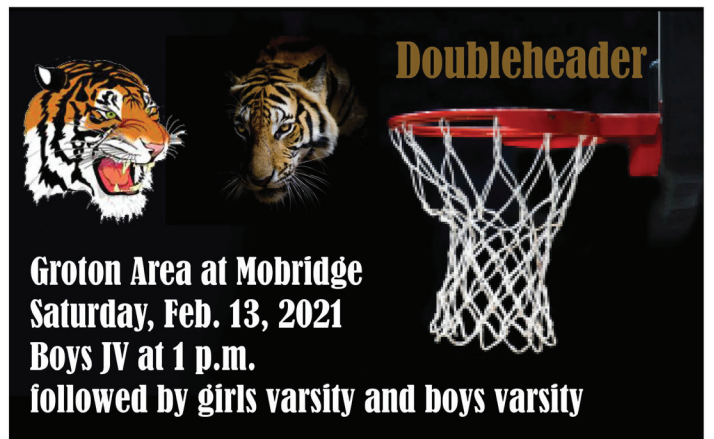


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Rich and Tami Zimney - Grandparents of Laila Roberts

In the event we are unable to livestream the girls JV game, we will record the game and when we get back home, we will upload it to the 397news.com archives.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Upcoming Schedule

Saturday, Feb. 12

Basketball Doubleheader at Moberg.

JV girls (Rich and Tami Zimney) at 1 p.m. in the middle school gym. JV boys (White House Inn) at 1 p.m. in the high school gym followed by the varsity girls and then the varsity boys.

Monday, Feb. 15

Roncalli has changed the schedule for Monday's games again. 7th grade will play at 4 and 8th grade at 5, there will be NO C GAME, JV and Varsity will follow the JH games. All games will be played at Roncalli HS.

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

Thursday, Feb. 18

Junior High Basketball hosts Moberg-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



Careflight Summoned to Groton

Careflight was summoned to Groton early Saturday morning. Activity was seen at a house at the intersection of Third Ave. and Sixth Street.

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda
February 16, 2021 – 7:00pm
Groton Community Center

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Award 2021 Gravel Bid
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Minutes
4. Bills
5. January Finance Report
6. Water Tower Replacement – Schedule C – AB Contracting Application for Payment Number 2 for \$111,671.86
7. Water Tower Logo
8. Close CD #30164 - \$1,500
9. Land and Water Conservation Grant application for Resurfacing Tennis Courts
10. Closing date for summer applications
11. First Reading of the Summer Salary Ordinance #741
12. First Reading of the 2021 Supplemental Appropriation Ordinance #742
13. Petitions must be submitted by February 26th at 5:00pm
14. Paint – South Dakota 2021
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. Adjournment

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Do reporters care about facts?

From Gov. Noem's Office

Folks,

We're hearing a lot of talk about "dark money" in the news cycle these days. What we aren't hearing are the facts.

Multiple news articles and broadcast stories in recent days have falsely claimed that HB 1079 is a "dark money push," or it "open[s] the door for more 'dark money' in state political campaigns." Such headlines are totally false – and they ignore what HB 1079 actually does.

Donors to charitable organizations should be applauded. They give of their own blessings to help others who need it. And HB 1079, which Governor Noem proposed, is an effort to protect those generous individuals and the organizations that they support.

Critics of the legislation are falsely claiming that it would make it easier for "dark money" to impact campaign finance. Here's the thing: HB 1079 doesn't change any campaign finance laws. It also doesn't change any donor disclosure requirements.

HB 1079 simply requires government entities in South Dakota to follow the law. They cannot circumvent existing requirements to demand financial disclosures from charitable organizations, as has been done in states like California.

Here's why such a law is needed in the first place:

In the 1950's, as the NAACP was fighting for equal rights for minorities who were being discriminated against, the Attorney General of Alabama demanded the names and addresses of the NAACP's "Alabama members and agents." One can surmise what the Attorney General intended to do with this information.

In the ensuing Supreme Court Case, NAACP v. Alabama, Justice Harlan outlined why donors are owed a right to privacy. HB 1079 will guarantee them such privacy. It will not give them any new exemption in state law, but it will shield them when the law does not require disclosure of their information.

But you don't have to take my word for it. You can read the bill for yourself. It's very short, less than 250 words. One wonders why Angela Kennecke and Stephen Groves (among others) didn't simply stick to the text of the bill:

2021 South Dakota Legislature

House Bill 1079

SENATE COMMERCE AND ENERGY ENGROSSED

Introduced by: The Committee on Judiciary at the request of the Office of the Governor

An Act to limit certain actions that may be taken by the executive branch relative to nonprofit corporations or charitable trusts.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of South Dakota:

Section 1. That a NEW SECTION be added:

47-24-18. Definitions.

Terms as used in this Act mean:

(1) "Nonprofit corporation," as defined in § 47-22-1;

(2) "Charitable trust," as defined in section 4947(a)(1) of the United States Internal Revenue Code as amended and in effect on January 1, 2021.

Section 2. That a NEW SECTION be added:

47-24-19. Protection--Nonprofit corporations--Charitable trusts.

An executive branch agency, bureau, department, division, board, commission, officer, or official may not require any annual filing or reporting of a nonprofit corporation or charitable trust that is more stringent, restrictive, or expansive than that required by state or federal law.

Section 3. That a NEW SECTION be added:

47-24-20. Exceptions.

The provisions in § 47-24-19 do not apply to:

- (1) Any information required to determine eligibility for or compliance with a state grant or contract; or
- (2) Any information required for, or obtained in the course of, a state fraud investigation or an enforcement action by the state.

Any information obtained shall be confidential and its disclosure is restricted as provided by law.

Governor Noem Signs Bills into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Friday, Governor Kristi Noem signed fourteen bills into law:

If the links work, you should be able to click on the bill number and get more information.

[HB 1001](#) corrects technical errors in statutory cross-references regarding insurance.

[HB 1002](#) revises certain provisions regarding fingerprint-based background checks for the Real Estate Commission and the appraiser certification program.

[HB 1003](#) revises certain provisions regarding credit for reinsurance.

[HB 1009](#) revises certain provisions regarding the licensing of electricians and electrical contractors.

[HB 1022](#) repeals certain obsolete state estate and inheritance tax provisions.

[HB 1023](#) repeals obsolete property tax provisions and revises property tax cross-references and land classification statutes.

[HB 1024](#) repeals obsolete provisions and revises statutory cross-references for the energy minerals severance tax, state and municipal sales taxes, contractor's excise tax, alcohol licenses, and gaming tax.

[HB 1025](#) deletes or revises certain outdated language relating to education.

[HB 1030](#) revises and clarifies certain provisions regarding the required minimum distribution methods of the South Dakota Retirement System.

[HB 1043](#) provides enhanced permit criteria for current and former law enforcement officers.

[HB 1048](#) revises provisions regarding the sales of certain older vehicles at auction.

[HB 1070](#) revises certain provisions regarding the Unified Judicial System.

[HB 1082](#) revises certain state aid to education definitions for the 2021-2022 school year.

[HB 1083](#) grants authority to the Secretary of Education to waive accountability requirements in certain situations.

Governor Noem has signed forty-two bills into law this legislative session.

From the SD Dept. of Tourism

Are you staying warm out there? BRRRRR! This has been quite the cold stretch we have experienced, and it sounds like temperatures will be even more brutal this weekend. Stay safe!

Here is our monthly COVID-19 research update for you. The latest insights are showing:

1. The severe repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the travel economies of every state and territory, leading to a 42% decline in national travel spending in 2020.
2. South Dakota was the 4th best performing state in the country for year-over-year percent change in hotel occupancy, decreasing only 21%, and surpassed only by MS (-15%), ID (-20.6%), and MT (-20.6%).
3. The pandemic hit the travel industry harder than any other sector in the country representing 39% of all jobs lost since February of 2020. The Business/Convention/Trade Show segments were hit the hardest with a decline of 77%.
- 4, 63% of Americans have plans to travel in the next six months, up from 57% in mid-December.
- 5, 41% of Americans now support opening up their community to visitors, up from 32% in early December.
6. For the first time ever, optimism about the course the pandemic will take in the United States over the next month significantly outweighs pessimism.
7. American travelers' primary motivations for taking their next trip are far and away to relax and escape stress and spend time with family.
8. When asked where they want to go on their trip, Americans want to visit small towns and rural destinations/attractions, cities or metropolitan areas, beach destinations/resorts, national parks, state and regional parks, and mountain destinations.
9. The last weekly Travel Sentiment Survey conducted February 5-7 showed that Americans are more open to travel inspiration than during any other period in the last 11 months (6.0/10).
10. Since March, U.S. Households have saved \$1.4 trillion, partially due to the inability to spend it on travel and leisure. This, along with pent up demand for vacationing, points to travel being the #1 key industry to lead an economic recovery.
11. Leisure will be the first travel segment to rebound followed by business travel, conventions/meetings and international.

Thank you to our research partners for providing this information: H2R Market Research, Tourism Economics, Destination Analysts, STR, U.S. Travel Association, Arrivalist, Miles Partnership, MMGY Travel Intelligence, ADARA, and Longwoods International.

If you ever have questions about the research we are sharing, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Kirk Hulstein oversees our research efforts and can always be reached at Kirk.Hulstein@TravelSouthDakota.com.

As we have done so often over the past 10 months, this is another reminder to be as diligent as ever about health, safety and hygiene protocols in your places of business. This resource page on SDVisit.com contains great guidance. The U.S. Travel Association has also created easy and important steps every business can take to make sure they are adapting their operations to protect employees and visitors. Check out "Travel in the New Normal" health and safety guidance.

Wishing you, your teams, and your loved ones a Happy Valentine's Day from your friends in the Department of Tourism! Stay well!

All our best, Jim Hagen, Secretary of Tourism

Northern State Selected as NCAA Men's Basketball Central Region Host Site

Aberdeen, S.D. – As announced by the NCAA Friday morning, Northern State University has been selected as the 2021 host site for the NCAA Central Region Men's Basketball Tournament. The Barnett Center and Wachs Arena will host the 6-team tournament scheduled for March 13-16.

"We are very excited to be selected to host the NCAA Central Region Men's Basketball Tournament and deliver a first class, championship level experience for all student-athletes, coaches and fans from around the region," noted NSU Director of Athletics, Josh Moon. "There is no better basketball community than the City of Aberdeen, Northern State University, and the Barnett Center/Wachs Arena; we are excited to showcase it with this tremendous opportunity.

Regional quarterfinal games will begin Saturday, March 13, followed by the semifinals Sunday, March 14, and the regional championship Tuesday, March 16. Winners will advance to the NCAA Division II Men's Basketball Elite Eight in Evansville, Indiana, on March 24-27.

Due to the health and safety protocols surrounding the pandemic, it was necessary for the NCAA to select championship competition sites in advance of regional qualification. The committee believes the sites and hosts chosen will provide an exceptional and safe experience for all participants.

Full information including ticket options, regional schedule, participating teams, and COVID protocols can be found at nsuwolves.com/2021/centralregion. Updates will be made to the page as more information is available.

Participating teams will be announced Sunday, March 7. The men's basketball selection show will air at 10:30 p.m. (ET) on [ncaa.com](https://www.ncaa.com).

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South Dakota State University announces dean's list

BROOKINGS, S.D. - The following students have been named to the dean's list for academic excellence after the fall 2020 semester at South Dakota State University. To earn dean's list distinctions in SDSU's colleges, students must have completed a minimum of 12 credits and must have earned at least a 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Students with an asterisk received a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Overall, nearly 3,200 students from 34 states and 26 foreign nations are on the list. More than 1,350 students received a 4.0.

Students with F, I, U, RI or RU grades are not eligible regardless of system term GPA attained. Note that this report includes courses that were taken at other South Dakota institutions this term. A minimum of 12 credits within the 100-699 course range must be taken. A student who passes pregeneral education courses may still qualify, if the student has 12 other credits that do fall within the 100-699 range.

School Codes:

SAFES – College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

SAHSS – College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

SEHS – College of Education and Human Sciences

SENGR – Jerome J. Lohr College of Engineering

SNS – College of Natural Sciences

SNURS – College of Nursing

SPAHP – College of SPAHP and Allied Health Professions

Aberdeen: Sarah Ann Aman, SENGR; Dylan Daniel Bader, SPAHP; Myranda Richelle Becking*, SNURS; Elise Irene Cardella, SEHS; Emilie Marie Casanova, SEHS; Colton John Cox*, SAHSS; Katherine Anne Erickson*, SNS; Christopher Charles Erickson, SNS; Paige Evans, SNS; Taryn Elizabeth Fergel, SPAHP; Symmone Aveanna Gauer*, SAHSS; Cassidie LaVerne Gergen*, SAHSS; Lucas Duane Goetz*, SNS; Joseph Neil Goetz*, SEHS; Matthew Curtis Hales, SENGR; Casey Kay Hanna, SNURS; Colton John Hansen, SPAHP; Abigail Lea Hanson, SENGR; Adam Tyler Heagley, SENGR; Kevin Daniel Heilman, SPAHP; Colton James Hellwig, SENGR; Jessica Gene Hollingsworth *, SNURS; Austin Roger Huff, SAHSS; Brianna Hope Humphries, SENGR; Amanda Marie Jacobs*, SNS; Calob Michael Jones, SAHSS; Nico Blue Jung, SEHS; Eliana Klipfel, SNURS; Viena Elisabet Klipfel, SAHSS; Brandon G. Lewis, SAFES; Riley Robert Meister*, SEHS; Taylor Catherine Morgan*, SNURS; Cole M. Peterson, SAHSS; Abigail Elizabeth Mae Pietz*, SAFES; Lucas Robert Schaeffbauer, SAHSS; Allison Paige Schock*, SNURS; Bailee Ann Schopp, SAHSS; Logen Nichole Snell*, SPAHP; Cassandra Cheyenne Soriano, SNURS; Bailey Renee Tollefson, SNURS; Asher Caleb Wahl*, SNURS; Darien Rae Watson, SNURS; Benjamin James Williams, SENGR; Sydney Hope Wirebaugh*, SEHS; Makyl J. Ziegler*, SNURS

Andover: Cassandra Ann Townsend*, SNS

Bath: Daniel Ward Sharp, SENGR; Travis George Sharp, SENGR; Matthew Robert Sperry*, SAFES

Bristol: Allison Lynn Duerre*, SEHS

Claremont: Kaitlyn Ann Anderson*, SAHSS; Dylan Michael Frey*, SAFES

Columbia: Aleigha Lynn Howell, SAFES; Seth Allen Howell, SAFES

Frederick: Cory Wren Murphy*, SAHSS

Groton: Faith Emily Crissman, SPAHP; Kaycie Lois Hawkins, SENGR; Kelby Nathan Hawkins*, SAHSS; Marshall McGregor Lane*, SNURS; Nicole Mabel Marzahn*, SNURS; Keri Jo Pappas, SNS; Erin Elizabeth Smith*, SAHSS; AnneMarie Lyn Smith*, SAHSS; Emily Anne Thompson*, SEHS

Hecla: Brooke Nicole Skoglund, SAFES

Langford: Sierra Brook Bivens, SNURS; Chesney Jesine Olson*, SENGR

Warner: Sydney Marie Leidholt*, SNURS

#355 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today's numbers are probably much like yesterdays, but there's a data anomaly that I do not yet understand. The new-case number is not much different at 103,300, still above 100,000—second consecutive day after four days below. Let's hope we drop back down instead of continuing upward. The total number of cases reported in the US in this pandemic is up to 27,530,900, which is 0.4% higher than yesterday. Hospitalizations continued to decline. We're at 74,225, which is 27% lower than two weeks ago. Deaths is the weird number; today shows 5667, which is the highest ever; but the data include a note that says there is an anomaly without specifying just what that is. We had this just over a week ago when a bunch of earlier deaths that were missed when they occurred were added to the total. I see that Ohio added close to 700 deaths to its total that were missed earlier, but that doesn't account entirely for the large jump in reported deaths. I'm going to guess there's another state in the same boat, but at the moment, I don't have clarity on this. At any rate, our total deaths increased to 480,642, which is 1.2% higher than yesterday.

Today, I read a report in the journal *Eurosurveillance* of a study done by a group at Ziv Medical Center in Safed, Galilee, Israel. The researchers tested IgG antibody levels in vaccinated people before and 21 days after the first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. This included 514 health care workers who were vaccinated and consented to have their antibodies tested (for science nerds, using the LIAISON SARS-CoV-2 S1/S2 IgG assay). They also identified participants who had a prior positive diagnostic test for Covid-19; there were 17 of those in the study with infections from one month to 10 months prior to the vaccination.

Of those 17 with prior infections, 11 no longer had detectable antibodies to the virus; that drop-off in antibody titers is the sort of thing we've been seeing for a while now, so no surprise there. Here's the good news: All 17 of those folks had huge immune responses to the first dose of vaccine, the kind of response most people have only after the second dose. Remember that the idea of a two-dose vaccine regimen is that the first dose exposes your immune system to the viral protein so that it can "learn" to respond, and then the second dose stimulates the immunologic memory from that first exposure, eliciting a stronger, larger, quicker, and longer-lasting response. The antibody levels seen in these folks after that first dose were all at least ten times higher than in the other vaccine recipients in the study—the ones who hadn't been infected before. It's a second-dose kind of response, what the experts call a "boost" response. There was no difference between those with recent infections and those with infections much longer in the past.

So who cares? We do; we all do. We care because this provides evidence that the relatively rapid decrease in antibody titers seen recovered patients does not necessarily translate to a loss of immunity; in fact, it seems, at least in this small sample, there is no loss at all for at least 10 months. The people with detectable antibodies and the people with no detectable antibodies all had a similar boost response to the first vaccine dose, no matter how long ago that infection was. We've talked before about how it could be that your antibodies drop off, but you are still protected. Probably the best summary of those conversations appears in my Update #150 posted July 22 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3796230603726651>. The thing is this study is pretty good news, indeed.

Now we will want to remember this was a very small study. Because Israel is not offering vaccine at this time to people with prior infection except for health care workers, they had only this small number to work with. This work needs to be replicated with a much larger sample. We also need to consider those asymptotically infected; no one is sure what happens with them—whether their response is as robust or as long-lasting as those in symptomatic individuals. The team suggests continuing work on this issue is important because it could mean, if confirmed with larger studies, that a single dose is sufficient to protect those with prior infections. That would extend the vaccine supply considerably.

There has been so much turmoil around opening of schools—whether we should, who we place at risk, whether it endangers the community. There are excellent reasons to open: the damage to kids' learning from the remote-learning model, the further marginalization of already-marginalized populations, the inability of many parents to earn an income while at home caring for their children, the risks to older fam-

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ily members (frequently grandparents) who end up caring for children so parents can work, the loss of nutritional support usually provided by schools, the stresses on parents, the psychological and emotional damage children are suffering. For starters. There are excellent reasons to keep schools closed: the risk of infection in school employees, the risk of contributing to community spread, the risk of serious infection to the small number of children who become ill, the damage to the economy of continuing spread. And there are many unknowns, primary among them how efficiently children spread infection. What to do?

The CDC has new guidance on the matter which Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, in a call today said "is grounded in science and the best available evidence." The guidance leans on growing evidence that schools can open safely if they put mitigation measures in place. Even where there are high transmission rates, elementary students can safely attend at least part of the time and middle and high school students can attend safely with lower levels of community transmission. The prerequisites are universal masking in the schools, phased reopening based on transmission in the community, physical distancing, contact tracing, and monitoring the level of spread in the community using extensive testing. Important in the plan is to prioritize vaccination for teachers and school employees.

That said, 99 percent of the population under 18 live in what the CDC defines as high transmission communities where schools may not be able to open safely. In these zones, the guidance recommends virtual learning for middle and high school and hybrid learning or reduced attendance for elementary students. Another issue is extracurricular activities, something most communities have decided not to forego, no matter how much community spread there is. And that's a real source of trouble. So we're not all that close at any rate.

A matter of some frustration to me is the number of people who holler about how our children are "the most important thing" and we need to "prioritize their education," but who also resist closing bars and restaurants so that community spread can be contained to the point that it is safe to open schools. Seems to me that, if kids are all-important, then you should be willing to cook your own damned dinner and have a beer at home so that the schools can open. The CDC guidance mentions the old saw that schools should be the last thing to close and the first thing to reopen; but if you are insisting that your own life not be disrupted even a little bit, then maybe you aren't as pro-child as you claim to be. I'd like to see folks, as Grandma used to say, "putting your money where your mouth is."

A while back we talked about the request Moderna had made of the FDA to include more doses in each vial of vaccine. The vaccine had been approved to carry 10 doses per vial, but the actual capacity of each vial is considerably larger. The company had sought permission to put up to 15 doses in each vial. Today the FDA informed them they can increase to 14 doses per vial. This is a fairly easy way to increase the vaccine supply because one bottleneck in the process has been fill and finish, the step of putting vaccine into the little bottles and slapping a label on. This permission could increase the vaccine supply by 20 percent fairly rapidly, within weeks, and by more as time goes on.

A team at the Cleveland Clinic completed a randomized study of the efficacy of zinc and vitamin C in the treatment of Covid-19. I was unable to access the paper published in JAMA Network Open, so I am relying on a summary here, but the news isn't good. They tested high-dose zinc gluconate, vitamin C, and a combination of the two and found none of these treatments decreased the duration of symptoms. Since the doses taken by the public tend to run considerably lower than those used in the study, it seems unlikely those are going to be beneficial, considering much higher doses were not. Since high doses of zinc can be harmful and high doses of both zinc and vitamin C have unpleasant side effects, it appears there is no real justification for using these in the hope they help with Covid-19.

Alex Trebek, game show host, died in November, leaving behind a huge base of saddened fans, but he wasn't quite finished brightening the world. Word came out this week that his wardrobe of suits, ties, and dress shirts has been donated to an organization that provides vocational training and social services to underserved people with issues of addiction, homelessness, and imprisonment. The clothing will be available to be worn in job interviews. Trebek's son is a supporter of the organization, and it was his suggestion that his dad's wardrobe be used for this purpose. It seems a fitting use for the possessions of a man who in his last day on the set of his show exhorted viewers to open their hearts to the suffering.

Stay healthy. I'll be back tomorrow.

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	450	428	845	15	Minimal	0.00%
Beadle	2646	2553	5646	39	Moderate	11.97%
Bennett	379	364	1146	9	Minimal	0.00%
Bon Homme	1502	1474	2008	24	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3519	3372	11371	35	Substantial	2.76%
Brown	5052	4840	12237	80	Substantial	10.56%
Brule	686	668	1819	9	Minimal	0.00%
Buffalo	419	406	886	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	964	929	3113	20	Moderate	3.16%
Campbell	129	121	248	4	Minimal	7.69%
Charles Mix	1246	1191	3805	18	Substantial	14.29%
Clark	359	337	922	4	Substantial	5.56%
Clay	1771	1736	5030	15	Moderate	5.37%
Codington	3856	3646	9349	76	Substantial	7.98%
Corson	463	448	987	11	Minimal	4.55%
Custer	734	715	2625	12	Moderate	9.84%
Davison	2924	2828	6278	59	Moderate	2.99%
Day	637	582	1699	28	Substantial	20.45%
Deuel	464	447	1095	8	Minimal	0.00%
Dewey	1390	1362	3730	21	Moderate	2.04%
Douglas	418	401	878	9	Minimal	3.45%
Edmunds	473	444	993	12	Moderate	0.00%
Fall River	515	491	2519	15	Moderate	6.85%
Faulk	351	322	669	13	Moderate	9.09%
Grant	942	871	2137	37	Substantial	17.74%
Gregory	520	476	1202	27	Moderate	6.90%
Haakon	245	231	515	9	Minimal	7.69%
Hamlin	679	622	1705	38	Moderate	12.12%
Hand	326	313	772	6	Minimal	0.00%
Hanson	349	331	687	4	Moderate	13.04%
Harding	91	90	179	1	Minimal	20.00%
Hughes	2243	2159	6307	34	Substantial	1.04%
Hutchinson	771	730	2254	24	Moderate	7.32%

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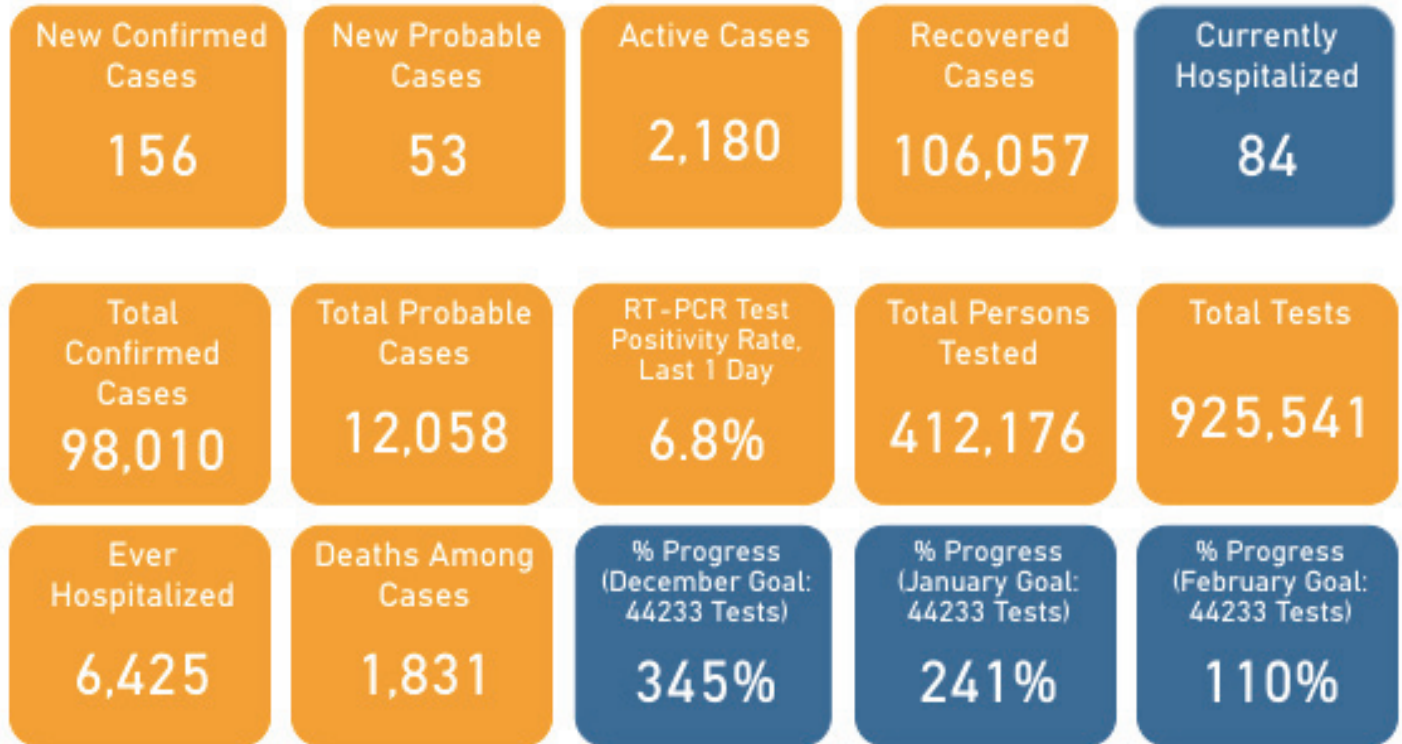
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Hyde	136	133	393	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	275	254	901	14	Minimal	8.33%
Jerauld	268	248	540	16	Minimal	9.09%
Jones	82	81	211	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	617	591	1582	14	Moderate	3.28%
Lake	1162	1119	3146	17	Moderate	2.15%
Lawrence	2781	2703	8257	44	Moderate	3.98%
Lincoln	7577	7370	19522	76	Substantial	7.99%
Lyman	593	577	1831	10	Minimal	0.00%
Marshall	293	280	1125	5	Minimal	0.00%
McCook	730	693	1564	24	Moderate	10.26%
McPherson	237	229	536	4	Minimal	0.92%
Meade	2523	2440	7383	31	Moderate	8.62%
Mellette	242	238	713	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	269	250	552	9	Minimal	0.00%
Minnehaha	27455	26612	75024	323	Substantial	8.31%
Moody	606	583	1704	16	Minimal	6.06%
Oglala Lakota	2043	1965	6515	47	Moderate	2.20%
Pennington	12580	12170	37920	182	Substantial	7.70%
Perkins	339	315	763	12	Moderate	0.00%
Potter	359	343	804	3	Moderate	28.00%
Roberts	1126	1070	3987	35	Substantial	6.60%
Sanborn	326	319	662	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	788	741	2062	25	Substantial	10.23%
Stanley	321	315	888	2	Moderate	3.85%
Sully	135	131	289	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1217	1177	4053	28	Moderate	8.96%
Tripp	672	641	1440	15	Moderate	1.23%
Turner	1050	987	2617	50	Moderate	5.88%
Union	1939	1842	6002	39	Substantial	12.96%
Walworth	712	680	1773	15	Moderate	11.48%
Yankton	2765	2705	9001	28	Moderate	1.75%
Ziebach	337	327	851	9	Minimal	7.14%
Unassigned	0	0	1841	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4332	0
10-19 years	12332	0
20-29 years	19700	4
30-39 years	18098	15
40-49 years	15696	34
50-59 years	15507	107
60-69 years	12593	243
70-79 years	6740	416
80+ years	5070	1012

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57406	864
Male	52662	967

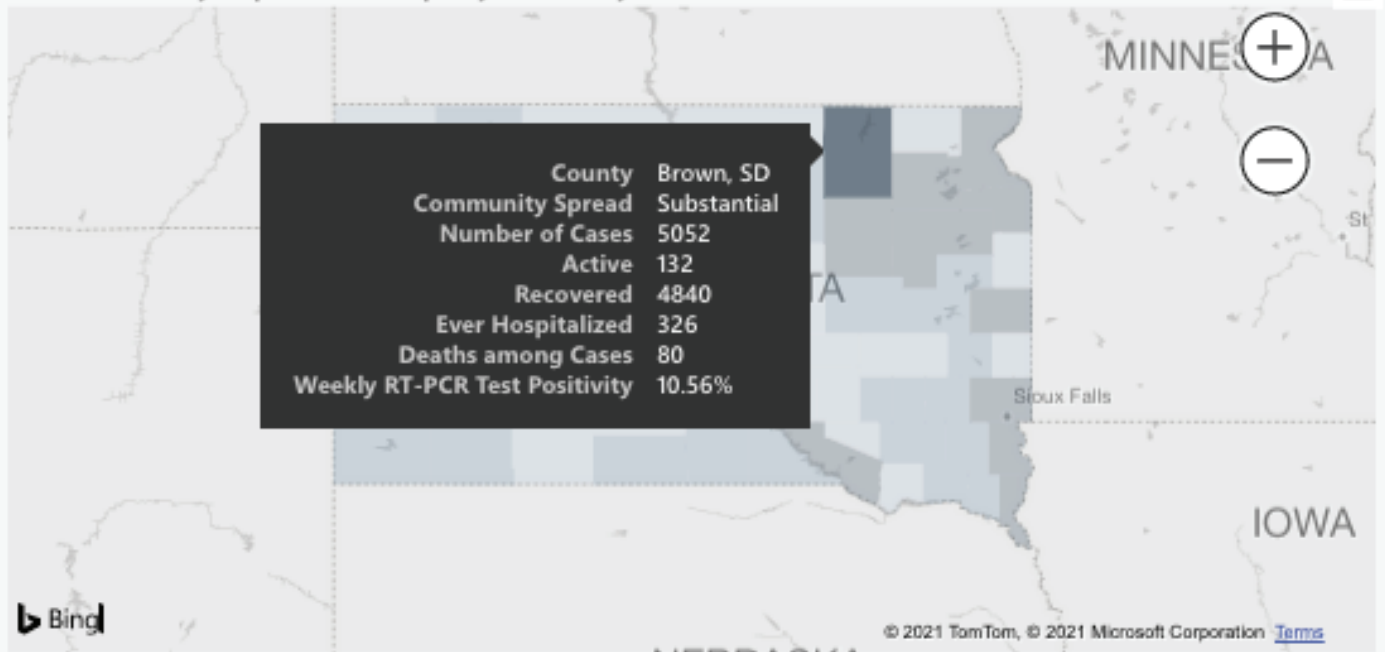
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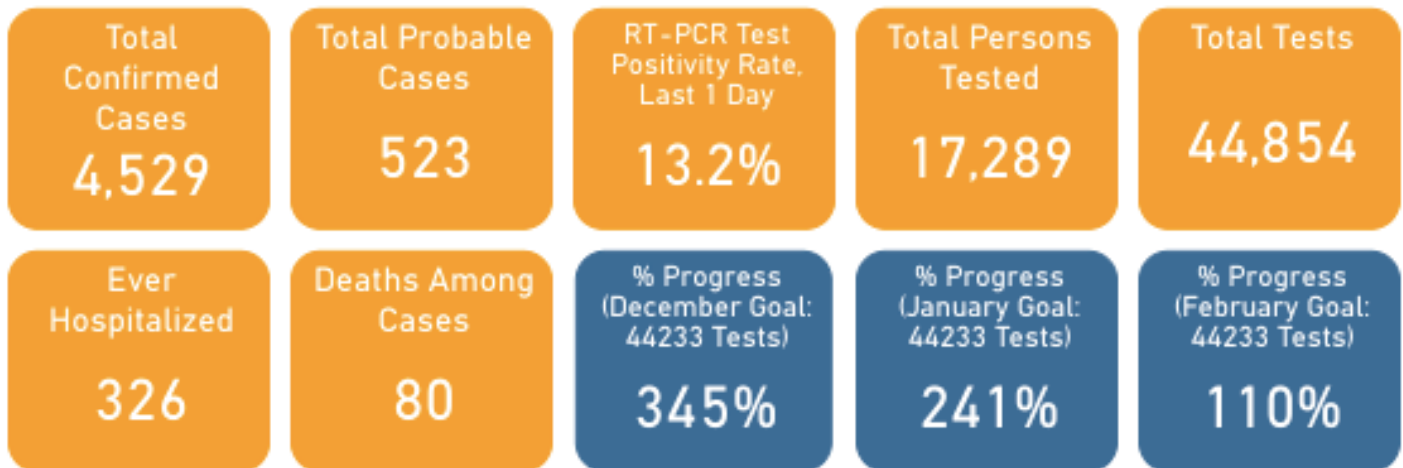
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



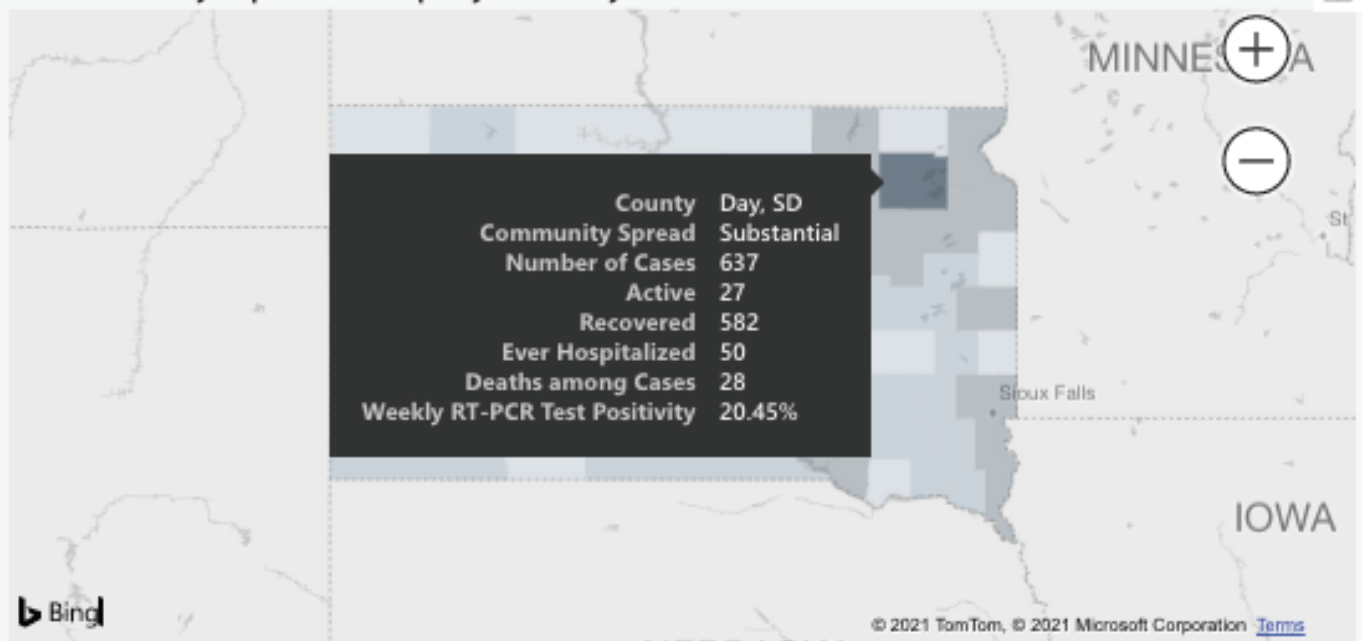
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Day County

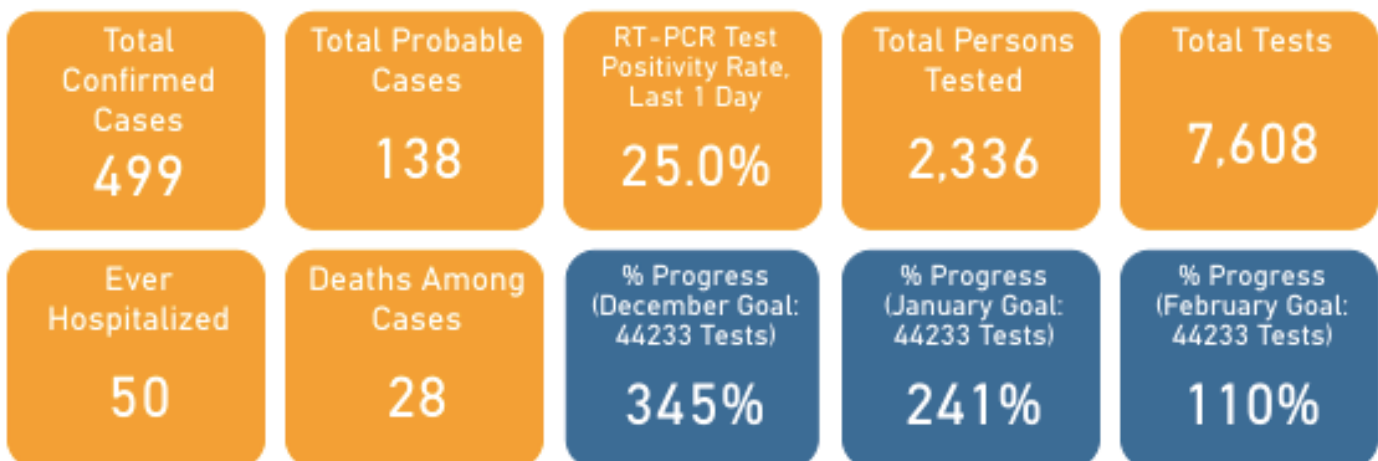


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

143,014

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

98,167

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

14%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	76,117
Pfizer	66,897

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	27,269
Moderna - Series Complete	24,424
Pfizer - 1 dose	26,051
Pfizer - Series Complete	20,423

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	14.23%
Series Complete	6.50%

Based on 2019 Census Estimate for those aged 16 years and older

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	355	167	94	261
Beadle	2783	1,177	803	1,980
Bennett*	207	123	42	165
Bon Homme*	1527	671	428	1,099
Brookings	3984	1,552	1,216	2,768
Brown	6663	2,359	2,152	4,511
Brule*	898	464	217	681
Buffalo*	84	76	4	80
Butte	775	427	174	601
Campbell	505	131	187	318
Charles Mix*	1434	638	398	1,036
Clark	539	283	128	411
Clay	2096	764	666	1,430
Codington*	4538	1,798	1,370	3,168
Corson*	107	77	15	92
Custer*	1158	542	308	850
Davison	3779	1,067	1,356	2,423
Day*	1051	431	310	741
Deuel	616	304	156	460
Dewey*	243	61	91	152
Douglas*	596	182	207	389
Edmunds	545	273	136	409
Fall River*	1241	539	351	890
Faulk	481	219	131	350
Grant*	1124	394	365	759
Gregory*	774	314	230	544
Haakon*	280	110	85	195

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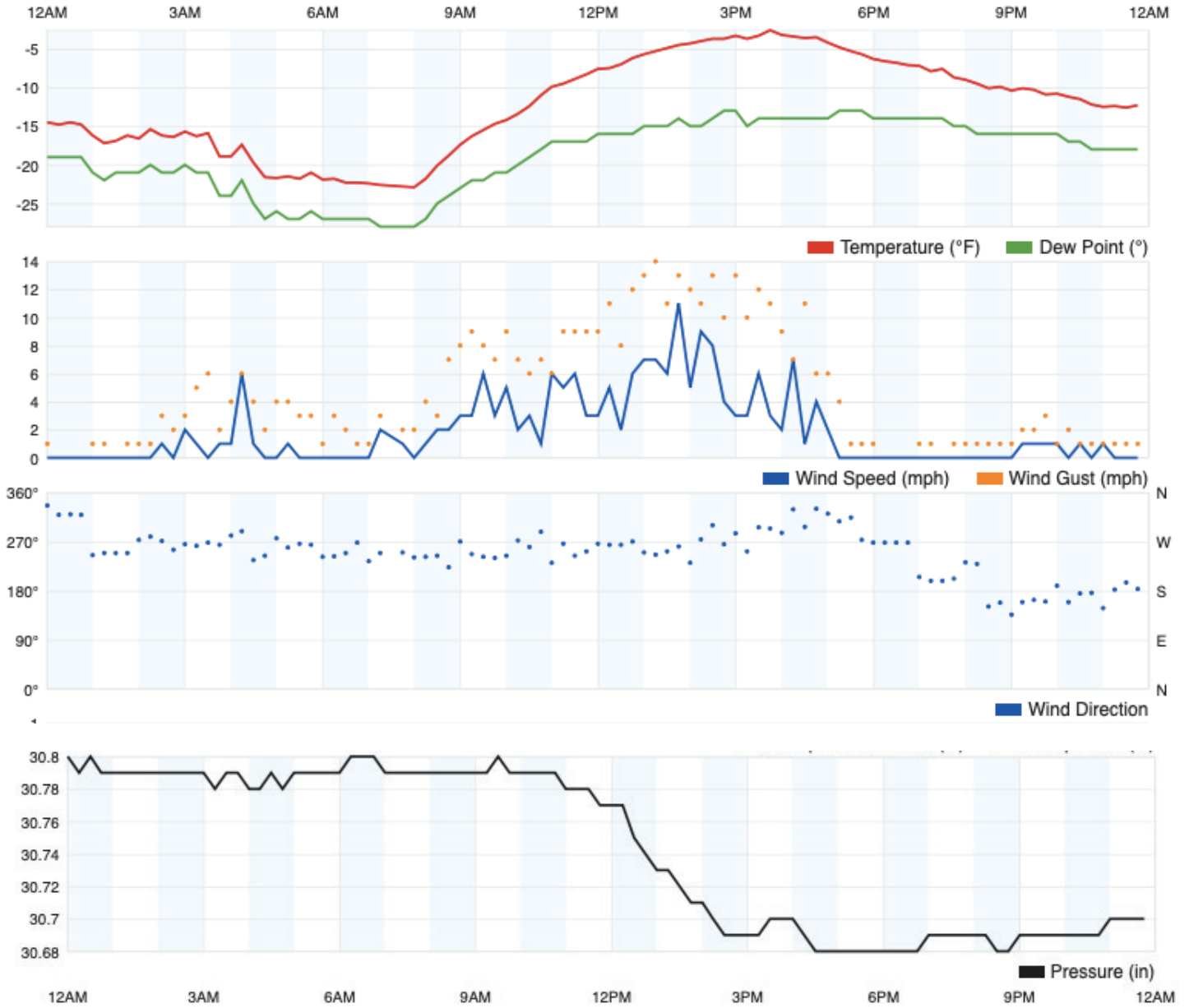
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Hamlin	776	344	216	560
Hand	622	268	177	445
Hanson	192	62	65	127
Harding	28	22	3	25
Hughes*	3461	1,677	892	2,569
Hutchinson*	1588	458	565	1,023
Hyde*	285	93	96	189
Jackson*	184	98	43	141
Jerauld	306	166	70	236
Jones*	287	113	87	200
Kingsbury	984	416	284	700
Lake	1616	598	509	1,107
Lawrence	3069	1,689	690	2,379
Lincoln	13289	3,757	4,766	8,523
Lyman*	320	198	61	259
Marshall*	727	287	220	507
McCook	1032	410	311	721
McPherson	87	47	20	67
Meade*	2543	1,199	672	1,871
Mellette*	20	8	6	14
Miner	431	175	128	303
Minnehaha	37829	12,941	12,444	25,385
Moody*	680	264	208	472
Oglala Lakota*	76	44	16	60
Pennington*	16422	6,580	4,921	11,501
Perkins*	222	120	51	171
Potter	383	149	117	266
Roberts*	1868	830	519	1,349
Sanborn	410	218	96	314
Spink	1438	474	482	956
Stanley*	498	240	129	369
Sully	141	91	25	116
Todd*	81	29	26	55
Tripp*	969	445	262	707
Turner	1718	588	565	1,153
Union	1114	596	259	855
Walworth*	855	381	237	618
Yankton	4741	1,283	1,729	3,012
Ziebach*	35	11	12	23
Other	3304	808	1,248	2,056

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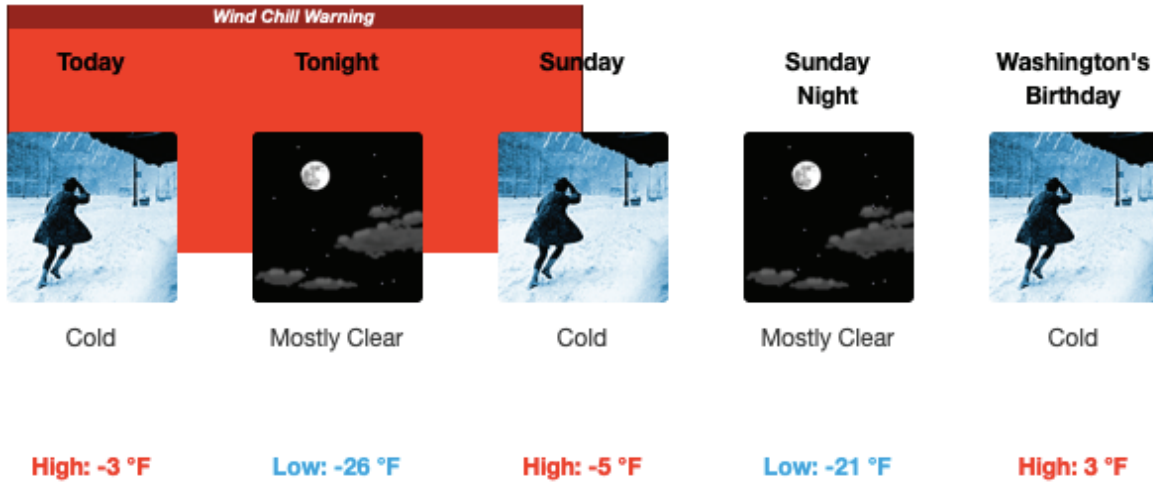
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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 Today, Scattered Afternoon Showers. Highs in the 70s.

 Monday, Scattered Afternoon Showers. Highs around 80°F

 Tuesday, Mostly Sunny. Highs 80-85°F

ISSUED: 4:28 AM - Sunday, June 23, 2019, National Weather Service, Aberdeen SD
Published on: 06/23/2019 at 12:30AM

Much below normal temperatures will continue today, with highs in the single digits on either side of zero. These temperatures are 30 to 35 degrees below average for this time of year.

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Today in Weather History

February 13, 1995: Snow fell over a broad strip from southwest to northeast South Dakota. The snow began as freezing rain in the northeast, and there were several vehicle accidents attributed to the icing. The most substantial snow was at Custer in the Black Hills with 14 inches. A few amounts of six to eight inches were reported over the plains of the southwest, central, and northeast South Dakota. Strong winds caused some blowing and drifting snow in northeastern South Dakota.

1905: Freezing temperatures were recorded over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. Morning lows of 29 degrees below zero at Gravette, Arkansas, 40 below at Lebanon Kansas, and 40 below at Warsaw Missouri established all-time records for those three states.

The low temperature at Vinita, Oklahoma plummeted to 27 degrees below zero. This temperature would be tied in the city of Watts in January 1930, and at Blackwell and Medford in February 2011. The negative 27-degree reading is cold enough to be the 2nd lowest temperature on record in Oklahoma. The coldest is 31 degrees below zero, recorded at Nowata on February 10th, 2011.

1958: Tallahassee, Florida recorded their most substantial snowfall on record with close to 3 inches.

1995: A National Weather Service Survey Team concluded a weak (F1) tornado occurred at the General Motors Desert Proving Grounds facility in Mesa Arizona. Moderate damage was observed. A roof was damaged, and about 20 vehicles were damaged and moved around. One car was lifted, moved several feet, and set down inside a roped off area containing solar exposure equipment. The tornado traveled northeast and lasted about five minutes.

2000: Late in the day and into the early morning hours of the 14th, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes over southwestern Georgia that killed 19, injured 202, and caused \$35 million dollars in damages. An F3 tornado hit southern Camilla, killing 11 and injuring 175 in the town.

1784 - Ice floes blocked the Mississippi River at New Orleans, then passed into the Gulf of Mexico. The only other time this occurred was during the "Great Arctic Outbreak" of 1899. (David Ludlum)

1885 - The "Friday the 13th" avalanche at Alva, UT, killed sixteen persons, and left thirteen others buried for twelve hours before being rescued. (David Ludlum)

1889 - It was the coldest morning of record along the Gulf Coast. The temperature dipped to 7 above zero at New Orleans LA and Pensacola FL, and plunged to -1 degree at Mobile AL. The mercury dipped to -2 degrees at Tallahassee, the coldest reading of record for the state of Florida. (David Ludlum)

1905 - Morning lows of -29 degrees at Pond AR, -40 degrees at Lebanon KS, and -40 degrees at Warsaw MO established all-time records for those three states. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain over central California. Chews Ridge reported nearly eleven inches of rain in 24 hours, and extensive flooding occurred in San Benito County. The Mount Rose ski resort in Nevada experienced a "white-out" with 60 mph winds and 36 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong winds in the wake of a storm in the northeastern U.S., gusting to 60 mph at Oswego NY, produced six foot snow drifts in northeastern Ohio. High winds in the mountains of Utah, gusting to 106 mph at the Snowbird ski resort, contributed to a forty car pile-up on Interstate 15, near the town of Bluffdale. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced locally heavy rain and flash flooding from central Texas to western Pennsylvania. Up to ten inches of rain deluged western Kentucky in two days, with five day totals ranging up to 13.16 inches at Gilbertsville Dam KY. Flooding caused tens of millions of dollars damage, including 18 million dollars damage at Frankfort KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A slow moving cold front brought heavy snow to Utah, Colorado and Wyoming. Big Horn WY reported 15 inches of snow, and up to 22 inches was reported in Utah. In Colorado, 8 to 12 inches of snow fell over the northwest suburbs of Denver, while 16 to 22 inches was reported in the high mountain elevations west of Fort Collins. Strong winds accompanied the heavy snow, and bitter cold weather followed in its wake. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

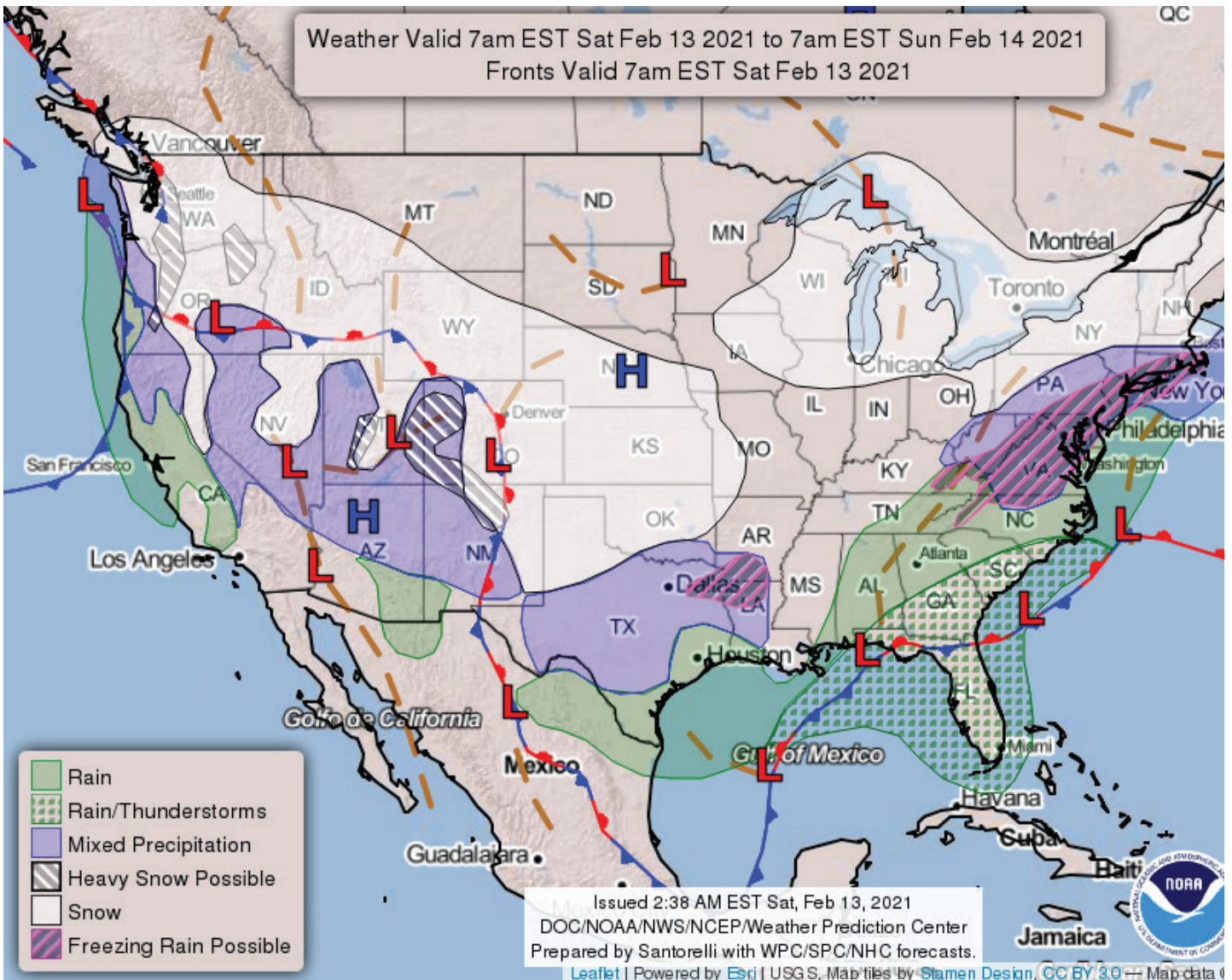
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: -2 °F at 3:40 PM
Low Temp: -23 °F at 7:51 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 1:09 PM
Precip:

Record High: 60° in 1901
Record Low: -34° in 1905
Average High: 27°F
Average Low: 6°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.19
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.66
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 5:59 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:36 a.m.



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DIVINE DELIVERANCE

Our God is a great and gracious and generous God. We see His greatness when we look into the spacious skies at night and see stars that cannot be counted and know that there are galaxies beyond galaxies. We also see His greatness and generosity when His Son walked among the sick and healed them, saw the hungry and fed them, heard the grieving and comforted them, listened to the distraught and encouraged them.

We see His power and greatness when we look at Jesus on the cross, His resurrection from the tomb when He defeated death, His offer of salvation, His promise of eternal life with Him, and His invitation to call on Him "whenever" for "whatever" as long as it is in His name.

David said that God "rescued him because He delighted in him." Delighted here means "to be mindful of, to be attentive to, to keep, to protect, to have pleasure in..." Imagine the great value that God placed on David. He had a special place in God's heart and was delivered repeatedly from God's wrath and his enemies. God certainly loved him!

But, David was not special! Christians have the same offer of deliverance and salvation through Christ that David did through God. Christ takes God's wrath from us in the salvation He provides for us. He will also deliver us from the power of Satan who would defeat us. He is with us now just as God was with David three thousand years ago.

Christ living in us gives us His presence and power. When we call upon Him and trust in Him, we can be assured that He "is attentive to us, will keep us, protect us and take great pleasure in caring for us" because He delights in us - just as He did David.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your greatness and grace that delivers us, cleanses us, and empowers us. May we realize just how much You care, In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He led me to a place of safety; he rescued me because he delights in me. Psalm 18:19

News from the Associated Press

Which GOP senators are seen as possible votes against Trump?

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most every senator has pledged to listen to the evidence in Donald Trump's historic second impeachment trial, but most minds were likely made up before the trial began. Democrats would need a minimum of 17 Republicans to vote with them to convict Trump of incitement of insurrection, and that appears unlikely.

Still, Democrats say they are holding out hope they will win over enough Republicans to convict the former president for his role in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, in which five people died. If Trump were convicted, the Senate could take a second vote to ban him from running for office again. A final vote is likely on Saturday.

A look at the Republicans whom Democrats are eyeing as they make final arguments in the case:

THE FREQUENT TRUMP CRITICS

Republican Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Mitt Romney of Utah and Susan Collins of Maine have been clear that they believe Trump incited the riot. While none of them is a lock to vote for conviction, they have joined with Democrats twice to vote against GOP efforts to dismiss the trial.

Collins said after the siege that Trump does "bear responsibility for working up the crowd and inciting this mob." Murkowski called on Trump to resign after the attack on the Capitol, telling a local paper three days later that "I want him out. He has caused enough damage."

Romney tweeted on Jan. 6: "What happened at the U.S. Capitol today was an insurrection, incited by the President of the United States." During the trial, the Democrats showed video of Romney narrowly escaping the mob, redirected by a Capitol Police officer as he unknowingly ran toward the violent crowd.

Sasse said that Trump had "lied to" Americans and the "consequences are now found in five dead Americans and a Capitol building that's in shambles." In a recent video, he said Republican politics shouldn't be about the "weird worship of one dude."

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HEADED OUT

Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, who is retiring in 2022, has also voted twice with Democrats to move forward with the trial. Like Murkowski, he called for Trump's resignation after the riots, saying that would be the best way to "get this person in the rearview mirror for us." Toomey had also aggressively pushed back on Trump's false assertions that he had won Pennsylvania and other states in the election.

Three other GOP senators have said they will not run again in two years, potentially freeing them up to vote against Trump and anger base voters in the party. They are Rob Portman of Ohio, Richard Burr of North Carolina and Richard Shelby of Alabama. All three voted to dismiss the trial, but Portman says he still has an open mind about conviction.

Burr said Thursday that he would not comment on the trial at all. Shelby said this past week that the impeachment managers had a "strong point" that Trump could have acted sooner to stop the violence, but maintained that the trial is unconstitutional because Trump is now out of office.

CASSIDY AS WILD CARD

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Cassidy, who has been taking extensive notes throughout the trial, said Friday that the managers had raised some "intriguing questions" during their two days of arguments. He said that he hoped Trump's lawyers would answer them thoroughly and that he is "trying to approach it objectively."

During the trial's question and answer session on Friday afternoon, Cassidy asked Trump's lawyers

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about a conversation the then-president had with Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville on Jan. 6 just after Vice President Mike Pence had been evacuated from the Senate. Tuberville says he told Trump that Pence had been whisked away, making clear that Trump likely knew of the danger at that point, even though he tweeted criticism of Pence after that for not trying to overturn the election. Cassidy asked the lawyers if that showed Trump "was tolerant of the intimidation of Vice President Pence?"

Lawyer Michael van der Veen dismissed Tuberville's account as "hearsay," an answer that Cassidy later said was not sufficient.

THUNE TAKES HEAT FROM TRUMP

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican leader, dismissed Trump's attempts to challenge the certification of Biden's presidential election victory. Thune predicted the effort would "go down like a shot dog" in the Senate.

That comment drew a furious response from Trump, who urged South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem to run against Thune in a GOP primary, an idea she immediately rejected.

Still, Thune has voted twice to dismiss the case. He said Friday that he was keeping an open mind and indicated he could be open to a censure resolution if Trump is acquitted.

"I know a couple of my colleagues who've seen a couple of resolutions, at least, that I think could attract some support," Thune said.

EYES ON McCONNELL

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has twice voted to dismiss the trial, indicating he will ultimately vote to acquit. But he has also said that Trump "provoked" the mob, which was "fed lies."

Soon after the attack, McConnell privately told associates he was done with Trump and said publicly he was undecided on impeachment. He has told Republicans the decision on Trump's guilt is a vote of conscience.

His neutral stand is in sharp contrast to his management of the first trial, when he largely protected Trump and pushed back against Democrats' pleas to call witnesses.

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Baltic 41, Alcester-Hudson 32

Chamberlain 46, Wagner 45

Dakota Valley 87, Dell Rapids 72

Deubrook 64, Colman-Egan 42

Elkton-Lake Benton 74, Estelline/Hendricks 55

Florence/Henry 62, Leola/Frederick 46

Gregory 46, Scotland 33

Highmore-Harrold 53, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 44

Lakota Tech 88, Rapid City Christian 84

Langford 52, Faulkton 42

Madison 61, McCook Central/Montrose 45

Platte-Geddes 77, Bon Homme 53

Tea Area 81, Lennox 64

Tripp-Delmont/Armour 57, Avon 35

Vermillion 59, LeMars, Iowa 45

Warner 57, North Central Co-Op 43

Winner 65, Pierre 62

Yankton 88, Watertown 58

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

New Underwood vs. Bennett County, ccd.

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GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Alcester-Hudson 47, Baltic 37
Avon 48, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 46
Canistota 54, Chester 44
Castlewood 73, Waverly-South Shore 64
Dakota Valley 78, Dell Rapids 33
DeSmet 55, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 22
Deubrook 46, Colman-Egan 39
Elk Point-Jefferson 43, Beresford 23
Faith 46, Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 41
Faulkton 62, Langford 29
Garretson 56, Flandreau 49
Highmore-Harrold 56, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 52
Lakota Tech 71, Rapid City Christian 63
LeMars, Iowa 61, Vermillion 37
Platte-Geddes 61, Bon Homme 44
Redfield 49, Clark/Willow Lake 39
Scotland 59, Gregory 47
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 74, Brookings 39
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 54, Yankton 44
Tea Area 59, Lennox 45
Wagner 66, Chamberlain 50
Webster 51, Tiospa Zina Tribal 35
Winner 51, Pierre 44
Wolsey-Wessington 66, Iroquois 30
DWU/Culver's Classic=
Bridgewater-Emery 53, Burke 44
Corsica/Stickney 64, Herreid/Selby Area 53
Hanson 45, Kimball/White Lake 25
Howard 73, Lyman 45
Menno 50, Jones County 28
St. Thomas More 61, Sioux Falls Christian 40
White River 62, Viborg-Hurley 57
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
New Underwood vs. Bennett County, ccd.

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

South Dakota reserve officers play key role during pandemic

By DANIELLE FERGUSON Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Tim Dahmen knew joining the Minnehaha County Law Enforcement reserves would be an opportunity to help out.

He didn't think that would mean pulling a shift in the jail during a pandemic.

He's one of about 20 police reserve officers the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office tapped to help with scheduling holes from COVID-19 related staffing issues.

When COVID-19 reached South Dakota, the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office asked the reserves if they'd be up to filing gaps should the pandemic cause staff shortages or excessive overtime.

That request proved useful quickly.

Since March, 47 inmates and 43 correctional officers tested positive for COVID-19. The number of in-

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mate cases does not reflect the total number of people who may have been booked at the jail and later developed symptoms. and there have been no COVID-19-related deaths in the jail.

The Minnehaha County Jail trained 23 of the reserve officers to work in the jail if needed. Of those, six officers worked at the jail as of last week, covering over 52 hours at the jail and a variety of shift hours since May, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader reported.

While there wasn't an entire shift of jail staff impacted all at once, it was important to have a group of extra trained workers, said Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office chief deputy Jeff Gromer.

"We received some very beneficial assistance at some very key times," Gromer said. "We were able to maintain our shift numbers and staff were not forced to work overtime to the extent we were fearful of."

Police reserve officers normally spend their required minimum of eight hours per month of volunteer hours helping with special events or riding along with law enforcement, both of which were mostly halted during the pandemic. In 2020, many of those hours were filled in the jail and doing traffic control at the food handouts at the fairgrounds.

"When we were short of staff to the point where we couldn't adequately staff (the jail)...they were a valued asset at that time," Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead said.

About 40 people participate in the reserves and a class of new officers is going on right now, said Doug Blomker, assistant director at Minnehaha County Emergency Management. Candidates must go through more than 150 hours of training over the course of a few months and an additional three hours each month they participate, but that training isn't jail-specific.

Dahmen went through additional training, including what to do during a fire emergency and how to do a wellness check. His shift was an interesting experience, he said.

"I was a bit nervous. You're in a different role," he said. "You're there to keep everybody safe from others and themselves. It was different."

Dahmen, who works full time in information technology, has been in the reserves since 1996. He joined after hearing about the opportunity through word-of-mouth, thinking it would be a good way to get involved.

"I feel like I'm contributing something, giving back to the community," he said.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

05-14-24-25-27, Mega Ball: 14, Megaplier: 3

(five, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-seven; Mega Ball: fourteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$82 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$56 million

As impeachment trial ends, GOP senators face big decision

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

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CASSIDY AS WILD CARD

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, who won re-election by a large margin in 2020, voted two weeks ago for a GOP effort to dismiss the trial. But he switched his vote this week, saying Trump's lawyers had done a "terrible" job making the case that the trial was unconstitutional.

Cassidy, who has been taking extensive notes throughout the trial, said Friday that the managers had raised some "intriguing questions" during their two days of arguments. He said that he hoped Trump's lawyers would answer them thoroughly and that he is "trying to approach it objectively."

During the trial's question and answer session on Friday afternoon, Cassidy asked Trump's lawyers about a conversation the then-president had with Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville on Jan. 6 just after Vice President Mike Pence had been evacuated from the Senate. Tuberville says he told Trump that Pence had been whisked away, making clear that Trump likely knew of the danger at that point, even though he tweeted criticism of Pence after that for not trying to overturn the election. Cassidy asked the lawyers if that showed Trump "was tolerant of the intimidation of Vice President Pence?"

Lawyer Michael van der Veen dismissed Tuberville's account as "hearsay," an answer that Cassidy later said was not sufficient.

THUNE TAKES HEAT FROM TRUMP

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Senate Republican, dismissed Trump's attempts to challenge the certification of President Biden's election victory. He predicted the effort would "go down like a shot dog" in the Senate.

That comment drew a furious response from the former president, who urged Gov. Kristi Noem to run against Thune in a GOP primary, an idea she immediately rejected.

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Still, Thune has voted twice to dismiss the case. He said Friday that he was keeping an open mind and indicated he could be open to a censure resolution if Trump is acquitted.

"I know a couple of my colleagues who've seen a couple of resolutions, at least, that I think could attract some support," Thune said.

EYES ON McCONNELL

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has twice voted to dismiss the trial, indicating he will ultimately vote to acquit. But he has also said that Trump "provoked" the mob, which was "fed lies."

Soon after the attack, McConnell privately told associates he was done with Trump and said publicly he was undecided on impeachment. He has told Republicans the decision on Trump's guilt is a vote of conscience.

His neutral stand is in sharp contrast to his management of the first trial, when he largely protected Trump and pushed back against Democrats' pleas to call witnesses.

Ravnsborg won't appeal ruling rejecting legalized marijuana

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's attorney general says his office will not participate in appealing a ruling that struck down a voter-approved constitutional amendment legalizing recreational marijuana.

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

Gov. Kristi Noem's administration had challenged the measure, which legalized small amounts of recreational marijuana, medical marijuana and hemp.

The Argus Leader reported Friday that Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg is obligated to defend state laws when they are challenged in court. But office spokesman Timothy Bormann said Ravnsborg concluded his office fulfilled its obligation and doesn't have to participate in an appeal to the South Dakota Supreme Court.

Melissa Mentele, executive director of New Approach South Dakota, which supported Amendment A in last year's election, said her group is prepared to appeal.

Mentele said Ravnsborg abdicated his responsibility to represent South Dakotans. "Simply put, he has decided to stop doing his job. The Attorney General's decision is difficult to understand given that he previously argued in court that Amendment A is completely lawful."

South Dakota lawmakers weigh voting laws amid election doubt

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republicans are pushing a series of bills that they say would instill more confidence in elections but that critics worry will make it harder for people to vote.

Despite Gov. Kristi Noem claims that the state's voting system is one of the best in the nation, lawmakers pushing the bills say the legislation is needed in light of Donald Trump's claim that November's election was unfair, even though it has repeatedly been found to be fair by the country's top elections officials and the courts.

Voting advocates and Democrats worry the fraudulent claims are being used to fuel a swift movement to clamp down on voting methods that allowed for the highest turnout for a presidential election in 50 years despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The state's Republican secretary of state, Steve Barnett, is trying to fend off efforts to curtail his ability to make sure people can vote. He has also struggled to get support from fellow Republicans for a proposal that would allow people to register to vote online, which he says would help rural voters and actually make voter registration records more accurate.

"Voting is such a fundamental right of our democracy, so we should be doing everything we can to increase access to the ballot," said Janna Farley, a spokeswoman for the American Civil Liberties Union of

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South Dakota.

Barnett called features of the state's election system, including a 46-day window for absentee voting and the ability to send out absentee voting applications, "tools" that became essential for overseeing safe and secure elections during the pandemic.

Although Republican Rep. Drew Dennert praised the high turnout, he is bringing a bill that would bar the secretary of state from sending out applications for absentee voting. The House passed it this week, and it then headed to a Senate committee.

Dennert defended his proposal as a way "to make a good system better." He didn't think it would make it harder for people to vote and said it would save taxpayers the cost of sending out applications to vote absentee.

But he said the main reason for the proposal, as well as another that would require election officials to stay at ballot counting locations until all votes are counted, was to restore confidence in elections after Trump's allegations.

The former president's claims were rejected by dozens of courts and were made even as a group of elections officials — including representatives of the federal government's cybersecurity agency — deemed the 2020 presidential election the "the most secure in American history." Trump's former attorney general, William Barr, also said he saw no evidence of widespread fraud that would have changed the election results.

With Barnett defending against the efforts to tighten the current election system, he has struggled to gain support for a proposal that would allow people to register to vote online, which he says would actually make voter rolls more accurate. Senate Republicans changed Barnett's bill to only allow people to update their voter registration, effectively blocking the online service from new voters.

Sen. Jim Bolin spearheaded the effort to change the bill after initially opposing it entirely. He felt that people had plenty of opportunities to register to vote, though he acknowledged that some people in rural parts of the state would have to drive more than 100 miles to the nearest courthouse.

"I'm not convinced it's an absolutely reliable system," he said of the online proposal.

Democrats say the watering down of the proposal amounts to voter suppression.

Sen. Troy Heinert, the Senate minority leader who lives on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, said people in his community have to drive 85 miles to a neighboring county to register to vote.

"It is voter suppression," he said. "We know it, they know it. That's the bad part."

Barnett called the proposal passing the Senate a "step in the right direction." But he acknowledged that even a voter service like online registration that is available in most states could face greater skepticism this year in the House after Trump fueled doubts about the election.

"It opens up a whole new can of worms and I think those concerns trickle back into the state and get into the heads of people," he said.

Airman on trial at Ellsworth base for death of baby son

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A military jury will decide whether a senior airman at Ellsworth Air Force Base is responsible for the death of his 6-month-old son.

Prosecutors said James Cunningham inflicted the injuries by shaking and punching Zachariah in March of last year.

Capt. Anna Sturges, during opening statements Thursday, said Cunningham, when he spoke to detectives, told four different versions of what happened to his son.

Sturges says a doctor will testify that the autopsy shows Zachariah didn't just have a brain bleed from blunt-force trauma but also suffered from eye and spinal injuries after being shaken.

Defense attorney Capt. Kaylee Gum told the jury of eight airmen that Cunningham set the baby on the counter for a "split second" so he could grab the baby's bottle and the child fell to the floor.

Gum says medical evidence will show that Zachariah's injuries are "consistent with a fall" from a counter to a hardwood floor. She did not specifically explain how the shaking symptoms would be accounted for, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The child's mother, Caitlynn Merhoff, testified her ex-fiancee was a caring and patient father with no history of aggression.

Unlike civilian courts, three-fourths of the jurors must believe the 26-year-old defendant is guilty of murder if he is to be convicted.

Medvedev in 5, finally, advances to 4th round in Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Daniil Medvedev finally worked out how to win a five-setter. All by himself. The fourth-seeded Medvedev was 0-6 in Grand Slam matches that went to five sets, and his Australian Open third-round match against No. 28-seeded Filip Krajinovic looked like it was going all the way.

After some angry outbursts from an increasingly animated and chatty Medvedev directed at his box in an otherwise empty Rod Laver Arena — fans have been banned as a COVID-19 precaution — his coach, Gilles Cervara, got up and left.

"He said just before leaving that he's sure I'm going to win the match. He's going to leave me alone to be more calm," Medvedev explained in his on-court TV interview after Saturday's 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-0 win. "It was a good thing to do. Luckily I won."

Some pundits, including John McEnroe, are tipping the 25-year-old Russian to make his major breakthrough in Australia. Medvedev, on a 17-match winning streak that includes titles at the 2020 season-ending ATP Finals, said while that's nice to hear, he's got a long way to go.

He'll have to face unseeded American Mackenzie McDonald in the next round. After that could be a quarterfinal against No. 7 Andrey Rublev, who helped him win the ATP Cup title for Russia last week. No. 2-ranked Rafael Nadal, a 20-time major winner, is also in his half of the draw.

Nadal extended his winning streak against fellow left-handers to 16 with a 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 victory over No. 69-ranked Cameron Norrie, reaching the fourth round at Melbourne Park for the 14th time in 16 trips.

He is chasing a men's record 21st major title but entered the tournament with back stiffness and without any competitive matches in 2021.

"Today is better, yeah," Nadal said of his back soreness. "First day I feel an improvement, and that's the most important thing for me today."

He hasn't dropped a set in three matches that, he said, "I hope will help me for what's coming."

In his immediate future is No. 16 Fabio Fognini, who had a straight-set win over Australia's last hope in the men's draw, 21st-seeded Alex de Minaur.

Medvedev had been bothered by a problem with his upper left leg and had a medical timeout for treatment late in the fourth set.

When he fell behind 5-2 in the fourth, Medvedev shouted, "I never saw something like this!"

He returned to better much play in the deciding set, smacking an inside-out forehand winner to a corner to close an 18-stroke exchange and break to go up 2-0.

He didn't drop another game as he seized the momentum back from Krajinovic, who was previously 4-1 in matches that went the full five sets.

"In contrary with previous matches where I could get tight . . . here I was really calm to finish the match," Medvedev said. "Really happy I got the five-set win."

Medvedev, the U.S. Open finalist last year, will next play McDonald, a player he compared with Roger Federer in style. McDonald beat Lloyd Harris in straight sets to equal his best Grand Slam result by reaching the round of 16 at the Australian Open.

Seventh-seeded Rublev had a 7-5, 6-2, 6-3 win over Feliciano Lopez, ending the 39-year-old Spaniard's 75th consecutive major tournament.

The Russian men had one loss on Day 6, with No. 19 Karen Khachanov beaten by No. 9 Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (1), 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5). Berrettini will next play fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, a 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 winner over Mikael Ymer of Sweden.

Two women with titles already this year are through to the Round of 16.

Top-ranked Ash Barty, who won the Yarra Valley Classic last week for a title in her first tournament back

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from almost 12 months on the sidelines, beat Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia 6-2, 6-4.

Barty said while it felt strange not having fans in the stadium for the first time in her career at the high-level, there were some things she didn't mind.

"It feels a little bit like practice," she said, "so we're pretty used to it."

Barty next faces American Shelby Rogers, who beat No. 21 Anett Kontaveit 6-4, 6-3.

Elise Mertens, a 2018 Australian Open semifinalist who won the Gippsland Trophy tuneup tournament last week, had a 6-2, 6-1 victory over 11th-seeded Belinda Bencic. She'll take a seven-match winning streak into her next match against Karolina Muchova in the fourth round.

No. 25-seeded Muchova rallied from a 5-0 second-set deficit in near silence, which only made the turnaround seem more bizarre as she beat No. 6 Karolina Pliskova 7-5, 7-5.

There were no fans in the stands due to the start of a five-day lockdown imposed by the Victoria state government in response to a COVID-19 outbreak at a quarantine hotel. Up to 30,000 spectators daily — 50% of capacity — had been admitted on previous days.

"I was actually getting happy yesterday morning that I'm finally going to play on a bigger court and there's going to be a crowd," Muchova said. "'But unlucky now for five days here. Hopefully then it's going to be back again.'"

No. 61-ranked Jessica Pegula had a 6-2, 6-1 win over Kristina Mladenovic and will next play No. 5-seeded Elina Svitolina, who won the last nine games to beat Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 6-0.

No. 22 Jennifer Brady dropped only four games to advance to a fourth-round match against No. 28 Donna Vekic, who saved a match point and beat Kaia Kanepi 5-7, 7-6 (2), 6-4.

"I was really brave in some moments," Vekic said. "I was like, 'OK, how am I a match point down? I don't want it to be over.'"

More AP tennis: <https://apnews.com/hub/tennis> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Close watch on tight-lipped GOP leader McConnell's stand

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seldom has Mitch McConnell signaled so little about such a consequential vote.

Many expect the Senate's top Republican will back acquitting former President Donald Trump of a charge of inciting rioters who assaulted the Capitol last month, but no one is really sure how McConnell will vote. The Washington political universe and the world beyond will hold their collective breath when the Senate impeachment trial roll call reaches the Kentuckian's name.

Over 36 years in the Senate, the measured McConnell has earned a reputation for inexpressiveness in the service of caution. This time, the suspense over how he'll vote underscores how much is at stake for McConnell and his party, though it seems extremely unlikely that 17 GOP senators will join all 50 Democrats to convict Trump.

"The overwhelming number of Republican voters don't want Trump convicted, so that means any political leader has to tread carefully," said John Feehery, a former top congressional GOP aide. While Feehery noted that McConnell was clearly outraged over the attack, he said the senator is "trying to keep his party together."

McConnell is the chamber's most influential Republican and the longest-serving GOP leader ever, and a vote to acquit would leave the party locked in its struggle to define itself in the post-Trump presidency. A guilty vote could do more to roil GOP waters by signaling an attempt to yank the party away from a figure still revered by most of its voters.

Either way, McConnell's decision could influence the party's short- and long-term election prospects and affect the political clout and legacy of both Trump and the Senate minority leader.

Just minutes after the Democratic-led House impeached Trump on Jan. 13 for inciting insurrection, McConnell wrote to his GOP colleagues that he had "not made a final decision" about how he would vote at

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the Senate trial.

It was an eye-opening departure from his quick opposition when the House impeached Trump in December 2019 for trying to force Ukraine to send the then-president political dirt on campaign rival Joe Biden and other Democrats.

McConnell also told associates he thought Trump perpetrated impeachable offenses and saw the moment as a chance to distance the GOP from the damage the tumultuous Trump could inflict on it, a Republican strategist told The Associated Press at the time, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

Yet as the trial began Tuesday, McConnell was among the 44 GOP senators who voted against proceeding at all on the grounds that Trump was no longer president. Just six Republicans voted to back a trial, suggesting little prospect of 17 of them joining Democrats and supporting conviction.

By all accounts, McConnell has not lobbied senators on impeachment, instead telling them to vote their consciences. His public words and demeanor have been equally unrevealing. "We're all going to listen to what the lawyers have to say and making the arguments and work our way through it," he said two weeks ago.

McConnell has spent the trial's first week in his seat in the Senate chamber, staring straight ahead. A pool report from a reporter watching from the press gallery Friday said, "McConnell was as stoic as ever, looking like a wax statue of himself in Madame Tussauds with his hands clasped in his lap."

A McConnell vote to convict could give cover to wavering Republicans to join him. Even if Trump is acquitted, a substantial number of Republicans voting guilty would cement for history that there was bipartisan support for repudiating Trump over the riot.

That could tar Trump's political appeal should he seek office again and further dull the impact his endorsements of other GOP candidates might have with moderate voters, whom he already has largely alienated.

Yet a McConnell vote against the former president would also enrage many of the 74 million voters who backed Trump in November, a record for a GOP presidential candidate. That could expose Republican senators seeking reelection in 2022 to primaries from conservatives seeking revenge, potentially giving the GOP less appealing general election candidates as they try winning Senate control.

It would also no doubt color the legacy of McConnell, a GOP loyalist who turns 79 next Saturday and doesn't face reelection for almost six years. Even critics say McConnell likes to play the long game.

"For McConnell, it's always strategy, it's always about how he can live to fight another day," said Colmon Elridge, chair of the Kentucky Democratic Party.

McConnell maneuvered through Trump's four years in office like a captain steering a ship through a rocky strait on stormy seas. Battered at times by vindictive presidential tweets, McConnell made a habit of saying nothing about many of Trump's outrageous comments. He ended up guiding the Senate to victories such as the 2017 tax cuts and the confirmations of three Supreme Court justices and more than 200 other federal judges.

Their relationship plummeted after Trump's denial of his Nov. 3 defeat and relentless efforts to reverse the voters' verdict with his baseless claims that Democrats fraudulently stole the election.

It withered completely last month, after Republicans lost Senate control with two Georgia runoff defeats they blamed on Trump, and the savage attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters. The day of the riot, McConnell railed against "thugs, mobs, or threats" and described the attack as "this failed insurrection."

A week later, the Democratic-controlled House impeached Trump for inciting insurrection. Six days after that, McConnell said, "The mob was fed lies" and he added, "They were provoked by the president and other powerful people."

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Senate poised to vote on holding Trump accountable for riot

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

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators are poised to vote on whether Donald Trump will be held accountable for inciting the horrific attack at the Capitol after a speedy impeachment trial that laid bare the violence and danger to their own lives and the fragility of the nation's tradition of a peaceful transfer of presidential power.

Barely a month since the deadly riot on Jan. 6, closing arguments are set for the historic trial in a rare Saturday session, held under the watch of armed National Guard troops still guarding the iconic building.

The outcome of the quick, raw and emotional proceedings is expected to reflect a country divided over the former president and the future of his brand of politics.

"What's important about this trial is that it's really aimed to some extent at Donald Trump, but it's more aimed at some president we don't even know 20 years from now," said Sen. Angus King, the independent from Maine.

The nearly weeklong trial has delivered a grim and graphic narrative of the riot and its consequences in ways that senators, most of whom fled for their own safety that day, acknowledge they are still coming to grips with.

Acquittal is expected in the evenly-divided Senate. That verdict could heavily influence not only Trump's political future but that of the senators sworn to deliver impartial justice as jurors.

House prosecutors have argued that Trump's rallying cry to go to the Capitol and "fight like hell" for his presidency just as Congress was convening Jan. 6 to certify Joe Biden's election victory was part of an orchestrated pattern of violent rhetoric and false claims that unleashed the mob. Five people died, including a rioter who was shot and a police officer.

Trump's lawyers countered in a short three hours Friday that Trump's words were not intended to incite the violence and that impeachment is nothing but a "witch hunt" designed to prevent him from serving in office again.

Only by watching the graphic videos — rioters calling out menacingly for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Mike Pence, who was presiding over the vote tally — did senators say they began to understand just how perilously close the country came to chaos. Hundreds of rioters stormed into the building, taking over the Senate. Some engaged in hand-to-hand, bloody combat with police.

While it is unlikely the Senate would be able to mount the two-thirds vote needed to convict, several senators appear to be still weighing their vote. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky will be widely watched for cues, but he is not pressuring his GOP colleagues and is telling senators to vote their conscience.

Many Republicans representing states where the former president remains popular doubt whether Trump was fully responsible or if impeachment is the appropriate response. Democrats appear all but united toward conviction.

Trump is the only president to be twice impeached and the first to face trial charges after leaving office.

Unlike last year's impeachment trial of Trump in the Ukraine affair, a complicated charge of corruption and obstruction over his attempts to have the foreign ally dig up dirt on then-campaign rival Biden, this one brought an emotional punch over the unexpected vulnerability of the U.S. tradition of peaceful elections. The charge is singular, incitement of insurrection.

On Friday, Trump's impeachment lawyers accused Democrats of waging a campaign of "hatred" against the former president as they wrapped up their defense.

His lawyers vigorously denied that Trump had incited the riot and they played out-of-context video clips showing Democrats, some of them senators now serving as jurors, also telling supporters to "fight," aiming to establish a parallel with Trump's overheated rhetoric.

"This is ordinarily political rhetoric," said Trump lawyer Michael van der Veen. "Countless politicians have spoken of fighting for our principles."

But the presentation blurred the difference between the general encouragement that politicians make to battle for health care or other causes and Trump's fight against officially accepted national election results, and minimized Trump's efforts to undermine those results. The defeated president was telling his

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supporters to fight on after every state had verified its results, after the Electoral College had affirmed them and after nearly every election lawsuit filed by Trump and his allies had been rejected in court.

Democratic senators shook their heads at what many called a false equivalency to their own fiery words. "We weren't asking them 'fight like hell' to overthrow an election," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

Democrats say that Trump was the "inciter in chief" whose monthslong campaign against the election results was rooted in a "big lie" and laid the groundwork for the riot, a violent domestic attack on the Capitol unparalleled in history.

"Get real," said the lead prosecutor, Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., at one point. "We know that this is what happened."

The Senate has convened as a court of impeachment for past Presidents Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton and now twice for Trump. But the unprecedented nature of the case against an out-of-office president has provided Republican senators one of several arguments against conviction.

Republicans maintain the proceedings are unconstitutional, even though the Senate voted at the outset of the trial on this issue and confirmed it has jurisdiction.

Six Republican senators who joined Democrats in voting to take up the case are among those most watched for their votes.

Early signals came Friday during questions for the lawyers.

Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, asked the first question, Two centrists known for independent streaks, they leaned into a point the prosecutors had made, asking exactly when Trump learned of the breach of the Capitol and what specific actions he took to end the rioting.

Democrats had argued that Trump did nothing as the mob rioted.

Another Republican who voted to launch the trial, Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, asked about Trump's tweet criticizing Pence moments after the then-president was told by another senator that Pence had just been evacuated.

Van der Veen responded that at "no point" was the president informed of any danger. Cassidy told reporters later it was not a very good answer.

Gender identity bill divides Spain's feminists, left-wing

By ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Victòria Martínez continues to sign official documents with the name that she, her partner and their two daughters ditched four years ago. Barring any surprises, she expects the Spanish government to recognize her as Victòria by May, closing a patience-wearing chapter familiar to transgender people around the world.

Changing her legal identity at a civil registry office in Barcelona will allow Martínez to update her passport and driver's license and to carry a health card that correctly states she is a woman. But the process, which the pandemic prolonged, has been, in her words, "humiliating" — requiring a psychiatric diagnosis, reports from three doctors and a court's approval.

"Did I want to be stigmatized by being labeled as crazy? Did I want to voluntarily apply for a shrink's report that says so, to have a judge decide whether I can be what I already am?" Martínez, 44, recalls asking herself. "The whole thing has been emotionally exhausting."

A new law proposed by the far-left party in Spain's coalition government would make it easier for residents to change genders for official purposes. A bill sponsored by Equality Minister Irene Montero aims to make gender self-determination — no diagnosis, medical treatment or judge required — the norm, with eligibility starting at age 16. Nearly 20 countries, eight of them in the European Union, already have similar laws.

Factions of the Catholic Church and the far-right have focused their opposition to the bill on the fact that it also would allow children under 16 to bypass parental objections and seek a judge's assistance in accessing treatment for gender dysphoria, the medical term for the psychological distress that results from a conflict between an individual's identity and birth-assigned sex.

Less expected has been the fierce resistance from some feminists and from within Spain's Socialist-led

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government.

"I'm fundamentally worried by the idea that if gender can be chosen with no more than one's will or desire, that could put at risk the identity criteria for 47 million Spaniards," Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo, a veteran Socialist and women's rights advocate, said last week.

Opponents argue that allowing people to choose their gender eventually would lead to "erasing" women from the public sphere: if more Spaniards registered male at birth switch to female, they say, it would skew national statistics and create more competition among women for everything from jobs to sports trophies.

The divide in Spain mirrors a debate between a branch of feminist theorists and LGBTQ rights movements around the globe. At one end, activists often derogatorily referred to as TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) posit that the advancement of transgender rights could undercut efforts to root out sexism and misogyny by negating the existence of biological sexes.

The State Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual people says that if passed in its current form, the law would help end discrimination against transgender people and leapfrog Spain to the European vanguard of protecting LGBTQ rights.

Montero's bill nonetheless has provoked unusual fury on online platforms, where critics express alarm over provisions that would assign public toilets and prisons according to "registered gender." Confluencia Feminista, an alliance of dozens of women's rights organizations, also has come out against any changes to Spain's existing law.

The concern of Alexandra Paniagua, one of the new platform's activists, pivots around the idea that by eliminating the opinions of doctors and judges, state-subsidized hormones and gender reassignment surgery would become more available, ultimately "promoting" more dysphoria among young people.

"More people will see easier access to the invasive treatment, especially girls who have been told that their bodies are less worthy in our society," she said.

But Trans Platform Federation President Mar Cambrollé argues that some of the fears cited as reasons to keep existing hurdles in place are based on outdated ideas that reduce boys and girls, men and women to a handful of socially prescribed characteristics and roles.

"Transphobic attitudes piss me off," Cambrollé said. "As a woman, I've been discriminated against for being a woman in a world made by men for men, but also by cis(gender) people who build it with other cis people in mind."

Finding a compromise any time soon looks like an insurmountable task judging by the virulence of the debate online. Cambrollé has sued 85-year-old Lidia Falcón, the founder of Spain's Feminist Party, for repeatedly saying that transgender and gay people promote pedophilia; prosecutors are investigating Falcón's statements as a possible hate crime.

Ángela Rodríguez, an advisor to Montero on LGBTQ issues, said the bill's timing has added to the tension, with International Women's Day coming up on March 8.

"There is a dispute for the hegemony of the message in the feminist movement," Rodríguez said during a recent panel discussion.

What for many is a theoretical debate is painfully real to Martínez, who has closed most of her social media accounts. She says the constant chatter feels both too "personal" and "perverse, generalizing about what a trans person is."

"Unfortunately, to this day, it's still easier for people who stare at you when you are walking down the street and they can reconcile a certain type of face with a pair of tits," said Martínez, who wears round-edged glasses and her hair in a bob to soften her sharp facial contours.

To come out as transgender, first to herself and then to her partner, required Martínez to grow a kind of confidence that wasn't part of growing up as a boy in 1980s Spain. There were suicide attempts before she started living as Victòria, and she doesn't consider herself brave.

"For me," she said, "there just wasn't any other choice."

Yet Martínez hesitated over taking hormones and updating her civil registry record. She fought hard to be proud of the woman she is, with a deep voice and a way of carrying herself that stands out. Didn't

she want to break with traditional gender molds, including expectations that transgender women should embody stereotypical femininity?

In the end, she decided it would be easier to navigate the world with a more socially conforming appearance and an identity card that confirms she is female, even if that meant bowing down to existing legal requirements and the notions of people who still think in binary terms.

"I lived 40 years in hiding," she said. "Now I protect myself, but I don't hide."

AP reporters Emilio Morenatti and Renata Brito contributed to this report.

Cover that red nose! Circus festival adapts to virus rules

By THOMAS ADAMSON and DANIEL COLE undefined

MARSEILLE, France (AP) — It's been a tough year for the performing arts in most countries, with virus lockdowns canceling shows and shuttering venues.

But the world's top circus festival has found a way to flourish between the cracks in the rules — even without the huge crowds that would normally have attended.

Ending Saturday in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, the fourth edition of the Circus Biennale (BIAC), held every two years in the south of France, celebrates the injury-defying and spine-stretching arts that fuel the storied spectacle.

More than 110,000 people attended the last BIAC, in 2019. This year it had up to 2,000 visitors, all professionals who work in the circus or are looking to buy shows.

Even that is a testament to the grit and determination of the organizers, who skillfully adapted their festival to the French authorities' rules and regulations.

"We started with a plan A, then plan B, then plan C, then plan D, and finally we decided to do plan E which was a Biennale for professionals. That was possible, we were allowed to do it," said BIAC organizer Raquel Rache de Andrade.

The dozens of performances featured upside-down tutus, acrobatic bicycles, multicolored parachutes and enough contortionism to shock a chiropractor.

Virus safety signs put up at the port-side venue showed a clown with red nose, bow tie and mask, and the accompanying text: "Having a big nose does not exempt you from wearing one."

In France, theaters, concert halls and other venues have been shuttered since Oct. 30 due to COVID-19. Before that, they were shut from mid-March to late June.

No one knows when the performing arts will be allowed to begin again.

But it's important to show that culture is essential, according to Yoann Bourgeois, a dancer and choreographer who trained in the circus arts and is the flagship artist of this year's BIAC.

"The management of this crisis has had an extremely violent impact on poets, artists, people who dedicate their lives to culture in general," Bourgeois said. "It has categorized what is considered essential or non-essential. We are convinced that poetry is essential to live."

Adamson reported from Leeds, England

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Herrera Beutler urges 'patriots' to talk about Trump call

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — A Republican from Washington state who was one of 10 GOP House members who voted to impeach former President Donald Trump late Friday urged people with knowledge of conversations Trump had during the Jan. 6 Capitol riot to come forward.

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Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler said in a statement House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy told her he spoke with Trump as rioters were storming the Capitol. She said McCarthy asked Trump to publicly “call off the riot” and told Trump the violent mob were Trump supporters, not far-left antifa members.

In her statement, released via Twitter, Herrera Beutler said: “That’s when, according to McCarthy, the president said: ‘Well, Kevin, I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are.’”

The congresswoman’s disclosure comes as the U.S. Senate is conducting Trump’s impeachment trial, which is to resume Saturday. On Friday Trump’s defense team denied he had incited the deadly riot and said his encouragement of followers to “fight like hell” at a rally that preceded it was routine political speech.

U.S. House members who are acting as prosecutors in the impeachment say Trump was the “inciter in chief” who spread election falsehoods, then encouraged supporters to come challenge the results.

Herrera Beutler, who represents Washington’s 3rd Congressional District in the southwestern part of the state, said she has relayed parts of her conversation with McCarthy before to constituents and local media.

She then called on people with knowledge of Trump’s conversation with McCarthy to speak out.

“And to the patriots who were standing next to the former president as these conversations were happening, or even to the former vice president: if you have something to add here, now would be the time,” she said.

This story has been updated to correct that Herrera Beutler represents Washington’s 3rd Congressional District.

Party in a pandemic: NASCAR fans power through at Daytona

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Sam Maxwell and his band of Cleveland bros packed up their 1997 Four Winds motorhome with 105,000 miles on it, headed south in the thick of the pandemic and pinned their hopes on a party.

Traveling on a budget, the friends like to hit a premier sporting event each year, and this week — thanks only to interest spiked by playing FanDuel — parked in the infield grass at Daytona International Speedway. They came to soak in the Daytona 500 atmosphere, or whatever they found among the campers killing time with games of cornhole and flip cup.

“We’re still going to have a party one way or the other,” Maxwell said. “Whether there’s 100 people or just the four of us, we’re still going to have fun.”

The diehard Browns fans brought the party to them. They hit a thrift store, plunking down \$25 for a ratty sofa — perfect to absorb spilled PBR — and even plucked a keyboard out of a dumpster.

They blew up red balloons and tied them to a sign: “Moms Drink 4 Free!!!” Their plan to liven up the bash was overheard by a neighbor, who pressed her face against a window screen and asked if there was an age limit for the moms.

At Daytona, in both speed and celebrations, there are no limits.

So one of the gang waved her down and busted out the Fireball.

In the middle of a pandemic that has killed more than 470,000 people in the U.S., the carousing was more casual than crazy this week at Daytona as race day approached. The roughly 30,000 fans inside the sprawling facility that usually packs more than 100,000 are expected to make Sunday’s Daytona 500 the largest-attended single sporting event in the nation since the coronavirus shut down much of the sports world 11 months ago.

Mask wearing? Not so much, and there’s more space between stock cars pack racing on the superspeedway than there is between most campers.

“I’m not really too concerned about it,” Maxwell said.

The track made all the usual window-dressing moves to prove safety is a priority, with temperature checks, distanced seating, cashless concessions and adherence to CDC guidelines. Speedweeks, the runup to the big race, is actually sponsored by a health care system headquartered in Florida and COVID-19

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testing information sits above a link to official travel packages on the track's website.

Yet in a week where Victoria's state government imposed a five-day lockdown — stripping the Australian Open of fans while play continues — Florida is going for two: The Super Bowl hosted 25,000 fans last week in Tampa, about 150 miles west of Daytona, and viral videos showed throngs of mostly mask-less fans and packed sports bars as the hometown Buccaneers won it all.

NASCAR went down this road last season when Bristol had about 22,000 fans for its All-Star race last July. Daytona is bigger, even with social distancing in place for the grandstands, a mandatory mask order and no access to garages or pit row. Asked for comment, the Florida Department of Health in Volusia County said "event planners implemented several strategies to maintain healthy environments" and noted access to the infield was "limited to camping customers and essential staff."

Those campers are having a ball. Even if Tent City — famous for its raucous parties — has been reimagined as a "Turn 3 drive-in" setup for the RV crowd.

Mark Minadeo of Boca Raton was attending his ninth Daytona 500 and bought a motorhome for Speedweeks.

"This is ridiculous," he said of the view. "It's completely empty. A lot of people don't know what's going on. As you're walking around as you ask people who work at the track, they're like, 'Yeah, you can go over there and watch the race.'"

Some traditions are in start-and-park mode.

Revelers, park your wheelbarrows. The booze-fueled races — some might say, the real races at Daytona — are an informal tradition of dumping your buddy in the belly of the barrow then sprinting, stumbling to the finish.

Dave Rotax of Bristol, Vermont, drilled a hole in his No. 9 Chase Elliott wheelbarrow tire and filled it with expanding foam — consider it a sort of steroid for wheels — and had it on standby for ambitious racers.

There was one bird chirping all day in a tree inside the fan zone that served as the soundtrack for the day more than the Q-&A sessions with drivers that often entertained the masses. The mood is in stark contrast to last year when NASCAR fans were revved for then-President Donald Trump's visit. Trump banners dotted the infield and the makeshift bars that lined the roads served drinks like the "Subpoena Colada."

Trump flags swayed here and there this week, and there was at least one notably profane one directed at President Joe Biden, but politics was greatly tamped down. The fan support was mostly reserved for cutouts of greats like Dale Earnhardt or paint schemes for champion Chase Elliott.

But perhaps that little patch of Cleveland was a sign of what's ahead. They are 20- and 30-somethings who got hooked on NASCAR through daily fantasy sports. The majority had never been to a NASCAR race. But a hole on Brandon McCoy's jorts revealed a deeper level of fandom: He had the NASCAR logo and "Turn Left" tattooed on his right leg.

He got the fresh ink just week.

Why?

"I knew I was coming," he said, laughing.

More AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/hub/auto-racing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Some Europeans get choosy about which vaccines they want

By VANESSA GERA and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Many Europeans are desperate for a coronavirus vaccine. But not just any vaccine.

As AstraZeneca shots are rolling out to European Union nations this month, joining the Pfizer and Moderna doses already available, some people are balking at being offered a vaccine that they perceive — fairly or not — as second-best.

Poland began vaccinating teachers Friday with the AstraZeneca vaccine, and some had misgivings about being put in line for a vaccine they believe is less effective than the others.

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Ewelina Jankowska, the director of a primary and high school in Warsaw's southern Wilanow district, said nobody in her school was enthusiastic about getting the AstraZeneca shot, although many signed up, eager for any protection against a virus that has upended their lives and their students' schooling.

"I still fear the illness more than the AstraZeneca vaccine," said Jankowska, who was infected with COVID-19 in November and had a very slow recovery.

AstraZeneca, an Anglo-Swedish company, developed its vaccine with the University of Oxford. While regulators in more than 50 countries, including the EU's drug watchdog, have authorized its widespread use, it has attracted more criticism than others due to concerns about its human trials.

Several European nations have recommended the drug only for people under 65, and other countries have recommended it for those under 55, because AstraZeneca's trials included a relatively small number of older people.

AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot acknowledged the criticism but said regulators had reviewed the data and deemed the vaccine safe and effective. COVID-19 vaccines are in short supply, he said, and the AstraZeneca shot offers high levels of protection against severe disease, which is the most important benchmark in fighting a virus that has killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide.

"Is it perfect? No, it's not perfect, but it's great," Soriot said Thursday. "We're going to save thousands of lives and that's why we come to work every day."

The World Health Organization says the AstraZeneca vaccine is about 63% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 after two doses. That's less than the 95% effectiveness reported by Pfizer and Moderna, but experts caution against such comparisons as the studies were done at different times and under different conditions. Furthermore, all have proven extremely effective at preventing serious illness and death.

"If you're offered any approved vaccine, take it," said Peter Piot, director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "They have all been found safe. Vaccines are the world's route back to some sort of normality."

French President Emmanuel Macron angered scientists last month when he called the AstraZeneca vaccine "quasi-ineffective" for people over 65 — a comment that came hours before the European Medicines Agency approved it and said it could be used for all adults, including those over 65. Those who criticized Macron argued that he had spoken irresponsibly and had encouraged vaccine skepticism.

French Health Minister Olivier Veran, who is 40, made a point this week of getting the AstraZeneca vaccine to show government confidence in it for under-65s.

Adding to AstraZeneca's troubles have been criticism from the EU about delivery shortages, its lack of approval yet in the U.S., and a preliminary study that raised questions about the vaccine's ability to combat a COVID-19 variant discovered in South Africa. In its favor, however, is that it is cheaper and can be stored at refrigerator temperatures — not the far colder temperatures required of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

In Cyprus, Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou warned that opting for one over another risks delaying inoculations, given the limited deliveries of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in the coming weeks, and he noted "all three vaccines reduce hospitalizations and deaths drastically."

Yet in Poland, Spain and Italy, some unions complained that their members are slated to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine, expressing concerns they were being treated as less important than groups getting the Pfizer or Moderna doses.

Police unions in Spain have raised concerns about a government decision to administer AstraZeneca shots to police, military, firefighters and teachers.

Some Italian doctors in the private sector are declining AstraZeneca shots, saying they want the Pfizer or Moderna shots going to public health care workers.

"I'm not a no-vax AstraZeneca. But for an at-risk population, health care workers, they should use the same vaccination strategy for everyone and not create any discrimination," said Dr. Paolo Mezzana, a Rome plastic surgeon who helps administer a Facebook group of private doctors. They have been posting refusals to accept the AstraZeneca shot after vaccinations began this week.

In Poland, the government announced earlier this month that the planned delivery of more than 1 million

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AstraZeneca doses meant teachers could get their shots ahead of schedule because the vaccine would not be given to older adults.

But instead of expressing relief, the head of the main teachers' union, Slawomir Broniarz, criticized the use of the vaccine in remarks that, in turn, came under fire from scientists and the government.

Michal Dworczyk, who leads the government's vaccine effort, said he regretted "that some irresponsible politicians or trade unions have tried to scare teachers or cause such anxiety by giving false information about the AstraZeneca vaccine."

Yet a sense of misgiving has settled in among teachers, who already have been in conflict with the government for years over low wages and unpopular reforms.

Patrycja Swistowska, who teaches second grade at the Wilanow school, said she signed up for the AstraZeneca shot despite her fears and confusion.

"I feel that teachers are treated a bit worse and this is the vaccine that they offered us. They didn't offer us the vaccines given to doctors and other professional groups," said Swistowska, 39. "I am disoriented and I don't feel good about this. We are paid worse and this is just another example of us being shown our place."

In Italy, the head of the SAP police union, Stefano Paoloni, argued that if officers believe they are getting a less-effective vaccine via the police force, they can opt out and wait to get another shot later when the rest of the population is vaccinated. That would defeat the strategy to vaccinate as many at-risk people as quickly as possible.

Some unions are going ahead with the AstraZeneca rollout without complaining, reflecting gratitude to get any protection.

Dr. Arianna Patricarca, a 52-year-old Italian dentist who received the AstraZeneca shot Thursday, called it "a great opportunity and I am very happy that I did it."

Warsaw preschool director Agnieszka Grabowska also welcomed getting the AstraZeneca vaccine Friday. "It is a great relief," said Grabowska, 48, adding that she was exhausted after a year of the pandemic. "I have been waiting for this moment all year," she said.

Winfield reported from Rome. Associated Press writers Danica Kirka in London; Aritz Parra in Madrid; Menelaos Hadjicostis in Nicosia, Cyprus; Angela Charlton in Paris; and Monika Scislowska in Warsaw contributed.

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Trump lawyers: Impeachment based on hatred, not facts

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's impeachment lawyers accused Democrats of waging a campaign of "hatred" against the former president as they sped through their defense of his actions and fiery words before the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, hurtling the Senate toward a final vote in his historic trial.

The defense team vigorously denied on Friday that Trump had incited the deadly riot and said his encouragement of followers to "fight like hell" at a rally that preceded it was routine political speech. They played a montage of out-of-context clips showing Democrats, some of them senators now serving as jurors, also telling supporters to "fight," aiming to establish a parallel with Trump's overheated rhetoric.

"This is ordinary political rhetoric that is virtually indistinguishable from the language that has been used by people across the political spectrum for hundreds of years," declared Trump lawyer Michael van der Veen. "Countless politicians have spoken of fighting for our principles."

But the presentation blurred the difference between general encouragement to battle for causes and

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Trump's fight against officially accepted national election results. The defeated president was telling his supporters to fight on after every state had verified its results, after the Electoral College had affirmed them and after nearly every election lawsuit filed by Trump and his allies had been rejected in court.

The case is speeding toward a vote and likely acquittal, perhaps as soon as Saturday, with the Senate evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans and a two-thirds majority required for conviction. Trump's lawyers made an abbreviated presentation that used less than three of their allotted 16 hours.

Their quick pivot to the Democrats' own words deflected from the central question of the trial — whether Trump incited the assault on the Capitol — and instead aimed to place impeachment managers and Trump adversaries on the defensive. His lawyers contended he was merely telling his rally crowd to support primary challenges against his adversaries and to press for sweeping election reform.

After a two-day effort by Democrats to sync up Trump's words to the violence that followed, including through raw and emotive video footage, defense lawyers suggested that Democrats have typically engaged in the same rhetoric as Trump.

But in trying to draw that equivalency, the defenders minimized Trump's months-long efforts to undermine the election results and his urging of followers to do the same. Democrats say that long campaign, rooted in a "big lie," laid the groundwork for the mob that assembled outside the Capitol and stormed inside. Five people died.

On Friday, as defense lawyers repeated their own videos over and over, some Democrats chuckled and whispered among themselves as many of their faces flashed on the screen. Some passed notes. Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal threw up his hands, apparently amused, when his face appeared. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar rolled her eyes. Most Republicans watched intently.

During a break, some joked about the videos and others said they were a distraction or a "false equivalence" with Trump's behavior.

"Well, we heard the word 'fight' a lot," said Maine Sen. Angus King, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats.

Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet said it felt like the lawyers were "erecting straw men to then take them down rather than deal with the facts."

"We weren't asking them fight like hell to overthrow an election," Blumenthal said.

After the arguments ended, senators asked more than 20 questions of the lawyers, read by a clerk after submission in writing, including several from Republicans who are being closely watched for how they will vote.

GOP Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana asked about Trump's tweet criticizing Pence moments after having been told by another senator that the vice president had just been evacuated. Van der Veen responded that at "no point" was the president informed of any danger. Cassidy told reporters later it was not a very good answer.

Trump's defenders told senators that Trump was entitled to dispute the 2020 election results and that his doing so did not amount to inciting the violence. They sought to turn the tables on prosecutors by likening the Democrats' questioning of the legitimacy of Trump's 2016 win to his challenge of his election loss.

The defense team did not dispute the horror of the violence, painstakingly reconstructed by impeachment managers earlier in the week, but said it had been carried out by people who had "hijacked" what was supposed to be a peaceful event and had planned violence before Trump had spoken.

"You can't incite what was already going to happen," van der Veen said.

Acknowledging the reality of the January day is meant to blunt the visceral impact of the House Democrats' case and pivot to what Trump's defenders see as the core — and more winnable — issue of the trial: Whether Trump actually incited the riot. The argument is likely to appeal to Republican senators who want to be seen as condemning the violence but without convicting the president.

Anticipating defense efforts to disentangle Trump's rhetoric from the rioters' actions, the impeachment managers spent days trying to fuse them together through a reconstruction of never-been-seen video footage alongside clips of the president's months of urging his supporters to undo the election results.

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On Thursday, they described in stark, personal terms the terror they faced that January day — some of it in the very Senate chamber where senators now are sitting as jurors. They used security video of rioters searching menacingly for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Mike Pence, smashing into the building and engaging in bloody, hand-to-hand combat with police.

Though defense lawyers sought to boil down the case to a single Trump speech, Democrats displayed the many public and explicit instructions he gave his supporters well before the White House rally that unleashed the deadly Capitol attack as Congress was certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory. And they used the rioters' own videos and words from Jan. 6 to try to pin responsibility on Trump. "We were invited here," said one Capitol invader. "Trump sent us," said another. "He'll be happy. We're fighting for Trump."

The prosecutors' goal was to cast Trump not as a bystander but rather as the "inciter in chief" who spread election falsehoods, then encouraged supporters to come challenge the results in Washington.

The Democrats also are demanding that he be barred from holding future federal office.

Trump's lawyers say that goal only underscores the "hatred" Democrats feel for Trump. Throughout the trial, they showed clips from Democrats questioning the legitimacy of his presidency and suggesting as early as 2017 that he should be impeached.

"Hatred is at the heart of the house managers' fruitless attempts to blame Donald Trump for the criminal acts of the rioters — based on double hearsay statements of fringe right-wing groups, based on no real evidence other than rank speculation," van der Veen said.

Trump's lawyers noted that in the same Jan. 6 speech he encouraged the crowd to behave "peacefully," and they contend that his remarks — and his general distrust of the election results — are all protected under the First Amendment. Democrats strenuously resist that assertion, saying his words weren't political speech but rather amounted to direct incitement of violence.

The Latest: Tuberville stands by account of Trump phone call

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on former President Donald Trump's second Senate impeachment trial (all times local):

8 p.m.

Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama is standing by his account that he told then-President Donald Trump that Vice President Mike Pence was being evacuated from the Senate during the Capitol riot.

The conversation is of interest to Democrats because Trump sent a tweet at 2:24 p.m. on Jan. 6 saying that Pence didn't have "the courage" to challenge the election results. If Tuberville's account is correct, then Trump would likely have known before sending the tweet that Pence had been evacuated and was in danger. At the time, the insurrectionists had already broken into the Capitol, some of them calling for Pence's death.

Tuberville recounted the phone conversation to reporters on Friday, saying, "I said, 'Mr. President, they've taken the vice president out. They want me to get off the phone, I gotta go.'"

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Republican who has indicated he is open to convicting Trump, asked Trump's lawyers and the House impeachment managers about the call during Friday's question-and-answer session.

In response, Trump lawyer Michael van der Veen called Tuberville's account "hearsay," comparing it to something someone had "heard the night before at a bar somewhere."

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FORMER PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S SECOND SENATE IMPEACHMENT TRIAL:

Senators are submitting written questions to the prosecution and the defense in the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump. The defense wrapped up their case in about three hours earlier Friday.

Read more:

- Trump lawyers say impeachment managers just want vengeance
- Trump's free speech impeachment defense open to debate
- Nebraska Sen. Sasse bets political future on opposing Trump

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON:

7:05 p.m.

The Senate has voted to give the Congressional Gold Medal to Eugene Goodman, a Capitol Police officer who led a violent mob away from the Senate doors on Jan. 6 as they hunted for lawmakers during the presidential electoral count.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called the vote at the end of the day's impeachment proceedings, noting Goodman's "foresight in the midst of chaos, and his willingness to make himself a target of the mob's rage so that others might reach safety."

The Senate voted to award Goodman the medal -- the highest honor Congress can bestow -- by unanimous consent, meaning there were no objections. Goodman was in the Senate chamber as Schumer spoke, and the entire Senate stood and turned toward him, giving him a standing ovation. He put his hand on his heart.

Goodman has been in the chamber for much of the impeachment trial, in which House Democrats are charging that former President Donald Trump incited the Jan. 6 insurrection. New evidence introduced in the trial this week showed additional video of Goodman leading Republican Sen. Mitt Romney to safety as he unknowingly headed toward a location where the mob had gathered.

The trial wrapped up for the day Friday night and will resume Saturday.

5:40 p.m.

The lead House prosecutor in Donald Trump's impeachment trial appears to have had enough of the defense argument that the former president wasn't responsible for inciting the deadly Capitol siege.

"Get real," said Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland.

The defense lawyers have been arguing that Trump didn't mean it when he told a rally to go to Congress and "fight like hell" for his presidency as lawmakers were certifying Joe Biden's election.

"How gullible do you think we are?" Raskin said Friday. "We saw this happen."

The defense has tried to compare his words to those used by other Democratic politicians fighting for health care or other priorities. The argument is drawing eyerolls from the senators on the Democratic side of the aisle.

Senators are posing questions to the lawyer as the trial heads toward a vote on whether to convict or acquit the former president on the charge of incitement of insurrection.

5 p.m.

A House impeachment manager says she questions why lawyers for former President Donald Trump played multiple video clips of people of color or women talking about fighting in a political context.

Del. Stacey Plaskett of the U.S. Virgin Islands told senators Friday that she noted a particular focus in the lawyers' presentation on "Black women like myself who are sick and tired of being sick and tired for our children, your children, our children."

Trump's lawyers have argued that his words exhorting his supporters to fight the election are protected by the First Amendment. They repeatedly showed clips on Friday of Rep. Maxine Waters of California, who is Black.

Democratic impeachment managers say Trump's Jan. 6 speech was the culmination of a monthslong campaign to sow doubt about his election loss to President Joe Biden and that he should be found guilty of inciting the riot.

The former president's counsel also used a video montage that created a false equivalency between the Capitol riot and Black Lives Matter protests that followed the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis last May, invoking race in arguments for the president's innocence.

Plaskett told senators Friday: "I thought we were past that. I think maybe we're not."

4:30 p.m.

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Senators are submitting written questions to the prosecution and the defense in the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump.

One of the first questions came from Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who have been critical of Trump's actions. They asked Trump's lawyers to lay out in detail what Trump did to stop the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, and when Trump first learned the building had been breached.

Trump lawyer Michael van der Veen did not answer directly, instead accusing Democrats of denying Trump due process during the impeachment process.

"The House managers did zero investigation and the American people deserve a lot better than that," he said.

Trump's defense wrapped up their opening arguments earlier Friday, telling senators the impeachment is unconstitutional and politically motivated.

Senators will have up to four hours to submit their questions.

3:20 p.m.

The defense attorneys for Donald Trump have wrapped up their presentation in the former president's impeachment trial.

Lawyers argued for three hours Friday that Trump didn't incite the Jan. 6 rally crowd to riot at the U.S. Capitol and that his words were merely figures of speech. They say the case against Trump was a political witch hunt by Democrats and was not valid because he is no longer in office.

Their truncated defense barely used the full time allotted, 16 hours over two days. Many senators' minds appear already made up.

Trump is accused of incitement of insurrection in the mob siege at the Capitol. Five people died. Senators will next be able to ask the lawyers and House impeachment managers questions when the trial resumes.

3 p.m.

Democrats in the Senate chamber chuckled and whispered among themselves as Donald Trump's defense team played videos of them saying "fight" over and over again at the former president's impeachment trial -- an effort to counter Trump's call to his supporters to "fight like hell" before they laid siege on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

Arguing that Trump did not incite the insurrection, as the House has charged, the lawyers played videos of Democrats saying the word "fight" without any context, calling for protests after Black men and women were killed by police officers and challenging the results of the presidential elections that Republicans won. At a break in the proceedings, Democrats said it was a distraction and a "false equivalence" with their own behavior.

"Donald Trump was warned, if you don't stop talking about a stolen election, people will be killed," said Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine. "He was specifically warned that. He kept talking about it, and a violent mob attacked the Capitol and seven people are dead who would be alive today, had he just followed their advice. That's what I thought about those videos."

Colorado Sen. Michael Bennett said it felt like the lawyers were "erecting straw men to then take them down rather than deal with the facts" and the events of Jan. 6.

Republicans watched intently as the Trump lawyers presented. Some praised them afterward, including Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who has been harshly critical of Trump's role in the riots and panned the lawyers' previous arguments on Tuesday.

"They are putting on a good defense today," Murkowski said, adding that the first two hours "were well put together."

1:15 p.m.

Donald Trump's lawyers are arguing that his words to his supporters who attacked the U.S. Capitol -- "fight like hell" -- are common political rhetoric, using a video montage to show almost every single Senate

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Democrat using the word "fight" in political speeches.

The lengthy video featured Vice President Kamala Harris, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and countless other Democrats using the word "fight," without context. The video also featured most of the Democratic impeachment managers who are prosecuting the case that Trump incited the violent insurrection.

Once the video finished, lawyer David Schoen pointed at both the senators and the impeachment managers and told them to "stop the hypocrisy." The Democratic prosecutors have argued that Trump's supporters were primed for violence on Jan. 6, the day of the attack, and that he egged them on with "obvious intent" before they interrupted the electoral count of votes. Five people died in the chaos.

The lawyers followed that with additional videos of Democrats praising protests after the death of George Floyd in Minnesota last year and also challenging the elections of previous Republican presidents. Trump's supporters attacked the Capitol after he falsely said for months that the presidential election was stolen.

12:40 p.m.

Donald Trump's lawyers have opened their arguments in the former president's impeachment trial with a direct attack on Democrats.

Arguing that Trump did not incite the Jan. 6 insurrection of his supporters at the U.S. Capitol, lawyer Michael van der Veen said that the trial is "constitutional cancel culture" by Democrats trying to retain power. He played a video of Democrats calling for protests after Black men and women were killed by police officers and objecting to Trump's election in 2017.

Trump's supporters violently attacked the Capitol last month after he falsely claimed the presidential election was stolen from him for months and then told them to "fight like hell" as Congress counted the votes.

The lawyers are arguing that the trial is unconstitutional, that Trump is protected by freedom of speech and that he did not intend to incite the deadly riot.

Van der Veen said the case "poses a serious threat to freedom of speech for political leaders of both parties at every level of government."

12:05 p.m.

Defense lawyers have begun their opening arguments in the impeachment trial of Donald Trump as the case speeds to an expected conclusion this weekend.

The Trump legal team is expected to argue that the former president did not incite the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and that his speech was protected by the First Amendment. The lawyers have also raised questions about the trial's constitutionality because Trump is no longer in office.

Trump's lawyers are not expected to use anywhere close to their allotted time and will wrap up their arguments later Friday. After that, senators who are serving as jurors will have an opportunity to ask questions of lawyers for both sides, followed by closing arguments.

The case is likely to conclude as soon as Saturday.

8:35 a.m.

Now it's the Trump team's time.

House prosecutors at former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial relied on emotion and violent images on video to make their case in arguments over the past two days.

The Senate trial is shifting to Trump's defense lawyers on Friday, and they're prepared to acknowledge that the violence at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 was every bit as traumatic, unacceptable and illegal as Democrats say.

But Trump's lawyers plan to say Trump had nothing to do with it. They want to pivot to what they see as the core and more winnable issue of the trial: whether Trump can be held responsible for inciting the deadly riot.

The argument is likely to appeal to Republican senators who themselves want to be seen as condemning

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the violence without convicting the former president.

7:45 a.m.

Donald Trump's lawyers have a simple objective as they open their defense at the former president's impeachment trial: Don't lose any Republican votes.

Most Republican senators have indicated they'll vote to acquit Trump on the House charge of incitement of insurrection. They say the trial is unconstitutional and that Trump didn't incite supporters to lay siege on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 when he told them to "fight like hell" against the certification of Joe Biden's White House victory.

If Republicans hold the line, Democrats will fall well short of the two-thirds of the Senate needed for conviction.

Trump's two top lawyers, Bruce Castor and David Schoen, risked losing one Republican vote on Tuesday after Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy said they did a "terrible" job arguing that the trial is unconstitutional.

Cassidy, who had voted with his party two weeks earlier to stop the trial, switched his vote to side with Democrats.

7:30 a.m.

Bruce Castor, is a onetime rising-star prosecutor from suburban Philadelphia, had burned bridges with much of the Republican establishment after a series of election losses. And he'd pretty much stayed out of sight.

But he's made a comeback as one of Donald Trump's lawyers at the former president's impeachment trial.

Castor's moment in the national glare on Tuesday was seen as a rambling and at times aimless hourlong presentation in search of a point.

He's getting a chance to make a different impression when he begins to present Trump's defense on Friday.

Census: No redistricting data until end of September

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The U.S. Census Bureau said Friday it won't be delivering data used for redrawing congressional and state legislative districts until the end of September, causing headaches for state lawmakers and redistricting commissions facing deadlines to redraw districts this year.

Officials at the statistical agency blamed operational delays during the 2020 census caused by the pandemic.

"The biggest reason? COVID-19. It's something beyond the Census Bureau's control," said Kathleen Styles, the Census Bureau's chief of Decennial Communications and Stakeholder Relations, in a call with reporters.

Styles had previously said the redistricting data would be available no earlier than the end of July because of delays caused by the virus. Before the pandemic, the deadline for finishing the redistricting data had been March 31.

The redistricting data includes counts of population by race, Hispanic origin, voting age and housing occupancy status at geographic levels as small as neighborhoods, and they are used for drawing voting districts for Congress and state legislatures. Unlike in past decades when the data were released to states on a flow basis, the 2020 redistricting data will be made available to the states all at once, according to the Census Bureau.

The delayed release creates a chain reaction in the political world. Several states will not get the data until after their legal deadlines for drawing new districts, requiring them to either rewrite laws or ask courts to allow them a free pass due to the delay. Candidates may not know yet whether they will live in the district they want to run in by the filing deadline. In some cases, if fights over new maps drag into the New Year, primaries may have to be delayed.

In the end, though, experts said the elections will proceed as normal in November 2022. The biggest impact will be to compress the window during which lawyers can challenge bad maps in court.

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"It makes it significantly more likely that courts will bump up against election deadlines," said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice.

Census Bureau officials are aware of the deadlines facing lawmakers and redistricting commissions nationwide, but "we have a strong schedule that reflects the time we need," said James Whitehorne, chief of the Redistricting and Voting Rights Data office at the bureau.

"We are consistently aware of the urgency and needs of the states for this data," Whitehorne said.

Gail Gitcho, a spokeswoman for the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said the group's attorneys were reviewing the implications of the delay.

Eric Holder, a U.S. attorney general in the Obama administration, warned that the new deadline shouldn't be "a pretext to hold 2022 elections on old maps" in an effort at political gain, or to draw maps without significant public input, using the compressed timetable as an excuse.

"I will oppose any such efforts," said Holder, who chairs the National Democratic Redistricting Committee.

In Pennsylvania, the state Senate's ranking member, President Pro Tempore Jake Corman, said late-arriving data could mean postponement of next year's primary election, currently set for May 17, 2022. The state House and Senate will hold a joint committee hearing Wednesday on the impact of the delay in the Census Bureau data.

The announcement from the statistical agency came as a bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced legislation that would extend the deadline for turning in the redistricting data to Sept. 30.

The legislation introduced by Democratic U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii and Republican U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, both of Alaska, also sets an April 30 deadline for turning in the apportionment figures used for divvying up congressional seats among the states. The Census Bureau had previously announced it was aiming to hand in those state population counts by that date.

The once-a-decade census is used to determine how many congressional seats and Electoral College votes each state gets. It also is used for redrawing state and local political districts and determining the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending each year.

The deadline for turning in the apportionment numbers used for congressional seats has been a moving, and litigated, target since the coronavirus pandemic upended the Census Bureau's head count of every U.S. resident. The numbers were supposed to be turned in at the end of last year, but the Census Bureau requested until the end of April after the virus outbreak caused the bureau to suspend operations.

Bureau officials say they need the extra time to fix not-unexpected irregularities found in the data.

The lawmakers introduced similar legislation last year but it never went anywhere in the Republican-controlled Senate after identical legislation passed the Democratic-controlled House. By then, the Trump administration had switched back to a Dec. 31 deadline for finishing the apportionment data after President Donald Trump issued a directive seeking to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the numbers used for divvying up congressional seats.

President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's order on his first day taking office last month. Control of the Senate also is now evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to provide a deciding vote for the Democrats.

AP writer Nicholas Riccardi in Denver and Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pa. contributed to this report.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

2 brothers from Kansas, Idaho arrested in Capitol riots

By JOHN HANNA and MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Two brothers from Kansas and Idaho were arrested Friday on federal charges stemming from the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, the FBI said.

William Pope, of Topeka, Kansas, and Michael Pope, of Sandpoint, Idaho, were arrested on federal charges of obstruction or impeding any official proceeding, causing civil disorder and other counts. An affidavit detailing the allegations against them was not immediately available.

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William Pope, 35, was arrested without incident and was being held without bond in the Shawnee County jail. He did not immediately return a phone message or respond to an email to his Kansas State account seeking comment.

In 2019, William Pope ran unsuccessfully for the Topeka City Council. As of October 2020, he was listed as a Republican precinct committee member in Shawnee County. He also worked for 10 months as an entry-level auditor for the Legislative Division of Post Audit, the state's official auditing agency, from November 2018 until August 2019. The division's head, Justin Stowe, said Friday that William Pope left the job to participate in the Kansas State doctoral program.

A committee of the Kansas Legislature oversees the Division of Post Audit's work, but it is a nonpartisan agency, and Stowe said it does not allow its staff to be involved in political activity. Stowe said division staff had not seen any indications of William Pope's political views while he worked there.

The Topeka Capital-Journal reported that William Pope acknowledged to the newspaper that he was among the thousands of people who stormed the U.S. Capitol, and he was caught on video inside the building.

"I was at the Capitol to exercise my first amendment rights and remain loyal to the United States of America," William Pope said.

He said he was not violent during the riot, and he reported himself to the FBI a few days later because "it was the right thing to do."

William Pope was also an adjunct instructor at Fort Hays State University from January 2016 until May 2020. And he was listed as a doctoral student in Kansas State University's communication studies department as of Friday.

Both schools issued statements Friday saying they condemned the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Kansas State spokeswoman Michelle Geering said the university is conducting an internal review and will not comment on future personnel actions.

Fort Hays State University spokesman Scott Cason said the school was not aware of any instance where William Pope's political views were included in his teaching, Cason said.

Michael Pope surrendered to FBI agents in Idaho and was taken into custody without incident. His initial appearance was scheduled for Friday afternoon via Zoom at the U.S. District Court in Boise, Idaho.

Two other Kansas men who were among five members of the Proud Boys whose arrests were announced Thursday made their initial court appearances on Friday.

William Chrestman, 47, of Olathe, will remain in custody until Wednesday when a federal judge will hear arguments on whether he should be released. Prosecutors argued in a court filing that Chrestman, an Army veteran, was a flight risk and a danger to society if he is released, The Kansas City Star reported.

"Releasing Defendant Chrestman to rejoin their fold and plan their next attack poses a potentially catastrophic risk of danger to the community," the filing said.

A second Olathe man, Christopher Kuehne, 47, was released on his own recognizance but ordered to be on home detention and wear an electric monitor. Kuehne, a retired Marine Corps officer, told the judge that he is being treated at the Department of Veterans Affairs for PTSD and a traumatic brain injury.

Kuehne's attorney, Robin Fowler, said in a statement Friday that Kuehne was in the Marines for more than 20 years and won several honors, including a Purple Heart for his service in Iraq and elsewhere.

"He looks forward to addressing the allegations against him at the appropriate time and in the appropriate forum, which he expects will be in federal court in Washington, D.C.," she said.

Cuomo administration 'froze' over nursing home data requests

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's top aide told Democratic lawmakers that the administration took months to release data revealing how many people living at nursing homes died of COVID-19 because officials "froze" over worries the information was "going to be used against us."

Republicans who term the comment admission of a "cover-up" are now calling for investigations into

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and the resignations of both Cuomo and the aide, secretary to the governor Melissa DeRosa. And a growing number of Democrats are joining calls to rescind Cuomo's emergency executive powers, blasting the administration's defense of its secrecy.

"To continual defenders of NY Gov. Cuomo how is this ok?" New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, a Democrat, tweeted. "How is it not #Trump like? And when FORCED into admission, the most you get is a sorry we got caught...and not even directly from him or to the families."

The disclosure of DeRosa's comments, made on a Wednesday conference call with Democratic legislative leaders, came as the Democratic governor — a third-term Democrat who says he'll run again in 2022 and penned a book touting his handling of the pandemic — and his administration were already facing backlash over their handling and reporting of outbreaks in nursing homes.

Cuomo refused for months to release data on how the pandemic has hit nursing home residents, instead pointing to figures more favorable to his administration. Experts say the release of more — and accurate — data can shape policy to help save people's lives.

"These are people's parents and grandparents," Fordham University political science professor Christina Greer said. "They're people. We should be more specific. Cooking the books on the data isn't just about nursing homes, it's about numbers of people infected and possibly dead."

In recent weeks, a court order and state attorney general report has forced the state to acknowledge the nursing home resident death toll is nearly 15,000, when it previously reported 8,500 — a number that excluded residents who died after being taken to hospitals. The new toll amounts to about one-seventh of the people living in nursing homes as of 2019 in New York.

Since last spring, news outlets, lawmakers and the public have asked the Cuomo administration for data about COVID-19 deaths among nursing home residents. On Aug. 3, lawmakers asked state health Commissioner Howard Zucker for the number of nursing home residents who died in hospitals.

By mid-August, then-President Donald Trump began retweeting comments criticizing Cuomo for his administration's response on nursing home deaths. On Aug. 26, the Department of Justice gave Cuomo's administration 14 days to provide data on nursing home deaths.

"Basically, we froze because then we were in a position where we weren't sure if what we were going to give to the Department of Justice or what we give to you guys and what we start saying was going to be used against us, and we weren't sure if there was going to be an investigation," DeRosa told the Democratic leaders in comments were first reported by The New York Post.

"That played a very large role into this," she added, saying the administration had asked legislative leaders whether it could "pause on getting back to everybody until we get through this period and we know what's what with the DOJ."

Cuomo's office provided a partial call recording to The Associated Press, but declined to say where it obtained it or allow its publication.

DeRosa didn't directly respond to a question from the AP about whether New York was withholding data from state lawmakers to avoid it being used in any Justice Department investigation.

DeRosa issued a statement Friday saying the administration told legislative leaders in September that it had to set aside lawmakers' August request to deal with the Justice Department's request first. Cuomo's office didn't respond to the AP's question Friday about when it fulfilled the federal data request.

"We were comprehensive and transparent in our responses to the DOJ, and then had to immediately focus our resources on the second wave and vaccine rollout," the news release said, adding that the administration was "committed to being better partners going forward."

Cuomo administration officials have also said they needed months to verify deaths outside nursing homes. Still, it remains unclear why New York couldn't provide data that nearly every other state publishes to lawmakers and the Justice Department at the same time, and later correct it if needed.

The state Department of Health initially released data about all deaths of nursing home residents, regardless of location. The administration stopped as of May 3, when New York became one of at least two states to only release the number of deaths that took place at nursing homes.

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Lawmakers at Wednesday's conference call said they still don't buy the Cuomo's administrations' reasons for delay. They spent the first hour of the call taking state health officials to task for the delay, according to Assemblymember Ron Kim, a Queens Democrat.

"We were all frustrated at the excuses; there was one after another," Kim said.

Richard Gottfried, the Assembly health chair representing Manhattan who also attended Wednesday's meeting, said he and other lawmakers also requested nursing home data in June. He called the entire meeting, including DeRosa's comments, "very disturbing."

"They weren't releasing data from the investigation," he said. "It's not the sort of thing they would make up. I don't think the state's explanation is acceptable."

When asked whether lawmakers would subpoena the Cuomo administration, he said, "I don't think the New York Legislature is well organized for conducting investigations."

He noted state Attorney General Letitia James' team has done a good job in an ongoing investigation that, among other things, correctly estimated that far more nursing home residents died of COVID-19.

James' spokesperson didn't respond to request for comment Friday.

Kim called for legislative action to protect vulnerable residents, including repealing immunity for nursing homes, launching a victims compensation fund and authorizing a bipartisan commission with subpoena power to investigate COVID-19 outbreaks at long-term care homes.

"If you make a mistake, issue a public apology for a change, that would make a big difference," Kim said.

Kim said after DeRosa's comments, staffers and lawmakers listening in on the call began texting each other asking: "Oh crap, did she just incriminate herself?"

But Kim said while he supports reducing Cuomo's emergency powers, he doesn't back ousting DeRosa because it wouldn't "resolve the institutional problems the administration caused over the last 10 months."

"There was a lot of trust that was lost," Kim said.

Timberlake apologizes to Britney Spears and Janet Jackson

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In a lengthy social media post, Justin Timberlake says that he wants to apologize to Britney Spears and Janet Jackson "because I care for and respect these women and I know I failed."

"I've seen the messages, tags, comments, and concerns and I want to respond. I am deeply sorry for the times in my life where my actions contributed to the problem, where I spoke out of turn, or did not speak up for what was right. I understand that I fell short in these moments and in many others and benefited from a system that condones misogyny and racism," he wrote Friday.

Timberlake's social media post comes a week after the release of The New York Times' documentary "Framing Britney Spears," the FX and Hulu film that takes a historical look at the circumstances that led to Spears' conservatorship in 2008 and highlights the #FreeBritney movement of fans who want to see her released from it and given control of her life. The documentary aired an old interview when Timberlake spoke about sleeping with his former girlfriend and indicated that he ridiculed her by hiring a look-a-like for his "Cry Me a River" music video.

Fans called out Timberlake for contributing to Spears' very public breakdown and controlling the narrative about the end of their relationship.

More backlash hit Timberlake as social media began to recall the wardrobe malfunction with Jackson that caused a national controversy at the 2004 Super Bowl. Some argued that Jackson, as a Black woman, fell victim to a racist and sexist double standard and received harsher treatment than Timberlake, as a white man, did and that he benefited from "white male privilege."

And the NFL's decision to invite Timberlake to perform at the halftime show three years ago triggered a backlash from women, minorities and others who felt Jackson was unfairly forced to pay a far higher price than Timberlake.

"I also feel compelled to respond, in part, because everyone involved deserves better and most importantly, because this is a larger conversation that I wholeheartedly want to be part of and grow from," he

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wrote. "The industry is flawed. It sets men, especially white men, up for success. It's designed this way. As a man in a privileged position I have to be vocal about this. Because of my ignorance, I didn't recognize it for all that it was while it was happening in my own life but I do not want to ever benefit from others being pulled down again."

The #FreeBritney hashtag has trended heavily in the last week, with celebrities backing Spears, including Paris Hilton, Miley Cyrus, Bette Midler and more.

Jackson was also a trending topic around the 2018 Super Bowl and after, with the hashtags #JusticeforJanet and #JanetJacksonAppreciationDay going strong on social media before Timberlake's record third trip to the stage at the Super Bowl.

"I have not been perfect in navigating all of this throughout my career. I know this apology is a first step and doesn't absolve the past. I want to take accountability for my own missteps in all of this as well as be part of a world that uplifts and supports," Timberlake wrote. "I care deeply about the wellbeing of the people I love and have loved. I can do better and I will do better."

Trial highlights: Trump grievances, angry outbursts and more

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a whirlwind defense, Donald Trump's impeachment attorneys aired a litany of grievances Friday, arguing the former president bore no responsibility for the deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol while accusing Democrats of "hatred" and "hypocrisy."

The defense team, which wrapped up its arguments in just over three hours, said Trump was engaged in "constitutionally protected speech" when he spoke at a rally that immediately preceded the violence on Jan. 6 that left five dead.

Echoing themes often heard in conservative media, they called the impeachment trial a "witch hunt" and accused Democrats of elevating a destructive "cancel culture" to the halls of Congress. They also suggested Democrats were hypocrites for impeaching Trump after some had previously voiced support for racial justice marches last summer, some of which turned violent.

"It has become very clear that House Democrats hate Donald Trump," said Michael van der Veen, a Philadelphia personal injury attorney who is part of Trump's defense team. "Hatred is at the heart."

Here are some highlights from Friday's impeachment proceedings:

FIRST AMENDMENT

Regardless of what occurred after Trump's Jan. 6 speech, the former president was simply exercising his First Amendment right to free speech and can't be found at fault, his attorneys argued.

"The Senate cannot ignore the First Amendment," said van der Veen.

Nearly 150 constitutional scholars disagree. In a letter signed last week they wrote that "the First Amendment does not apply in impeachment proceedings, so it cannot provide a defense for President Trump."

The First Amendment has long been invoked as a powerful and compelling defense in court. But impeachment proceedings are an inherently political process that exists outside the U.S. court system in which senators sit as jurors.

Further, just because speech is protected by the Constitution doesn't mean that there aren't limits. Threats to commit a crime or "fighting words" that are likely to incite violence can be exceptions to protected speech.

ANGRY OUTBURSTS

Tempers flared during a question and answer session as impeachment proceedings stretched into the evening.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent who caucuses with Democrats, tried to pressure Trump's attorneys to say whether the former president had lost the election — a reality Trump himself has refused to acknowledge.

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"Are the prosecutors right when they claim that Trump was telling a big lie or in your judgment, did Trump actually win the election?" Sanders asked in a written inquiry.

van der Veen bristled and inquired who had asked. Sanders responded, "I did." van der Veen retorted: "irrelevant."

"No, it isn't!" Sanders angrily shot back from his desk, adding: "You represent the president of the United States!"

He scoffed audibly when van der Veen avoided answering the question.

Separately, van der Veen at one point complained that the impeachment trial was his "worst experience in Washington."

"You should have been here on Jan. 6.," lead prosecutor Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., dryly noted.

INSURRECTION OR NOT?

The articles of impeachment charge Trump with the "incitement of an insurrection," a word that Webster's Dictionary defines as "an act or instance of revolting against civil authority or an established government."

Trump's lawyers say that's not technically correct. And they offered some alternative facts to make their point.

"Insurrection' is a term of art," said attorney Bruce Castor, and it "involves taking over a country" or "a shadow government taking the TV stations over and having some plan on what you're going to do when you finally take power."

"Clearly this is not that," he added.

In any event, Trump still wasn't responsible for what happened after his speech, Castor said.

Trump's speech, in which he urged his supporters to "fight like hell," was actual a call for the "peaceful exercise of every American's first amendment rights to peacefully assemble and petition their government for redress of grievances," according to Castor.

And he suggested that Trump wasn't literally calling on his supporters to "fight," but rather get involved in the political process, like supporting primary challengers of elected officials they did not like.

Many of Trump's supporters who participated in the attack found far different meaning in the former president's words on Jan. 6.

They have said in media interviews, videos taken at the scene and in statements to law enforcement that they were acting on Trump's orders and aimed to overturn the outcome of the election by stopping Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's Electoral College victory — the definition of an insurrection.

FIGHTING

Donald Trump's defense team attempted to undermine a key Democratic argument: that the former president incited the attack on the Capitol by urging his supporters to "fight like hell" and "go by very different rules" or they "wouldn't have a country anymore."

To do so, they played a lengthy montage of video clips during Friday's proceedings, which featured President Joe Biden and other prominent Democrats repeatedly uttering the word "fight" during public speeches.

"There is a fight in front of us," Vice President Kamala Harris said in one clip from November 2019. Another showed Biden talking about taking Trump "behind the gym" to "beat the hell out of him," like in high school.

The use of the words "fight" or "fighting" is exceedingly common in political speech. The effort by Trump's legal team amounted to an effort to muddy the waters by drawing an equivalence and ignoring his false claims about voter fraud.

Trump used the word "fight" while trying to undermine the outcome of a free and fair election that he lost. And his use of the word on Jan. 6 came after weeks of baselessly claiming the election was being stolen from him.

There was no widespread fraud in the election, as has been confirmed by election officials across the

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country and former Attorney General William Barr. Dozens of legal challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed.

Still, Trump's lawyers said they were making a valid point by highlighting Democrats' use of the word "fight."

"This is not whataboutism," said Michael van der Veen. "I am showing you this to make the point that all political speech must be protected."

DEMOCRATS REACT

Senate Democrats seemed mostly amused by the defense's video of prominent party leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton, repeatedly saying the word "fight."

Though initially stone-faced and impassionate, as the minutes ticked by some reacted, particularly after their own turn on the screen.

Some giggled, others gasped. Some raised their hands or shrugged.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar rolled her eyes. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts fidgeted with a pen during a lengthy section devoted to her. But Sanders, of Vermont, was visibly annoyed.

It "feels like they are erecting straw men to then take them down rather deal with the fact the events (on Jan. 6) happened," said Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo.

A fight or a 'fight'? In impeachment, a clash about context

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

Was he calling for a fight, or was he calling for a "fight"?

In American political speech — and particularly in Donald Trump's impeachment trial and the discussions around it — words matter. But beyond that is another axiom: Context, it seems, can be everything.

Yes, Trump used pointed, intense words that aroused supporters' emotions. Yes, he deployed the notion of battle as potent political metaphor. Yes — he might have gone too far for some. His attorneys acknowledged all of that during their combative defense at his impeachment trial Friday.

But what the 45th president didn't do on that day in January, when he stood near the White House and used the words "fight" or "fighting" 20 times as he tried to overturn a legitimate election was this, his lawyers insisted: He didn't cross the lines of free speech and wade into literal incitement that produced the riot at the Capitol.

"We fight like hell," Trump said then. "And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

This was a day about Donald Trump, about what he said on that chaotic day and what he says in general. But it was also, as Trump attorney Michael van der Veen pointed out, part of a broader context of increasingly strident and aggressive political speech in the American republic — and one, it's worth noting, that Trump's remarks and voluminous tweets while president certainly inflamed.

"The Jan. 6 speech did not cause the riots. The president did not cause the riots. He neither implicitly nor explicitly called for the use of violence or lawless action," Bruce Castor Jr., Trump's lead attorney, told the Senate.

It was the polar opposite of what House impeachment manager Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colo., said during Democrats' arguments on Wednesday. "The president," he said, "used the speech as a call to arms. It was not rhetorical."

What can legally be said in public life? And where is the line drawn? That has been a fundamental part of American constitutional tension since the First Amendment was instituted, and particularly since Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. came up with the now-classic road test of where the right ends.

"The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic," Holmes wrote in a 1917 ruling that anti-draft flyers couldn't be distributed during World War I because they might undermine military recruitment efforts.

"The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such

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a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent," Holmes wrote.

As with Trump's words, this is no easy thing to work out in a country so deeply committed for so long to linguistic metaphors built around fighting and violence and guns — metaphors that in many contexts, from sports to corporate settings, aren't actually violent or gun-related.

Fight for your rights, fight for your children, join the fight against breast cancer: Do those always involve fists? "Take aim against cavities," an old toothpaste commercial once exhorted, and guns were nowhere in sight. A great movie or TV show can blow us away. We lash out. We throw elbows. We slap people down. Sometimes we go for the jugular.

"This is ordinary political rhetoric that is virtually indistinguishable from the language that has been used by people across the political spectrum for hundreds of years," van der Veen said.

That's where context comes in. And context is where the arguments in the Senate this week came to a head.

With Trump and his remarks on Jan. 6 to supporters, many of whom went on to storm the Capitol, the question of context came down to this: Can a speaker be held responsible if a metaphor produces violent results after being perceived, from a mob's vantage point, as literal?

After all, a euphemism in a debate or an interview is far different — at least in impeachment prosecutors' view — from a euphemism in front of a specific, agitated crowd about a specific thing that could happen in the immediate future.

This is part of what euphemism in language allows. It creates space for "dog whistles" that can be brushed off as innocuous but also act as messages to those whose ears are cocked in the right political ways.

Van der Veen illustrated this dramatically — and, one could argue, ad nauseam — with three lengthy video montages showing Democrat after Democrat using the word "fight" and others like it when referring to political maneuverings.

"I just don't know why there aren't uprisings all over the country, and maybe there will be," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in one clip. In another, Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said of two Trump-appointed Supreme Court justices: "You have released the whirlwind, and you will pay the price."

Van der Veen's point: We all say this stuff, and don't forget that when you accuse Trump of incitement.

"The inflammatory language from both sides of the aisle has been alarming, frankly, but this political discourse must be considered as part of these proceedings to contextualize Mr. Trump's words," he said.

Perhaps. But that argument about larger context also excludes another kind of context — that of the actual moments when Trump was speaking before the riot, as Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-Texas, pointed out later in the day.

"When people are armed and they're saying they're mad as hell and not going to take it anymore," Castro said, that produces "an incredibly combustible situation."

In short, shouting "Fire!" in a swimming pool or shouting "Water!" in a crowded theater are probably fine. But when the right (or wrong) words meet the right (or wrong) situation, that changes. And those are the conditions when incitement often occurs.

Finally, the question of fight or "fight" points, too, to the status of Trump himself — his position as president.

As a private citizen, he has free speech just like any American. But did his own context — standing as the head of the executive branch, with the might of the world's strongest military at his command — change the equation at all? Does a president saying "fight" in that situation remove the quote marks like a street brawler tossing aside his jacket?

Much of the time, when we fight, we "fight." On Jan. 6, 2021, outside and inside the U.S. Capitol, some Americans decided to actually fight. We know the results of that day now, viscerally and comprehensively.

And as public discourse in the United States grows ever more polarized, the amount of light shining between those two versions of a single word — one figurative, the other literal — is going to reveal a lot about free speech, and a lot about the American future.

Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

CDC: Strong evidence in-person schooling can be done safely

By COLLIN BINKLEY and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

The nation's top public health agency said Friday that in-person schooling can resume safely with masks, social distancing and other strategies, and vaccination of teachers, while important, is not a prerequisite for reopening.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its long-awaited road map for getting students back to classrooms in the middle of a pandemic that has killed nearly 480,000 people in the U.S. But the agency's guidance is just that — it cannot force schools to reopen, and CDC officials were careful to say they are not calling for a mandate that all U.S. schools be reopened.

Officials said there is strong evidence now that schools can reopen, especially at lower grade levels.

Recommended measures include hand washing, disinfection of school facilities, diagnostic testing and contact tracing to find new infections and separate infected people from others in a school. It's also more emphatic than past guidance on the need to wear masks in school.

"We know that most clusters in the school setting have occurred when there are breaches in mask wearing," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC's director, said in a call with reporters.

The guidance was issued as President Joe Biden faces increasing pressure to deliver on his promise to get the majority of K-8 schools back to in-person teaching by the end of his first 100 days in office. He acknowledged that the goal was ambitious, but added, "It is also a goal we can meet if we follow the science."

Biden said schools will need more money to meet the CDC's standards and called on Congress to pass his COVID-19 package quickly to get \$130 billion in aid to schools.

"We have sacrificed so much in the last year," Biden said in a statement. "But science tells us that if we support our children, educators and communities with the resources they need, we can get kids back to school safely in more parts of the country sooner."

The new guidance includes many of the same measures previously backed by the CDC, but it suggests them more forcefully. It emphasizes that all of the recommendations must be implemented strictly and consistently to keep school safe. It also provides more detailed suggestions about what type of schooling should be offered given different levels of virus transmission, with differing advice for elementary, middle and high schools.

"We know that most clusters in the school setting have occurred when there are breaches in mask wearing," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC's director, said in a call with reporters.

Vaccinating teachers can provide "an additional layer of protection," she said.

Asked how the guidance differed from that offered by the Trump administration, Walensky said, "We've used stronger languages than prior guidance. We've been much more prescriptive here as to putting some guardrails on what can and should be done to get to a safe reopening."

"And I can assure you that this is free from political meddling," she added.

There's wide agreement that learning in the classroom is more effective and that students can face isolation and learning setbacks at home. But teachers unions in some areas say schools have failed to make buildings safe enough to return.

The new guidance was embraced by both sides of the debate, with each saying it bolstered their position. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said it's further evidence that schools are equipped to reopen now.

The new information "affirms what many of us, including students and parents, have known for months: It is critical for schools to open as safely and as soon as possible," he said.

Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, applauded the guidance but said schools are failing to meet it. Most still have outdated ventilation systems, she said, and few have the type of virus testing programs suggested by the CDC.

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"CDC standards still aren't being met in too many of our schools," Pringle said. "We can and must provide students the opportunity to return to in-person learning, but we also must ensure that every school has the safety measures in place to keep students and educators safe."

In Florida, which ordered schools to reopen in August, Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran called the new guidance "informative" but warned schools not to veer from their current plans. He said the state has shown in-person teaching is safe. But the state has dealt with school-related infections, including an outbreak at a high school wrestling tournament in December in which 38 attendees tested positive.

CDC officials emphasized that in-person learning has not been identified as a substantial driver of coronavirus spread in U.S. communities, and that transmission among students is now considered relatively rare.

The CDC also stressed that the safest way to open schools is by making sure there is as little disease in a community as possible. The agency urged local officials to assess whether a bad outbreak is occurring in a community when making decisions about sending adults and children in to schools.

The guidance included a color-coded chart, from blue to red, on assessing community spread, including rates of new cases per 100,000 people and the percentage of positive tests.

That said, high community transmission does not necessarily mean schools cannot be open — especially those at the elementary level. If school mitigation measures are strictly followed, the risk of spread in the schools should still be low, the guidance suggests.

The document suggests that when things get risky, elementary schools can go hybrid, providing in-person instruction at least on some days, but that middle and high schools might go virtual.

"The older children get ... the more they act like adults in terms of transmission and disease," Walensky explained. "So when we are in areas of high transmission, we have pushed more for elementary school hybrid learning."

Government officials estimate that about 60% of K-12 schools right now have some form of in-person learning going on, though in many cases it may be part-time.

Schools also can tighten up restrictions for the in-person learning that is going on. For example, the CDC continues to recommend that children be spaced 6 feet apart in school settings. But it should be required when there's a worrisome surge of new infections in the community, said Greta Massetti, a CDC official who led much of the work on the new guidance.

Biden has been caught between competing interests as he works to get students in the classroom without spurning the powerful teachers unions that helped get him elected. Critics say he has bowed to unions instead of taking more aggressive action on reopening.

Unlike former President Donald Trump, who pressured schools to open and blasted the CDC for issuing guidance that he said was impractical, Biden has kept his distance from the CDC as it works on recommendations. Even after the CDC's director recently said that vaccinations are not a prerequisite for reopening, the White House declined to take a firm stance on the question.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that "no one on our senior staff" had seen the CDC guidelines ahead of their release. "I can assure you that the White House is not directing the CDC."

Biden's national strategy says the administration "will also work with states and local school districts to support screening testing in schools, including working with states to ensure an adequate supply of test kits."

But the CDC guidance stops short of recommending testing, saying "Some schools may also elect to use screening testing as a strategy to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission."

In the early days of the U.S. epidemic, some health experts worried that schools might become cauldrons of coronavirus infection, with kids infecting each other and then spreading it to family members — as seems to be the case during cold and flu season.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's team glosses over his Jan. 6 tirade

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's legal team thoroughly distorted his remarks from the rally that

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prefaced the storming of the Capitol last month, seizing on the one instance when Trump spoke of peaceful protest in his "fight like hell" tirade of anger and grievance.

Trump attorney Michael van der Veen accused House Democratic impeachment managers of showing selectively edited scenes of the violence and Trump's words Jan. 6.

Yet he ignored the incendiary substance and tenor of that staging speech as well as the president's words of affection for the attackers later, while they were still hunting for lawmakers and sacking their offices. He ignored the fact, too, that all of Trump's provocations that day and for weeks beforehand had the lie of a stolen election at their core.

Another Trump lawyer, Bruce Castor, denied that the siege was an insurrection, saying that's a "term of art" not merited by the events of that day. Actually it's a term of dictionaries and legal texts, and what happened Jan. 6 was an insurrection.

A look at rhetoric from the Senate impeachment trial, where Trump is charged with inciting the siege of the Capitol before Congress affirmed his defeat to Joe Biden in the presidential election:

VAN DER VEEN: "No thinking person could seriously believe that the president's Jan. 6 speech on the Ellipse was in any way an incitement to violence or insurrection. ... Nothing in the text could ever be construed as encouraging, condoning or enticing unlawful activity of any kind. Far from promoting insurrection against the United States, the president's remarks explicitly encouraged those in attendance to exercise their rights peacefully and patriotically."

THE FACTS: This characterization does not resemble Trump's speech. For more than an hour, Trump made the case that he and his supporters at the rally had been "cheated" and "defrauded" in the "rigged" election by a "criminal enterprise" made up of some of the "weak" legislators the insurrectionists were about to confront.

As for Trump "explicitly" encouraging non-violence, as the lawyer put it, the president's sole gesture in the speech was this passing remark, lost in the winds of that day's rage: "I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."

There were no other approximate appeals for calm, order or respect for the institutions that Trump assailed in the speech as a "swamp."

"That was the one time, the only time, President Trump used the word 'peaceful' or any suggestion of non-violence," Rep. Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, one of the Democratic impeachment managers, said during the trial. "President Trump used the word 'fight' or 'fighting' 20 times."

Her count is correct. In addition, Trump thanked supporters when they chanted: "Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!"

To be sure, not all of Trump's "fighting" words were about the march to the Capitol. Some were about the political struggle to reverse a fair and certified election that he lost or about his other struggles in Washington.

But he sent his followers off to the Capitol with these words: "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

This, after his lawyer Rudy Giuliani had told the crowd: "Let's have trial by combat."

This, after Trump had summoned his followers to Washington in the first place with the promise: "Be there, will be wild!"

At the rally, Trump roused his followers with words such as these:

—"Let the weak ones get out. This is a time for strength." This was in reference to Republicans in Congress who weren't going along with his effort to subvert the election.

—"You have to show strength, and you have to be strong." That was to the marchers specifically.

—"When you catch somebody in a fraud, you are allowed to go by very different rules." Despite this remark, van der Veen argued Friday that the "entire premise" of Trump's rally speech was that the democratic process should "play out according to the letter of the law."

—"You will have an illegitimate president. That is what you will have, and we can't let that happen." A reference to Biden's ascendance to the presidency if he wasn't stopped.

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—“We are going to the Capitol,” Trump told his followers, to “try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So let’s walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.” Actually, he didn’t go with them.

For all of that, his attorney Friday contended that Trump had “devoted nearly his entire speech to an extended discussion” of the voting process.

During the melee that ensued, Trump made a video telling the attackers it was time to “go home.” Only when the violence was underway did he stress the need for “law and order” and “peace.” But he added: “We love you. You’re very special people.” Others are “so bad and evil.”

He followed later with a tweet that expressed no concern with the deadly consequences of the siege. He appeared to see justice in what had transpired.

“These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long,” he wrote. “Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!”

CASTOR: “Clearly, there was no insurrection. Insurrection is a term of art, defined in the law, involves taking over a country ... a shadow government taking the TV stations over and having some plan on what you’re going to do when you finally take power.”

THE FACTS: It was a textbook insurrection.

As “defined in the law,” an insurrection is “the act or an instance of revolting esp. violently against civil or political authority or against an established government,” according to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of Law.

Under the U.S. Code, the crime of insurrection is committed by “Whoever incites, sets on foot, assists, or engages in any rebellion or insurrection against the authority of the United States or the laws thereof, or gives aid or comfort thereto.”

Apart from the law and legal texts, insurrection is defined by Webster’s New World College Dictionary, which is used by The Associated Press, as “a rising up against established authority; rebellion; revolt.”

On Jan. 6, attackers rose up physically and violently against the established authorities — Congress, as it was carrying out its constitutional duties surrounded and protected by U.S. government staff and police. Many in the siege were intent on stopping Congress from affirming Trump’s defeat.

An insurrection is commonly understood to mean a short-lived revolt that fails, as this one did. Castor may have been conflating an insurrection with a coup d’état, which suggests a more organized and advanced effort to seize power, perhaps involving a shadow government ready to take over. Jan. 6 was not that.

EDITOR’S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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‘I am a child!’ Pepper spray reflects policing of Black kids

By DEEPTI HAJELA and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

The 9-year-old Black girl sat handcuffed in the backseat of a police car, distraught and crying for her father as the white officers grew increasingly impatient while they tried to wrangle her fully into the vehicle.

“This is your last chance,” one officer warned. “Otherwise pepper spray is going in your eyeballs.”

Less than 90 seconds later, the girl had been sprayed and was screaming, “Please, wipe my eyes! Wipe my eyes, please!”

What started with a report of “family trouble” in Rochester, New York, and ended with police treating a fourth-grader like a crime suspect, has spurred outrage as the latest example of law enforcement mistreatment of Black people.

As the U.S. undergoes a new reckoning on police brutality and racial injustice in the wake of George Floyd’s death last May, the girl’s treatment illustrates how even young children are not exempt.

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Research shows Black children are often viewed as being older than they are, and are more likely to be seen as threatening or dangerous. Advocates have long said that leads to police treating them in ways they wouldn't dream of treating white children. In some cases it has led to fatalities like the killing of Tamir Rice, a Black 12-year-old shot by a white police officer in Cleveland in 2014.

"Black children have never been given their opportunity to be children," said Kristin Henning, law professor and director of the Juvenile Justice Clinic and Initiative at Georgetown Law.

A study published in the journal *Pediatrics* in late 2020 found Black children and teenagers were six times as likely to die from police gunfire as white children. It analyzed data from police use of force in situations involving young people between the ages of 12 and 17 from 2003 to 2018.

"Black children have really been seen as older, more culpable, less amenable to rehabilitation and less worthy of the Western notions of innocence and the Western notions of childhood," Henning said.

The headlines from Rochester were deeply personal for Mando Avery, whose 7-year-old son was hit by pepper spray from a police officer aiming at someone else during a protest in Seattle last summer. The spray left his son's face and chest painful and swollen from chemical burns for several days, and even required a visit to the emergency room.

He has since had nightmares and now fears police. Small things can bring back bad memories, like using a spray bottle to do his hair.

"Their innocence goes away much, much sooner," Avery said. "What kind of temper tantrum leads to handcuffing a child?"

In the Rochester case, the girl's mother called police on Jan. 29 after an argument with her spouse and said she asked officers to call mental health services when her daughter grew increasingly upset.

But police body camera video shows only officers at the scene, first handcuffing the girl's hands behind her back and then growing increasingly impatient as they tried to get her into the police car, culminating in the pepper spray.

There's a point in the video when an officer says, "You're acting like a child!" to which the girl replies, "I am a child!"

The officers have been suspended pending an investigation. More video footage released Thursday showed the wait until an ambulance arrived for the girl.

The case comes months after the high-profile death last spring of Daniel Prude, a Black man undergoing a mental health crisis when his family called the Rochester police. Officers handcuffed him, then put a hood over his head when he spit at them. As he struggled, they pinned him face down on the ground, one officer pushing his head to the pavement until he stopped breathing.

The 9-year-old girl's mother, Elba Pope, told *The Associated Press* she didn't think the white officers saw her daughter the same way they would have seen a white child.

"Had they looked at her as if she was one of their children, they wouldn't have pepper sprayed her," she said.

Henning agreed. "This is where the question of race comes into play," she said. "If that child had looked like one of their little girls, looked like the little child that they tucked into bed, it is far less likely that they would have done that."

The president of the Rochester police union has said the officers didn't lack compassion but were dealing with a difficult situation with limited resources and were following department protocol.

New York isn't the only place where police treatment of Black children has been a flashpoint.

In suburban Denver, four Black girls aged 6 to 17 were detained by police at gunpoint after they were wrongly suspected of being in a stolen car last year.

One officer tried to handcuff the 6-year-old, who was wearing a tiara for what was supposed to be a girls day out with her relatives, but the cuffs were too big, according to a lawsuit filed by the family.

In North Texas, a white police officer was recorded on video pushing a swimsuit-clad Black girl to the ground at a pool party in 2015. Later that year, a sheriff's deputy at a school in South Carolina flipped a girl to the floor and dragged her across a classroom after she refused to surrender her cellphone in math class.

In Tamir Rice's case, the 12-year-old was playing with a pellet gun in November 2014 when Cleveland

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police responding to a call pulled up and within seconds, shot him. When his 14-year-old-sister ran to the scene, she was pushed to the ground and handcuffed. The officers were not indicted.

It's that history that makes Christian Gibbs, a Black father of three daughters, grateful the girl in Rochester wasn't more grievously injured — and angered that's even a worry.

"Thank God she wasn't killed. ... And the fact that we have to say that is already an indictment of the type of treatment that we expect to be doled out, even to little children," said Gibbs, 46, of Bowie, Maryland.

Holly M. Frye, of South Ogden, Utah, said she has near-daily conversations with her three children about how to act around police officers, the same kind of conversations her parents had with her.

"This sort of aggression toward the Black race has always been in existence, it's just being recorded now," she said. "It's a topic that never leaves our kitchen table, we're always constantly talking about it."

While data is scarce on very young children's interactions with police, Black youths are nearly five times as likely to be incarcerated compared with white young people, according to an analysis by the nonprofit The Sentencing Project.

The incarceration rate for white youth is 83 per 100,000; for Black youths that number jumps to 383, The Sentencing Project found. While that is partly due to differences in offending, studies have found teenagers of color are more likely to be arrested and more likely to face severe consequences compared with their white peers, the report said.

And it's not just policing and the criminal justice system. Black students face higher rates of suspension and expulsion from school, said Judith Browne Dianis, executive director of the Advancement Project, which fights against structural racism.

It's "the way that our Black children are questioned by adults, with this underlying assumption that they are not to be believed, and they're not to be trusted, and that they're always up to something wrong," she said.

That leads to trauma and mistrust on the part of Black youth toward the authorities around them, she said. "There is no 'Officer Friendly' for Black kids," she said.

Hajela reported from Essex County, New Jersey, Whitehurst reported from Salt Lake City. Associated Press writer Carolyn Thompson in Buffalo, New York, contributed to this report.

Hajela is a member of the Race and Ethnicity reporting team at The Associated Press.

Biden: Governors, mayors need \$350 billion to fight COVID-19

By JOSH BOAK and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden met with a bipartisan group of governors and mayors at the White House on Friday as part of his push to give financial relief from the coronavirus pandemic to state and local governments — a clear source of division with Republican lawmakers who view the spending as wasteful.

As part of a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus package, Biden wants to send \$350 billion to state and local governments and tribal governments. While Republicans in Congress have largely objected to this initiative, Biden's push has some GOP support among governors and mayors.

"You folks are all on the front lines and dealing with the crisis since day one," Biden said at the start of the Oval Office meeting. "They've been working on their own in many cases."

Republican lawmakers have stressed that some past aid to state and local governments remains unspent and revenues have rebounded after slumping when the coronavirus first hit. But state governments have shed 332,000 jobs since the outbreak began to spread last February, and local governments have cut nearly 1 million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Republican Govs. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas and Larry Hogan of Maryland attended the Friday meeting, along with Democratic governors, including New York's Andrew Cuomo and New Mexico's Michelle Lujan Grisham. The mayors of Atlanta, Detroit, Miami and Arlington, Texas, also were at the meeting. New

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Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell was set to attend, but she could not because a White House test showed she was positive for the coronavirus, according to her press secretary. A second test taken later came back negative.

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, a Republican, called the discussion spirited and said the past aid to local governments was insufficient, so more money was needed.

"Our residents got a fraction of the help that they needed," Suarez said at the White House briefing, adding that the city is "going to put the money to good use."

Under the relief package being crafted in House committees this week, every state and the District of Columbia would get at least \$500 million, but most of the money going to states would be distributed based on their share of unemployed workers nationally.

Hutchinson said he objected to the plan's \$1.9 trillion price tag and the strategy of using jobs figures to guide the flow of money to state and local governments.

"That's really a disincentive for economic growth and people working," Hutchinson told The Associated Press. "I said the only fair way to do it is to distribute money to the states on a per capita basis. That's fair, it's undisputable and I think, by and large, most governors understand that and want that."

Local governments would get \$130.2 billion, and tribal governments would get \$20 billion.

The money could be used to cover costs incurred because of the pandemic and lost revenue and to address the negative economic impact of the disease.

Congress provided \$150 billion in direct assistance to state and local governments in an earlier relief package signed into law last March.

Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform debated the merits of the spending for state and local governments on Friday.

Rep. Carolyn Maloney, the committee's Democratic chair, said states and communities are desperate for help at a time when the pandemic continues to take lives and livelihoods.

"This money will allow these governments to distribute vaccines faster, expand testing more broadly and maintain vital services across our country," Maloney said. "It will also help Main Street economies and save the jobs of our teachers, first responders and other essential workers."

Republican lawmakers described the proposed \$350 billion in spending as a boondoggle that in the long run could cause inflation and an economic crash.

Rep. James Comer, the ranking Republican, said states still have money to spend from the relief package Congress passed last March. He played a video clip of California Gov. Gavin Newsom recently talking about how higher-than-expected revenues would allow the state to boost its cash reserves.

"Despite this surplus, California is still receiving an additional \$41.2 billion in taxpayer dollars from this \$350 billion slush fund," Comer said. He went on to describe the spending as a "big blue state bailout."

Boak reported from Baltimore. Associated Press writers Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Ark., and Chevel Johnson in New Orleans contributed to this report.

Religion and the death penalty collide at the Supreme Court

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is sending a message to states that want to continue to carry out the death penalty: Inmates must be allowed to have a spiritual adviser by their side as they are executed.

The high court around midnight Thursday declined to let Alabama proceed with the lethal injection of Willie B. Smith III. Smith had objected to Alabama's policy that his pastor would have had to observe his execution from an adjacent room rather than the death chamber itself.

The order from the high court follows two years in which inmates saw some rare success in bringing challenges based on the issue of chaplains in the death chamber. This time, liberal and conservative members of the court normally in disagreement over death penalty issues found common ground not on

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the death penalty itself but on the issue of religious freedom and how the death penalty is carried out.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of three justices who said they would have let Smith's execution go forward, said Alabama's policy applies equally to all inmates and serves a state interest in ensuring safety and security. But he said it was apparent that his colleagues who disagreed were providing a path for states to follow.

States that want to avoid months or years of litigation over the presence of spiritual advisers "should figure out a way to allow spiritual advisors into the execution room, as other States and the Federal Government have done," he wrote in a dissent joined by Chief Justice John Roberts. Justice Clarence Thomas also would have allowed the execution of Smith, who was sentenced to die for the 1991 murder of 22-year-old Sharma Ruth Johnson in Birmingham.

Alabama had up until 2019 allowed a Christian prison chaplain employed by the state to be physically present in the execution chamber if requested by the inmate, but the state changed its policy in response to two earlier Supreme Court cases.

Robert Dunham, the executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, says the court's order will most clearly affect states in the Deep South that have active execution chambers. Dunham said most state execution protocols, which set who is present in the death chamber, do not mention spiritual advisers. For most of the modern history of the U.S. death penalty since the 1970s, spiritual advisers have not been present in execution chambers, he said.

The federal government, which under President Donald Trump resumed federal executions following a 17-year hiatus and carried out 13 executions, allowed a spiritual adviser to be present in the death chamber. The Biden administration is still weighing how it will proceed in death penalty cases.

The court's order in Smith's case contained only statements from Kavanaugh and Justice Elena Kagan. "Willie Smith is sentenced to death, and his last wish is to have his pastor with him as he dies," Kagan wrote for herself and liberal justices Sonia Sotomayor and Stephen Breyer, as well as conservative Amy Coney Barrett. Kagan added: "Alabama has not carried its burden of showing that the exclusion of all clergy members from the execution chamber is necessary to ensure prison security."

Justice Neil Gorsuch and Justice Samuel Alito did not make public their views, but at least one or perhaps both of them must have voted with their liberal colleagues to keep Smith's execution on hold.

The court's yearslong wrestling with the issue of chaplains in the death chamber began in 2019, when the justices declined to halt the execution of Alabama inmate Domineque Ray. Ray had objected that a Christian chaplain employed by the prison typically remained in the execution chamber during a lethal injection, but the state would not let his imam be present.

The next month, however, the justices halted the execution of a Texas inmate, Patrick Murphy, who objected after Texas officials wouldn't allow his Buddhist spiritual adviser in the death chamber. Kavanaugh wrote at the time that states have two choices: Allow all inmates to have a religious adviser of their choice in the execution room or allow that person only in an adjacent viewing room.

In response, the Texas prison system changed its policy, allowing only prison security staff into the execution chamber. But in June, the high court kept Texas from executing Ruben Gutierrez after he objected to the new policy.

Diana Verm, a lawyer at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which had submitted briefs in two of the spiritual adviser cases, said it was unusual for the court with its conservative majority to halt executions.

"You can tell from some of the opinions that the justices don't like the last-minute nature of execution litigation, but this is an area where they are saying: 'Listen ... religious liberty has to be a part of the process if it's going to happen,'" Verm said.

After yearslong separation, Sharpton files for divorce

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 16 years after separating, civil rights activist Rev. Al Sharpton has filed for divorce from his estranged wife, Kathy Jordan Sharpton.

Paperwork for a contested divorce was filed Thursday in Manhattan Supreme Court.

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A statement attributed to both of them said: "After years of being separated, Kathy and I have decided to formalize our separation by filing for divorce. We plan to resolve this in an amicable manner. We remain good friends and our highest concern is the well-being of our grandson."

The couple had been married for more than 20 years when a separation was announced in November 2004. They have two daughters together.

Biden will try to close Guantanamo after 'robust' review

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will seek to close the prison on the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay following a review process, resuming a project begun under the Obama administration, the White House said Friday.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said it was the "intention" of the Biden administration to close the detention facility, something President Barack Obama pledged to do within a year shortly after he took office in January 2009.

Psaki gave no timeline, telling reporters that the formal review would be "robust" and would require the participation of officials from the Department of Defense, the Justice Department and other agencies who have not yet been appointed under the new administration.

"There are many players from different agencies who need to be part of this policy discussion about the steps forward," she said.

Obama ran into intense domestic political opposition when he sought to close the detention center, a notorious symbol of the U.S. fight against terrorism. Biden may have more leeway now that there are only 40 prisoners left and Guantanamo draws much less public attention, though his announcement did draw some immediate criticism.

The U.S. opened the detention center in January 2002 to hold people suspected of ties to al-Qaida and the Taliban. It became a source of international criticism over the mistreatment of prisoners and the prolonged imprisonment of people without charge.

The announcement of a closure plan was not unexpected. Biden had said as a candidate he supported closing the detention center. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said so as well in written testimony for his Senate confirmation.

"Guantanamo has provided us the capability to conduct law of war detention in order to keep our enemies off the battlefield, but I believe it is time for the detention facility at Guantanamo to close," Austin said.

The 40 remaining prisoners at Guantanamo include five who were previously cleared for release through an intensive review process created under Obama as part of the effort to close the detention center and transfer the remaining prisoners to facilities in the U.S.

At its peak in 2003, the detention center at the Navy base on the southeast tip of Cuba held nearly 680 prisoners. Amid the international outrage, President George W. Bush called it a "a propaganda tool for our enemies and a distraction for our allies" and said he supported closing it but left it to his successor.

Under Bush, the U.S. began efforts to prosecute some prisoners for war crimes in tribunals known as military commissions. It also released 532 prisoners.

Obama vowed to close the detention center, while keeping the larger Navy base, but ran into fierce political opposition over plans to prosecute and imprison men in the U.S. and concerns that returning others to their homeland would pose a security risk.

To some extent at least, that opposition remains. "The Democrats' obsession with bringing terrorists into Americans' backyards is bizarre, misguided, and dangerous," Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican from Texas, said after the White House announcement Friday. "Just like with President Obama, Republicans will fight it tooth and nail."

Obama argued that keeping the detention center was not just a bad policy but a waste of money, costing more than \$445 million per year in 2016.

Under his administration, 197 were repatriated or resettled in other countries.

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That left 41 under Trump, who pledged at one point to "load it up" with some "bad dudes." He never did and approved a single release, a Saudi prisoner who had reached a plea deal in his war crimes case.

Of those who remain at Guantanamo, there are 10 men facing trial by military commission. They include five men charged with planning and providing logistical support to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The case has been bogged down in pre-trial proceedings for years.

Human rights groups who have long championed the closure of Guantanamo welcomed Biden's announcement.

"For almost two decades, the United States has denied justice to the hundreds of men the government has kept detained at Guantánamo Bay indefinitely, without charge or trial," said Daphne Eviatar, director of the Security with Human Rights Program at Amnesty International USA. "Forty men remain there today. It is long past time to close it down."

Nebraska Sen. Sasse bets political future on opposing Trump

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — When Ben Sasse heard that GOP activists in Nebraska were primed to censure him for insufficiently supporting Donald Trump, the Republican senator didn't try to talk them out of it. Instead, he punched first.

In a five-minute video posted to Facebook and YouTube, Sasse ripped fellow Republicans for following a "cult of personality" and "acting like politics is religion."

It's the no-apologies approach Nebraskans have come to expect — and even appreciate — from their junior senator, who perhaps more than any other rising Republican leader is cultivating anti-Trumpism as his brand.

Sasse has said Trump's claims of election fraud were "lies" and that Trump "riled a mob that attacked the Capitol" on Jan. 6, when Congress was voting to affirm Joe Biden's election victory. Sasse is among the small group of Republicans considered most likely to vote to convict Trump on the charge of inciting an insurrection when the Senate impeachment trial concludes.

Sasse's criticism of Trump is angering plenty of activists in deeply Republican Nebraska. But Sasse is also winning some respect for speaking his mind even when it's unpopular, a trait that some Republicans said reminded them of the former president himself.

"I'd rather have him say what he's seeing and what he's thinking," said Tracy Fackler, an Omaha auto repair shop owner, who like many across the state said he voted for Trump for much the same reason.

Sasse, who was elected to a second six-year term last year, does not have to worry much about the consequences of his anti-Trump campaign in a state that Trump won by 18 percentage points in November. Sasse's more immediate risk is how his votes on impeachment will go over with Republicans if he were to run for president in 2024.

Of the small number of Republican senators who've sided with Democrats on impeachment, only the 48-year-old Sasse is viewed as still aspiring to higher office. He is, in effect, betting there's a political future in trying to fight for the comeback of the establishment Republican party.

"We still agree on some big things," he said in his video, pointing to values his party often promoted before Trump. "Rule of law. Constitutionalism. Limited government."

Even in Nebraska, Sasse has some reason to think there's a market for what he's selling.

He won almost 27,000 more votes than Trump in the state, proving better at holding on to wayward GOP voters and winning over Democrats. Twenty-one percent of Nebraska Democrats backed Sasse while just 4% supported Trump, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate. Meanwhile, 7% of Republicans voted for Biden, while 3% of Republicans voted for Sasse's challenger, Democrat Chris Janicek.

Sasse benefited from a scandal that befell Janicek. But the incumbent also showed strength in swing-voting neighborhoods of suburban Omaha, places that resemble those presidential battleground-state suburbs where Trump lost ground last year.

"I think he's just a man who stands up for common principles and values, and doesn't go along with

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Trump," said Mike Lewis, a 56-year-old real estate agent from south Omaha and a registered Democrat for 30 years who calls himself a moderate. "I believe he is a man of morals and principles, and not party lines."

It's a diverse, older, first-ring suburb of neighborhoods and small businesses — not unlike pockets of working- and middle-class voters just outside Milwaukee, or St. Paul, Minn. Omaha's once-thriving stockyards are just a mile to the east and steam rises overhead from Nebraska Beef and other smaller meatpackers.

Scraping ice off his sidewalk a few blocks away, Fackler also praised Sasse for "speaking his piece."

"It wasn't popular what he said because of the way he said it. Everyone else just pussyfoots around, and he just told it like it was," said Fackler, adding that he had been an infrequent voter until Sasse ran in 2014 and Trump two years later. "When you take on the party, you're going to take a lot of criticism."

A block away, Leah Fontenelle braved the single digits on her front stoop to side with Fackler.

"I would rather have someone speak his mind than just bow to the party," said the 65-year-old retired medical supply director who voted for Trump. "The party doesn't speak for everyone."

But its elected officials should represent the party's views, said Kolene Woodward.

More than 450 miles west, the Scotts Bluff County GOP chair had grown furious with Sasse by mid-January after the senator said Trump had "consistently lied by claiming that he 'won the election by a landslide'" and that the then-president was "derelict in his duty to defend the Constitution and uphold the rule of law" during the Capitol siege.

"He's made such a public spectacle of his hatred for President Trump. And that's not the way Nebraska feels," Woodward said. She described Sasse as "Oh, just so disrespectful to the former president."

Three other county GOP committees have voted to censure Sasse. The state Republican central committee is expected to consider at least eight separate resolutions to censure him when it meets next month.

Several other Republicans have faced similar scolding at home, including Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, Fred Upton of Michigan and Tom Rice of South Carolina.

Sasse's criticism of Trump isn't the only complaint Republicans have against the senator. Some Republicans grumble about his professorial style. Sasse has degrees from Harvard and Yale, and later was president of Midland University, a Christian school in eastern Nebraska.) Critics also say that in his six years in office, Sasse has not led on a marquee piece of legislation or regularly participated party fundraising.

During his 2014 campaign, Sasse said repeatedly that he identified more as a conservative than a Republican.

The sentiment came through in the video Sasse released Feb. 4. He cast angry state GOP committee members as out of step with not just some on the committee itself but with other Nebraska Republicans and, even more broadly, Nebraska voters.

Purging "Trump skeptics" would be "terrible for our party," he said, and appealed for refocusing on shared conservative principles.

It's a tack that could persuade Lewis, the self-described moderate Democrat, to back Sasse on the national stage.

"I don't agree with him all the time," Lewis said. "But I agree with his principles and willingness to speak his mind."

White House aide suspended for threatening reporter

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House deputy press secretary T.J. Ducklo has been suspended for a week without pay after he reportedly issued a sexist and profane threat to a journalist seeking to cover his relationship with another reporter.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Friday that Ducklo's conduct was "completely unacceptable." Psaki said while she had not spoken about the incident with President Joe Biden, Ducklo and aides "at the highest levels" of the White House's communications team had apologized for the incident.

"No one wants anyone to feel uncomfortable, to be put in an uncomfortable position," Psaki said.

Psaki said in a statement earlier Friday that Ducklo had been suspended without pay with the approval

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of White House chief of staff Ron Klain. She said Ducklo "is the first to acknowledge this is not the standard of behavior set out" by Biden, and that Ducklo had sent the reporter in question "a personal note professing his profound regret."

Ducklo's personal life came under scrutiny earlier this week when Politico reported on his relationship with a reporter for the news outlet Axios who was assigned to cover the Biden campaign and its transition. Before Politico broke the story Tuesday, People Magazine published a glowing profile of the relationship. It was the first time either one had publicly acknowledged the relationship.

On Friday, Vanity Fair published a report citing two unnamed sources that Ducklo had threatened the Politico reporter to try to suppress the story, telling her "I will destroy you."

Psaki, White House communications director Kate Bedingfield and Anita Dunn, director of West Wing operations, were all reportedly involved in conversations with Politico editors about the incident. Psaki said that when Ducklo returns, he won't be assigned to work with any Politico reporters.

President Donald Trump's White House was known for an adversarial relationship with reporters, and both Trump himself and his lead spokespeople would frequently pick fights with and lob personal attacks at reporters from behind the podium. But the Biden White House sought to strike a more cordial and professional tone with the Washington press corps from the start, installing a cadre of seasoned Washington communicators led by Psaki.

On her first day behind the podium, Psaki told reporters, "I have deep respect for the role of a free and independent press in our democracy and for the role all of you play."

"There will be moments when we disagree," Psaki added, "but we have a common goal, which is sharing accurate information with the American people."

Biden offered his own standard for the conduct he expects from his staff in comments he made during a virtual swearing-in with staff the day he was sworn in.

"I'm not joking when I say this: If you ever work with me and I hear you treat another colleague with disrespect, talk down to someone, I will fire you on the spot," he said that day. "No ifs, ands or buts."

Confronted with those comments from the president, Psaki reiterated that Ducklo's conduct "doesn't meet our standards, it doesn't meet the president's standard, and it was important that we took a step to make that clear."

The apologies offered by her team, along with Ducklo's weeklong suspension, were "an important step to send the message that we don't find it acceptable," Psaki added.

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Biden policies did not lead to thousands of Shell layoffs

CLAIM: Shell is eliminating 9,000 jobs because of President Joe Biden.

THE FACTS: A post circulating on Facebook falsely links Shell layoffs to the Biden administration. "Shell oil laying off 9000 workers Thanks Biden," states the false post. But energy producer Royal Dutch Shell announced in September, before Biden was even elected, that the company would cut up to 9,000 jobs worldwide. At the time, Shell said that around 1,500 employees had agreed to take voluntary redundancy. The cuts follow a drop in oil demand during the pandemic. The false posts emerged weeks after Biden signed an executive order his first day in office revoking the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline, halting construction. The 1,700-mile pipeline was planned to carry roughly 800,000 barrels of oil a day from Alberta in Canada to the Texas Gulf Coast. Biden's executive order cited economic and climate reasons for revoking the permit. Keystone XL President Richard Prior said over 1,000 jobs, the majority unionized, will be eliminated in the coming weeks. "The assertion that Shell is eliminating jobs as a result of moves made

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by the Biden administration is inaccurate," Anna Arata, a spokesperson for Shell, told the AP in an email. Arata further stated that "up to 9,000 positions would be eliminated as part of a broader effort to reduce costs, simplify the company's structure and accelerate investments in lower-carbon energy products."

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this report.

Video taken election night doesn't show illegal activity in Detroit

CLAIM: Newly discovered video from election night at the TCF Center in Detroit shows tens of thousands of illegal ballots were delivered eight hours after the deadline.

THE FACTS: The video doesn't show anything illicit. It shows the city delivering legal ballots to be counted, as expected. The conservative website The Gateway Pundit is using a new video to recycle old misinformation about Michigan's presidential election. In an article published Feb. 5, it spins a tale of fraudulent ballots delivered in the early hours of the morning the day after the election. The article quotes Michigan resident Shane Trejo, a writer for the right-leaning website Big League Politics, who claims to have witnessed "thousands of ballots" being delivered to the TCF Center at 3:30 a.m. "well after the 8:00 p.m. deadline for ballots to show up." The article also claims to show "proof of the fraud" on film, sharing a seven-minute video of testimony from Michigan residents clipped together with footage of a white van delivering ballots to the TCF Center for counting early in the morning. But this article and video don't show proof of fraud. Contrary to Trejo's claims, the 8 p.m. deadline on Election Day was for voters to cast their ballots, not for those ballots to be delivered or counted. In big cities such as Detroit, it is customary for ballots to be processed at clerk offices before they are sent to counting boards, Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson's office explained on her website. "In many larger jurisdictions, absentee ballots that arrived on Election Day were marked as received and put through security checks at clerk offices prior to being brought to absent voter counting boards," Benson's office said. "If a ballot arrived at a clerk's office at 8 p.m., it may not move through the process and be sent to the counting board for several hours. This is why, in cities including Detroit, ballots arrived at counting boards several hours after polling places had closed." It's true that a white van used by the city arrived at the TCF Center to deliver about 16,000 ballots in the early hours of the morning on Nov. 4, according to a sworn affidavit from Christopher Thomas, a former state elections chief who worked at the TCF Center on election night. But there was nothing fraudulent or illegal about that. Thomas added that no ballots received after 8 p.m. on Nov. 3 "were ever at the TCF Center." In a Nov. 13 order, Wayne County Circuit Chief Judge Timothy Kenny declined to stop the certification of Detroit-area votes, ruling that allegations of fraud at the TCF Center on election night were "incorrect and not credible." The Gateway Pundit and Big League Politics did not respond to requests for comment.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Semora, North Carolina, contributed this report.

Fox News did air parts of ceremony for officer who died after Capitol riot

CLAIM: While television networks such as CNN and MSNBC broadcast live coverage of the Feb. 2 ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda honoring slain U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, Fox News ignored the ceremony entirely.

THE FACTS: Fox News did not air the entire ceremony for Sicknick live on its main cable channel, but two of its hosts briefly cut to the event. Fox News also streamed the ceremony for Sicknick, who died after defending the Capitol during the insurrection on Jan. 6, live on its Facebook page and YouTube channel. On the evening on Feb. 2, President Joe Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and a handful of other congressional leaders paid their respects as Sicknick lay in honor in the building he died trying to protect. In the days following the ceremony, social media users criticized Fox News, claiming the network skipped coverage of Sicknick's memorial while other news channels carried the proceedings live. "Fox News ignored the ceremony entirely," read a widely shared post from the left-leaning Facebook page Meidas Touch. "Disgraceful." The claim also circulated widely on TikTok. But the posts are misleading. A review of Fox News programming from the time of the event shows the network cut to live footage of the ceremony at least twice, once as Fox News host Sean Hannity handed

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off coverage to host Laura Ingraham, and again later in Ingraham's show. Host Shannon Bream, whose show airs after Ingraham's, also mentioned the ceremony. Unlike some networks, Fox News didn't spend a lot of time covering the ceremony live on its main cable news channel, and several social media users and journalists criticized the network for that. However, it is false to claim Fox News ignored the event entirely. A representative for Fox News confirmed the claims were false.

— Ali Swenson

Photo appearing to show Biden asleep in Oval Office is fake

CLAIM: Photo shows President Joe Biden asleep in his seat at the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office with a stack of executive orders in front of him.

THE FACTS: A photo that appears to show the newly inaugurated president asleep at his desk is fabricated. Facebook users shared the altered image this week as part of a larger post criticizing the president's age and work ethic. "AMERICA IN DECLINE," read the original post, which was screen-grabbed and shared thousands of times on Facebook. "This decrepit old grifter works MAYBE five hours a day. We traded in a work horse, for someone that belonged out to pasture or sent to the glue factory a long time ago. Nothing says we threw in the towel better than this nauseating image, the 'commander in chief' can't even stay awake." The image makes it look like Biden was asleep at his desk in the Oval Office on his first day as president, with a stack of executive orders beside him. However, a closer look reveals the photo is a composite image, with an old photo superimposed onto a recent one. Biden's body and the background in the post match AP images from Biden's first day in office, when he signed a series of executive orders at the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. Numerous photos and videos from that event confirm that Biden was awake — and wearing a black face covering — during the signing process. Biden's head in the post comes from a 2011 photo where he appears to briefly doze off as former President Barack Obama delivered a speech on the national debt.

— Ali Swenson

Photo of Tampa mayor was not taken at Super Bowl

CLAIM: Photo shows Tampa Mayor Jane Castor was not wearing a mask at the Super Bowl.

THE FACTS: Social media users are falsely claiming a photo of Castor without a mask was taken on Feb. 7 at the Super Bowl, when it was actually taken last fall at the same stadium. Jeremy Rex, a spokesperson for the mayor, confirmed the photo was taken on Sept. 30 at Raymond James Stadium during a Stanley Cup celebration for the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team. Ahead of the football championship, Castor had signed an executive order requiring people to wear face coverings at Super Bowl festivities or face fines of up to \$500, according to AP reporting. Those who attended the game were mandated to wear masks, except when eating or drinking. Social media posts about Castor this week also misinterpreted a statement she made at a Feb. 8 news conference to mean she was taking law enforcement action against fans who didn't wear masks, something her office denies. "Breaking: At a press conference Monday, Tampa Mayor Jane Castor said that maskless fans at the Super Bowl will be 'identified' by law enforcement and that police will 'handle' the situation," reads a Twitter post that shared an edited video of Castor's press conference. The clip had over 1 million views by Thursday evening. Social media users accused Castor of being a hypocrite and shared the months-old photo of her without a face covering, falsely stating the photo showed her at the Super Bowl. An Instagram post shared a screenshot of Castor at the press conference, along with the September photo of her with the caption: "Mayor of Tampa will be prosecuting maskless fans from the Super Bowl. Yet...." The misunderstanding came after a reporter asked Castor about post-Super Bowl festivities that required law enforcement intervention. The reporter began the question by stating, "I did see pretty bad things on the street," and then asked the mayor to comment on the fact that, "officers had to disperse really large crowds that were not wearing masks." Castor responded: "Those few bad actors will be identified and the Tampa police department will handle it." Rex clarified the mayor's comments to the AP. "Regarding Mayor Castor's comments during that press conference, Tampa Police are working to identify people who destroyed street signs and property during

Super Bowl celebrations NOT people who failed to wear a mask," he said in an email.

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Attacks on older Asians stoke fear as Lunar New Year begins

By DAISY NGUYEN Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Police are stepping up their patrols and volunteers are increasing their street presence after several violent attacks on older Asians stoked fear in San Francisco Bay Area Chinatowns and subdued the celebratory mood leading up to Lunar New Year.

City officials also have visited Chinatowns in San Francisco and Oakland this week to address residents' safety concerns and condemn the violence. They vowed to combat a problem that has been simmering since the start of the coronavirus pandemic but sparked new outrage after two unprovoked attacks were caught on video within a span of days and spread widely online.

In one, a young man shoved Vicha Ratanapakdee to the ground on Jan. 28 as he was taking his morning walk in San Francisco's Anza Vista neighborhood. The 84-year-old Thai man's head struck the pavement, and he died two days later in a hospital. Prosecutors charged a 19-year-old with murder and elder abuse.

On Jan. 31, a security camera caught a man in a hooded sweatshirt barreling into a 91-year-old Asian man in Oakland's Chinatown, causing him to fall face-first into the pavement, narrowly missing a bike rack. Police arrested the suspect and said he had assaulted a couple on the same block later that day and another on Feb. 1.

In just the last two weeks, authorities recorded 18 crimes against Asian Americans around Oakland's Chinatown, said Nancy O'Malley, district attorney for Alameda County.

Community advocates said the attacks have left many older Asians fearful about going out to shop for Friday's start of the Lunar New Year, the most important holiday in several East Asian countries that marks the beginning of the Chinese lunar calendar. Shops and restaurants are typically bustling in Chinatowns this time of year, but the pandemic and safety concerns have dampened the festive atmosphere.

"There's a huge amount of sadness and rage in the community," said Alvina Wong, director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network. "Folks are on edge and tense and don't know when the next thing is going to happen. They see what's happening in other cities, and it's not stopping."

The recent attacks represent the latest spike in verbal and physical attacks against Asian Americans since the coronavirus, which emerged in China, reached the United States. Stop AAPI Hate, launched by two advocacy groups to encourage Asian Americans to report such incidents, has documented more than 3,000 attacks to date.

O'Malley said older Asians are targeted because of the stereotype that they don't report crimes due to language barriers. Her office is investigating whether the attacks were racially motivated and has launched a special response unit focused on crimes against Asian Americans, especially older Asians.

She said her team will focus on outreach and encourage victims to report crimes.

"For many of the seniors, it's not part of their nature or culture to call the police. Some of them come from countries where you do everything to avoid the police," the prosecutor said. "So the more they meet with us and understand our culture, the more people will open up to us about what's been happening to them."

Oakland's new police chief, LeRonne Armstrong, visited Chinatown twice in his first week to build trust with business owners and residents and let them know about the increased presence of police there.

"We want them to feel like they're not alone," he said.

Meanwhile, the attacks have prompted volunteers to offer to walk older residents to their cars or homes after shopping.

Jacob Azevedo said more than 200 people signed up after he posted on social media the idea of an on-call buddy system to chaperone residents who feel unsafe walking alone in Oakland's Chinatown. They

also donated thousands of dollars to help him buy a personal alarm device that will be distributed to older Asians in the community.

"The only way that we can help people and stop this from happening is if everyone steps in," he said.

Azevedo said he intends to keep the program going "as long as old people don't feel safe and people are taking advantage of a vulnerable group like that."

Policeman gets suspended jail term over migrant child death

BRUSSELS (AP) — A Belgian court handed a one-year suspended prison sentence to a police officer on Friday over the shooting death of a two-year-old toddler who was in a van during a high-speed chase of suspected migrant smugglers.

The court in the southern Belgian city of Mons ruled that the police officer's version of an accidental shooting was credible but also found that he had a share of responsibility for the child's death.

According to local media, the van's driver was sentenced to four years in prison while another alleged smuggler was acquitted. The smugglers were trying to reach Britain during the pursuit.

In May 2018, police wanted to check on a suspicious van making its way through Belgium and gave chase when the driver tried to evade them. Police shot at the van during the chase, striking two-year-old Kurd Mawda Shawri in the head. She later died of her injuries.

Belgian authorities said pursuing officers shot at the car to try and stop it and had no intention of targeting the people inside. The police officer who took the shot said he tried to puncture the vehicle's left front tire and force it to come to a stop. In all, 30 people were in the van including Mawda's brother and parents.

The police officer said he fired his weapon after the van swerved in the direction of the police car. The court said using a gun to puncture a tire was a disproportionate use of force that put the van's passengers, as well as other road users, in danger.

Mawda's death has become a symbol for many Belgians of the injustice that confronts migrants and refugees fleeing their homelands to seek a better life in Europe. On Friday, demonstrators gathered outside the courthouse to support Mawda's family.

Earlier Friday, migration minister Sammy Mahdi told local broadcaster RTBF that Mawda's parents have been granted permission to remain in Belgium indefinitely and would no longer need to annually renew a temporary residence permit.

Among those who supported the "Justice For Mawda" campaign on social media are musicians Peter Gabriel and Roger Waters and British director Ken Loach.

WHO chief warns of complacency as global virus cases drop

GENEVA (AP) — The head of the World Health Organization said Friday that the drop in confirmed COVID-19 infections around the world was encouraging, but cautioned against relaxing restrictions that have helped curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the number of reported infections globally has declined for the fourth week in a row, and the number of deaths also fell for the second consecutive week.

"These declines appear to be due to countries implementing public health measures more stringently," Tedros said. "We should all be encouraged, but complacency is as dangerous as the virus itself."

"Now is not the time for any country to relax measures or for any individual to let down their guard," he added. "Every life that is lost now is all the more tragic as vaccines are beginning to be rolled out."

While the figures reported by countries to the WHO for the week ending Feb. 8 are still incomplete, the global body said so far about 1.9 million newly confirmed cases were registered worldwide, down from more than 3.2 million the previous week.

Tedros said members of a WHO expert mission who recently visited China to investigate the possible source of the outbreak would publish a summary of their findings next week.

Chinese scientists and the WHO's team of international researchers said this week that the coronavirus most likely first appeared in humans after jumping from an animal, and an alternate theory that the virus

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leaked from a Chinese lab was unlikely.

Peter Ben Embarek, the leader of the WHO mission, said Friday the labs in Wuhan that his team visited stated they had not been working with the virus that causes COVID-19, or had it in their collections before the outbreak. But he said it was possible the virus could still be present in samples that haven't yet been analyzed.

He said the team had gained a much better insight into the early stages of the outbreak and concluded there was no large cluster of the disease in Wuhan or elsewhere around the city in the months prior to the first cases in December 2019. But he added that scientists are still "far away from understanding the origin and identifying animal species and, or the pathways from which the virus could have entered the human in December."

Tedros, the WHO's director-general, said that the Geneva-based body had this week held its first meeting to help define and diagnose what he called post-COVID condition, also known as long COVID.

"This illness affects patients with both severe and mild COVID-19," he said. "Part of the challenge is that patients with long COVID can have a range of different symptoms that can be persistent or can come and go."

"Given the scale of the pandemic, we expect many people to be affected by post COVID-19 condition," said Tedros. "Of course, the best way to prevent long COVID is to prevent COVID-19 in the first place."

Sign of inequality: US salaries recover even as jobs haven't

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a stark sign of the economic inequality that has marked the pandemic recession and recovery, Americans as a whole are now earning the same amount in wages and salaries that they did before the virus struck — even with nearly 9 million fewer people working.

The turnaround in total wages underscores how disproportionately America's job losses have afflicted workers in lower-income occupations rather than in higher-paying industries, where employees have actually gained jobs as well as income since early last year.

In February 2020, Americans earned \$9.66 trillion in wages and salaries, at a seasonally adjusted annual rate, according to the Commerce Department data. By April, after the virus had flattened the U.S. economy, that figure had shrunk by 10%. It then gradually recovered before reaching \$9.67 trillion in December, the latest period for which data is available.

Those dollar figures include only wages and salaries that people earned from jobs. They don't include money that tens of millions of Americans have received from unemployment benefits or the Social Security and other aid that goes to many other households. The figures also don't include investment income.

A separate measure tracked by the Labor Department shows the same result: Total labor income, excluding government workers, was 0.6% higher in January than it was a year earlier.

That is "pretty remarkable," given the sharp drop in employment, said Michael Feroli, an economist at JPMorgan Chase.

The figures document that the vanished earnings from 8.9 million Americans who have lost jobs to the pandemic remain less than the combined salaries of new hires and the pay raises that the 150 million Americans who have kept their jobs have received.

The job cuts resulting from the pandemic recession have fallen heavily on lower-income workers across the service sector — from restaurants and hotels to retail stores and entertainment venues. By contrast, tens of millions of higher-income Americans, especially those able to work from home, have managed to keep or acquire jobs and continue to receive pay increases.

"We've never seen anything like that before," said Richard Deitz, a senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, referring to the concentration of job losses. "It's a totally different kind of downturn than we've experienced in modern times."

Of the nearly 10 million jobs that have been eliminated by the pandemic, 40% have been in restaurants, bars, hotels, arts, and entertainment. Retailers have lost nearly 400,000 jobs and many low-paying health

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care workers, such as nursing home attendants and home health care aides, have also been laid off.

On average, restaurant workers make just below \$13 an hour, according to Labor Department data. Retail cashier pay is about the same. That's less than half the economy-wide average of nearly \$30 an hour.

"It tells the story of an economy that has really tanked for the most vulnerable," said Elise Gould, an economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute. "It's shocking how small a dent that has made in the aggregate."

The figures also underscore the unusually accelerated nature of this recession. As a whole, both the job losses that struck early last spring and the initial rebound in hiring that followed have happened much faster than they did in previous recessions and recoveries. After the Great Recession, for example, it took nearly 2 1/2 years for wages and salaries to regain their pre-recession levels.

"This is one of the worst recessions we've ever had — compressed into one-tenth of the time that a normal recession would take," said Ernie Tedeschi, policy economist at the investment bank Evercore ISI. "Hopefully, the recovery will continue to be compressed as well. That's where the fears are and where the debate is."

One reason why the job losses have had relatively little impact on the nation's total pay is that so many of the affected employees worked part time. The average work week in the industry that includes hotels, restaurants and bars is just below 26 hours. That's the shortest such figure among 13 major industries tracked by the government. The next shortest is retail, at about 31 hours. The average for all industries is nearly 35 hours.

The recovery in wages and salaries helps explain why some states haven't suffered as sharp a drop in tax revenue as many had feared. That is especially true for states that rely on progressive taxes that fall more heavily on the rich. California, for example, said last month that it has a \$15 billion budget surplus. Yet many cities are still struggling, and local transit agencies, such as New York City's subway, have been hammered by the pandemic.

The wage and salary data also helps explain the steady gains in the stock market, which have been led by high-tech companies whose products are being heavily purchased and used by higher-income Americans, such as Apple iPads, Peloton bikes, or Amazon's online shopping.

This week, the New York Fed released research that underscored how focused the job losses have been. For people making less than \$30,000 a year, employment has fallen 14% as of December. For those earning more than \$85,000, it has actually risen slightly. For those in-between, employment has fallen 4%.

By contrast, job losses were much more widespread in the Great Recession of 2008-2009. Relatively higher-paying blue collar jobs in manufacturing and construction were hit worst: Construction lost 20% of its jobs, manufacturing 15%. Even a decade later, neither sector had fully recovered those jobs by the time the pandemic hit. Financial services lost 6% of its jobs in the previous recession, compared with 1% this time.

Some companies have cut wages in this recession, but on the whole the many millions of Americans fortunate enough to keep their jobs have generally received pay raises at largely pre-recession rates. Some of those income gains likely reflect cost-of-living raises; the Commerce Department's wage and salary data isn't adjusted for inflation.

Tedeschi calculates that the typical — or median — hourly pay for employed workers has risen about 3.5% in the past year, roughly the same pace as before the pandemic. That's a sign of what some economists refer to as the "sticky wages" concept: Some employers prefer to lay off workers while leaving pay largely unchanged for their remaining employees.

Truman Bewley, a retired Yale University economist who wrote a book about the concept of sticky wages, said that most companies have a key core of workers they rely on through hard times and are reluctant to cut pay for them.

And there's another reason, Bewley said, why many companies cut jobs instead of pay. While researching his book, he said a factory manager told him why his company did so: "It gets the misery out the door."

Riot video spotlights mob's focus on stopping Biden win

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

As the insurrectionists breached the U.S. Capitol, smashing windows and climbing in over the jagged glass, some of their first audible cries were a declaration of purpose: "Where are they counting the votes?"

The group encountered a single Capitol police officer who yelled: "Don't do it. Don't do it."

"Where are they counting the (expletive) votes!" they hollered as they streamed inside, wielding wooden beams and a metal baseball bat, forcing the officer to retreat, according to footage shown this week at Donald Trump's impeachment trial. Outside, others were setting up a makeshift gallows on the Capitol lawn for Trump's own vice president, Mike Pence.

The stunning and disturbing footage, some never seen publicly before, brought into clear focus how central the former president's baseless 2020 election claims were to the rioters, and how determined they were to stop lawmakers inside the Capitol from certifying Joe Biden as president. In clip after clip, the insurrectionists called out for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Pence, who were overseeing the count of Electoral College votes when the riot began.

"We were invited here! We were invited!" one man is heard screaming in one of the videos. "We were invited by the president of the United States!"

Democratic impeachment managers have shown video and audio from Jan. 6 dozens of times during the impeachment trial, often introducing and punctuating clips with an emphasis on how the rioters believed they were following Trump's orders. They say the clips prove that without Trump's attempt to overturn the election results, the Capitol riot would never have taken place.

The trial was continuing Friday with a presentation from Trump's lawyers, who have decried the use of the video footage as unnecessary. They acknowledge the violence was as dramatic and illegal as Democrats say, but contend that Trump is not responsible and that he can no longer be impeached because he is out of office. The latter argument was rejected by the majority of the Senate, but is likely to appeal to Republican senators want to be seen as condemning the violence without convicting the president.

It's counter to the Democrats' emotive and visceral presentation.

Among the clips the managers presented this week:

1. Crowds chanting "Hang Mike Pence!" Earlier that day, Trump had told a crowd, falsely, that the vice president could stop the certification of the Electoral College. "Mike Pence, I hope you're going to stand up for the good of our Constitution and for the good of our country."

2. A rioter searching for Pelosi, drawing out the first syllable of her name mockingly: "Oh, Nancy. Nancy. Where are you Nancy?"

3. Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah running down a hallway, then turning around at the direction of Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman, who was hailed for his heroism in directing a mob away from the Senate chamber with senators inside.

4. A rioter later in the group picking up a phone and pretending: "Can I speak to Pelosi? Yeah, we're coming (expletive)." "Oh, Mike Pence? We're coming for you too (expletive) traitor."

Quick thinking staffers grabbed the electoral college certificates, so the paperwork wasn't there as the rioters rummaged through paperwork on the Senate floor, paging through lawmaker's folders and taking photos.

At least 17 Republican senators would have to join Democrats for Trump to be convicted at the trial, which is considered unlikely. Only six Republicans voted with Democrats to advance the trial earlier this week, and conviction would require a two-thirds vote.

Some Republicans, including Romney and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, have told reporters how they were shocked by the footage at trial and indicated a willingness to convict Trump. But most of their GOP colleagues, while condemning the insurrection, have argued the trial is invalid because Trump has left office. Some also say Democrats haven't proven that he incited the riot.

"To me, they're losing credibility the longer they talk," said Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma.

Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, accused by Democrats and some Republicans of feeding a false narrative

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of voter fraud by challenging Biden's election victory in Pennsylvania during the electoral college count, called Thursday's presentation "very repetitive."

"I was really disappointed that they didn't engage much with the legal standards," Hawley said.

As for holding rioters accountable criminally, 200 people have been charged so far with federal crimes, including serious offenses such as assaulting federal officers and conspiracy. Investigators have been combing through thousands of photos, videos and tips from the public to try to track down hundreds more who went into the Capitol.

Authorities have been focused on whether extremist groups planned the violence in advance. They brought conspiracy charges last month against three members of the Oath Keepers, a far-right militia group, who officials say plotted to overturn Biden's victory.

One of those people, Jessica Watkins, suggested as Biden's inauguration neared that she "was awaiting direction from President Trump," prosecutors said in court papers this week.

"I am concerned this is an elaborate trap," Watkins said in a text message days after the election, according to prosecutors. "Unless the POTUS himself activates us, it's not legit. The POTUS has the right to activate units too. If Trump asks me to come, I will."

A special group of prosecutors is considering whether to bring sedition charges against any of the rioters. No charges have been brought yet in the death of Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick.

Associated Press Writer Alanna Durkin Richer contributed to this report.

AP Interview: French government to tackle child abuse issue

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France has a "deeply rooted" societal problem with child sexual abuse, the French official responsible for children and families acknowledged Friday while discussing new government plans to address it with tougher laws and heightened vigilance in schools.

Speaking in an interview with The Associated Press, Adrien Taquet, a secretary of state in the French Health Ministry, said "there are some urgent matters, and we have some urgent responses."

"But there are some very very deep issues so it's only a beginning," he added.

Proposed legal changes announced by the government this week would classify any sexual penetration of a child under age 15 by an adult as rape and expand the statute of limitations to make it easier to prosecute sexual predators. The proposed measures follow a series of high-profile cases in France that highlighted legal obstacles to prosecuting alleged child rapists.

"If you have 5 victims of a perpetrator and only the last crime can be prosecuted due to the statute of limitations, tomorrow the four previous victims will also be able to bring their case to justice," Taquet explained.

A massive online movement that saw thousands of people share accounts about sexual abuse within their families also brought attention to the issue. Over 160 French celebrities signed an appeal Friday in Le Parisien newspaper urging the government to take action.

"This is important in itself, it is important as a symbol, as a message to the society," Taquet said. "But there are so many other things we have to improve."

Changes are going "to take some time" because problems are "so deeply rooted in our society," he said.

Authorities register about 25,000 legal complaints each year about sexual abuse of children, but the actual number of cases could be up to 10 times higher, Taquet said.

French President Emmanuel Macron has promised that all elementary and middle school students will be screened for signs of sexual abuse and that prevention education will be stepped up. Taquet said teachers and other professionals who work with children will get specific training.

"Today, when (child protection) groups intervene in schools to raise these issues, systematically you have a kid or two coming at the end to tell them that something happened," Taquet said.

"So we need to extend that practice, make it systematic," help children through potential judicial pros-

education and offer psychological help, he added.

Taquet, who has been Macron's junior minister for families and children since 2019, said he is also working on specific measures to better protect children with special needs from abuse.

"It was a matter of emergency to listen to the children and to listen to the victims, to believe them," he said. "For so many years, we haven't believed them. The institutions haven't believed them."

Investigating Trump a big early move for Atlanta's new DA

By KATE BRUMBACK and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The district attorney investigating whether former President Donald Trump should face charges for attempting to pressure Georgia's elections chief into changing the results of the presidential race in his favor has a reputation as a tough courtroom veteran, not only as a prosecutor but also as a defense lawyer and judge.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who was sworn in last month after winning a resounding 2020 election victory over her former boss, entered the national spotlight Wednesday when letters to top state officials revealed her office is investigating whether illegal attempts were made to influence the state's 2020 elections. That includes the Jan. 2 phone call in which Trump was recorded asking Georgia's secretary of state to overturn his defeat.

Prosecuting Trump would likely prove a career-defining move for Willis — and one fraught with risk, said Atlanta attorney Robert James, a former district attorney in neighboring DeKalb County. Constituents in heavily Democratic Atlanta would demand an aggressive prosecution. The Republican ex-president would likely unleash an army of lawyers to defend him. And news coverage would scrutinize every step, or misstep.

"Nobody should be confused about the fact that you're going into a whirlwind," James said. "If this is what she chooses to do based on the facts and the evidence, from what I know about her as a prosecutor, she's smart enough and tough enough to handle it."

In her first weeks on the job, Willis has already faced criticism for trying to hand off two high-profile cases against police officers, including a fatal shooting. But fellow lawyers who have faced her in court say she's a skilled litigator who isn't afraid of tough cases.

"She is a hard-charging, tough trial lawyer," Atlanta defense attorney Page Pate said. "I would never question her ethics. I would never question her diligence or her intelligence. She is a bulldog when she thinks she's on the right side."

Willis worked 17 years as an assistant district attorney under Paul Howard, who was Georgia's first Black DA when he took office in 1997. Before challenging Howard for his job in 2020, Willis spent short stints as a criminal defense lawyer and a municipal court judge.

Running an aggressive campaign in which she accused Howard of mismanagement, Willis trounced him in an August runoff election for the Democratic nomination, winning nearly 72% of the vote. With no Republican on the ballot, Willis cruised to victory in November.

In her most high-profile case under Howard, Willis served as the lead prosecutor bringing charges against nearly three dozen Atlanta public school educators accused in a cheating scandal. In April 2015, after an unwieldy trial that spanned months, a jury convicted 11 former educators of racketeering for their role in a scheme to inflate students' scores on standardized exams.

Pate, who defended one of the accused educators, said Howard bungled the case and should have lost. But Willis and her co-counsel, he said, "pieced that thing together, worked day and night to make it what it was."

The new district attorney has come under fire for seeking to offload a pair of cases against Atlanta police. One involves officers charged with dragging two Black college students from a car during May protests over racial injustice. The other deals with two officers charged in the July 12 shooting death of Rayshard Brooks, a Black man killed as he tried to flee arrest for drunken driving.

Willis last month asked Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr to reassign the cases to an outside prosecutor, arguing that her predecessor had acted improperly in the cases, including politicizing them during his

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reelection campaign. Carr declined to transfer the cases.

Though some attorneys said Willis had good reason for seeking to recuse her office, her attempt outraged members of Brooks' family.

"Not only did you hurt me, but you hurt everyone out here who was counting on you to do the right thing," Tomika Miller, Brooks' widow, said at a news conference last week. "You say that you don't run from hard cases. But, baby, you ran from this one."

Shean Williams, an Atlanta civil rights attorney who represents the family of a man killed in a different police shooting being prosecuted by Willis' office, said he understands the desire to have such cases prosecuted by the local district attorney. He applauded Willis for investigating Trump's phone call, saying it makes him hopeful she will hold police officers and others in power accountable.

It's uncertain whether Willis will seek charges against Trump or anyone else in relation to the election.

Senior Trump adviser Jason Miller has already decried the investigation, saying it's a continuation of a "witch hunt" by Democrats against the former president.

Though Willis' letters to state officials don't name Trump as a target, the prosecutor's spokesman, Jeff DiSantis, confirmed that, among other things, investigators are looking into the phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger.

Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, can be heard on the call rejecting Trump's repeated calls for him to change the state's certified results of the presidential election, which President Joe Biden won by about 12,000 votes.

"In most cases, you would have sort of a he-said, she-said case where one person is contending another party said something," said Cathy Cox, dean of the law school at Mercer University and a former Georgia secretary of state. "But you have a tape of Trump's actual words. There is no dispute of what he said."

Regardless, in cases against celebrities and public officials like Trump, even obtaining a grand jury's indictment that allows a case to proceed to a trial court can be difficult, said James, the former DeKalb County prosecutor. That's because citizens empaneled to hear such cases often find it difficult to be impartial about famous defendants, he said.

"Ultimately, as a prosecutor, your job is to prosecute cases without fear, favor or affection," James said. "You look at the law, you look at the facts, and you compare the two."

Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia. Associated Press writer Sudhin Thanawala contributed from Atlanta.

Amazon faces biggest union push in its history

By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The second Jennifer Bates walks away from her post at the Amazon warehouse where she works, the clock starts ticking.

She has precisely 30 minutes to get to the cafeteria and back for her lunch break. That means traversing a warehouse the size of 14 football fields, which eats up precious time. She avoids bringing food from home because warming it up in the microwave would cost her even more minutes. Instead she opts for \$4 cold sandwiches from the vending machine and hurries back to her post.

If she makes it, she's lucky. If she doesn't, Amazon could cut her pay, or worse, fire her.

It's that kind of pressure that has led some Amazon workers to organize the biggest unionization push at the company since it was founded in 1995. And it's happening in the unlikeliest of places: Bessemer, Alabama, a state with laws that don't favor unions.

The stakes are high. If organizers succeed in Bessemer, it could set off a chain reaction across Amazon's operations nationwide, with thousands more workers rising up and demanding better working conditions. But they face an uphill battle against the second-largest employer in the country with a history of crushing unionizing efforts at its warehouses and its Whole Foods grocery stores.

Attempts by Amazon to delay the vote in Bessemer have failed. So too have the company's efforts to

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require in-person voting, which organizers argue would be unsafe during the pandemic. Mail-in voting started this week and will go on until the end of March. A majority of the 6,000 employees have to vote "yes" in order to unionize.

Amazon, whose profits and revenues have skyrocketed during the pandemic, has campaigned hard to convince workers that a union will only suck money from their paycheck with little benefit. Spokeswoman Rachael Lighty says the company already offers them what unions want: benefits, career growth and pay that starts at \$15 an hour. She adds that the organizers don't represent the majority of Amazon employees' views.

Bates makes \$15.30 an hour unpacking boxes of deodorant, clothing and countless other items that are eventually shipped to Amazon shoppers. The job, which the 48-year-old started in May, has her on her feet for most of her 10-hour shifts. Besides lunch, Bates says trips to the bathroom are also closely monitored, as is getting a drink of water or fetching a fresh pair of work gloves. Amazon denies that, saying it offers two 30-minute breaks during each shift and extra time to use the bathroom or get water.

Fed up, Bates and a group of workers reached out to the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union last summer. She hopes the union, which also represents poultry plant workers in Alabama, will mandate more breaks, prevent Amazon from firing workers for mundane reasons and push for higher pay.

"They will be a voice when we don't have one," Bates says.

But according to Sylvia Allegretto, an economist and co-chair of the Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics at the University of California, Berkeley, "history tells us not to be optimistic."

The last time Amazon workers voted on whether they wanted to unionize was in 2014, and it was a much smaller group: 30 employees at a Amazon warehouse in Delaware who ultimately turned it down. Amazon currently employs nearly 1.3 million people worldwide.

Also working against the unionizing effort is that it's happening in Republican-controlled Alabama, which generally isn't friendly to organized labor. Alabama is one of 27 "right-to-work states" where workers don't have to pay dues to unions that represent them. In fact, the state is home to the only Mercedes-Benz plant in the world that isn't unionized.

That the union push at the Bessemer warehouse has even gotten this far is likely due to who the organizers are, says Michael Innis-Jiménez, an associate professor at the University of Alabama. Companies typically villainize union organizers as out-of-staters who don't know what workers want. But the retail union has an office in nearby Birmingham and many of the organizers are Black, like the workers in the Bessemer warehouse.

"I think that really helps a lot," Innis-Jiménez said. "They're not seen as outsiders."

More than 70% of the population of Bessemer is Black. The retail union estimates that as many as 85% of the workers are Black, much higher than the 22% for overall warehouse workers nationwide, according to an Associated Press analysis of census data.

Stuart Appelbaum, the president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, says the union's success in Bessemer is partly due to the pandemic, with workers feeling betrayed by employers that didn't do enough to protect them from the virus. And the Black Lives Matter movement, which has inspired people to demand to be treated with respect and dignity. Appelbaum says the union has heard from Amazon warehouse workers all over the country.

"They want a voice in their workplace, too," he says.

Representatives of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union spend most days outside the entrance of the Bessemer warehouse holding signs and wearing neon vests, although a lot of the unionization effort is being conducted online or by phone because of the pandemic. At the end of a recent workday, some Amazon employees leaving the plant rolled down their car windows and chatted with organizers; others hurried past without acknowledgement.

Some workers from poultry plants have helped. Among them is Michael Foster, a union representative who works at a north Alabama poultry plant but has been in town for more than a month helping with the organizing push.

He says an Amazon employee tried to shoo them away, saying they better make sure they're not on Amazon property.

"I let them know that this is not my first rodeo," says Foster, who has helped get two other poultry plants to unionize.

Inside the warehouse, Bates says Amazon has been holding daily classes on why workers should vote against the union. Lighty, the Amazon spokeswoman, says the sessions are a way for employees to get information and ask questions.

"If the union vote passes, it will impact everyone at the site and it's important all associates understand what that means for them and their day-to-day life working at Amazon," Lighty says.

Dawn Hoag says she'll vote against unionization. The 43-year-old has worked at the warehouse since April and says Amazon makes clear that its jobs are physically demanding. Plus, she says she can speak up for herself and doesn't need to pay a union to do it for her.

"That's just what I believe," Hoag says. "I don't see a need for it at all."

Unions have been forming in unusual places recently. Last month, about 225 Google engineers formed a union, a rarity in the high-paid tech industry. Google has fired outspoken workers, though the company says it was for other reasons.

At Amazon, things haven't ended well for outspoken workers either.

Last year, Amazon fired warehouse worker Christian Smalls, who led a walkout at a New York warehouse, hoping to get the company to better protect workers against the coronavirus. Office workers who joined in and spoke about working conditions in the warehouses during the pandemic were also fired, though Amazon says it was for other reasons. An Amazon executive quit in protest last spring, saying he couldn't stand by as whistleblowers were silenced.

Bates is aware of the risks.

"I know it might happen," she says about being fired. "But it's worth it."

Associated Press reporter Jay Reeves in Bessemer, Alabama and data reporter Angeliki Kastanis in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Black hospital faces vaccine mistrust from unlikely source

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — In a makeshift vaccination center at a safety-net Chicago hospital, a patient services aide ushers an older woman with a cane toward a curtained cubicle.

"Here, have a seat right here," Trenese Bland says helpfully, preparing the woman for a shot offering protection against the virus that has ravaged their Black community. But the aide has doubts about getting her own inoculation.

"It's not something that I trust right now," says Bland, 50, who worries about how quickly the COVID-19 vaccines were developed. "It's not something that I want in me."

Just 37% of the 600 doctors, nurses and support staff at Roseland Community Hospital have been vaccinated even though health care workers are first in line. Many holdouts come from the mostly Black, working class neighborhoods surrounding the hospital, areas hard hit by the virus yet plagued with vaccine reluctance.

The irony hasn't escaped organizers of a vaccination campaign at the 110-bed hospital, which until recently was overflowing with coronavirus patients. If seeing COVID-19 up close and personal isn't enough to persuade people to get vaccinated, what will?

The resistance confounds Dr. Tunji Ladipo, an emergency room physician who has seen the disease devastate countless patients and their families, and frequently works side by side with unvaccinated colleagues.

"Why people that work in the health care field would not trust the science? I don't understand that," he said.

Health experts have underscored the vaccines' safety, noting that their development was unusually quick

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but based on years of previous research and those used in the U.S. have shown no signs of serious side effects in studies of tens of thousands of people. But a history of abuses has contributed to distrust of the medical establishment among some Black Americans.

In a recent poll by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 57% of Black Americans said they'd received at least one shot or planned to be vaccinated, compared with 68% of white Americans.

Black Americans surveyed by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases cited reasons for vaccination hesitancy that echo those of Roseland employees.

The no-frills hospital, five stories of red brick, opened its doors nearly a century ago on Chicago's far South Side. Adjacent to a strip mall, auto parts store and gas station, its backyard is a residential street pockmarked by boarded-up frame homes and three-flat apartment buildings.

Doctors, nurses and staff are nearly all Black, as are the patients.

It would be hard to imagine that any are unaware of the staggering health inequities that plague the city's Black community and others across the nation.

Black people make up 30% of Chicago's population but, early in the pandemic, more than half the COVID-19 deaths. That gap has narrowed, though illness disparities that explain that risk persist, including high rates of high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. Black people are more likely to have jobs that don't provide health insurance or the luxury of working safely at home in a pandemic.

South Side neighborhoods lagged behind wealthier white ones in getting COVID-19 testing sites and recent city data shows COVID-19 vaccinations in Black and Latino residents are far behind white residents.

Without enough takers among hospital workers, Roseland has offered some of its doses to city police and bus drivers. Hospital representatives are scrambling for ways to raise awareness and boost its vaccination rates — posters, stickers, education sessions.

They even brought in veteran civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse Jackson recently to get his first shot on camera.

"African Americans have been first to be victims of the crisis, cannot be last to be seeking remedy," Jackson said before his inoculation.

Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, a Black U.S. government scientist who helped develop Moderna's vaccine, accompanied Jackson. She acknowledged "centuries of medical injustice" against Black Americans but said COVID-19 vaccines resulted from years of solid research. Trust in those vaccines, she said, is needed to save lives.

Rhonda Jones, a 50-year-old nurse at the hospital, has treated many patients with severe COVID-19, a relative died from it, and her mother and a nephew were infected and recovered, but she is still holding out.

The vaccines "came out just too fast" and haven't been adequately tested, she said. She doesn't rule out getting vaccinated, but not any time soon.

"I always tell my patients, just because a doctor orders you medication, you have to ask; you don't take it just because," Jones said. "Nursing school teachers always told us, when in doubt, check it out,"

Early in the pandemic, the hospital cafeteria shut down for two months when a worker there became infected. Still, hospital administrator Elio Montenegro said that when he questioned cafeteria staff about getting vaccinated, "every single person said, 'Nope, I'm not getting it.'"

Adam Lane, a cook, said he doesn't trust the U.S. government. He thinks political pressure rushed vaccines to the market and fears those given in Black communities are different and riskier than the ones offered to whites.

"I'm tired of the COVID. I think we all just want it to be over with," Lane said. "But I don't want to lose my soul for a quick vaccine."

Dr. Rita McGuire, an obstetrician and infection control specialist at Roseland, says countering misinformation and mistrust about vaccinations is a daily battle. Many workers "have not forgotten about those studies where they used us as experiments," McGuire said, including the infamous Tuskegee research on Black patients with syphilis.

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Many also worry about severe side effects from the vaccine, but those are extremely rare, McGuire tells them.

Some say they'll wait until the spring or summer to get vaccinated. With infection rates still high and the emergence of more contagious virus variants, "that's too late," McGuire said.

Follow AP Medical Writer Lindsey Tanner at @LindseyTanner.

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.

Chinese TV features blackface performers in New Year's gala

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese state TV included dancers in blackface portraying Africans in a holiday gala for the second time in three years, prompting criticism online, as Asia welcomed the Year of the Ox with muted festivities amid travel curbs to contain renewed coronavirus outbreaks.

The "African Song and Dance" performance Thursday came at start of the Spring Festival Gala, one of the world's most-watched TV programs. It included Chinese dancers in African-style costumes and dark face makeup beating drums.

The five-hour annual program, which state TV has said in the past is seen by as many as 800 million viewers, also included tributes to nurses, doctors and others who fought the coronavirus pandemic that began in central China in late 2019.

Festivities for the holiday, normally East Asia's busiest tourism season, are muted after China, Vietnam, Taiwan and other governments tightened travel curbs and urged the public to avoid big gatherings following renewed virus outbreaks.

China's ruling Communist Party tries to promote an image of unity with African nations as fellow developing economies. But China Central Television has faced criticism over using blackface to depict African people in past New Year broadcasts.

On Twitter, Black Livity China, a group for people of African descent who work in or with China, called the broadcast "extremely disappointing." It noted CCTV's 2018 Spring Festival Gala featured performers in blackface with a monkey.

"We cannot stress enough the impact scenes such as these have on African and Afro-diasporic communities living in China," the group said.

Elsewhere in China, Buddhist and Daoist temples that usually are packed with holiday worshippers were closed. Streets in major cities were largely empty.

Visitors gathered outside the locked gates of the Tibetan-style Lama Temple on Beijing's north side to burn incense and pray.

Ji Jianping, who wore a jacket and face mask in red, the traditional color of good fortune, said she and her family skipped visiting their hometown in the northern province of Shanxi due to the pandemic.

"I wish for safety and health, as well as happiness for my family," said Ji, 62.

The government's appeal to China's public to avoid travel is denting spending on tourism and gifts. But economists say the overall impact might be limited if factories, shops and factories keep operating instead of taking their usual two-week break.

The Commerce Ministry said it found 48 million more people in Chinese cities planned to celebrate where they live instead of traveling. Departures from Beijing's two major airports were down 75% from last year on Wednesday, the Chinese capital's government reported.

In Taiwan, merchants said this year's sales are up 10%-20% because Taiwanese celebrated at home with family dinners instead of traveling abroad.

"Business this year is good. We have even more people," said a sausage vendor in the capital, Taipei, who would give only his surname, Tsai. "People stay home and prepare food for year-end dinner to share

with friends and family.”

AP video journalist Caroline Chen in Beijing and journalist Taijing Wu in Taipei, Taiwan, contributed to this report.

Mori is gone but gender issues remain for Tokyo Olympics

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Yoshiro Mori resigned as the president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee on Friday after sexist comments made last week in which he said women “talk too much.”

The resignation of the former Japanese prime minister at an executive board meeting has left a mess in its wake. And it comes just over five months before the postponed Olympics are to open in the middle of a pandemic with public sentiment overwhelmingly against the games. The pandemic is one reason, and the soaring costs are the other.

The executive board did not immediately choose a successor for Mori, which CEO Toshiro Muto said would come “as soon as possible” and will be made by a review committee. He called it a “single-digit body” made up equally of men and women, and he repeatedly declined to give a specific time frame.

Muto also declined to say if Mori’s replacement would be a woman. Gender inequality in Japan is exactly the issue that was raised last week by Mori’s demeaning comments, and what drove his ouster. Women are largely absent in the boardroom and in top politics in Japan, and Muto acknowledged that the organizing committee has too few women in leadership roles, and no women at the vice president level.

“For myself in selecting the president, I don’t think we need to discuss or debate gender,” Muto said. “We simply need to choose the right person.”

The front runner is probably Seiko Hashimoto, the current government Olympic minister who was also a bronze medalist in speedskating in the 1992 Albertville Games. She fits all the bills — female, a former Olympian, and she’s been around the organizing committee.

Any pick will be tricky.

On Thursday, 84-year-old Saburo Kawabuchi, the former head of the governing body of Japanese soccer, gave interviews and said he had talked with the 83-year-old Mori and was likely to be his successor.

That news — that another elderly man was taking over — exploded Friday morning on national television and social media. A few hours later, Kawabuchi withdrew his candidacy at the board meeting and told Muto to make it public.

“He (Kawabuchi) is not thinking of becoming president, even if he is asked he will decline,” Muto said.

Mori’s departure comes after more than a week of non-stop criticism about his remarks earlier this month. He initially apologized but refused to step away, which was followed by relentless pressure from television commentators, sponsors and an online petition that drew 150,000 signatures.

“As of today I will resign from the president’s position,” Mori said to open an executive board and council meeting.

Mori was appointed in 2014, just months after Tokyo won the bid to host the Olympics.

“My inappropriate comments have caused a lot of chaos,” he said, repeating several times he had regret over the remarks, but also said he had “no intention of neglecting women.”

“As long as I remain in this position, it causes trouble,” he told the board. “If that is the case, it will ruin everything we’ve built up.”

Muto was asked repeatedly if Mori would have a behind the scenes role as an advisor, which seems logical.

“Currently we are not discussing any position for him,” Muto said.

It’s not clear that his resignation will clear the air and return the focus to exactly how Tokyo can hold the Olympics in just over five months in the midst of a pandemic.

The Olympics are to open on July 23 with 11,000 athletes and 4,400 more in the Paralympic a month later. About 80% of people in Japan in recent polls say they want the Olympics canceled or postponed.

Japanese media immediately pointed out there were three qualified women — all athletes and former

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Olympians and at least a generation younger — who could fill the job.

Kaori Yamaguchi won a bronze medal in judo at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Mikako Kotani won two bronze medals at the same Olympics in synchronized swimming. And Naoko Takahashi was a gold medalist in the marathon at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Mori's remarks have put the spotlight on how far Japan lags behind other prosperous countries in advancing women in politics or the boardrooms. Japan stands 121st out of 153 in the World Economic Forum's gender equality rankings.

Koichi Nakano, a political scientist at Sophia University in Tokyo, characterized Japan as a country still run "by a club of old men." But he said this could be a watershed.

"Social norms are changing," he wrote in an email to The Associated Press. "A clear majority of the Japanese found Mori's comments unacceptable, so the problem is more to do with the lack of representation of women in leadership positions. This sorry episode may have the effect of strengthening the call for greater gender equality and diversity in the halls of power."

Though some on the street called for Mori to resign — several hundred Olympic volunteers say they are withdrawing — most decision makers, including Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, stopped short and simply condemned his remarks.

A comment a few days ago from Toyota Motor Corp. President Akio Toyoda seemed to move the needle.

Toyota is one of 14 so-called Olympic TOP sponsors that pay about \$1 billion every four-year cycle to the International Olympic Committee. The company seldom speaks out on politics, and Toyoda did not call for Mori's resignation. But just speaking on the matter might have been enough.

"The (Mori) comment is different from our values," Toyoda said, "and we find it regrettable."

Associated Press writer Yuri Kageyama and Mari Yamaguchi contributed to this report.

AP Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/olympic-games> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Heart-shaped art brings love, hope to virus-ravaged spots

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

FALMOUTH, Maine (AP) — Donald Verger has been putting heart into his art during the pandemic.

And images of those intricate hearts made from vibrant sea glass are flowing back to schools and hospitals that have been hard hit by COVID-19 during the pandemic.

"The hearts hit a sweet spot for people," Verger said. "People love sea glass, the color, the patterns."

Across the country, many artists find themselves struggling during the pandemic, but they're also finding ways to give back during a health crisis that has claimed more than 465,000 lives in the United States.

Verger's efforts represent his small but colorful contribution to the effort to bring people a smile, or maybe a moment of calm and peace, amid the isolation of the pandemic.

He's sent about 25,000 postcards of his hearts and landscape photography to schools and hospitals. He delivers them at 1,000 or 2,500 at a time. Employers and teachers give them to staff, students and patients.

Recently, he's donated at least 10,000 with LOVE superimposed on them. Another 10,000 had HOPE superimposed on them.

"It seems like a great privilege to do something that supports happiness and some sense of hope," said Verger, whose studio is in Falmouth, Maine.

In Boston, Shriners Hospital Administrator Eileen Skinner was handing out cards with hearts with the word LOVE to more than 400 workers ahead of Valentine's Day.

"You have to be in a health care organization to understand the COVID fatigue," Skinner said. "It's just encouraging to the staff that somebody is thinking of them."

Verger, 72, grew up in New York but considers himself a New Englander. Living in Massachusetts, where he raised his family, he founded the Children's Discovery Museum and Science Discovery Museum in New England, in the town of Acton, Massachusetts.

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As a photographer, he's renowned for his stunning images of landscapes and lighthouses in New England. His best known photo is "Dawn of Peace," which depicts sea smoke greeting the sunrise on a subzero morning on Thompson Lake in Otisfield, Maine.

He merged his photography with colorful sea glass that he began collecting on the coast of California. He began arranging the sea glass into images reminiscent of a Monet or Renoir painting.

His first donations came about after a brush with a tornado in Missouri while photographing the dramatic storms in 2011. The storm chasers became the ones being chased by a massive tornado that left the town of Joplin, Missouri. More than 150 people were killed.

After returning to Maine, he put some of his images meant to soothe and to calm onto postcards with a message and the name Joplin. All told, he sent about 25,000 of them to the Red Cross, schools and other organizations.

During the pandemic, he's sent postcards to schools and hospitals. He recently donated to Northern Light Mercy Hospital in Portland and other facilities, in addition to Boston Shriners Hospital for Children.

Skinner and Verger first met in Maine, when he donated framed photos to be used at Mercy Hospital when she was CEO.

"Donald is a warm and generous person," she said. "He shares what he does best."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 13, the 44th day of 2021. There are 321 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 13, 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia, the influential conservative and most provocative member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was found dead at a private residence in the Big Bend area of West Texas; he was 79. During a Republican presidential debate that evening in South Carolina, the candidates, with the exception of Jeb Bush, insisted that President Barack Obama should let his successor nominate Scalia's replacement. (Obama nominated Merrick Garland; Senate Republicans refused to advance the nomination, which expired the following January.)

On this date:

In 1633, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before the Inquisition, accused of defending Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of the other way around. (Galileo was found vehemently suspect of heresy and ended up being sentenced to a form of house arrest.)

In 1861, Abraham Lincoln was officially declared winner of the 1860 presidential election as electors cast their ballots.

In 1935, a jury in Flemington, New Jersey, found Bruno Richard Hauptmann guilty of first-degree murder in the kidnap-slaying of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh. (Hauptmann was later executed.)

In 1939, Justice Louis D. Brandeis retired from the U.S. Supreme Court. (He was succeeded by William O. Douglas.)

In 1960, France exploded its first atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert.

In 1965, during the Vietnam War, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, an extended bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese.

In 1974, Nobel Prize-winning Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union.

In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, allied warplanes destroyed an underground shelter in Baghdad that had been identified as a military command center; Iraqi officials said 500 civilians were killed.

In 1998, Dr. David Satcher was sworn in as the 16th Surgeon General of the United States during an Oval Office ceremony.

In 2000, Charles Schulz's final "Peanuts" strip ran in Sunday newspapers, the day after the cartoonist died in his sleep at his California home at age 77.

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In 2002, John Walker Lindh pleaded not guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Va., to conspiring to kill Americans and supporting the Taliban and terrorist organizations. (Lindh later pleaded guilty to lesser offenses and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He was released in September 2019 after serving 17 years of that sentence.)

In 2013, beginning a long farewell to his flock, a weary Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his final public Mass as pontiff, presiding over Ash Wednesday services inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

Ten years ago: Egypt's military leaders dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and promised elections in moves cautiously welcomed by protesters who'd helped topple President Hosni Mubarak. Lady Antebellum was the big winner at the Grammys with five awards, including record and song of the year for the band's yearning crossover ballad "Need You Now," but rockers Arcade Fire won the biggest prize, album of the year, for their highly acclaimed "The Suburbs."

Five years ago: On his first full day in Mexico, Pope Francis issued a tough-love message to the country's political and church elites, telling them they had a duty to provide their people with security, justice and courageous pastoral care.

One year ago: China reported a surge in deaths and infections from the coronavirus after changing the way the count was tallied; the number of confirmed cases neared 60,000 with more than 1,300 deaths. Japan announced the country's first death from the coronavirus, a woman in her 80s, and said the number of cases on a quarantined cruise ship had reached 218. The cruise ship MS Westerdam, which had been stranded at sea for about two weeks after being refused entry by four Asian governments, docked in Cambodia, where passengers were given health checks. Attorney General William Barr told ABC that President Donald Trump's tweets about Justice Department prosecutors and open cases "make it impossible for me to do my job."

Today's Birthdays: Actor Kim Novak is 88. Actor George Segal is 87. Actor Bo Svenson is 80. Actor Stockard Channing is 77. Talk show host Jerry Springer is 77. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., is 75. Singer Peter Gabriel is 71. Actor David Naughton is 70. Rock musician Peter Hook is 65. Actor Matt Salinger is 61. Singer Henry Rollins is 60. Actor Neal McDonough is 55. Singer Freedom Williams is 55. Actor Kelly Hu is 53. Rock singer Matt Berninger (The National) is 50. Country musician Scott Thomas (Parmalee) is 48. Singer Robbie Williams is 47. Singer-songwriter Feist is 45. Rhythm-and-blues performer Natalie Stewart is 42. Actor Mena Suvari (MEE'-nuh soo-VAHR'-ee) is 42. Actor Katie Volding is 32. Michael Joseph Jackson Jr. (also known as Prince Michael Jackson I) is 24.