins. The WHO team that visited Wuhan, where the first cases of COVID-19 were discovered in December 2019, is considering several theories for how the disease first ended up in humans, leading to a pandemic that has now killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide.

"Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific targeted research," WHO food safety and animal diseases expert Peter Ben Embarek said at a news conference Tuesday.

"However, the findings suggest that the laboratory incidents hypothesis is extremely unlikely to explain the introduction of the virus to the human population" and will not be suggested as an avenue of future study, Embarek.

The WHO team — which includes experts from 10 countries — arrived in Wuhan from Singapore on Jan. 14 and spent the first two weeks working by video conference from a hotel while in quarantine. The visit is politically sensitive for Beijing. An AP investigation has found that the Chinese government put limits on research into the outbreak and prevents scientists from speaking to reporters.

The WHO team's mission is intended to be an initial step delving into the origins of the virus, which is believed to have originated in bats before being passed to humans through another species of wild animal, such as a pangolin or bamboo rat, which is considered an exotic delicacy by some in China.

Transmission through the trade in frozen products was also a possibility, Embarek said.

Another member of the WHO team told The Associated Press late last week that they enjoyed a greater level of openness than they had anticipated, and that they were granted full access to all sites and personnel they requested.

That expert, British-born zoologist Peter Daszak, said the team looked into issues including what the first cases were, the link with animals and what, if any, the role that imports of frozen food may have played — a theory that China has long put forward.

The visit by the WHO team took months to negotiate after China only agreed to it amid massive international pressure at the World Health Assembly meeting last May, and Beijing has continued to resist calls for a strictly independent investigation.

While China has weathered some localized resurgences of infection since getting the outbreak under control last year, life in Wuhan itself has largely returned to normal.

Police in Myanmar crack down on crowds defying protest ban

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Police cracked down on demonstrators opposing Myanmar's military coup, firing warning shots and shooting water cannons to disperse crowds that took to the streets again Tuesday in defiance of rules making protests illegal.

Water cannons were used in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-biggest city, where witnesses said at least two warning shots were fired to try to break up the crowd. Reports on social media said police arrested more than two dozen people there. Police also used water cannons in the capital, Natpyitaw, for a second day and fired shots into the air.

Police were reported to have also shot rubber bullets at the crowd in Naypyitaw, wounding several people. Photos on social media showed an alleged shooter — an officer with a short-barreled gun — and several injured people.

Unconfirmed social media reports circulated of shootings with live rounds and deaths among the protesters, with the potential of sparking violent retaliation against the authorities, an outcome proponents of the country's civil disobedience movement have warned against. The AP was unable to immediately confirm the reports.

The protesters are demanding that power be restored to the deposed civilian government and are seeking freedom for the nation's elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other ruling party members detained since the military took over and blocked the new session of Parliament from convening on Feb. 1.

The growing defiance is striking in a country where past demonstrations have been met with deadly force and are a reminder of previous movements in the Southeast Asian country's long and bloody struggle for democracy. The military used deadly force to quash a massive 1988 uprising against military dictatorship and a 2007 revolt led by Buddhist monks.

The decrees issued Monday night for some areas of Yangon and Mandalay banned rallies and gatherings of more than five people, along with motorized processions, while also imposing a 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew. It was not immediately clear if regulations have been imposed for other areas.

Violation of the orders, issued under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, is punishable by up to six months in prison or a fine.

Demonstrations were also held in other cities Tuesday, including Bago — where city elders negotiated with police to avoid a violent confrontation — and Dawei, and in northern Shan state.

In Magwe in central Myanmar, where water cannons were also used, unconfirmed reports on social media claimed several police officers had crossed over to join the protesters' ranks. A police officer in Naypyitaw was also said to have switched sides. The AP was unable to immediately confirm the reports.

Crowds also gathered in Yangon, the country's biggest city where thousands of people have been demonstrating since Saturday, despite a heightened security presence. No violence was reported.

Soldiers do not appear to have been deployed to stop the demonstrations, a small indicator of restraint by the military government. The army has a record of brutality in crushing past revolts as well as in fighting ethnic minorities in border areas seeking self-determination. It also has been accused of carrying out genocide in its 2017 counterinsurgency campaign that drove more than 700,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority across the border to seek safety in Bangladesh.

State media for the first time on Monday referred to the protests, claiming they were endangering the

country's stability.

"Democracy can be destroyed if there is no discipline," declared a statement from the Ministry of Information, read on state television station MRTV. "We will have to take legal actions to prevent acts that are violating state stability, public safety and the rule of law."

However, the military commander who led the coup and is now Myanmar's leader made no mention of the unrest in a 20-minute televised speech Monday night, his first to the public since the takeover.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing instead repeated claims about voting fraud that have been the justification for the military's takeover, allegations that were refuted by the state election commission. He added that his junta would hold new elections as promised in a year and hand over power to the winners, and explained the junta's intended policies for COVID-19 control and the economy.

The general's remarks, which included encouragement for foreign investors, did nothing to assuage concern about the coup in the international community.

The U.N.'s Human Rights Council, the 47-member-state body based in Geneva, is to hold a special session on Friday to consider "the human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar."

Britain and the European Union spearheaded the request for the session, which will amount to a high-profile public debate among diplomats over the situation in Myanmar and could lead to a resolution airing concerns about the situation or recommending international action.

The call for the special session — the 29th in the nearly 15-year history of the council — required support from at least one-third of the council's 47 member states.

New Zealand has suspended all military and high-level political contact with Myanmar, its Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta announced Tuesday in Wellington, adding that any New Zealand aid should not go to Myanmar's military government or benefit them.

"We do not recognize the legitimacy of the military-led government and we call on the military to immediately release all detained political leaders and restore civilian rule," Mahuta said. She said New Zealand was also placing a travel ban on the military leaders and had joined other countries in calling for the special session at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

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Associated Press writer Jamey Keaten in Geneva and Nick Perry in Wellington, New Zealand, contributed to this report.

The Latest: Belgium to give AZ vaccines only to under-55s

By The Associated Press undefined

BRUSSELS — Belgium will use the 443,000 doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine the country will receive over the course of February to vaccinate people under the age of 55.

Regulators in the country of 11.5 million inhabitants have advised against the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for older people due a lack of data about its efficacy, so Belgium's vaccination task force has reshaped its strategy.

It decided that the doses will go in priority to health care workers under 55 as well as residents and staff in collective care institutions in that age group. Sabine Stordeur, who co-chairs the task force, said on Tuesday that people from high-risk groups with underlying conditions and police officers working in the field will also be offered AstraZeneca injections.

People over 55 will continue to receive the two other vaccines approved in the EU, Pfizer/BioNtech and Moderna.

Infection numbers have reached a plateau in Belgium, with new daily cases between 2,000 and 2,500, while coronavirus-related deaths are decreasing. So far, some 336,300 Belgium's residents have received a first vaccine dose.

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THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— Evidence is mounting that having COVID-19 may not protect against getting infected again with some

of the new variants.

—The drive to vaccinate Americans against the coronavirus is gaining speed and newly recorded cases have fallen to their lowest level in three months, but authorities worry that raucous Super Bowl celebrations could fuel new outbreak s.

— South Africa seeks a new virus vaccination pla n after deciding not to use AstraZeneca jab, fearing it's not effective enough against the country's dominant variant

— Democrats are proposing an additional $1,400 in direct payments as part of the U.S. relief package.

— 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

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norway has extended its global travel restrictions until April 15, advising against trips that are not strictly necessary and urging people to stay home for the Easter break.

"The infection situation globally means that very many countries have very strict restrictions on entry, as well as extensive infection control measures," the Foreign Ministry in Oslo said.

"We are still far from a normal situation, and the infection situation in many parts of the world is changing rapidly," Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soereide told Norwegian News Agency NTB.

Neighboring Estonia on Tuesday lifted some of its travel restrictions saying travelers from Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Iceland and Norway are not subject to its 10-day quarantine starting Feb. 15.

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JACKSON, Miss. — Officials in Mississippi say about 2% of the coronavirus vaccinations given so far in the state have gone to people with out-of-state addresses.

Mississippi guidelines say vaccination is available to anyone 65 or older or to those who are least 16 years old and have underlying health conditions that might make them more vulnerable to the virus.

The state's top public health officials said Monday that the vaccination is supposed to be limited to Mississippi residents, or to people from other states who work in Mississippi. However, they said people giving the shots do not check identification or verify that out-of-state residents work in Mississippi.

The New Orleans Advocate/The Times-Picayune recently reported that Louisiana residents are traveling to Mississippi to be vaccinated because Louisiana has tighter vaccination eligibility guidelines.

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- Hundreds of people have showed up at Alabama vaccination sites as the state drastically expands eligibility to receive immunizations against the coronavirus.

Starting Monday, people who qualify for vaccinations in Alabama include everyone 65 and older, educators, grocery store workers, some manufacturing workers, public transit workers, agriculture employees, state legislators and constitutional officers.

Only health care workers, first responders, nursing home residents and people 75 and older were eligible previously.

The change means as many as 1.5 million people in the state now qualify for shots, up from about 700,000. But vaccine supply is still limited, and officials are asking people who aren't at high risk for becoming ill to let other people get vaccines first.

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Appointments to receive the coronavirus vaccine in Oregon have been quickly booked as residents who are 80 years and older are now eligible to receive doses.

Seniors in Oregon have waited weeks to receive the vaccine, after the original eligibility date was delayed and then Gov. Kate Brown decided to prioritize educators ahead of the elderly.

The elderly have been the hardest hit group in state when it comes to the virus — people 60 years and older account for 90% of Oregon's COVID-19 deaths.

On Monday, seniors 80 and older began to receive shots. And media reports say every available appointment for seniors were booked up.

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LANSING, Mich. — A judge in Michigan has dismissed disorderly conduct charges against six hair stylists who were ticketed last spring during a protest at the state Capitol.

The women were cutting hair to protest Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's decision to keep barber shops and salons closed for nearly three months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The women argued the tickets should be dismissed because the state Supreme Court ruled in October that many Whitmer orders were issued under an unconstitutional law.

Lansing District Judge Kristen Simmons granted the request Monday.

There was no immediate comment from the attorney general's office.

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INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana lawmakers have taken the first step toward overriding the governor's veto of a bill blocking cities from regulating rental properties.

Gov. Eric Holcomb had said the law shouldn't be adopted during the coronavirus pandemic, and critics of the measure argued it would prevent local officials from protecting tenants from abusive landlords.

The state Senate voted 30-17 on Monday to override the veto that Holcomb issued in March following last year's legislative session. The bill's supporters say it avoids a "hodgepodge" of local regulations.

The state House would also have to vote to override the veto for it to be overturned.

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GENEVA — The head of the World Health Organization said Monday the emergence of new COVID-19 variants has raised questions about whether or not existing vaccines will work, calling it "concerning news" that the vaccines developed so far may be less effective against the variant first detected in South Africa.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a media briefing that South Africa's decision on Sunday to suspend its vaccination campaign using the AstraZeneca vaccine is "a reminder that we need to do everything we can to reduce circulation of the virus with proven public health measures."

He said it was increasingly clear that vaccine manufacturers would need to tweak their existing shots to address the ongoing genetic evolution of the coronavirus, saying booster shots would most likely be necessary, especially since new variants of the virus are now spreading globally and appear likely to become the predominant strains.

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WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris "virtually toured" a federally supported mass-vaccination site Monday in Glendale, Arizona.

The drive-thru 24-hour facility at the State Farm Stadium is giving one COVID-19 shot about every 10 seconds.

Biden and Harris have promised to open 100 similar sites across the country in the coming weeks and have called on Congress to provide funding for even more. Biden has ramped up federal support for the facilities through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Pentagon.

The president said he is ahead of pace to deliver on his promise of providing 100 million injections in the first 100 days of his presidency, saying, "I think we'll exceed that considerably." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that more than 22 million doses have been given since Biden's inauguration less than three weeks ago.

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SEATTLE — Dozens of Washington state hospitals have learned N95 respirator masks believed to be purchased from 3M Company are counterfeits that were not manufactured by the company.

The Seattle Times reported the Washington State Hospital Association alerted the state's hospitals about a notification from 3M that some masks were knockoffs.

The association has asked the state's 115 hospitals to sort through mask supplies and pull potentially affected equipment.

Several hospitals sent masks to 3M for testing and the company confirmed some were counterfeit.

It is unclear whether the counterfeit masks are less safe than those manufactured by 3M.

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 46 of 99

Himalayan glacier disaster highlights climate change risks

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL AP Science Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — When Ravi Chopra saw the devastating deluge of water and debris crash downstream from a Himalayan glacier on Sunday, his first thought was that this was exactly the scenario that his team had warned the Indian government of in 2014.

At least 31 people have died, 165 people are missing many more are feared to have died. The deluge first smashed into a small dam, gathering more energy as it grew heavier from the debris it collected along the way. Then, it smashed into a larger, under-construction dam and gathered even more energy.

Chopra and other experts had been tasked by India's Supreme Court to study the impact of receding glaciers on dams. They had warned that warming temperatures due to climate change was melting the Himalayan glaciers and facilitated avalanches and landslides, and that constructing dams in this fragile ecosystem was dangerous.

"They were clearly warned, and yet they went ahead," said Chopra, director of the non-profit People's Science Institute.

Scientists had first suspected that a glacial lake had burst, but after examining satellite images now believe that a landslide and avalanche were the more likely cause of the disaster. What isn't clear still is whether the landslide induced an avalanche of ice and debris, or whether falling ice resulted in the landslide, said Mohammad Farooq Azam, who studies glaciers at the Indian Institute of Technology at Indore.

What is known though is that mass of rock, boulders, ice and snow came crashing down a 2-kilometer (1.2 miles), near vertical mountain slope on Sunday. And now scientists are trying to figure out if the heat produced during this crash due to friction would be enough to melt the snow and ice to result in the flood of water, he said.

Experts say that the disaster underscores the fragility of the Himalayan mountains where the lives of millions are being altered by climate change. Even if the world was to meet its most ambitious climate change targets, rising temperatures would melt away a third of the Himalayan glaciers by the end of the century, a 2019 report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development found. Himalayan glaciers are melting twice as fast since 2000 as they were in the 25 years before due to human-caused climate change, a 2019 paper published in Science Advances found.

Whether this particular disaster was caused by climate change isn't known. But climate change can increase landslides and avalanches. As glaciers melt due to warming, valleys that were earlier crammed with ice open up, creating space for landslides to move into. In other places, steep mountainous slopes may be partially "glued" together by ice frozen tightly inside its crevices. "As warming occurs and the ice melts, the pieces can move downhill more easily, lubricated by the water," explained Richard B. Alley, a professor of earth sciences at the Pennsylvania State University.

With warming, ice is also essentially becoming less frozen: Earlier its temperature would range between minus 6 degrees Celsius to minus 20 C and it it is now minus 2 C (from 21.2 degrees Fahrenheit to minus 4 F earlier to 28.4 F now), said Azam. The ice is still frozen, but is closer to its melting point, so it takes less heat to trigger an avalanche than some decades ago, added Azam.

Another threat from warming temperatures is that of a glacial lake bursting — what some first suspected was the cause of Sunday's disaster. The hazard posed by these expanding lakes becoming more susceptible to breaches can't be ignored, said Joerg Michael Schaefer, a climate scientist who specializes in ice and especially Himalayan glaciers at Columbia University.

The water the lakes release into rivers contain the energy equal to "several nuclear bombs" and can provide clean, carbon-free energy through hydropower projects.

The water the lakes release into rivers contain the energy equal to "several nuclear bombs" and can provide clean, carbon-free energy through hydropower projects, Schaefer said. But the setting up power plants without looking uphill and mitigating the risk by siphoning water from the lakes to control levels was dangerous, he said.

"The brute force of these things just kind of just really mind blowing," especially if they break, he said. "You cannot tame that tiger. You have to prevent that."

The Uttarakhand state government said it continually faced "acute power shortage" and was forced to spend $137 million each year to buy electricity, documents submitted to India's Supreme Court show. The state has the second-highest potential for generating hydropower in India, but experts say that solar energy and wind energy offered more sustainable and less risky alternatives in the long-run.

Development was needed for the upliftment of the impoverished region, but experts said that the paradigm shift was necessary so that executing such projects take into account the ecological fragility of the mountains, and the unpredictable risks posed by climate change.

For instance, during the 2009 construction of the second dam that got hit by flood water on Sunday, workers accidentally punctured an aquifer. Enough water for 2-3 million people to drink drained out at the rate of 60-70 million liters of water every day for a month and villages in the area faced water shortages, the 2014 report found.

Development plans need to "go along with the environment" and not against it, said Anjal Prakash, a professor at the Indian School of Business who has contributed to research into the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

"Climate change is here and now. It is not something that is going to happen later on," he said.

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Victoria Milko in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Seth Borenstein in Kensington, Maryland, contributed to this report.

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Iran starts limited COVID vaccinations with Russian shots

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran on Tuesday launched a coronavirus inoculation campaign among healthcare professionals with recently delivered Russian Sputnik V vaccines as the country struggles to stem the worst outbreak of the pandemic in the Middle East with its death toll nearing 59,000.

At a ceremony marking the start of the campaign, Parsa Namaki, son of Health Minister Saeed Namaki, received his first dose. The minister said the vaccination would be simultaneously carried out in more than 600 medical centers across the country.

In the coming weeks, Iran plans to extend the vaccination to elderly people and those suffering from chronic diseases, the minister added. "We have to vaccinate vulnerable groups."

COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, has so far claimed the lives of more that 300 healthcare professionals in Iran.

Last Thursday, Iran received its first batch of foreign-made coronavirus vaccines from Russia. Iran has so far reported some 1.48 million confirmed cases of the virus. Iranian media have reported that a total of 2 million Russian vaccines will arrive in Iran in February and March.

Though the daily death toll has remained under 100 for weeks, authorities warn about a possible surge in March as many ignore distancing measures in public places.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has banned imports of the American and Britain vaccines, a reflection of mistrust toward the West. In December, Iran began testing an Iranian-made vaccine in humans and said it expects to distribute it in spring. The country has also began working on a joint vaccine with Cuba, too.

Iran is also planning to import some 17 million doses of vaccine from COVAX and millions from other countries.

Polish pride, free speech at stake in Holocaust libel case

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — A Warsaw court is due to deliver a verdict Tuesday in a closely watched libel case in which one side sees Polish national pride at stake and the other the future independence of Holocaust research.

Two prominent Polish scholars, Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, are being sued by the 81-year-old niece of a wartime village elder who argues a book they co-edited defames her deceased uncle's memory by suggesting he had a role in the death of Jews. The uncle is mentioned in a brief passage of a 1,600-page historical work, "Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland."

The woman, Filomena Leszczynska, is backed by the Polish League Against Defamation, a group that fights harmful and untruthful depictions of Poland. It argues the woman's uncle, Edward Malinowski, was a hero who helped save Jews during World War II and accuses the scholars of research errors that resulted in Malinowski appearing as someone who betrayed Jews to the Germans.

Malinowski was acquitted in 1950 of being an accomplice to the killing by Germans of 18 Jews in a forest near the village of Malinowo in 1943.

The anti-defamation group says the authors slandered an innocent man and deprived the niece of her rights, including the right to pride and national identity. The plaintiffs are suing Grabowski and Engelking for 100,000 zlotys ($27,000) in damages and a published apology.

Grabowski, a Polish-Canadian history professor at the University of Ottawa, and Engelking, founder and director of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research in Warsaw, are among Poland's most prominent Holocaust researchers. They were among several who researched and wrote parts of the two-volume work.

They view the case as an attempt to discredit their overall findings and discourage other researchers from investigating the truth about Polish involvement in the German mass murder of Jews.

The plaintiffs' lawyer, Monika Brzozowska-Pasieka, denied there was any attempt to stifle research or speech. She said it was a civil case brought by people who feel they or their families have been defamed.

"The ruling will determine whether the researchers properly examined the sources, made a correct assessment of these sources and applied an appropriate research methodology," Brzozowska-Pasieka said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Poland was occupied by Nazi Germany during the war and its population subjected to mass murder and slave labor. While 3 million of the country's 3.3 million Jews were murdered, so were more than 2 million mostly Christian Poles. Poles resisted the Nazis at home and abroad and never collaborated as a state with the Third Reich. Thousands of Poles have been recognized by Yad Vashem in Israel for risking their own lives to save Jews.

Yet amid the more than five years of occupation, there were also some Poles who betrayed Jews to the Germans. The topic was taboo during the communist era and each new revelation of Polish wrongdoing in recent years has sparked a backlash.

The libel case has raised concerns internationally because it comes amid a broader state-backed historical offensive.

Last week, a journalist, Katarzyna Markusz, was questioned by police on suspicions she slandered the Polish nation, a crime with a penalty of up to three years in prison, for an article that mentioned "Polish participation in the Holocaust."

Jewish leaders in Poland issued a statement Monday saying they have seen an intensification of attempts to "repress historians and journalists ... who are trying to honestly present the fate of Polish Jews under the occupation."

Poland's conservative authorities don't deny that some Poles harmed Jews, but they believe the focus on Polish wrongdoing obscures the fact that most of these killings occurred under German orders and terror. The government's pushback against what it calls a "pedagogy of shame" is popular with many Poles.

The Polish League Against Defamation is ideologically aligned with the country's ruling party, and the scholars see that as an indication the case is part of a government-backed effort to promote its historical narrative.

"Night Without End" focuses of the fates of Jews who escaped as the Nazis were "liquidating" ghettos and sending inhabitants to extermination camps. It documents cases of Jews who tried to hide, with those who survived doing so thanks to the help of Poles. It also presents extensive evidence of individual Poles who collaborated in betraying Jews to the Nazis.

At the center of the case is testimony given in 1996 by a Jewish woman, born Estera Siemiatycka, to the USC Shoah Foundation, a Los Angeles-based group that collects Holocaust-era oral histories. When she spoke, she had changed her name to Maria Wiltgren.

Wiltgren, who is no longer alive, described Malinowski, the elder of the village of Malinowo, as someone who helped her to survive under an assumed "Aryan" identity by putting her in a group of Poles sent to work in Germany after she had purchased false papers. But she also said he cheated her out of money and possessions. Two of her sons testified that she considered him a "bad man."

The book states that Wiltgren "realized that he was an accomplice in the deaths of several dozen Jews who had been hiding in the woods and had been turned over to the Germans, yet she gave false testimony in his defense at his trial after the war."

Engelking, who wrote the chapter, acknowledged one error. In the book she mentioned that when Wiltgren was in Germany during the war, she traded with Malinowski. The book didn't make clear that was a different man with the same name. Engelking argued the mistake had no bearing on the larger question of the village elder's behavior toward Jews.

The plaintiff's lawyer, Brzozowska-Pasieka, also pointed to other details that she believes the authors got wrong, including the discrepancy between 18 Jews killed and Engelking's reference to several dozen deaths. Engelking says she believes they aren't major issues, and they mean her critics could find no other real fault in the book.

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Associated Press researcher Randy Herschaft in New York, and AP writer Monika Scislowska in Warsaw, contributed to this report.

What to watch as Trump's 2nd impeachment trial kicks off

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial begins on Tuesday, a solemn proceeding that will force lawmakers to relive the violent events of Jan. 6 as House Democrats prosecute their case for "incitement of insurrection."

The nine Democratic impeachment managers for the House, which impeached Trump last month, argue that he alone was responsible for inciting the mob of supporters who broke into the U.S. Capitol and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

Lawyers for Trump argue that the trial is unconstitutional and say the former president was exercising freedom of speech when he told his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat. The arguments against conviction are expected to be persuasive with Senate Republicans, most of whom have signaled that they will vote to acquit.

The trial is expected to last into the weekend and possibly longer. It will begin midday Tuesday and could go late into some evenings.

What to watch as the trial kicks off:

FIRST, AN EFFORT TO DISMISS

Tuesday's proceedings will begin with a debate to dismiss the trial before it even begins. Trump's lawyers have argued the trial is moot now that Trump is out of office, and 45 Senate Republicans have already voted once to move forward with an effort to dismiss the trial on those grounds.

The Senate will debate the constitutionality of the trial for four hours on Tuesday and then hold a vote on whether to dismiss it. The effort to dismiss is expected to fail, allowing arguments in the trial to begin on Wednesday.

Democrats point to the opinion of many legal scholars — including conservatives — who say the trial is

valid under the Constitution. They point to an 1876 impeachment trial of a secretary of war who had resigned and note that Trump was impeached before he left office. Trump's lawyers dismiss that precedent and say language in the Constitution is on their side.

WEDNESDAY: ARGUMENTS BEGIN

The House managers will present their arguments first, beginning Wednesday. Each side will have up to 16 hours, running no more than eight hours per day.

The Democrats are expected to try and take advantage of the senators' own experiences, tapping into their emotions as they describe in detail — and show on video — what happened as the mob broke through police barriers, injured law enforcement officers, ransacked the Capitol and hunted for lawmakers. The carnage led to five deaths.

The impeachment managers have argued that the mob subverted democracy and that Trump was "singularly" responsible for their actions after months of falsely saying there was widespread fraud in the election. They will appeal to Senate Republicans to vote to convict after most of them criticized Trump in the wake of the riots, with many saying he was responsible for the violence.

There was no widespread fraud in the election. Election officials across the country, and even then-Attorney General William Barr, contradicted Trump's claims, and dozens of legal challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed.

It appears unlikely, for now, that there will be witnesses at the trial. But the managers can ask for a Senate vote on calling witnesses if they so choose.

TRUMP'S TEAM HITS BACK

Defense arguments are likely to begin Friday. In their main filing with the Senate, Trump's lawyers made clear that they will not only argue against the trial on process grounds, but also present a full-throated defense of Trump's actions that day and why they believe he did not incite the riot.

While the Democrats are expected to appeal to the senators' emotions, Trump's lawyers have signaled they will try and tap into raw partisan anger. They repeatedly go after the Democrats personally in the brief, describing their case as a "selfish attempt by Democratic leadership in the House to prey upon the feelings of horror and confusion" and another example of "Trump derangement syndrome" after four years of trying to drive him out of office.

The lawyers argue that Trump's words "fight like hell" did not mean to literally fight, that the rioters acted on their own accord.

A (LESS) CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

As they were last year, at Trump's first impeachment trial, senators are expected to listen to every word of the arguments before they cast their votes.

But this trial will look a bit different than the last one due to COVID-19 restrictions. To protect against the virus, senators don't have to be stuck at their desks for the entirety of the trial, and will be allowed to spread out in the upper galleries or watch a video feed in a room just off the chamber.

REPUBLICANS TO WATCH

Five Republican senators voted with Democrats two weeks ago not to dismiss the trial on constitutional grounds. Those senators so far appear the most likely to vote to convict Trump.

The five senators, all of whom have harshly criticized the president's behavior, are Susan Collins of Maine, Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

Democrats appear to have little chance of persuading 17 Republicans to find Trump guilty, the minimum number that they would need for conviction. But some GOP senators who voted in favor of the effort to dismiss, such as Rob Portman of Ohio and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, have said they are coming into the trial with an open mind.

Democrats are likely to focus, too, on senators who are retiring in 2022 and will have less to lose politically if they vote to convict. In addition to Toomey and Portman, also retiring are Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby and North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr.

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Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: How are the Myanmar protests being organized?

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

Protests in Myanmar against the military coup that removed Aung San Suu Kyi's government from power have grown in recent days despite official efforts to make organizing them difficult or even illegal. Here's a look at who is organizing the protests and the obstacles they face:

IS PROTESTING ALLOWED?

It was a grey area for many days after the Feb. 1 coup, which also included the declaration of a state of emergency. But with the protests growing and spreading in recent days, the military on Monday issued decrees that effectively ban peaceful public protests in the country's two biggest cities.

Rallies and gatherings of more than five people, along with motorized processions, are outlawed and an 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew has been imposed for areas of Yangon and Mandalay, where thousands of people have been demonstrating since Saturday.

The restrictions have raised concerns about the potential for a violent crackdown.

WHO IS LEADING THE PROTESTS?

For the most part the protests have grown organically.

"This movement is leaderless — people are getting on the streets in their own way and at their own will," said Thinzar Shunlei Yi, a prominent activist.

Activist groups, professional work groups, unions and individuals across Myanmar have all come out in opposition to the coup, as has Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

Shortly after the return to direct military rule — which Myanmar experienced for five decades until 2012 — a Facebook page titled "Civil Disobedience Movement" started issuing calls for peaceful protests. The page now has more than 230,000 followers and hashtags associated with it are widely used by Myanmar Twitter users.

Health care workers also started a protest campaign, wearing red ribbons, holding signs and urging other medical staff to not work at state-operated health facilities.

Street protests over the weekend featured the heavy presence of unions, student groups and other groups representing professions as diverse as park rangers and book printers.

Yangon residents have voiced dissent by banging pots and pans together across the city at night.

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES?

One of the biggest challenges for protesters has been the military's attempts at blocking communications.

Authorities first went after Facebook — which has more than 22 million users in Myanmar, or 40% of the population — but people simply moved to other platforms like Twitter.

Making the rounds have been copies of safety protocol information sheets, some of them originally from Hong Kong, with instructions on how to encrypt communications and how to stay safe during protests.

Over the weekend the military temporarily cut internet access and some phone services. Protestors were quick to adapt, with some even using phones registered in neighboring Thailand.

"Even when the internet was completely cut off on Saturday for 24 hours, people were able to communicate within Myanmar by phone and SMS," said Clare Hammond, a senior campaigner the rights group Global Witness.

For some who don't have phone service or internet access during blackouts, word of mouth and simply historical precedent has brought them to protest sites, many of which are the same as in previous uprisings against military rule.

WILL THE PROTESTS CONTINUE?

So far protesters seem undeterred, even with the new restrictions on demonstrations.

Nevertheless, some are concerned that the military is laying the groundwork for a violent crackdown such as those that ended protest movements in 2007 and 1988.

Linda Lakhdhir, a legal advisor at Human Right Watch, said the military could try to use the violation of the military's decrees as well as other laws already in place as justification for a crackdown.

"They may maybe a terrible, abusive, draconian laws, but the military will justify (use of them) as them following the law," she said.

Authorities fired water cannons and rubber bullets at some protests on Tuesday, ratcheting up tensions.

AP Interview: Salvador Illa, Catalonia's quiet gamechanger

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — As the head of Spain's response to the coronavirus pandemic, Salvador Illa transformed from a mostly unknown, bespectacled civil servant into a household figure who won both accolades and criticism for his level-headed, soft-spoken approach.

The former Spanish health minister now hopes to become a political disrupter in the country's Catalonia region when voters there go to the polls this weekend.

Illa will lead the ticket of the Socialist Party of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez for the Feb. 14 regional election in a bid to bring some calm to Catalonia, which for the past decade has been run by politicians committed to breaking the region away from the rest of Spain.

Polls show that Illa, 54, has helped boost the Socialist Party's popularity, and rivals are targeting him as the man to beat for the job of Catalonia's president.

Illa is convinced that the pandemic, which has killed over 62,000 across Spain, has made some pro-secession Catalans refocus on health and the common good.

"There are episodes in the life of a nation, a people, or a community, when despite having very different political positions and opinions, it is necessary that we come together. The pandemic is one of these moments," Illa told The Associated Press.

"I sense that in Catalonia the majority want to turn the page after 10 wasted years," he said. "(They) want to dedicate our energies to the problems we face today, to protecting our health, reviving our economy and making sure no one gets left behind."

With political loyalties fragmented on both sides of the Catalan independence debate, no party is expected to win an outright majority of 68 seats in the 135-seat regional parliament.

Illa's chances of becoming the first non-separatist leader of Catalonia since 2010 will rest on his Socialists doing well and getting support from other parties. He has ruled out forming a government with any pro-independence parties.

But there's also a strong chance that pro-secession forces could retain power after a race that is too close to call and whose outcome will depend on deal-making that could take weeks.

Critics of Illa believe Spain's response to the pandemic was too slow and disorganized and claim he used the Health Ministry, which he left last month, as a platform to launch his campaign.

Separatist rivals are aiming their attacks on Illa's commitment to keep Catalonia, the wealthy region that includes Barcelona, as part of Spain.

"The solution of Illa is amnesia," said Pere Aragonès, the acting regional president of Catalonia and the leading candidate from the pro-secession Republican Left of Catalonia party.

Aragonès and other separatists are campaigning hard on the secessionists' failed breakaway attempt in 2017 that left several leaders in prison.

"I don't want to turn the page on. We cannot ignore that they are political prisoners and exiles," Aragonès said.

Illa's approach contrasts with the voices that dominate much of Catalonia's politics. Separatist leaders, such as former regional President Carles Puigdemont, who fled to Belgium to avoid prosecution for the failed 2017 secession attempt, have consistently blamed Spain as the cause of Catalonia's alleged ills.

Quim Torra, who was removed from office last year for violating election laws, suggested that an independent Catalonia would have reacted to the pandemic with more agility.

Illa firmly disputes that notion.

"That is not true, because we have seen how different countries have had to work together during the pandemic," Illa said.

Sánchez, along with the former head of Catalan Socialists, Miquel Iceta, picked Illa to run.

"We need a reasonable, serene and calm candidate who can heal wounds, restore Catalonia to what it was, and mend the bonds of affection among Catalans and between Catalonia and Spain," Sánchez said at a campaign event.

The global health emergency has had varying political impacts across Europe.

Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who despite high approval ratings for steering the country through the West's first coronavirus lockdown, recently resigned amid a power struggle over how Italy would use its European Union pandemic recovery funds.

While British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's authority has been shaken by the U.K.'s COVID-19 death toll, which at over 113,000 is the highest in Europe, his government has been praised for its quick vaccine rollout.

In Germany, Health Minister Jens Spahn has fared well thanks to the country's comparatively successful initial effort to curb infections. Bavarian governor Markus Soeder also benefitted from taking tough action to keep virus case numbers down and is viewed as a possible contender to succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel later this year.

But Illa is one of the first politicians to have his reputation as an efficient, caring manager put to the test during an election.

A former mayor of La Roca del Vallès, a village near Barcelona, Illa had spent most of his career with Catalonia's Socialist Party in second-line positions before Sánchez tapped him as health minister last year. He had no experience in health care and took over weeks before the pandemic began its savage sweep through Europe.

Illa acknowledges that he and other Spanish officials "reacted late because we did not see the dimension of what was heading toward us." But he said even when he faced accusations of incompetence from rivals, he assumed their goal "was to save lives."

"That is how I understand politics. It is very different from what we have seen in the past 10 years of the so-called politics of polarization," Illa said.

He said he has lost friends to COVID-19 and has experienced the social strains the secession debate has caused in Catalonia. Illa credited his university degree in philosophy with instilling central values in him: "self-control, measure, modesty and prudence."

"When you assume a humble attitude and abandon arrogant positions, you can learn," he said. "You can recognize that you do not know all there is to know about this virus, nor how to fight it. And then you start to learn. I think this pandemic has been a lesson in humility."

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Jill Lawless in London, Nicole Winfield in Rome, and Geir Moulson in Berlin 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

Lebanese group gives a home away from home to health workers

By FAY ABUELGASIM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — In the middle of the destroyed Beirut neighborhood of Gemmayzeh, a small team in masks and gloves were sanitizing and packing oxygen machines to be sent to those in need.

It's the latest venture of a Lebanese civil group that arose with the coronavirus pandemic and has been finding new avenues to help as the country's crises expand.

"No one is exempt from COVID. Nobody. Nobody has super-power immunity," said Melissa Fathallah, one of the founders of Baytna Baytak, Arabic for Our Home is Your Home.

"We saw that our own relatives and our colleagues are suffering with this, we decided, okay, we are going to start another fundraiser and to specifically focus on the oxygen machines."

Raising more than $27,000, they currently have placed 48 machines with those who need it across the

country.

Baytna Baytak, with 110 staffers, launched at the start of the pandemic with a very different initiative: Finding a home away from home for front-line workers who were worried about exposing their families to the virus. During Lebanon's first lockdown in March, they housed 750 front-line workers in various apartments.

Chloe Ghosh, a 26-year-old medical resident at a government hospital in Beirut, has been living in accommodations provided by the group since the start of the pandemic.

Her family is from Tannourine, a small town 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Lebanon. For her, putting her family at risk was another burden she couldn't fathom.

"If I got COVID or anyone my age got COVID, we could survive," Ghosh said. "But our families, no."

Her first accommodation with the group was wrecked when another disaster struck Beirut, the massive Aug. 4 explosion at the city's port. The blast killed more than 200 people, injured 6,000 others and destroyed thousands of homes.

Ghosh was unharmed. She moved to another place provided by Baytna Baytak across town in Hamra street. She now shares a four-bedroom apartment with three other medical workers who work in different hospitals around the city.

On a recent afternoon, Gosh and one her apartment mates, Issa Tannous, were decompressing after a long day, sipping a cup of coffee in front of the lights strung across the apartment's windows. It was a rare instance when they were home at the same time.

"At the end of the day, someone cared for us," said Tannous, a 28-year-old medical resident at private hospital. "Someone appreciated what you are going through and all that is going through our heads. It gave us space not to be afraid, not to worry that we might actually hurt someone."

The apartment was donated to Baytna Baytak by a philanthropist to help accommodate the front-line workers. The same donor gave several other properties around Beirut for the same purpose.

After the port explosion, Baytna Baytak rushed to expand its efforts to help those whose homes had been shattered. It placed them in temporary housing while it helped raise funds to fix their homes. Within the first 24 hours of the call for housing, they had six apartments donated.

Baytna Baytak grew out a lack of services provided for front-line workers in Lebanon, Fathallah said.

"As far as the government is concerned, we don't have a government. Let's just get that out of the way," she said. "If we actually want to acknowledge their existence, then they are a completely failed government in every which way possible."

Lebanon's health sector is overworked and stretched thin, even more so after the explosion.

Doctors are working multiple shifts a day to cover for colleagues infected with the virus. More than 2,300 Lebanese health care workers have been infected since February, according to the Order of Physicians.

Lebanon has over 14,000 medical doctors and 17,000 nurses, but many doctors have also left the country, reeling from a crippling economic crisis that preceded the pandemic.

After the explosion, Lebanon saw a major surge in COVID-19 infections that only worsened by the end of 2020, forcing Baytna Baytak to put some of its work on hold. Donors also were fewer.

Currently, they have 100 front-line workers placed in six apartments, a few hotels and a Covent.

Still, the group has continued to work amid a 24-hour lockdown that started mid-January. Even while distributing oxygen machines, the team was getting fined for violating curfew.

Fathallah is determined to keep going.

"We took it upon ourselves because of the greater good, because of the bigger picture because of the country and the citizens. We took it upon ourselves."

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"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

Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 55 of 99

California uses ZIP codes, outreach to boost vaccine equity

By JANIE HAR and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Hing Yiu Chung lives in a racially diverse San Francisco neighborhood hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. While vaccines have been difficult to come by, the 69-year-old got one by showing proof she lives where she does.

She had to wait in line for two hours with other seniors, some who were disabled or leaning on canes, for a chance at a couple hundred shots available each day through a local public health clinic in the Bayview neighborhood.

"Fortunately, it wasn't a cold or rainy day, otherwise it would have been harder," she said in Chinese.

The experience wasn't ideal, but targeting vulnerable ZIP codes is one way San Francisco and other U.S. cities and counties are trying to ensure they vaccinate people in largely Black, Latino and working-class communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic. In Dallas, authorities tried to prioritize such ZIP codes, which tended to be communities of color, but backtracked after the state threatened to reduce the city's vaccine supply.

Nationwide, states are struggling to distribute vaccines equitably even as officials try to define what equity means. They're debating what risk factors gets someone to the head of the line: those in poverty, communities of color, their job or if they have a disability. Others simply want to vaccinate as many people as possible, as soon as possible.

In California, which has prioritized seniors and health care workers, Gov. Gavin Newsom last week announced a federal partnership for mass vaccination sites in Oakland and east Los Angeles, saying the locations were chosen to target working-class "communities that are often left behind."

"Not only do we want fast and efficient, but we want equitable distribution of the vaccine," he told reporters Monday in San Diego, where he hinted that a mass vaccination site would be announced soon for farm and food workers in central California.

Newsom also says a new state vaccine distribution system will pay providers to offer shots in vulnerable neighborhoods and communities of color. Insurer Blue Shield of California will run the program and collect demographics on who's getting the shots.

"Unfortunately, because of the history of racism and discrimination in the United States, what we see is that those community resources are not evenly allocated," said California's surgeon general, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris. "So we do have to incentivize and pay for performance if we want to get equivalent outcomes in vulnerable communities."

Some counties aren't waiting for a state program.

In agriculturally rich areas, Fresno County has set aside vaccines for farmworkers, while the public health agency further south in Riverside County has partnered with an immigrant advocacy group to inoculate farmworkers.

In Santa Clara County, near the San Francisco Bay Area, community leaders called on Newsom last week to prioritize doses for ZIP codes with the highest COVID-19 rates, saying vaccines are going to wealthier people with internet access and time on their hands. Latinos make up a quarter of the county but represent more than half of COVID-19 infections.

"Our message to the governor is simple: Prioritize communities that have been hit the hardest by this pandemic. That would be a commitment to equity," said Jessica Paz-Cedillos, executive director of the School of Arts and Culture at the Mexican Heritage Plaza, which is in one of five Santa Clara County ZIP codes where the infection rate is double the countywide average.

The plaza in San Jose holds vaccinations two days a week for county residents on a first-come, first-served basis, and people must show proof of age or occupation. Seniors line up well before sunrise, carrying blankets and chairs.

Similar scenes played out at a new pop-up vaccination clinic in San Francisco's Mission District, which also has high infection rates. Some 120 doses a day are intended for health workers and seniors by invitation only, but Jon Jacobo, health committee chairman with the Latino Task Force, easily saw 200 people lined

up recently, some in their 90s.

He called the lines of desperate seniors "heartbreaking" but said the clinic needs to prioritize people in the most disadvantaged ZIP codes.

"What I don't want to see is what's happening in Washington Heights (in Manhattan) or in South Central LA, where you've had doctors helping serve the Black community say, 'This is the most white people I've seen in this neighborhood,'" he said.

Aura Sunux, a 43-year-old immigrant from Guatemala who delivers food and health supplies to homebound clients, received her shot Monday at the clinic.

"I feel relieved, believe me," she said. "I have not gotten sick, but I've been very close to people who have come up positive."

California released figures Monday suggesting the lopsided distribution of vaccines to date. Latinos have received 15% of nearly 5 million doses administered — half the rate of white residents, though they make up the bulk of infections and deaths. Black residents have received 2.7% of the doses despite making up 6% of the state's population.

Los Angeles County, the nation's most populous with 10 million residents, has delivered at least one dose to just 7% of Black residents 65 and older, while inoculating more than twice that rate of white and Asian seniors. While lower than the rate for white seniors, 14% of older Latinos have been vaccinated.

"Everyone is pretending like this is going to get done in a month or two months," said Karthick Ramakrishnan, founding director of University of California, Riverside's Center for Social Innovation. "Now is the time to design these systems so those who are most severely impacted by COVID, in terms of cases and deaths, are those who have a fair shot at getting a shot."

Overwhelming demand for vaccines and short supplies can discourage people from seeking the shot, especially in communities where many are suspicious of vaccines.

Health officials said working with community groups is key to ensuring people have access to the vaccine and get it. Riverside County gave more than 600 shots during two visits to the farm-rich Coachella Valley by joining with a local group that signed people up, said Jose Arballo, public health agency spokesman.

"We can do a million clinics," he said, "but if they don't want to come because they're afraid or anxious or afraid their information is going to be used as part of immigration enforcement, they're not going to come to us."

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Taxin reported from Orange County. Associated Press journalists Haven Daley contributed from San Francisco and Kathleen Ronayne from Sacramento, California.

Vaccinating Florida's seniors at Miami's largest hospital

By KELLI KENNEDY Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The tiny glass vaccine vials are delivered to Miami's largest hospital and immediately whisked to a secret location, where they are placed inside a padlocked freezer with a digital thermometer that reads minus 76 degrees Celsius (minus 105 F). An armed guard watches outside the door.

The pharmacy staff at Jackson Health System often gets short notice on how many doses are coming — sometimes as little as 24 hours. As soon as the doses arrive, the pressure builds to administer them quickly, but the timing is complicated. The staff can thaw out only as much COVID-19 vaccine as the hospital can administer that same day.

The Associated Press was given exclusive access to a recent day of vaccinations at the system's main hospital, offering a glance inside the hour-to-hour efforts that fuel the largest inoculation campaign in U.S. history. It is an anxious undertaking for both vaccine providers and Americans seeking the shots, and everyone has to watch the clock.

Appointments must be handled carefully — without overbooking but also with confidence that those who are booked will show up — to ensure that the fewest possible doses go to waste. Once mixed, the vaccine is good for only six hours.

"We don't book any appointments until we know we've got the supply," said David Zambrana, vice presi-

dent of hospital operations. "We're constantly checking the supply. You can feel the anxiety these folks have. We've heard people say, 'You've saved my life'. They are coming with so much hope."

Alette Simmons-Jimenez is part of a WhatsApp text group with about 60 women who keep a hawkish watch as appointment slots open in Miami-Dade, where Jackson Memorial Hospital is helping in the effort to vaccinate 465,000 of the county's most vulnerable seniors who are 65 and older — from shuts-ins to snowbirds.

Someone alerted her on a recent evening that Jackson Memorial would offer an "extremely limited" number of slots starting at 8 a.m. the next day. Typically, 1,500 slots fill up in 15 minutes.

Simmons-Jimenez, 68, was on her computer by 7:30 a.m., frequently refreshing her browser. She eventually snagged an appointment for herself and her husband for 12:30 p.m.

"I think I'm the only one in my group that got an appointment," she said.

The Jackson system has distributed over 105,000 doses so far. It's a massive lift, requiring roughly 275 staff at three locations, including parking attendants and security guards to guide patients in and out; medical and nursing students and firefighters and paramedics to give injections; and nurses to monitor patients after they receive the shots. The sites run seven days a week. The site at Jackson Memorial vaccinates about 60 people an hour.

The hospital's tech team created an app for appointments, but they are keenly aware that seniors are not always tech savvy. The hospital reached out to 55 churches, temples and mosques in the area trying to contact seniors in underserved communities and will soon partner with local homeless organizations.

As demand for the vaccines outpaces supply, nearby hospitals are canceling appointments. Earlier this month, Baptist Health sent out a tweet canceling all appointments for Jan 20 and later and announcing that new appointments could not be booked.

Both Simmons-Jimenez and her husband's appointments had been canceled by another hospital, which told her the appointments would be rescheduled, but that was quickly rescinded. She told friends it seemed unlikely they would get vaccinated before summer.

"I said, 'So now we're just left out in the dark,'" she said. "I was frustrated."

At Jackson Memorial, people start lining up outside the hospital by 7 am, 6 feet apart, most wearing double masks in an orderly, fast-moving line. Inside, workers hold laminated cards — green to signal an open seat and red to wait. The process moves quickly — most are vaccinated within 30 minutes.

In a tiny, nondescript room off to the side, three pharmacy technicians sit at a long white table, sticking syringes into the vials and laying them on trays that are delivered to vaccination tables.

A small refrigerator stands in the corner to hold defrosted vials. Each vial holds enough for five doses, sometimes six.

The pharmacy techs mix vaccine based on the number of appointments to ensure nothing is wasted. As the end of the day nears, they mix fewer batches.

"They are literally mixing right on the spot. In the last hour, between 4 and 5 p.m., we slow down. They'll only bring out one tray of drawn syringes for the exact number of people in the room," Zambrana said.

The hospital is now required to report how much vaccine is discarded and so far, none has gone to waste, he said.

Simmons-Jimenez and her husband sit down with a two-person team — someone to check them in and someone who administers the shot, typically a paramedic. After a quick prick, patients are given the coveted vaccination card. Within the week, they will get a text or email with the date for their second shot.

When they stand up, someone immediately disinfects the seat and touch-screen pad with bleach wipes.

Simmons-Jimenez marvels at the process. "It's very well organized," she said. "I was prepared to arrive today and for them to tell us to go away."

Patients must stay 10 to 30 minutes for observation, depending on underlying health issues.

The key to avoiding mass cancellations is not opening slots too far in advance, and instead only opening up appointments 24 to 48 hours ahead of time — when the hospital is certain of the supply.

Only 10 percent are no-shows.

The hospital guarantees everyone who has been given a first shot will get the second booster shot —

something that hospitals in other states have struggled with because of supply shortages.

Irma Mesa, a 74-year-old grandmother, was shocked when she logged onto the website and got an appointment.

"The first time," squealed Mesa, who received her second dose.

Mesa, who hasn't seen her children or grandchildren since January 2020, even got a second appointment for her 80-year-old husband, Angel. Now the couple will consider whether they can safely see their grandkids.

"I feel good, happy," said Mesa, beaming and echoing the sentiments of many exiting the hospital corridors with fresh Band-Aids on their arms, proudly carrying new vaccination cards. "I'm relieved."

Ethnic clashes in Darfur could reignite Sudan's old conflict

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Sayid Ismael Baraka, a Sudanese-American visiting from Atlanta, was playing with his three children, and his wife was making tea, when the gunmen stormed into his family village in Sudan's Darfur region.

The gunmen went through the village of Jabal, shooting people. The 36-year-old Baraka was shot to death as he rushed to help a wounded neighbor, his wife and brother said. The attack on Jan. 16 left more than two dozen dead in and around the village.

They were among 470 people killed in a days-long explosion of violence between Arab and non-Arab tribes last month in Darfur. The bloodletting stoked fears that Darfur, scene of a vicious war in the 2000s, could slide back into conflict and raised questions over the government's efforts to implement a peace deal and protect civilians.

Baraka's wife, Safiya Mohammed, blamed the attack on "militias and janjaweed" — a name that harkens back to dark times for Darfur.

The Arab militias known as janjaweed became notorious in 2003 and 2004 for their terror campaigns, killing and raping civilians, when the Khartoum government unleashed them to put down an insurgency by Darfur's non-Arab residents. Some 300,000 people were killed and 2.7 million were displaced, before the violence gradually declined.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. A transitional military-civilian government is now in power, trying to end decades-long rebellions in various parts of the country.

The latest burst of violence came just two weeks after the joint U.N.-African Union peacekeeping force that had been in Darfur for a decade ended its mandate, at the request of the transitional government. It was replaced with a much smaller, political mission.

"Anyone could have predicted that as soon as the U.N. troops departed, some of these militias would begin attacking," said John Prendergast, co-founder of The Sentry, an organization that tracks corruption and human rights violations in Africa.

The bloodshed followed a familiar scenario: a dispute between two people or a minor crime turning into all-out ethnic clashes. It first grew out of a fistfight on Jan. 15 between two men in a camp for displaced people in Genena, the capital of West Darfur province . An Arab man was stabbed to death. The suspect, from the African Massalit tribe, was arrested, but the dead man's family, from the Arab Rizeigat tribe, subsequently attacked people in the Krinding camp and other areas across Genena.

Three days later, clashes renewed in South Darfur province between Rizeigat and the non-Arab Falata tribe over the killing of a shepherd in al-Twaiyel village.

The fighting in the two provinces killed around 470 people, including Baraka and three aid workers, according to the United Nations and local officials. More than 120,000 people, mostly women and children, fled their homes, including at least 4,300 who crossed into neighboring Chad, the U.N. said. The transitional government deployed additional troops to West Darfur and South Darfur to try to contain the situation.

Mohammed Osman, a Sudan researcher at Human Rights Watch, said witnesses said the government

forces' response was too little, too late. "The government repeated promises of protecting civilians and holding perpetrators accountable," he said.

A government spokesman didn't answer repeated calls and messages seeking comment.

War first erupted in Darfur in 2003 when non-Arab Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination. Al-Bashir's government is accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes and unleashing the janjaweed on civilians — a charge it denies.

The International Criminal Court charged al-Bashir with war crimes and genocide over Darfur, but it remains unclear whether the transitional government will hand him over to face justice in The Hague, Netherlands.

In December, the joint U.N.-African Union envoy for Darfur, Jeremiah Mamabolo, cautioned that mistrust still runs deep in Darfur.

The people of Darfur "have been betrayed," Mamabolo told The Associated Press. "A lot of crimes and injustice have been committed against them, so they feel insecure."

Last year, the transitional government struck a peace deal in October with the Sudan Revolutionary Front, a coalition of several armed rebel groups — including from the Darfur region.

The government and rebel groups have said they will deploy a 12,000-strong Civilian Protection Force to the region. But some worry it could include former militia members who may have taken part in atrocities.

Baraka's brother, Usumain Baraka, who settled in Israel, is skeptical the interim rulers can bring about peace. "The current government of Sudan is run by former generals who designed and carried out the genocide in 2003," he said.

Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the deputy head of Sudan's ruling sovereign council, leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which grew out of the Darfur militias. Rights groups say his forces burned villages and raped and killed civilians during a series of counterinsurgency campaigns over the last decade.

A report by U.N. experts covering March to December said tribal clashes and attacks on civilians increased sharply "in both frequency and scale," particularly in South Darfur and West Darfur. Acts of sexual and gender-based violence continue to be committed daily and go unaddressed, the report found.

For Baraka's family, his death has shattered their plans for the future.

Baraka fled Darfur when the war began, going first to Chad, then Libya and Ghana. From there, he was resettled as a refugee in the U.S., where he gained citizenship in 2015. In Atlanta, he ran a trucking business, his brother said, through which he supported his extended family in Sudan. He was also studying to become a medical assistant.

"He was the backbone of our family," said his brother.

Baraka had married his wife on a trip home to Jabal, where she had their children. He had arrived in December to register his newly born third child at the American Embassy and start the process of bringing all of them to the United States — now that the Trump administration ban on travel from Sudan has ended.

Now those plans are gone, said his wife.

"Nothing remains but memories," she said.

Likely cause of Kobe Bryant helicopter crash to be announced

By STEFANIE DAZIO and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In the year since the helicopter carrying Kobe Bryant crashed into a hillside on a foggy morning, killing all nine aboard, there's been plenty of finger-pointing over the cause of the tragedy.

Bryant's widow blamed the pilot. She and families of other victims also faulted the companies that owned and operated the helicopter. The brother of the pilot didn't blame Bryant but said he knew the risks of flying. The helicopter companies said the weather was an act of God and blamed air traffic controllers.

On Tuesday, federal safety officials are expected to announce the long-awaited probable cause of the crash that unleashed worldwide grief for the retired basketball star, launched several lawsuits and prompted state and federal legislation.

"I think the whole world is watching because it's Kobe," said Ed Coleman, an Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University professor and safety science expert.

Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, and six other passengers were flying from Orange County to a youth basketball tournament at his Mamba Sports Academy in Ventura County on Jan. 26, 2020, when the helicopter encountered thick fog in the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles.

Pilot Ara Zobayan climbed sharply and had nearly broken through the clouds when the Sikorsky S-76 helicopter banked abruptly and plunged into the Calabasas hills below, killing all nine aboard instantly before flames engulfed the wreckage.

There was no sign of mechanical failure, and it was believed to be an accident, the National Transportation Safety Board has said.

The board is likely to make nonbinding recommendations to prevent future crashes when it meets remotely Tuesday.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency that investigates crashes but has no enforcement powers. It can only submit suggestions to bodies like the Federal Aviation Administration or the Coast Guard, which have repeatedly rejected some of the board's safety recommendations after other disasters.

One recommendation could be for helicopters to have a Terrain Awareness and Warning System, a device that signals when an aircraft is in danger of crashing. The helicopter didn't have the system, which the NTSB has recommended as mandatory for helicopters. The FAA only requires it for air ambulances.

Federal lawmakers have sponsored the Kobe Bryant and Gianna Bryant Helicopter Safety Act to mandate the devices on all helicopters carrying six or more passengers.

Former NTSB Chairman James Hall said he hopes the FAA will require the systems as a result of the crash.

"Historically, it has required high-profile tragedies to move the regulatory needle forward," he said.

The devices, known as TAWS, cost upward of $35,000 per helicopter and require training and maintenance.

Helicopter Association International discouraged what it called a "one solution fits all" method. President and CEO James Viola said in a statement that mandating specific equipment to the entire industry is "ineffective" and "potentially hazardous."

Even though Zobayan was flying at low altitude in a hilly area, the warning system may not have prevented the crash, Coleman said. The terrain could have triggered the alarm "constantly going off" and distracted the pilot or prompted him to lower its volume or ignore it, the Embry-Riddle safety science professor said.

Federal investigators said Zobayan, an experienced pilot who often flew Bryant, may have "misperceived" the angles at which he was descending and banking, which can occur when a pilot becomes disoriented in low visibility, according to NTSB documents.

The others killed were Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli, his wife, Keri, and their daughter Alyssa; Christina Mauser, who helped Bryant coach his daughter's basketball team; and Sarah Chester and her daughter Payton. Alyssa and Payton were Gianna's teammates.

The crash has spawned lawsuits and countersuits.

On the day a massive memorial service was held at the Staples Center, where Bryant played most of his career, Vanessa Bryant sued Zobayan and the companies that owned and operated the helicopter for negligence and the wrongful deaths of her husband and daughter. Families of other victims sued the helicopter companies but not the pilot.

Vanessa Bryant said Island Express Helicopters Inc., which operated the aircraft, and its owner, Island Express Holding Corp., did not properly train or supervise Zobayan. She said the pilot was careless and negligent to fly in fog and should have aborted the flight.

Zobayan's brother said Kobe Bryant knew the risks of flying in a helicopter and his survivors aren't entitled to damages from the pilot's estate. Island Express Helicopters Inc. denied responsibility and said the crash was "an act of God" it couldn't control.

It also countersued two FAA air traffic controllers, saying the crash was caused by their "series of erroneous acts and/or omissions."

The countersuit claims one controller improperly denied Zobayan's request for "flight following," or radar assistance as he proceeded in the fog. Officials have said the controller terminated service because radar couldn't be maintained at the altitude the aircraft was flying.

According to the lawsuit, the controller said he was going to lose radar and communications shortly, but radar contact was not lost. When a second controller took over, the lawsuit said the first controller failed to brief him about the helicopter, and because the radar services were not terminated correctly, the pilot was under the belief he was being tracked.

Vanessa Bryant also sued the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, accusing deputies of sharing unauthorized photos of the crash site. California now has a state law prohibiting such conduct.

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Associated Press writers David Koenig in Dallas and Tom Krisher in Detroit contributed.

Koala rescued after 5-car pileup on Australian freeway

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A koala has been rescued after causing a five-car pileup while trying to cross a six-lane freeway in southern Australia.

Police said the crash in heavy Monday morning traffic in the city of Adelaide caused some injuries but no one required an ambulance.

The animal's rescuer said she got out of her car to investigate what had caused the pileup. Nadia Tugwell, with her coat in hand, teamed up with a stranger clutching a blanket in a bid to capture the marsupial. A concrete highway divider had blocked the koala's crossing.

"The koala was absolutely not damaged in any way," Tugwell said. "It was very active, but very calm."

Once the koala was in her trunk, Tugwell drove to a gas station to turn the animal over to wildlife rescuers. In the interim, the koala was able to climb from the trunk into her SUV's cabin.

"It decided to come to the front toward me, so I said, 'OK, you stay here. I'll get out,'" she said.

"It started sitting for a while on the steering wheel: (as if) saying: 'let's go for a drive,' and that's when I started taking photos," she added.

Tugwell said she had learned from past experience how to calm koalas by covering their eyes. She lives near a eucalyptus forest outside Adelaide and has twice called animal handlers to rescue koalas injured in fights with other koalas.

"I live up in the hills, and if you let them do what they want to do and you don't chase them or something, they're OK," Tugwell said.

The leather trimmings of her luxury vehicle were scratched by the animal, but Tugwell said the happy ending was well worth the damage.

The koala later was released in a forest — well away from the freeway.

Dems propose $1,400 payments as part of Biden virus relief

By ALAN FRAM, KEVIN FREKING and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats proposed an additional $1,400 in direct payments to individuals as Congress began piecing together a $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package that tracks President Joe Biden's plan for battling the pandemic and reviving a still staggering economy.

Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee would expand tax credits for families with children, for lower-earning people and those buying health insurance on marketplaces created by the 2010 Affordable Care Act. The panel, which plans to approve the measure by week's end, would also provide health care subsidies for some unemployed workers.

Less than three weeks into his presidency, Biden has declared that vanquishing the virus and resuscitating the economy are his top priorities. The coronavirus pandemic has killed over 460,000 Americans while the economy has lost 10 million jobs since the crisis began last year.

Monday's Ways and Means unveiling of its piece of the package — at over $900 billion, nearly half of Biden's entire plan — came with Congress' Democratic leaders hoping to rush the legislation to the president for his signature by mid-March, when existing emergency unemployment benefits expire. Their schedule reflects a desire by Biden and congressional Democrats to show they can respond swiftly and decisively

to the crisis, even if, as seems likely, they must muscle past solid Republican opposition.

"While it is still our hope that Republicans will join us in doing right by the American people, the urgency of the moment demands that we act without further delay," said Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass.

Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, top Republican on that committee, criticized Democrats for driving ahead on the massive measure "without bipartisan compromise." He said the GOP wants to focus on vaccine distribution and more targeted relief for workers, families and small businesses — essentially previewing amendments Republicans are expected to propose during committee votes this week, some of which might win Democratic backing.

House Education and Labor Committee Democrats also previewed their plans Monday. Their $350 billion package includes $130 billion to help schools reopen safely, $40 billion for colleges battered by the pandemic and a plan to gradually raise the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour. The minimum wage increase faces an uphill climb, and even Biden has conceded it likely won't survive.

The Financial Services Committee proposal includes $50 billion to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency handle pandemic costs, plus $25 billion for struggling rental property owners and people at risk of homelessness. Transportation and Infrastructure Committee spending would include grants of $30 billion for struggling public transit agencies with starkly reduced ridership.

Democrats have only narrow House and Senate majorities. Besides Republican opposition that could be unanimous, Democrats will have to balance party moderates who worry about a package going too far and progressives eager to push Biden as far leftward as they can.

In one potential battleground within the party, the Ways and Means Democrats proposed limiting the full $1,400 relief payments to individuals making $75,000 or less, and phasing them out until they end completely at $100,000. Couples who make up to $150,000 would be entitled to $2,800 relief payments, which would gradually diminish and fully disappear for those earning $200,000.

The income levels at which people qualify for the direct payments has caused rifts among Democrats, with moderates arguing that relief should be more narrowly targeted to people most in need. Biden has said he will not allow the per-person payments to fall below $1,400 but has indicated flexibility on the income thresholds.

"There is a discussion right now about what that threshold will look like. A conclusion has not been finalized," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Congress approved $600 per person direct payments in December. The additional $1,400 would bring the total to $2,000. Democrats have sought that amount for months, and it won support from then-President Donald Trump during his unsuccessful reelection campaign, even as it was opposed by many congressional Republicans.

The Ways and Means proposal would increase emergency jobless aid to $400 weekly from its current $300. Benefits would last until Aug. 29, instead of March 14 as now scheduled. The new amount is still below the original $600 extra weekly benefit that was enacted last March but expired July 31.

The plan would fight child poverty by increasing the child tax credit for families for one year. Now a maximum $2,000 annually, it would grow to up to $3,600 per child under 6 and as much as $3,000 for those up to age 17. Payments of the credit would be made monthly, even to families that owe no federal income taxes — a change from current policy.

The bill also provides several pathways for people to get and keep health insurance, including an early test of Biden's pledge to build on Obama's health care law.

One section would sweeten the subsidies provided under former President Barack Obama's health law. The Biden administration has already announced a three-month special sign-up period for ACA coverage starting next Monday. The more generous financial assistance in the House bill would be available for this year and next.

The bill would also cover 85% of the cost of premiums for workers trying to preserve their job-based health insurance after getting laid off. A federal law known as COBRA already allows them to temporar-

ily keep their old employer's health plan, but they typically have to pay prohibitively high premiums. The assistance would be available through Sept. 30.

For workers without children, the plan proposes a significant expansion of the earned-income tax credit — a refundable credit currently claimed by taxpayers who earn an average $20,000 a year. The EITC is viewed by its proponents as a major anti-poverty tool for working people.

The legislation calls for the maximum credit for workers without children to be nearly tripled and for wider eligibility. It also contains tax breaks for some restaurants that have received pandemic aid.

The bills' details were announced as a report by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said boosting the minimum wage to $15 an hour would increase joblessness even as it boosts wages for millions of workers.

Progressives like Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., author of the minimum wage legislation, want Democrats to fight for it now. It faces opposition from the GOP and some Democratic moderates wary that it will hurt small businesses during the pandemic.

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Associated Press writers Marcy Gordon in Washington and Collin Binkley in Boston contributed to this report.

Arab spacecraft closes in on Mars on historic flight

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A spacecraft from the United Arab Emirates was set to swing into orbit around Mars in the Arab world's first interplanetary mission Tuesday, the first of three robotic explorers arriving at the red planet over the next week and a half.

The orbiter, called Amal, Arabic for Hope, traveled 300 million miles in nearly seven months to get to Mars with the goal of mapping its atmosphere throughout each season.

A combination orbiter and lander from China is close behind, scheduled to reach the planet on Wednesday. It will circle Mars until the rover separates and attempts to land on the surface in May to look for signs of ancient life.

A rover from the U.S. named Perseverance is set to join the crowd next week, aiming for a landing Feb. 18. It will be the first leg in a decade-long U.S.-European project to bring Mars rocks back to Earth to be examined for evidence the planet once harbored microscopic life.

About 60% of all Mars missions have ended in failure, crashing, burning up or otherwise falling short in a testament to the complexity of interplanetary travel and the difficulty of making a descent through Mars' thin atmosphere.

If it pulls this off, China will become only the second country to land successfully on Mars. The U.S. has done it eight times, the first almost 45 years ago. A NASA rover and lander are still working on the surface.

For the UAE, it was the country's first venture beyond Earth's orbit, making the flight a matter of intense national pride.

For days, landmarks across the UAE, including Burj Khalifa, the tallest tower on Earth, glowed red to mark Amal's anticipated arrival. This year is the 50th anniversary of the country's founding, casting even more attention on Amal.

The celestial weather station aimed for an exceptionally high Martian orbit of 13,670 miles by 27,340 miles (22,000 kilometers by 44,000 kilometers). It was set to join six spacecraft already operating around Mars: three U.S., two European and one Indian.

Amal was expected to perform an intricate, high-stakes series of turns and engine firings to maneuver into orbit and achieve what has eluded so many before.

"Anything that slightly goes wrong and you lose the spacecraft," said Sarah al-Amiri, minister of state for advanced technology and the chair of the UAE's space agency.

A success would be a tremendous boost to the UAE's space ambitions. The country's first astronaut rocketed into space in 2019, hitching a ride to the International Space Station with the Russians. That's

58 years after the Soviet Union and the U.S. launched astronauts.

In developing Amal, the UAE chose to collaborate with more experienced partners instead of going it alone or buying the spacecraft elsewhere. Its engineers and scientists worked with researchers at the University of Colorado, the University of California at Berkeley and Arizona State University.

The spacecraft was assembled at Boulder, Colorado, before being sent to Japan for launch last July.

All three spacecraft en route to the red planet lifted off within days of one another, taking advantage of the close alignment of Earth and Mars — thus their close arrival times.

The car-size Amal cost $200 million to build and launch; that excludes operating costs at Mars. The Chinese and U.S. expeditions are considerably more complicated — and expensive — because of their rovers. NASA's Perseverance mission totals $3 billion.

The UAE, a federation of seven skeikhdoms, is looking for Amal to ignite the imaginations of the country's scientists and its youth, and help prepare for a future when the oil runs out.

"This mission was never about just reaching Mars," said Omran Sharaf, Amal's project manager. "Mars is just a means for a much bigger objective."

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Associated Press writer Malak Harb contributed to this report.

Sources: Biden officials snub Salvadoran leader in DC trip

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The Biden administration turned down a meeting request with El Salvador's president on an unannounced trip to Washington last week, as criticism of the Central American leader mounts among Democrats, three people with knowledge of the decision said Monday.

The trip by Nayib Bukele, which has not been previously reported, came after a senior White House official warned in an interview with a Salvadoran news outlet highly critical of Bukele that the Biden administration expected to have "differences" with him.

Bukele was quick to embrace former President Donald Trump's hardline immigration policies restricting asylum requests, which won him a great deal of U.S. support for his tough governing style in El Salvador, where he is popular. But like other world leaders befriended by Trump, he faces an uphill climb pivoting to the Biden administration, which is seeking to undo those policies and has signaled its relationship with El Salvador is under review.

The president's surprise trip amid a pandemic posed a dilemma for U.S. policy makers. They were given little advance notice and are mostly avoiding in-person meetings due to the coronavirus and because many senior positions remain vacant, said the the three people, all of whom are in Washington and insisted on speaking anonymously in return for discussing internal decision-making.

In rejecting Bukele's request, the Biden officials wanted to ensure Bukele didn't try to tout any meeting as a show of support before legislative elections later this month where he's seeking to expand his power base, the people said. However, they did make an exception for Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno, who met in Washington with senior Biden officials 11 days before the Andean nation's presidential election.

Bukele insisted that the trip was private and that he didn't request any meeting with Biden officials.

What "president in the world will go to a trip with his wife and baby girl to sit down in Washington and ask for random meetings to be held immediately? That doesn't even make sense," he said in a text message.

The three people didn't say how the request for a meeting was made. But they said the decision not to meet with Bukele was deliberate.

While the Biden administration hopes to eventually engage Bukele in its $4 billion plan to attack the root causes of migration from Central America, it has serious concerns about his respect for the rule of law and democracy, the people added.

"Clearly conditions have changed for Bukele," said José Miguel Vivanco, the Americas director at Human Rights Watch in Washington. "His popularity in El Salvador doesn't insulate him from legitimate scrutiny in Washington over his record on human rights and respect for the rule of law."

The State Department's Western Hemisphere section said the Biden administration values what it considers a strong relationship between El Salvador and the United States and will work closely with its partners to address challenges in the region. A spokesperson declined further comment.

During the visit to Washington, Bukele did meet with Luis Almagro, the secretary general of the Organization of American States, said Foreign Minister Alexandra Hill, who did not accompany the president on the trip.

The OAS, which last year announced it would send an observer mission to El Salvador for the Feb. 28 congressional election, didn't respond to a request for comment nor put out any statement about the visit. Almagro is known to regularly tweet about his meetings with visiting dignitaries and on the same day he met with Bukele promoted his participation in a Zoom call with diplomats from Colombia.

Bukele took office in 2019 as an i ndependent vowing to rescue El Salvador from the deep divisions left by uncontrolled gang violence and systemic corruption in both right- and left-wing governments that followed the end of a bloody civil war in 1992.

Polls say an overwhelming majority of Salvadorans approve of his tough approach, which is credited with reducing high levels of violence, and his allies are expected to win a majority in this month's congressional vote.

But increasingly Democrats, but also some Republicans, have criticized Bukele for strong arm tactics like sending troops to surround Congress last year to pressure lawmakers to vote on funding for the fight against the gangs.

Over the weekend, two House Democrats, Rep. Norma Torres and Rep. Albio Sires, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Latin America, sent a letter to Bukele urging him "not to stoke divisions in the interest of political gain."

The letter was prompted by the Jan. 31 killing of two individuals returning from a rally by Bukele's opponents from the leftist FMLN party. Police have arrested three bodyguards who work for the Health Ministry as suspects.

Both Bukele and his opponents seized on the confusing incident, which is under investigation, to mutually accuse each other of inciting political violence.

"It looks like the moribund parties have put into practice their final plan," Bukele wrote in the immediate aftermath of the killings, countering criticism on social media from opponents that his rhetoric was to blame for the deaths. "They're so desperate not to lose their privileges and corruption."

The Biden administration last week terminated Trump-era bilateral agreements with El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala that required people seeking asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border to go instead to one of the Central America nations and pursue their claims there.

Legislation passed last year and supported by Democrats curbs U.S. foreign aid to El Salvador to fund the purchase of U.S. military equipment. The State Department is also required to come up within six months a public list of corrupt individuals in Central America subject to sanctions, a move that could include some of the region's most-powerful politicians.

Juan González, the National Security Council's senior director for the Western Hemisphere, said last month that the Biden administration expected to have "differences" with El Salvador's president and that any leader unwilling to tackle corruption won't be considered a U.S. ally.

González's comments carried added weight because they were his first as head of White House policy toward Latin America and because they were made in an interview with El Faro, a frequent target of Bukele.

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Joshua Goodman on Twitter: @APJoshGoodman

Vaccine drive gains speed, but maskless fans fuel worries

By ADAM GELLER and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

The drive to vaccinate Americans against the coronavirus is gaining speed and newly recorded cases have fallen to their lowest level in three months, but authorities worry that raucous Super Bowl celebra-

tions could fuel new outbreaks.

More than 4 million more vaccinations were reported over the weekend, a significantly faster clip than in previous days, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nearly one in 10 Americans have now received at least one shot. But just 2.9% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated, a long way from the 70% or more that experts say must be inoculated to conquer the outbreak.

Newly confirmed infections have declined to an average of 117,000 a day, the lowest point since early November. That is a steep drop from the peak of nearly 250,000 a day in early January.

The number of Americans in the hospital with COVID-19 has also fallen sharply to about 81,000, down from more than 130,000 last month.

Health officials say the decline in hospitalizations and new cases most likely reflects an easing of the surge that was fueled by holiday gatherings, and perhaps better adherence to safety precautions.

The drop-off in new cases comes as fewer tests for the virus are being reported. But experts say the decline in cases is real. It is more pronounced than the apparent slowdown in testing, and it is accompanied by other encouraging signs.

"We are seeing a real decline because it's been sustained over time and it's correlated with decreasing hospitalizations," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious disease specialist at Johns Hopkins University. "That tells you that there does seem to be something afoot."

The question, he said, is whether the lower numbers can be sustained as new variants of the virus take hold in the United States. President Joe Biden has announced plans to spend billions to increase rapid testing by the summer.

COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are still running at close to all-time highs, at an average of about 3,160 per day, down about 200 since mid-January. The death toll overall has eclipsed 460,000.

Federal officials are warning states not to relax restrictions on dining out and other social activities.

"We have yet to control this pandemic," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, head of the CDC, said Monday.

The sight of fans, many without masks, celebrating the Super Bowl in the streets, in sports bars and at game-watching parties has sparked worries of new outbreaks.

"This isn't how we should be celebrating the Super Bowl," the mayor of St. Petersburg, Florida, Rick Kriseman, tweeted after a maskless party was hosted by Rapper Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson in a hangar at the city's airport, not far from where the Tampa Bay Buccaneers won the title.

"It's not safe or smart. It's stupid. We're going to take a very close look at this, and it may end up costing someone a lot more than 50 cent."

Police in Charleston, South Carolina, issued citations to nearly 50 people for not wearing masks in public during Sunday's game.

Richard Medina of Los Angeles attended a friend's backyard game party on Sunday, though he knew case numbers in Southern California remain high.

"It was outdoors, and felt like it was going to be pretty chill," said Medina, who spent most of the past year in isolation with a roommate who hates sports. He enjoyed the escape but decided to leave after awhile.

"More people started showing up later, and it felt like the more people drank, the more they started getting sloppy about masks and keeping their distance," he said.

Matt Reischling of Petaluma, California, said after careful consideration of the safety of the situation, he went to a small gathering of about six people with the family of a friend who had been vaccinated in nearby San Francisco.

It was his first meetup with more than one person in many months.

"It was a mental health thing for me to just get … out of town and visually put my eyes on different things, talk with different people, regardless of potential risk."

He felt exhilarated by seeing the kids being active and the family dog barking as they deep-fried wings in the backyard..

"I feel very energized by the visit and need more of those," he said, "so, in the end, totally worth it."

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Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, Andrew Dalton and Jeffrey Collins contributed to this story.

Dems propose $1,400 payments as part of Biden virus relief

By ALAN FRAM, KEVIN FREKING and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats on Monday proposed an additional $1,400 in direct payments to individuals as Congress began piecing together a $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package that tracks President Joe Biden's plan for battling the pandemic and reviving a still staggering economy.

Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee would expand tax credits for families with children, for lower-earning people and those buying health insurance on marketplaces created by the 2010 Affordable Care Act. The panel, which plans to approve the measure by week's end, would also provide health care subsidies for some unemployed workers.

Less than three weeks into his presidency, Biden has declared that vanquishing the virus and resuscitating the economy are his top priorities. The coronavirus pandemic has killed over 460,000 Americans while the economy has lost 10 million jobs since the crisis began last year.

Monday's Ways and Means unveiling of its piece of the package — at over $900 billion, nearly half of Biden's entire plan — came with Congress' Democratic leaders hoping to rush the legislation to the president for his signature by mid-March, when existing emergency unemployment benefits expire. Their schedule reflects a desire by Biden and congressional Democrats to show they can respond swiftly and decisively to the crisis, even if, as seems likely, they must muscle past solid Republican opposition.

"While it is still our hope that Republicans will join us in doing right by the American people, the urgency of the moment demands that we act without further delay," said Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass.

Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, top Republican on that committee, criticized Democrats for driving ahead on the massive measure "without bipartisan compromise." He said the GOP wants to focus on vaccine distribution and more targeted relief for workers, families and small businesses — essentially previewing amendments Republicans are expected to propose during committee votes this week, some of which might win Democratic backing.

House Education and Labor Committee Democrats also previewed their plans Monday. Their $350 billion package includes $130 billion to help schools reopen safely, $40 billion for colleges battered by the pandemic and a plan to gradually raise the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour. The minimum wage increase faces an uphill climb, and even Biden has conceded it likely won't survive.

The Financial Services Committee proposal includes $50 billion to help the Federal Emergency Management Agency handle pandemic costs, plus $25 billion for struggling rental property owners and people at risk of homelessness. Transportation and Infrastructure Committee spending would include grants of $30 billion for struggling public transit agencies with starkly reduced ridership.

Democrats have only narrow House and Senate majorities. Besides Republican opposition that could be unanimous, Democrats will have to balance party moderates who worry about a package going too far and progressives eager to push Biden as far leftward as they can.

In one potential battleground within the party, the Ways and Means Democrats proposed limiting the full $1,400 relief payments to individuals making $75,000 or less, and phasing them out until they end completely at $100,000. Couples who make up to $150,000 would be entitled to $2,800 relief payments, which would gradually diminish and fully disappear for those earning $200,000.

The income levels at which people qualify for the direct payments has caused rifts among Democrats, with moderates arguing that relief should be more narrowly targeted to people most in need. Biden has said he will not allow the per-person payments to fall below $1,400 but has indicated flexibility on the income thresholds.

"There is a discussion right now about what that threshold will look like. A conclusion has not been finalized," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Congress approved $600 per person direct payments in December. The additional $1,400 would bring the total to $2,000. Democrats have sought that amount for months, and it won support from then-President Donald Trump during his unsuccessful reelection campaign, even as it was opposed by many congressional Republicans.

The Ways and Means proposal would increase emergency jobless aid to $400 weekly from its current $300. Benefits would last until Aug. 29, instead of March 14 as now scheduled. The new amount is still below the original $600 extra weekly benefit that was enacted last March but expired July 31.

The plan would fight child poverty by increasing the child tax credit for families for one year. Now a maximum $2,000 annually, it would grow to up to $3,600 per child under 6 and as much as $3,000 for those up to age 17. Payments of the credit would be made monthly, even to families that owe no federal income taxes — a change from current policy.

The bill also provides several pathways for people to get and keep health insurance, including an early test of Biden's pledge to build on Obama's health care law.

One section would sweeten the subsidies provided under former President Barack Obama's health law. The Biden administration has already announced a three-month special sign-up period for ACA coverage starting next Monday. The more generous financial assistance in the House bill would be available for this year and next.

The bill would also cover 85% of the cost of premiums for workers trying to preserve their job-based health insurance after getting laid off. A federal law known as COBRA already allows them to temporarily keep their old employer's health plan, but they typically have to pay prohibitively high premiums. The assistance would be available through Sept. 30.

For workers without children, the plan proposes a significant expansion of the earned-income tax credit — a refundable credit currently claimed by taxpayers who earn an average $20,000 a year. The EITC is viewed by its proponents as a major anti-poverty tool for working people.

The legislation calls for the maximum credit for workers without children to be nearly tripled and for wider eligibility. It also contains tax breaks for some restaurants that have received pandemic aid.

The bills' details were announced as a report by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said boosting the minimum wage to $15 an hour would increase joblessness even as it boosts wages for millions of workers.

Progressives like Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., author of the minimum wage legislation, want Democrats to fight for it now. It faces opposition from the GOP and some Democratic moderates wary that it will hurt small businesses during the pandemic.

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Associated Press writers Marcy Gordon in Washington and Collin Binkley in Boston contributed to this report.

Man charged in US Capitol riot worked for FBI, lawyer says

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man who authorities say is a leader of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group and helped to organize a ring of other extremists and led them in the attack last month at the U.S. Capitol has held a top-secret security clearance for decades and previously worked for the FBI, his attorney said Monday.

Thomas Caldwell, who authorities believe holds a leadership role in the extremist group, worked as a section chief for the FBI from 2009 to 2010 after retiring from the Navy, his lawyer, Thomas Plofchan, wrote in a motion urging the judge to release him from jail while he awaits trial.

The defense said Caldwell, who has denied being part of the Oath Keepers, has held a top-secret security clearance since 1979, which required multiple special background investigations, according to Plofchan. Caldwell also ran a consulting firm that did classified work for the U.S. government, the lawyer said.

"He has been vetted and found numerous times as a person worthy of the trust and confidence of the

United States government, as indicated by granting him Top Secret clearances," Plofchan wrote.

Most section chiefs within the FBI rise through the ranks of the bureau and it is unclear whether Caldwell would've been directly hired for that position or whether he held any other positions with the bureau. The FBI did not immediately comment Monday evening and Caldwell's lawyer didn't immediately answer questions about his client's work.

Caldwell is one of three people authorities have described as Oath Keepers who were charged last month with conspiracy and accused of plotting the attack on the Capitol in advance. He has been locked up since his arrest at his home in Berryville, Virginia, on Jan. 19.

Caldwell's lawyer said he denies ever going into the Capitol and has "physical limitations" that would prevent the 66-year-old from forcing his way into any building.

Caldwell's lawyer said his client retired as a lieutenant commander with the Navy and that he was a "100% disabled veteran." Caldwell suffered from complications related to a "service-connected injury," including shoulder, back and knee issues, the attorney said. In 2010, Caldwell had spinal surgery, which later failed and led to chronic spinal issues and a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the court filing.

Charging documents show messages between Caldwell and the others about arranging hotel rooms in the Washington area in the days before the siege. In one Facebook message from to Caldwell, one the others says: "Will probably call you tomorrow … mainly because … I like to know wtf plan is. You are the man COMMANDER."

Authorities say the Oath Keepers communicated during the attack about where lawmakers were. At one point during the siege, Caldwell received a message that said "all members are in the tunnels under the capital," according to court documents. "Seal them in turn on gas," it said.

Other messages read: "Tom all legislators are down in the Tunnels 3floors down" and "go through back house chamber doors facing N left down hallway down steps," according to court documents.

Caldwell is among roughly 200 people charged so far in the siege for federal crimes such as disrupting Congress, disorderly conduct and assault. A special group of prosecutors is weighing whether to bring sedition charges, officials have said.

Several members of the Proud Boys, a far-right, male-chauvinist extremist group that seized on the Trump administration's policies, have also been charged with conspiracy and accused of working together during the siege.

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Richer reported from Boston.

Bucs hope to keep core together to chase another Super Bowl

By FRED GOODALL AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Tom Brady's coming back. So is Bruce Arians.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are already thinking about what it'll take to repeat as Super Bowl champions. The challenge begins with trying to keep some key components together for next season.

Brady threw three touchdowns passes on the way to claiming a record seventh NFL title with a 31-9 rout of the Kansas City Chiefs — two to Rob Gronkowski and one to Antonio Brown, both of whom played on one-year deals after being lured to Tampa Bay by the 43-year-old quarterback.

Leonard Fournette ran for the team's other TD. He, too, joined the Bucs on a one-year contract after Brady reached out to the talented running back after he was released by the Jacksonville Jaguars late in training camp.

If Brady, Arians and general manager Jason Licht have their way, Gronkowski, Brown and Fournette won't wind up being one-season rentals.

The team is also interested in signing linebacker Shaquil Barrett and receiver Chris Godwin to long-term deals. Defensive starters Lavonte David and Ndamukong Suh can become free agents, although there's been no indication either of them is eager to leave.

"I'm very very confident," Arians said Monday of keeping the bulk of the roster together for next season.

"I have all the trust in the world in Jason and what he will do. There will be dollars involved, but I think this group is so so close that sometimes dollars don't matter. But we're going to do everything we can to get the dollars right, too."

The Bucs likely have about $38 million in salary cap space, though the 2021 cap number has not been set yet.

Arians also expressed the belief that the Bucs, who rode Brady and a dynamic young defense on an impressive playoff surge that culminated with Tampa Bay becoming the first team to appear in a Super Bowl in its own stadium, can be even better next year.

He and Brady reiterated how difficult it was to navigate this season, the quarterback's first in Tampa Bay after 20 years in New England, amid COVID-19 protocols that eliminated offseason workouts and preseason games.

"Hopefully we can keep the band together, have an offseason and actually know what we're doing (entering next season)," Arians said. "I think the sky's the limit for this group."

Brady, who won his fifth Super Bowl MVP award, was asked Sunday night and again Monday where his first title with Tampa Bay ranks with the six he won with the Patriots. He said every season is different and poses different challenges, though he finally conceded there was something special about what the Bucs were able to accomplish playing through a pandemic.

"It's great. That's where I rank it. It's been a great year, incredibly fun. I think in a unique way it was kind of like, with the coronavirus situation and all the protocols, it really was like football for junkies. There was not really a lot of other things to do other than show up to work and play football," Brady said.

"If you love football this was the year to be a player in the NFL because that's all it was," Brady added. "It was football camp with all your buddies year round. I really enjoyed that part."

Arians, 68, came out of retirement two years ago, inheriting a team that hadn't made the playoffs in more than a decade. The Bucs went 7-9 in his first season, then hit the jackpot in free agency when Brady decided to leave New England.

Life hasn't been the same since.

"This was a very talented football team last year, but we really didn't know how to win. And when you bring a winner in, and he's running the ship, it makes a total difference in your locker room and every time we step on the field," Arians said.

"I think the leadership that Tom brings and his attitude of let's go play, it's never over till it's over and we're going to win this thing somehow, some way, it permeated the locker room," the coach added. "His belief that we're going to do this, and knowing he had been there and done it, our guys believed it. It changed our entire football team."

Brady said Arians, who also has two Super Bowl rings as an assistant coach, deserves credit, too.

"B.A. had confidence in us from the moment we got started. And even when we hit a rough patch, he never lost his poise, he never doubted what we could accomplish. He just kept believing we could do it," the quarterback said.

"When the coach believes it," Brady added, "the players believe it, too."

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More AP NFL: https://apnews.com/NFL and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

EXPLAINER: What's ahead as Trump impeachment trial begins

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial begins Tuesday, forcing the Senate to decide whether to convict him of incitement of insurrection after a violent mob of his supporters laid siege to the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

While Trump's acquittal is expected, Democrats hope to gain at least some Senate Republican votes by linking Trump's actions to a vivid description of the violence, which resulted in five deaths and sent lawmakers fleeing for safety. The House impeached Trump on Jan. 13, one week later.

Trump's lawyers say the trial should not be held at all because the former president is now a private citizen. They argue that he did not incite the violence when he told his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat.

A look at the basics of the upcoming impeachment trial:

HOW DOES THE TRIAL WORK?

As laid out by the Constitution, the House votes to impeach and the Senate then holds a trial on the charge or charges. Two thirds of senators present can convict.

The House appointed nine impeachment managers who will present the case against Trump on the Senate floor. Trump's defense team will have equal time to argue against conviction.

The chief justice of the United States normally presides over the trial of a president, but because Trump has left office, the presiding officer will be Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who is the ceremonial head of the Senate as the longest-serving member of the majority party.

Once the senators reach a final vote on the impeachment charge — this time there is just one, incitement of insurrection — each lawmaker will stand up and cast their vote: guilty or not guilty.

HOW LONG WILL THE TRIAL LAST?

Likely more than a week. The agreement between Senate leaders provides for up to 16 hours for both prosecutors and the defense to make their arguments, starting Wednesday, with no more than eight hours of arguments per day. Later, there will be time for senators to ask questions, and there could be additional procedural votes.

Under the agreement, the trial will open Tuesday with four hours of debate on whether the trial is constitutional. The Senate will then vote on whether to dismiss the charge against Trump. If that vote fails, as expected, the House managers will begin their arguments Wednesday and continue into Thursday.

Trump's lawyers are likely to begin their arguments Friday and finish Saturday. That almost certainly means a final vote on Trump's conviction won't happen until next week.

Trump's first impeachment trial, in which he was acquitted on charges that he abused power by pressuring Ukraine to investigate now-President Joe Biden, lasted almost three weeks. But this one is expected to be shorter, as the case is less complicated and the senators know many of the details already, having been in the Capitol during the insurrection.

And while the Democrats want to ensure they have enough time to make their case, they do not want to tie up the Senate for long. The Senate cannot confirm Biden's Cabinet nominees and move forward with their legislative priorities, such as COVID-19 relief, until the trial is complete.

WILL THERE BE WITNESSES?

It appears unlikely, for now, though that could change as the trial proceeds. Trump himself has declined a request from the impeachment managers to testify.

While Democrats argued vociferously for witnesses in the last impeachment trial, they were not allowed to call them after the GOP-controlled Senate voted against doing so. This time, Democrats feel they don't need witnesses because they can rely on the graphic images of the insurrection that played out on live television. They also argue that the senators were witnesses themselves.

If the managers do decide they want to call witnesses, the bipartisan agreement for the trial allows them to ask for a vote. The Senate would have to approve subpoenaing any witnesses for the trial.

WHY TRY TRUMP WHEN HE IS OUT OF OFFICE?

Republicans and Trump's lawyers argue that the trial is unnecessary, and even unconstitutional, because Trump is no longer president and cannot be removed from office. Democrats disagree, pointing to opinions of many legal scholars and the impeachment of a former secretary of war, William Belknap, who resigned in 1876 just hours before he was impeached over a kickback scheme.

While Belknap was eventually acquitted, the Senate held a full trial. And this time, the House impeached Trump while he was still president, seven days before Biden's inauguration.

If Trump were convicted, the Senate would take a second vote to bar him from holding office again, Schumer said Monday. Democrats feel that would be an appropriate punishment.

In response to GOP efforts to dismiss the trial, Democrats argue that there should not be a "January exception" for presidents who commit impeachable offenses just before they leave office. They say the trial is necessary not only to hold Trump properly accountable but also so they can deal with what happened and move forward.

"You cannot go forward until you have justice," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi last week. "If we were not to follow up with this, we might as well remove any penalty from the Constitution of impeachment."

HOW IS THIS TRIAL DIFFERENT FROM TRUMP'S FIRST TRIAL?

Trump's first trial was based on evidence uncovered over several months by the House about a private phone call between Trump and the president of Ukraine, as well as closed-door meetings that happened before and afterward. Democrats held a lengthy investigation and then compiled a report of their findings.

In contrast, the second trial will be based almost entirely on the visceral experience of a riot that targeted the senators themselves, in the Capitol building. The insurrectionists even breached the Senate chamber, where the trial will be held.

The fresh memories of Jan. 6 could make it easier for the House impeachment managers to make their case, but it doesn't mean the outcome will be any different. Trump was acquitted in his first trial a year ago Friday with only one Republican, Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, voting to convict, and there may not be many more guilty votes this time around.

In a test vote Jan. 26, only five Senate Republicans voted against an effort to dismiss the trial — an early indication that Trump is likely to be acquitted again.

WHAT WILL TRUMP'S LAWYERS ARGUE?

In a brief filed Monday, they argued that the trial is unconstitutional, that Trump did nothing wrong and that he did not incite the insurrection during his Jan. 6 speech to supporters.

While the House impeachment managers say Trump is "singularly" responsible for the attack on the Capitol, Trump's lawyers say the rioters acted on their own accord. They suggest that Trump was simply exercising his First Amendment rights when he falsely disputed the election results and told his supporters to fight — a term they note is often used in political speeches.

The brief goes after the impeachment managers personally, charging that the Democrats have "Trump derangement syndrome," are "selfish" and are only trying to impeach Trump for political gain.

There was no widespread fraud in the election, as Trump claimed falsely over several months and again to his supporters just before the insurrection. Election officials across the country, and even former Attorney General William Barr, contradicted his claims, and dozens of legal challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed.

WHAT WOULD ACQUITTAL MEAN FOR TRUMP?

A second impeachment acquittal by the Senate would be a victory for Trump — and would prove he retains considerable sway over his party, despite his efforts to subvert democracy and widespread condemnation from his GOP colleagues after Jan. 6.

Still, acquittal may not be the end of attempts to hold him accountable. Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, floated a censure resolution after last month's vote made clear that Trump was unlikely to be convicted.

While they haven't said yet if they will push for a censure vote after the impeachment trial, Kaine said last week that "the idea is out there on the table and it may become a useful idea down the road."

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Associated Press writers Eric Tucker and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Trump's trial starting: 'Grievous crime' or just 'theater'?

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate launches Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial on Tuesday, with lawyers for the former president insisting he is not guilty of inciting mob violence at the Capitol to overturn the election while prosecutors say he must be convicted of the "most grievous constitutional

crime" even though he's gone from the White House.

Trump faces a sole charge of incitement to insurrection over the Jan. 6 Capitol siege, an attack that stunned the nation and the world after he encouraged a rally crowd to "fight like hell" for his presidency. Rioters stormed the building trying to stop the certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

No witnesses are expected to be called, in part because the senators sworn as jurors will be presented with graphic videos of the scenes they witnessed that day, forced to flee for safety. Under COVID-19 protocols senators will distance for the trial, some even using the visitors' galleries. Holed up at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, Trump has declined a request to testify.

The first president to face charges after leaving office and the first to be twice impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors, Trump continues to challenge the nation's civic norms and traditions even in defeat. Security remains extremely tight at the Capitol. While acquittal is likely, the trial will test the nation's attitude toward his brand of presidential power, the Democrats' resolve in pursuing him and the loyalty of Trump's Republican allies defending him.

"In trying to make sense of a second Trump trial, the public should keep in mind that Donald Trump was the first president ever to refuse to accept his defeat," said Timothy Naftali, a clinical associate professor at New York University and an expert on Richard Nixon's impeachment saga.

"This trial is one way of having that difficult national conversation about the difference between dissent and insurrection," he said.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that Biden will be busy with the the business of the presidency and won't spend much time watching the televised proceedings. "He'll leave it to his former colleagues in the Senate," she said.

In filings Monday, lawyers for the former president lobbed a wide-ranging attack against the House case, dismissing the trial as "political theater" on the same Senate floor that was invaded by the mob.

Trump's defenders are preparing to challenge both the constitutionality of the trial and any suggestion that he was to blame for the insurrection. They suggest that Trump was simply exercising his First Amendment rights when he encouraged his supporters to protest at the Capitol, and they argue the Senate is not entitled to try Trump now that he has left office.

"While never willing to allow a 'good crisis' to go to waste, the Democratic leadership is incapable of understanding that not everything can always be blamed on their political adversaries," the Trump lawyers say.

House impeachment managers filed their own document Monday, asserting that Trump had "betrayed the American people" and there is no valid excuse or defense.

"His incitement of insurrection against the United States government — which disrupted the peaceful transfer of power — is the most grievous constitutional crime ever committed by a president," the Democrats said.

The trial will begin Tuesday with a debate and vote on whether it's constitutionally permissible to prosecute the former president, an argument that could resonate with Republicans keen on voting to acquit Trump without being seen as condoning his behavior.

Under an agreement between Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican leader Mitch McConnell, the opening arguments would begin Wednesday at noon, with up to 16 hours per side for presentations.

The trial was set to break Friday evening for the Jewish Sabbath at the request of Trump's defense team, and resume Sunday. But Trump attorney David Schoen told senators in a letter late Monday he was concerned about a delay and withdrew the request. The schedule will likely be adjusted, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the planning.

A presidential impeachment trial is among the most serious of Senate proceedings, conducted only three times before, leading to acquittals for Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton and then Trump last year.

Typically senators sit at their desks for such occasions, but the COVID-19 crisis has upended even this tradition. Instead, senators will be allowed to spread out, in the "marble room" just off the Senate floor, where proceedings will be shown on TV, and in the public galleries above the chamber, to accommodate

social distancing, according to the person familiar with the discussions.

Trump's second impeachment trial is expected to diverge from the lengthy, complicated affair of a year ago. In that case, Trump was charged with having privately pressured Ukraine to dig up dirt on Biden, then a Democratic rival for the presidency.

This time, Trump's "stop the steal" rally rhetoric and the storming of the Capitol played out for the world to see. The trial could be over in half the time.

The Democratic-led House impeached the president swiftly, one week after the most violent attack on Congress in more than 200 years. Five people died, including a woman shot by police inside the building and a police officer who died the next day of his injuries.

House prosecutors are expected to rely on videos from the siege, along with Trump's incendiary rhetoric refusing to concede the election, to make their case. His new defense team has said it plans to counter with its own cache of videos of Democratic politicians making fiery speeches.

Initially repulsed by the graphic images of the attack, a number of Republican senators have cooled their criticism as the intervening weeks have provided some distance.

Senators were sworn in as jurors late last month, shortly after Biden was inaugurated, but the trial was delayed as Democrats focused on confirming the new president's initial Cabinet picks and Republicans sought to stall.

At the time, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky forced a vote to set aside the trial as unconstitutional because Trump is no longer in office.

The 45 Republican votes in favor of Paul's measure suggest the near impossibility of reaching a conviction in a Senate where Democrats hold 50 seats but a two-thirds vote — or 67 senators — would be needed to convict Trump. Only five Republicans joined with Democrats to reject Paul's motion: Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

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Associated Press writer Hope Yen contributed to this report.

Georgia election officials investigate Trump call

By BEN NADLER and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's secretary of state's office on Monday opened an investigation into a phone call between Donald Trump and the state's top elections official in which the then-president said he wanted to "find" enough votes to overturn his loss in the state, an official said.

Walter Jones, a spokesman for Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, confirmed the investigation.

"The Secretary of State's office investigates complaints it receives. The investigations are fact-finding and administrative in nature. Any further legal efforts will be left to the Attorney General," Jones wrote.

Trump had refused to accept his loss to Democrat Joe Biden and focused much of his attention on Georgia, a traditionally red state that he narrowly lost. During the Jan. 2 phone call, Trump repeatedly argued that Raffensperger could change the certified results, an assertion the secretary of state firmly rejected.

"All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have," Trump said. "Because we won the state."

The investigation by the secretary of state's office stems from a complaint by George Washington University Law School professor John Banzhaf III, according to the investigative case sheet.

In an emailed press release sent Jan. 4, Banzhaf said he had filed a complaint with the secretary of state's office requesting "that this matter be fully investigated, and action be taken to the extent appropriate." The complaint suggests Trump may have committed one or more violations of Georgia law, including conspiracy to commit election fraud, criminal solicitation to commit election fraud and intentional interference with the performance of election duties, the release says.

Jason Miller, a senior adviser to Trump, said in a statement that there was "nothing improper or untoward about a scheduled call between President Trump, Secretary Raffensperger and lawyers on both sides."

Investigators will present their findings to the state election board, which will then decide how to proceed.

If the board believes there's evidence that a crime occurred, it could take action ranging from issuing a letter of reprimand to referring the case to Georgia's attorney general.

St. Louis circuit attorney to investigate conditions at jail

ST. LOUIS (AP) — St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner on Monday launched an investigation into conditions at the City Justice Center, a large downtown jail that was the site of a massive disturbance over the weekend.

More than 100 detainees on Saturday were able to get out of their cells, smash windows and set fires. A corrections officer was injured and hospitalized but is expected to recover.

Advocates for inmates on Sunday said the uprising was "an act of courage" that was necessitated by inmates' basic needs not being met, including a lack of personal protective equipment to help stave off a coronavirus outbreak.

Gardner, in a statement, called the weekend incident and other recent protests inside the jail "deeply troubling" and said her office's investigation will focus on the circumstances that led to the actions.

"We will ensure there is full accountability," Gardner said. "But while some are calling for the immediate prosecution of the detainees involved, this situation demands further scrutiny."

She cited concerns raised by relatives of detainees, public defenders and advocates about conditions, "including whether or not appropriate protocols have been followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Earlier Monday, Mayor Lyda Krewson announced the appointment of a task force to examine issues at the jail that has had three inmate uprisings since December.

Krewson's office said the task force will be chaired by former state Supreme Court Justice Michael Wolff, who also is a professor and dean emeritus at St. Louis University School of Law.

"The City takes very seriously the health and safety of the individuals who the courts have determined need to be held pretrial," Krewson said in a statement. While officials believe the corrections division is being run in a "professional and capable" way, the concerns deserve investigation, she said.

An advocate for inmates, Tracy Stanton of Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing St. Louis, said the inmates rioted in part because they lack adequate heat in cells and personal protective equipment to protect against COVID-19. The uprising "was an act of courage that was staged to reinforce these issues because their needs are still not being met," Stanton said.

City officials say there are no positive cases among the general population, and that inmates are provided with adequate PPE and are tested upon request.

But activist Inez Bordeaux, of the legal aid group Arch City Defenders, said she's taken calls on the organization's jail hotline and heard from dozens of detainees who say they don't have access to COVID-19 testing or PPE.

Analysis: Child poverty a hidden focus of virus relief plan

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Tucked inside President Joe Biden's $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan is a seemingly radical notion that children should not grow up in poverty.

Congressional Democrats are now sketching out that vision more fully by proposing to temporarily raise the child tax credit, now at a maximum of $2,000, to as much as $3,600 per child annually. Their plan would also make the credit fully available to the poorest families, instead of restricting it based on the parents' tax liability.

"The Democratic plan would likely mark the most significant step in the fight against child poverty since LBJ's Great Society," said Daniel Hemel, a law professor at the University of Chicago, who noted that a family with two school-age children and no income would get $6,000 under the proposal.

This one-off benefit is intended to help relieve millions of families hurt by the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Parents have lost their access to child care, pushing them out of the labor force and hindering

the economic recovery. Children have gone without the classroom time needed for social and academic progress.

When Lyndon Johnson became president in 1963, nearly 25% of children lived in poverty. The combination of Great Society programs that included nutrition aid and preschool funding helped slash the child poverty rate to 14% by 1969, according to the Census Bureau. The rate has since bounced up and down with the broader economy, but it has never fallen meaningfully below that 1969 level.

Biden has pitched his rescue plan as an immediate response to the pandemic, but the child tax credit expansion might end up seeding the kind of lasting change that tends to bring a political fight. Some conservatives say the plan would discourage parents from working and would not reduce poverty as a result. But liberals view it as an investment in children that needs to stay in place to ultimately improve people's lives and the economy.

"This is a really bold idea," said C. Nicole Mason, CEO of the liberal Institute for Women's Policy Research. "Things that we wouldn't have been talking about as possible a year before the pandemic are suddenly on the table — and this is one of those things."

In a Friday speech about his full COVID-19 relief proposal, Biden said the spending would ultimately lead to durable economic gains. His plan includes funding for school reopenings, child care and other programs to help the youngest Americans.

"The simple truth is, if we make these investments now, with interest rates at historic lows, we'll generate more growth, higher incomes, a stronger economy and our nation's finances will be in a stronger position as well," Biden said.

Past economic research has shown that each dollar spent on health insurance programs for children led to a $1.78 return for the government, according to a 2020 paper by Harvard University economists Nathaniel Hendren and Ben Sprung-Keyser. The argument from many economists is that financial relief for children would produce similar benefits for decades to come.

But conservatives say the increased child tax credits could discourage poor people from seeking jobs. Robert Rector, a senior research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said he believes the proposal would eventually undo the work requirements that were part of the 1996 overhaul of welfare, a reform that Biden voted for as a Delaware senator.

"They're clearly using this COVID situation to try and permanently change the welfare state and permanently enlarge it," said Rector, stressing that needy families already have access to extensive anti-poverty programs.

As outlined by the House Ways and Means Committee, the expanded child tax credit would likely help about 20 million lower-income people. Families would receive up to $3,600 annually for each child under age 6 and as much as $3,000 for those up to 17. The credit would start to phase out for individual parents earning more than $75,000 and couples making $150,000. Payments of the credit would be made monthly, even to families who owe no federal income taxes — a change from current policy.

The plan has shifted some of the politics around child poverty. Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah last week proposed his own plan to provide at least $3,000 per child to families, but the payments would be funded by cutting other government programs and tax credits for parents. It's unlikely that Democrats would back Romney's plan because it would cut other forms of aid to children, meaning it has not gained much political traction so far.

Researchers at Columbia University estimated that Biden's entire $1.9 trillion relief plan would slash the child poverty rate to less than 7% this year.

Supporters of the package also see a return to grappling with big ideas about poverty that has not occurred for decades. The child tax credit is possibly the start of a larger transformation in how the government addresses child poverty.

"A one-year improvement is great, and it puts the architecture in place," said Michelle Dallafior, senior vice president for the advocacy group First Focus on Children. "But we need to keep doing more and build something permanent. ... No child should live in poverty."

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Groton Daily Independent
Tuesday, Feb. 09, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 220 ~ 77 of 99

EDITOR'S NOTE: Josh Boak has covered the U.S. economy for The Associated Press for six years.

Election turmoil splits West Virginia city's evangelicals

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and JESSIE WARDARSKI Associated Press

BLUEFIELD, W.Va. (AP) — If you're Christian in Bluefield — and most everyone is, in this small city tucked into the Appalachian Mountains — you have your choice.

You can follow Pastor Doyle Bradford of Father's House International Church, who has forcefully backed Donald Trump — doubting Trump's defeat in November and joining some congregants at the Jan. 6 "Save America" rally that degenerated into the Capitol riot.

Or you can go less than 3 miles away next to the rail yard, to Faith Center Church, where Pastor Frederick Brown regards Bradford as a brother — but says he's seriously mistaken. Or you can venture up East River Mountain to Crossroads Church, where Pastor Travis Lowe eschews Bradford's fiery political rhetoric, seeking paths to Christian unity.

The three churches have much in common. All of them condemn the desecration of the Capitol and pray for a way to find common ground.

But they diverge on a central issue: What is the role of evangelical Christianity in America's divisive politics?

Bradford and his flock defend his actions as expressions of freedom of speech and religious freedom, and say they should be allowed to voice their views against what they feel is an assault on democracy and Christian values. But his fellow pastors fear that fiery rhetoric and baseless claims made online and from the pulpit could stoke more tensions, rancor and divisiveness.

Though AP VoteCast found that about 8 in 10 evangelical voters supported Donald Trump in November — and though broadly, they have backed the political efforts of church leaders — they are not monolithic.

As is evident in this Appalachian town of just more than 10,000.

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Long before he followed his pastoral calling, Doyle Bradford dug for coal underground — a traditional vocation in Bluefield, where folks proudly recall how rock extracted from the surrounding hills powered ships in the two world wars and helped build the skylines of cities across America.

Joe Biden carried parts of Bluefield itself, small splotches of blue in the sea of red that is West Virginia. But Mercer County gave more than three-quarters of its votes to Trump, and Bradford and his pronouncements are very much in line with that.

"For those of you who are surprised at my attending (the Washington rally), we have 2 choices," he wrote on Facebook, "I stand with the platform that most closely aligns with my faith and values. Those do not include the murder of babies in the womb, and not knowing which bathroom one should use and banning pronouns."

He said he did not participate in or even see the violence Jan. 6. On Facebook, he said he believed it was a "planned response from non Trump supporters." He claimed there was "plenty of evidence of fraud" in the presidential election — though there is no evidence that that is the case — and called on people to "wake up" because "America is at stake."

In an interview, Bradford fiercely defended his actions and denied he was part of a larger movement toward Christian nationalism, described by a coalition gathered by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty as an ideology that "demands Christianity be privileged by the state and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian."

"I consider myself a Christian who loves America, but what we've got going on in the Earth today is, if a Christian does love America, they're automatically called nationalist," Bradford said.

"I do not believe that America is any greater in the eyes of God than any other country. But as a minister of the Gospel, I do not want to be shut out of the public arena. I do have freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and it is my personal belief that America is going in a direction that will cause great harm to America."

At Faith Center Church, Frederick Brown does not deny Bradford's right to speak, but he does question the wisdom and even the godliness of some of the things he's said.

Brown wants other religious leaders to return to "real Christianity" instead of getting wrapped up in the political arena. Although he respects Bradford as a "tremendous teacher" who loves God, he criticized some of his comments.

"With all love and due respect to my brother, I just feel that he has been completely out of order. I believe that he has said things publicly that just were not biblical," he said.

"I've watched him declare that the wrath of God was coming upon people that did not vote for Trump, and the wrath of God was coming on the people that rigged the election. All of these things, from my perspective, that is totally contrary to what we teach and what we preach in Christendom."

During a recent Sunday service — the first in-person one since November, due to the pandemic — Brown thanked the mostly Black congregation for its support after he contracted the coronavirus along with his wife and 17-month-old twins. Then he asked them to put politics aside and trust God.

"I don't know about you all," he said, "but I've been through 11 presidents, and I have survived them all."

In a town where another church marquee read, "Don't look to the White House. Look to heaven," Brown's message reverberated.

"I'm ready for this political jockeying to be over with," said congregant Jonathan Jessup. "You know, I'm sick of it because the only thing it's doing is causing more division."

At Crossroads Church, Travis Lowe has struggled with his own inclination to preserve Christian unity at all costs. He supported Black Lives Matter protests, but was reproached by a friend because his comments were divisive. He resolved to rein in his political speech.

In a post on Medium, he recounted how he struggled to remain silent as "pastors and prophets began to publicly take sides in the U.S. election. I was silent as scriptures were used to demonize political enemies. I was silent as the language of violence flowed from the mouths of `people of peace.'"

He recalled Bradford posted on Facebook after the first presidential debate that leaders in the church had supported Trump for years for not being a politician but were now backpedaling because he was not acting like one: "If you said he was the leader God chose, own it."

After Jan. 6, Lowe finally spoke out: "I can no longer risk having blood on my hands for the sake of unity."

"I struggle to see the way that people can wave a banner of Christianity and still employ the language of violence, and even a lot of the imagery that I've seen used will reference Jesus as being a lion, a lion of the tribe of Judah," he said. "But one of the things that I recognize in the New Testament is that every time that we expect Jesus to show up as a lion, he shows up as a lamb."

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Bradford takes pride in the diversity of his congregation, which includes white, Black and Latino members. His flock defend their pastor and say his church has transformed their lives through acceptance and love.

That does not mean that they are happy with the violence they saw in Washington on Jan. 6, or that they are all certain that their faith offers clear instruction on how they should act politically.

"My biggest prayer is just that, God, that we would see the truth ... and that this country would come together in unity," said 21-year-old Kara Sandy, a congregant and junior at Bluefield State College.

Congregant Brenda Gross teared up when she was asked about Jacob Chansley, an Arizona man who was part of the insurrection at the Capitol. Known as the "QAnon Shaman," Chansley led a prayer at the Senate chamber thanking God "for allowing the United States of America to be reborn," while shirtless and wearing face paint and a furry hat with horns.

"I don't know what prayer he prayed, but our Jesus was meek and mild. ... He wasn't representing the Jesus that I know and love," she said.

Her husband attended the Washington rally with Bradford. Gross said she both stands by her pastor and prays for Biden, though she worries about Biden's support for abortion rights, and how her community might lose jobs if he limits the use of coal.

Gina Brooks, who leads the children's ministry at Bradford's church, agreed that the Capitol melee was a sorry spectacle: "It's sad, it's really disheartening to see people take on the name Christian and they're not."

Brooks said she voted for Trump because she's pro-life, but was often outraged by his behavior and felt it clashed with her Christian values.

Her 18-year-old son Jacob, who is studying music at Bluefield College, a private, Christian liberal arts college, said that at times it's best to try to remain impartial.

"It's important that people like us realize that we shouldn't take sides, because the sides are what's basically dividing the country," he said. "As the body of Christ, our duty is to realize that this is sort of, I don't know if I want to say like above us, but above our understanding. So, I think it's just important that we just seek answers from our creator."

But his mother said politics and religion are often deeply intertwined. She backed the decision to demonstrate by her pastor, whose most recent Facebook posts have been less strident, focusing on a message of unity and humility.

"I agree with him ... was there things that were wrong in our election? Absolutely. Is it our responsibility to intercede for this nation? Absolutely," she said.

"The end result is what the Lord's will is, and if the Lord's will is this, then so be it. But it doesn't mean that we stop interceding in the spirit."

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Associated Press writer Elana Schor in Washington contributed to this report.

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Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Tampa mayor addresses maskless fans after Super Bowl

By TAMARA LUSH and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — So much for the mayor's order requiring masks at Super Bowl parties. Videos went viral on social media, showing throngs of mostly maskless fans and packed sports bars as the clock inside Raymond James Stadium ticked down on a hometown Super Bowl win for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"It is a little frustrating because we have worked so hard," Tampa Mayor Jane Castor said during an early Monday morning news conference with the Super Bowl Host Committee. "At this point in dealing with COVID-19, there is a level of frustration when you see that."

Some 200,000 masks were handed out ahead of the game, and "a majority" of people and businesses followed the rules, she said.

Hours later, during another news conference, Castor's remarks shifted, saying that at least among those people that she saw celebrating, most of them were masked.

"I'm proud to say the majority of individuals that I saw out and about enjoying the festivities associated with the Super Bowl were complying," she said. "They understood their level of personal responsibility and they were doing the right thing. I'm very proud of that."

Even the White House weighed in.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki was asked about whether President Joe Biden was concerned over Tampa fans taking to the streets following the Buccaneers Super Bowl.

"He is of course concerned when there are pictures and photos - we all are - that show many, many people without masks in close distance with one another at the height of a pandemic," she said.

To meet coronavirus protocols, the NFL capped the crowd at under 25,000 in a stadium that normally holds some 66,000 fans, and required masks.

But outside the stadium, crowds of fans who weren't wearing masks or practicing social distancing could be seen celebrating the Buccaneers' 31-9 win over the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday night. Folks cheered, crammed into bars and hugged in several hotspots around the city — and swarmed the streets — all without masks.

In hopes of curbing so-called super-spreader events, Castor had signed a largely voluntary executive order requiring people wear face coverings during the Super Bowl festivities, even while they're outdoors. She pleaded with people to celebrate safely, noting the city could issue fines of up to $500.

It wasn't clear on Monday how many citations the city handed out, if any.

The mayor noted that there had been no major spikes in COVID-19 cases following the fall Stanley Cup

win by the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team and outdoor celebrations surrounding that victory.

"We didn't see those spikes after the Stanley Cup events," she said.

Local orders were overridden last year by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, whose executive order made it difficult for local governments to enforce mask policies because it prohibits them from fining people who don't comply. Florida has never had a mask policy.

Across Tampa Bay in St. Petersburg, Mayor Rick Kriseman was already unhappy about a maskless party hosted by Rapper Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson in a hangar at Albert Whitted Airport on Friday night. Pictures from the party posted on social media showed a densely packed event with few people wearing masks to protect against spread of the coronavirus.

"This isn't how we should be celebrating the Super Bowl," the mayor tweeted on Saturday. "It's not safe or smart. It's stupid. We're going to take a very close look at this, and it may end up costing someone a lot more than 50 cent."

The nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, also warned against turning the Super Bowl into a super spreader, saying before the game that people should "just lay low and cool it."

Florida has recorded 1.7 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus and more than 28,000 deaths, according to state health records. State officials said Sunday that 667,830 people in Florida had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Castor said the city and Buccaneers are planning an official celebration to be held later this week.

"This win was from the Buccaneer team but this win was for our entire community," she said. "They deserve to be able to celebrate with the team. Everybody will be able to participate and participate safely."

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Frisaro reported from Fort Lauderdale and Aamer Madhani contributed from Chicago.

Bucs' Javadifar, Locust 1st female coaches to win Super Bowl

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Lori Locust and Maral Javadifar, Super Bowl champs.

To their many fans in the NFL world and beyond, that's got a real nice ring to it.

Locust and Javadifar became the first female coaches on a team to win the Super Bowl, helping the Tampa Bay Buccaneers beat the Kansas City Chiefs 31-9 Sunday night.

The 30-year-old Javadifar is an assistant strength and conditioning coach, and the 56-year-old Locust is an assistant defensive line coach.

"History was made tonight!" tennis great and social justice champion Billie Jean King tweeted.

Locust and Javadifar have worked two seasons on the staff of coach Bruce Arians. Soon enough, they'll get their Super Bowl rings, just like Tom Brady and the rest of the Buccaneers.

"If you can teach, you can coach," Arians said last week. "As far as the women, it was time. It was time for that door to be knocked down and allow them because they've been putting in time, and they're very, very qualified. The ones we have are overly qualified."

Last season, Katie Sowers became the first female to coach in a Super Bowl. She was an offensive assistant for the San Francisco 49ers in their loss to the Chiefs.

"Even though I have yet to win the big game, with these amazing women helping to lead the way ... tonight, I feel like we all won," tweeted Sowers, who included the hashtags #progress #diversity and #WomenSupportingWomen.

This year's game was the 55th Super Bowl.

The Buccaneers were the only NFL team with two female coaches on their staff this season.

"I do look forward to the day that it's no longer newsworthy to be a woman working in the pros or making the Super Bowl for that matter," Javadifar said last week. "And, you know, I hope we get to a point where all people are afforded equal opportunities to work in professional sports because there are a lot of great qualified coaches out there."

Locust echoed that sentiment.

"It wouldn't matter if we were second in or 273rd," she said last week. "And I mean, like we acknowledge

the fact there hasn't been many before us, but it's not anything that we kind of keep in the forefront of what we do on a daily basis."

Sarah Thomas also made history as the first woman to officiate a Super Bowl, working as the down judge.

"I'm cheering you on today, Sarah Thomas!" first lady Jill Biden tweeted.

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More AP NFL: https://apnews.com/NFL and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Nothing to sneeze at: Global warming triggers earlier pollen

BY SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

When Dr. Stanley Fineman started as an allergist in Atlanta, he told patients they should start taking their medications and prepare for the drippy, sneezy onslaught of pollen season around St. Patrick's Day. That was about 40 years ago. Now he tells them to start around St. Valentine's Day.

Across the United States and Canada, pollen season is starting 20 days earlier and pollen loads are 21% higher since 1990 and a huge chunk of that is because of global warming, a new study found in Monday's journal the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences.

While other studies have shown North America's allergy season getting longer and worse, this is the most comprehensive data with 60 reporting stations and the first to make the required and detailed calculations that could attribute what's happening to human-caused climate change, experts said.

"This is a crystal clear example that climate change is here and it's in every breath we take," said lead author Bill Anderegg, a biologist and climate scientist at the University of Utah, who also has "really bad allergies."

Chris Downs, a 32-year-old mechanical engineer in St. Louis, is already getting sinus problems, headaches and worst of all itchy red eyes — and his Facebook friends in the area tell him they're feeling the same. He said the allergies, which started 22 years ago, usually hit in March, but this year and last year, they were already around in early February, along with blooms of trees and flowers outside.

"As a kid I never saw anything start blooming in February, now I see a handful of years like that," Downs said.

The warmer the Earth gets, the earlier spring starts for plants and animals, especially those that release pollen. Add to that the fact that trees and plants produce more pollen when they get carbon dioxide, the study said.

"This is clearly warming temperatures and more carbon dioxide putting more pollen in the air," Anderegg said. Trees are spewing the allergy-causing particles earlier than grasses, he said, but scientists aren't sure why that's the case. Just look at cherry blossoms opening several days earlier in Japan and Washington, D.C., he said.

Texas is where some of the biggest changes are happening, Anderegg said. The South and southern Midwest are getting pollen season about 1.3 days earlier each year, while it's coming about 1.1 days earlier in the West, he said. The northern Midwest is getting allergy season about 0.65 days earlier per year, and it's coming 0.33 days earlier a year in the Southeast. In Canada, Alaska and the Northeast researchers couldn't see a statistically significant trend.

Anderegg said his team factored that in that parks and plants in cities were getting greener. They did standard detailed calculations that scientists have developed to see if changes in nature can be attributed to the increase of heat-trapping gases from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas. They compared what's happening now to computer simulations of an Earth without human-caused warming and rising carbon dioxide in the air.

Since 1990, about half of the earlier pollen season can be attributed to climate change — mostly from the warmer temperatures — but also from the plant-feeding carbon dioxide, Anderegg said. But since the 2000s, about 65% of earlier pollen seasons can be blamed on warming, he said. About 8% of the increased pollen load can be attributed to climate change, he said.

Dr. Fineman, past president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and who wasn't

part of the study, said this makes sense and fits with what he sees: "Pollen really follows the temperature. There's not a question."

While doctors and scientists knew earlier allergy season was happening, until now no one had done formal climate attribution studies to help understand why, said University of Washington environmental health professor Kristie Ebi, who wasn't part of the study. This can help scientists estimate how many allergies and asthma cases "could be due to climate change," she said.

This is not just a matter of sniffles.

"We should care about pollen season because pollen is an important risk factor for allergic diseases such as hay fever and asthma exacerbation," said University of Maryland environmental health professor Amir Sapkota, who wasn't part of the study. "Asthma costs the U.S. economy an estimated $80 billion per year in terms of treatment and loss of productivity. So a longer pollen season poses real threats to individuals suffering from allergy as well as the U.S. economy."

Sapkota recently found a correlation between earlier spring onset and increase risk in asthma hospitalizations. One study found students do worse on tests because of pollen levels, Anderegg said.

Gene Longenecker, a hazards geographer who recently returned to Alabama, didn't really suffer from pollen allergies until he moved to Atlanta. Then he moved to Colorado: "Every summer it was just crushing headaches and big things like that and (I) started into allergy testing and found out that, well, I'm allergic to everything in Colorado — at the very least trees, grasses and pollens, weeds."

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Read stories on climate issues by The Associated Press at https://apnews.com/hub/climate

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Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

UN chief: Polluters must join 'net zero' club for climate

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Polluters must step up their commitments to cutting greenhouse gas emissions before a crucial climate summit in November, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Monday.

Guterres said the global body's "central objective" this year is to get countries and companies responsible for 90% of the world's human-made emissions to set credible deadlines by when they will stop adding further planet-heating gases to the atmosphere.

Several countries including the United States, China and members of the European Union have already announced plans to achieve " net zero " emissions, meaning they will only release as much carbon dioxide and other gases as can be absorbed by natural or technological means.

But scientists say some of the targets are too far off and aren't backed by clear plans that would ensure that the Paris climate accord's goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) can be achieved.

"The drive to net zero must become the new normal for everyone, everywhere, for every country, every company, city, financial institution, as well as the key sectors such as aviation, shipping, industry and agriculture," Guterres told diplomats during a virtual gathering. "At the same time, all commitments to net zero must be underpinned by clear and credible plans to achieve them. Words are not enough."

After making good on his campaign pledge to rejoin the Paris accord, U.S. President Joe Biden is expected to present his administration's strategy for cutting carbon emissions by 2030 at the November summit.

"The United States is putting the climate crisis at the center of our foreign policy and our diplomacy," the U.S. envoy to the United Nations, Richard M. Mills, said. "The United States considers it a serious threat to our national security and to global security."

But Mills made clear that the U.S. expects others to join in the fight. The Glasgow summit "will only suc-

ceed if the biggest emitters lay out detailed roadmaps in advance, how they will achieve net zero emissions by 2050," he said — a clear reference to China and others.

Guterres urged major industrialized countries to phase out their use of coal — a big source of carbon emissions — by 2030, and to ensure that poor countries get the $100 billion in funding they need each year to respond to climate change.

He said the U.N. climate meeting in Glasgow this fall, delayed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, also needs to finalize rules for international carbon markets that economists say would give companies greater incentives to cut emissions.

One major holdout in those negotiations, Brazil, pushed backed Monday against calls for it to give up vast piles of emissions credits it amassed under rules that experts say weren't stringent enough.

Brazil's U.N. ambassador, Ronaldo Costa Filho, said the Amazon nation wants those credits transferred to the new system, a demand that other nations including the United States are likely to oppose.

The U.N. chief said the global body will make offices and venues around the world available to governments so officials can take part in virtual meetings before the November summit, since the usual flurry of preparatory events likely won't happen in-person because of COVID-19.

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Follow all AP stories about climate change at https://apnews.com/hub/Climate

Schools plan for potential of remote learning into the fall

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Parents of schoolchildren learning from home shouldn't necessarily count on reclaiming the dining room table any time soon.

After seeing two academic years thrown off course by the pandemic, school leaders around the country are planning for the possibility of more distance learning next fall at the start of yet another school year.

"We have no illusions that COVID will be eradicated by the time the start of the school year comes up," said William "Chip" Sudderth III, a spokesperson for Durham, North Carolina schools, whose students have been out of school buildings since March.

President Joe Biden has made reopening schools a top priority, but administrators say there is much to consider as new strains of the coronavirus appear and teachers wait their turn for vaccinations.

And while many parents are demanding that schools fully reopen, others say they won't feel safe sending children back to classrooms until vaccines are available to even young students. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top public health expert, said late last month the Biden administration hopes to begin vaccinating children by late spring or early summer.

By then, districts will be deep into preparations for the next school year.

"As far as 2021-22, at least some part of that school year is likely still going to be pandemic response-related on the assumption that children won't have access to the vaccine, or at least many won't," said Superintendent Brian Woods, of Northside Independent School District, among the largest districts in Texas.

That could mean a more teacher-friendly version of the mix of in-person and remote learning happening now, one that doesn't require teachers to simultaneously instruct two groups. That could be accomplished either by splitting staffing or rearranging schedules, he said, adding longer term may see an all-remote option for students who have moved on permanently from traditional school.

"There's going to be some element of the genie not being able to be put back in the bottle," Woods said. "I think that there now will always be a group of families who want a virtual option. ... We know we're able to, but are we willing to do it?"

Faced with the same reality, California's West Contra Costa Unified School District is planning a new K-12 Virtual Academy for 2021-22.

"One thing that we have learned during the pandemic is that teaching and learning is now different, and it will not fully be what we used to think was `normal' ever again," read the January agenda item before the Board of Education.

The pivot to distance learning last march has proved a lifeline for the education system, but concerns have grown with each passing month about the effects on racial inequities, students' academic performance, attendance and their overall well being.

In Durham, North Carolina, schools — which has been fully remote since March — announced last month that it would remain that way through the end of the current academic year.

Beyond that, Sudderth said, "the prevalence of the disease will determine what we are able to do."

The guideline for whether the 32,000-student district could move from remote to hybrid learning in January was a testing positivity rate below 4%. But it's unclear whether that metric or others that until now have been set by states or districts will hold.

Biden, in an early executive order, directed his education secretary to provide "evidence-based guidance" and advice to schools to safely conduct in-person learning.

"I'm hoping that we don't have to do hybrid, but I don't want to be in a position where we haven't thought it all through," said Eva Moskowitz, whose 47 Success Academy Charter Schools enroll 20,000 students in New York City.

Success students have been signing in for full days of live remote instruction on school-provided laptops and tablets since the beginning of the school year, an exhausting undertaking that Moskowitz plans to end for the current school year on May 28. The 2021-22 school year will then begin Aug. 2, possibly in a hybrid format.

"I honestly don't know what the chances are" of continuing remote learning into the next school year, she said.

"Logic would tell me that we shouldn't have to, but my knowledge of government makes me a little more hesitant," she said, noting the sometimes conflicting guidance from the city and state and the slow start to the rollout of vaccines.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has vowed that schools in the nation's largest school district are "going to be back full-strength in September."

"Everyone wants to be back," he's said.

But the head of the powerful teachers' union, Michael Mulgrew, says it's too soon to commit. Schools currently are providing some in-person classes to elementary and pre-K students who want them. A plan announced Monday by De Blasio will reopen middle school buildings Feb. 25 but there is no plan yet for high schools.

"It's a goal of mine, but I can't say they're going to open" the United Federation of Teachers president said in an interview. His view of the mayor's pledge: "This is not about what you want. This is about what you can do safely."

Chancellor Richard Carranza acknowledged that while the goal is in-person school, distance learning "is going to stay with us" past the pandemic.

"We're looking at this being a component," he said during a news conference Monday with de Blasio.

Mulgrew said it will take more than teacher vaccines to open schools fully and safely.

He noted that scientists aren't yet clear on whether vaccinated people might still be able to spread the virus, even if they aren't sickened themselves. And he wonders how comfortable families will feel about having unvaccinated children and young teens begin the new year unvaccinated.

"This is where it gets tough. So how do you say you're opening in September when we need to get these questions answered?" he asked.

A parent coalition in Evanston, Illinois, has asked Superintendent Eric Witherspoon what assurances he could give that Evanston Township High School will provide in-person learning in the 2021-22 academic year.

"We are witnessing a real crisis in our community," Laurel O'Sullivan, the parent of an Evanston high school junior, said by phone. "We are a coalition that includes medical and mental health experts who are, in their practices in the community, daily seeing kids experiencing a huge surge in mental and emotional health crises. … It's a social, emotional and academic crisis that we're seeing."

The district did not respond to a request for comment.

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Thompson reported from Buffalo, New York. Associated Press writer Jennifer Peltz in New York City contributed to this report.

Israeli PM pleads not guilty as corruption trial resumes

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pleaded not guilty Monday as his trial on corruption charges resumed in a Jerusalem courtroom just weeks before national elections in which he hopes to extend his 12-year rule.

Netanyahu was indicted last year for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. In recent months, Israelis have held weekly protests calling on him to resign over the charges and criticizing his government's response to the coronavirus crisis. Protesters gathered outside the courthouse could be heard inside the room where the hearing was being held.

He stands accused of accepting lavish gifts from wealthy friends and offering to grant favors to powerful media moguls in exchange for favorable coverage of him and his family. The latest hearing was postponed last month due to lockdown restrictions on public gatherings.

"Everyone knows the cases against me are rigged," Netanyahu said, adding that the prosecutors hadn't done a good job. Still, he said holding the evidentiary stage at this time would amount to election "interference."

Israel's longest serving leader is also the first sitting prime minister to go on trial for corruption. Israeli law requires Cabinet ministers to resign when charged with criminal offenses, but does not specifically address the case of a prime minister under indictment.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing and has dismissed the charges against him as a "witch-hunt" orchestrated by biased law enforcement and media. He has refused to step down and has used his office as a bully pulpit against critics and the criminal justice system.

At Monday's hearing, Netanyahu's lawyers submitted a written response pleading not guilty. They then argued against the cases on procedural grounds, saying the attorney general had not properly approved the investigations in writing.

After around 20 minutes, Netanyahu left the courtroom without explanation and his motorcade departed. His only remarks to the court were that he had nothing to add to his attorney's response to the charges.

The hearing continued in his absence, with his lawyers arguing for more than an hour that constitutional procedures had not been followed. The judges appeared skeptical and repeatedly called on the defense lawyers to wrap it up. The prosecution then rejected those arguments, saying the attorney general had approved the investigations in dozens of meetings.

The prime minister's attorneys called on the court to postpone evidence hearings for several more months, claiming they had inadequate time to prepare. If granted, the hearings would take place after the upcoming elections.

Outside the courthouse, around 150 protesters chanted against Netanyahu. Many carried banners reading "Crime Minister."

"We want a new government, a clean government, no corruption" said Sharon Sagy, a protester, "We don't want Bibi Netanyahu, we want him to go, he needs to go," she said, using his nickname.

At the start of his trial last May, Netanyahu was flanked by a cohort of Likud party allies as he railed against the media, police, judges and prosecutors. He said the trial aimed to "depose a strong, right-wing prime minister, and thus remove the nationalist camp from the leadership of the country for many years."

Monday's hearing was far more subdued. Netanyahu arrived at the courthouse unaccompanied by supporters and entered through a rear entrance.

Netanyahu has served as Israel's prime minister since 2009, and in the past two years has managed to hang onto power through three tumultuous, deadlocked elections. His flimsy ruling coalition collapsed in December and he now faces a major battle for reelection in March 23 parliamentary elections.

Netanyahu hopes to campaign on having pulled the country out of the pandemic through one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns. He boasts of having personally secured millions of doses from major drug makers, allowing Israel to vaccinate more than a third of its population of 9.3 million. He hopes to vaccinate the entire adult population by late March.

But his government has faced heavy criticism for other aspects of its response to the crisis. The country is only now starting to emerge from its third nationwide lockdown and the closures have sent unemployment skyrocketing.

An emergency government formed last May to combat the coronavirus outbreak has been mired in bickering. The country's leaders have struggled to enact consistent policies and repeatedly accused each other of playing politics with the pandemic. Israel has meanwhile reported nearly 700,000 cases since the outbreak began, including 5,121 deaths.

One major controversy concerns Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, many of whom have openly flouted restrictions on public gatherings. Netanyahu will need the ultra-Orthodox parties to form a ruling coalition, and his critics accuse him of turning a blind eye to their violations.

Polls show Netanyahu's Likud winning the most seats but struggling to form a 61-seat majority coalition in the Knesset, Israel's parliament. The margin of victory could be extremely tight, potentially allowing a small, fringe party to decide who heads the next government.

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Associated Press writer Joseph Krauss in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

EU countries expel Russian diplomats in Navalny dispute

By FRANK JORDANS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany, Poland and Sweden on Monday each declared a Russian diplomat in their country "persona non grata," retaliating in kind to last week's decision by Moscow to expel diplomats from the three European Union countries over the case of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Russia had accused diplomats from Sweden, Poland and Germany of attending a demonstration in support of Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most high-profile political foe.

"We have informed the Russian Ambassador that a person from the Russian embassy is asked to leave Sweden," Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde wrote on Twitter. "This is a clear response to the unacceptable decision to expel a Swedish diplomat who was only preforming his duties."

Germany's foreign ministry said Russia's decision to expel the European diplomats "was not justified in any way," insisting that the German Embassy staffer had been acting within his rights under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to "inform himself about developments on site."

The ministry added that the decision was taken in close coordination with Poland, Sweden and the EU's diplomatic service. Poland's foreign ministry tweeted that "in accordance with the principle of reciprocity" it considers "the diplomat working at the Consulate General in Poznan as a persona non grata."

In a statement, EU lawmakers also appealed to "all EU Member States to show maximum solidarity with Germany, Poland and Sweden and take all appropriate steps to show the cohesiveness and strength of our Union."

The parliamentarians called for "a new strategy for the EU's relations with Russia, centered around support for civil society, which promotes democratic values, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights."

The tit-for-tat expulsions come as EU officials ponder the future of the 27-nation bloc's troubled relations with Moscow amid deep concern that their large eastern neighbor sees democracy as a threat and wants to distance itself further from the EU.

Moscow's decision Friday was as an extra slap in the face for the Europeans because it came as the bloc's top diplomat — foreign policy chief Josep Borrell — was meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Borrell said he learned about the expulsions on social media.

"The messages sent by Russian authorities during this visit confirmed that Europe and Russia are drifting

apart," Borrell wrote in a blog on his return to Brussels. "It seems that Russia is progressively disconnecting itself from Europe and looking at democratic values as an existential threat."

He said the trip left him "with deep concerns over the perspectives of development of Russian society and Russia's geostrategic choices," and the expulsions, which he requested be dropped, "indicate that the Russian authorities did not want to seize this opportunity to have a more constructive dialogue."

Some EU lawmakers criticized Borrell for going, or for not insisting on visiting Navalny, who was arrested in January when he returned to Moscow after spending months in Germany recovering from a poisoning in Russia with what experts say was the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok. On Feb. 2, a Moscow court ordered Navalny to prison for more than 2 1/2 years for violating the terms of his probation while in Germany.

Borrell tried to arrange a prison meeting through Lavrov but was told to take it up with the courts.

"If you are familiar with the court procedures in Russia, you will know that it would take much more time than the duration of the visit," Borrell's spokesman, Peter Stano, said Monday.

Ultimately, the trip was never uniquely about Navalny. Russia is a major trading partner and the EU depends on it for natural gas. It's also a key player in talks on curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions and has a central role in conflicts that impact on European interests, like those in Syria and Ukraine.

Borrell's aim was to "deliver firm messages" on the broad state of EU-Russia ties as much as on the imprisonment of Navalny, Stano said. EU foreign ministers will debate the issue Feb. 22 in preparation for the bloc's leaders to weigh Europe's Russia strategy at a summit on March 25-26.

But the real challenge is overcoming the vast divisions between countries on how to approach Russia.

EU heavyweight Germany has strong economic interests there, notably the NordStream 2 undersea pipeline project, and German and other ambassadors are reluctant to rapidly wade into any sanctions battle over Navalny.

Despite calls for such punitive measures, particularly among some of Russia's close but small EU neighbors like Lithuania, Borrell said Friday that no country has officially raised any proposals on who or what organizations to hit with sanctions.

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Cook reported from Brussels. Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, contributed.

New variants raise worry about COVID-19 virus reinfections

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer

Evidence is mounting that having COVID-19 may not protect against getting infected again with some of the new variants. People also can get second infections with earlier versions of the coronavirus if they mounted a weak defense the first time, new research suggests.

How long immunity lasts from natural infection is one of the big questions in the pandemic. Scientists still think reinfections are fairly rare and usually less serious than initial ones, but recent developments around the world have raised concerns.

In South Africa, a vaccine study found new infections with a variant in 2% of people who previously had an earlier version of the virus.

In Brazil, several similar cases were documented with a new variant there. Researchers are exploring whether reinfections help explain a recent surge in the city of Manaus, where three-fourths of residents were thought to have been previously infected.

In the United States, a study found that 10% of Marine recruits who had evidence of prior infection and repeatedly tested negative before starting basic training were later infected again. That work was done before the new variants began to spread, said one study leader, Dr. Stuart Sealfon of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

"Previous infection does not give you a free pass," he said. "A substantial risk of reinfection remains."

Reinfections pose a public health concern, not just a personal one. Even in cases where reinfection causes no symptoms or just mild ones, people might still spread the virus. That's why health officials are urging vaccination as a longer-term solution and encouraging people to wear masks, keep physical distance and

wash their hands frequently.

"It's an incentive to do what we have been saying all along: to vaccinate as many people as we can and to do so as quickly as we can," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease expert.

"My looking at the data suggests ... and I want to underline suggests ... the protection induced by a vaccine may even be a little better" than natural infection, Fauci said.

Doctors in South Africa began to worry when they saw a surge of cases late last year in areas where blood tests suggested many people had already had the virus.

Until recently, all indications were "that previous infection confers protection for at least nine months," so a second wave should have been "relatively subdued," said Dr. Shabir Madhi of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

Scientists discovered a new version of the virus that's more contagious and less susceptible to certain treatments. It now causes more than 90% of new cases in South Africa and has spread to 40 countries including the United States.

Madhi led a study testing Novavax's vaccine and found it less effective against the new variant. The study also revealed that infections with the new variant were just as common among people who had COVID-19 as those who had not.

"What this basically tells us, unfortunately, is that past infection with early variants of the virus in South Africa does not protect" against the new one, he said.

In Brazil, a spike in hospitalizations in Manaus in January caused similar worry and revealed a new variant that's also more contagious and less vulnerable to some treatments.

"Reinfection could be one of the drivers of these cases," said Dr. Ester Sabino of the University of Sao Paulo. She wrote an article in the journal Lancet on possible explanations. "We have not yet been able to define how frequently this is happening," she said.

California scientists also are investigating whether a recently identified variant may be causing reinfections or a surge of cases there.

"We're looking at that now," seeking blood samples from past cases, said Jasmine Plummer, a researcher at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Dr. Howard Bauchner, editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association, said it soon would report on what he called "the Los Angeles variant."

New variants were not responsible for the reinfections seen in the study of Marines — it was done before the mutated viruses emerged, said Sealfon, who led that work with the Naval Medical Research Center. Other findings from the study were published in the New England Journal of Medicine; the new ones on reinfection are posted on a research website.

The study involved several thousand Marine recruits who tested negative for the virus three times during a two-week supervised military quarantine before starting basic training.

Among the 189 whose blood tests indicated they had been infected in the past, 19 tested positive again during the six weeks of training. That's far less than those without previous infection — "almost half of them became infected at the basic training site," Sealfon said.

The amount and quality of antibodies that previously infected Marines had upon arrival was tied to their risk of getting the virus again. No reinfections caused serious illness, but that does not mean the recruits were not at risk of spreading infection to others, Sealfon said.

"It does look like reinfection is possible. I don't think we fully understand why that is and why immunity has not developed" in those cases, said an immunology expert with no role in the study, E. John Wherry of the University of Pennsylvania.

"Natural infections can leave you with a range of immunity" while vaccines consistently induce high levels of antibodies, Wherry said.

"I am optimistic that our vaccines are doing a little bit better."

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The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical

Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Iowa governor auctioned off access for pork barons' charity

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds auctioned off an afternoon of her time to raise money for the namesake charity of a couple who own one of the nation's largest pork producers and have contributed nearly $300,000 to her campaign.

The 2019 auction to benefit the Deb and Jeff Hansen Foundation provides a striking example of the Republican governor's close relationship with the state's pork industry and particularly Iowa Select Farms, owned by the West Des Moines couple. Company staff members run the Hansens' foundation, which sponsors charitable programs including giveaways of pork products to needy families.

Details of the auction surfaced recently in public records the governor's office released to Direct Action Everywhere, an animal rights group that has accused Iowa Select of mistreating hogs.

The records show Reynolds has supported policies Iowa Select has sought, made several appearances for the corporation and its charity, and routinely spoken with Jeff Hansen.

The day after Reynolds won a four-year term in November 2018, Iowa Select's public affairs director wrote to an aide in the governor's office to "request you save the date" on Reynolds' calendar so that she could attend a Hansen foundation gala scheduled for six months later. The Hansens had been her top campaign donors.

Reynolds not only attended their May 10, 2019, event but turned her state position into one of the night's most lucrative auction items.

The event at a Des Moines hotel featured auctions for goods ranging from wine to tickets to sporting events, and the crowd included Iowa Select employees and business partners. The time with Reynolds was advertised as an "afternoon with Iowa's leading lady."

The "one-of-a-kind package" for four would begin with lunch at the state mansion where the governor lives and proceed to the Capitol for discussion and "a personalized tour of the building where all of Iowa's legislative action happens."

"From the top of the gold dome to the Governor's office, you'll be treated to a tour unlike any other!" it said.

Influential pork industry executive Gary Lynch, a major GOP campaign donor who owns Lynch Livestock in Waucoma, made the winning bid of $4,250.

Reynolds spokesman Pat Garrett said the event was one of many in which the governor auctioned off meals and tours for charity in 2018 and 2019, before she paused the practice during the pandemic.

Others that benefited included educational, civic and medical groups, such as the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and the Science Center of Iowa. Reynolds also participated twice in the annual charity auction of grocery store chain Hy-Vee.

"All of these are great causes that help people in need," Garrett said.

Lawyers for former Democratic Govs. Chet Culver and Tom Vilsack say their administrations never auctioned off the governors' time for a donor's charity, which they said carried the appearance of impropriety.

"I'm not aware of a single instance in Gov. Culver's tenure where we got anywhere close to that kind of use of a governor's time or resources or public spaces," said Culver aide Jim Larew.

Former Vilsack general counsel Gary Dickey said constituents' access to the governor should not be up for auction, calling Reynolds' participation "a colossal error in judgment." Vilsack served as U.S. agriculture secretary under former President Barack Obama, and President Joe Biden has nominated him to fill that role again.

Lynch, who declined comment, has donated more than $100,000 to Reynolds' campaigns since 2016. Weeks after he won the auction, Reynolds was a keynote speaker at Lynch's annual charity banquet in Decorah.

Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board director Mike Marshall said he did not believe the auction

violated any campaign finance laws. He said he saw no indication that the governor's participation in the fundraiser was contingent upon the Hansens' campaign contributions or that public resources were used for political purposes.

The auction wasn't the only favor for Iowa Select and its owners. Reynolds made a cameo in a cooking video for its employees last summer, spoke at a ribbon-cutting for a new warehouse in Osceola and her staff once flew one of the company's flags over the Iowa Capitol.

"It is AMAZING. She hit on so many talking points in a short period of time," Jennifer Crall, Iowa Select's director of public affairs, wrote to the governor's office about a video Reynolds recorded for the charity in 2018.

Before Reynolds participated in its Christmas pork loin giveaway that year, Crall supplied the governor's office with talking points that included, "What a great example of Iowa farmers giving back."

The access paid dividends when the coronavirus disrupted the pork industry.

Iowa Select pushed Reynolds' office to keep meatpacking plants open at full capacity after outbreaks slowed production, for aid programs to benefit producers and to arrange drive-thru COVID-19 testing at its corporate office in West Des Moines.

Iowa Select spokeswoman Jen Sorenson said the company feels "an important responsibility" to educate elected officials on Iowa's multibillion-dollar animal agriculture industry, saying it leads to better policy.

Reynolds' spokesman Garrett said the governor "has a strong relationship with Iowa producers."

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement policy director Adam Mason said his group, which has opposed Iowa Select's expansion on environmental grounds, has been unable to get a meeting with Reynolds for years. He said the Hansens' charity buys good will in communities where their farms pollute the air and water with hog manure.

"The general criticism that we have the best government money can buy — this is that actually happening," Mason said. "She is auctioning off her time to representatives of this industry, and not only that, bending over backward to do it and to make a donor happy. If it's not illegal, it should be."

UN: 'Concerning news' vaccines may not work against variants

GENEVA (AP) — The head of the World Health Organization said Monday the emergence of new COVID-19 variants has raised questions about whether or not existing vaccines will work, calling it "concerning news" that the vaccines developed so far may be less effective against the variant first detected in South Africa.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a media briefing that South Africa's decision on Sunday to suspend its vaccination campaign using the AstraZeneca vaccine is "a reminder that we need to do everything we can to reduce circulation of the virus with proven public health measures."

He said it was increasingly clear that vaccine manufacturers would need to tweak their existing shots to address the ongoing genetic evolution of the coronavirus, saying booster shots would most likely be necessary, especially since new variants of the virus are now spreading globally and appear likely to become the predominant strains.

Tedros added that WHO expected to make a decision "in the next few days" on whether it would recommend an emergency use listing for the AstraZeneca vaccine. That designation would allow millions of doses to be shipped to poor countries as part of a U.N.-backed effort to distribute COVID-19 vaccines worldwide known as COVAX.

Last week, Tedros said that more than three quarters of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered in just 10 countries and that immunization in nearly 130 countries had yet to start. Despite WHO's aim of starting COVID-19 vaccination in poor countries at the same time as wealthy countries, COVAX hasn't delivered any vaccine doses anywhere.

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's chief scientist, said people shouldn't conclude from South Africa's decision that the AstraZeneca vaccine doesn't work. She said all of the available evidence to date shows the vaccines developed so far reduce deaths, hospitalizations and severe disease.

Other COVID-19 vaccines developed by Novavax, Pfizer and BioNTech and Johnson & Johnson also

appear to be less effective against the strain first identified in South Africa, although they may prevent severe disease.

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Brazil's wealthy cause a stir trying to score quick vaccines

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazilian marketing executive Eduardo Menga is extra cautious when it comes to his health. During the pandemic, he consulted a slew of doctors to ensure he was in good shape and uprooted his family from Rio de Janeiro to a quiet city in the countryside where he works remotely. His wife Bianca Rinaldi, an actress, hasn't worked since March.

Menga and Rinaldi are among a minority of Brazilians who will pay for a COVID-19 vaccine if an association of private clinics can close a deal to bring 5 million shots to Latin America's most unequal country. President Jair Bolsonaro, under fire for his government's handling of the pandemic, has promised not to interfere.

"When I go to a restaurant and I pay for my own food, I'm not taking anyone else's food," the 68-year-old Menga said from his home in Jundiai in Sao Paulo state. "I don't think getting a vaccine from a private clinic will take it from someone else waiting in the public system. It could be an alternative line, and those who have the chance should take it."

Amid the government's stumbling vaccine rollout, many moneyed Brazilians want to find a swift path to vaccination, sparking backlash from some public health experts and igniting debate on social media, editorial pages and talk shows.

There has been concern globally that the privileged could game the system to get themselves vaccinated before others. When the connected have been caught leapfrogging ahead, in countries like Turkey, Morocco and Spain, they have faced criticism, investigations or forced resignations.

Brazil has had its reports of line-jumpers, too, but the nation stands apart because maneuvering isn't only done in the shadows. Some is out in the open, with the prosperous coordinating efforts that the government endorses, according to Roberto DaMatta, an emeritus anthropology professor at the University of Notre Dame.

"The pandemic makes Brazil's inequality more obvious, because the virus doesn't choose social class, but the cure just might," said DaMatta, who authored the book "Do You Know With Whom You're Speaking?" a portrait of Brazilian privilege. It was inspired by episodes during the pandemic, including a judge who refused a policeman's order to don a mask, then called the state's security chief to protest and ripped up his 100 reais ($20) fine.

"Brazil's wealthy normalized slavery for ages. Now, they accept that more poor and Black people die of COVID, and put little pressure on a government that has sabotaged the rollout. Taking the vaccine in this scenario might depend on organization, so the well-off are organizing," DaMatta told The Associated Press.

Business leaders and some authorities defend attempts to secure a vaccine as boosting Brazil's economic reboot. And anyway, they argue, why shouldn't the well-heeled buy vaccines if government efforts are falling short? So far, Brazil has 13.9 million shots available for a population of 210 million people, and has given the first of two shots to just 1% of citizens since immunizations began Jan. 18.

Health experts, for their part, view such efforts as unethical given vaccines are scarce globally and at-risk groups are in more immediate need to avoid death; already nearly 230,000 Brazilians have died from COVID-19, the second-highest tally in the world.

And while people over 65 like Menga are near the top of the list, Brazil's slow rollout, which could take up to 16 months, means it could be a long time before he gets a shot, and even longer for his wife, who is 46.

Debate over unfair vaccine distribution in Brazil first flared after Supreme Court employees reportedly maneuvered to set aside some 7,000 COVID-19 vaccines for themselves and their families; the government laboratory that will make and distribute AstraZeneca shots declined, saying it cannot reserve shots. Sao Paulo state prosecutors also lobbied for inclusion in priority groups, alongside health professionals.

After those efforts floundered, Brazil's private health clinics stepped in to try to bypass government procurement plans. Executives from Brazil's association of private clinics negotiated directly with Indian pharmaceutical company Bharat Biotech for its COVAXIN shot. The association of about 30,000 private clinics is registering would-be clients on a waiting list.

Brazil has no deals with Bharat and its health regulator has yet to approve COVAXIN, but in a sign of what the future may hold if the deal does go through, Rio Grande do Sul state's association of judges asked its members last month if they were interested in buying shots from the clinics association.

Gonzalo Vecina, who headed Brazil's health agency between 1999 and 2003, says such private-sector efforts pose a major problem, not only on ethical and legal grounds, but also to public health.

"The private network doesn't have to follow the Health Ministry's priority protocol. So, if this goes ahead we will have a line for people who have $200, where you can get a shot next week, and another that won't move for months," Vecina said.

"What everyone needs to understand is that the pandemic doesn't end if it doesn't end for everyone."

Most of the planet is relying on public health care networks to administer vaccines, and few countries with large populations are using private channels for distribution. A notable exception is the U.S., where Americans can get their shots at pharmacies, clinics and other private institutions. Hospitals in at least eight U.S. states have been accused of favoring board members, trustees, relatives and donors who should have waited their turn.

On Jan. 26, Bolsonaro said he had signed a letter to bolster a bid from a group of Brazilian executives to score 33 million doses of the AstraZeneca shot, with half for them to use as they like and half donated to the country's public health system.

Brazilian media reported at least 11 companies were in the group, including state-run oil company Petrobras, steelmaker Gerdau and phone carrier Oi, all of which declined to comment.

"That would help the economy a lot, and also those who might want to get vaccinated," Bolsonaro said of the companies' effort. Economy Minister Paulo Guedes labeled the effort "evidently very good."

By contrast, a council of business leaders in neighboring Colombia hit a roadblock when it sought permission to purchase COVID-19 shots. Colombia's health minister said the possibility would only be considered in the second phase of immunization, after all health professionals and people over 60 years old have received their shots.

Bolsonaro's support notwithstanding, AstraZeneca declined the Brazilian executives' effort, saying in a statement that it wouldn't supply Brazil's private sector, at least for now. Sao Paulo's industry federation released a statement two days later denying such negotiations ever were pursued.

A former governor of Brazil's central bank, Armínio Fraga, said he opposes the moves by wealthier Brazilians and fears vaccine prices could surge if companies are allowed to bid for them.

"We are living in a moment of global scarcity," Fraga, a partner at investment firm Gavea Investimentos, said in an online interview to newspaper Valor. "We need some coordination so that priority groups are respected." ____

AP reporters Suzan Fraser contributed from Ankara, Elena Becatoros from Athens, Aritz Parra from Madrid, Mosa'ab Elshamy from Rabat, and Russ Bynum from Savannah, Georgia.

Rescuers in India digging for 37 trapped in glacier flood

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE and RISHABH R. JAIN Associated Press

RUDRAPRAYAG, India (AP) — Rescuers in northern India worked Monday to rescue more than three dozen power plant workers trapped in a tunnel after part of a Himalayan glacier broke off and sent a wall of water and debris rushing down a mountain in a disaster that has left at least 26 people dead and 165

missing.

More than 2,000 members of the military, paramilitary groups and police have been taking part in search-and-rescue operations in the northern state of Uttarakhand after Sunday's flood, which destroyed one dam, damaged another and washed homes downstream.

Officials said the focus was on saving 37 workers who are stuck inside a tunnel at one of the affected hydropower plants. Heavy equipment was brought in to help clear the way through a 2.5-kilometer (1.5-mile) -long tunnel and reach the workers, who have been out of contact since the flood.

"The tunnel is filled with debris, which has come from the river. We are using machines to clear the way," said H. Gurung, a senior official of the paramilitary Indo Tibetan Border Police.

Authorities fear many more people are dead and were searching for bodies downstream using boats. They also walked along river banks and used binoculars to scan for bodies that might have been washed downstream.

The flood was caused when a portion of the Nanda Devi glacier snapped off Sunday morning, releasing water trapped behind it. Experts said the disaster could be linked to global warming and a team of scientists was flown to the site Monday to investigate what happened.

The floodwater rushed down the mountain and into other bodies of water, forcing the evacuation of many villages along the banks of the Alaknanda and Dhauliganga rivers. Video showed the muddy, concrete-gray floodwaters tumbling through a valley and surging into a dam, breaking it into pieces with little resistance before roaring on downstream. It turned the countryside into what looked like an ash-colored moonscape.

A hydroelectric plant on the Alaknanda was destroyed, and a plant under construction on the Dhauliganga was damaged, said Vivek Pandey, an Indo Tibetan Border Police spokesman. Flowing out of the Himalayan mountains, the two rivers meet before merging with the Ganges River.

The trapped workers were at the Dhauliganga plant, where on Sunday 12 workers were rescued from a separate tunnel.

A senior government official told The Associated Press that they don't know the total number of people who were working in the Dhauliganga project. "The number of missing people can go up or come down," S. A. Murugesan said.

Pandey said Monday that 165 workers at the two plants, not including those trapped in the tunnel, were missing and at least 26 bodies were recovered.

Those rescued Sunday were taken to a hospital, where they were recovering.

One of the rescued workers, Rakesh Bhatt, told The Associated Press said they were working in the tunnel when water rushed in.

"We thought it might be rain and that the water will recede. But when we saw mud and debris enter with great speed, we realized something big had happened," he said.

Bhatt said one of the workers was able to contact officials via his mobile phone.

"We waited for almost six hours — praying to God and joking with each other to keep our spirits high. I was the first to be rescued and it was a great relief," he said.

The Himalayan area where Sunday's flood struck has a chain of hydropower projects on several rivers and their tributaries. Authorities said they were able to save other power units downstream because of timely action taken to release water by opening gates.

The floodwaters also damaged homes, but details on the number and whether any residents were injured, missing or dead remained unclear. Officials said they were trying to track whether anyone was missing from villages along the two rivers.

Government officials airdropped food packets and medicine to at least two flood-hit villages.

Many people in nearby villages work at the Dhauliganga plant, Murugesan said, but as it was a Sunday fewer people were at work than on a weekday,

"The only solace for us is that the casualty from the nearby villages is much less," he said.

Some have already started pointing at climate change as a contributing factor given the known melting and breakup of the world's glaciers, though other factors such as erosion, earthquakes, a buildup of water

pressure and volcanic eruptions have also been known to cause glaciers to collapse.

Anjal Prakash, research director and adjunct professor at the Indian School of Business who has contributed to U.N.-sponsored research on global warming, said that while data on the cause of the disaster was not yet available, "this looks very much like a climate change event as the glaciers are melting due to global warming."

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Banerjee reported from Lucknow, India.

Austria warns against travel to Tyrol, eases virus curbs

VIENNA (AP) — Austria on Monday issued a warning against travel to its Tyrol province amid concerns over cases of a coronavirus variant first discovered in South Africa, even as the country eased its third lockdown by reopening schools, shops, hairdressing salons, museums and zoos.

Officials have been discussing for days whether extra restrictions are required in Tyrol, a popular skiing destination. Federal authorities say 293 infections with the more contagious variant first discovered in South Africa have been confirmed in Tyrol.

The regional government on Monday drew up a list of measures that included calls for people to avoid nonessential travel, more police checks on mask-wearing and social distancing, and a requirement for negative antigen tests before people can use cable cars and ski lifts.

A little later, the federal government urged Austrians to refrain from nonessential travel to Tyrol, which borders Germany, Italy and Switzerland. It called on people who have been in the region in the past two weeks to get tested and for those planning to travel from Tyrol to other Austrian regions to be tested before they set off.

"Everything must be done to prevent these (virus) mutations spreading ever further," Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said.

Austria's overall relaxation of restrictions is far from complete. People going to the hairdresser will need to show a negative test result that is at most 48 hours old. In shops, customers have to wear full protective masks rather than just fabric face coverings.

Restaurants and hotels remain closed, and authorities say they won't reopen this month. Border checks are in place, with new arrivals required to quarantine for 10 days.

Austria's lockdown had been in place since Dec. 26. While the government has said that Austria needs to get as close as possible to an infection level of 50 new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days, the figure is still considerably higher -- currently 104.

The government's decision to go ahead with relaxing restrictions has drawn criticism, with the opposition leader arguing that reopening more than schools is a significant risk.

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Around the globe, virus cancels spring travel for millions

By DAVID McHUGH, CASEY SMITH and JOE McDONALD AP Business Writers

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — They are the annual journeys of late winter and early spring: Factory workers in China heading home for the Lunar New Year; American college students going on road trips and hitting the beach over spring break; Germans and Britons fleeing drab skies for some Mediterranean sun over Easter.

All of it canceled, in doubt or under pressure because of the coronavirus.

Amid fears of new variants of the virus, new restrictions on movement have hit just as people start to look ahead to what is usually a busy time of year for travel.

It means more pain for airlines, hotels, restaurants and tourist destinations that were already struggling

more than a year into the pandemic, and a slower recovery for countries where tourism is a big chunk of the economy.

Colleges around the U.S. have been canceling spring break to discourage students from traveling. After Indiana University in Bloomington replaced its usual break with three "wellness days," student Jacki Sylvester abandoned plans to celebrate her 21st birthday in Las Vegas.

Instead she will mark the milestone closer to home, with a day at the casino in French Lick, Indiana, just 50 miles (80 kilometers) away.

"I was really looking forward to getting out of here for a whole week. I wanted to be able to get some drinks and have fun — see the casinos and everything — and honestly see another city and just travel a little," she said.

"At least it's letting us have a little fun for a day in a condensed version of our original Vegas plans. Like, I'm still going to be able to celebrate. … I'm just forced to do it closer to home."

Flight cancellations will keep Anthony Hoarty, a teacher from Cranfield in England, from spending Easter with his family at their bungalow on the Greek island of Crete, a trip already postponed from last October. A trip to Mauritius last Easter also fell victim to COVID-19. "It's the uncertainty," he said. "You can't plan things. It's not knowing if the government is going to change its mind, if the other countries in Europe are changing their mind about travel."

"I love going to our house - I'd walk if I could," he said.

They could holiday in Britain but with most people grounded, places may be booked up or expensive: "The chances of us doing anything are pretty remote, actually."

At bus and train stations in China, there is no sign of the annual Lunar New Year rush. The government has called on the public to avoid travel following new coronavirus outbreaks. Only five of 15 security gates at Beijing's cavernous central railway station were open; the crowds of travelers who usually camp on the sprawling plaza outside were absent.

The holiday, which starts Feb. 12, is usually the world's single biggest movement of humanity as hundreds of millions of Chinese leave cities to visit their hometowns or tourist spots or travel abroad. For millions of migrant workers, it usually is the only chance to visit their hometowns during the year. This year, authorities are promising extra pay if they stay put.

The government says people will make 1.7 billion trips during the holiday, but that is down 40% from 2019.

Each news cycle seems to bring new restrictions. U.S. President Joe Biden reinstituted restrictions on travelers from more than two dozen European countries, South Africa and Brazil, while people leaving the U.S. are now required to show a negative test before returning.

Canada barred flights to the Caribbean. Israel closed its main international airport. Travel into the European Union is severely restricted, with entry bans and quarantine requirements for returning citizens.

For air travel, "the short-term outlook has definitely darkened," said Brian Pearce, chief economist for the International Air Transport Association. Governments have poured $200 billion into propping up the industry.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization says international arrivals fell 74% last year, wiping out $1.3 trillion in revenue and putting up to 120 million jobs at risk. A UNWTO expert panel had a mixed outlook for 2021, with 45% expecting a better year, 25% no change and 30% a worse one.

In Europe the outlook is clouded by lagging vaccine rollouts and the spread of the new variants.

That means "there is a growing risk of another summer tourist season being lost" said Jack Allen-Reynolds at Capital Economics. "That would put a huge dent in the Greek economy and substantially delay the recoveries in Spain and Portugal."

Travel company TUI is offering package vacations in the sun in Greece and Spain, but with broad cancellation provisions to attract cautious customers. Places that can be reached by car, such as Germany's North Sea islands and the Alps, are benefiting to some extent because they offer a chance to isolate. The German Vacation Home Association says the popular locations are 60% booked for July and August already.

Thailand, where about a tenth of the population depends on tourism for its livelihood, requires a two-week quarantine for foreigners at designated hotels costing about $1,000 and up. So far, only a few dozen

people a day are opting to visit. Tourist arrivals are forecast to reach only 10 million this year from 40 million in 2019.

Gerasimos Bakogiannis, owner of the Portes Palace hotel in Potidaia in Greece's northern Halkidiki region, said he is not even opening for Western Easter on April 4 but will wait a month for Greek Orthodox Easter on May 2 — and, he hopes, the start of a better summer.

"If this year is like last year, tourism will be destroyed," he said.

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McDonald contributed from Beijing and Smith from Indianapolis. Elaine Kurtenbach contributed from Bangkok and Costas Kantouris from Thessaloniki, Greece.

AP-NORC poll: Few in US say democracy is working very well

By STEVEN SLOAN and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Only a fragment of Americans believe democracy is thriving in the U.S., even as broad majorities agree that representative government is one of the country's bedrock principles, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Just 16% of Americans say democracy is working well or extremely well, a pessimism that spans the political spectrum. Nearly half of Americans, 45%, think democracy isn't functioning properly, while another 38% say it's working only somewhat well.

The core elements of democratic government, including free and fair elections and the peaceful transfer of power, were put to a dire test by the baseless claims of election fraud advanced by former President Donald Trump. Those assertions of fraud were a root cause of the deadly violence at the U.S. Capitol last month, which damaged the country's reputation as a model for democracy.

Trump will face an unprecedented second impeachment trial in the Senate this week for his role in sparking the violence. About half of Americans say the Senate should convict the Republican former president.

"At every turn, it's gotten worse and worse," said Curtis Musser, a 55-year-old Republican-leaning independent in Clermont, Florida, who didn't vote for Trump. "You could see it brewing even before the election. And everything just kept spiraling downward from there."

The poll's findings are broadly consistent with how Americans graded democracy before the election. But there are signs that Trump's attacks on the democratic process, including his repeated and discredited argument that the election was "stolen" because of voter irregularities, resonated with Republicans.

In October, about two-thirds of those who identify with the GOP, 68%, said democracy was working at least somewhat well. That figure plummeted to 36% in January. Democratic views whipsawed in the opposite direction, with 70% reporting democracy working at least somewhat well compared with 37% in the fall.

Overall, about two-thirds of Americans say Joe Biden was legitimately elected president, but only a third of Republicans hold that view.

That debate is now playing out in Congress, with a clear split among Republican leaders like Sen. Mitch McConnell, Rep. Liz Cheney and others who have rejected Trump's claims and validated Biden's victory. Still, more than 140 House Republicans refused to accept Biden's victory, a sign of the far right's grip on the party.

GOP officials in several battleground states that Biden carried, including Arizona and Georgia, have said the election was fair. Trump's claims were roundly rejected in the courts, including by judges appointed by Trump, and by his former attorney general, William Barr.

Fred Carrigan, a 58-year-old industrial heating mechanic in Portland, Indiana, said he doesn't believe Trump's argument that the election was stolen. But he also views the push to impeach and convict Trump as an affront to democracy. A conviction would give senators the option to ban Trump from seeking office again.

"Trump didn't do himself any favors by telling them to go march. But he didn't tell them to vandalize the Capitol," Carrigan said. "I don't think it's impeachable. Impeaching him is petty. They are a bunch of

children trying to prove who is right, when it doesn't matter in the big picture."

"All this shows is it's just going to get worse," he said.

Biden, a Democrat, has pledged to use the power of the presidency to promote democratic ideals.

In one of the first tests of that commitment, he was quick to condemn military leaders who staged a coup last week in Myanmar, threatening sanctions and blasting a "direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and rule of law."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meanwhile, has said the Biden administration is "deeply concerned" by Russia's jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

An overwhelming majority of Americans, 70%, say they believe Biden respects democratic institutions at least a fair amount. But there is a stark political split with about 96% of Democrats saying Biden respects such institutions, compared with about 42% of Republicans.

Those are still much higher marks than Trump earned: 62% say the former president has little or no respect for democratic traditions or institutions. That view is held by 93% of Democrats and, notably, 27% of Republicans.

Linda Reynolds, a 64-year-old retired paper sales representative in Torrance, California, was a lifelong Republican until Trump captured the party's presidential nomination in 2016. With Biden in the White House, she's feeling better about whether the U.S. will again embrace democracy.

"We obviously have a lot of problems," she said. "But in the big picture, reason seems to have prevailed, hopefully in the eyes of the world."

While Americans are downbeat on the current state of democracy, they are unified that such a form of government is still the desired approach. Eighty percent say a democratically elected government is very or extremely important to the nation's identity.

Support persisted or was even higher for other central tenets of the nation's democratic government. Eighty-eight percent say a fair judicial system and the rule of law are very or extremely important, and 85% held similar feelings about individual liberties and freedoms as defined by the Constitution.

Those tenets of democracy are considered important by large majorities of Republicans and Democrats.

Despite dour views of how the U.S. is being governed today, the poll finds heightened optimism about the country's future. Nearly half, 49%, say things are headed in the right direction, compared with 37% in December and 25% in October. Optimism hit a low, 20%, last summer. Much of the surge in optimism came among Democrats, who are confident in Biden and his ability to govern and manage crises facing the country.

"We remain a great country and do a lot of good things," Reynolds said.

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Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writers Hannah Fingerhut and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

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The AP-NORC poll of 1,055 adults was conducted Jan. 28-Feb. 1 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

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Online:

AP-NORC Center: http://www.apnorc.org/.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 9, the 40th day of 2021. There are 325 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 9, 1825, the House of Representatives elected John Quincy Adams president after no candidate

received a majority of electoral votes.

On this date:

In 1870, the U.S. Weather Bureau was established.

In 1942, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff held its first formal meeting to coordinate military strategy during World War II.

In 1943, the World War II battle of Guadalcanal in the southwest Pacific ended with an Allied victory over Japanese forces.

In 1950, in a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, Sen. Joseph McCarthy, R-Wis., charged the State Department was riddled with Communists.

In 1960, Adolph Coors Co. chairman Adolph Coors III, 44, was shot to death in suburban Denver during a botched kidnapping attempt. (The man who killed him, Joseph Corbett, Jr., served 19 years in prison.)

In 1962, an agreement was signed to make Jamaica an independent nation within the British Commonwealth later in the year.

In 1964, the Beatles made their first live American television appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show," broadcast from New York on CBS.

In 1971, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake in California's San Fernando Valley claimed 65 lives. The crew of Apollo 14 returned to Earth after man's third landing on the moon.

In 1984, Soviet leader Yuri V. Andropov, 69, died 15 months after succeeding Leonid Brezhnev; he was followed by Konstantin U. Chernenko (chehr-NYEN'-koh).

In 1986, during its latest visit to the solar system, Halley's Comet came closest to the sun (its next return will be in 2061).

In 1995, Former Senator J. William Fulbright died in Washington at age 89.

In 2002, Britain's Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth II, died in London at age 71.

Ten years ago: Thousands of workers went on strike across Egypt, adding a new dimension to the uprising as public rage turned to the vast wealth President Hosni Mubarak's family reportedly amassed while close to half the country struggled near the poverty line. Rep. Christopher Lee, R-N.Y., abruptly resigned with only a vague explanation of regret after gossip website Gawker reported that the married congressman had sent a shirtless photo of himself to a woman on Craigslist. Lindsay Lohan pleaded not guilty in Los Angeles to felony grand theft of a $2,500 necklace. (Lohan later pleaded no contest to taking the necklace without permission and served 35 days of house arrest.)

Five years ago: Republican Donald Trump posted a decisive victory in the New Hampshire primary, while Democrats lined up behind Bernie Sanders in their own act of anti-establishment defiance. President Barack Obama unveiled his eighth and final budget, a $4 trillion-plus proposal freighted with liberal policy initiatives and tax hikes. Two commuter trains crashed head-on in a remote area of southern Germany, killing 12 people and injuring dozens of others.

One year ago: U.S. officials said airline passengers from China, including those who'd been in China in the last 14 days, were being funneled to 11 airports to ensure that they received medical screening and treatment for the coronavirus. New coronavirus cases were reported in Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, the U.K. and Spain. "Parasite," from South Korea, won the best picture Oscar, becoming the first foreign-language film to take home the biggest honor in film.

Today's Birthdays: Retired television journalist Roger Mudd is 93. Actor Janet Suzman is 82. Nobel Prize-winning author J.M. Coetzee is 81. Actor-politician Sheila James Kuehl (kyool) (TV: "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis") is 80. Singer-songwriter Carole King is 79. Actor Joe Pesci is 78. Singer Barbara Lewis is 78. Author Alice Walker is 77. Actor Mia Farrow is 76. Former Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., is 75. Singer Joe Ely is 74. Actor Judith Light is 72. R&B musician Dennis "DT" Thomas (Kool & the Gang) is 70. Actor Charles Shaughnessy is 66. Actor Ed Amatrudo is 65. Former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe is 64. Jazz musician Steve Wilson is 60. Country singer Travis Tritt is 58. Actor Julie Warner is 56. Country singer Danni Leigh is 51. Actor Sharon Case is 50. Actor Jason George is 49. Actor Amber Valletta is 47. Actor-producer Charlie Day is 45. Rock singer Chad Wolf (Carolina Liar) is 45. Actor A.J. Buckley is 44. Rock musician Richard On (O.A.R.) is 42. Actor Ziyi (zee yee) Zhang is 42. Olympic silver and bronze medal figure skater Irina

Slutskaya is 42. Actor Tom Hiddleston is 40. Actor David Gallagher is 36. Actor Michael B. Jordan is 34. Actor Rose Leslie is 34. Actor Marina Malota is 33. Actor Camille Winbush is 31. Actor Jimmy Bennett is 25. Actor Evan Roe (TV: "Madam Secretary") is 21.