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Groton Prairie Mixed

Team Standings: Jackelopes 9, Shih Tzus 6, Cheetahs 6, Chipmunks 3
Men's High Games: Brad Waage 202, Roger Spanier 189, 188, Mike Siegler 185
Women's High Games: Nicole Kassube 168, Darci Spanier 159, Karen Spanier 158
Men's High Series: Brad Waage 565, Roger Spanier 559, Mike Siegler 493
Women's High Series: Darci Spanier 493, Brenda Waage 429, Lori Wiley 422

Conde National League

Team Standings: Mets 26, Giants 21, Cubs 20, Braves 18, Pirates 16, Tigers 7
Men's High Games: Ryan Bethke 202, Butch Farmen 200, Lance Frohling 190
Men's High Series: Butch Farmen 541, Ryan Bethke 533, Lance Frohling 518
Women's High Games: Mary Larson 168, Sam Bahr 156, Vickie Kramp 149, Joyce Walter 149, Nancy Radke 149
Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 441, Nancy Radke 439, Mary Larson 428



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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The 2020 NFL season is officially over. Between a global pandemic shutting down the offseason last year and injuries to some of the best players on the roster, the 2020 season wasn't great for the Minnesota Vikings. The Vikings didn't make the playoffs, but there are plenty of signs that point to this team being much better than their 7-9 record from last year would indicate. Let's review how the Vikings fared in 2020 before we get into how the team can rebound and make another run at a championship in 2021. We'll start with the offense, with the defense coming next week.



By Jordan Wright

The Vikings' offense was one of the best offenses in the league last season, finishing fourth with 393.3 yards per game, thanks in large part to the running game which averaged 142.7 ypg (fifth-best in the league). The passing game, on the other hand, was right in the middle of the pack with 250.6 ypg (14th in the NFL). Where the Vikings struggled was putting points on the board – for a team that finished fourth in yards, the Vikings were merely 11th in points per game.

Entering his third year with the team, Kirk Cousins had one of the best seasons of his career in 2020. The signal-caller finished with 4,265 yards (8th in the NFL), 35 touchdowns (6th), a 67.6 completion percentage (9th), and a passer rating of 105 (8th). However, the quarterback will need to work on several things if he wants to take his game to the next level, including cutting down his interceptions (he had 13 last season, third-worst in the league).

After trading Stefon Diggs last offseason, it was a forgone conclusion that the Vikings' receiving corps would take a step back in 2020. Thanks in large part to Justin Jefferson having one of the best rookie receiving seasons in NFL history, however, the Vikings were able to find just as much success through the air this year as they have in years past. Jefferson didn't play much the first two weeks of the season but still finished with 1,400 yards, which was the third-best mark in the league. With JJ getting most of the yards, Adam Thielen became one of the best wide receivers at the goal line, finishing with 14 touchdowns in 2020 (3rd). The Vikings have had some of the best one-two WR combos in the league, from Randy Moss and Cris Carter to Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs, and it looks like the Thielen/Jefferson combo will be another great duo for years to come.

As good as Cousins, Jefferson and Thielen were in 2020, there is no question the offensive MVP for the Vikings was Dalvin Cook. Even though he missed two games during the regular season, Cook still ran for 1,557 yards (second-best in the NFL) and 16 touchdowns (also second best, one behind Derrick Henry's 17). Not only was Cook the primary ball carrier in Minnesota, but he was also third on the team in targets with 54 – although most of those targets were check-downs because Kirk Cousins was running for his life and needed someone to throw the ball to. Dalvin Cook is one of the best running backs in the NFL, and after signing a contract extension last offseason, the 25-year-old RB will be in Minnesota for many years to come.

The Vikings' offense was good in 2020, but they weren't good enough to cover the defensive deficiencies. If the offense can sustain this level of production next season, and the defense gets back to where it should, this team has the potential to be special in 2021. Skol!

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The Do-It-Yourself Disease

I've learned a lot from my patients over the years. Sometimes, the lessons are learned as I walk beside them through struggles, both medical and non-medical. Sometimes, the lessons are explicitly stated, words of wisdom that stick with me through the years, and change the way I understand illness, or life in general.

The first such lesson I remember was from a middle-aged woman who had been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes only a few years prior. She came to me with blood sugars that ran critically low in the middle of the night, but sky high during the day. The situation only worsened when she tried to adjust her insulin. Back in those days, our tools for managing diabetes were far more limited, and our insulin regimens far more rigid.

After we adjusted her dosing so that the peaks and valleys of her insulin effect were a better fit for her life, we started fine tuning the control of her blood sugar. We needed to balance her insulin, with her activity, with her food. This is when she said to me, "Diabetes is the original do-it-yourself disease."

The truth of this statement resonated with me then, and I still hear her words almost every time I see a person with diabetes 20 years later.

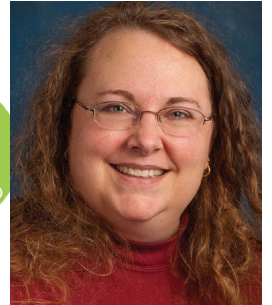
The stakes are high. Control of blood sugar is directly correlated with the odds of developing one of the terrible complications of diabetes, such as blindness, strokes, heart attacks, kidney failure, amputations, and nerve damage.

That control rests in part with our medicines, but the real challenge of diabetes lies in the fact that success depends on changing habits, and that is difficult indeed. People with diabetes are asked to change the way they eat, the way they move, the very way they live. They are often asked to monitor their blood sugars, which to date has meant pricking their fingers to take blood, and to make decisions based on those results, sometimes multiple times a day. Then, do it again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day. Additionally, diabetes medications and supplies are awfully expensive!

There is some hope: new technologies are making it easier to handle the mechanics of managing diabetes, and new medicines are allowing more flexibility in lifestyle. But the burden of success still rests very much on the shoulders of the patient, to balance medicines, with activity, with food, in all the decisions he or she makes every day.

Diabetes is no doubt, the do-it-yourself disease.

Debra Johnston, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Debra Johnston, M.D ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

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Upcoming Schedule

Monday, Feb. 15

Roncalli has changed the schedule for Monday's games again. 7th grade (Robyn and Jason Warrington) will play at 4 and 8th grade (J Simon Photography) at 5, there will be NO C GAME, JV (Rutgear 605) 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.

City Council meeting, 7 p.m., Groton Community Center.

Thursday, Feb. 18

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

Friday, Feb. 19

Basketball Doubleheader with Deuel in Groton. JV girls at 4 p.m., JV boys (Craig and Tasha Dunker) 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



The graphic features a black background with several elements: on the left, the Groton Cavaliers logo (a knight on a horse) and a tiger's head; on the right, a basketball hoop with a red rim and white net. The word "Boys" is written in gold above the hoop. The schedule text is in white.

Groton Area at Roncalli
Monday, Feb. 15, 2021
7th grade at 4 p.m.
followed by 8th, JV and Varsity

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The Travels of Kittie the Stagecoach

Kittie was welcomed warmly when she returned to South Dakota.

She's the stagecoach now displayed in the museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

"The Governor (George S. Mickelson) unveiled the stagecoach in January at his third annual reception for the South Dakota Legislature, and she was very well received. The stage now is on display in the exhibition wing," wrote J.R. Fishburne, then the director of the South Dakota State Historical Society, in a 1991 letter.

Kittie was one of four stagecoaches used by the Medora Stage & Forwarding Company to transport passengers and freight between Medora and Deadwood, Dakota Territory. The company was organized by the Marquis de Mores, a wealthy Frenchman who had come to what is now the North Dakota badlands in 1883 and founded the town of Medora, named after his wife. The gold fields in the Black Hills were already connected with stage lines from the east, south and west. The Medora Stage & Forwarding Company would connect Deadwood to Medora, which was connected to the Northern Pacific Railroad, on the north.

Four used Concord stagecoaches and harnesses were purchased from Gilmer, Salisbury and Company, a freight and stage transportation firm. The stagecoaches were named Kittie, Medora, Dakota and Deadwood, and the name of each stagecoach was painted on it. De Mores hoped that the company would be awarded a contract to carry mail, and the letters "U S M" for United States Mail were also painted on each coach in anticipation of being awarded the contract. The company established 13 stations over the 215-mile stretch between Medora and Deadwood and purchased 150 well-bred western stage horses. Each station had a tender, who cared for the horses and served the passengers when necessary. In South Dakota, the route passed near Buffalo and through Belle Fourche and Spearfish before reaching Deadwood.

The first stagecoach to roll into Deadwood from Medora arrived about noon on Sunday, Oct. 5, 1884.

"It created a great deal of enthusiasm as it passed up Main street, drawn by six horses," stated The Black Hills Daily Pioneer in Deadwood.

Three cheers were heartily given as the stagecoach halted in front of the ticket office.

The stage headed back to Medora the next day.

The trip between Medora and Deadwood took about 36 hours and cost passengers \$21.50 or 10 cents a



Kittie, the stagecoach that is on display in the museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. (South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives)

mile. Stages departed from both Medora and Deadwood on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings and arrived at their destination the evening of the following day.

The business venture quickly folded, however, as Mores failed to get the mail contract he had hoped for as well as the freight business needed in order for the venture to financially survive.

The May 28, 1885, issue of the Turner County Herald carried the news that "The Medora Stage Line to the Black Hills has been abandoned." Other sources state that the Medora Stage & Transport Company ceased to exist in the winter of 1885-1886.

De Mores' other business ventures in Dakota Territory also failed, and the de Mores family moved back to France. The Marquis was murdered in 1896 while in Africa.

Kittie's history did not end with the Medora to Deadwood stage.

In 1896, Andrew Olson of Pelan, Minn., purchased

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the coaches Kittie and Medora from the estate of the Marquis, according to Paul Englund. He wrote the South Dakota State Historical Society that his great-grandparents were probably the last people to have a route using Kittie when they ran a stagecoach route in approximately 1909 between Karlstad and Greenbush, in northwestern Minnesota. Before that, his great-grandparents had a way-station along the stage route between Stephen and Roseau, also in northwestern Minnesota. Kittie ran between Stephen and the half-way point of Pelan and the Medora ran between Pelan and Roseau, according to Englund.

Eventually, Harry Miller of Jamestown, N.D., went to Roseau, Minn., and returned to Jamestown with Kittie.

Kittie appeared in all the city's parades, according to a letter to the South Dakota State Historical Society from Mary F. Young of Jamestown. A photograph taken in 1936 shows South Dakota Gov. Tom Berry in a parade in Jamestown, riding on a stagecoach that was identified as Kittie.

Miller eventually moved to California and left Kittie and another stagecoach in Jamestown. In a letter written from California in 1949, Miller stated that a man in Jamestown was looking after the stagecoaches. "They have been standing in the open more or less since I came out here during the war," he wrote.

By 1969, according to an article in the Minot, N.D. Daily News, the stagecoaches Kitty and Medora were owned by Osborne (Ozzie) Klavestad of Shakopee, Minn. He owned a tourist attraction in the form of a pioneer village. A bill of sale indicates that Klavestad sold two stagecoaches in 1980.

In 1990, the South Dakota State Historical Society obtained Kittie from a private collector.

The stagecoach's presence in the museum is a reminder of this historic and once invaluable form of transportation.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at www.sdhsf.org. Contact us at info@sdhsf.org to submit a story idea.



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Lana's Annals-week 5 House of Representatives

Brrr. South Dakota winter did not forget us. Even though we have had colder winters for longer stretches, it still takes awhile to acclimate.

The bills (over 500 combined in the House and Senate) are moving along. As we head into crossover day, the work hours are getting longer.

In the House this week we heard 1126 which was created as one way to prevent election confusion. It provides for mail-in ballots only if requested. This should make perfect sense. One of the legislators gave an example of one of her deceased parents who was sent a ballot this past year. It could have easily and fraudulently been filled out. As this is a common sense issue and one I voted for, it passed the House. Now it moves over.

We got many e-mails about SB87, which sets up a health program for largely ag members and exempts them from the insurance commissions. This favors young families to get health programs at cheaper rates than what they are now seeing. It passed the House with a vote of 50-16. I thought quite a bit about independent agents and how it may affect them. I did find out, though, that some of these people do not carry any insurance at all so may not be a factor.

HB1017 and HB1018 which called for approval of funding a Sioux Falls National Guard and Cold Storage Center, passed easily. I asked questions as to whether these were needed. I was assured by people who are neutral that the building needed to be improved and that much of the money was from federal dollars. I have never been a fan of hearing that as don't people know that is us!! The bills did pass.

Also on the floor, we heard HB1132. It is a bill which makes dental hygienists mandatory reporters if child abuse is suspected. The argument against the bill was that so many people of all professions should be reporters already. I voted for it as it was stated that hygienists can often detect abuse of the mouth and gums. It would seem that if they were specifically listed, it would be easier to make a possible report on abuse. They are now one step closer to being legally be required to do so.

In Local Government HB1093 proved to be a talker. It would have lifted all restrictions put on by cities about forced business closures during a pandemic. The main testifier seemed to indicate that individual freedom trumped safety. We decided that the former statement was false and sent it to the 41st day. Ironically, the person who pushed for its passage had to leave as was found to test positive for Covid later that day.

Speaking of that, we now have 7 in the House who have tested positive with most likely more to come. Those who are able can join via Teams remote site and vote. They can also join their respective committees to vote. So much is missed during the course of the day if one is not there, however.

Until next week, Stay well and warm!

Rep. Lana Greenfield

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Glimpses From Greenfield 2021-Week 5

Last week found several relatively close votes on the Senate floor. There are several bills this year seeking to lessen penalties for prisoners convicted of violent crimes. On Monday, SB 98 sought to effectively repeal the death penalty in South Dakota. I have talked about this issue several times in the past, so I won't plunge deeply into the issue. I know there are strong feeling on both sides. What this bill sought to do was remove every "aggravating circumstance" from our statutes with the exception that if a crime was committed against a law enforcement officer, a corrections employee, or a firefighter ONLY if the victim was on-the-job. Also, it would have provided that even if two persons committed the murder, only one would be subject to possibly being prosecuted for a capital crime. This bill seemed flawed for many reasons, but the most notable two were 1) that a person could potentially seek revenge against an off-duty officer or prison guard or firefighter and not be subject to a capital charge and 2) in the case of the two prisoners who brutally murdered prison guard Ronald Johnson in Sioux Falls in an attempt to escape, only one would be deemed the aggressor. The bill failed on a vote of 13-20.

Two days later, SB 146 was taken up on the Senate floor. This bill is apparently part of a weak-on-crime movement that is sweeping across more liberal states. We were given a handout that spoke of similar efforts in California, Vermont, Illinois, and other left-leaning states. This bill would establish that if a person committed a heinous violent crime while he or she was under the age of 25, and if they received a life-without-parole sentence, they would automatically be eligible for parole when they turn 50. The argument was that these violent serial rapists and murderers committed crimes against their victims while their brains were still developing and they could not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions. I will refrain from spelling out the obvious, but we give 16-year-olds the ability to make certain life-altering decisions saying they are fully capable of making such decisions. In a mind-blowing turn of events the bill passed the Senate 18-17. I expect the bill to meet a fiery death on the House side.

SB 81 seeks to ensure that the American flag plus one other specific flag may be flown regardless of ordinances that ban other flags. The other flags that may be flown are either the SD flag or one of the military branches' flags. As I understand it, one local homeowners' group sought the removal of "Trump" flags within their neighborhood. In an effort to not discriminate, a proud military family with a child serving in the US Marine Corps was told they could not fly the Marine Corps flag anymore. While this seems to be a slam-dunk bill, there was some resistance by legislators that said it was a bill seeking to remedy an isolated incident. Nevertheless, I voted in favor of the bill, and it passed, 22-12.

Last year, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, a bill that substantially revamped youth driver's licenses in South Dakota. For the record, I did not support that legislation. It placed all sorts of new restrictions on drivers under 18, including that they could only have one non-family passenger as well as requiring that the parents had to provide documentation that the youth had driven at least 10 hours in inclement weather and 10 hours at nighttime. SB 105 seeks to repeal last year's legislation that has never been implemented because when COVID gripped us, the Governor signed an executive order putting that law on-hold. The administration has been working to help get SB 105 passed, and it did meet with strong support on the Senate side, prevailing 27-8.

Finally, in a return to logic, SB 134 seeks to revise a law passed several years ago that has literally added millions of dollars to public building projects across the state. In just one example, the SD Board of Regents said that in order to achieve the "silver standard" for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), one particular project included planting native grasses, which gave them enough points to be LEED certified. After six years, they said the native grasses were unsightly and looked like weeds, so they removed them and replanted the property with grass. When LEED standards were passed into law several years ago, I opposed the legislation, citing unnecessary increased costs going forward. While the grass situation is just one example, there are dozens of others even more egregious that have driven costs up. Granted, the goal of all new building projects is to be as energy-efficient as possible. However, requiring public entities to incur extraordinary costs in order to achieve LEED status without an offset by way of future cost-savings is unjustifiable and indefensible. SB 134 passed the Senate 34-1.

With that, know that tons of funding and other policy discussions continue to take place. Five weeks are down with four to go. Buckle up! Things are about to get good!

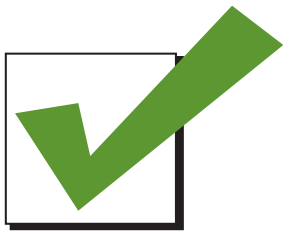
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#357 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Things continue to look better; the declines continue. If we're going to have Super Bowl effects, I'd expect those to show up over the next few days; I'd be fine with nothing happening there. One week ago tonight we went below 100,000 daily new cases for the first time in over three months; we managed to stay below for five of the seven days since. We are now at 27,682,700 cases in the US, 0.2% more than yesterday. There were just 65,900 new case reports today. I know this is Sunday, but I think there's something wrong with that number, some sort of reporting glitch. The decline from where we've been running and from yesterday are just too precipitous, and so I'm not trusting that figure. We'll see what turns up in the reporting tomorrow which might explain this. Don't misunderstand me: I think we're still doing fine; I just don't think we're doing that fine, not yet.

Hospitalizations have been declining for over five weeks and are getting below the record by over 60,000. There are 69,283 people hospitalized with this virus today.

We're down to 27 states and territories in the red zone, up to 25 in orange, and three in yellow. One-week increase in total cases was 830,300 last week and is 641,700 this week. Two-week increase was below two million this week at 1,874,500 last week and is down to 1,472,000 this week. I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 91,671.4; this is a decline of over 20 percent again this week and is below 100,000 for the first time in a long while.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and none of these is showing a two-week rate of increase greater than 25%. Worst we can do is 14.3%, and because that's in Vermont where case numbers are ridiculously low, chances are a flukey reporting day or two was enough to create a percentage this high. We have 18 states and territories with growth rates above the US growth rate. Highest per capita rates of increase are in South Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Rhode Island; most of these were not among the leaders a week ago as patterns continue to shift.

There were 1123 deaths reported today, a 0.2% increase to 485,154. Average daily deaths is down farther this week. We're still well above where we were at the beginning of the year, but moving in the right direction. We're at 3131.0 this week, still too high, but coming down. This is the thirteenth consecutive week since spring we've reported over 10,000 deaths, and we're well over it—be a long while before we drop below. States with the most per capita deaths over the past week are Alabama, Tennessee, Arizona, Kansas, Delaware, and Rhode Island.

Where there is an unmet need, someone has figured out how to make money on it. Vaccines for Covid-19 are no exception. The American Medical Association warned its members about a number of the scams going around on its website. For starters, there's the usual run of people asking for your personal information so they can set you up for vaccination. No one legitimately offering vaccines will contact you to ask for this information; if you've signed up with them for vaccination, they'll have it. If you haven't, then they're likely not legit. If you receive requests for personal information from an unknown source, it is important not to provide it. Text messages, e-mails, and such from anyone you do not recognize as a health provider should be ignored. Work only with known and reputable health systems, physicians, clinics, or pharmacies. If you've never heard of the organization who contacts you, there's a sure warning things are not on the up-and-up. Medicare will not call you to offer services. No one can provide vaccines or a step-up in eligibility in return for a fee—at least not for a fee the general public can afford. (I have heard of folks endowing a new wing on the local hospital for a vaccine, but if you don't have millions of dollars at your disposal, no one who can provide you a vaccination will be calling you about this.) Some of these folks are looking to download malware on your device, and this is nothing you want to deal with. Some just want your bank account information; you don't really want anything to do with them either.

So beware of ads offering you early access for payment, requests asking you to send money for vaccine or to get on a waiting list, offers for medical testing, people offering to send doses of vaccine for a fee, any call or message claiming to be from a clinic, insurance company, or vaccination center unless you've contacted them or signed up with them. Vaccines are free to all, there is no way for the average person to

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buy your way up the priority list (shouldn't be for anyone, but that's another story), and you should never give out your personal or financial information to strangers on the phone or the Internet. So be careful.

I had a question after yesterday's Update about just what it means if a new variant is more transmissible. One part of that isn't answerable at the moment because we don't have enough information, and that has to do with what it is about this variant that makes it easier to transmit. One likely explanation is that it is found in larger numbers in an infected person and so is also shed in larger numbers. Since most viral infections are dependent on what's called exposure dose, getting a bigger number of virus particles from an infected person makes it more likely you'll get sick. The other likely possibility is that the variant is better at getting into our cells. If that was the case, then it wouldn't take as many particles to establish infection, that is, a smaller exposure dose would be sufficient.

The other part of the question has to do with how that plays out in the world where people get sick and give the virus to other people and some of us go to the hospital and maybe die. Here, we're interested in numbers of sick people because a more transmissible virus means more cases; additionally, because cases grow exponentially, an increase in transmissibility causes an escalating increase in case numbers.

Let's return to a concept we haven't talked about in a while, the virus's reproduction number, or R_e . This is the average number of people whom each case transmits the virus. If the R_e is 1, then each case, on average, transmits to one other person, and the outbreak continues at a steady rate, neither growing nor declining. If the R_e is below 1, then each case, on average, transmits to less than one other person, and the outbreak begins to die out. Might take a while, but it's going away. And if the R_e is above 1, then each case, on average, transmits to more than one other person, and the outbreak grows; but it doesn't just grow—it grows exponentially, that is, getting worse faster and faster.

I'll show you what I mean, borrowing an example constructed by Bill Hanage, a Harvard epidemiologist for Vox. Let's say we have the R_e for this virus down to 1 right now. We have established that would mean each case passes the virus on to one new person and the number of cases in the population stays the same. If we have 1000 cases today, one month from now, we'll have 1000 cases. If the virus became 50 percent more transmissible, then the R_e would be increased to 1.5. That means each case infects 1.5 new people. If we figure a five-day cycle time (time from when you get infected until you infect the next person), then 1000 people infected today means in five days we'll have 1500, in 10 days we'll have 2250, and one month from today we'll be over 11,000. In two months, we'd be close to 130,000. This, of course, presupposes we don't do anything to stop spread. But it also means whatever we do to stop spread isn't going to work as well as it used to work, so we're going to have to do it better, more consistently, and more strictly.

If we keep doing exactly what we've been doing just as well (or as poorly) as we have been, then that new variant is going to cause a 50 percent increase in the R_e with the kind of growth in cases we just talked about. As epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch, also from Harvard, explained on a press call, a 50 percent more transmissible variant means "we need to cut our contacts down by another third" in order to stay in the same shape we're in right now.

Another consequence of higher transmissibility is that the threshold for herd immunity goes up. Because that threshold is predicated on R_e , as R_e goes up, the threshold goes up. There's already some doubt about persuading enough people to be vaccinated to establish herd immunity; raising the number we need would not be helpful.

There is also the matter of deaths numbers. Adam Kucharski, epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, constructed this example and shared it on Twitter to explain why a more contagious virus is deadlier than a more deadly virus. (And if that seems weird, stay with me.) Let's say you have a community with 10,000 infections. Each new case transmits to 1.1 other people ($R_e = 1.1$) and 0.8 percent result in death. In one month, we expect 129 deaths.

If the virus becomes 50 percent deadlier, then we expect 193 deaths after a month; but if the virus becomes 50 percent more contagious, then we expect 978 deaths. That's huge, and it's because we have so many more cases. So when you're counting funerals, a 50 percent more deadly virus is less deadly than a 50 percent more transmissible virus. This is because, as Kucharski explains, severity (deadliness) scales

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proportionally whereas transmission grows exponentially. There's no getting around that math.

And a further problem none of this accounts for is that more transmissions increase the chances another new variant emerges, one even better suited to causing us grief. As I've quoted Dr. Fauci saying (many times), a virus that isn't replicating isn't mutating. When we have a lot of transmission, we have a lot of replication. When we have a lot of replication, we have more mutating. And when we have more mutating, the chances for a more transmissible or more deadly or more dangerous variants increases. The faster we get vaccinated and the more we suppress this virus in the meanwhile, the better. This is why it's too soon to relax and let up on our efforts. We are at a delicate stage.

Most of us have heard of novelist Stephen King. I'm not much for the horror genre, so some of his stuff isn't really my speed; but he did also write one of the great pandemic novels of all time (in my totally unbiased opinion), *The Stand*. But while I will recommend the book highly, that's not why I mention him tonight. I mention him because there is a group of kids in his home state of Maine who wrote a couple of books. The kids are at Farwell Elementary School, and they are enrolled in its Author Studies Program. As a group, these kids have been working with a different Maine author, Gary Savage, writing a book over the past four years. They have reworked a story from Savage's manuscript and have drawn on their own experiences over the past year to incorporate this current pandemic in the story line as they wrote.

Finally after all this time, the kids, some of whom have graduated to middle school by now, have their work ready for publication—if they can get it published. Having it printed and distributed takes money, so they'd started a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the purpose; and there's where King comes in. His foundation is providing the money they need to accomplish this goal. One of the kids told WMTW TV, the local CNN affiliate, "I've been in it for the last four years, and only the people in my school have ever gotten to read what I've written, and it's really cool to think that pretty much anyone can read anything you write."

That is pretty cool. If you want to watch for it and pick up a copy, the title is "Fletcher McKenzie and the Passage to Whole." Anything they make on sales goes to their school's library.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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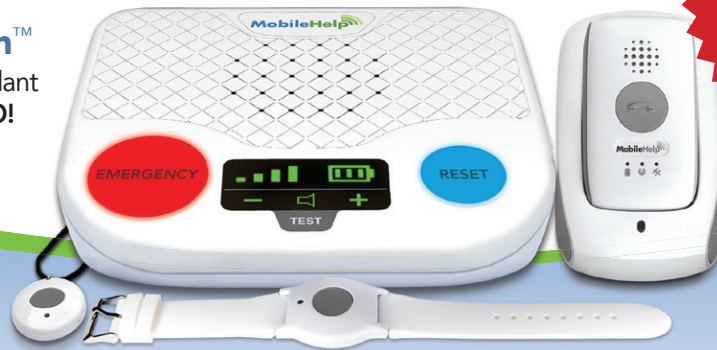
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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	452	429	847	15	Minimal	0.00%
Beadle	2654	2557	5669	39	Moderate	11.97%
Bennett	380	364	1150	9	Minimal	0.00%
Bon Homme	1502	1473	2017	25	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3535	3391	11436	35	Substantial	2.76%
Brown	5062	4867	12272	83	Substantial	10.56%
Brule	686	669	1821	9	Minimal	0.00%
Buffalo	420	406	886	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	965	931	3124	20	Moderate	3.16%
Campbell	129	123	249	4	Minimal	7.69%
Charles Mix	1248	1194	3810	18	Substantial	14.29%
Clark	359	341	924	4	Substantial	5.56%
Clay	1773	1742	5047	15	Moderate	5.37%
Codington	3872	3661	9378	76	Substantial	7.98%
Corson	462	447	991	12	Minimal	4.55%
Custer	738	715	2628	12	Moderate	9.84%
Davison	2924	2831	6296	60	Moderate	2.99%
Day	640	588	1709	28	Substantial	20.45%
Deuel	466	448	1095	8	Minimal	0.00%
Dewey	1395	1367	3734	22	Moderate	2.04%
Douglas	419	405	885	9	Minimal	3.45%
Edmunds	476	446	1005	12	Moderate	0.00%
Fall River	515	493	2526	15	Moderate	6.85%
Faulk	352	324	674	13	Moderate	9.09%
Grant	944	876	2144	37	Substantial	17.74%
Gregory	522	478	1210	27	Moderate	6.90%
Haakon	246	232	518	9	Minimal	7.69%
Hamlin	682	624	1711	38	Moderate	12.12%
Hand	326	313	778	6	Minimal	0.00%
Hanson	350	333	689	4	Moderate	13.04%
Harding	91	90	180	1	Minimal	20.00%
Hughes	2248	2162	6334	34	Substantial	1.04%
Hutchinson	775	732	2264	24	Moderate	7.32%

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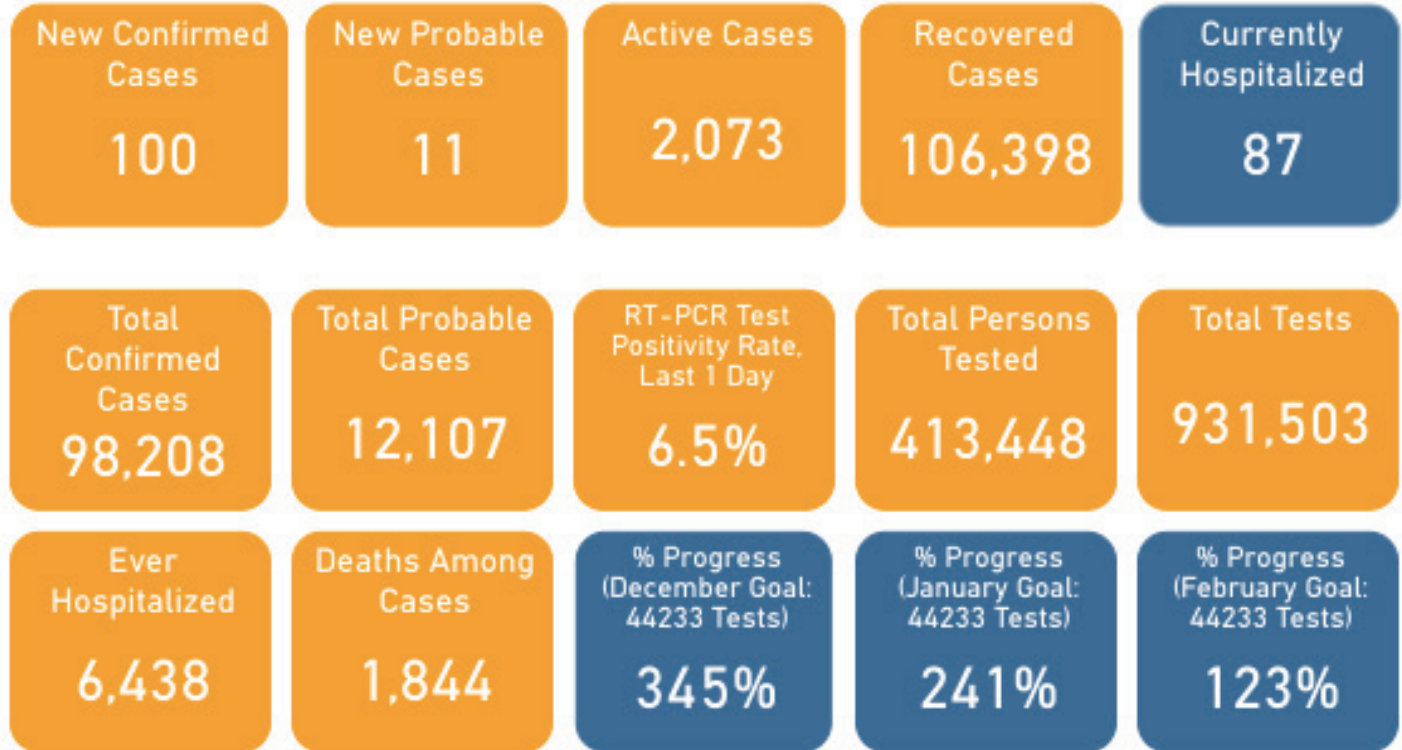
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Hyde	136	133	396	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	275	254	902	14	Minimal	8.33%
Jerauld	268	249	544	16	Minimal	9.09%
Jones	83	81	213	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	621	592	1588	14	Moderate	3.28%
Lake	1164	1124	3161	17	Moderate	2.15%
Lawrence	2789	2706	8282	44	Moderate	3.98%
Lincoln	7588	7392	19580	76	Substantial	7.99%
Lyman	594	577	1833	10	Minimal	0.00%
Marshall	295	281	1133	5	Minimal	0.00%
McCook	731	696	1569	24	Moderate	10.26%
McPherson	237	229	539	4	Minimal	0.92%
Meade	2525	2448	7416	31	Moderate	8.62%
Mellette	241	238	713	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	269	250	554	9	Minimal	0.00%
Minnehaha	27505	26692	75297	325	Substantial	8.31%
Moody	608	585	1709	16	Minimal	6.06%
Oglala Lakota	2044	1967	6524	47	Moderate	2.20%
Pennington	12616	12221	38020	184	Substantial	7.70%
Perkins	340	316	773	13	Moderate	0.00%
Potter	361	346	805	3	Moderate	28.00%
Roberts	1129	1075	4005	35	Substantial	6.60%
Sanborn	327	319	663	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	789	745	2068	25	Substantial	10.23%
Stanley	323	317	896	2	Moderate	3.85%
Sully	136	131	295	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1218	1177	4058	28	Moderate	8.96%
Tripp	675	643	1440	15	Moderate	1.23%
Turner	1051	986	2623	51	Moderate	5.88%
Union	1946	1857	6022	39	Substantial	12.96%
Walworth	717	685	1780	15	Moderate	11.48%
Yankton	2771	2709	9057	28	Moderate	1.75%
Ziebach	335	325	849	9	Minimal	7.14%
Unassigned	0	0	1825	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	4358	0
10-19 years	12367	0
20-29 years	19736	4
30-39 years	18135	16
40-49 years	15725	34
50-59 years	15541	108
60-69 years	12625	243
70-79 years	6752	419
80+ years	5076	1020

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57530	869
Male	52785	975

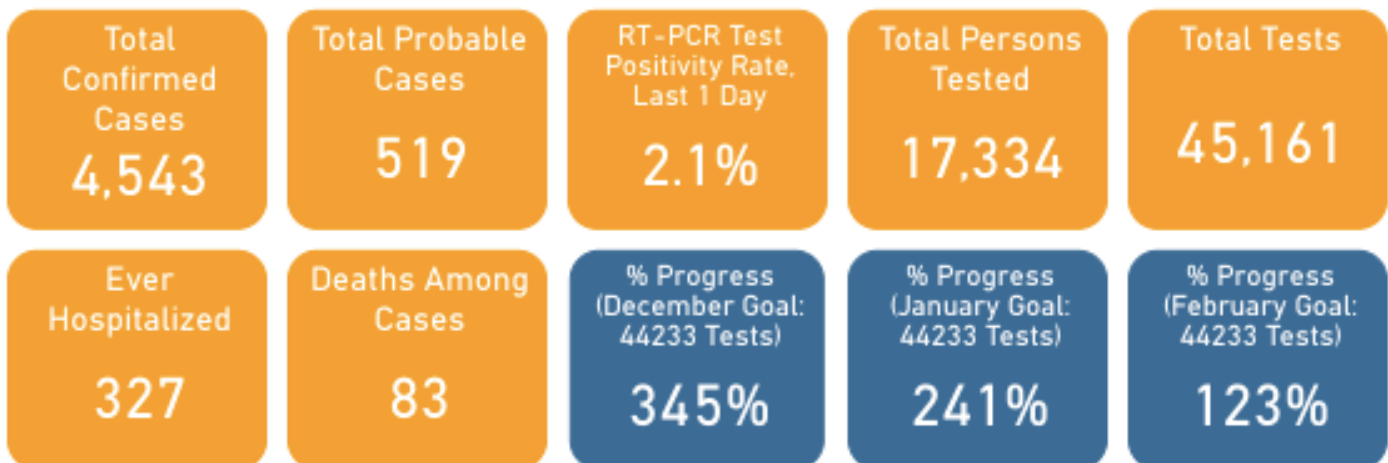
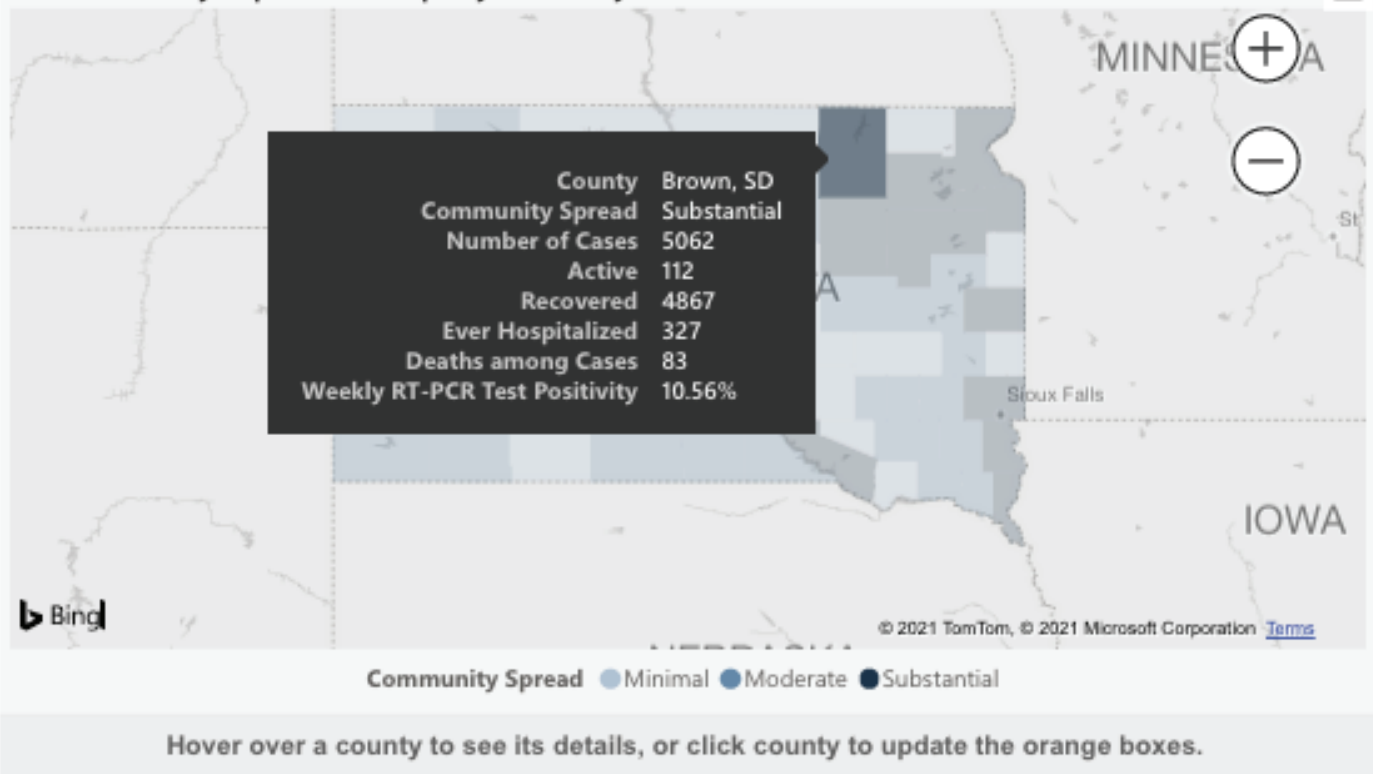
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



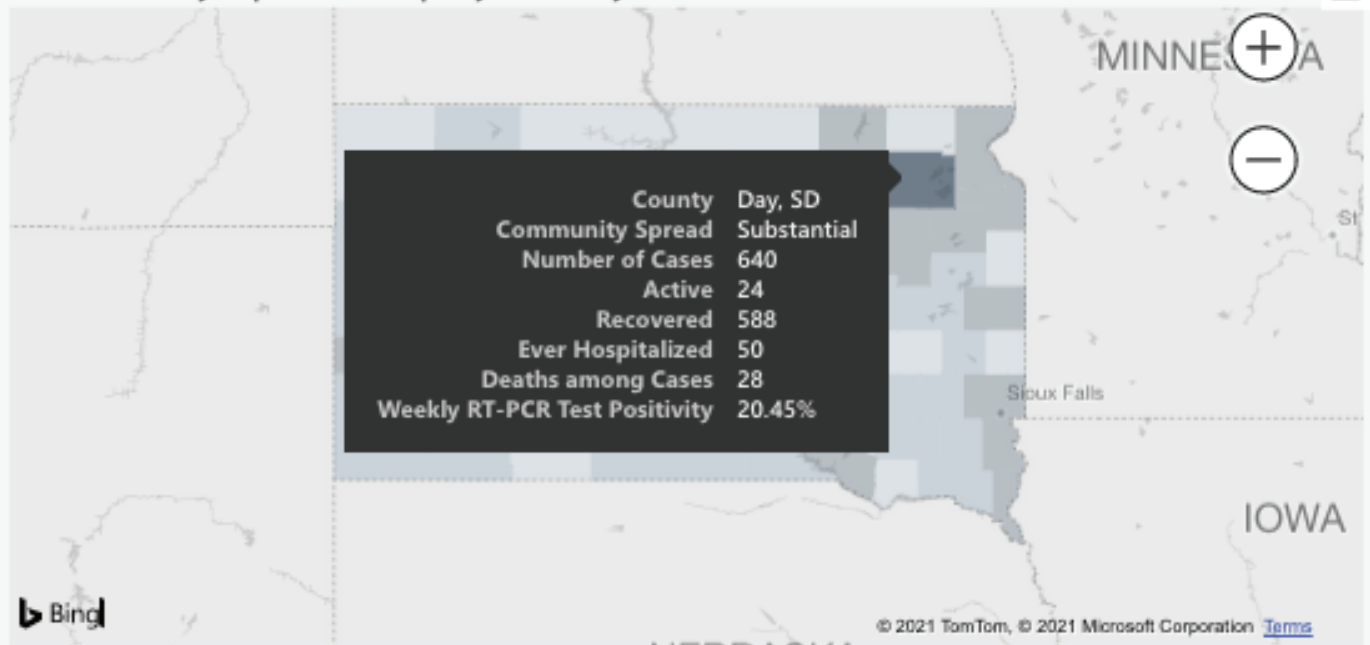
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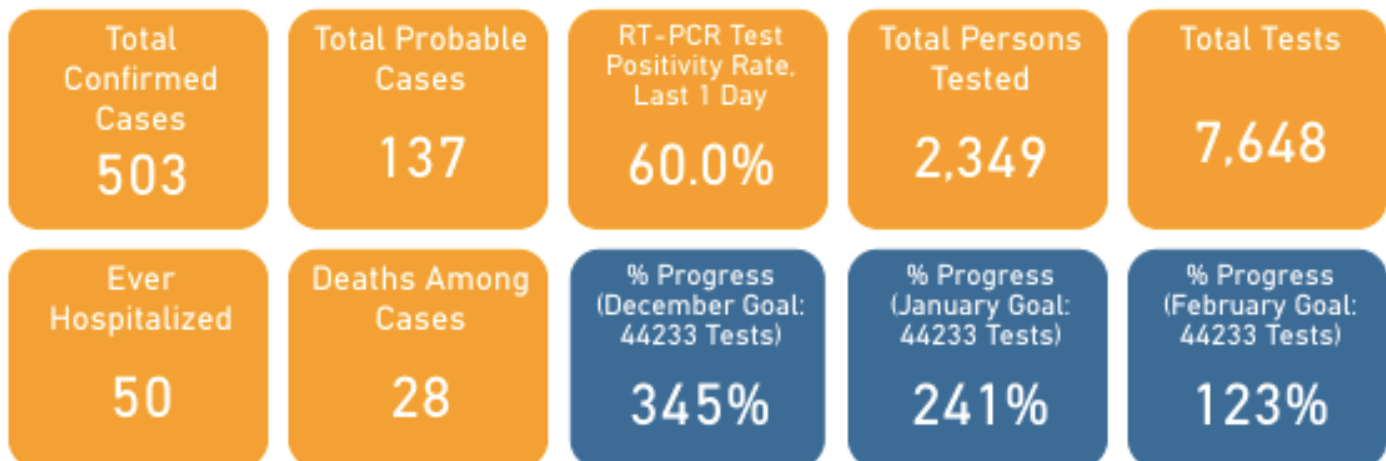
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

152,992

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

103,895

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

15%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	80,901
Pfizer	72,091

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	28,039
Moderna - Series Complete	26,431
Pfizer - 1 dose	26,759
Pfizer - Series Complete	22,666

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	15.06%
Series Complete	7.12%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	386	190	98	288
Beadle	2931	1,237	847	2,084
Bennett*	238	120	59	179
Bon Homme*	1667	777	445	1,222
Brookings	4178	1,516	1,331	2,847
Brown	7402	2,516	2,443	4,959
Brule*	916	460	228	688
Buffalo*	86	78	4	82
Butte	814	434	190	624
Campbell	542	162	190	352
Charles Mix*	1522	672	425	1,097
Clark	553	289	132	421
Clay	2375	891	742	1,633
Codington*	4718	1,962	1,378	3,340
Corson*	119	85	17	102
Custer*	1257	575	341	916
Davison	4029	1,281	1,374	2,655
Day*	1153	509	322	831
Deuel	641	311	165	476
Dewey*	252	66	93	159
Douglas*	630	196	217	413
Edmunds	604	260	172	432
Fall River*	1256	538	359	897
Faulk	538	184	177	361
Grant*	1185	357	414	771
Gregory*	805	339	233	572
Haakon*	287	117	85	202

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Hamlin	810	370	220	590
Hand	661	251	205	456
Hanson	224	92	66	158
Harding	28	22	3	25
Hughes*	3948	1,906	1,021	2,927
Hutchinson*	1648	494	577	1,071
Hyde*	299	101	99	200
Jackson*	196	104	46	150
Jerauld	311	169	71	240
Jones*	319	139	90	229
Kingsbury	1015	437	289	726
Lake	1704	658	523	1,181
Lawrence	3283	1,745	769	2,514
Lincoln	13943	3,849	5,047	8,896
Lyman*	337	205	66	271
Marshall*	811	355	228	583
McCook	1057	419	319	738
McPherson	101	53	24	77
Meade*	2783	1,163	810	1,973
Mellette*	20	8	6	14
Miner	436	178	129	307
Minnehaha	40267	13,055	13,606	26,661
Moody*	804	298	253	551
Oglala Lakota*	84	42	21	63
Pennington*	17924	5,830	6,047	11,877
Perkins*	257	131	63	194
Potter	392	154	119	273
Roberts*	2134	966	584	1,550
Sanborn	436	242	97	339
Spink	1475	465	505	970
Stanley*	580	286	147	433
Sully	164	110	27	137
Todd*	82	30	26	56
Tripp*	975	447	264	711
Turner	1750	584	583	1,167
Union	1156	594	281	875
Walworth*	919	425	247	672
Yankton	5054	1,556	1,749	3,305
Ziebach*	38	12	13	25
Other	3483	731	1,376	2,107

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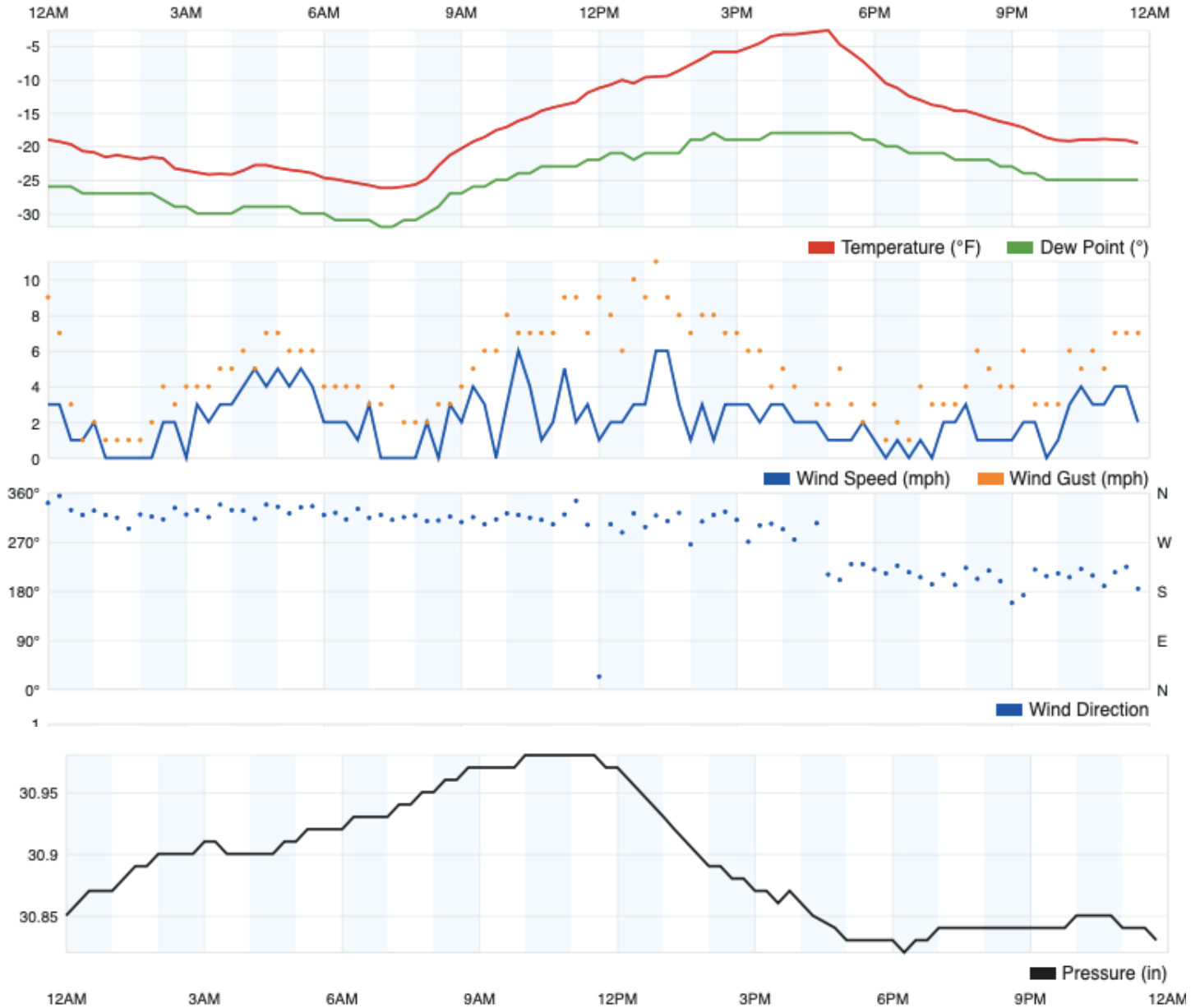
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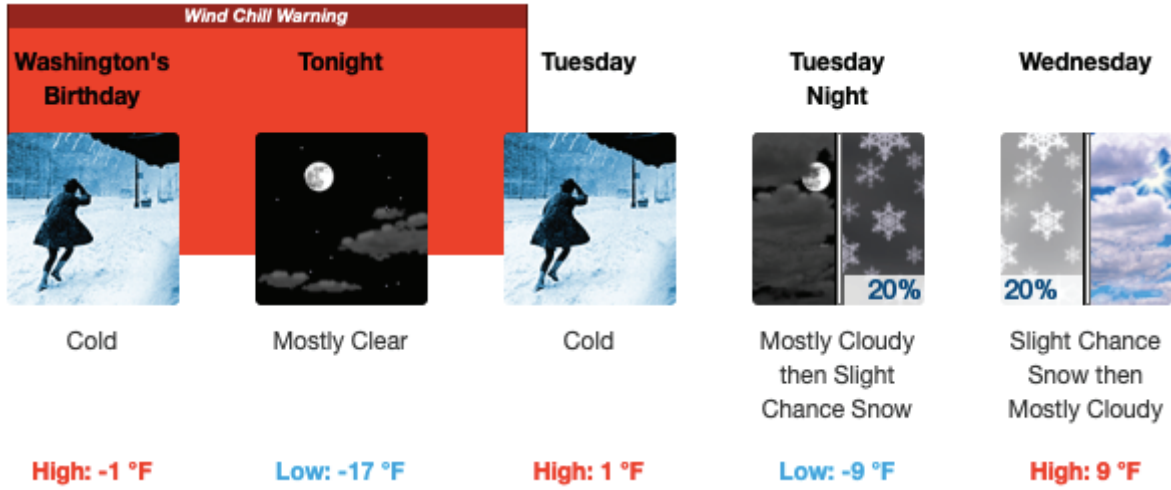
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Bitterly Cold to Dangerous Wind Chills into Tuesday Morning!

Although wind chills improve this afternoon, they will drop again tonight.

Frostbite possible in 10!

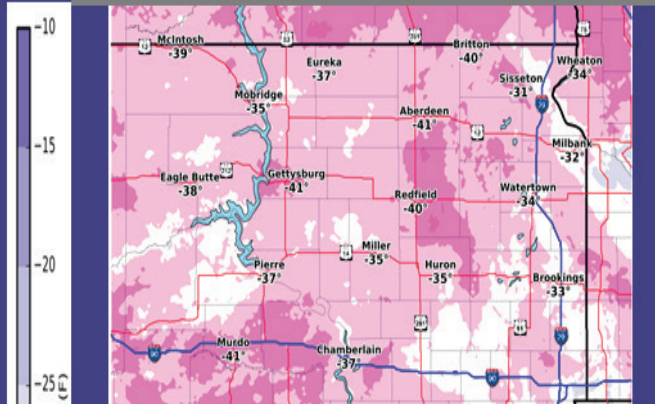
EXTREME COLD



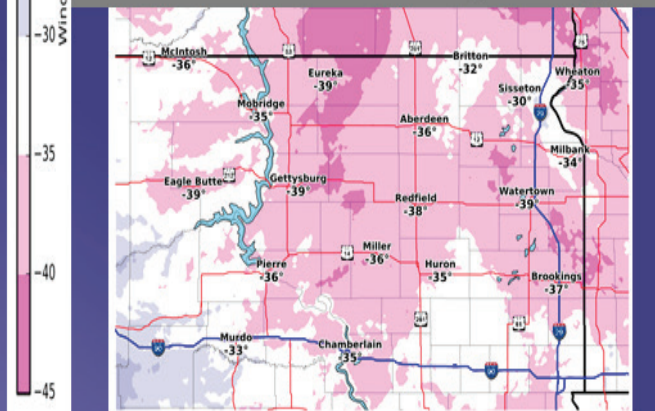
NWS Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 2/15/2021 5:05 AM Central

Lowest Wind Chills this Morning



Lowest Wind Chills Tuesday Morning



Cold conditions continue with highs today in the single digits on either side of zero. Lows tonight will once again drop into the teens below zero. Wind chills of 30° below zero or colder can be expected through this morning and later tonight into Tuesday morning.

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Today in Weather History

February 15, 1969: Heavy snow, along with winds of 15 to 25 mph caused blowing and drifting snow which closed many roads. The heaviest snow fell in the southeast part of the state, where a foot of snow was reported.

February 15, 1990: Heavy snow developed across southwest South Dakota early on the 15th and moved slowly across the state before ending early on the 16th. A narrow band of 10 to 12 inches accumulated in Central South Dakota from Pierre to near Huron. Lesser amounts of 3 to 6 inches fell north and south of the heavy snow band. Some of the heavier snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Aberdeen and Sioux Falls, 10 inches Pierre, and 12 inches at Huron.

1982: A "meteorological bomb" exploded in the Atlantic southeast of Newfoundland. The term is used to describe a storm that rapidly intensifies. An intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The storm produced 80 mph winds that whipped the water into waves fifty feet high.

2000: Amarillo, Texas, set unusual temperature records today. The high of 82 degrees smashed the old daily high of 76 degrees set in 1921. The morning low of 41 degrees broke the old high-low record for the date of 40 degrees, which was also set in 1921.

1895 - A big Gulf snowstorm produced six inches at Brownsville TX and Mobile AL, 15 inches at Galveston TX, and 24 inches of snow at Rayne LA in 24 hours. Snow fell at the very mouth of the Mississippi River. Houston TX received 22 inches of snow, and nine inches blanketed New Orleans LA. (David Ludlum)

1936 - The temperature at Parshall ND plunged to 60 degrees below zero to establish a state record. On the 6th of July that same year the temperature at Steele ND hit 121 degrees, also a state record. (David Ludlum)

1982 - An intense cyclone off the Atlantic coast capsized a drilling rig killing 84 persons, and sank a Soviet freighter resulting in 33 more deaths. The cyclone produced 80 mph winds which whipped the water into waves fifty feet high. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm crossing the central U.S. produced severe thunderstorms which spawned tornadoes in Louisiana and Mississippi. Tornadoes injured four persons at Pierre Pass LA, three persons at Tangipahoa LA, two persons at Lexie MS and two persons at Nicholson MS. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph killed one person south of Sulphur LA. Jackson MS was drenched with 1.5 inches of rain in ten minutes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure brought heavy snow to parts of Michigan, with eleven inches reported at Rogers City. A cold front crossing the Northern Rockies produced wind gusts to 74 mph at Livingston MT, and created blizzard conditions in Idaho. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thirty-seven cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Atlanta GA was a February record. Highs of 79 degrees at Chattanooga TN, 84 degrees at Columbia SC and 85 degrees at New Orleans LA equalled February records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Snow, sleet and freezing rain along an arctic cold front prevailed from the north central U.S. to the Northern Atlantic Coast Region. High winds created near blizzard conditions in southern Wyoming, closing Interstate 80, while up to eleven inches of snow fell across central Minnesota.

1990 - Heavy snow also blanketed the Northern Atlantic Coast States, with ten inches reported at Buffalo NY and Mount Washington NH. Freezing rain over southern New England knocked out electricity to more than 10,000 homes in the western suburbs of Boston MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - Up to 11 inches of snow fell in areas south of Nashville, TN, causing power outages and producing hazardous driving conditions. The Weather Doctor

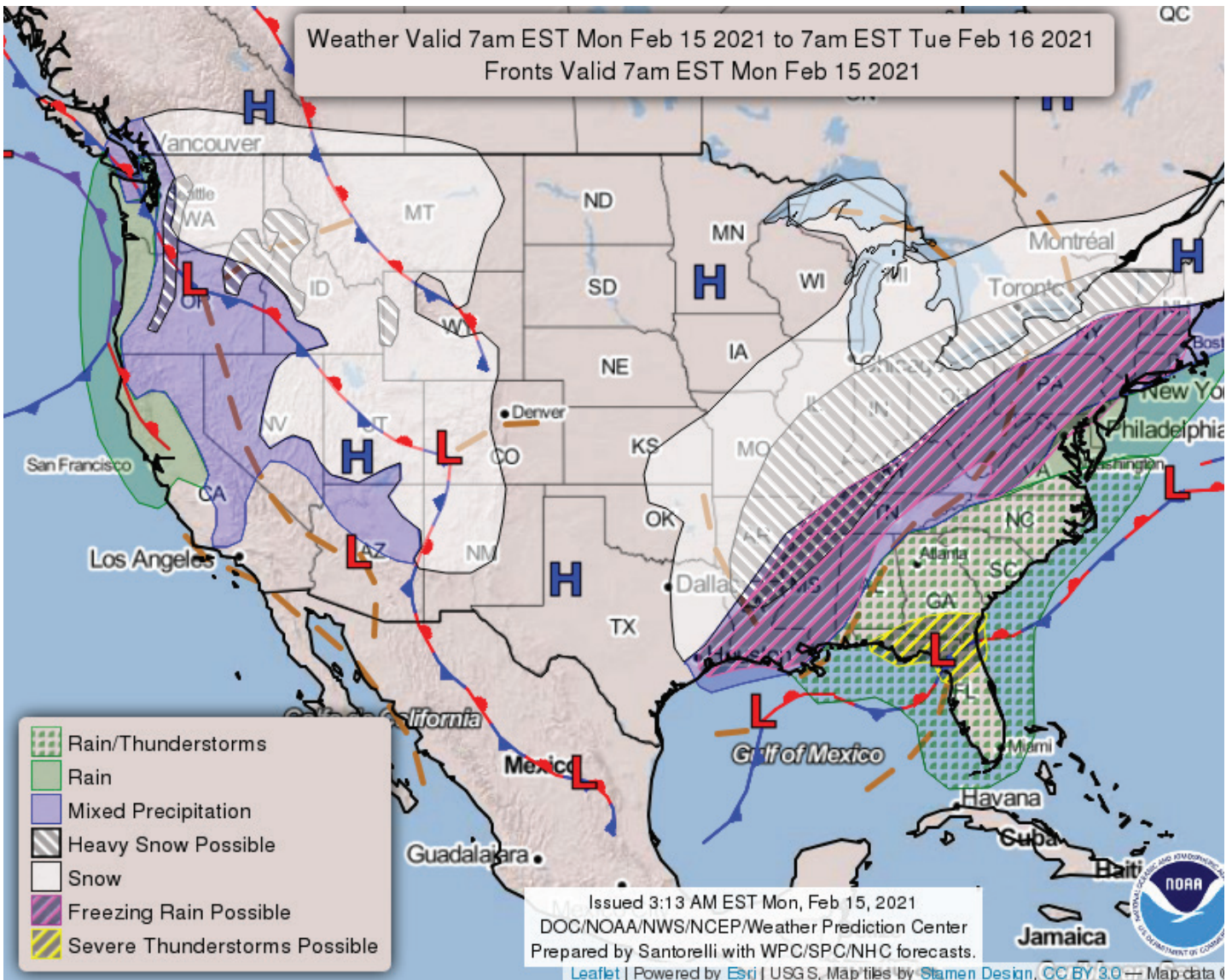
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: -2 °F at 4:56 PM
Low Temp: -26 °F at 7:18 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 1:12 PM
Precip:

Record High: 65° in 1921
Record Low: -35° in 1939
Average High: 28°F
Average Low: 7°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.23
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.70
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 6:01 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33 a.m.



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FENCED IN?

Years ago, one of the most popular songs was, "Don't Fence Me In!" Its catchy tune and happy words captured the minds of many, and people sang the refrain over and over.

A psychologist became interested in its popularity and decided to conduct a research project to discover why it was so appealing to so many.

His conclusion? Everyone feels as though they are "fenced in" by one thing or another - whether it is a job or a mortgage, unpaid credit cards, or the responsibilities of life in general. Life has a way of building walls around us and we feel "fenced in!"

There is a wall of fear. Life is unpredictable and uncertain. A job, or a loved one, or the reality that our health can be taken from us in a moment. Suddenly, what once was a shield of security is gone. Perhaps forever.

There is a wall of failure. Many find themselves behind this wall because of poor choices, bad advice, or lack of planning, or following the path of least resistance. But failure is not a disgrace - not doing our very best is!

There is the wall of forsaking truth. Often we do not want to admit what is, so we "create" what isn't and get trapped. One lie always calls for another until the "wall of lies" is so high above us it blocks the light of truth from us.

But we find Good News in God's Word! There is God's strength to scale these walls as well as the other walls we build around ourselves or that rise up before us.

"With my God, I can scale a wall," said the Psalmist. Whatever is before us can be put behind us with God's help available to us!

Prayer: Father, there are far too many walls in life to climb without Your help. Thank You for being our Ladder to get us over, around, or through any wall. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall. Psalm 18:29

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Father/Daughter Dance (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (Halloween)
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

News from the Associated Press

2 Aberdeen men tackle COVID-19 blahs by running every street

By TRENT ABREGO Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Paul Hopkins listened to a podcast in which the host had run every street in San Francisco and it got him thinking about a similar venture in Aberdeen.

Now, he and running partner Jeff Larson have just about completed the task.

The temperature at 7 a.m. in Aberdeen was below zero, but that didn't deter Hopkins, 61, and Larson, 49, from hitting the streets. On this day, they ran primarily along Third Avenue Southeast and weaved through side streets to continue to check off the map they have that tracks their progress.

"It really wasn't that bad," Larson said of the frigid weather. "I think your initial first mile is always the tough mile to get moving, get the joints going, especially when you get older. It's not fun right away, but when (your face) numbs up, it's fun. We're talking about life, and so you get good conversations out there so you just stop thinking about it."

While their eyelids were frosted by the end of their run, it wasn't the coldest temperature that they have run in.

"We ended up running from here (Aberdeen), it was about 10 miles. It was 19 below and we ran all the way back to Warner, and my wife drove us back in," Larson said.

Hopkins first mentioned the idea of running every street in Aberdeen to Larson two years ago. Larson jumped at the chance.

"As soon as I heard it, it was just getting it to go," he said.

After two years of discussing and preparing, the duo got together and set out to complete the challenge. Even though it was Hopkins' idea, it was Larson who put the plan together.

"He's the one that got it going, though," Hopkins said.

The mission started in November, before Thanksgiving. They will have run about 230 miles by the end of the tour, the Aberdeen American News reported.

Each Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, Hopkins and Larson have been taking to the streets to try and inch closer to their goal. Not only has the challenge strengthened their friendship, they also hold each other accountable, each runner making sure the other shows up.

"I think you could do anything you set out to achieve if you have someone alongside you to keep you accountable and keep you excited about it," Larson said. "That's what this is all about, it's just enjoyment. It's not trying to set new records out on the street, it's just enjoying each other's company."

In the era of COVID-19, most marathons, triathlons and other such races have either been canceled or held virtually. That's made it hard to train.

"Because there's no really big races going on, you try to come up with ideas to keep your training going, keep some motivation going. Without races, it's really hard to get up and get those miles in," Larson said.

Larson and Hopkins are members of the Aberdeen Area Running Club, which hosts group runs. Members run different distances and at different paces.

"It's just a nice time to get together with people like-minded. You'll find the group is so diverse, we have a lot of triathlon people who are in there, we got a lot of marathon runners and we got people just trying to get fit," Larson said. "It's just kind of nice to throw ideas out. It's kind of our think tank every Sunday. ... It's a big social event, kind of our church type of deal."

Wilson, Scheierman carry S. Dakota St. past Oral Roberts

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Douglas Wilson tied a season-high 23 points and Baylor Scheierman scored 22 and South Dakota State topped Oral Roberts 95-80 on Sunday.

Scheierman finished with a double-double collecting 11 rebounds whiled distributing seven assists. Alex Arians scored 15 with 10 rebounds for South Dakota State (12-5, 8-3 Summit League) and Charlie Easley

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scored 12.

The 95 points were a season high for South Dakota State.

Max Abmas scored 30 points for the Golden Eagles (11-9, 8-4) and Kareem Thompson scored 18.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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Panoam carries North Dakota past South Dakota 85-81

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Bentiu Panoam had 22 points as North Dakota narrowly beat South Dakota 85-81 on Sunday.

Filip Rebraca had 17 points for North Dakota (8-15, 7-7 Summit League). Mitchell Sueker added 15 points. Caleb Nero had 13 points. Tyree Ihenacho had 7 points, 11 rebounds, and seven assists.

A.J. Plitzuweit had 34 points for the Coyotes (11-9, 10-5). Stanley Umude added 15 points and seven rebounds. Tasos Kamateros had 10 points.

The Fighting Hawks are undefeated in three games against the Coyotes this season. Most recently, North Dakota defeated South Dakota 85-76 on Saturday.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

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Selland has 30, No. 23 South Dakota St. women top ORU 72-60

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Myah Selland scored a career-high 30 points and No. 23 South Dakota State scored the last 10 points of the game to hold off Oral Roberts 73-61 on Sunday for the Jackrabbits' 14th-straight win.

Compared with Saturday's 82-60 win over the Golden Eagles, the Jackrabbits had to work much harder but made all the plays down the stretch.

Oral Roberts pulled within 63-61 on a Tierney Coleman basket with 3:06 to go. Paiton Burckhard answered with a layup and then Oral Roberts missed its last five shots and had three turnovers. Tylee Irwin made two free throws, Selland made a basket at 1:06 to surpass her previous career high by one and Burckhard closed it out with a half-minute to go.

Burckhard finished with 12 points for the Jackrabbits (17-2, 10-0 Summit Conference). Selland had eight rebounds and six assists.

Coleman had a career-high 22 points for the Golden Eagles (16-2, 4-6).

A day after getting pounded on the boards by 24, Oral Roberts cut that to two and was even on the offensive end after SDSU turned a 21-6 advantage into a 15-4 difference on second-chance points on Saturday.

The Jackrabbits only led 38-32 at the half but Oral Roberts took a 43-41 lead midway through the third quarter. That's when Sinetra Jones was called for a flagrant foul on a rebound. Selland made the free throws and scored underneath on the ensuing possession. Haley Greer and Sydney Stapleton then added 3-pointers.

ORU stayed close, hitting 10 of 20 3s through three quarters but went 0 for 7 in the fourth.

South Dakota State plays a pair at North Dakota State next weekend.

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More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

South Dakota confirms 111 new COVID-19 cases, 6 new deaths

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Sunday confirmed six new deaths due to complications from the coronavirus, raising the total fatalities to 13 for the weekend, 66 in February and 1,844 since the start of the pandemic.

The state's death count is the 40th highest in the country overall and the seventh highest per capita at about 208 deaths per 100,000 people, according to data compiled Saturday by Johns Hopkins University researchers.

State officials listed 111 new positive COVID-19 tests in the last day, increasing the total number of cases to 110,315. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases in the state has remained mostly constant at about 153 per day, The COVID Tracking Project reported.

Active cases in the state continue to fall. The state noted 2,073 active cases on Sunday, down 46 from Saturday's update. Hospitalizations rose by five, to 87.

The Department of Health update showed that 152,992 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered to 103,895 residents, with 49,097 people receiving both shots.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

South Carolina considers breaking up public health agency

By MICHELLE LIU Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina's public health workers have been tasked with keeping the state safe for 143 years, ever since lawmakers created a health board in 1878 after a yellow fever outbreak killed 20,000 Americans.

Now, as the coronavirus pandemic surges, legislators are trying to break their agency apart.

As in most states, South Carolina's public health agency was underfunded and overworked long before it had to sustain an exhausting defense against a virus humans had never seen before.

Criticism has mounted from all sides since then — over a slow rollout of testing, the agency's refusal to release detailed data on early cases, and for seeming to sideline its top epidemiologist.

Now a new director has stepped into what many see as a leadership vacuum, but lawmakers intent on dismantling the Department of Health and Environmental Control aren't cutting him much slack.

Dr. Edward Simmer is the first medical doctor to helm the agency in nearly four decades — a fact that surprises Simmer himself. He told The Associated Press in an interview that he'll put science at the center of his dealings with the public, the legislature and the governor.

"Obviously, there are political aspects to what DHEC does. My focus is to be as apolitical as we can be," Simmer said.

Unlike most public health agencies, South Carolina's portfolio has included environmental regulation since the 1970s. It now has nearly 4,000 employees, overseeing everything from water quality, dams and landfills to hospitals and vaccine distribution.

The sprawling agency only indirectly answers to elected officials, through an eight-member board appointed by the governor. State officials have said for years that it has become too powerful and unmanageable.

Lawmakers have accused the agency of failing to advocate forcefully enough for prevention measures or to push back on Republican Gov. Henry McMaster's decisions to reopen businesses. They said DHEC staff shirked responsibility by letting the board decide how to allocate limited vaccines; that the board, comprised mostly of businesspeople and just one doctor, lacks transparency; and that board members moved too slowly to find a new director after the last one quit, mid-pandemic.

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Senate President Harvey Peeler is ready to split DHEC apart, bundling public health duties with the state's mental health department and funneling environmental permitting operations to other state agencies. McMaster has said he supports breaking up DHEC as well.

"No one is in control at DHEC and hasn't been for quite some time," Peeler declared in December when he announced the bill that would restructure the agency.

Public health agencies have become political scapegoats nationwide after years of inadequate funding, and a lack of federal leadership and coordination has made responding to the pandemic even more difficult, said Simon Haeder, a professor of public policy at Penn State.

In some other states with Republican-controlled legislatures such as Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Oklahoma, lawmakers are looking to curb the powers of proactive state and local health departments.

In South Carolina, the prevailing sentiment is a desire to make the agency more effective, after the response has been hamstrung by a series of politically-appointed directors who didn't last and other staff turnovers.

"You can make all the structural changes you want, but you've got to pick people who are really good at this," said former Gov. Jim Hodges, who served from 1999 to 2003.

Sen. Dick Harpootlian, a Columbia Democrat who has railed against the agency's refusal to shut down businesses flouting public health guidelines, said the plan to split DHEC is a "distraction" and it's the board that ought to be replaced: "They've been useless. Useless is an understatement."

There are signs that other basic agency functions are falling through the cracks.

Lapsed water pollution permits at three of the state's coal plants had languished for about a decade before environmentalists sued the agency last summer to do its job. The agency finally agreed in January to review the permits.

"Abdicating your responsibility to make sure you're protecting the citizens of the state from pollution is a pretty serious deficiency," said Amy Armstrong of the South Carolina Environmental Law Project.

More recently, a computer system switchover left families and funeral homes without death certificates, as bodies awaiting cremation stacked up in at least one funeral home, The Post and Courier reported.

Still, people who've worked closely with the agency say splitting up DHEC without adequate funding and staffing will only make problems worse, and that trying to do so during a pandemic is ill-timed.

If anything, the agency's two sides should coordinate even more closely as hazards to human health increase due to climate change and other environmental threats, said John Simkovich, a regional director of public health who left in 2013.

Public health resources were slashed by lawmakers during the Great Recession, and board members' terms lapsed under Gov. Mark Sanford. His successor, Gov. Nikki Haley, remade the board, and Catherine Templeton, previously tapped by Haley to trim jobs at the state's labor department, was named director. Templeton initiated more cuts, centralizing offices and laying off seasoned staffers.

Dr. Robert Ball, one of the state's top infectious disease epidemiologists until 2012, said morale went downhill after Templeton arrived, prompting an exodus of longtime employees that rapidly drained institutional knowledge.

Salaries remain relatively low for trained health professionals and scientists, so younger staffers quickly move on to earn more elsewhere, former employees say.

Simmer told lawmakers who confirmed him this month that he believes the agency's environmental and public health halves complement each other. He asked senators to give him a year on the job to figure out reforms before they try to take the agency apart.

So far, he said, no one has promised him that time.

Myanmar security forces intensify crackdown on protesters

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Security forces in Myanmar pointed guns toward anti-coup protesters and attacked them with sticks on Monday, seeking to quell the large-scale demonstrations calling for the military junta that seized power earlier this month to reinstate the elected government.

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More than 1,000 protesters rallied in front of the Myanmar Economic Bank in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, when at least 10 trucks full of soldiers and police arrived and immediately started firing slingshots toward the protesters, according to a photographer who witnessed the events.

The soldiers and police then attacked the protesters with sticks, and police could be seen aiming long guns into the air amid sounds that resembled gunfire. Local media reported that rubber bullets were also fired into the crowd, and that a few people were injured.

Police were also seen pointing guns toward the protesters.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, protesters gathered outside a police station demanding the release of a group of high school students who were detained while joining in anti-coup activities.

One student who managed to escape told reporters that the pupils — thought to range in age from 13 to 16 — were demonstrating peacefully when a line of riot police suddenly arrived and began arresting them. It wasn't clear exactly how many students were rounded up, but estimates put the figure at between 20 and 40.

Earlier Monday, Myanmar's military leaders extended their detention of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose remand was set to expire and whose freedom is a key demand of the crowds of people continuing to protest the Feb. 1 coup.

Suu Kyi will now be remanded until Feb. 17, when she will likely appear in court by videoconference, according to Khin Maung Zaw, a lawyer asked by Suu Kyi's party to represent her. The Nobel laureate remains under house arrest on a minor charge of possessing unregistered imported walkie-talkies.

Suu Kyi's extended detention is likely to further inflame tensions between the military and the protesters who have taken to the streets of cities across the Southeast Asian nation seeking the return of the government they elected.

Protesters continued to gather across Myanmar on Monday, following a night in which authorities cut the country's internet access and increased the security presence in major cities seeking to curtail demonstrations.

Thousands of engineers marched on the streets of Mandalay chanting and holding signs that read: "Free our leader," "Who stands with justice?" and "Stop arresting people illegally at midnight."

In Yangon, the country's most populous city, fewer protesters gathered on Monday due to the loss of the internet and reports of military vehicles on the streets. Nevertheless, more than 1,000 anti-coup demonstrators were outside the Central Bank of Myanmar building, where there were also military trucks full of soldiers, riot police, water cannon trucks and armored personnel carriers.

Demonstrators carried placards that read "#SupportCDM #SaveMyanmar." CDM refers to the civil disobedience movement that has seen doctors, engineers and others in Myanmar refuse to work until the military releases elected political leaders and returns the country to civilian rule.

Some protesters posed for photographs in front of military vehicles while holding red signs that read "Join in CDM."

When the military seized power, it detained Suu Kyi and members of her government and prevented recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament. The junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, said it stepped in because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The state election commission refuted that contention, saying there is no evidence to support it.

The military justified its move by citing a clause in the 2008 constitution, implemented during military rule, that says in cases of national emergency, the government's executive, legislative and judicial powers can be handed to the military commander-in-chief.

It is just one of many parts of the charter that ensured the military could maintain ultimate control over the country it ruled for 50 years following a 1962 coup. The military is allowed to appoint its members to 25% of seats in Parliament and it controls several key ministries involved in security and defense.

An order on Sunday that appeared to be from the Ministry of Transport and Communications told mobile phone service providers to shut down internet connections from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. Monday. It circulated

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widely on social media, as did a notice said to be from service provider Oredoo Myanmar containing the same details.

On Sunday, ambassadors from the United States and Canada and 12 European nations called on Myanmar's security forces to refrain from violence against those "protesting the overthrow of their legitimate government."

They condemned the arrests of political leaders and activists as well as the military's interference with communications.

"We support the people of Myanmar in their quest for democracy, freedom, peace, and prosperity," they said in a joint statement issued late Sunday night. "The world is watching."

The Latest: Variants-wary Germany turns back 5,000 at border

By The Associated Press undefined

BERLIN — German authorities say police have turned back some 5,000 people at the country's borders with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol region since tight controls were introduced on Sunday.

Germany imposed checks to slow the spread of the British coronavirus variant from the Czech Republic and the South African variant from Tyrol. It is restricting entry to German citizens and residents, truck drivers, transport and health service workers and a few others including cross-border commuters working in "systemically relevant sectors." All have to show a negative coronavirus test.

Interior Ministry spokesman Steve Alter said, by Monday morning, federal police had checked about 10,000 people and turned back some 5,000.

The checks have prompted strong criticism from Austria.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, defended the German measures. He said that "the German government had to act here" to prevent the rapid spread of more contagious virus variants.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- COVID-19 conspiracy shows the reach of Chinese disinformation around the world
- Here's a look at the key superspreaders of virus disinformation
- Peru minister resigns amid uproar over government officials being vaccinated before country received 1M doses for health workers
- Britain reaches a vaccination goal: Giving first shots to 15 million most vulnerable
- Italy won't open its ski slopes due to fears of virus variants
- Follow all of AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>, <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

MADRID — Police across Spain have wrapped a weekend of cracking down on parties and boozing in public contravening restrictions to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

Large parties ignoring social distancing, mask wearing and existing curfews were closed down in Ibiza, northeastern Tarragona and many other parts of the country, which has only recently slowed down the sharp increase of contagion seen after the end-of-year celebrations.

In Madrid alone, police fined 450 people for street alcohol consumption in groups and busted 418 illegal parties in entertainment venues and private homes from Friday to Sunday, including a rave in a warehouse with 55 adults and 11 minors who were not wearing masks and were using drugs.

The National Police also found over 50 people in a small apartment rented for tourists in the center of the Spanish capital.

The parties are increasingly better organized to attract foreign visitors and avoid scrutiny, the local police say, with no cash exchanged and payments via phone. In contrast with much of Europe, where entertainment venues have been closed, bars and restaurants in Madrid are allowed to open until 9 p.m.

Spain has managed to lower its 14-day rate of infection per 100,000 residents, from nearly 900 cases

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in Jan. 27 to less than 500 on Friday, but experts are warning against relaxing restrictions too fast, given that COVID-19 wards in hospitals are still grappling with high occupation rates.

BERLIN — Officers trying to bust a clandestine Carnival celebration in eastern Germany were left red-faced when most of the revelers escaped police on skis.

German news agency dpa reported Monday that police in the town of Marienberg, near the border with the Czech Republic, received information that about 100 people were partying Sunday without abiding by the requirements to wear face masks or respect minimum social distancing.

Police were unable to determine how many people had broken the law, however, because their arrival prompted a hasty on-ski departure by most of the party-goers.

Saxony, where Marienberg is located, has the second-highest infection rate of Germany's 16 states. Germany has restricted entry from the neighboring Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol state to prevent the spread of variant viruses from those countries.

Police across Germany have broken up numerous Carnival celebrations across the country in recent days.

LONDON — People arriving in Britain must quarantine in hotels starting Monday as the government tries to prevent new variants of the coronavirus derailing its fast-moving vaccination drive.

On Sunday the government reached its goal of giving the first of two doses of vaccine to 15 million of the most vulnerable people, including health care workers and over-70s.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the vaccination drive is now being extended to people over 65 and those with underlying health conditions.

Health officials are concerned that vaccines may not work as well on some new strains of the virus, including one first identified in South Africa.

People arriving in England from 33 high-risk countries must stay in quarantine hotels for 10 days at their own expense. In Scotland the rule applies to arrivals from any country.

Critics say the move comes too late, with the South African variant already circulating in the country.

HARARE — Zimbabwe has received its first COVID-19 vaccines with the arrival early Monday of an Air Zimbabwe jet carrying 200,000 Sinopharm doses from China.

It is one of China's first shipments of vaccines to Africa, after deliveries to Egypt and Equatorial Guinea.

The first Sinopharm vaccines are a donation from China to the southern African country. President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government has purchased an additional 600,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine that are expected to arrive early next month, according to state media.

Mnangagwa, in a Twitter post, said the Chinese vaccines will be administered to Zimbabweans this week.

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — As people in Auckland adjusted to a new lockdown on Monday, health officials said they'd found no evidence the coronavirus had spread further in the community, raising hopes the restrictions might be short-lived.

New Zealand's largest city was hurriedly placed into a three-day lockdown Sunday after three unexplained virus cases were found. It's the country's first lockdown in six months and represents a setback in its largely successful efforts to control the virus.

Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield said the negative test results since the first three were found was an encouraging start, but cautioned a fuller picture of the outbreak wouldn't emerge until Tuesday, when the results from an expanded testing regimen would be known.

New Zealand also announced its first batch of vaccine had arrived. Officials said the shipment of about 60,000 doses of the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech would initially be prioritized on border workers.

LISBON, Portugal — A French medical team is due to start work Monday at a hospital in Portugal,

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which for more than three weeks has been the country in the world with most COVID-19 deaths by size of population.

The French doctor and three nurses arrived amid signs that a month-long lockdown, which is being extended to at least March 1, is paying off.

On Sunday, just over 4,800 COVID-19 patients were in hospital, down from a Feb. 1 peak of close to 7,000. There were 795 virus patients in intensive care, a drop from a peak of 905 on Feb. 5.

Johns Hopkins University says the seven-day rolling average of daily deaths in Portugal has fallen from 2.82 deaths per 100,000 people on Jan. 31 to 1.63 deaths per 100,000.

JERUSALEM — A large-scale Israeli study has pointed to the efficacy of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at preventing symptomatic infections with the coronavirus.

Clalit, the largest of Israel's four health care providers, released a study Sunday that compared infections in 600,000 Israelis who had received the vaccine compared to 600,000 who were not immunized.

The study found a 94% drop in symptomatic infections and a 92% drop in serious cases of the disease among those vaccinated. It said "the efficacy of the vaccine is preserved in every age group," particularly a week after the second dose of the vaccine.

The researchers said the preliminary findings of the ongoing research "is aimed at emphasizing to the population that has yet to vaccinate that the vaccine is highly effective and prevents serious illness."

Israel launched its COVID-19 vaccine campaign in December. Since then, over a quarter of the population — 2.5 million people — have received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and over 42% have received the first shot, according to the Health Ministry.

BUDAPEST — The first shipment of a COVID-19 vaccine developed in China will arrive Tuesday in Hungary, the first country in the European Union to approve the Chinese vaccine.

In a video on Facebook on Monday, State Secretary Tamas Menczer said 550,000 doses of the vaccine developed by Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm will be transported by jet from Beijing, enough to treat 275,000 people with two doses each. The first shipment will undergo testing by the National Public Health Center before inoculations begin, Menczer said.

Hungary earlier broke with the EU's common vaccine procurement program by approving the vaccine on Jan. 29, and has purchased 5 million doses. Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, has said he would choose to take the Sinopharm jab himself.

The vaccine's developer says it is nearly 80% effective, but has not yet released stage 3 clinical trial data. Around 30 million people worldwide have received the Sinopharm vaccine, including half a million ethnic Hungarians in Serbia, Hungary's non-EU neighbor to the south, Menczer said. Hungary has also approved Russia's Sputnik V vaccine and began administering it in hospitals in the capital of Budapest last week.

PRAGUE — Long lines of trucks and other vehicles have formed on two major highways leading from the Czech Republic to Germany due to tight border controls on the German side.

Germany on Sunday implemented the controls on its frontiers with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol province in an effort to stem the spread of more contagious coronavirus variants.

The new restrictions limit entry from those areas to German citizens and residents, truck drivers, transport and health service workers and a few others who have to register online and show a negative coronavirus test and be quarantined for at least 10 days on arrival. No one else is allowed to enter Germany.

Sunday was quiet on the roads but Monday was a different story.

The queue reached 23 kilometers (14 miles) on the D8 highway to the German state of Saxony while the line on the D5 highway to the state of Bavaria was about 15 kilometers (9 miles) long.

Three Czech counties on the border with Germany and Poland are in a complete lockdown after a surge in a more contagious coronavirus variant originally found in Britain.

MANILA, Philippines — The approval for many Philippine movie theaters, video game arcades and other

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leisure businesses to reopen has been postponed another two weeks after mayors expressed fear it will bring new coronavirus infections.

They've been closed since last year in most of the Philippines, which has suffered a pandemic-wrought recession since.

The government had announced it would allow them to reopen Monday, but the delay came after a meeting of local Manila and national officials.

Philippine officials said mayors and health officials should draw rules to ensure safety amid the easing of quarantine restrictions in more public areas, including museums, libraries, parks and historical sites.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque later said in a televised news briefing that the reopening of movie houses would be moved to March 1 to allow more time to craft safety guidelines.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Health officials are urging tougher coronavirus restrictions and a partial lockdown in parts of Sri Lanka after patients were confirmed to have a more contagious variant.

Patients in several parts of the Indian Ocean island nation have been confirmed to have a variant that first emerged in the United Kingdom, health officials said Saturday.

"There is a greater risk of spreading the new variant into others areas unless tough and effective measures including lockdowns are taken immediately as already the number of positive cases are rising," President of the Public Health Inspectors Association Upul Rohana said Monday.

Sri Lanka had a one-month lockdown last March when the first positive case was detected. A lockdown in the capital and its suburbs was imposed again in October after two fresh outbreaks erupted.

Sri Lanka has now confirmed 75,653 cases with 397 fatalities.

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia will begin vaccinating its population against COVID-19 next week after its first shipment of Pfizer vaccine was delivered on Monday.

More than 142,000 doses had arrived at Sydney airport, the government said. Health care, aged care and quarantine workers will be among the first to be vaccinated from Feb. 22.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison will also be among the first to receive a dose in a bid to raise public confidence in the program.

Australia decided against accelerating the vaccine regulator's approval process in order to increase public confidence that the Pfizer product was safe.

So far, Pfizer is the only vaccine approved for use in Australia. But the regulator is expected to also approve the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine soon.

Australia is contracted to receive 20 million Pfizer doses and to receive or manufacture at home 53.8 million AstraZeneca doses.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Alaska will no longer require travelers to have a negative COVID-19 test when arriving in the state, Gov. Mike Dunleavy said when outlining plans for the state to transition into a recovery phase.

The announcement came after the state's emergency declaration expired Sunday.

Dunleavy ordered his commissioners and state employees to continue following the policies that were in place under the declaration. However, officials will spend the next several weeks reviewing which policies are still needed.

"My administration will begin moving Alaska, its economy and our lives forward through this transition and recovery process," Dunleavy said. "Make no mistake about it, the virus may be with us for some time. But the data shows that the worst is most likely behind us."

Alaska has had 54,282 total cases of the virus, and 280 Alaskans have died.

LONDON — The U.K. announced Sunday that it had reached its goal of giving at least one COVID-19 vaccine shot to the most vulnerable people in the country, increasing pressure on ministers to clarify when

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they will ease a lockdown imposed in early January.

More than 15 million people, or 22% of the U.K. population, have received their first shot. The figure includes most people in the government's top four priority groups, including everyone over 75, frontline healthcare workers and nursing home staff and residents. Over 537,000 of them have also received their second dose.

"15,000,000! Amazing team," Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines minister, said in a tweet that featured a red heart and three syringes. "We will not rest till we offer the vaccine to the whole of phase1 the 1-9 categories of the most vulnerable & all over 50s by end April and then all adults."

Britain ranks behind only Israel, 73%, the Seychelles, 53%, and the United Arab Emirates, 51% in the percentage of people who have received one dose, according to Oxford University. The U.S. is fifth at 15%.

Power cut across Texas as snow, ice blanket southern Plains

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A winter storm dropping snow and ice also sent temperatures plunging across the southern Plains, prompting a power emergency in Texas a day after conditions canceled flights and impacted traffic across large swaths of the U.S.

Rotating power outages were initiated by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, or ERCOT, early Monday morning, meaning thousands went without electricity for short periods as temperatures fell into the teens near Dallas and 20s (about minus 5 degrees Celsius) around Houston.

"We urge Texans to put safety first," the council tweeted as it urged residents to reduce electricity use. ERCOT manages the flow of electric power in the state.

"Traffic lights and other infrastructure may be temporarily without power," ERCOT said.

The council described the rotating outages as a "last resort to preserve the reliability of the electric system as a whole," adding that utility transmission companies are tasked with determining how to reduce demand on the system.

"Every grid operator and every electric company is fighting to restore power right now," ERCOT President and CEO Bill Magness said in a statement.

The rotating outages were expected to last throughout Monday morning.

More than 1.6 million customers were in the dark as of 5 a.m. local time, according to poweroutage.us, a utility tracking site.

Around 5,000 Oklahoma Gas & Electric customers were without power overnight, and Entergy Arkansas logged about 3,000 outages. Both states have much smaller populations compared to Texas.

Officials in Houston had warned people to prepare for outages and hazardous roads — conditions similar to what residents might see in the wake of a Category 5 hurricane.

"There (have) been numerous reports of accidents from icing recently," National Weather Service lead forecaster Bob Oravec said Monday. "I think there's going to be a big threat today as the system pushes northeastward."

Accumulating ice between a tenth and a quarter of an inch (0.25 and 0.6 centimeters) was possible across eastern Louisiana, Mississippi, central Tennessee, Kentucky and over into the West Virginia and Ohio border region, Oravec said.

Up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) of snow was expected across parts of the southern Plains into Monday, said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center.

The region had been gearing up for the winter weather for the better part of the weekend. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for all of the state's 254 counties. Abbott, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson each activated National Guard units to assist state agencies with tasks including rescuing stranded drivers.

President Joe Biden also declared an emergency in Texas in a statement Sunday night. The declaration is intended to add federal aid to state and local response efforts.

More than 760 flights were canceled at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, and at Dallas Love Field

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most of the nearly 200 flights for Southwest Airlines, the airport's main carrier, were canceled on Sunday. American Airlines said about 345 of their flights were canceled at DFW Airport, its hub, by early Sunday afternoon. The airline said the storm was also affecting their flights across the region, with operations reduced and canceled at airports across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

The National Weather Service said Sunday that the forecast through early Tuesday calls for 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow in central Oklahoma, and 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) in an area extending from eastern Texas to the Ohio Valley in the Northeast.

In Memphis, Tennessee, snow started falling Sunday afternoon, and while main roads were still passable, lines formed during the day at grocery stores as people rushed to stock up.

In Mississippi, sleet in Jackson and other central parts of the state left roads and bridges slick. Bill Parker, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Jackson, said up to three-quarters of an inch (2 centimeters) of ice could accumulate in central Mississippi, bringing the possibility of power outages or falling tree limbs.

Parts of Kentucky and West Virginia still recovering from an ice storm last week are expected to get up to a quarter-inch (0.6 centimeters) of ice or up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow by Tuesday.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Northwest, tens of thousands of people were without power after a winter storm blanketed the region with ice and snow and made travel treacherous.

Through the wintry conditions Sunday, florists stayed busy for Valentine's Day.

In Fort Worth, Texas, Gordon Boswell Flowers' general manager said delivery drivers worked to wrap up deliveries before the weather worsened.

"It is icy and snowing and they're calling for more snow," Cheri Kirkman said.

Despite the weather, she said they still had some people coming in to pick up gifts. "We've got plenty all made up, ready to go," Kirkman said.

Associated Press journalists Julie Walker in New York City; John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia; Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee; and Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, contributed to this report.

At Camp David retreat, Biden hangs out, shows he's got game

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden spent his third week in office visiting the Pentagon, touring the National Institutes of Health and working on the administration's COVID-19 response.

He capped it off by beating one of his granddaughters at Mario Kart during his first presidential visit to Camp David, the historic retreat for U.S. leaders.

That's what Camp David has traditionally offered presidents: a respite from Washington where they can shed their ties and relax with family. The compound in the Maryland mountains just 60 miles (97 kilometers) from the capital features everything from a bowling alley to an archery range.

It's been used by every president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt first went there in 1943 as a personal hideaway and has been the site of major diplomatic negotiations and policy discussions throughout history, according to Michael Giorgione, who served as commander of Camp David for Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and wrote the book "Inside Camp David."

With the exception of Donald Trump — he generally preferred his own private clubs — every president has used Camp David "for a personal getaway, an escape from the clamor and the noise and the likes of the White House, and really go to this exclusive mountain retreat. That's one purpose. And the other is to bring world leaders there," Giorgione said.

When Roosevelt first arrived, the rustic retreat was "a hide-out with little hot water and with brush growing to the windowsills," former Associated Press White House reporter Dale Nelson wrote in his 1995 history, "The President is at Camp David." Still, Roosevelt somewhat fantastically dubbed it "Shangri-La," the name of the utopian community in the popular 1933 novel "Lost Horizon."

When Dwight Eisenhower took over, he added a putting green and a new name: Camp David, after his father and his grandson.

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Over the years, presidents made upgrades to suit their tastes. Richard Nixon added a heated swimming pool, and George H.W. Bush installed a regulation horseshoe range. Barack Obama, known for his love of basketball, built a court.

The compound also features a movie theater, skeet shooting range, horseback riding and tennis courts. "I leave my troubles outside the gate," Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon Johnson, once said of the camp.

Biden himself told reporters before departing Washington for the compound that his main plans for the long weekend were to "just hang out with the family and do what we always do." While presidents typically take the Marine One helicopter for the brief trip, weather forced the president to fly to Hagerstown, Maryland, via Air Force One, before taking a motorcade to the camp.

His granddaughter Naomi posted on her Instagram Saturday night a clip of Biden playing the video game, captioning it, "a little rusty, but he still won (barely)."

Biden took work with him, though, meeting with national security advisers on Saturday, issuing a statement on Trump's acquittal in his impeachment trial Saturday night and signing an executive order reestablishing a White House office on religious engagement on Sunday.

The compound's history includes more than just games of golf and winter sledding. It's also played host to foreign dignitaries and has been a gathering place for diplomacy. Giorgione says the camp's relaxed atmosphere lends itself to relationship-building.

"There's a certain feeling of going to camp as opposed to the White House, which is a little more formal, a little more stuffy if you'd say, and certain presidents find a much better connection at camp than they do at the White House," he said.

Roosevelt hosted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill there in 1943 to help lay the groundwork for the Normandy invasion, in the first visit by a foreign leader.

The camp became synonymous with fevered, last-ditch diplomatic negotiations after President Jimmy Carter invited Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat there in 1978 to negotiate a peace deal. After 13 days of tense talks, the two agreed to a framework that ultimately led to peace between the two nations.

Bill Clinton tried to replicate that diplomatic alchemy when he invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Camp David for Mideast peace talks in 2000. After two weeks of negotiations, the summit ended without an agreement.

George W. Bush visited the camp frequently, using it to entertain an array of foreign leaders as well as for a Cabinet retreat to plot out his administration's response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 2012, Obama hosted the Group of Eight summit for world leaders there, after Occupy Wall Street protests made his hometown of Chicago out of the question. World leaders stayed in the compound's 12 cabins, and could spend their free time mingling on the grounds.

Trump spent little time there and didn't host any foreign dignitaries. He once joked to a reporter: "You know how long you'd like it? For about 30 minutes."

But Giorgione said he expected that Biden, with his appreciation for diplomacy, would likely use the space to host foreign leaders after the coronavirus pandemic, which has precluded most in-person gatherings, is under control. He said when foreign leaders descend on Camp David, it can be like an "adult sleepover."

"Going to camp in the cabins creates an atmosphere where leaders are very close together. There's no large conference room with chandeliers and coffee service. This is a homespun, rustic get-together," he said.

Attendees "walk the trails together, we go for a bike ride, we sit down at a nice table in a small conference room."

"It created this art of having to get down in each other's personal space, and find time to legitimately talk," he said.

Russian cargo ship launched to International Space Station

MOSCOW (AP) — An unmanned Russian cargo ship launched successfully Monday with a load of sup-

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plies for the International Space Station.

The Progress MS-16 cargo ship blasted off as scheduled at 9:45 a.m. (0445 GMT) from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan and reached a designated orbit en route to the station.

It is carrying water, propellant and other supplies and is set to dock at the space outpost on Wednesday.

The space outpost is now operated by NASA's Kate Rubins, Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker; Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Soichi Noguchi; and Russian Space Agency Roscosmos' Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchkov.

Trump looks to reassert himself after impeachment acquittal

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump took in the win at Mar-a-Lago, surrounded by friends and family. His lawyers celebrated with hugs and smiles. One joked, "We're going to Disney World!"

Now acquitted in his second Senate impeachment trial, Trump is preparing for the next phase of his post-presidency life. Feeling emboldened by the trial's outcome, he is expected to reemerge from a self-imposed hibernation at his club in Palm Beach, Florida, and is eyeing ways to reassert his power.

But after being barred from Twitter, the former president lacks the social media bullhorn that fueled his political rise. And he's confronting a Republican Party deeply divided over the legacy of his jarring final days in office, culminating in the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol. Searing video images of the day played on loop during his impeachment trial, which ended Saturday.

Trump remains popular among the GOP base, but many Republicans in Washington have cooled to him. Never before have so many members of a president's party — seven GOP senators, in his case — voted for his removal in a Senate trial.

Some may work to counter efforts by Trump to support extreme candidates in next year's congressional primaries.

Undeterred, friends and allies expect Trump to resume friendly media interviews after weeks of silence. He has met with political aides to discuss efforts to help Republicans try to take control of the House and Senate in the 2022 midterms elections. He remains fixated on exacting revenge on Republicans who supported his impeachment or resisted his efforts to overturn the results of the November election won by Democrat Joe Biden.

"I imagine you'll probably be hearing a lot more from him in the coming days," senior adviser Jason Miller said.

In a statement after the vote, Trump offered few clues, but was defiant as he told supporters their movement "has only just begun."

"In the months ahead I have much to share with you, and I look forward to continuing our incredible journey together to achieve American greatness for all of our people," he said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, who spoke with Trump on Saturday night, acknowledged that Trump is "mad at some folks," but also "ready to move on and rebuild the Republican Party" and "excited about 2022."

In their conversations, Graham has stressed to Trump, who has threatened to start his own party to punish disloyal Republicans, that the GOP needs him to win.

"I said, 'Mr. President, this MAGA movement needs to continue. We need to unite the party. Trump-plus is the way back in 2022,'" Graham, R-S.C., told "Fox News Sunday."

"My goal is to win in 2022 to stop the most radical agenda I've seen coming out of the Democratic presidency of Joe Biden. We can't do that without Donald Trump, so he's ready to hit the trail and I'm ready to work with him," Graham said.

Graham said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who voted to acquit but then delivered a scalding denunciation of Trump, "got a load off a chest, obviously." Graham said later in the interview: "If you want to get something off your chest, fine, but I'm into winning."

At his Palm Beach club on Saturday night, Trump was in a joyous mood as he enjoyed dinner on a patio packed with people. After a mellow last several weeks, one member described a party atmosphere not

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felt since before the election.

Still, Trump isn't in the clear yet. No longer protected by a Justice Department opinion against the prosecution of sitting presidents, he now faces multiple ongoing criminal investigations.

In Georgia, the Fulton County district attorney has opened a criminal investigation into "attempts to influence" the election, including Trump's call to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger demanding that the official find enough votes to overturn Biden's victory.

In New York, Attorney General Letitia James is investigating whether Trump and his company improperly inflated the value of his assets on annual financial statements in order to secure loans and obtain tax benefits. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. continues his own investigation, which has included grand jury testimony.

"He didn't get away with anything — yet," McConnell, R-Ky., after the vote. "We have a criminal justice system in this country. We have civil litigation. And former presidents are not immune from being accountable by either one."

McConnell voted to acquit Trump on the grounds the trial was unconstitutional because he is no longer in office, but insisted, "There's no question — none — that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of the day."

That sharp rebuke from his once-loyal defender underscores how dramatically Trump's stock has fallen in Washington since his first impeachment trial just over a year ago. But the desire to be rid of Trump is not shared across the country, where Republicans who have dared to admonish him have faced swift rebuke.

Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., was forced to defend her third-in-line leadership position after she voted in favor of impeachment. On Saturday, Louisiana's Republican Party quickly censured Sen. Bill Cassidy, one of the seven Republicans senators who voted for Trump's conviction.

In an interview Sunday with ABC's "This Week," Cassidy seemed at peace with his decision.

"I think his force wanes," he said of Trump. "The Republican Party is more than just one person. The Republican Party is about ideas."

But how long Trump retains his grip remains an open question, especially with a slew of likely 2024 candidates now trying to take the mantle.

Some, like Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, are advocating a clean break from Trump, who ended his presidency with a record low 34% approval rating according to Gallup polling. Others have stressed the need to keep his voters engaged, perhaps with candidates who trumpet the policies Trump championed, but with a less caustic style that might win back suburban voters.

In a sign of his enduring power, the Republican National Committee and other groups spent the trial sending fundraising appeals urging their followers to "Stand with Trump" and "SAVE President Trump's Legacy," in the words of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

"Oh, time is going to take care of that some way or another," said Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, told reporters Saturday. "But remember, in order to be a leader you got to have followers. So we're gonna find out, whoever leads. But everybody's going to be involved. We're a big tent."

While the Senate failed to bar Trump from running again for office, many believe he has done too much damage to be a credible candidate himself in 2024.

Republican Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, who is retiring, said Trump's refusal to accept the results of the election had "very badly damaged his reputation," eclipsing his accomplishments in office.

"Instead," Toomey said, "he'll be remembered throughout history as the president who resorted to nonlegal steps to try to hold on to power."

Support grows for Capitol riot inquiry after Trump acquittal

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After former President Donald Trump's acquittal at his second Senate impeachment trial, bipartisan support appears to be growing for an independent Sept. 11-style commission into the deadly insurrection that took place at the U.S. Capitol.

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Investigations into the riot were already planned, with Senate hearings scheduled later this month in the Senate Rules Committee. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has asked retired Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré to lead an immediate review of the Capitol's security process.

Lawmakers from both parties, speaking on Sunday's news shows, signaled that even more inquiries were likely. The Senate verdict Saturday, with its 57-43 majority falling 10 votes short of the two-thirds needed to convict Trump, hardly put to rest the debate about the Republican former president's culpability for the Jan. 6 assault.

"There should be a complete investigation about what happened," said Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, one of seven Republicans who voted to convict Trump. "What was known, who knew it and when they knew, all that, because that builds the basis so this never happens again."

Cassidy said he was "attempting to hold President Trump accountable," and added that as Americans hear all the facts, "more folks will move to where I was." He was censured by his state's party after the vote.

An independent commission along the lines of the one that investigated the Sept. 11 attacks would probably require legislation to create. That would elevate the investigation a step higher, offering a definitive government-backed accounting of events. Pelosi has expressed support for such a commission while stressing that the members who sit on it would be key. Still, such a panel would pose risks of sharpening partisan divisions or overshadowing President Joe Biden's legislative agenda.

"There's still more evidence that the American people need and deserve to hear and a 9/11 commission is a way to make sure that we secure the Capitol going forward," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a Biden ally. "And that we lay bare the record of just how responsible and how abjectly violating of his constitutional oath President Trump really was."

House prosecutors who argued for Trump's conviction of inciting the riot said Sunday they had proved their case. They also railed against the Senate's Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, and others who they said were "trying to have it both ways" in finding the former president not guilty but criticizing him at the same time.

A close Trump ally, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., voted for acquittal but acknowledged that Trump had some culpability for the siege at the Capitol that killed five people, including a police officer, and disrupted lawmakers' certification of Biden's White House victory. Graham said he looked forward to campaigning with Trump in the 2022 election, when Republicans hope to regain the congressional majority.

"His behavior after the election was over the top," Graham said. "We need a 9/11 commission to find out what happened and make sure it never happens again."

The Senate acquitted Trump of a charge of "incitement of insurrection" after House prosecutors laid out a case that he was an "inciter in chief" who unleashed a mob by stoking a monthslong campaign of spreading debunked conspiracy theories and false violent rhetoric that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

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

The conviction tally was the most bipartisan in American history but left Trump to declare victory and signal a political revival while a bitterly divided GOP bickered over its direction and his place in the party.

The Republicans who joined Cassidy in voting to convict were Sens. Richard Burr of North Carolina, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

"It's frustrating, but the founders knew what they were doing and so we live with the system that we have," Democratic Del. Stacey Plaskett, a House prosecutor who represents the Virgin Islands, said of the verdict, describing it as "heartbreaking." She added: "But, listen, we didn't need more witnesses. We needed more senators with spines."

McConnell told Republican senators shortly before the vote that he would vote to acquit Trump. In a blistering speech after the vote, the Kentucky Republican said the president was "practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day" but that the Senate's hands were tied to do anything about it because Trump was out of office. The Senate, in an earlier vote, had deemed the trial constitutional.

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"It was powerful to hear the 57 guiltyies and then it was puzzling to hear and see Mitch McConnell stand and say 'not guilty' and then, minutes later, stand again and say he was guilty of everything," said Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-Pa. "History will remember that statement of speaking out of two sides of his mouth," she said.

Dean also backed the idea of an impartial investigative commission "not guided by politics but filled with people who would stand up to the courage of their conviction."

The lead House impeachment manager, Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., called the trial a "dramatic success in historical terms" by winning unprecedented support from GOP senators. He said the verdict didn't match the reality of the strength of evidence.

"We successfully prosecuted him and convicted him in the court of public opinion and the court of history," he said. Pointing to McConnell and other Republican senators critical of Trump but voting to acquit, Raskin said, "They're trying to have it both ways."

Raskin and Plaskett defended the House team's last-minute reversal not to call a witness, Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Wash. They acknowledged they were aware they might lose some GOP votes for conviction if they extended the trial much longer.

Beutler's statement late Friday that Trump rebuffed a plea from House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy to call off the rioters was ultimately entered into the trial record.

"I think what we did was, we got what we wanted, which was her statement, which was what she said, and had it put into the record," Plaskett said.

Cassidy and Dean spoke on ABC's "This Week," Graham appeared on "Fox News Sunday," Raskin was on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Plaskett appeared on CNN's "State of the Union."

Associated Press writers Alexandra Jaffe, Lisa Mascaro, Eric Tucker, Mary Clare Jalonick and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

As vaccinations lag, Israel combats online misinformation

By ISAAC SCHARF and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — After surging ahead in the race to vaccinate its population against the coronavirus, Israel is blaming online misinformation for a sudden slowdown in the campaign. Now, officials are fighting back.

Israel's Health Ministry, which is spearheading the vaccination efforts, is employing both warnings and incentives as it tries to persuade reluctant holdouts to get immunized. It has beefed up a digital task force to counter spurious claims about the vaccines, while local governments are turning to DJs and free food to lure people to vaccination centers. Concerts and museums could soon be off limits to the unvaccinated.

"Decide whether you are part of the celebration or whether you will be left behind," Health Minister Yuli Edelstein declared on Twitter. "Just lend a shoulder to the vaccine."

Since launching its COVID-19 vaccine campaign in December, over a quarter of the population — 2.5 million people — has received both doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, according to the Health Ministry. Over 42% have received the first shot.

The vaccination rates are among the highest in the world, and many countries are looking at the Israeli experience to understand what may lie ahead in the future.

But in a cause for concern, Israel has seen a drop in immunization rates since making the vaccine available to everyone over the age of 16 this month. In February, Israel averaged just over 106,000 vaccinations per day, down from January's daily average of more than 127,000 per day, according to Health Ministry statistics.

The reluctance of some groups in the population to get vaccinated is a key reason why infection rates remain high.

Israel, a country of 9.3 million people, has reported over 5,000 new cases each day over the past week, according to the ministry. In all, the country has recorded over 723,000 cases of COVID-19 since the start

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of the pandemic and nearly 5,400 deaths — over 20% of them in the past month.

Last week Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has pinned his reelection hopes on the vaccination campaign, said the only obstacle to completing the task was “the fake news and the superstitious and sometimes malicious beliefs that are planted in the public and on the internet.”

The Health Ministry has reportedly invested millions of dollars in its efforts to educate the public.

The task has been complicated because different segments of society have resisted vaccination calls for different reasons.

In the case of the ultra-Orthodox, some influential religious leaders have called on their followers not be immunized. Meanwhile, Israel’s Arab minority tends to suffer from a lack of trust in the Jewish leadership. And younger Israelis often think they can’t get seriously ill.

Einav Shimron, the Health Ministry’s deputy director for international relations, said the ministry is working with physicians and religious leaders to counter misinformation, such as claims that the vaccine can cause infertility.

The ministry manages a command center with 11 trackers who monitor social media activity for anti-vaccination posts in Hebrew, Russian, Amharic, Arabic and English on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Telegram. The center is adding more staffers in the coming days.

The undertaking is akin to whack-a-mole for conspiracy theories.

Shimron said center alerts the Justice Ministry to any misinformation, and the ministry immediately presses the social media networks to remove the false claims. “There are several times we even called the police” on grounds that the false claims are a public health risk, she said.

In the ultra-Orthodox community, where internet use is low, the response is often more low tech. Anti-vaccination rabbis have posted false claims on posters — known as pashkevils — commonly used to spread messages among the faithful. The ministry is countering with pashkevils of its own.

Rabbi Yuval Hacoen Asherov, a popular Jewish preacher with an online following who has stated that germs do not cause diseases, has posted numerous anti-vaccine videos with hundreds of thousands of views. A recent video falsely claimed the COVID-19 vaccine caused death.

“Why run? Why vaccinate now? Let’s do it in another half a year — maybe. Let’s see what happens,” Ashrov said. “Why should the Swiss and Chinese use us as guinea pigs to see what happens?”

The Health Ministry has asked the Justice Ministry to try to get Asherov’s videos pulled from YouTube and said that he “endangers the public.”

Asherov declined requests for comment. It was not clear if YouTube has been formally approached.

But Avishai Matia, another anti-vaccine activist, said his Facebook and Twitter accounts with thousands of followers were suspended this month in what he called a “violent reaction by the technology giants in cooperation with the WHO and other groups.”

Matia has wrongly claimed the Pfizer vaccine is “an experimental drug” that is being tested on Israeli citizens.

In fact, it has been granted approval for emergency use in the U.S. and Europe. In exchange for getting sufficient quantities for its population, Israel has agreed to share data with Pfizer, though it is not conducting any experiments.

Facebook did not respond to requests for comment about its collaboration with Israeli authorities.

At the same time, authorities are devising incentives for people to get the jab. The Health and Culture ministries said Sunday that museums, libraries, concert venues and other cultural events will reopen later this month — but only to those who have been fully immunized.

The Health Ministry is also enlisting dozens of Israeli social media influencers to promote immunization in concert with its own online video campaign.

One new message released on Valentine’s Day showed a man presenting his girlfriend with a small box appearing to contain an engagement ring. “Will you get vaccinated with me?” he asks, as she opens the box to find a vaccine vial.

The ultra-Orthodox town of Bnei Brak has tried to encourage immunization by serving free cholent — a hearty stew — to residents who turn up for a vaccine. A municipal spokesman said Thursday’s “Operation

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Cholent" brought in three times the typical number of recipients.

Holon, a Tel Aviv suburb, has enlisted the help of DJs and a party atmosphere to draw over-16s to receive immunizations. Ministry figures show Israelis between 16-30 have been vaccinated at levels far below the national average.

For many young and middle-aged Israelis, however, the availability of coronavirus vaccines has been enough of an incentive to line up.

At an immunization center in Tel Aviv, Moran Keret, 44, said that a friend convinced her to go. "The corona is not going away. So if it's not disappearing, I'm here."

UK's chief mouser celebrates 10 years on the prowl

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Larry the cat, a four-legged inhabitant of London's 10 Downing St., is marking a decade as Britain's mouse-catcher in chief on Monday.

The tabby cat was recruited by then-Prime Minister David Cameron to deal with a pack of rats seen scuttling close to the British leader's official residence, and entered Downing Street on Feb. 15, 2011.

The former stray, adopted from London's Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, was given the title Chief Mouser to the Cabinet Office, an unofficial pest control post. He was the first cat to hold the rat-catching portfolio since the retirement of Humphrey in 1997, and has loyally served three prime ministers.

But it seems like yesterday that Larry was just another cat — as opposed to a media superstar — said Lindsey Quinlan, the head of cattery of Battersea.

"Throughout his time at Number 10, Larry has proven himself to not only be a brilliant ambassador for Battersea but also demonstrated to millions of people around the world how incredible rescue cats are," she said. "His rags to riches tale is yet more proof of why all animals deserve a second chance — one minute they may be an overlooked stray on the streets, the next they could become one of the nation's beloved political figures, with fans around the world."

Larry, who has met a number of world leaders, has been largely unfriendly to men but took a liking to former U.S. President Barack Obama. When former President Donald Trump visited in 2019, Larry took a nap under his car.

His grip on the public imagination is clear — and political leaders know better than to ignore that popularity. The tomcat was a sentimental topic of conversation in Cameron's final appearance in Parliament as prime minister when he said he wanted to quash a rumor that — perish the thought — he didn't like Larry.

And just to prove it, he whipped out evidence: a picture of Larry lying on his lap.

"He belongs to the house and the staff love him very much — as do I," he said at the time, explaining why he wasn't taking Larry with him after leaving office.

After the December 2019 election, rumors swirled that Larry might be headed for retirement with the news that the new prime minister, Boris Johnson, was a dog man. However, despite the prime minister moving Jack Russell cross Dilyn into Downing Street, Larry remained in office.

Reports of his rodent-killing abilities vary. Larry became known for his occasional scraps with neighboring cats -- especially Palmerston, chief mouser to the Foreign Office across the street -- and fondness for sleep. Palmerston has retired to the country, so things have been a bit quieter of late.

These days Larry, now 14, is often seen by photographers patrolling his turf. Visitors to the building can sometimes find him napping on a ledge above a radiator or sleeping on a floor, where dignitaries occasionally have to step over him.

At the heart of government, he specializes in power naps.

Dragnet, planned law boost French fight of Islamic radicals

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — More than three dozen police officers descended on a small private school in Paris, blocked the 92 students inside their classrooms, took photos everywhere, even inside the refrigerator, and grilled

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the school director in her office.

"It was like they were moving in on a drug deal," Hanane Loukili, the director and co-founder of the MHS middle and high school said, recalling the Nov. 17 scene.

Loukili didn't know it then, but a team from the Cell to Fight Radical Islam and Community Withdrawal, or CLIR, had arrived for an inspection. The dragnet sweeps schools, shops, clubs or mosques to rout out "radicalization." Within a week, a shaken Loukili informed students their school was shutting down.

Loukili insists she is no radical, but such operations illustrate the extent of French efforts to fight extremism as lawmakers prepare to vote Tuesday on a bill aimed at snuffing it out.

The MHS school had an unusual profile. It was secular and co-educational but allowed female Muslim students to wear headscarves in class — forbidden in public schools — and to pray during breaks. Unlike private Muslim schools in France, where headscarves are allowed, MHS did not offer religion or theology courses.

Loukili and others at the school claim it was a perfect target in what some say is an uncomfortable climate for France's Muslims.

Scrubbing France clean of radicals and their breeding grounds is a priority cause of President Emmanuel Macron in a nation bloodied by terror attacks, including the beheading of a teacher outside his school in a suburb outside Paris in October, followed by a deadly attack inside the basilica in Nice.

The proposed legislation is intended to re-anchor secularism in a changing France, where Muslims are increasingly visible and Islam — the nation's No. 2 religion — is gaining a stronger voice.

The legislation, expected to pass the first critical vote, will also expand and facilitate the crackdown.

Along with the bill, contested by some Muslims, politicians and others, such strong-arm inspections risk accentuating the climate of suspicion many Muslims feel in a country where the vast majority of Muslims don't hold extremist views.

Loukili, herself a Muslim, is well aware of major problems she and her school faced linked to fire hazards, but fervently denied in an Associated Press interview, any links to radicalism by her or staff at the school, which opened in 2015.

Only on Dec. 9, did Loukili learn her situation was graver than she thought. A statement from the Police Prefecture and prosecutors office suggested the closure was part of a growing push to "fight all forms of separatism" — the word coined by Macron for extremists who undermine the nation's values in a bid to create a "counter society."

Dragnet raids like those unleashed against Loukili's school, which were initially carried out as an experiment shortly after Macron took office in 2017, have become the underside of the presidential priority, unearthing soft spots on a local level to nip Islamic radicalization in the bud. They now reach across the country, with police accompanied by education or other specialists depending on the target.

In December alone, teams carried out 476 raids and closed 36 establishments of various types, according to Interior Ministry figures. Since November 2019, when the program marked its first year, 3,881 establishments have been inspected and 126 closed, mostly small businesses but also two schools, ministry figures show.

One was an underground school with no windows or educational program, along with sports clubs where preaching and obligatory prayer are behind-the-scenes activities. Five were closed.

The proposed law and the Cell to Fight Radical Islam program, led by prefects in each region, are just part of a many-layered operation to rout out what authorities call "enemies of the Republic." Mayors of towns considered "most impacted" by the extremist threat have been asked to sign a charter agreeing to cooperate in the hunt for radicals, like flagging potential suspects, the AP has learned.

The Cell to Fight Radical Islam would also get a boost from the planned law, which would provide new legal tools to shut down facilities.

"Today, we're obliged to use administrative motives to close establishments that don't respect the law," said an official close to Citizenship Minister Marlene Schiappa, who oversees the Cell to Fight Radical Islam program and is also a sponsor of the proposed law, along with Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin.

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The official, not authorized to speak publicly, could not address the case of the MHS school. Police also would not comment.

The school's problems began more than a year ago with safety concerns linked mainly to the large building where it was housed. Loukili, its director and a math teacher at the school, was ordered to close the school, to stop teaching and to not run any future educational establishment. She returns to court March 17.

"I think they (accuse) us of separatism because they needed to make an example," Loukili said, noting the school's Paris location, its fragile finances and the leeway given to girls to wear headscarves.

A mother who had to scramble to find new schools for her children after the school closed said her son is fine but her 15-year-old daughter, who insists on wearing a head scarf, had to switch to a Muslim school where the head coverings are allowed but where boys and girls are separated inside classrooms and at lunch.

Her daughter, unhappy in the strict climate, "comes home with her stomach in knots," said the woman, who asked to be identified only by her first name, Rafika, to protect her daughter.

The MHS school "is a school like me, what I call the France of today," said Rafika, a working mother who wears a head scarf. "It's a real melting pot."

Jean-Riad Kechaou, a history teacher in the working class Paris suburb of Chelles, sees anger in his Muslim adolescent students.

"It comes from this permanent stigmatization of their religion," he said. "In the head of an adolescent of 12, 13, 14, 15 years old, everything gets mixed up and what comes out is his religion has been completely dirtied and fingers are pointed at him."

No new community cases found in New Zealand since lockdown

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — As people in Auckland adjusted to a new lockdown on Monday, health officials said they'd found no evidence the coronavirus had spread further in the community, raising hopes the restrictions might be short-lived.

New Zealand's largest city was hurriedly placed into a three-day lockdown Sunday after three unexplained virus cases were found. It's the country's first lockdown in six months and represents a setback in its largely successful efforts to control the virus.

Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield said the negative test results since the first three were found was an encouraging start, but cautioned a fuller picture of the outbreak wouldn't emerge until Tuesday, when the results from an expanded testing regimen would be known.

New Zealand also announced its first batch of vaccine had arrived. Officials said the shipment of about 60,000 doses of the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech would initially be prioritized on border workers.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the three community cases were of the more contagious variant first found in Britain and that genome testing hadn't linked them to any previous known cases.

"This is a highly transmissible and a fast moving strain, one that requires extra care in order to stamp it out, and this is exactly what our approach entails," Ardern said.

New Zealand's greatest vulnerability has been at the border.

New cases are regularly caught among returning travelers, all of whom are required to spend two weeks in quarantine. Despite precautions, there have been several times when the virus has leaked out from the border before being controlled again, and officials are trying to determine whether that's happened again.

In the latest case, an Auckland mother, father and daughter caught the disease. Officials said the mother works at a catering company that does laundry for airlines, and they're investigating whether there is a link to infected passengers.

The rest of New Zealand outside of Auckland has also had restrictions imposed for three days, including mandatory mask wearing on public transport and limiting crowd sizes to 100.

The superspreaders behind top COVID-19 conspiracy theories

By DAVID KLEPPER, FARNOUSH AMIRI and BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

As the coronavirus spread across the globe, so too did speculation about its origins. Perhaps the virus escaped from a lab. Maybe it was engineered as a bioweapon.

Legitimate questions about the virus created perfect conditions for conspiracy theories. In the absence of knowledge, guesswork and propaganda flourished.

College professors with no evidence or training in virology were touted as experts. Anonymous social media users posed as high-level intelligence officials. And from China to Iran to Russia to the United States, governments amplified claims for their own motives.

The Associated Press collaborated with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab on a nine-month investigation to identify the people and organizations behind some of the most viral misinformation about the origins of the coronavirus.

Their claims were explosive. Their evidence was weak. These are the superspreaders.

FRANCIS BOYLE

WHO HE IS: A Harvard trained law professor at the University of Illinois, Boyle drafted a 1989 law banning biological weapons and has advised the nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Palestinian Authority.

Boyle has no academic degree in virology or biology but is a longstanding critic of research on pathogens. He has claimed Israeli intelligence was involved in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; that SARS, the swine flu and Ebola have been genetically modified; and that West Nile virus and Lyme disease escaped from a U.S. biowarfare lab. He has also claimed that Microsoft founder Bill Gates "was involved" in the spread of Zika.

COVID CLAIM: Boyle says the coronavirus is a genetically engineered bioweapon that escaped from a high-level lab in Wuhan, China. He maintains it shows signs of nanotechnological tinkering and the insertion of proteins from HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus. He alleges that U.S. researchers helped create it, and that thousands of doctors, scientists, and elected leaders are conspiring to hide the truth.

Boyle promoted his claim in an email to a list of news organizations and personal contacts on Jan. 24, 2020. That same day, he was interviewed on a podcast called "Geopolitics and Empire." That podcast was cited by a little-known Indian website, GreatGameIndia, and went viral, with Boyle's comments picked up and featured in Iranian-state TV, Russian state media, and fringe websites in the U.S. and around the world. He's since repeated his claims on Alex Jones' show Infowars.

EVIDENCE? Boyle bases his argument on circumstantial evidence: the presence of a Biosafety Level 4 lab in Wuhan, the fact that other viruses have escaped from other labs in the past, and his belief that governments around the world are engaged in a secret arms race over biological weapons.

Biosafety Level 4 labs - or BSL4 labs - have the highest level of biosafety precautions.

"It seemed to me that obviously, this came out of the Wuhan BSL 4," Boyle told The Associated Press, dismissing the accepted explanation that the virus emerged from the Wuhan market as "completely preposterous."

A World Health Organization team concluded it was extremely unlikely the virus escaped from the Wuhan lab, and other experts have said the virus shows no signs of genetic manipulation.

GREATGAMEINDIA

WHAT IT IS: A website that was an early promoter of the theory that the coronavirus was engineered.

Its Jan. 26, 2020, story on "Coronavirus bioweapon-How China Stole the Coronavirus From Canada and Weaponized It" was picked up by far-right financial blog Zero Hedge and shared to thousands of social media users before it was promoted by conservative website RedStateWatcher and received more than 6 million engagements.

COVID CLAIM: GreatGameIndia claims that the virus, which has now killed more than 2 million people worldwide, was first found in the lungs of a Saudi man and then sent to labs in the Netherlands and then

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Canada, where it was stolen by Chinese scientists. The article relies in part on speculation from Dany Shoham, a virologist and former lieutenant colonel in Israeli military intelligence.

Shoham was quoted discussing the possibility that COVID is linked to bioweapon research in a Jan. 26, 2020, article in the conservative U.S. newspaper The Washington Times. In that article, Shoham was quoted saying there was no evidence to support the idea that the virus has escaped from a lab, but GreatGameIndia did not include that context in its piece.

"We do stand by our report," said website co-founder Shelley Kasli wrote in an email. "In fact, recently Canadians released documents which corroborated our findings with Chinese scientists... A lot of information is still classified."

EVIDENCE? The coronavirus most likely first appeared in humans after jumping from an animal, a World Health Organization panel announced this month, saying an alternate theory that the virus leaked from a Chinese lab was unlikely.

America's top scientists have likewise concluded the virus is of natural origin, citing clues in its genome and its similarity to SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome. Vincent Racaniello, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Columbia University, who has been studying the virus since its genome was first recorded, has said it is clear that the virus was not engineered or accidentally released.

"It is something that is clearly selected in nature," Racaniello said. "There are two examples where the sequence tells us that humans had no hand in making this virus because they would not have known to do these things."

THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON GLOBALIZATION

WHAT IT IS: The Montreal-based center publishes articles on global politics and policy, including a healthy dose of conspiracy theories on vaccines and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It's led by Michel Chossudovsky, a professor emeritus of economics at the University of Ottawa and a conspiracy theorist who has argued the U.S. military can control the weather.

The center publishes authors from around the world — many of whom have advanced baseless claims about the origins of the outbreak. In February, for instance, the center published an interview with Igor Nikulin suggesting the coronavirus was a U.S. bioweapon created to target Chinese people.

The center's website, globalresearch.ca, "has become deeply enmeshed in Russia's broader disinformation and propaganda ecosystem" by peddling anti-U.S. conspiracy theories, according to a 2020 U.S. State Department report which found that seven of its supposed writers do not even exist but were created by Russian military intelligence.

COVID CLAIM: While the center has published several articles about the virus, one suggesting it originated in the U.S. caught the attention of top Chinese officials.

On March 12, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian retweeted an article published by the center titled: "China's Coronavirus: A Shocking Update. Did The Virus Originate in the US?"

"This article is very much important to each and every one of us," he posted in English on Twitter. "Please read and retweet it. COVID-19: Further Evidence that the Virus Originated in the US."

He also tweeted: "It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation."

The story by Larry Romanoff, a regular author at the center, cites several debunked theories, including one that members of the U.S. military brought the virus to China during the Military World Games in fall 2019. Romanoff concludes that it has now "been proven" that the virus originated from outside of China, despite scientific consensus that it did.

EVIDENCE? The World Health Organization has concluded that the coronavirus emerged in China, where the first cases and deaths were reported. No evidence has surfaced to suggest the virus was imported into China by the U.S.

Chossudovsky and Romanoff did not respond to repeated messages seeking comment. Romanoff's biography lists him as a visiting professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, but he is not listed among the university's faculty. The university did not respond to an email asking about Romanoff's employment.

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Romanoff's original article was taken down in the spring, but Zhao's tweet remains up.

IGOR NIKULIN

WHO IS HE? A four-time failed political candidate, Nikulin is prominently quoted in Russian state media and fringe publications in the west as a biologist and former weapons inspector in Iraq who served on a U.N. commission on biological and chemical weapons in the 1990s.

COVID CLAIM: Nikulin argues the U.S. created the virus and used it to attack China. He first voiced the belief in a Jan. 20, 2020, story by Zvezda, a state media outlet tied to the Russian military. He appeared on Russian state TV at least 18 times between Jan. 27, 2020, and late April of that year.

Once the virus reached the U.S., Nikulin changed his theory, saying "globalists" were using the virus to depopulate the earth.

Nikulin has expressed support for weaponizing misinformation to hurt the U.S. in the past. On his website, he suggests claiming the U.S. created HIV as a way to weaken America from within. Russian intelligence mounted a similar 1980s disinformation campaign dubbed "Operation INFEKTION."

"If you prove and declare... that the virus was bred in American laboratories, the American economy will collapse under the onslaught of billions of lawsuits by millions of AIDS carriers around the world," Nikulin wrote on his website.

EVIDENCE? Nikulin offered no evidence to support his assertions, and there are reasons to doubt his veracity.

Former U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler, for whom Nikulin claims to have worked, said he had no memory of Nikulin, and that his story sounded "sloppily fabricated, and not credible."

No U.N. records could be found to confirm his employment.

In an exchange with the AP over Facebook, Nikulin insisted his claims and background are accurate, though he said some records from U.N. work were destroyed in an American bombing during the Iraq invasion.

When told that Butler didn't know him, Nikulin responded "This is his opinion."

GREG RUBINI

WHO HE IS: Greg Rubini is the name of an internet conspiracy theorist who claims to have high-level contacts in intelligence and listed his location on Twitter as "classified," until he was kicked off the platform. His posts have been retweeted thousands of times by supporters of QAnon, a conspiracy theory centered on the baseless belief that Trump is waging a secret campaign against enemies in the "deep state" and a secret sect of satanic pedophiles and cannibals.

COVID CLAIM: Rubini has tweeted that Dr. Anthony Fauci created the coronavirus and that it was used as a bioweapon to reduce the world's population and undermine Trump.

EVIDENCE? Rubini's doesn't appear to be the intelligence insider that he pretends to be.

Buzzfeed attempted to track down Rubini last year and determined it is the alias of a 61-year-old Italian man who has worked in marketing and music promotions. A previous version of his Twitter bio indicates he is a fan of classic rock and the films of Stanley Kubrick.

Attempts to reach Rubini online and through business contacts were unsuccessful.

Rubini has bristled at efforts to verify his claims. When a social media user asked: "My question to you @GregRubini is, 'Where and what is your proof?' Rubini responded curtly: "And my question is: why should I give it to you?"

Twitter suspended Rubini's account in November 2020 for repeated violations of its policies.

KEVIN BARRETT

WHO HE IS: A former lecturer on Islam at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Barrett left the university amid criticism for his claims that the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were orchestrated by people linked to the U.S. and Israeli governments.

Barrett calls himself "a professional conspiracy theorist, for want of a better term" and has argued gov-

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ernment conspiracies were behind the 2004 Madrid bombing, the 2005 London bombing, the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting.

COVID CLAIM: Barrett said he is "80%" sure coronavirus was created by elements within the U.S. government as a bioweapon and used to attack China.

Iran was a secondary target, he has argued. Writing for Iran's PressTV, he said the early outbreak in that country "suggests that the Americans and/or their partners the Israelis... may have deliberately attacked Iran."

Barrett further detailed his views during an interview with the AP.

"It seemed fairly obvious to me that the first hypothesis one would look at when something as extraordinary as this COVID pandemic hits, is that it would be a US bio-war strike," he said.

EVIDENCE? Barrett cited reports that the US warned its allies in November 2019 about a dangerous virus emerging from China. Barrett said that's long before authorities in China knew about the severity of the outbreak.

Official sources have denied issuing any warning. If the U.S. did know about the virus that soon, it was likely thanks to intelligence sources within China, which may have known about the virus as early as November 2019, according to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

LUC MONTAGNIER

WHO HE IS: Montagnier is a world-renowned virologist who won the Nobel prize in 2008 for discovering HIV.

COVID CLAIM: During an April interview with the French news channel CNews, Montagnier claimed that the coronavirus did not originate in nature and was manipulated. Montagnier said that in the process of making the vaccine for AIDS, someone took the genetic material and added it to the coronavirus. Montagnier cites a retracted paper published in January from Indian scientists who had said they had found sequences of HIV in the coronavirus. AP made multiple unsuccessful attempts to contact Montagnier.

EVIDENCE: Experts who have looked at the genome sequence of the virus have said it has no HIV-1 sequences. In January, Indian scientists published a paper on bioRxiv, a repository for scientific papers that have not yet been peer-reviewed or published in a traditional scientific journal. The paper said that the scientists had found "uncanny similarity of unique inserts" in COVID-19 and HIV. Social media users picked up the paper as proof that the virus was engineered. As soon as it was published, the scientific community widely debunked the paper on social media. It was later withdrawn.

SUPREME LEADER ALI KHAMENEI and HOSSEIN SALAMI

WHO THEY ARE: Khamenei is the second and current Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He has the final say on all matters of state, including the economy, military and health divisions.

Since being elected to office in 1981, Khamenei has maintained his skeptical view of the U.S. as Iran's foremost enemy. The tensions between the two countries boiled over in 2018 when Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed crippling sanctions. At the time, Khamenei remarked, "I said from the first day: Don't trust America."

Hossein Salami was appointed by Khamenei as commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard in April 2019. He leads the country's paramilitary force that oversees Iran's ballistic missile program and responds to threats from both inside and outside the country.

COVID CLAIM: Salami declared on March 5, 2020, that Iran was engaged in a fight against a virus that might be the product of an American biological attack. On those grounds, Salami ordered a Ground Force Biological Defense Maneuver to test the country's ability to combat a biological attack. Beginning March 16, the Ground Force, in close collaboration with the Health Ministry, began holding nationwide biodefense drills.

Khamenei was among the first and most powerful world leaders to suggest the coronavirus could be a biological weapon created by the U.S. During his annual address on March 22 to millions of Iranians for the Persian New Year, Khamenei questioned why the U.S. would offer aid to countries like Iran if they themselves were suffering and accused of making the virus.

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Khamenei went on to refuse U.S. assistance, saying "possibly (U.S.) medicine is a way to spread the virus more." Last month, he refused to accept coronavirus vaccines manufactured in Britain and the U.S., calling them "forbidden." The Iranian Mission to the United Nations in New York did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

EVIDENCE: There is no evidence that the U.S. created the virus or used it as a weapon to attack Iran.

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Anatomy of a conspiracy: With COVID, China took leading role

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The rumors began almost as soon as the disease itself. Claims that a foreign adversary had unleashed a bioweapon emerged at the fringes of Chinese social media the same day China first reported the outbreak of a mysterious virus.

"Watch out for Americans!" a Weibo user wrote on Dec. 31, 2019. Today, a year after the World Health Organization warned of an epidemic of COVID-19 misinformation, that conspiracy theory lives on, pushed by Chinese officials eager to cast doubt on the origins of a pandemic that has claimed more than 2 million lives globally.

From Beijing and Washington to Moscow and Tehran, political leaders and allied media effectively functioned as superspreaders, using their stature to amplify politically expedient conspiracies already in circulation. But it was China -- not Russia -- that took the lead in spreading foreign disinformation about COVID-19's origins, as it came under attack for its early handling of the outbreak.

A nine-month Associated Press investigation of state-sponsored disinformation conducted in collaboration with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, shows how a rumor that the U.S. created the virus that causes COVID-19 was weaponized by the Chinese government, spreading from the dark corners of the Internet to millions across the globe. The analysis was based on a review of millions of social media postings and articles on Twitter, Facebook, VK, Weibo, WeChat, YouTube, Telegram and other platforms.

Chinese officials were reacting to a powerful narrative, nursed by QAnon groups, Fox News, former President Donald Trump and leading Republicans, that the virus was instead manufactured by China.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs says Beijing has used its expanding megaphone on Western social media to promote friendship and serve facts, while defending itself against hostile forces that seek to politicize the pandemic.

"All parties should firmly say 'no' to the dissemination of disinformation," the ministry said in a statement to AP, but added, "In the face of trumped-up charges, it is justified and proper to bust lies and clarify rumors by setting out the facts."

The battle to control the narrative about where the virus came from has had global consequences in the fight against COVID-19.

By March, just three months after COVID-19 appeared in central China, belief that the virus had been created in a lab and possibly weaponized was widespread, multiple surveys showed. The Pew Research Center found, for example, that one in three Americans believed the new coronavirus had been created in a lab; one in four thought it had been engineered intentionally. In Iran, top leaders cited the bioweapon conspiracy to justify their refusal of foreign medical aid. Anti-lockdown and anti-mask groups around the world called COVID-19 a hoax and a weapon, complicating public health efforts to slow the spread.

"This is like a virus, like COVID, a media pathogen," said Kang Liu, a professor at Duke University who studies cultural politics and media in China, comparing the spread of disinformation about the virus to the spread of the virus itself. "We have a double pandemic -- the real pathological virus and the pandemic of fear. The fear is what is really at stake."

SPREADING RUMORS

On Jan. 26, a man from Inner Mongolia posted a video claiming that the new virus ravaging central China

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was a biological weapon engineered by the U.S. It was viewed 14,000 times on the Chinese app Kuaishou before being taken down. The man was arrested, detained for 10 days and fined for spreading rumors.

People's Daily, the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, broadcast news of his detention in early February, showing the man, face pixelated, wrists shackled, and legs caged in a chair. It was a stern reminder to the citizens of China that fake news can lead to arrest and part of a broader effort by Chinese state media to debunk COVID-19 conspiracies.

But just six weeks later the same conspiracy would be broadcast by China's foreign ministry, picked up by at least 30 Chinese diplomats and missions and amplified through China's vast, global network of state media outlets.

During those six weeks, China's leadership came under intense internal criticism. On Feb. 7, Li Wenliang, a Chinese doctor punished for circulating an early warning about the outbreak, died of COVID-19. The outpouring of grief and rage sparked by Li's death was an unusual – and for the ruling Communist Party, unsettling -- display in China's tightly monitored civic space.

Meanwhile, powerful voices in the U.S. -- from former President Trump to congressional Republicans -- were working to rebrand COVID-19 as "the China virus," amplifying fringe theories that it had been engineered by Chinese scientists.

Social media accounts that appeared to be pro-Trump or QAnon followers pushed the disinformation, repeatedly retweeting identical content that claimed China created the virus as a bioweapon, researchers at the Australia Institute's Centre for Responsible Technology found.

As U.S. rhetoric intensified, China went on the offensive. On Feb. 22, People's Daily ran a report highlighting speculation that the U.S. military brought the virus to China, pushing the story globally through inserts in newspapers such as the Helsinki Times in Finland and the New Zealand Herald.

The New Zealand Herald said it has an "ad hoc commercial relationship with People's Daily," labels their content as sponsored and reviews it before publication. "Upon further review of the story that you have referred to, we have removed this particular item from our website," a spokesman said in an email.

The Helsinki Times said it has a "barter-exchange" content agreement with People's Daily, whose content it labels but does not vet. "We believe that the western media coverage is at times extremely one-sided and biased," said Alexis Kouros, the editor of the Helsinki Times. "Even though People's Daily is state-owned, like the BBC, we believe it is beneficial for the global audience to have both sides of stories."

As China embraced overt disinformation, it leaned on Russian disinformation strategy and infrastructure, turning to a long-established network of Kremlin proxies in the West to seed and spread messaging.

"One was amplifying the other...How much it was command controlled, how much it was opportunistic, it was hard to tell," said Janis Sarts, director of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, based in Riga, Latvia. Long-term, he added, China is "the more formidable competitor and adversary because of the technological capabilities they bring to the table."

'THE TRUTH AS I SEE IT'

In January, long before China began overtly spreading disinformation, Russian state media swept in to legitimize the theory that the U.S. engineered the virus as a weapon.

On Jan. 20, the Russian Army's media outlet, Zvezda, announced that the outbreak in China was linked to a bioweapons test, citing a four-time failed political candidate named Igor Nikulin.

Nikulin claims to have worked with the United Nations on disarmament in Iraq from 1998 to 2003, including as an adviser to former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

But the U.N. has no record of his service. Richard Butler, the lead U.N. weapons inspector at the time, told AP he's never heard of him. Neither has Hans Corell, who served as Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and Legal Counsel of the United Nations from 1994-2004, where he worked closely with Annan.

Nikulin said records of his U.N. work may have been destroyed and stuck by his theory that COVID is a U.S. bioweapon – a claim that has been repeatedly debunked. "What other proof is needed?!" he said in an email to AP.

Over the next two months, more than 70 articles appeared in pro-Kremlin media making similar bio-

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weapons claims in Russian, Spanish, Armenian, Arabic, English and German, according to AP's analysis of a database compiled by EUvsDisinfo, which tracks disinformation for the European Union.

Online journals identified by the U.S. State Department and others as pro-Russian proxies picked up the bioweapons narrative, enhancing its reach and resonance.

Russian politicians joined the chorus. Parliamentarian Natalia Poklonskaya argued that the novel coronavirus could be a biological weapon created "by those who want to rule the planet" to undermine China. Shortly after, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the nationalistic leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, suggested that the U.S. and its greedy pharmaceutical companies were to blame.

Meanwhile, Nikulin kept flogging his theory, which morphed as the pandemic spread from an attack on China to an attack on Trump. Despite his inconsistency and questionable bona fides, by April, Nikulin had appeared at least 18 times on Russian television. U.S. officials also said Russian intelligence had been covertly spreading COVID-19 disinformation, including claims that the virus was a U.S. bioweapon.

On Jan. 23, Beijing began to roll out the largest medical quarantine in modern history, sealing tens of millions of people at the epicenter of the outbreak in central China. The images were harrowing, as people desperate to slip out thronged train stations.

Shortly after 11 a.m. the next morning, Francis Boyle, a Harvard-trained law professor at the University of Illinois, emailed a "worldwide alert" to 300 contacts warning, without evidence, that China had been developing the coronavirus as a bioweapon at a biosafety lab in Wuhan.

Over the next few weeks, Boyle refined his theory, now asserting that Chinese scientists had not developed the virus themselves, but taken it from a North Carolina laboratory.

"This is clearly an offensive biological warfare agent," Boyle told conspiracy theorist Alex Jones on a Feb. 19 Infowars broadcast.

The theory spread via outlets like One America News Network, a pro-Trump channel, Iran's Press TV, Global Research and its erstwhile partner, the Strategic Culture Foundation, an online journal that masquerades as independent but is actually directed by Russia's foreign intelligence service, according to the U.S. State Department.

Boyle told the AP his conclusions are based on research and that he can't stop conspiracy theorists or foreign governments from using his claims for their own ends.

"My job is to tell the truth as I see it," he said.

"INFORMATION LAUNDERING"

On March 9, a public WeChat account called Happy Reading List reposted an essay claiming the U.S. military created SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, at a lab at Fort Detrick, in Maryland, and loosed it in China during the Military World Games, an international competition for military athletes, held in Wuhan in October 2019.

The account, which has been suspended, was registered in May 2019 by a woman from Henan province in central China, who did not reply to messages. It's not clear who first wrote the article, which can still be found on other WeChat accounts.

The next day an anonymous petition appeared on the White House's now-defunct "We the People" portal. It urged U.S. authorities to clarify whether the virus had been developed at Fort Detrick and leaked from the lab. The petition was lavishly covered by China's state media, despite getting only 1,426 signatures, far shy of the 100,000 needed to merit a response from the White House.

On March 11, Larry Romanoff, who claims to be a former management consultant based in Shanghai, posted an article on Global Research Canada that cribbed heavily from the Happy Reading List posting, citing it as a source.

"There have been a number of stories where the origin of a story is in Russian-controlled space but it's picked up by Global Research and then put forward as their own story. Then you get Russian media saying western analysts in Canada say that. We call that information laundering," said Sarts, the NATO StratCom director. "They have been helpful for a long time to Russian information operations and recently to the Chinese as well."

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Neither Romanoff nor Global Research responded to requests for comment.

The day of Romanoff's article, the World Health Organization officially designated the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.

Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry, spent part of the next afternoon retweeting cute dog videos. Then, late that night, he sent out a series of tweets over 13 minutes that launched what may be China's first truly global digital experiment with overt disinformation.

"When did patient zero begin in US?" Zhao wrote. "How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe (sic) us an explanation!"

The next morning, Zhao urged his hundreds of thousands of Twitter followers to read and retweet Romanoff's piece. An hour and a half-hour later he gave Global Research another boost, referring his followers to an earlier Romanoff article that cited Chinese state media reporting to cast doubt on the origins of the virus.

Twitter later added a fact-check warning to Zhao's tweet about the US Army – but only in English. An identical post in Mandarin carried no such alert. Twitter also put a fact-checking label on only one of Zhao's two reposts of Global Research content.

A Twitter spokesperson said that the platform has expanded its policies to deal with misleading COVID-19 information but did not address specific posts flagged by AP.

Zhao's tweets were now global news, and they hijacked mainstream discussion of the coronavirus. On Twitter alone, Zhao's aggressive spray of 11 tweets on March 12 and 13 was cited over 99,000 times over the next six weeks, in at least 54 languages, according to analysis conducted by DFRLab. The accounts that referenced him had nearly 275 million followers on Twitter – a number that almost certainly includes duplicate followers and does not distinguish fake accounts.

Influential conservatives on Twitter, including Donald Trump Jr., hammered Zhao, propelling his tweets to their largest audiences.

China's Global Times and at least 30 Chinese diplomatic accounts, from France to Panama, rushed in to support Zhao. Venezuela's foreign minister and RT's correspondent in Caracas, as well as Saudi accounts close to the kingdom's royal family also significantly extended Zhao's reach, helping launch his ideas into Spanish and Arabic.

His accusations got uncritical treatment in Russian and Iranian state media and shot back through QAnon discussion boards. But his biggest audience, by far, lay within China itself -- despite the fact that Twitter is banned there. Popular hashtags about his tweetstorm were viewed 314 million times on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, which does not distinguish unique views.

Late on the night of March 13, Zhao posted a message of gratitude on his personal Weibo: "Thank you for your support to me, let us work hard for the motherland ☐!"

CONTAGION

The same day Zhao tweeted that the virus might have come from the U.S. Army, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei also announced that COVID-19 could be the result of a biological attack.

State media outlets reinforced Khamenei's message, drawing on foreign sources for validation. Tasnim News, for example, quoted Nikulin, the self-proclaimed Russian bioweapons expert, to suggest the U.S. engineered the virus to target China. Javan Online quoted Zhao's tweets to claim Chinese officials had evidence the U.S. was behind the pandemic.

Military and religious leaders in Iran repeatedly referred to the virus as a U.S.-made bioweapon. Their remarks were, in turn, amplified by Russian media and picked up in China, where they fueled further speculation.

The International Union of Virtual Media (IUVM), an Iranian network that has been purged repeatedly by Facebook, Google and Twitter, activated a network of websites and covert social media accounts to accuse the U.S. of engineering the virus and praise the leadership and benevolence of China.

Khamenei again cited the conspiracy theory that the virus was made in America during his annual Persian

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New Year speech on March 22 -- this time as justification for refusing U.S. assistance.

"I do not know how real this accusation is but when it exists, who in their right mind would trust you to bring them medication?" Khamenei told the nation. "Possibly your medicine is a way to spread the virus more."

That same day, the first of two cargo planes loaded with doctors and supplies for a 50-bed field hospital from Doctors Without Borders landed in Iran.

On March 23, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted a Global Research reprint of an article from Chinese state broadcaster CGTN that questioned the origin of the coronavirus, again suggesting it had been made in a U.S. government lab at Fort Detrick.

The next day, Iran's Ministry of Health withdrew permission for Doctors Without Borders to deliver COVID-19 aid.

A MEDIA PATHOGEN

Ten days after Zhao's first conspiratorial tweets, China's global state media apparatus kicked in to push the theory that Zhao, and now Khamenei, were broadcasting.

"Did the U.S. government intentionally conceal the reality of COVID-19 with the flu?" asked a suggestive op-ed in Mandarin published by China Radio International on March 22. "Why was the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Ft. Detrick in Maryland, the largest biochemical testing base, shut down in July 2019?"

Within days, versions of the piece appeared more than 350 times in Chinese state outlets, mostly in Mandarin, but also around the world in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic, AP found.

The story flew across China, through social media accounts run by police, prosecutors, propaganda departments, anti-cult associations and Communist Youth Leagues. Seven prisons in Sichuan province, five provincial and municipal traffic radio stations, and a dozen accounts run by state media giant CCTV also pushed it out.

China's Embassy in France promoted the story on Twitter and Facebook. It appeared on YouTube, Weibo, WeChat and a host of Chinese video platforms, including Haokan, Xigua, Baijiahao, Bilibili, iQIYI, Kuaishou and Youku. A seven-second version set to driving music appeared on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.

"Clearly pushing these kinds of conspiracy theories, disinformation, does not usually result in any negative consequences for them," said Mareike Ohlberg, a senior fellow in the Asia Program of the German Marshall Fund.

AP found the story was viewed over 7 million times online, with more than 1.8 million comments, shares or reactions. Those numbers are an undercount because many platforms did not publish metrics, and they don't account for television viewership or circulation in closed groups. Accounts promoting the content had a combined total of over 817 million followers, though many are likely to be duplicates or fakes.

Conspiracies brewing in the United States reinforced China's messaging. In late March, George Webb, a for-profit conspiracy theorist in Washington D.C., doxed a U.S. Army reservist as Patient Zero, claiming on YouTube that she brought the virus from Fort Detrick to Wuhan during the October military games.

Webb's video circulated widely in China and was picked up by state-run Global Times. The falsely accused woman got death threats and Webb's video was pulled from YouTube, but it's still live in China on Weibo, where it has accrued millions of views.

IN SEARCH OF AN ENDING

In April, Russia and Iran largely dropped the bioweapon conspiracy in their overt messaging. They had a more pressing concern: Surging numbers of dead.

China carried on.

Beijing was besieged by demands for accountability. In the U.S., there were calls for a "pandemic tariff" and canceling U.S. debt with China. Republicans in Congress began introducing legislation to strip China of its sovereign immunity so Americans could sue.

Australian officials called for an inquiry into the origins and spread of coronavirus. China's ambassador to Australia, Cheng Jingye, issued a veiled threat. "Maybe the ordinary people will say, 'Why should we

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drink Australian wine? Eat Australian beef?" he said.

Within a month, China banned beef from four big Australian producers and slapped an 80% tariff on Australian barley -- moves widely seen as retribution, though China has denied that charge.

Chinese officials and state media continued to promote made-in-America COVID-19 conspiracies.

State broadcaster CGTN jumped in on May 16, releasing a slick documentary about Fort Detrick set to spooky music that has been viewed on its YouTube channel more than 82,000 times. YouTube has not flagged the video as state-sponsored content, despite a 2018 policy to label government-funded videos. A YouTube spokesperson said that because the video is about COVID-19, it was labeled with an information panel about the virus instead of the publisher.

The video has been played on China's Bilibili platform 378,000 times and broadcast in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Indonesian, Filipino -- as well as by NTV, a Houston TV station that failed to note the content was Chinese government propaganda.

NTV said it has removed the video flagged by AP. "I have warned our newsroom department for the future," said Navroz Prasla, the CEO of NTV, which says it is the largest South Asian TV network in North America.

In July and August, Zhao, the foreign ministry spokesman, rekindled the Fort Detrick conspiracy in Tweets that have not been flagged for fact-checking: "Much remains unclear about US' #FortDetrick and over 200 bio labs in the world," he wrote on Aug. 11.

On Jan. 14, 2021, a team from the World Health Organization landed in China to investigate the origins of the outbreak. The next day, in one of the final acts of the Trump administration, the U.S. State Department put out a "Fact Sheet" stating that the pandemic could be the result of a leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which it claimed has collaborated on secret projects with China's military.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned those allegations as "the 'last-day madness' of 'Mr. Liar.'"

"I'd like to stress that if the United States truly respects facts, it should open the biological lab at Fort Detrick, give more transparency to issues like its 200-plus overseas bio-labs, invite WHO experts to conduct origin-tracing in the United States," spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a Jan. 18 press conference.

Her remarks went viral in China.

COVID-19 disinformation has been good for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within China, Zhao and his colleagues have a growing fan base and their followers on Twitter have soared. Zhao now has over 879,000 Twitter followers.

Questions have been raised about how much of this audience is real and how much is from fake accounts — speculation China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said is groundless.

"Spreading disinformation about the epidemic is indeed spreading a 'political virus,'" the ministry told AP. "False information is the common enemy of mankind, and China has always opposed the creation and spread of false information."

Associated Press reporters David Klepper, Farnoush Amiri, Beatrice Dupuy, Dake Kang, Peter Hamlin, Jeannie Ohm, Allen Breed, Francois Duckett and news researcher Si Chen contributed to this report.

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Impeachment isn't the final word on Capitol riot for Trump

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's acquittal at his second impeachment trial may not be the final word on whether he's to blame for the deadly Capitol riot. The next step for the former president could be the courts.

Now a private citizen, Trump is stripped of his protection from legal liability that the presidency gave him. That change in status is something that even Republicans who voted on Saturday to acquit of inciting the

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Jan. 6 attack are stressing as they urge Americans to move on from impeachment.

"President Trump is still liable for everything he did while he was in office, as an ordinary citizen, unless the statute of limitations has run," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said after that vote. He insisted that the courts were a more appropriate venue to hold Trump accountable than a Senate trial.

"He didn't get away with anything yet," McConnell said. "Yet."

The insurrection at the Capitol, in which five people died, is just one of the legal cases shadowing Trump in the months after he was voted out of office. He also faces legal exposure in Georgia over an alleged pressure campaign on state election officials, and in Manhattan over hush-money payments and business deals.

But Trump's culpability under the law for inciting the riot is by no means clear-cut. The standard is high under court decisions reaching back 50 years. Trump could also be sued by victims, though he has some constitutional protections, including if he acted while carrying out the duties of president. Those cases would come down to his intent.

Legal scholars say a proper criminal investigation takes time, and there are at least five years on the statute of limitations to bring a federal case. New evidence is emerging every day.

"They're way too early in their investigation to know," said Laurie Levenson, a law professor at Loyola Law School and former federal prosecutor. "They have arrested 200 people, they're pursuing hundreds more, all of those people could be potential witnesses because some have said 'Trump made me do it.'"

What's not known, she said, is what Trump was doing during the time of the riot, and that could be the key. Impeachment didn't produce many answers. But federal investigators in a criminal inquiry have much more power to compel evidence through grand jury subpoenas.

"It's not an easy case, but that's only because what we know now, and that can change," Levenson said.

The legal issue is whether Trump or any of the speakers at the rally near the White House that preceded the assault on the Capitol incited violence and whether they knew their words would have that effect. That's the standard the Supreme Court laid out in its 1969 decision in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, which overturned the conviction of a Ku Klux Klan leader.

Trump urged the crowd on Jan. 6 to march on the Capitol, where Congress was meeting to affirm Joe Biden's presidential election, Trump even promised to go with his supporters, though he didn't in the end. "You'll never take our country back with weakness," Trump said.

He also had spent weeks spinning up supporters over his increasingly combative language and false election claims urging them to "stop the steal."

Trump's impeachment lawyers said he didn't do anything illegal. Trump, in a statement after the acquittal, did not admit to any wrongdoing.

Federal prosecutors have said they are looking at all angles of the assault on the Capitol and whether the violence had been incited. The attorney general for the District of Columbia, Karl Racine, has said that district prosecutors are considering whether to charge Trump under local law that criminalizes statements that motivate people to violence.

"Let it be known that the office of attorney general has a potential charge that it may utilize," Racine told MSNBC last month. The charge would be a misdemeanor with a maximum sentence of six months in jail.

Trump's top White House lawyer repeatedly warned Trump on Jan. 6 that he could be held liable. That message was delivered in part to prompt Trump to condemn the violence that was carried out in his name and acknowledge that he would leave office Jan. 20, when Biden was inaugurated. He did depart the White House that day.

Since then, many of those charged in the riots say they were acting directly on Trump's orders. Some offered to testify. A phone call between Trump and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy emerged during the impeachment trial in which McCarthy, as rioters stormed the Capitol, begged Trump to call off the mob. Trump replied: "Well, Kevin, I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are."

The McCarthy call is significant because it could point to Trump's intent, state of mind and knowledge of the rioters' actions.

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Court cases that try to prove incitement often bump up against the First Amendment. In recent years, federal judges have taken a hard line against the anti-riot law. The federal appeals court in Virginia narrowed the Anti-Riot Act, with a maximum prison term of five years, because it swept up constitutionally protected speech. The court found invalid parts of the law that encompassed speech tending to "encourage" or "promote" a riot, as well as speech "urging" others to riot or involving mere advocacy of violence.

The same court upheld the convictions of two members of a white supremacist group who admitted they punched and kicked counter-demonstrators during the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

It's possible federal prosecutors will decide not to bring charges, and if Trump were indicted in one of the many other separate investigations, federal prosecutors could decide justice would be done elsewhere.

Atlanta prosecutors have recently opened a criminal investigation into Trump's attempts to overturn his election loss in Georgia, including a Jan. 2 phone call in which he urged that state's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, to "find" enough votes to reverse Biden's narrow victory.

And Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr., is in the midst of an 18-month criminal grand jury investigation focusing in part on hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf, and whether Trump or his businesses manipulated the value of assets — inflating them in some cases and minimizing them in others — to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits.

GOP Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who voted to acquit along with McConnell and 41 other Republicans, argued that because Trump is no longer in office, impeachment is not the right way to hold him to account.

"The ultimate accountability is through our criminal justice system where political passions are checked and due process is constitutionally mandated. No president is above the law or immune from criminal prosecution, and that includes former President Trump."

Associated Press writers Jim Mustian and Michael R. Sisak in New York and Mark Sherman contributed to this report.

Follow Colleen Long on Twitter at: <https://twitter.com/ctlong1>

Wintry weather blanketing US making rare dip to Gulf Coast

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Snow and ice blanketed large swaths of the U.S. on Sunday, prompting canceled flights, making driving perilous and reaching into areas as far south as Texas' Gulf Coast, where snow and sleet were expected overnight.

"Typically, we just don't have quite this much cold air in place that far south," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center.

The storm has prompted officials in Houston, where temperatures were in the 70s (20s Celsius) earlier this week, to advise residents to prepare for power outages and hazardous roads that could be similar to those experienced in the wake of a Category 5 hurricane.

As rain fell Sunday in the Houston area, the temperature hovered near freezing. "This rain will be transitioning over to just freezing rain, sleet and snow during the overnight through early morning hours tomorrow," said National Weather Service meteorologist Josh Lichter.

Chenard said significant ice and up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) of snow were expected across parts of the southern Plains into Monday.

Winter weather conditions are affecting large portions of the U.S., but it is rare for them to extend so far south, Chenard said.

The Dallas area had a covering of snow by Sunday morning, with flakes still falling, and as much as 6 inches (15 centimeters) was forecast.

With the wintry conditions falling on Valentine's Day, florists stayed busy even as the snow fell.

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In Fort Worth, where it was already icy and snowy, Gordon Boswell Flowers' general manager said delivery drivers were trying to wrap up before conditions got worse later Sunday afternoon.

"It is icy and snowing and they're calling for more snow," Cheri Kirkman said.

Despite the weather, she said they still had some people coming in to pick up gifts. "We've got plenty all made up, ready to go," Kirkman said.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who issued a disaster declaration for all of the state's 254 counties, warned on Saturday: "All of Texas is facing an extremely dangerous winter storm."

Abbott, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson have each activated National Guard units to assist state agencies with tasks including rescuing stranded drivers.

In a statement Sunday night, President Joe Biden also declared an emergency in Texas and ordered federal assistance to aid state and local response efforts. The declaration allows the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate disaster relief efforts and provide assistance, equipment and resources to those affected by the storm.

The weather was affecting operations at airports across the area, with more than 760 flights canceled at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, and at Dallas Love Field most of the nearly 200 flights for Southwest Airlines, the airport's main carrier, were canceled.

American Airlines said about 345 of their flights were canceled at DFW Airport, its hub, by early Sunday afternoon. The airline said the storm was also affecting their flights across the region, with operations reduced and canceled at airports across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Officials were discouraging travel in the wintry conditions. By early Sunday afternoon, the Texas Highway Patrol had reported several multi-car pileups in West Texas, including one that involved 25 vehicles and shut down a portion of Interstate 20 westbound.

The Oklahoma Highway Patrol said a portion of the Turner Turnpike was shut down due to a multi-vehicle accident, while the Oklahoma Department of Transportation said the southern corridor of Interstate 35 was mostly snow packed in the left lane and conditions were expected to deteriorate.

The National Weather Service said Sunday that the forecast through early Tuesday calls for 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow in central Oklahoma, and 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) in an area extending from eastern Texas to the Ohio Valley in the Northeast.

In Memphis, Tennessee, snow had started falling, and while main roads were still passable, lines were forming at grocery stores as people rushed to stock up.

In Mississippi, sleet in Jackson and other central parts of the state left roads and bridges slick. Bill Parker, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Jackson, said up to three-quarters of an inch of ice could accumulate in central Mississippi, bringing the possibility of power outages or falling tree limbs.

Parts of Kentucky and West Virginia still recovering from an ice storm last week are expected to get up to a quarter-inch (0.6 centimeters) of ice or up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow by Tuesday. About 19,000 customers remained without electricity in southern West Virginia and about 9,000 in eastern Kentucky on Sunday from the storm that moved through on Wednesday and Thursday.

Utilities warned of the likelihood for additional power outages due to falling tree limbs. Hundreds of utility crews and contractors were traveling Sunday to be in place if additional outages occurred.

In Texas, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which manages the flow of electric power in the state, was asking customers to reduce electricity use as much as possible through Tuesday, including closing shades to reduce the amount of heat lost through windows and avoiding the use of large appliances.

"We are experiencing record-breaking electric demand due to the extreme cold temperatures that have gripped Texas," said ERCOT President and CEO Bill Magness. "At the same time, we are dealing with higher-than-normal generation outages due to frozen wind turbines and limited natural gas supplies available to generating units."

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Northwest, tens of thousands of people were without power after a winter storm blanketed the region with ice and snow and made travel treacherous.

Associated Press journalists Julie Walker in New York City; John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia; Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee; and Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, contributed to this report.

Impeachment isn't the final word on Capitol riot for Trump

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's acquittal at his second impeachment trial may not be the final word on whether he's to blame for the deadly Capitol riot. The next step for the former president could be the courts.

Now a private citizen, Trump is stripped of his protection from legal liability that the presidency gave him. That change in status is something that even Republicans who voted on Saturday to acquit of inciting the Jan. 6 attack are stressing as they urge Americans to move on from impeachment.

"President Trump is still liable for everything he did while he was in office, as an ordinary citizen, unless the statute of limitations has run," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said after that vote. He insisted that the courts were a more appropriate venue to hold Trump accountable than a Senate trial.

"He didn't get away with anything yet," McConnell said. "Yet."

The insurrection at the Capitol, in which five people died, is just one of the legal cases shadowing Trump in the months after he was voted out of office. He also faces legal exposure in Georgia over an alleged pressure campaign on state election officials, and in Manhattan over hush-money payments and business deals.

But Trump's culpability under the law for inciting the riot is by no means clear-cut. The standard is high under court decisions reaching back 50 years. Trump could also be sued by victims, though he has some constitutional protections, including if he acted while carrying out the duties of president. Those cases would come down to his intent.

Legal scholars say a proper criminal investigation takes time, and there are at least five years on the statute of limitations to bring a federal case. New evidence is emerging every day.

"They're way too early in their investigation to know," said Laurie Levenson, a law professor at Loyola Law School and former federal prosecutor. "The have arrested 200 people, they're pursuing hundreds more, all of those people could be potential witnesses because some have said 'Trump made me do it.'"

What's not known, she said, is what Trump was doing during the time of the riot, and that could be the key. Impeachment didn't produce many answers. But federal investigators in a criminal inquiry have much more power to compel evidence through grand jury subpoenas.

"It's not an easy case, but that's only because what we know now, and that can change," Levenson said.

The legal issue is whether Trump or any of the speakers at the rally near the White House that preceded the assault on the Capitol incited violence and whether they knew their words would have that effect. That's the standard the Supreme Court laid out in its 1969 decision in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, which overturned the conviction of a Ku Klux Klan leader.

Trump urged the crowd on Jan. 6 to march on the Capitol, where Congress was meeting to affirm Joe Biden's presidential election, Trump even promised to go with his supporters, though he didn't in the end. "You'll never take our country back with weakness," Trump said.

He also had spent weeks spinning up supporters over his increasingly combative language and false election claims urging them to "stop the steal."

Trump's impeachment lawyers said he didn't do anything illegal. Trump, in a statement after the acquittal, did not admit to any wrongdoing.

Federal prosecutors have said they are looking at all angles of the assault on the Capitol and whether the violence had been incited. The attorney general for the District of Columbia, Karl Racine, has said that district prosecutors are considering whether to charge Trump under local law that criminalizes statements that motivate people to violence.

"Let it be known that the office of attorney general has a potential charge that it may utilize," Racine told MSNBC last month. The charge would be a misdemeanor with a maximum sentence of six months in jail.

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Trump's top White House lawyer repeatedly warned Trump on Jan. 6 that he could be held liable. That message was delivered in part to prompt Trump to condemn the violence that was carried out in his name and acknowledge that he would leave office Jan. 20, when Biden was inaugurated. He did depart the White House that day.

Since then, many of those charged in the riots say they were acting directly on Trump's orders. Some offered to testify. A phone call between Trump and House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy emerged during the impeachment trial in which McCarthy, as rioters stormed the Capitol, begged Trump to call off the mob. Trump replied: "Well, Kevin, I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are."

The McCarthy call is significant because it could point to Trump's intent, state of mind and knowledge of the rioters' actions.

Court cases that try to prove incitement often bump up against the First Amendment. In recent years, federal judges have taken a hard line against the anti-riot law. The federal appeals court in Virginia narrowed the Anti-Riot Act, with a maximum prison term of five years, because it swept up constitutionally protected speech. The court found invalid parts of the law that encompassed speech tending to "encourage" or "promote" a riot, as well as speech "urging" others to riot or involving mere advocacy of violence.

The same court upheld the convictions of two members of a white supremacist group who admitted they punched and kicked counter-demonstrators during the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

It's possible federal prosecutors will decide not to bring charges, and if Trump were indicted in one of the many other separate investigations, federal prosecutors could decide justice would be done elsewhere.

Atlanta prosecutors have recently opened a criminal investigation into Trump's attempts to overturn his election loss in Georgia, including a Jan. 2 phone call in which he urged that state's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, to "find" enough votes to reverse Biden's narrow victory.

And Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr., is in the midst of an 18-month criminal grand jury investigation focusing in part on hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf, and whether Trump or his businesses manipulated the value of assets — inflating them in some cases and minimizing them in others — to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits.

GOP Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who voted to acquit along with McConnell and 41 other Republicans, argued that because Trump is no longer in office, impeachment is not the right way to hold him to account.

"The ultimate accountability is through our criminal justice system where political passions are checked and due process is constitutionally mandated. No president is above the law or immune from criminal prosecution, and that includes former President Trump."

Associated Press writers Jim Mustian and Michael R. Sisak in New York and Mark Sherman contributed to this report.

Follow Colleen Long on Twitter at: <https://twitter.com/ctlong1>

Support grows for Capitol riot inquiry after Trump acquittal

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A day after former President Donald Trump won his second Senate impeachment trial, bipartisan support appeared to be growing for an independent Sept. 11-style commission into the deadly insurrection that took place at the U.S. Capitol.

Investigations into the riot were already planned, with Senate hearings scheduled later this month in the Senate Rules Committee. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has asked retired Army Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré to lead an immediate review of the Capitol's security process.

Lawmakers from both parties, speaking on Sunday's news shows, signaled that even more inquiries were likely. The Senate verdict Saturday, with its 57-43 majority falling 10 votes short of the two-thirds needed to

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convict Trump, hardly put to rest the debate about the former president's culpability for the Jan. 6 assault.

"There should be a complete investigation about what happened," said Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, one of seven Republicans who voted to convict Trump. "What was known, who knew it and when they knew, all that, because that builds the basis so this never happens again."

Cassidy said he was "attempting to hold President Trump accountable," and added that as Americans hear all the facts, "more folks will move to where I was." He was censured by his state's party after the vote.

An independent commission along the lines of the one that investigated the Sept. 11 attacks would probably require legislation to create. That would elevate the investigation a step higher, offering a definitive government-backed accounting of events. Pelosi has expressed support for such a commission while stressing that the members who sit on it would be key. Still, such a panel would pose risks of sharpening partisan divisions or overshadowing President Joe Biden's legislative agenda.

"There's still more evidence that the American people need and deserve to hear and a 9/11 commission is a way to make sure that we secure the Capitol going forward," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a Biden ally. "And that we lay bare the record of just how responsible and how abjectly violating of his constitutional oath President Trump really was."

House prosecutors who argued for Trump's conviction of inciting the riot said Sunday they had proved their case. They also railed against the Senate's Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, and others who they said were "trying to have it both ways" in finding the former president not guilty but criticizing him at the same time.

A close Trump ally, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., voted for acquittal but acknowledged that Trump had some culpability for the siege at the Capitol that killed five people, including a police officer, and disrupted lawmakers' certification of Biden's White House victory. Graham said he looked forward to campaigning with Trump in the 2022 election, when Republicans hope to regain the congressional majority.

"His behavior after the election was over the top," Graham said. "We need a 9/11 commission to find out what happened and make sure it never happens again."

The Senate acquitted Trump of a charge of "incitement of insurrection" after House prosecutors laid out a case that he was an "inciter in chief" who unleashed a mob by stoking a monthslong campaign of spreading debunked conspiracy theories and false violent rhetoric that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

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

The conviction tally was the most bipartisan in American history but left Trump to declare victory and signal a political revival while a bitterly divided GOP bickered over its direction and his place in the party.

The Republicans who joined Cassidy in voting to convict were Sens. Richard Burr of North Carolina, Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Mitt Romney of Utah, Ben Sasse of Nebraska and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania.

"It's frustrating, but the founders knew what they were doing and so we live with the system that we have," Democratic Del. Stacey Plaskett, a House prosecutor who represents the Virgin Islands, said of the verdict, describing it as "heartbreaking." She added: "But, listen, we didn't need more witnesses. We needed more senators with spines."

McConnell told Republican senators shortly before the vote that he would vote to acquit Trump. In a blistering speech after the vote, the Kentucky Republican said the president was "practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day" but that the Senate's hands were tied to do anything about it because Trump was out of office. The Senate, in an earlier vote, had deemed the trial constitutional.

"It was powerful to hear the 57 guilties and then it was puzzling to hear and see Mitch McConnell stand and say 'not guilty' and then, minutes later, stand again and say he was guilty of everything," said Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-Pa. "History will remember that statement of speaking out of two sides of his mouth," she said.

Dean also backed the idea of an impartial investigative commission "not guided by politics but filled with people who would stand up to the courage of their conviction."

The lead House impeachment manager, Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., called the trial a "dramatic success in

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historical terms" by winning unprecedented support from GOP senators. He said the verdict didn't match the reality of the strength of evidence.

"We successfully prosecuted him and convicted him in the court of public opinion and the court of history," he said. Pointing to McConnell and other Republican senators critical of Trump but voting to acquit, Raskin said, "They're trying to have it both ways."

Raskin and Plaskett defended the House team's last-minute reversal not to call a witness, Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Wash. They acknowledged they were aware they might lose some GOP votes for conviction if they extended the trial much longer.

Beutler's statement late Friday that Trump rebuffed a plea from House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy to call off the rioters was ultimately entered into the trial record.

"I think what we did was, we got what we wanted, which was her statement, which was what she said, and had it put into the record," Plaskett said.

Cassidy and Dean spoke on ABC's "This Week," Graham appeared on "Fox News Sunday," Raskin was on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Plaskett appeared on CNN's "State of the Union."

Associated Press writers Alexandra Jaffe, Lisa Mascaró, Eric Tucker, Mary Clare Jalonick and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Myanmar rattled by army movements, apparent internet cutoff

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Sightings of armored personnel carriers in Myanmar's biggest city and an internet shutdown raised political tensions late Sunday, after vast numbers of people around the country flouted orders against demonstrations to protest the military's seizure of power.

Public concern has already been heightened for the past few nights by what many charge is the military's manipulation of criminals released from prison to carry out nighttime violence and stir up panic.

Ambassadors from the United States and Canada and 12 European nations called on Myanmar's security forces to refrain from violence against those "protesting the overthrow of their legitimate government." They condemned the arrests of political leaders and activists as well as the military's interference with communications.

"We support the people of Myanmar in their quest for democracy, freedom, peace, and prosperity," they said in a joint statement issued late Sunday night. "The world is watching."

The military seized power on Feb. 1, detaining the country's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of her government and preventing recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament.

The junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, said it was forced to step in because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The state election commission found no evidence to support the allegations.

There was no official word about why armored personnel carriers traversed the streets of Yangon in broad daylight Sunday, making their way through busy traffic. As night fell, there were videos and other reports on social media of the movement of trucks packed with soldiers, and in the central city of Mandalay as well.

An order that appears to be from the Ministry of Transport and Communications told mobile phone service providers to shut down internet connections from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. Monday. It circulated widely on social media, as did a notice said to be from service provider Ooredoo Myanmar containing the same details. Several users contacted through other means confirmed that access though Myanmar's broadband and mobile services were cut as scheduled.

Monday holds the prospect of two flashpoints for the political standoff.

Suu Kyi remains under house arrest, but a remand order holding her on a minor charge of possessing unregistered imported walkie-talkies expires Monday and a court in the capital, Naypyitaw, is supposed to take action on her case. Her freedom is a major demand of the protest movement.

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Khin Maung Zaw, a lawyer asked by Suu Kyi's party to represent her, said he was uncertain if she would have a court appearance Monday, and it could be delayed by a day. He has not been able to make contact with Suu Kyi.

There is also the possibility that a young woman who was shot during a demonstration last week, also in Naypyitaw, will be declared legally dead. She has been on life support in a hospital in the capital, and unofficial memorial services were held for her Sunday at protests in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's two biggest cities.

Large demonstrations were also held in Naypyitaw and far-flung corners of the country dominated by ethnic minorities.

Resistance also took place in cyberspace, as a group calling itself BrotherHood of Myanmar Hackers defaced the government's Myanmar Digital News website, replacing content on its home page with words and pictures against the military takeover.

Protesters in Yangon again rallied outside the Chinese and U.S. embassies. They accuse Beijing of propping up the military regime and applaud Washington's actions sanctioning the military. There were scattered appeals on Twitter for armed intervention by the United States.

Other protesters carried signs urging people to boycott businesses linked to the military.

Eight days of street demonstrations are estimated to have drawn hundreds of thousands of people to the streets despite the threat of six months' imprisonment for violating an order banning gatherings of five or more people. The same order imposes an 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew.

Sunday's activism took place after the ruling junta issued a new order suspending several basic civil liberties.

The order, issued late Saturday and published Sunday in state newspapers, suspends provisions in an existing law on security and privacy protection, allowing the authorities to carry out searches and make arrests without court warrants.

It also allows the interception of electronic and other communications without a warrant and permits the detention of detainees for more than 24 hours without court permission.

Civil servants have been very active in the protests, and social media postings on Sunday indicated that state railway workers have joined them, with some unconfirmed claims that they have gone on strike.

The public at large has been alarmed since the government last week declared an amnesty that led to the release of more than 23,000 convicts. There are many claims on social media that some have been recruited by the authorities to carry out violent activities at night in residential areas to spread panic, especially by setting fires. Some areas have responded by setting up their own neighborhood watch groups.

The truth of the allegations about government-directed thugs is difficult to verify, even with videos claiming to show their activities. There is historical precedent, as the military released convicts to carry out violence and cause chaos in 1988 during a failed popular uprising against a military dictatorship.

People have also been rattled by police raids carried out during curfew hours to seize individuals seen as opposed to the coup. In several cases, nearby residents rushed to the scene in such numbers that security forces abandoned their attempts to haul in their targets.

The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says 400 people have been detained since the coup, with 375 still being held.

Detainees have included political leaders, government officials, civil servants, activists and student leaders. Medical personnel have been singled out because their community initiated the civil disobedience campaign against the military takeover and remains in its vanguard.

Duchess of Sussex expecting 2nd child, a sibling for Archie

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are expecting their second child, their office confirmed Sunday.

A spokesperson for Prince Harry, 36, and Meghan, 39, said in a statement: "We can confirm that Archie is going to be a big brother. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are overjoyed to be expecting their second

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child.”

In a black-and-white photo of themselves, the couple sat near a tree with Harry’s hand placed under Meghan’s head as she lies on his lap with her hand resting on her bump.

The baby will be eighth in line to the British throne.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: “Her Majesty, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales and the entire family are delighted and wish them well.”

The duke told chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall in 2019 that he would only have two children for the sake of the planet.

Goodall said: “Not too many,” and Harry replied: “Two, maximum.”

Harry and American actor Meghan Markle married at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son Archie was born a year later.

In early 2020, Meghan and Harry announced they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America, citing what they said were the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. They recently bought a house in Santa Barbara, California.

In November, Meghan revealed that she had a miscarriage in July 2020, giving a personal account of the traumatic experience in hope of helping others.

A few days ago, the duchess won a privacy claim against a newspaper over the publication of a personal letter to her estranged father.

Italy won’t open its ski slopes due to virus fears

ROME (AP) — The Italian government on Sunday abruptly delayed opening Italy’s beloved ski season because a coronavirus variant was detected in a good portion of recently infected persons in the country.

Health Minister Roberto Speranza’s ordinance forbidding amateur skiing at least until March 5 effectively kills the hopes of ski lift operators and resort owners that they would be able to salvage part of the season. The ski business is a big source of winter tourism in Italy and the news came on the eve of the expected opening.

A ministry statement noted that analyses of virus samples indicated that a variant first found in Britain is sickening 17.8% of recently infected people in Italy.

France and Germany have adopted similar measures in the ski sector due to the “worry for the spread of this and other variants of the virus,” the statement said.

The ski industry swiftly lamented that they have repeatedly prepared slopes and lifts, only to have been denied permission to open, including just before the year-end holidays.

The day-old government of Premier Mario Draghi promised to quickly compensate the sector for economic losses.

Speranza was also the health minister in the previous government and is advised by a commission of technical and scientific experts about what activities can be safely allowed during efforts to rein in COVID-19 contagion.

Italy, with over 93,000 confirmed virus deaths, has Europe’s second-highest known death toll in the pandemic after Britain.

The president of the Italian Winter Sports Federation, Flavio Roda, slammed the last-minute timing of the decision.

“The (ski) stations have invested a lot to prepare the slopes, hire personnel, get organized with hoteliers. A lot of money was invested and yet again our world is heavily penalized,” he said.

Tourism and leisure travel has suffered in Italy for nearly a year since the COVID-19 outbreak struck the nation. International tourism dried up under the government’s anti-pandemic restrictions on travel from abroad. Travel is currently forbidden between Italy’s regions, except for work, health care or other grave reasons, further damaging the domestic tourism sector.

On Saturday, Speranza signed another ordinance, requiring anyone arriving from Austria, Italy’s neighbor to the north, to be tested for COVID-19 and quarantine themselves after entering Italy. That ordinance

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cited the circulation in Austria of a variant found in South Africa.

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

Average new US virus cases below 100K for 1st time in months

By SUDHIN THANAWALA and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Average daily new coronavirus cases in the United States dipped below 100,000 in recent days for the first time in months, but experts cautioned Sunday that infections remain high and precautions to slow the pandemic must remain in place.

The seven-day rolling average of new infections was well above 200,000 for much of December and went to roughly 250,000 in January, according to data kept by Johns Hopkins University, as the pandemic came roaring back after it had been tamed in some places over the summer.

That average dropped below 100,000 on Friday for the first time since Nov. 4. It stayed below 100,000 on Saturday.

"We are still at about 100,000 cases a day. We are still at around 1,500 to 3,500 deaths per day. The cases are more than two-and-a-half-fold times what we saw over the summer," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "It's encouraging to see these trends coming down, but they're coming down from an extraordinarily high place."

On Saturday, the seven-day rolling average for deaths was around 2,500. That number peaked at more than 3,300 earlier in the winter, according to Johns Hopkins.

The U.S. saw a spike of more than 5,400 deaths reported Friday — nearly half from Ohio, where authorities said earlier in the week that they planned to add deaths to the state's tally over the course of a few days after discovering as many as 4,000 unreported COVID-19 fatalities.

Walensky added that new variants, including one first detected in the United Kingdom that appears to be more transmissible and has already been recorded in more than 30 states, will likely lead to more cases and more deaths.

"All of it is really wraps up into we can't let our guard down," she said. "We have to continue wearing masks. We have to continue with our current mitigation measures. And we have to continue getting vaccinated as soon as that vaccine is available to us."

The U.S. has recorded more than 27.5 million virus cases and more than 484,000 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins data.

With parents and political leaders eager to have children around the country back in school for in-person learning, it is important that people continue to observe precautions, Walensky said.

"We need to all take responsibility to decrease that community spread, including mask wearing so that we can get our kids and our society back," she said.

The CDC released guidance on Friday outlining mitigation strategies necessary to reopen schools or to keep them open.

Some teachers have expressed concern about returning to the classroom without having been vaccinated, but the guidelines do not say that's necessary. Dr. Anthony Fauci said on ABC's "This Week" that it would be "optimal" if teachers were vaccinated but that other measures laid out in the 24-page document can lessen their risk.

"Practically speaking, when you balance the benefit of getting the children back to school with the fact that the risks are being mitigated, if you follow the recommendations and these new guidelines from the CDC, hopefully, I think that will alleviate the concerns on both sides," he said.

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

Pro-Navalny 'flashlight' protests light up Russian cities

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Supporters of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny came out to residential courtyards and shined their cellphone flashlights Sunday in a display of unity, despite efforts by Russian authorities to extinguish the illuminated protests.

Navalny's team sent photos of small groups with lit-up cellphones in cities from Siberia to the Moscow region. It was unclear how many people participated overall.

No arrests were immediately reported. However, police detained nine people at a daytime demonstration in the city of Kazan calling for the release of political prisoners, according to OVD-Info, a human rights group that monitors political arrests.

The group said security guards at Moscow State University recorded the names of people leaving a dormitory to take part in a flashlight rally there.

When Navalny's first team urged people to come out to the cellphone protests, many responded with jokes and skepticism. After two weekends of nationwide demonstrations, the new protest format looked to some like a retreat.

Yet Russian officials spent days trying to blacken the protests. Officials accused Navalny's allies of acting on NATO's instructions. Kremlin-backed TV channels warned that flashlight rallies were part of major uprisings around the world. State news agencies cited unnamed sources as saying a terrorist group was plotting attacks during unapproved mass protests.

The suppression attempts represent a change of tactics for Russian authorities, who used to ignore Navalny. Kremlin-controlled TV channels used to not report about protests called by Navalny. Russian President Vladimir Putin has never mentioned his most prominent critic by name. State news agencies referred to the anti-corruption investigator as "a blogger" in the rare stories when they did mention him.

"Navalny went from a person whose name is not allowed to be mentioned to the main subject of discussion" on state TV, said Maria Pevchikh, head of investigations at Navalny's Foundations for Fighting Corruption.

Pevchikh credited Navalny's latest expose for the sudden surge in attention. His foundation's two-hour video alleging that a lavish palace on Black Sea was built for Putin through corruption has been watched over 111 million times on YouTube since Jan. 19.

The video went up two days after Navalny was arrested upon returning to Russia from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. The Russian government denies involvement and claims it has no evidence that Navalny was poisoned.

While the high-profile arrest and the subsequent expose were a double blow to authorities, political analyst and former Kremlin speech writer Abbas Gallyamov says that keeping Navalny and his protests off the airwaves to deprive him of additional publicity no longer makes sense.

"The fact that this strategy has changed suggests that the pro-government television audience is somehow receiving information about Navalny's activities through other channels, recognizes him, is interested in his work, and in this sense, keeping the silence doesn't make any sense," Gallyamov said.

The weekend protests in scores of Russian cities last month over Navalny's detention represented the largest outpouring of popular discontent in years and appeared to have rattled the Kremlin. Police reportedly arrested about 10,000 people, and many demonstrators were beaten, while state media sought to downplay the scale of the protests.

TV channels aired footage of empty squares in cities where protests were announced and claimed that few people showed up. Some reports portrayed police as polite and restrained, claiming officers had helped people with disabilities cross busy streets, handed out face masks and offered demonstrators hot tea.

Once the protests died down and Navalny ally Leonid Volkov announced a pause until the spring, Kremlin-backed media reported that grassroots flash mobs titled "Putin is our president" started sweeping the country. State news channel Rossiya 24 broadcast videos from different cities of people dancing to patriotic songs and waving Russian flags, describing them as a genuine expression of support for Putin.

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Several independent online outlets reported that instructions to record videos in support of Putin came from the Kremlin and the governing United Russia party and that people in some of the recordings were invited under false pretenses.

The Russian president's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the Kremlin had nothing to do with the pro-Putin videos.

After Navalny's team posted its video involving the palace allegedly built for Putin, state channel Rossiya aired its own expose of Navalny. Anchor Dmitry Kiselev claimed in Germany, Navalny lived "in the luxury he so much despises."

The reporter filmed inside a house Navalny rented but failed to capture any high-end items in the two-story building, which featured several bedrooms and a small swimming pool.

She pointed to "two sofas, a TV, fresh fruit on the table" in the living room and "a kitchen with a coffee machine," and described a bedroom as "luxurious" even though it looked a a business hotel room.

In recent days, official media coverage focused on the flashlights-in-courtyards protest, accusing Navalny ally Volkov of acting on instructions from his Western handlers.

The political talk show "60 Minutes" devoted nearly a half-hour to the topic, calling the flashlight rally an idea from a handbook on revolutions. It aired footage of protesters shining flashlights during the 2014 Maidan protests in Ukraine, mass rallies in Belarus last summer and other uprisings.

On Thursday, state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti, citing anonymous sources, claimed that a terrorist group from Syria was training insurgents for possible terrorist attacks in Russian cities at "mass rallies."

"The Kremlin is awfully scared of the flashlight action," because such a peaceful, light-hearted event would allow the opposition to build a rapport with new supporters who are not ready to be more visible, Volkov said in a YouTube video.

He suggested the heavy-handed response to the announcement actually helped dispel skepticism about the courtyard demonstrations.

"I saw many posts on social media (saying) 'When Navalny's headquarters announced the flashlight rally, I thought what nonsense... But when I saw the Kremlin's reaction, I realized they were right to come up with it.'"

Jim Heintz in Moscow contributed to this story.

Czechs re-declare state of emergency to keep restrictions

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — The Czech government on Sunday re-declared a state of emergency for next two weeks to tackle the coronavirus pandemic in one of the European Union's hardest-hit nations.

The decision comes in defiance of the lower house of Parliament, which has refused the minority government's request to extend the powerful tool that gives the Cabinet the extra powers needed to impose nationwide restrictions and limit people's travel and rights.

The Czech Republic, a nation of 10.7 million, has had more than 1 million confirmed cases, with 18,143 deaths. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, its rate of 915 new confirmed cases per 100,000 people in the past two weeks is the second worst per capita in the 27-nation EU after Portugal.

The country has also been facing a surge of a fast-spreading coronavirus variant first found in Britain that scientists now say is more deadly than the original virus. The Czech Republic's three hardest-hit counties, on the border with Germany and Poland, are under a complete lockdown. The number of new cases per 100,000 inhabitants in last seven days there is higher than 1,100.

Despite the dire situation, some lawyers and politicians, including Milos Vystrcil, the Senate speaker, say the government's move violates the country's Constitution. The government denies that, saying its legal advisers support such a solution.

"I'm really glad that common sense has won," Prime Minister Andrej Babis said.

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The current state of emergency would have expired on Sunday. The government could use other legal options to reimpose some coronavirus restrictions but not all of them.

Without the state of emergency, bars, restaurants and cafes could reopen Monday, service businesses could resume, the nighttime curfew would end and a ban on more than two people gathering in public would be cancelled.

"We can't afford that to happen," Babis said.

The government warned that the restrictions are needed to keep the country's outbreak from getting worse and causing the health system to collapse. Sunday's move comes at the request of the leaders of all 14 Czech regions, who say they do not have enough powers to fight the pandemic.

"I'd like to thank the governors, who understand that it's of the utmost importance for us to do the maximum to protect the lives of our citizens," Babis said.

The governors also requested changes in the government's approach to the pandemic, including a mass testing of employees financed by the state, a gradual return of children to schools in March and new legislation that would define the state's responsibilities in fighting the pandemic.

Babis also said his government will meet the opposition on Tuesday to discuss further steps. The lower house still has a right to dismiss the government's step.

Germany on Sunday implemented tight border controls on its frontiers with the Czech Republic and Austria's Tyrol province in an effort to stem the spread of more contagious coronavirus variants.

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

Good dogs! 20 years of covering Westminster Kennel Club show

By GINGER TIDWELL and BEN WALKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — To every sport, there's a season, a spot on the calendar that fans mark for the big event. World Series, October. College hoops, March. Indy 500, Memorial Day.

For dog owners, it's right around Valentine's Day. That's when they normally cuddle up on the couch with their precious pooch to watch the Super Bowl of Dogs -- the Westminster Kennel Club show.

This year, they'll have to wait for the coveted best in show. Because of coronavirus concerns, the competition was moved from Madison Square Garden this weekend to mid-June at an outdoor estate about 25 miles north of New York City.

For now, AP Baseball Writer Ben Walker and wife Ginger Tidwell share their fondest memories from the green carpet over 20 paws-ively wonderful years covering Westminster:

HE'S NUMERO UNO!

Beagles had always been in the Westminster doghouse. No matter how cute, poor ol' Snoopy had never, ever won the grand prize. Bow-wow bummer.

That changed in 2008 when perhaps the greatest show dog of all time showed up. A tri-colored package of personality-plus, Uno quickly bayed his way to fan favorite.

A sold-out Garden crowd chanted his name as judge J. Donald Jones studied the seven finalists for nearly three minutes, mulling over his pick for best in show. They say there's no cheering in the press box, but having been raised in Maryland with beagles -- Charlie, Gatsby, Sam and Jake -- I looked at Ginger and prayed this was our moment.

When Jones said, "May I have the beagle," the place went bonkers.

"Ah-roo!" Uno erupted. "Ah-roo!"

This little, merry hound enjoyed a terrific life. He visited President George W. Bush at the White House, rode in a float at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and brought out the first ball at Busch Stadium and Miller Park.

Uno lived till 13, spending his last years on a ranch in Texas and playing with his buddy, a neighbor's

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potbellied pig.

Happy trails, champ.

GOT SOME GRUB?

Sometimes the dog that everybody's barking about isn't the best in show. Like, Dario the Leonberger. Winning wasn't on this big guy's mind when he romped around the ring in the 2016 working group competition. Naw, he only wanted to gnaw at his handler's pocket, trying to scarf up a treat.

Doggedly determined, the 2 1/2-year-old eating machine kept nipping at Sam Mammano's gray suit, hoping to grab some loose rebounds. A dog just being a dog ... and the crowd went crazy, hollering with every step and every bite.

He didn't win, that went CJ the German shorthaired pointer. But Dario earned a place in dogdom lore forever.

We rushed from our seats on the floor to catch up with Mammano backstage, right after he left the ring. He was a little disappointed, but also could see the charm.

"Good comic relief," he said. "He's a young, silly dog and was just having fun."

K-9 HEROES

Most years, a dog like Appollo wouldn't get close to the green carpet at the Garden. But the show in 2002 was no ordinary show.

With New York City still in shock from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 20 search and rescue dogs were honored for their tireless work at the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

At 10, Appollo the German shepherd was getting a bit gray in the muzzle, his teeth were yellowing. He didn't look like the 2,500 perfectly primped pooches around him.

Yet there was hardly a dry eye as the 10,000 spectators stood and cheered for the German shepherds, retrievers and their partners, an ovation usually reserved for the star athletes who played in the arena. It was hard not to be swept up in the emotion.

A spotlight featured them as they walked one by one into the center ring and actress Glenn Close sang "God Bless America" during the 15-minute ceremony.

Not the usual reception for this group.

"We were pretty nervous," said Lt. Daniel Donadio, head of the New York Police Department's K-9 unit. "We'd rather face gunmen than the crowd."

UNDERDOGS

Each year, there are the favorites. J.R. the bichon frise, Mick the Kerry blue terrier, Banana Joe the affenpinscher. Wire fox terriers and poodles always seem to take home the hallowed silver bowl.

Then there was Stump.

With floppy ears and a slow roll, the golden-red Sussex spaniel didn't make our early list of potential champions in 2009. How could he? Retired from the ring for five years, it was just five days before the show when handler Scott Sommer thought Stump might like to take one final walk at the Garden.

What a walk! At 10 -- that's almost 70 in human years -- Stump became the oldest Westminster winner ever.

He was in good company among unlikely top dogs over the years. Rufus the colored bull terrier had a football-shaped noggin and won by a head. Hickory the Scottish deerhound was a rare champion. Big, barkin' Josh the Newfoundland slobbered around the ring, then nearly knocked over Ginger in the winner's circle.

And Stump. That old dog sure taught the young pups some new tricks.

POOCH PLANET

Seeing an Azawakh at the Garden was unusual. Loosely called an African greyhound, they made their Westminster debut last year.

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Seeing the woman cheering them on was even more eye-catching. Dressed in bright pink and wearing a colorful hijab, Aliya Taylor realized she stood out.

"Like a sore thumb," she laughed.

The retired Philadelphia police officer is among the few Muslims in the dog show world.

"Our sport welcomes people from all walks of life," said Gail Miller Bisher, the television host of the event. "That's our common bond, dogs."

Hiram Stewart made history in 2003 when he guided Les the Pekingese into the final best-in-show ring. It had been three decades since an African American handler made it that far.

"Maybe this will raise awareness of our sport among people of color," he said at the time. "It might give people of color something to aspire to."

In a competition that can include a Norwegian elkhound, Australian shepherd and Chinese shar-pei, the people come from all over the world, too. Born in Mexico, Gabriel Rangel is among the most successful handlers in history.

He's won best in show three times at Westminster. In 2014, he guided Sky the wire fox terrier to victory. One of the perks was a walk-on part at the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical "Kinky Boots."

Ginger had the pleasure of dog-sitting Sky in a third-floor dressing room when he wasn't on stage. Almost every actor dropped by during the show to pet him and pose for a picture.

Having never tended such a prized pooch, Ginger wondered what to do if the dog got hungry. Surely some special high-performance, ultra-healthy food was in order, right?

Nope, said Rangel's wife, Ivonne.

"Just go get him a hot dog," she said.

UK hits target: Gives at least 1 vaccine shot to 15 million

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. announced Sunday that it had reached its goal of giving at least one COVID-19 vaccine shot to the most vulnerable people in the country, increasing pressure on ministers to clarify when they will ease a lockdown imposed in early January.

More than 15 million people, or 22% of the U.K. population, have received their first shot. The figure includes most people in the government's top four priority groups, including everyone over 75, frontline healthcare workers and nursing home staff and residents. Over 537,000 of them have also received their second dose.

"15,000,000! Amazing team," Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines minister, said in a tweet that featured a red heart and three syringes. "We will not rest till we offer the vaccine to the whole of phase1 the 1-9 categories of the most vulnerable & all over 50s by end April and then all adults."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to unveil his roadmap for easing restrictions on Feb. 22 amid signs that infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths have fallen sharply since England's third national lockdown began on Jan. 4.

"This country has achieved an extraordinary feat — administering a total of 15 million jabs into the arms of some of the most vulnerable people in the country," Johnson said in a tweet.

Johnson said in England, everyone in the four top priority groups had been offered the vaccine. He plans to release further details on the vaccination effort on Monday.

Jockeying has already begun between those who want the measures lifted as soon as possible and those who fear moving too fast will lead to a resurgence of the virus.

Britain got a head start on its vaccination effort in December, when it became the first country to authorize widespread use of a COVID-19 shot. It ranks behind only Israel, 73%, the Seychelles, 53%, and the United Arab Emirates, 51% in the percentage of people who have received one dose, according to Oxford University. The U.S. is fifth at 15%.

At the same time, coronavirus lockdown rules that have closed schools, restaurants and nonessential shops in the U.K. are starting to pay off. The number of new infections, hospital admissions and deaths recorded over the past seven days have all dropped by more than 20% from the previous week.

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When Johnson announced the lockdown, he said the government would review the measures in mid-February based on their success in controlling the pandemic and progress in the vaccination effort. Johnson's first priority is to reopen schools, and he has promised to give schools two weeks notice to give teachers time to prepare.

Britain has reported over 117,000 virus-related deaths, the highest pandemic toll in Europe.

Mark Harper, a lawmaker from the ruling Conservative Party, has warned the government against "moving the goalposts" for deciding when to ease the lockdown.

Johnson should start by reopening schools, then gradually lift other restrictions as more people are vaccinated, said Harper, who leads a group of about 70 lawmakers who have lobbied the government to consider the negative economic and social impacts of the restrictions along with the health benefits.

"Once you have protected people from serious illness and from death, I don't think these draconian restrictions of not being able to meet your family, not see your friends, not see your children, not see your parents, not visit people in care homes, I don't think they are justifiable anymore," Harper told Times Radio.

After meeting the target for reaching the most vulnerable, U.K. authorities will progressively expand the vaccination drive to the next five priority groups until everyone over 50 and vulnerable younger people with health conditions that put them at higher risk from the virus have been offered the vaccine.

Public health officials say the top nine priority groups account for 99% of the deaths caused by COVID-19 so far.

While the vaccines currently authorized for use in the U.K. require two doses to ensure full protection against COVID-19, British authorities say one dose provides a significant level of protection.

Because of this, they have made it their priority to give the first dose to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. To do this, Britain is planning to give second doses after three months, instead of one month as recommended by the manufacturers.

Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust health think tank, said the number of COVID-19 infections in Britain is still too high to think about lifting the restrictions.

"We've made enormous progress ... but the transmission is incredibly high still and we've got to get it lower," he said.

There are other dangers on the horizon. U.K. government scientific advisers say the COVID-19 variant now predominant in the country may be up to 70% more deadly than previous variants, underscoring concerns about how mutations may change the characteristics of the disease.

The findings from the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group, published Friday on the government's website, builds on preliminary research released Jan. 21. The group, known as NERVTAG, includes experts from universities and public agencies across the U.K.

The new report is based on analysis of a dozen studies that found the so-called Kent variant, named after the county where it was first identified, is likely 30% to 70% more deadly than other variants. The studies compared hospitalization and death rates among people infected with the variant and those infected with other variants.

The results of the analysis are worrisome, said Dr. David Strain, a clinical senior lecturer at the University of Exeter Medical School and the clinical lead for COVID at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital.

"The higher transmissibility means that people who were previously at low risk of catching COVID (particularly younger fitter females) are now catching it and ending up in hospital," Strain said. "This is highlighted by the latest figures for hospitalization that now suggest almost 50:50 male to female ratio compared to this being predominantly in men during the first wave."

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

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

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Today in History

Today is Monday, Feb. 15, the 46th day of 2021. There are 319 days left in the year. This is Presidents Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 15, 1989, the Soviet Union announced that the last of its troops had left Afghanistan, after more than nine years of military intervention.

On this date:

In 1564, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa.

In 1764, the site of present-day St. Louis was established by Pierre Laclède and Auguste Chouteau.

In 1798, a feud between two members of the U.S. House of Representatives (meeting in Philadelphia) boiled over as Roger Griswold of Connecticut used a cane to attack Vermont's Matthew Lyon, who defended himself with a set of tongs. (Griswold was enraged over the House's refusal to expel Lyon for spitting tobacco juice in his face two weeks earlier; after the two men were separated, a motion to expel them both was defeated.)

In 1879, President Rutherford B. Hayes signed a bill allowing female attorneys to argue cases before the Supreme Court.

In 1898, the U.S. battleship Maine mysteriously blew up in Havana Harbor, killing more than 260 crew members and bringing the United States closer to war with Spain.

In 1933, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt escaped an assassination attempt in Miami that mortally wounded Chicago Mayor Anton J. Cermak; gunman Giuseppe Zangara was executed more than four weeks later.

In 1944, Allied bombers destroyed the monastery atop Monte Cassino (MAWN'-tay kah-SEE'-noh) in Italy.

In 1961, 73 people, including an 18-member U.S. figure skating team en route to the World Championships in Czechoslovakia, were killed in the crash of a Sabena Airlines Boeing 707 in Belgium.

In 1992, a Milwaukee jury found that Jeffrey Dahmer was sane when he killed and mutilated 15 men and boys. (The decision meant that Dahmer, who had already pleaded guilty to the murders, would receive a mandatory life sentence for each count; Dahmer was beaten to death in prison in 1994.)

In 2004, Dale Earnhardt Jr. won the Daytona 500 on the same track where his father was killed three years earlier.

In 2005, defrocked priest Paul Shanley was sentenced in Boston to 12 to 15 years in prison on child rape charges.

In 2018, the last of the bodies of the 17 victims of a school shooting in Florida were removed from the building after authorities analyzed the crime scene; 13 wounded survivors were still hospitalized. In response to the Florida school shooting, President Donald Trump, in an address to the nation, promised to "tackle the difficult issue of mental health," but avoided any mention of guns. Nikolas Cruz, the suspect in the shooting, was ordered held without bond at a brief court hearing.

Ten years ago: Protesters swarmed Wisconsin's capitol after Gov. Scott Walker proposed cutbacks in benefits and abolishing bargaining rights for most public employees. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was ordered to stand trial on charges he'd paid a 17-year-old Moroccan girl for sex and then used his influence to cover it up. (Berlusconi was found guilty, but had his conviction overturned.)

Five years ago: President Barack Obama opened a meeting in Rancho Mirage, California, of leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, calling the landmark gathering on U.S. soil a reflection of his personal commitment to an enduring partnership with the diverse group of countries. Taylor Swift's "1989" brought the singer her second Grammy Award win for album of the year; Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars earned top record for "Uptown Funk," while Ed Sheeran won song of the year for "Thinking Out Loud." Vanity, a Prince protege who renounced her sexy stage persona to become a Christian minister, died in Fremont, California; she was 57.

One year ago: The U.S. government said Americans who were on board a cruise ship under quarantine in Japan because of the coronavirus would be flown back home on a chartered flight, but that they would face another two-week quarantine; about 380 Americans were aboard the Diamond Princess. China reported 143 new coronavirus deaths, but a dip in the number of new cases; the World Health Organization

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praised China's efforts to contain the new disease.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Claire Bloom is 90. Author Susan Brownmiller is 86. Songwriter Brian Holland is 80. Rock musician Mick Avory (The Kinks) is 77. Jazz musician Henry Threadgill is 77. Actor-model Marisa Berenson is 74. Actor Jane Seymour is 70. Singer Melissa Manchester is 70. Actor Lynn Whitfield is 68. "Simpsons" creator Matt Groening (GREE'-ning) is 67. Model Janice Dickinson is 66. Actor Christopher McDonald is 66. Reggae singer Ali Campbell is 62. Actor Joseph R. Gannascoli is 62. Musician Mikey Craig (Culture Club) is 61. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Darrell Green is 61. Actor-comedian Steven Michael Quezada is 58. Actor Michael Easton is 54. Latin singer Gloria Trevi is 53. Rock musician Stevie Benton (Drowning Pool) is 50. Actor Alex Borstein is 50. Actor Renee O'Connor is 50. Actor Sarah Wynter is 48. Olympic gold medal swimmer Amy Van Dyken-Rouen is 48. Actor-director Miranda July is 47. Rock singer Brandon Boyd (Incubus) is 45. Rock musician Ronnie Vannucci (The Killers) is 45. Rock singer/guitarist Adam Granduciel (The War on Drugs) is 42. Singer-songwriter-musician Conor Oberst (Bright Eyes) is 41. Actor Ashley Lyn Cafagna is 38. Blues-rock musician Gary Clark Jr. is 37. Actor Natalie Morales is 36. Actor Amber Riley is 35. Rapper Megan Thee Stallion is 26. Actor Zach Gordon is 23.