

# Groton Daily Independent

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## COVID-19 Vaccine Now Offered to Residents Age 70 and Over

PIERRE, S.D. – Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon released the following statement to remind state residents that starting today, the COVID-19 vaccination age statewide has been dropped to those 70 and over in age:

"The Department of Health and our vaccination partners continue making strides in protecting South Dakotans against COVID-19 through our vaccination efforts," said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. "Today, as we lower the age of vaccination to 70, we continue delivering on the promise of an orderly and well thought out vaccination strategy reaching all corners of our state."

The vaccination age will continue to be decreased in five-year increments as vaccine supply allows until all people age 65 and older can be vaccinated.



### **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

## Ice cold shooting yields win to Roncalli

It was not only cold outside, but the Tigers experience ice cold shooting at Aberdeen Roncalli Monday night as the Cavaliers posted a 44-32 non-conference win over Groton Area in boys basketball action. Just how cold was the shooting? Groton made 25 percent of its shots in the first quarter, 20 percent in the second quarter, 33 percent in the third quarter and 20 percent in the fourth quarter. Plus, they only made 35 percent of their free throws.

The Cavaliers had a run of nine points in the first half and a 12-point run in the second half.

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

Roncalli led at the quarterstops at 10-6, 23-13 and 35-21.

Groton Area made seven of 26 two-pointers for 27 percent, four of 22 three-pointers for 18 percent, six of 17 free throws for 35 percent, had 24 rebounds, 12 turnovers, four assists, 10 steals, 17 fouls and two blocked shots.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 15 points and three steals. Jacob Zak had eight points, six rebounds and one assist. Tate Larson had five points, six rebounds and four steals. Wyatt Hearnen had two points, four rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jayden Zak had one point, two rebounds, two assists and one steal. Cole Simon had one point and one steal. Tristan Traphagen had three rebounds and two blocked shots. Lucas Simon had one rebound and Kannon Coats had two rebounds.

Roncalli made 16 of 33 field goals for 48 percent, nine of 18 free throws for 50 percent, had 13 turnovers and 16 team fouls.

Gray Imbery led the Cavaliers with 20 points followed by Micah Dohrer with 12, Brian Holmstrom had five, Maddox May four and Keegan Stewart three.

Groton Area, now 11-6 on the season, will host Deuel in the final Northeast Conference game. The Tigers have slipped to second place in the regional standings behind Tiospa Zina.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 48-38. Rutgear 605 sponsored the broadcast on GDILIVE.COM.

Wyatt Hearnen led the Tigers with 20 points while Logan Ringgenberg had 11, Jackson Cogley five, Cole Simon, Colby Dunker and Taylor Diegel each had four points.

Groton Area held a 12-8 lead at the end of the first quarter and a 25-23 lead at half time. The Cavaliers took a 33-32 lead after the third quarter, but Groton Area outscored Roncalli, 16-5, in the fourth quarter to secure the win.

Caden Shelton led the Cavaliers with 11 points while Matthew Martinez had seven, Jayden Munroe and Keegan Stewart each had five, Aiden Fisher and Darwin Gambler each had four and Brody Weinmeister added two points.

The eighth grade lost their game, 38-12. J. Simon Photography sponsored the broadcast on GDILIVE.COM. The Cavaliers led at the quarter stops at 10-7, 16-9 and 30-12. Carter Simon led the Tigers with eight points while Ryder Johnson and Taylor Diegel each had two points. Brody Weinmeister led Roncalli with 12 points and Parker Grieben added 10.

Groton easily won the seventh grade game, 43-9. Robyn and Jason Warrington sponsored the broadcast on GDILIVE.COM. The Tigers led at the quarter stops, 9-0, 16-6 and 25-6. Groton Area scored the first 16 points of the game and later on, had a 19-point rally. Keegan Tracy led Groton Area with 14 points followed by Gage Sippel with nine, Ryder Johnson seven, Logan Warrington six, Karter Moody three and one Roncalli player made a basket in Groton's end of the court. Quinten Shelton led Roncalli with three points.

- Paul Kosek

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## Upcoming Schedule

**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 three main elements: a blue and white lion head logo on the left, a tiger's face in the center, and a basketball hoop with a red rim and white net on the right. The word "Girls" is written in gold above the hoop. At the bottom, white text provides the event details.

**Warner at Groton Area  
Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021  
JV at 6:30 followed by Varsity**

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**#358 in a series**

## **Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller**

Numbers have dropped today to what I think is an unreasonable low. Mondays are unreliable, so we'll wait with bated breath to see whether the data hold tomorrow. I'd really like these to be for real, but it looks like too precipitous a drop, something we haven't seen in this pandemic. We've gone from 103,300 new cases on February 12 to 85,900 new cases on February 13 to 65,800 on February 14 to 55,200 today. A 47 percent drop in four days just feels wrong. We'll check in tomorrow on this. The current total case count for the US stands at 27,737,900, which is 0.2% lower than yesterday.

Hospitalizations continue their steady decline. Today, we're at 67,023, making this the thirty-ninth day of decreases; we're more than two weeks under 100,000 hospitalized. Deaths are also lower than I think is realistic at 989 today. Our total is 486,143, which is 0.2% less than yesterday. Again, the decline is too much too soon to comport with any prior experience we have during this pandemic. I'm feeling as though we have another reporting anomaly, but I haven't read what it could be, so I'm waiting to see what tomorrow brings and to find whether there is some news of an explanation. My experience is that this sort of anomaly reporting is about a day behind in the sources I check.

If it turns out these numbers are the real thing, I'll be the first to pop a cork and celebrate, but this makes me uneasy. I think there is something here we don't yet understand.

Now despite my concerns, there is little doubt that our numbers are falling. Our seven-day new-case average has fallen from around 250,000 early in the year to around 90,000 at the moment. That's pretty stark in six weeks. So what's behind that? First thing: It's not vaccination—not yet. Only something like four percent of us have been fully vaccinated, and that's not going to be enough to do the job. So what is it?

First, the holiday travel and gatherings are pretty much through the system. Surges caused by those things have worked their way through and are no longer contributing appreciably to new cases; their effects on deaths are tapering off as well. Secondly, more of us seem to be getting the memo that masks and precautions are worth our while. According to Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health in an interview with CNN, "[T]here is pretty good evidence that people are doing a better job of social distancing and mask wearing." Dr. Jonathan Reiner, professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University, concurs. Jha adds that a third consideration is that "we've had so much infection that you have some level of population immunity. Not herd immunity, but enough population immunity that it is causing the virus to slow down." And then we think first doses of vaccine are helping at the margins; more than 11 percent of us have received at least one dose, and we know one dose contributes some significant level of protection. All of this adds up to better news, if we can hold those new variants at bay—still the big question.

Novavax told CNN today that they expect their US phase 3 clinical trial for their vaccine candidate will reach full enrollment this week. They are looking to enroll about 30,000 adults in 115 locations across the US and Mexico and have been enrolling people for a good month now. They already have data from a UK trial which look very good, indeed, with something like 89 percent efficacy rates. If all goes well in this North American trial, I would expect we're going to have another arrow in our quiver by early summer. The recent downturn in transmissions will slow things down a bit (because trials generally have to reach a predetermined number of severe cases before data can be evaluated and fewer transmissions means longer time to get that predetermined number); but they feel they're still going to be there by summer. This is a very strong contender, and once again, I will emphasize that more tools is better.

The company also announced today that it is lab-testing a new version of its vaccine; this version specifically targets the B.1.351 variant first seen in South Africa, the variant which has shown the most resistance to current immunity and vaccines. These early tests are intended to determine whether this would function as a booster to the currently-in-trials vaccine or would replace it entirely as a stand-alone bivalent (aimed at two different variants) vaccine. It's early times, but I would expect a fairly quick movement to clinical trials if the candidate continues to perform well in tests. We have some indications from the FDA that they are prepared to work with manufacturers to evaluate vaccine modifications relatively expeditiously.



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We'll keep an eye on this one.

TSA reports show over four million passengers flew in the US between Thursday and today, more than 1.1 million just on Friday. That makes this one of the busiest air travel weekends in a month. I'm going to put this as gently as I can: This is stupid, If you're at risk in any way—age, preexisting conditions, etc.—travel is foolhardy. Even if you're vaccinated, even if you're young and healthy and don't have any reason to think your outcomes would be bad if you were infected, this is stupid. We have a couple of highly transmissible variants gaining a foothold in our country. We know high transmissibility is a killer. We know travel greatly increases the chance of carrying one of these variants to more parts of the country where it may not have arrived yet. We know that more transmissions means more replications means more mutations means more new variants, any one of which could be something terrifying. Sigh.

Among the very few good reasons I can think of to travel at all, but particularly by air, at this moment might be to see someone you dearly love as the person lays dying, to transport an organ for transplant, or to deliver the secret formula which will save the world from a madman bent on world domination with a death laser from outer space. But if you do happen to find yourself in possession of a secret formula requiring immediate delivery, here are the bare minimum precautions you should be taking:

- Get tested one to three days before your trip, and only travel if the test is negative.
- Get tested three to five days after you arrive at home.
- Quarantine for seven days on each end of your travel, even if your test is negative.

Anything less is little short of criminal at this sensitive juncture when we face the threat of variants and are so close to getting a fair proportion of our population vaccinated. Doing less is almost like you have a death wish—for everyone around you. You do not just take a chance for yourself (which you would have every right to do if the only one at risk was you) when you travel. You are taking the choice to be safe out of the hands of your friends and neighbors and all the folks you casually come into contact with in your life, making their safety subject to your whims.

We talked about a month ago about two gorillas at the San Diego Zoo who were diagnosed with Covid-19. Since then, more of their gorillas suffered "mild coughing, congestion, nasal discharge and intermittent lethargy," according to an update on their website. The Zoo is now reporting all of the animals have made a full recovery, which is very good news, indeed, for these critters whose natural habitat is shrinking, reducing their numbers in the wild.

Marybeth Hearn, at the age of 10, had a good idea what she wanted to do with her life: She wanted to train guide dogs for visually-impaired people. We have to give credit to this kid for knowing her own mind. She went to the local Lion's club to raise the \$2500 needed to pay for her first dog's training costs and then picked up that dog, Letta. These dogs spend around 14 months with their first trainer, going everywhere with the trainer so they become socialized before they move on to certified trainers for the technical part of their training.

She also became an agriculture teacher, spending 33 years at Lemoore High School in California. In the more than 50 years since, she has raised 56 guide dogs. And that's not all she's done; she's brought others on board with her—lots of others, including two sons and a granddaughter, as well as student trainers ever since 1992. Those students have worked with 170 dogs over the years. Service to others is her watchword; she told an AP reporter about seeing her student trainers with the dogs, "It's a great feeling." Quite an accomplishment for just one kid with dreams.

Take care. I'll be back tomorrow.

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	452	429	847	15	Minimal	0.00%
Beadle	2655	2557	5674	39	Moderate	11.86%
Bennett	380	364	1150	9	Minimal	0.00%
Bon Homme	1502	1473	2018	25	Minimal	0.00%
Brookings	3535	3392	11451	35	Substantial	2.77%
Brown	5066	4871	12306	83	Substantial	10.53%
Brule	686	669	1824	9	Minimal	0.00%
Buffalo	420	406	886	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	965	933	3125	20	Moderate	3.16%
Campbell	129	123	249	4	Minimal	7.69%
Charles Mix	1251	1193	3814	18	Substantial	14.29%
Clark	359	341	924	4	Moderate	5.56%
Clay	1774	1742	5051	15	Moderate	5.37%
Codington	3878	3663	9387	76	Substantial	7.98%
Corson	462	447	991	12	Minimal	4.55%
Custer	738	715	2628	12	Moderate	9.84%
Davison	2924	2831	6307	60	Moderate	2.50%
Day	641	588	1709	28	Substantial	20.45%
Deuel	466	449	1096	8	Minimal	0.00%
Dewey	1395	1367	3734	22	Moderate	2.04%
Douglas	419	405	885	9	Minimal	3.45%
Edmunds	476	446	1006	12	Moderate	0.00%
Fall River	515	493	2528	15	Moderate	6.85%
Faulk	352	324	674	13	Moderate	9.09%
Grant	945	876	2143	37	Substantial	16.39%
Gregory	523	478	1213	27	Moderate	6.90%
Haakon	246	232	518	9	Minimal	7.69%
Hamlin	684	624	1711	38	Moderate	12.12%
Hand	326	313	779	6	Minimal	0.00%
Hanson	351	334	690	4	Moderate	16.67%
Harding	91	90	180	1	Minimal	20.00%
Hughes	2249	2162	6339	34	Substantial	1.05%
Hutchinson	775	732	2265	24	Moderate	7.32%

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Hyde	136	133	397	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	623	592	1589	14	Moderate	3.28%
Lake	1165	1124	3169	17	Moderate	2.17%
Lawrence	2790	2707	8291	44	Moderate	3.99%
Lincoln	7590	7397	19598	76	Substantial	8.44%
Lyman	594	577	1833	10	Minimal	0.00%
Marshall	295	281	1135	5	Moderate	10.00%
McCook	731	696	1571	24	Moderate	10.26%
McPherson	237	229	539	4	Minimal	0.92%
Meade	2524	2448	7421	31	Moderate	8.62%
Mellette	241	238	713	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	269	250	555	9	Moderate	0.00%
Minnehaha	27518	26707	75387	325	Substantial	8.23%
Moody	608	585	1709	16	Minimal	8.82%
Oglala Lakota	2044	1968	6526	47	Moderate	2.20%
Pennington	12629	12228	38036	184	Substantial	7.78%
Perkins	341	316	777	13	Moderate	0.00%
Potter	361	346	806	3	Moderate	28.00%
Roberts	1129	1075	4008	35	Substantial	6.54%
Sanborn	327	319	663	3	Minimal	5.88%
Spink	791	746	2069	25	Substantial	10.23%
Stanley	323	317	897	2	Moderate	3.85%
Sully	136	131	295	3	Minimal	0.00%
Todd	1218	1178	4058	28	Moderate	8.96%
Tripp	675	643	1441	15	Minimal	1.23%
Turner	1053	986	2623	51	Moderate	6.00%
Union	1946	1857	6031	39	Substantial	13.66%
Walworth	717	685	1784	15	Moderate	11.48%
Yankton	2774	2710	9065	28	Moderate	1.75%
Ziebach	335	325	849	9	Minimal	7.14%
Unassigned	0	0	1812	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	4364	0
10-19 years	12375	0
20-29 years	19745	4
30-39 years	18141	16
40-49 years	15739	34
50-59 years	15547	108
60-69 years	12633	243
70-79 years	6754	419
80+ years	5078	1020

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57563	869
Male	52813	975



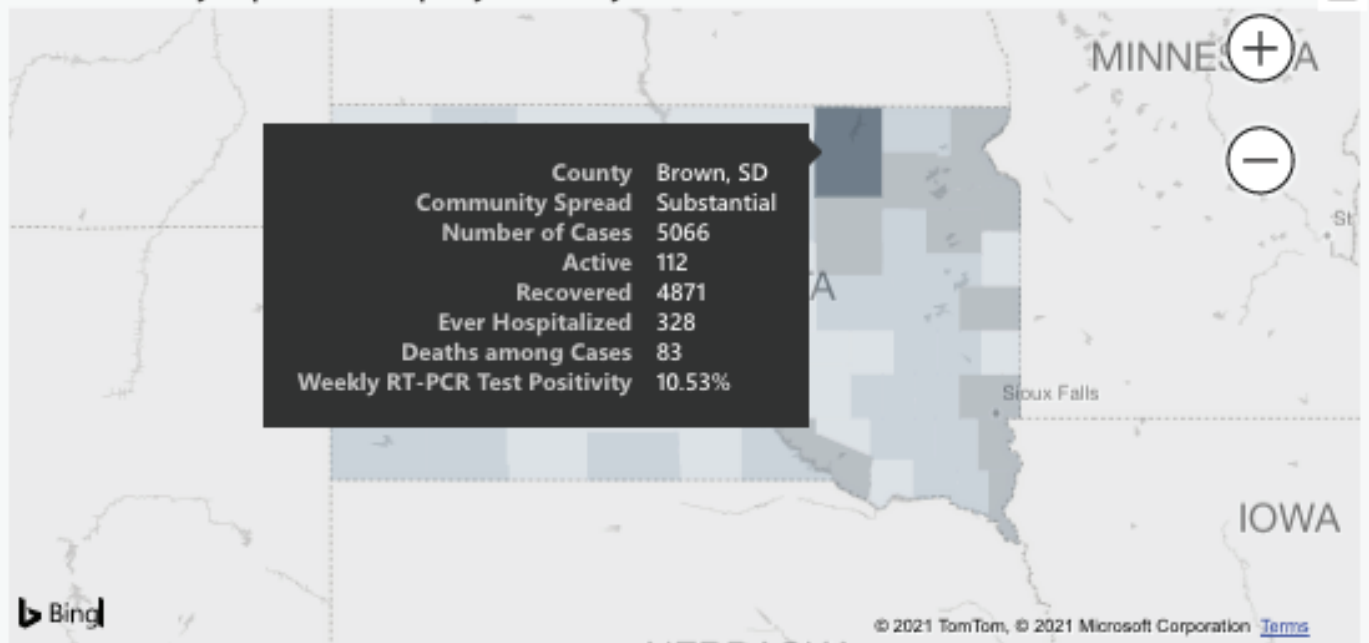
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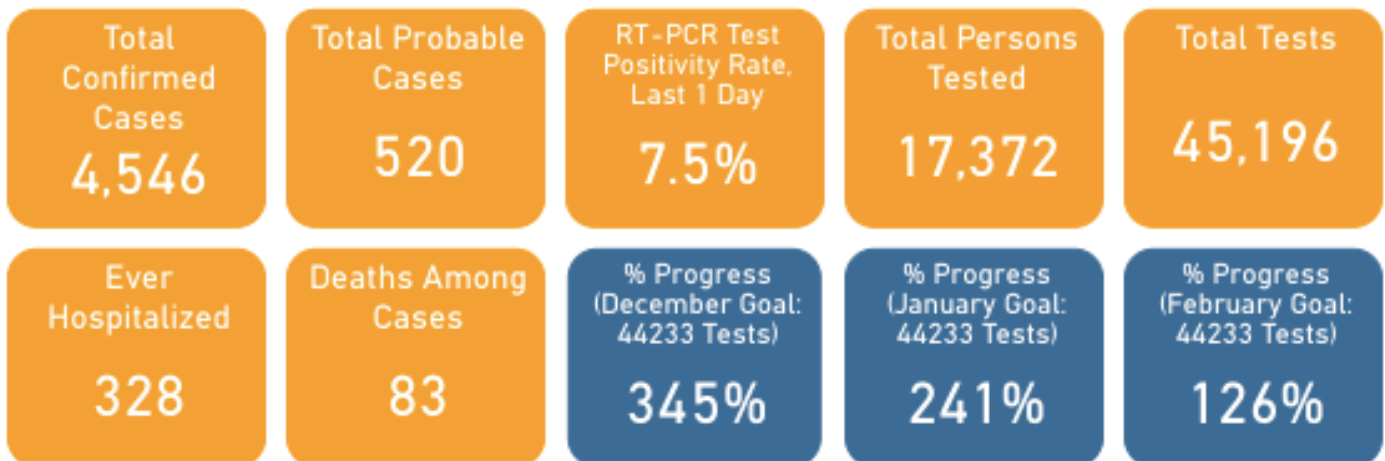
## Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



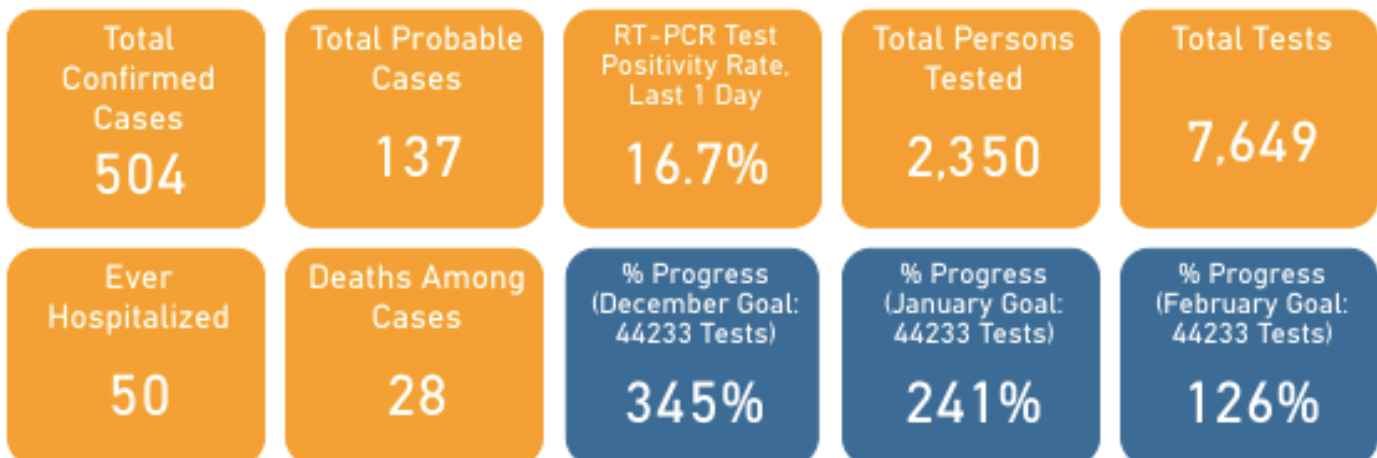
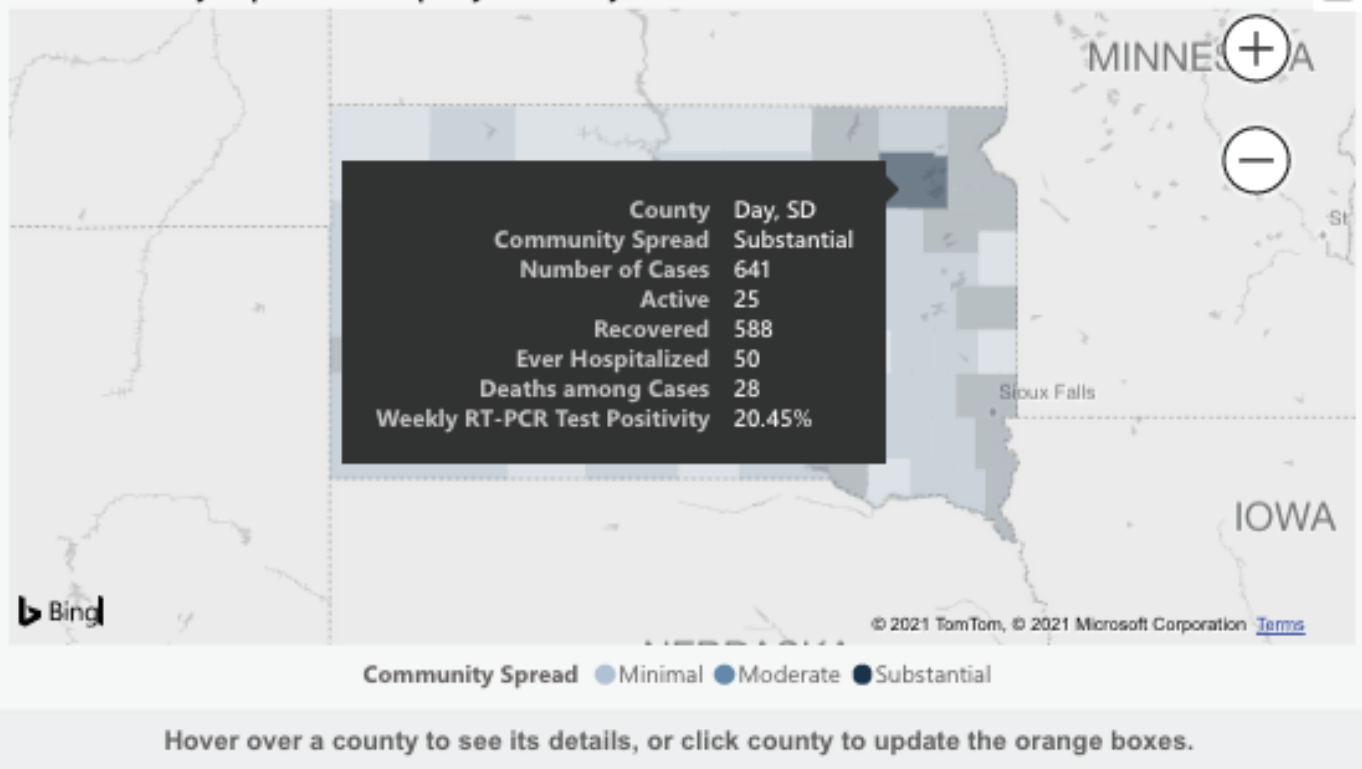
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## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

154,548

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

104,661

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

15%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	81,962
Pfizer	72,586

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	28,172
Moderna - Series Complete	26,895
Pfizer - 1 dose	26,602
Pfizer - Series Complete	22,992

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	15.17%
Series Complete	7.23%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	387	191	98	289
Beadle	2954	1,256	849	2,105
Bennett*	238	120	59	179
Bon Homme*	1669	779	445	1,224
Brookings	4207	1,537	1,335	2,872
Brown	7417	2,521	2,448	4,969
Brule*	916	460	228	688
Buffalo*	86	78	4	82
Butte	814	434	190	624
Campbell	542	162	190	352
Charles Mix*	1536	688	424	1,112
Clark	555	287	134	421
Clay	2388	902	743	1,645
Codington*	4721	1,959	1,381	3,340
Corson*	119	85	17	102
Custer*	1259	573	343	916
Davison	4065	1,301	1,382	2,683
Day*	1153	509	322	831
Deuel	644	312	166	478
Dewey*	252	66	93	159
Douglas*	629	195	217	412
Edmunds	605	261	172	433
Fall River*	1257	537	360	897
Faulk	538	184	177	361
Grant*	1190	360	415	775
Gregory*	805	339	233	572
Haakon*	287	117	85	202

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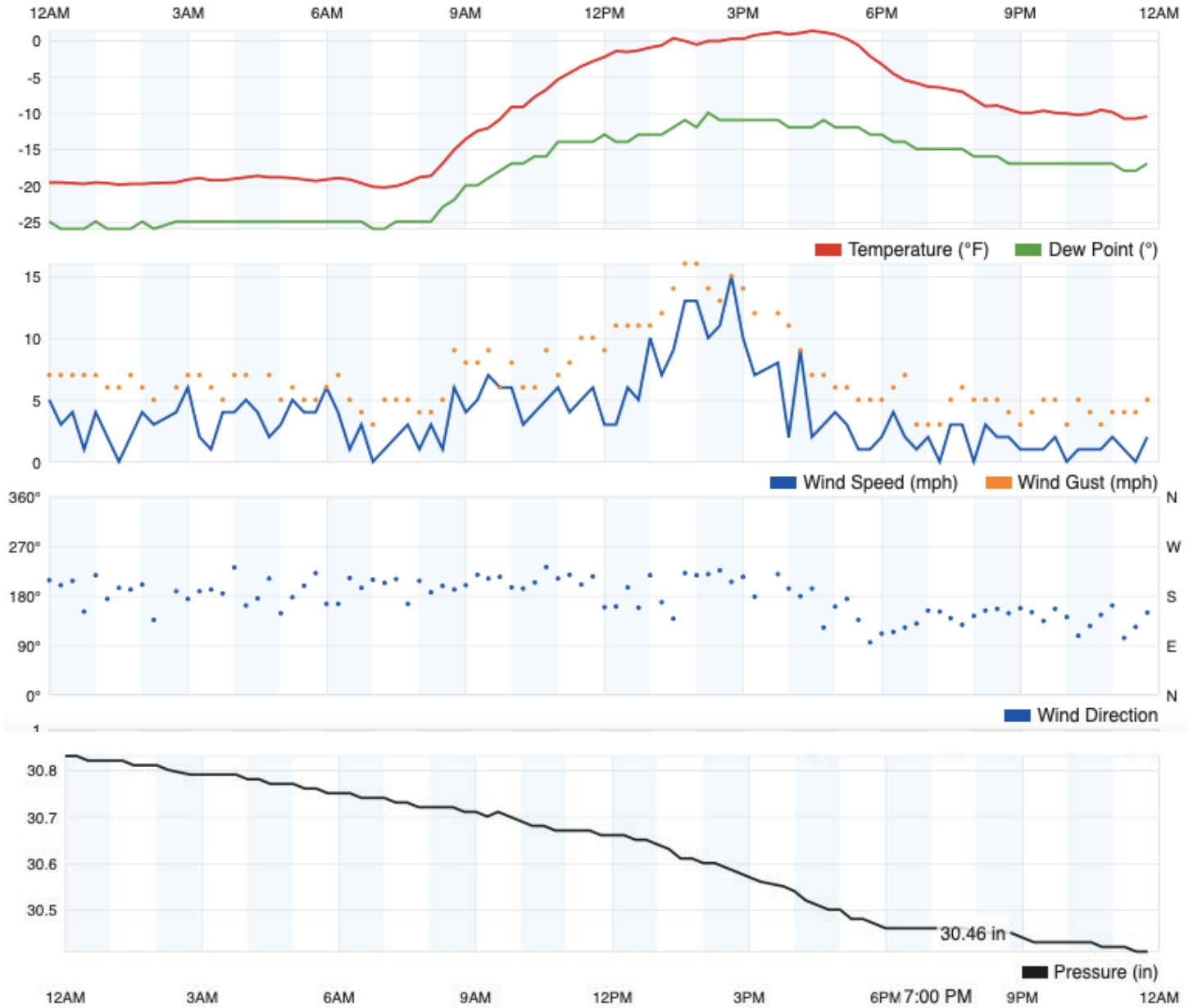
Hamlin	811	371	220	591
Hand	662	252	205	457
Hanson	225	93	66	159
Harding	28	22	3	25
Hughes*	3959	1,911	1,024	2,935
Hutchinson*	1664	504	580	1,084
Hyde*	299	101	99	200
Jackson*	196	104	46	150
Jerauld	312	170	71	241
Jones*	319	139	90	229
Kingsbury	1022	442	290	732
Lake	1724	664	530	1,194
Lawrence	3285	1,747	769	2,516
Lincoln	14105	3,899	5,103	9,002
Lyman*	337	205	66	271
Marshall*	811	355	228	583
McCook	1130	398	366	764
McPherson	101	53	24	77
Meade*	2795	1,157	819	1,976
Mellette*	20	8	6	14
Miner	440	182	129	311
Minnehaha	41033	13,021	14,006	27,027
Moody*	807	299	254	553
Oglala Lakota*	84	42	21	63
Pennington*	18055	5,795	6,130	11,925
Perkins*	258	132	63	195
Potter	392	154	119	273
Roberts*	2135	965	585	1,550
Sanborn	440	242	99	341
Spink	1476	464	506	970
Stanley*	580	286	147	433
Sully	164	110	27	137
Todd*	82	30	26	56
Tripp*	977	449	264	713
Turner	1766	582	592	1,174
Union	1194	572	311	883
Walworth*	921	427	247	674
Yankton	5169	1,477	1,846	3,323
Ziebach*	38	12	13	25
Other	3499	725	1,387	2,112



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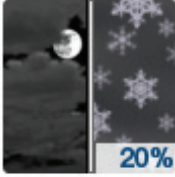



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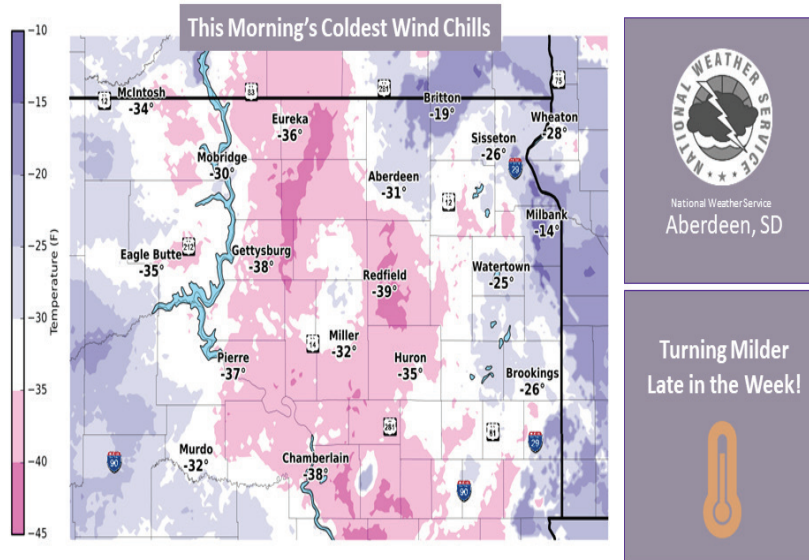
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Cold	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Cold	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 4 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 10 °F	Low: -4 °F	High: 16 °F



Today: 

 Partly-Mostly Cloudy & Cold  
Highs -1 to 9°F  
(warmest west)

Wednesday: 

Still Chilly, but slowly improving  
Light snow through the Morning  
Highs 7 to 18°F

2/16/2021 5:18 AM

We'll have to deal with one more bitterly cold day today as temperatures will struggle to get above zero in some spots. The very cold temperatures and slight breeze through mid-morning will lead to dangerously cold wind chills of 25 to 40 below. Daytime highs today will be warmest west with afternoon readings between 5 and 10 above. Farther east across the James valley and points east, afternoon highs will only reach the single digits above zero. Lows tonight won't be quite as cold with readings in the single digits below zero. A little light snow will be possible overnight into Wednesday morning with very little in the way of accumulation. Highs Wednesday will be a bit warmer with afternoon readings upper single digits to mid-teens.

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## Today in Weather History

February 16, 1969: Freezing drizzle and thick fog formed a heavy glaze on utility lines resulting in several broken power and telephone lines across northern South Dakota.

1903: The temperature at Pokegama Dam, Minnesota, plunged to 59 degrees below zero to establish a state record. This record was held until February 2nd, 1996 when the temperature at Tower fell to 60 degrees below zero.

1989: A surge of arctic air produced all-time record high barometric pressure readings of 31.08 inches at Duluth Minnesota, 30.97 inches at Chicago Illinois, and 30.94 inches at South Bend Indiana. Readings of 31.00 inches at Milwaukee Wisconsin, and 30.98 inches at Rockford, Illinois, tied their all-time records. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southeastern U.S. Highs of 81 degrees at Athens, Georgia, 87 degrees at Charleston South Carolina, 85 degrees at Macon Georgia, and 86 degrees at Savannah Georgia were records for February.

1899 - Washington D.C. received 1.26 inches of rain in six hours atop a snow cover more than 30 inches deep making it the soggiest day of record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1903 - The temperature at Pokegama Dam MN plunged to 59 degrees below zero to establish a state record. (David Ludlum)

1943 - Record cold prevailed in the northeastern U.S. The mercury plunged to 43 degrees below zero at Concord NH, and to -39 degrees at Portland ME. The morning low of -32 degrees at Falls Village CT established a state record, yet the afternoon high that day was 20 degrees above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm produced snow and ice in the Ohio Valley and the Appalachian Region. Snowfall totals in Virginia ranged up to 14 inches around Farmville, while Granville NC reported eight inches of sleet and ice. Freezing rain in eastern North Carolina caused extensive damage to power lines. Gales lashed the coast of Virginia and North Carolina. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Santa Ana winds in southern California gusted to 50 mph in the Rancho Cucamonga area. Quiet weather prevailed across the rest of the nation. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A surge of arctic air produced all-time record high barometric pressure readings of 31.08 inches at Duluth MN, 30.97 inches at Chicago IL and 30.94 inches at South Bend IN. Readings of 31.00 inches at Milwaukee WI and 30.98 inches at Rockford IL tied their all-time records. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southeastern U.S. Highs of 81 degrees at Athens GA, 87 degrees at Charleston SC, 85 degrees at Macon GA, and 86 degrees at Savannah GA were records for February. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Strong thunderstorms developing ahead of an arctic cold front produced severe weather across the southeastern U.S. between mid morning on the 15th and early evening on the 16th. Thunderstorms spawned thirteen tornadoes, including one which, prior to dawn on the 16th, injured eleven persons near Carrollton GA. There were also 121 reports of large hail or damaging winds. A late afternoon thunderstorm on the 15th produced baseball size hail at Jackson MS, and prior to dawn on the 16th, a thunderstorm produced high winds which injured four persons at Goodwater AL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



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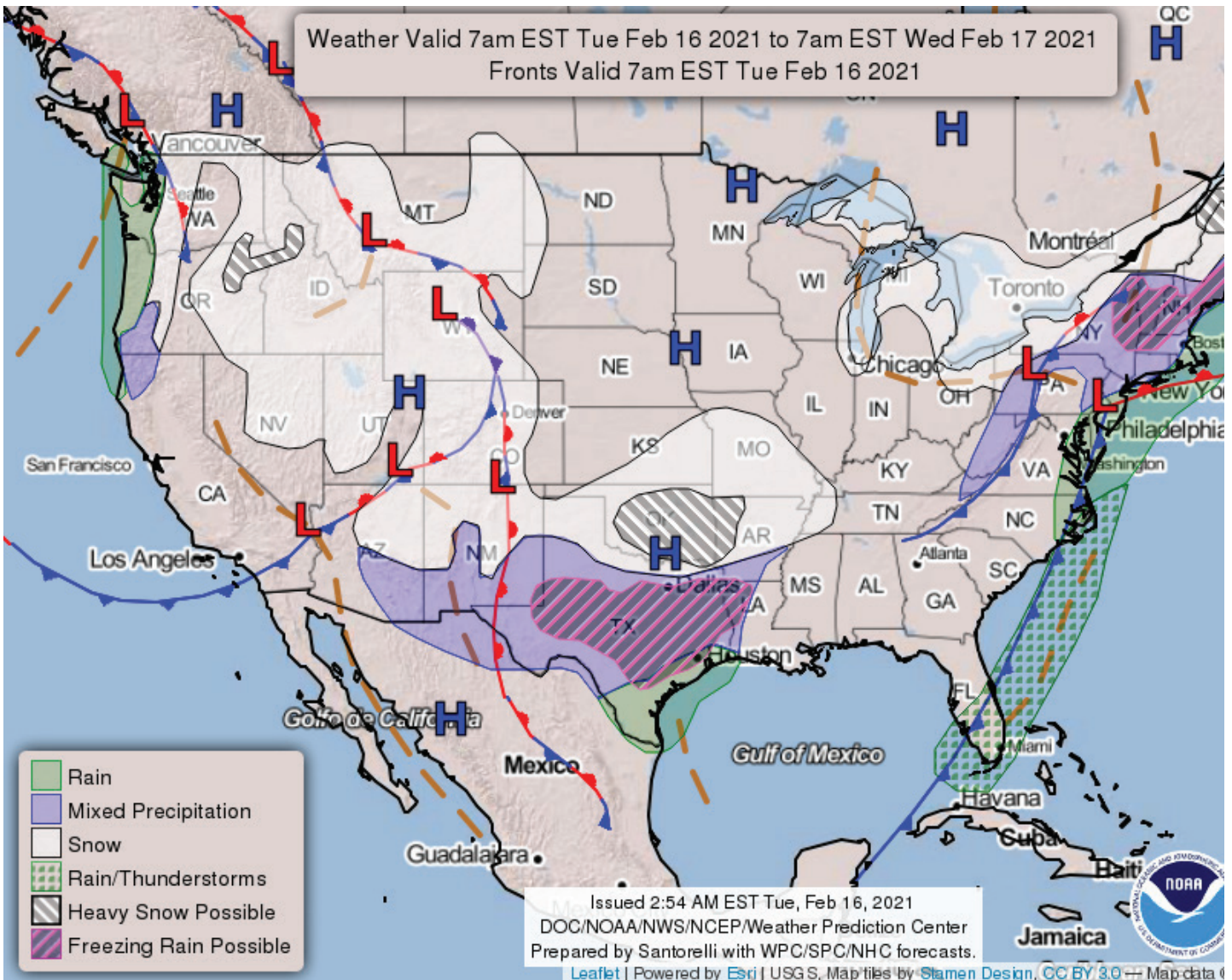
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 1 °F at 4:30 PM**  
**Low Temp: -20 °F at 7:23 AM**  
**Wind: 18 mph at 2:20 PM**  
**Precip:**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 56° in 1981**  
**Record Low: -40° in 1936**  
**Average High: 28°F**  
**Average Low: 8°F**  
**Average Precip in Feb.: 0.25**  
**Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.72**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.14**  
**Sunset Tonight: 6:03 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32 a.m.**





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## **GOD - OUR GUIDANCE SYSTEM**

Often, life's disappointments end up being one of God's special appointments. Like a good father, God will not allow anything into our lives that will permanently hurt, harm or hinder us from accomplishing His purpose for our lives. Often, what seems to be an accident is a very special gift from God. However, sometimes we have to wait until "the assignment" makes sense to us before we realize its true value.

Quite often I find it disheartening when I hear a Christian say, "This is my lucky day!" or "I can't believe that I'm this unfortunate!" or "God must not love me as much as He does others or He would not have placed me in this lousy job."

Life, for the Christian, is not chance. It is choice – God's choice for us. But as He allows things to enter into our lives, we are responsible to look at "it" through His eyes, His Word, pray, seek wise counsel from others, and then choose how to respond to "it."

Consider the story of Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery. Then, he was falsely accused of doing things he did not do. But, it did not matter to him. He was forced to pay the consequences and was thrown into prison for two years of hard labor.

And, what did he say to his brothers? "Guess what, Brothers! You meant to do evil and harm me. But, God turned your evil intentions into good things for His glory!" God led him from being a prisoner to becoming a premier!

Our eyes keep us from seeing beyond the immediate - what is right now. But God sees our past, our present and the future He has planned for us to become Christ-like.

Prayer: Lord, open our hearts and minds and make us willing to accept Your Leadership and Lordship each day. Help us to seek Your insight and wisdom. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: God's way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection. Psalm 18:30

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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

### Hospitals still ration medical N95 masks as stockpiles swell

By JASON DEAREN, JULIET LINDERMAN and MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

Mike Bowen's warehouse outside Fort Worth, Texas, was piled high with cases of medical-grade N95 face masks. His company, Prestige Ameritech, can churn out 1 million masks every four days, but he doesn't have orders for nearly that many. So he recently got approval from the government to export them.

"I'm drowning in these respirators," Bowen said.

On the same day 1000 miles (1,600 kilometers) north, Mary Turner, a COVID-19 intensive care nurse at a hospital outside Minneapolis, strapped on the one disposable N-95 respirator allotted for her entire shift.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Turner would have thrown out her mask and grabbed a new one after each patient to prevent the spread of disease. But on this day, she'll wear that mask from one infected person to the next because N95s — they filter out 95% of infectious particles — have supposedly been in short supply since last March.

Turner's employer, North Memorial Health, said in a statement that supplies have stabilized, but the company is still limiting use because "we must remain mindful of that supply" to ensure everyone's safety.

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, many millions of N95 masks are pouring out of American factories and heading into storage. Yet doctors and nurses like Turner say there still aren't nearly enough in the "ICU rooms with high-flow oxygen and COVID germs all over."

While supply and demand issues surrounding N95 respirators are well-documented, until now the reasons for this discrepancy have been unclear.

The logistical breakdown is rooted in federal failures over the past year to coordinate supply chains and provide hospitals with clear rules about how to manage their medical equipment.

Internal government emails obtained by The Associated Press show there were deliberate decisions to withhold vital information about new mask manufacturers and availability. Exclusive trade data and interviews with manufacturers, hospital procurement officials and frontline medical workers reveal a communication breakdown — not an actual shortage — that is depriving doctors, nurses, paramedics and other people risking exposure to COVID-19 of first-rate protection.

Before the pandemic, medical providers followed manufacturer and government guidelines that called for N95s to be discarded after each use, largely to protect doctors and nurses from catching infectious diseases themselves. As N95s ran short, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention modified those guidelines to allow for extended use and reuse only if supplies are "depleted," a term left undefined.

Hospitals have responded in a variety of ways, the AP has found. Some are back to pre-COVID-19, one-use-per-patient N95 protocols, but most are doling out one mask a day or fewer to each employee. Many hospital procurement officers say they are relying on CDC guidelines for depleted supplies, even if their own stockpiles are robust.

Chester "Trey" Moeller, a political appointee who served as the CDC's deputy chief of staff until President Joe Biden's inauguration last month, said efforts to increase U.S. mask production were successful, but there has since been a federal breakdown in connecting those who need them with this new supply.

"We are forcing our health care industry to reuse sanitized N95s or even worse, wear one N95 all day long," he said.

Before the pandemic tore through the U.S., the demand for N95 masks was 1.7 billion per year, with 80% going to industrial uses and 20% into medical, trade groups say. In 2021, demand for N95 masks for medical use is estimated by industry sources to be 5.7 billion.

With the increased demand and prodding from the federal government, U.S. manufacturers stepped in. Bowen's company, Prestige Ameritech, boosted production from 75,000 N95 respirators a month to almost 10 million during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still, many hospitals are building their stockpiles over fears of a future surge, and restricting the number

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given directly to health care workers.

The AP spoke with a dozen procurement officers who buy supplies for more than 300 hospitals across the U.S. All said they have enough N95s now, between two and 12 months worth, sitting in storage.

Even so, all but two of those hospital systems are limiting their doctors, nurses and other workers to one mask per day, or even one per week. Some say they are waiting for the supply to grow even more, while others say they never plan to go back to pre-COVID-19 usage.

Dean Weber, vice president of corporate supply chain management for Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Sanford Health, said the one-N95-per-patient guidelines were established with the help of manufacturers.

"You know, the mask manufacturers are in the business of selling masks," Weber said. He said he prioritizes safety over cost, but he doesn't believe these respirators need to be tossed after each use. "We were all, in fact, you know, just infatuated with an N95."

But John Wright, vice president of supply chains for Salt Lake City-based Intermountain Healthcare, says reusing masks or wearing them longer "would not be appropriate" once they have enough supplies. He hopes his 23 hospitals and hundreds of clinics will be back to single use within two weeks.

As the coronavirus spread through spring and summer, demand for N95 masks surged to unprecedented levels and the respirators disappeared from stockpiles and distributors' shelves. Hospitals and distributors looked overseas to fill the need.

In March 2020, just six shipping containers arrived in the U.S. with N95s in them, and almost all of those masks were for industrial use, not medical. By September 2020, orders had soared — in one month, almost 3,000 shipping containers of N95s arrived at U.S. ports, almost entirely medical-grade.

Federal officials saw the reliance on imports as a security problem and worked to boost domestic supply. The federal agency that oversees N95 manufacturers, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, approved 94 new brands, including 19 new domestic manufacturers, according to the internal government emails.

Over the fall and winter, those domestic producers hired thousands of employees and invested millions in supplies to churn out masks,

As U.S. production rose through the fall and winter, imports plunged. Shipment data maintained by ImportGenius and Panjiva Inc., services that independently track global trade, shows arrivals dropped sharply to about 150 in January 2021.

In Shanghai, Cameron Johnson, a trade consultant at the Tidalwave Solutions recruitment firm and an adjunct business faculty member at New York University, says "the bottom has fallen out of the mask market."

But the U.S. government failed to help link buyers to the growing supplies. Now some of those U.S.-based makers are facing major financial losses, potential layoffs and bankruptcies.

In December, Moeller, an appointee of President Donald Trump, grew frustrated while working in the office of CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield.

"(NIOSH) had approved almost 20 U.S. manufacturers to make N95 masks, but had not published any guidance or notice of what is ultimately more than 100 million N95 mask-making capacity a month going unsold," Moeller told the AP.

The Food and Drug Administration was monitoring N95 supply chains, and received \$80 million in emergency pandemic funds "to prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus." Of that amount, about \$38 million was for efforts related to tracking medical product shortages.

But the agency has still not solved the problem. "There have been a good number of new NIOSH (mask) approvals that have been granted," said Suzanne Schwartz, director of the FDA's Office of Strategic Partnerships & Technology Innovation. "Yet the access to those new manufacturers, there seems to be a hurdle there. FDA ... is trying to identify that blockage."

Schwartz said the agency is working with President Joe Biden's pandemic response team and the health care industry to find answers.

The internal emails show that Moeller in December alerted NIOSH head Dr. John Howard about the



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unused U.S. N95 manufacturing capacity.

In a Dec. 22 email, Howard acknowledged he was still hearing of shortages: "Apparently, there is a significant domestic production capacity going unused for the lack of orders and we have tried to address this supplier/purchaser disconnect."

A few weeks later, as a suggested remedy, Howard said the list of domestic N95 manufacturers had now been published for potential buyers. But the list shows up on page 3 of an obscure newsletter published by a University of Cincinnati toxicologist, after a satirical column on "chin warmers," or improperly worn surgical masks.

NIOSH was not actively promoting the new mask producers, Howard wrote, saying that "to avoid the perception of inequitable treatment and because of the dynamic production landscape, we have not posted information on our website regarding respirator availability."

Howard, through an agency spokesperson, declined a request for an interview. In a statement, NIOSH also acknowledged "a supply and demand disconnect" exists and said it is working with FEMA and other federal agencies, as well as online sales platforms like Amazon.com Inc., to better connect purchasers with U.S.-made mask producers.

"How could this be happening? You have an obvious need, and you have a tremendous engine of supply," said Tony Uphoff, president and CEO of Thomas, an online platform for product sourcing. Uphoff said that for decades the N95 market was stable, so when the virus upended the supply chain, procurement officers were unprepared to respond.

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Meanwhile, the U.S. finds itself in a paradox. The more N95s are rationed to alleviate a perceived shortage, the fewer masks are actually reaching the front lines.

N95s still appear on the FDA shortage list, in part because of reports from doctors and nurses who say they still don't have enough. The American Hospital Association also says there's a scarcity of N95s, citing global demand. But the government shortage list triggers distributors to limit how many masks they can sell to each hospital.

"The concept is similar to when trading is halted on Wall Street," said David Hargraves, senior vice president of supply chain for Premier, a group purchasing organization that helps buy equipment and supplies for thousands of hospitals across the U.S. "You put the protective allocation in place to prevent folks from hoarding and overbuying, therefore exacerbating the shortage situation."

But without clear guidance, hospitals are left to make their own decisions.

Some procurement officers are loath to trust masks from unfamiliar suppliers. Others balk at federally approved domestic manufacturers, some of whom charge more than international makers. And adding new products into a hospital's inventory can be tricky: Every health care worker must be fit-tested before using a new brand.

"It's not easy to pivot from one brand to another," said Katie Dean, health care supply chain director at Stanford Health Care in California, where they are back to using one N95 mask per patient, as needed.

Dr. Robert Hancock, an emergency room doctor and president of the Texas College of Emergency Room Physicians, said hospitals are taking risks by continuing to ration N95s, even when they have enough. He said some doctors tell him they get one N95 mask every five to seven days.

"All the N95s currently out there were designed to be worn once. They were never designed to be reused," Hancock said. "Hospitals are going to have to come up with some hard data to back up that a mask built for single use is OK to use repeatedly if there are other masks available. It was one thing when we had no choice. But you can't just say something works because it favors you financially."

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AP Medical Writer Linda A. Johnson in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, and AP writer Allen Breed in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

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To contact AP's investigative team, email [investigative@ap.org](mailto:investigative@ap.org). Follow the reporters @jhdearen @men-

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dozamartha @julietlinderman

## Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 44, Groton Area 32

Custer 71, Lakota Tech 56

Edgemont 46, Newell 45, OT

Estelline/Hendricks 57, Iroquois 31

Kadoka Area 58, Wall 48

Northwestern 56, Leola/Frederick 50

Timber Lake 55, North Central Co-Op 33

Vermillion 71, Madison 49

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Parker vs. Flandreau, ccd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Baltic 44, Elkton-Lake Benton 41

Estelline/Hendricks 74, Iroquois 35

Florence/Henry 46, Colman-Egan 43

Harding County 61, Bison 53

James Valley Christian 49, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 46

McCook Central/Montrose 64, Tri-Valley 56

Northwestern 37, Leola/Frederick 24

Rapid City Central 69, Lakota Tech 26

Timber Lake 49, North Central Co-Op 43

Wagner 55, Beresford 43

Waverly-South Shore 47, Waubay/Summit 44

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Hanson vs. Bon Homme, ppd.

Parker vs. Flandreau, ccd.

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

## The Latest: 2 dead in Texas amid subfreezing cold

The Latest on winter weather across the U.S. (all times local):

HOUSTON — Officials in Texas say two people are dead likely because of the subfreezing temperatures that have caused massive power outages across the state.

As nightfall threatened to plummet temperatures again into single digits, officials warned that homes still without power would likely not have heat until at least Tuesday, as frustration mounted and the state's electric grid came under growing demand and criticism.

"Things will likely get worse before they get better," said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the top elected official in the county of nearly 5 million people around Houston.

Law enforcement reported two men were found dead along Houston-area roadways. Causes of death were pending, but officials said the subfreezing temperatures were likely to blame.

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BATON ROUGE, La. — The Louisiana Department of Health announced the state's first storm-related death Monday evening after a 50-year-old Lafayette Parish resident slipped on ice and fatally hit his head on the ground.

The victim was not immediately identified.

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Unusually cold temperatures and slippery road conditions prompted officials in the Deep South to urge people to stay home as the winter storms shut down roads and caused traffic accidents, among other issues.

**LOUISVILLE, Ky.** — Two people died in separate crashes in Kentucky on Monday as winter weather hit across the state.

One crash happened on Interstate 64 and one was on I-75, Kentucky Transportation Secretary Jim Gray said during a press conference to update weather conditions in the state, where snow, sleet and freezing rain were falling.

“Do not get on these roads. These roads are extremely hazardous and dangerous now,” Gray said.

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** — Some energy companies have begun implementing rolling power outages in response to overwhelming demand for power during record-setting low temperatures and wind chills.

The Southwest Power Pool, a group of utilities across 14 states, called for rolling outages because the supply of reserve energy had been exhausted. Some utilities said they were starting blackouts, while others urged customers to reduce power usage.

Every in eastern Kansas and western Missouri began 30 to 60-minute blackouts Monday shortly after noon. City Utilities in Springfield and the city of Independence also implemented rolling blackouts to their customers.

The power blackouts come as nearly all of Missouri is gripped by temperatures that barely reached zero degrees, and wind chills that in some areas registered at minus 30.

**DALLAS** — The nation’s largest oil refinery shut down because of the winter weather hitting Texas.

Motiva said it shut down the Port Arthur, Texas, refinery due to “unprecedented” freezing conditions along the Gulf Coast.

The company said it was monitoring the weather and would resume operations “as soon as it is safe to do so.”

Many power-generating plants in the state remained offline, causing utilities to impose rolling blackouts.

**OMAHA, Neb.** — Nebraska saw a number of low-temperature records broken as Arctic air sits over the Plains.

The National Weather Service said record lows were broken early Monday in Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings and North Platte.

In Omaha, the temperature dropped to minus 15. Lincoln hit minus 16. In Hastings, the temperature fell to minus 26. North Platte saw a low of minus 29.

Even with the record-breaking temperatures, none fell as low as Valentine in north-central Nebraska, which saw the mercury dip to minus 33.

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** — The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency is urging people to be cautious as road conditions worsen amid a winter storm.

The agency says people should not travel unless necessary.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation said impacted roads are being treated and plowed and there were no major issues as of late morning.

Shelters and warming centers were opened in Nashville, Paris, Jackson and Memphis.

**SEATTLE** — A winter storm that blanketed the Pacific Northwest with ice and snow is causing lingering problems.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Oregon are still in the dark after heavy snow and then ice brought down tree branches this weekend and blocked storm drains in Washington state and Idaho, raising concerns about flooding.

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Portland General Electric's map of power outages listed 288,922 customers without electricity, most in Clackamas County. At least 4,000 power lines were brought down by ice and tree limbs and multiple transmission lines were severely damaged by the storm that swept through this weekend.

The winter weather wasn't giving up its grip in the Cascade Range, where heavy snowfall was expected at times all week.

CONCORD, N.H. — In New Hampshire, snow Monday night was expected to turn to sleet and freezing rain Tuesday.

State-run COVID-19 vaccination sites and testing clinics will be closed Tuesday.

State officials were reaching out by phone to reschedule everyone for appointments later in the week.

MINNEAPOLIS — The National Weather Service says several cities are experiencing record lows amid a winter storm that's dropping snow and ice in a huge swath of the U.S.

The weather station in Hibbing/Chisholm, Minnesota, saw a record low of minus 38 degrees, while Sioux Falls, South Dakota, hit minus 26 degrees.

La Crosse, Wisconsin, reached a record low of minus 19.

In Dallas, the low could drop to just 1 degree Monday. The weather has prompted a power emergency in Texas, where rotating power outages were initiated by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas.

CHICAGO — Warming centers in Chicago are staying open as temperatures in the city and across the region linger well below freezing.

WBBM-TV reports that some community centers, various public libraries, the Chicago Cultural Center and several park district locations were open Monday. Police stations also are available as warming centers. The National Weather Service says the high was expected to reach 12 degrees. The city is warning residents that 8-12 inches of snow was expected through Tuesday

TOPEKA, Kan. — Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly has declared a state of disaster as frigid temperatures and life-threatening wind chills grip the state.

Wind chills dropped as low as minus 30 in some areas overnight Sunday and temperatures will struggle to be above zero, adding to nearly a week of extremely low temperatures in much of the state, the National Weather Service said.

The low temperatures put stress on utility and natural gas providers, which were asking customers to conserve energy during the cold snap. The emergency declaration allows of state resources and personnel to be used to help with response or recovery operations under certain circumstances.

## Girl's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press

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

Class AA

- |                         |      |    |    |  |
|-------------------------|------|----|----|--|
| 1. Washington (12)      | 10-2 | 79 | 2  |  |
| 2. Aberdeen Central (5) | 15-1 | 66 | 1  |  |
| 3. Harrisburg (1)       | 14-2 | 52 | 3  |  |
| 4. O'Gorman             | 13-5 | 25 | RV |  |
| 5. Brandon Valley       | 12-4 | 18 | 4  |  |

Others receiving votes: Mitchell 14, Rapid City Stevens 1.

Class A

- |                        |      |    |   |  |
|------------------------|------|----|---|--|
| 1. St. Thomas More (8) | 17-1 | 72 | 1 |  |
| (tie) West Central (7) | 16-2 | 72 | 3 |  |



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3. Winner (2) 16-2 59 2

4. Hamlin 16-2 35 4

5. SF Christian 15-3 17 5

Others receiving votes: None.

Class B

1. Corsica-Stickney(11) 17-2 79 1

2. Castlewood (5) 15-0 70 2

3. White River (1) 15-1 53 3

4. Ethan 15-3 23 4

5. Viborg-Hurley 14-3 21 5

Others receiving votes: Hanson 9.

## Boy's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press \

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

Class AA

1. Washington (17) 12-0 85 1

2. Yankton 13-3 62 3

3. Roosevelt 10-5 42 5

4. Mitchell 13-3 41 4

5. Harrisburg 11-3 24 2

Others receiving votes: Brandon Valley 1.

Class A

1. Vermillion (17) 16-0 85 1

2. SF Christian 13-3 66 2

3. Sioux Valley 16-1 44 4

4. Dakota Valley 14-2 43 3

5. Winner 16-2 10 5

Others receiving votes: St. Thomas More 7.

Class B

1. De Smet (17) 17-1 85 1

2. Viborg-Hurley 13-3 65 3

3. Howard 16-2 41 2

4. Canistota 15-2 40 4

5. Dell Rapids St. Mary 14-4 15 RV

Others receiving votes: Platte-Geddes 7, White River 2.

## South Dakota House given OK to attend remotely due to virus

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Members of the South Dakota House of Representatives received the go-ahead to attend floor sessions remotely after an eighth reported positive COVID-19 test among the legislative body in as many days.

Republican House Speaker Spencer Gosch told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader in a text message that "if a legislator has been exposed" they are allowed to attend remotely because of temporary rules passed at the start of the session.

Democratic House Minority Leader Jamie Smith said Gosch told the House members Sunday that because of the amount of spread in the Capitol, all lawmakers should consider themselves exposed,

"We are all considered close contacts," Smith said.

The temporary rules also called for mandatory mask use by the public and lobbyists during Senate pro-

ceedings. While masks aren't mandatory in the House, they are "strongly encouraged," according to signs posted around the building in Pierre.

During the first four weeks of the session, which began Jan. 12, no lawmaker was known to have received a positive diagnosis for the coronavirus. Republican Rep. Aaron Aylward, of Harrisburg, became the first to be diagnosed with COVID-19, which was reported Feb. 7. Seven more followed in the House.

With the latest positive cases, more than 30 lawmakers are now known to have or have had the coronavirus. At least 16 representatives have publicly acknowledged having had the virus at some point.

## 35 Montana bison moved to South Dakota reservation

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Thirty-five bison have been moved from Montana to their new home on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota as part of an effort to expand the herd.

The bison were a gift from the American Prairie Reserve in north-central Montana. The Billings Gazette reported that the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's goal is to expand the herd near Mission, South Dakota, to 1,500 bison spread across 28,000 acres (113 square kilometers), which would make it the largest tribal-managed bison herd in the U.S.

The herd is currently numbered at 134 bison, and American Prairie has agreed to contribute up to 170 bison.

"When the buffalo are strong, we will be strong," said Wizipan Little Elk, chief executive of Rosebud Economic Development Corporation, which oversees the Wolakota Buffalo Range near Mission, South Dakota.

"We are doing our part to ensure the genetic health and longevity of our buffalo relatives," Little Elk said in a post on the tribe's website.

American Prairie Reserve has also shipped four bison to One Spirit, a nonprofit organization serving the Lakota people of the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. One Spirit's website says it supports the Lakota community by providing resources that "allow them to meet the needs of their people according to their own culture, traditions and values."

"We prioritize partnerships with native tribes who are working to restore a deeper cultural, spiritual and economic connection to the animal," said Alison Fox, chief executive of American Prairie Reserve.

Since 2009, American Prairie has distributed more than 400 bison to conservation and tribal herds in Montana, Colorado, Nebraska, Arizona, South Dakota and Oklahoma.

"The return of the buffalo to our lands is a common goal and vision shared with tribal elders, the tribal council, wildlife managers and spiritual leaders," said Bronck Speak Thunder, who helps manage the Fort Belknap bison program.

## Chinese vaccine arrives in Hungary, a first in the EU

JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — A shipment of a COVID-19 vaccine produced in China arrived in Hungary on Tuesday, making it the first of the European Union's 27 nations to receive a Chinese vaccine.

A jet carrying 550,000 vaccine doses developed by the Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm landed at Budapest's international airport after flying in from Beijing. The shipment is enough to treat 275,000 people with the two-dose jab, Dr. Agnes Galgoczy of the National Public Health Center told a press conference.

"With this vaccine, five different types are now available in Hungary so that we may get as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible," Galgoczy said, adding that vaccine shots won't begin until the shipment is evaluated by the National Public Health Center.

Hungarian health authorities were the first in the EU to approve the Sinopharm jab for emergency use on Jan. 29. That came after a government decree streamlined Hungary's vaccine approval process by allowing any vaccine administered to at least 1 million people worldwide to be used without undergoing review by the country's medicines regulator.

The country expects to receive 5 million total doses of the Sinopharm vaccine over the next four months, enough to treat 2.5 million people in the country of nearly 10 million.

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Hungarian officials, including Prime Minister Viktor Orban, have been critical of the EU's common vaccine procurement program, claiming the bloc's slow rollout of shots is costing lives.

"If vaccines aren't coming from Brussels, we must obtain them from elsewhere ... One cannot allow Hungarians to die simply because Brussels is too slow in procuring vaccines," Orban said last month.

Hungary has also agreed to purchase 2 million doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, which hospitals began administering in Budapest last week.

On Friday, Orban claimed these additional vaccines from Russia and China will enable Hungary to vaccinate millions more people by the end of May than other European countries with similar populations.

"As things stand now, (we can vaccinate) 6.8 million people by the end of May or beginning of June," Orban said in a radio interview. "I think this is huge."

The Sinopharm vaccine, which the developer says is nearly 80% effective, is already in use in Hungary's non-EU neighbor Serbia, where around half a million ethnic Hungarians have already received the jab. The company has not yet released data on the results of the vaccine's stage 3 trials.

The new vaccines shipment represents around 40% of all COVID-19 vaccine doses that Hungary has received so far, and makes Sinopharm nearly equally prevalent in Hungary as the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine.

But recent polling shows that some Hungarians are reluctant to receive the Sinopharm jab. A survey of 1,000 people in the capital of Budapest by pollster Median and the 21 Research Center showed that among those willing to receive a vaccine, only 27% would take a Chinese vaccine, compared to 43% a Russian vaccine and 84% a jab developed in Western countries. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 3%.

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>

## Myanmar's Suu Kyi faces new charge as crackdown intensifies

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Police in Myanmar filed a new charge against ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer said Tuesday, in a move that may allow her to be held indefinitely without trial as part of an intensifying crackdown by authorities who seized power in a coup.

Suu Kyi, who was deposed and detained in the military takeover on Feb. 1, already faced a charge of illegally possessing walkie-talkies — an apparent attempt to provide a legal veneer for her house arrest. The new charge was for breaking a law that has been used to prosecute people who have violated coronavirus restrictions, lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told reporters after meeting with a judge in a court in the capital, Naypyitaw.

It carries a maximum punishment of three years in prison. But, perhaps more worryingly, because of changes to the Penal Code instituted by the junta last week, it could allow her to be detained indefinitely without court permission.

The legal maneuver comes two weeks after the military seized power in a coup that shocked many in the international community who had been hopeful that Myanmar was taking steps toward democracy. Since then, the junta has ratcheted up the pressure on protesters resisting the takeover, including violently breaking up some demonstrations and ordering internet access blocked.

On Monday, security forces pointed guns at a group of 1,000 demonstrators and attacked them with slingshots and sticks in the city of Mandalay. Local media reported that police also fired rubber bullets into a crowd and that a few people were injured.

Protests continued Tuesday in Yangon, the country's largest city, and elsewhere. In Yangon, police blocked off the street in front of the Central Bank, which protesters have targeted amid speculation online that the military is seeking to seize money from it. Buddhist monks demonstrated outside the U.N.'s local office in the city.

Around 3,000 demonstrators — mainly students — returned to the streets of Mandalay, carrying posters

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of Suu Kyi and shouting for the return of democracy.

The protests are taking place in defiance of an order banning gatherings of five or more people. But the security presence was low-key around the march after Monday's confrontations.

Suu Kyi's lawyer told reporters he did not arrive at the court in time to see a videoconference the judge said had been held with her. That videoconference had not been expected, the lawyer said, adding that he has not yet seen his client.

State media have been acknowledging the protest movement only indirectly. The Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported about a meeting of the State Administration Council, the new top governing body, and quoted its chief, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, saying the authorities "are handling the ongoing problems with care."

It said the council discussed taking legal action against protesters and providing "true information" to the media. On Sunday and Monday nights, the military ordered an internet blackout — almost entirely blocking online access. Once before in recent weeks it imposed a similar blackout and has also tried less successfully to block social media platforms. It has also prepared a draft law that would criminalize many online activities.

While the military did not say why the internet was blocked, there is widespread speculation that the government is installing a firewall system to allow it to monitor or block most or all online activity.

The Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper also reported that council members discussed acting against a "parallel government" established by some elected lawmakers of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, who were prevented from taking their seats when the military stopped Parliament from opening its session Feb. 1.

In the days following the takeover, members of Suu Kyi's party formed a committee, declaring themselves the true representatives of Myanmar's people and asking for international recognition. No such recognition has come, even as the United Nations, the United States and other governments have urged the military to return power to the elected government and release Suu Kyi and other detainees.

The military contends there was fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide, and says it will hold power for a year before holding new elections. The state election commission found no evidence to support the claims of fraud.

## Deadly tornado in North Carolina; bitter cold sweeps Plains

At least three people were killed when a tornado tore through a seaside town in North Carolina as millions of people in Texas remained in the dark early Tuesday amid subfreezing temperatures.

The tornado also left at least 10 people injured after it hit just after midnight Tuesday in southeastern Brunswick County near Grissetown in the Ocean Ridge Plantation Community, authorities said. The tornado destroyed homes, downed powerlines that left thousands without electricity and snapped trees in half, news outlets reported.

"It's something like I have never seen before. A lot of destruction. It's going to be a long recovery process," Brunswick County Sheriff John Ingram said at a press conference early Tuesday.

Brunswick County Emergency Management said people were trapped in homes. Ingram said searches for missing people were underway and will increase during the day. He's asked people to avoid the area while crews work to clear the streets and search for victims.

Meanwhile, nearly 4 million homes and businesses were without power early Tuesday in Texas, where temperatures dipped into the single digits overnight. More than 250,000 people also lost power across parts of Appalachia, and another quarter-million were still without electricity after an ice storm in northwest Oregon, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility outage reports.

In Houston, a woman and a girl died from suspected carbon monoxide poisoning at a home without electricity from a car running in an attached garage, police said.

## Vigorous preparation returns as Biden calls other leaders



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By AAMER MADHANI and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new-old ritual is taking shape in the Biden White House, one that starts with bulky briefing packages, war-gaming the “what-ifs,” and Oval Office discussions about how to talk to this or that particular U.S. ally or adversary.

Twelve times since he took office, President Joe Biden has dialed up a world leader after reinstating what was a long-held White House standard mothballed by Donald Trump: vigorous preparation. Gone are unnecessary digressions and over-the-top cajoling or haranguing of fellow heads of state.

The changes to telephone diplomacy have been about both style and substance as Biden has sought to send the message to foreign leaders — many embittered by Trump’s habit of berating his counterparts and conflating personal interests with U.S. national security — that Biden is determined to reset the U.S. relationship with the world.

“They’ve come cued in to the idea that they need to manage alliances really well right off the bat,” said Matthew Goodman, who served on the White House National Security Council staff during the Barack Obama and George W. Bush administrations. “It’s a central organizing principle as they look to turn the page on Trump and get alliances back on track. The preparation for calls is part of that.”

Biden’s foreign policy will ultimately be judged on results more than form or preparation. But his approach so far is a marked change from Trump, who seemed to have better rapport with autocrats like Russia’s Vladimir Putin and North Korea’s Kim Jong Un than with many historic U.S. allies. The former president frequently strayed far from telephone talking points and advice his aides provided for his dialogue with world leaders.

Leaked conversation transcripts showed that days into his administration, Trump disposed with diplomatic niceties and hectoring Mexico’s President Enrique Peña Nieto against publicly saying that Mexico would never pay for a southern border wall, a signature call of the president’s 2016 campaign. Trump also complained to Australia’s Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull that he was forcing Trump to endure the most “unpleasant call” and was “worse than I am” for detaining refugees on small islands off Australia.

Most notably, the Republican president’s 2019 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy led to Trump’s impeachment after it was revealed that Trump had asked him to “do us a favor” and investigate Biden and his son Hunter’s activity in the country.

As was the practice with past administrations, Biden advisers are typically preparing the president ahead of calls with a package of written background information, including summaries of recent developments in the country, a recap of previous interactions with the leader, talking points on issues to highlight, as well as “if asked” notes to help shape the president’s response to hot-button issues that his counterpart might raise.

Trump aides realized early on that the president had little patience for briefing material or talking points. At first, they offered him a six-page pre-brief with attachments ahead of calls, but that proved to be too long. So they did a one-page version. Trump later was given note cards that typically contained just three talking points.

“Sweating the details on every single word in a memo didn’t matter, because communicating the right message on behalf of the United States didn’t matter to the president,” said Frances Brown, who served as a senior adviser on the National Security Council in the Trump and Obama administrations. “For an NSC staffer, it invited a bit of an existential crisis.”

Last week, Biden dialed up China’s Xi Jinping for a two-hour conversation in which he raised concerns about human rights abuses and unfair trade practices. Earlier, in a call with Putin, Biden condemned the jailing of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and pressed Putin on his nation’s involvement in a vast cyberespionage campaign in the U.S.

Ahead of both calls, senior Biden administration officials previewed for reporters what the president planned to say, a step meant to help head off potential efforts by Beijing and Moscow to control public messaging about the conversations.

Biden’s first leader call as president went to Canada’s Justin Trudeau, the prime minister whom Trump

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once disparaged as "very dishonest and weak."

For Biden, the chat with Trudeau was part tough conversation and part easy banter. Biden explained his decision to halt construction on the Keystone XL oil pipeline, a Canada-to-U.S. project that Trudeau supports. Biden also reminisced about his late first wife's family ties to Toronto and his own 2016 visit to Ottawa when Trudeau honored him with a state dinner.

The two leaders discussed the coronavirus pandemic, the economy and two Canadians imprisoned in China in apparent retaliation for Canada's arrest of a top Huawei executive, according to Canadian officials.

One senior Canadian official familiar with the call said Biden appeared well prepared for the half-hour conversation and noted that it went longer than any call the prime minister had with Trump.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who spent years flattering and courting Trump, said in an interview Sunday with CBS on "Face the Nation" that his conversation with Biden was "fantastic" and they had talked about issues like climate change, NATO, Iran and more.

The White House notably published an official photo of Biden meeting in the Oval Office with national security adviser Jake Sullivan and NSC senior director of European affairs Amanda Sloat as he prepared for his recent call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

James Carafano, a national security analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said Biden with his first round of calls has been primarily concerned with sending the message that he's turned the page on Trump. But Carafano argues that the new president has largely avoided detailing what that means in substance for U.S. foreign policy.

"He hasn't really gone beyond we're going to work with friends and allies theme," Carafano said.

Biden made clear his desire to return to diplomacy after Trump withdrew from the Obama-backed international nuclear deal with Iran.

Around the globe, considerable attention also is being paid to which countries haven't made it onto Biden's call list yet.

The new president has yet to speak with Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who had a close relationship with Trump even as the U.S. and Turkey were at odds over a number of issues, including Syria policy and Turkey's decision to purchase Russia's advanced anti-aircraft missile systems. The latter prompted Washington to expel Turkey from its F-35 stealth fighter program.

Biden on the campaign trail called Erdogan an autocrat, and as vice president was forced to offer an official apology in 2014 after suggesting Turkey played a role in the rise of the Islamic State group.

Israel's former ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, on Wednesday tweeted a list of 10 countries that he said had received calls from Biden. "Might it now be time to call the leader of #Israel, the closest ally of the #US?" Danon posted.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said nothing should be read into the lack of a call so far. "It is not an intentional diss," she said, and promised that a call to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was coming.

Gillies reported from Toronto.

## Vaccine delays leave grocery workers feeling expendable

By ALEXANDRA OLSON, DEE-ANN DURBIN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

As panicked Americans cleared supermarkets of toilet paper and food last spring, grocery employees gained recognition as among the most indispensable of the pandemic's front-line workers.

A year later, most of those workers are waiting their turn to receive COVID-19 vaccines, with little clarity about when that might happen.

A decentralized vaccine campaign has resulted in a patchwork of policies that differ from state to state, and even county to county in some areas, resulting in an inconsistent rollout to low-paid essential workers who are exposed to hundreds of customers each day.

"Apparently we are not front-line workers when it comes to getting the vaccine. That was kind of a shock,"

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said Dawn Hand, who works at a Kroger supermarket in Houston, where she said three of her co-workers were out with the virus last week. She watches others getting vaccinated at the in-store pharmacy without knowing when she'll get her turn.

Texas is among several states that have decided to leave grocery and other essential workers out of the second phase of its vaccination effort, instead prioritizing adults over 65 and people with chronic medical conditions.

Focusing on older adults is an approach many epidemiologists support as the most ethical and efficient because it will help reduce deaths and hospitalizations faster. People over 65 account for 80% of deaths in the country, according to the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention.

"Our main goals with vaccines should be reducing deaths and hospitalizations," said William Moss, executive director of the International Vaccine Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health. "In order to do that, we need to begin vaccinating those at the highest risks."

But many grocery workers have been surprised and disheartened to find that they've been left out of such policies, in part because a CDC panel had raised their expectations by recommending the second phase of the vaccine rollout — 1B — include grocery and other essential employees.

Even when grocery workers are prioritized, they still face long waits. New York opened up vaccines to grocery workers in early January, along with other essential employees and anyone 65 and over. But limited supply makes booking an appointment difficult, even more so for the workers who don't have large companies or unions to advocate for them.

Edward Lara had to close his small grocery store — known as a bodega — in the Bronx for 40 days when he and his employees contracted the virus last spring. He has tried for weeks to get a vaccine appointment and finally figured out he could register through the website of a network of health care providers, which will notify him when a slot opens.

Lara's father-in-law died of the virus in March. His mother-in-law died in November. Last week, a friend who manages his bodega's insurance policy also died. And a cousin in New Jersey got the virus for a second time, leaving him terrified it could happen to him.

"Nothing to be done. Cross my fingers and hope that God protects me," Lara said after registering for the waitlist.

Only 13 states are currently allowing grocery workers to sign up for vaccines, according to the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which represents 1.3 million U.S. grocery, meatpacking and other front-line workers.

Some states are still working through an initial phase that prioritizes health workers and nursing home residents. Many states have divided the second phase into tiers that put grocery workers lower than others, including people 65 and over, teachers and first responders. Eleven states have no clear plan for prioritizing grocery workers at all, according to research from United 4 Respect, a labor group that advocates for workers at Walmart, Amazon and other major retailers.

At MOM's Organic Market, a 21-store grocery chain in the Mid-Atlantic region, chief culture officer Jon Croft initially thought the company's 1,500 workers would be vaccinated by the end of January. He now thinks it will be more like March or April. The company has only been able to pre-register workers from two stores in Maryland and two in Virginia.

"Folks feel they deserve to have an opportunity to be vaccinated having been on the front line," Croft said. "The politicians and the health departments have been singing the praises of grocery workers but now they have been silent."

Major food retailers say they are doing their part to get their workers vaccinated. Kroger, the nation's largest grocery chain, said it has been vaccinating employees in Illinois ever since they became eligible, but grocery workers aren't yet eligible in most of the jurisdictions in which the company operates. Target and Walmart also said they would offer their workers vaccines at their own pharmacies as soon as they are eligible.

Kroger, Trader Joe's, Target and online delivery service Instacart have offered bonuses or extra paid

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time off for workers who get the vaccine.

When grocery chain Lidl got word from Suffolk County on Long Island that it would be given appointments for its local workers, it immediately contacted those who it knew to be at highest risk. So far, more than 100 employees in Suffolk County have now gotten shots.

Joseph Lupo, a Lidl supervisor who fell ill with the virus in March, is one of them.

"I never ever want to get COVID again, or see anybody else get it," said Lupo, 59.

But for many grocery workers, the realization that they won't be eligible any time soon adds to the sense of being expendable. They have fought a mostly losing battle for hazard pay, which a handful of companies offered in the spring but ended despite multiple resurgences of the virus.

A year into the pandemic, some shoppers still refuse to wear masks and managers often don't force them to follow the rules.

"There are the people who come in wearing a mask halfway down or take it off as soon as they get in the door," said Drew Board, who makes \$13.50 an hour handling grocery pick-up orders at a Walmart in Albemarle, North Carolina. "I ask them politely to pull it back up and they do and then take it back down when they walk away."

Francisco Marte, president of the Bodega and Small Business Association of New York, said he tells his own workers not to risk their lives confronting shoppers who won't wear masks. In August, an angry customer slashed thousands of dollars worth of goods at a Bronx bodega after being asked to wear a mask.

"It should be the job of the police," said Marte, whose organization handed out 150,000 free masks in the spring when they were scarce. "I tell the employees, keep your distance and wear your mask but don't put yourself in danger because we are the ones who lose."

Marte said he has been lobbying local officials to set aside vaccine appointments for bodega workers, many of whom are unaware they are eligible. He hopes that the recent opening of a large vaccination site at Yankee Stadium will make access easier.

The virus, meanwhile, continues its march through grocery stores.

Over the past two months, there have been 137 COVID-19 outbreaks in Southern California grocery stores, and 500 Houston grocery workers have been infected, according to the UFCW. The union knows of 124 grocery workers who have died since the start of the pandemic.

Debbie Whipple, a scan manager at a Kroger in Fayetteville, Georgia, said her union, UFWC Local 1996, doesn't expect Georgia to open vaccines to grocery workers until April at the earliest.

"We have to be here, just like a fireman and a policeman, because people need food," said Whipple, who described the frustration of watching customers routinely walk around barefaced and decline offers of free masks. "We should be getting the vaccine."

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Associated Press Writer Anita Snow in Phoenix contributed to this report.

## The Latest: Hungary is 1st EU nation to get Chinese vaccine

By The Associated Press undefined

BUDAPEST— A shipment of a COVID-19 vaccine produced in China arrived in Hungary Tuesday morning, making the country the first in the European Union to receive a Chinese vaccine.

A jet carrying 550,000 doses of the vaccine, developed by the Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm, landed in Budapest after flying from Beijing. The shipment is enough to treat 275,000 people with the two-dose vaccine, head of the Epidemiology Department of the National Public Health Center, Dr. Agnes Galgoczy, said at a press conference.

Hungary expects to receive 5 million total doses of the Sinopharm vaccine over the next four months. The country has sought to purchase vaccines from countries outside the EU's common procurement program, claiming that delays in the bloc's rollout is costing lives.

The Sinopharm vaccine, which the developer says is nearly 80% effective, is already in use in Hungary's non-EU neighbor Serbia, where around half a million ethnic Hungarians have already received the jab.



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Hungary has also agreed to purchase 2 million doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, which hospitals began administering in Budapest last week.

## THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- South African health care workers eagerly await Johnson & Johnson vaccine jabs
- Pandemic stresses take a huge toll on college students, who struggle to pay for food and housing as jobs and internships dry up
- U.S. Hospitals still ration medical N95 masks even as stockpiles swell by millions
- Vaccine delays leave grocery workers feeling expendable
- India's dramatic fall in virus cases leaves experts stumped
- Explaining the UN vaccine plan for poor countries as it nears rollout
- 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:

**THE HAGUE, Netherlands** — A Dutch court has ordered the government to end the curfew it imposed last month to rein in the spread of the coronavirus, saying the ruling coalition was not entitled to use emergency powers to enforce the restrictive measure.

In a written statement, The Hague District Court on Tuesday called the curfew a "far-reaching violation of the right to freedom of movement and privacy" that also indirectly curtails the rights of freedom of assembly and demonstration.

The court adds that "This requires a very careful decision-making process."

The government extended the 9 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. curfew to March 2 last week. It used a law allowing it to bypass the usual legislative process in emergencies.

However, the court says the introduction of the curfew did not require the use of the fast-track process as it had been discussed at length during the coronavirus crisis.

The Dutch government said it is studying the ruling.

**PARIS** — The long lines of young people waiting for food aid that stretch through Paris neighborhoods several times a week are a dramatic symbol of the toll the coronavirus has taken on France's youth.

On a recent evening, Leila Ideddaim waited to receive a bag of food, along with hundreds of other French young people who are unable to make ends meet. She saw the chitchat that accompanied the handout as a welcome byproduct, given her intense isolation during the pandemic.

The 21-year-old student in hotel and restaurant management has seen her plans turned upside down by the virus crisis. With restaurants and tourist sites shuttered and France under a 6 p.m. curfew, her career prospects are uncertain. Odd jobs that were supposed to keep her going during her studies hard to come by.

The pandemic has devastated economies the world over. In France, the economic fallout has weighed particularly heavily on young people — and their woes have only been compounded by disruptions to their studies and social interactions.

Nearly a quarter of French young people can't find work — two-and-a-half times the national unemployment rate and one of the highest in the European Union's 27 nations. Many university students now rely on food aid and several organizations have rallied to meet the need.

**CANBERRA, Australia** — Australia's regulator on Tuesday approved the AstraZeneca vaccine as its second for use against COVID-19.

Pfizer's product will be available in Australia next week. It will be given in two doses three weeks apart, while AstraZeneca's will be administered in two doses 12 weeks apart.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Therapeutic Goods Administration, the regulator, found the As-

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traZeneca vaccine was safe and effective.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the AstraZeneca vaccine will prevent serious COVID-19 illness.

Morrison will be vaccinated with the Pfizer product and Hunt with AstraZeneca in a demonstration of confidence in both vaccines.

Australia has contracted 53.8 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and 50 million of those will be manufactured in Australia.

The government has also secured 20 million Pfizer vaccines for a population of 26 million.

ELANDSDOORN, South Africa — After testing thousands of people for coronavirus, South African nurse Asnath Masango says she can't wait to get vaccinated.

"So many people, I test them and within days they have passed away," said Masango. "I want protection."

Health care workers at the Ndlovu Care Group in rural northeastern South Africa are eagerly awaiting the first jabs of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which will be given out to medical staff starting this week.

That's despite the fact that the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine — unlike the two-shot Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines — has not been approved for general use anywhere in the world.

No matter, say many South African health workers who are enthusiastic about getting the J&J jab, which comes amid a huge shift in the government's vaccination strategy.

South Africa, with nearly 1.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 including more than 47,000 deaths, has had 41% of Africa's reported cases.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand reported no new virus cases in the community for a second day, raising hopes a lockdown in Auckland will be lifted Wednesday.

The three-day lockdown of New Zealand's largest city was the nation's first in six months.

Lawmakers say their final decision on whether to lift the lockdown will depend on any new information or cases that crop up over the next day.

The lockdown was prompted by the diagnoses of three family members, but how they got it remains a mystery.

The mother in the family works at a catering company that does laundry for airlines, and a possible link to infected passengers is being investigated. So far, other people at her workplace have tested negative, officials said.

Health officials have ramped up testing, administering more than 15,000 tests on Monday and processing the results of nearly 6,000.

TEL AVIV, Israel — Dr. Anthony Fauci has won the \$1 million Dan David Prize for "defending science" and advocating for vaccines now being administered to protect people from the coronavirus.

The Israel-based Dan David Foundation on Monday named President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser as the winner of one of three prizes. It said he had earned the recognition over a lifetime of leadership on HIV research and AIDS relief, as well as his advocacy for the vaccines against COVID-19.

In its statement, the private foundation did not mention former President Donald Trump, who undermined Fauci's follow-the-science approach to the pandemic. But it credited Fauci with "courageously defending science in the face of uninformed opposition during the challenging COVID crisis."

GENEVA — It's nearly launch time for COVAX, the United Nations' unprecedented program to deploy COVID-19 vaccines for hundreds of millions in need around the globe.

More than two months after countries like Britain and the United States started immunizing their most vulnerable people, the U.N.'s health agency gave its approval to a vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, which should trigger the release of hundreds of millions of doses by COVAX.

COVAX missed its own target of starting vaccination in poor countries at the same time as immunizations

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were rolled out in rich countries, and numerous developing countries have signed their own deals to buy vaccine, fearing the program won't deliver.

The World Health Organization and partners hope COVAX can finally start shipping out vaccines later this month.

**BOGOTA, Colombia** — Colombia received its first shipment of coronavirus vaccines on Monday and will soon begin to vaccinate its population of 50 million people, the third largest in Latin America.

The government says it aims to vaccinate 35 million people this year including hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan migrants and refugees who are currently living in the South American country.

On Monday, a yellow DHL plane carrying Colombia's first 50,000 vaccines arrived at Bogota's international airport and was welcomed personally by President Ivan Duque and his health minister. The shots were supplied by Pfizer, which has a contract to sell 10 million vaccines to Colombia.

Colombia will be one of the last countries in Latin America to start vaccinations.

**MEXICO CITY** — Mexico began vaccinating senior citizens in more than 300 municipalities across the country Monday after receiving some 870,000 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

Most of the effort was concentrated in remote rural communities, but in a few far-flung corners of the sprawling capital, hundreds of Mexicans over the age of 60 lined up before dawn for the chance to get vaccinated.

The government has designated 1,000 vaccination sites, including schools and health centers, mostly in the country's poorest communities.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador conceded Monday that bad weather and snow had kept the vaccine from arriving to some isolated areas in Mexico's northwest. He said the armed forces, which are in charge of logistics for the vaccination campaign, were working to access those areas.

Mexico started vaccinating health workers in mid-December with 726,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

## At least 3 dead, 10 injured in North Carolina tornado

**WILMINGTON, N.C. (AP)** — A tornado ripped through North Carolina's Brunswick County, killing at least three people and injuring 10 others in its trail of destruction, authorities said.

The tornado hit just after midnight Tuesday in southeastern Brunswick County near Grissetown in the Ocean Ridge Plantation Community, destroying homes, downing powerlines that left thousands without electricity and snapping trees in half, news outlets reported.

"It's something like I have never seen before. A lot of destruction. It's going to be a long recovery process," Brunswick County Sheriff John Ingram said at a press conference early Tuesday.

Brunswick County Emergency Management said people were trapped in homes.

Ingram said searches for missing people were underway and will increase during the day. He's asked people to avoid the area while crews work to clear the streets and search for victims.

The Wilmington Fire Department tweeted that it would send teams to help find people missing after the tornado.

## As the virus crisis drags on, hard-hit French youth struggle

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

**PARIS (AP)** — On a recent evening, Leïla Ideddaim waited to receive a bag of food, along with hundreds of other French young people who are unable to make ends meet. She saw the chitchat that accompanied the handout as a welcome byproduct, given her intense isolation during the pandemic.

The 21-year-old student in hotel and restaurant management has seen her plans turned upside down by the virus crisis. With restaurants and tourist sites shuttered and France under a 6 p.m. curfew, her career prospects are uncertain. Odd jobs that were supposed to keep her going during her studies are hard to come by.

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"I'm in a fog," said Ideddaim, who moved to Paris last year and is now struggling to meet both her basic needs and her emotional ones.

She is not alone. The long lines of young people waiting for food aid that stretch through Paris neighborhoods several times a week are a dramatic symbol of the toll the coronavirus has taken on France's youth.

The pandemic has devastated economies the world over, pushing vulnerable people deeper into poverty or tipping some into it for the first time. In France, the economic fallout has weighed particularly heavily on young people — and their woes have only been compounded by disruptions to their studies and social interactions.

Nearly a quarter of French young people can't find work — two-and-a-half times the national unemployment rate and one of the highest in the European Union's 27 nations. Many university students now rely on food aid and several organizations have rallied to meet the need.

The pandemic has led to a surge in mental health complaints that authorities say are most acute in people without work, those in financial hardship and young adults. A hotline devoted to students has seen a surge in calls, and young people have streamed into psychiatric wards.

As French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged, "it's hard to be 20" in coronavirus times.

Other European countries have also noted a particularly heavy toll on young people. In Belgium, some areas are giving aid to students to help them pay for food, rent, transport and psychological help. In Germany, a study by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found about one in three children are suffering from pandemic-related anxiety, depression or are exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms like headaches or stomach aches.

For Ideddaim, who has to support herself, the pandemic means a spreadsheet that doesn't always add up. Each month, she needs over 800 euros (\$970) for housing, transport and utility bills. She could not get a well-paid apprenticeship because restaurants are closed and hotels are in a precarious situation.

Instead, an internship at a campground 45 kilometers (28 miles) east of Paris brings in 300 euros a month — and alleviates her isolation. She also earns some money from occasional temp work in shopping centers. Still, she has almost spent all her savings.

"I draw up a Google sheet, and I put down my expenses and my fixed costs every month. So I look at how much comes in, and I calculate what I'm left with and where I can tighten my belt — on food for instance," she said.

Ideddaim is just one of many needy students being served by Linkee, an organization that has long collected and distributed unused food to fight waste but only recently turned its attention to students.

Farid Khelef, 28, came from Algeria to study in France. He would not have imagined he would one day be waiting for food aid.

"Before, I was working as an electrician in parallel with my studies. Because of the health crisis, it's been almost four months that I have no job," he said while waiting for a bag from Linkee.

The organization began offering meals and fresh food to students in October — and their twice-weekly handouts now serve about 500 people, up from 200.

"We are a safety net for all these students ... who don't have enough money to buy some food and have no other solution than coming to get some quality food and at the same time find a friendly atmosphere," said Julien Meimon, the organization's president.

With a smile, Ideddaim showed her bag filled with salad, cauliflower, apples, smoked salmon, yogurts and chocolate. But she comes to the food distribution site for more than just basic sustenance.

"It's a great morale boost — to know that I'm going to eat well and to come to a place with plenty of people and everyone is in a good mood," she said.

With only three weeks of in-person classes since September and being new to the city, she has struggled to create the social connections that are essential to building an adult life.

"It has not been easy to integrate, to meet with people," she said. In the meantime, she enjoys chatting on the phone with her grandmother, who also lives alone, and is looking forward to working this summer in the Atlantic seaside resort of Biscarrosse — as long as restaurants reopen.

Many young people are similarly struggling. Nightline in Paris, a hotline for students, has seen a 40%



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jump in calls since the country entered its first lockdown in March.

Depression among people aged 18 to 24 has jumped from 16.5% at the beginning of April to 31.5% in November, during the country's second lockdown, according to France's national health agency, Sante Publique France.

Authorities have noticed the problem and, starting this month, they have asked universities to allow students to go back to classes one day per week to help them regain some sense of normalcy. The institutions have also started providing 1-euro meals.

There are concerns the pandemic could have long-term effects on youth. In the U.K., the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank estimated that young people will have missed out on more than half a year of face-to-face learning, or more than 5% of their total time in school, by the end of the country's latest national lockdown. The lost education could cut average lifetime earnings by 40,000 pounds (\$55,325) per student, it estimated.

Ideedaim, who prefers to look on the bright side, said she feels privileged to get food aid at all.

"That kind of aid does not exist in many countries, and we're lucky enough in France to have that," she said.

Samuel Petrequin in Brussels, Danica Kirka in London and Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin contributed to this report.

Follow AP coverage of the pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

## Analysis: NATO faces conundrum as it mulls Afghan pullout

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — After 20 years of military engagement and billions of dollars spent, NATO and the United States still grapple with the same, seemingly intractable conundrum — how to withdraw troops from Afghanistan without abandoning the country to even more mayhem.

An accelerated U.S. drawdown over the past few months, led by the previous U.S. administration, has signaled what may be in store for long-suffering Afghans.

Violence is spiking and the culprits are, well, everyone: the Taliban, the Islamic State group, warlords, criminal gangs and corrupt government officials.

According to NATO's website, there are about 9,600 troops currently in Afghanistan, including 2,500 U.S. troops. NATO defense ministers will meet on Wednesday and Thursday to discuss the way forward.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden is reviewing his predecessor's 2020 deal with the Taliban, which includes a May 1 deadline for a final U.S. troop withdrawal from the war-ravaged country. In Washington, calls are mounting for the U.S. to delay the final exit or renegotiate the deal to allow the presence of a smaller, intelligence-based American force.

All key players needed for a stable post-war Afghanistan come with heavy baggage.

The Taliban now hold sway over half the country and both sides in the conflict have continued to wage war, even after peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government began last year in Qatar.

The Taliban have lately been accused of targeted killings of journalists and civic leaders — charges they deny. But they lack credibility, particularly because they refuse to agree to a cease-fire. There is also no proof they have cut ties with al-Qaida militants as required under the Taliban-U.S. deal. A January report by the U.S. Treasury found that they continue to cooperate and that al-Qaida is getting stronger.

Some reports from areas under Taliban control speak of heavy-handed enforcement of a strict interpretation of Islamic law: While the Taliban allow girls to go to school, the curriculum for both boys and girls seems mostly focused on religion. There is little evidence of women's progress in the deeply conservative, rural areas.

Afghan warlords — some accused of war crimes — have been co-opted by international forces since the 2001 collapse of the Taliban regime, amassing power and wealth. In a vacuum that would follow the with-

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drawal of foreign troops, activists and Afghans fear the heavily armed warlords would return to another round of fighting, similar to the 1992-1996 bloodletting. At that time, the warlords turned their firepower on each other, killing more than 50,000 people, mostly civilians, and destroying much of the capital, Kabul.

Afghan forces have also been accused of heavy-handedness. In January, a new U.N. report said that nearly a third of all detainees held in detention centers across Afghanistan say they have suffered some form of torture or ill-treatment. Corruption is rampant and government promises to tackle it, according to a U.S. watchdog, rarely go beyond paper.

The regional affiliate of the Islamic State group, which in particular targets the country's minority Shiites, has grown more brazen and violent, its attacks increasing in frequency and audacity, testing a weak security apparatus.

Despite nearly \$1 trillion spent in Afghanistan — of which a lion's share went on security — lawlessness is rampant. According to the U.S. State Department, crime in Kabul is widespread, with criminals typically working in groups and using deadly force. "Local authorities are generally ineffective in deterring crime," the State Department said. "Officers openly solicit bribery at all levels of local law enforcement. In some cases, officers carry out crimes themselves."

Economic benchmarks are no better.

The World Bank said the poverty rate rose from 55% in 2019 to 72% in 2020. Two-thirds of Afghans live on less than \$1.90 a day. Unemployment rose in 2020 to 37.9%, from 23.9%, the World Bank said last week.

"This is an absolute disgrace given the billions spent on this country over the last two decades," Saad Mohsini, owner of Afghanistan's popular TOLO TV, tweeted in response. "Who will stand up and take responsibility?"

Meanwhile, Afghan youth, activists, minorities and women worry that the freedoms they have won since 2001 — while still fragile — will be lost to a Taliban-shared government, and if not to the Taliban, then to warring warlords.

For the U.S. and NATO, the big concern is national security. Both want guarantees that Afghanistan will not again become a safe haven for terrorist groups as it was both during the Taliban era and when warlords ruled.

Among them is Abdur Rasoul Sayyaf, now a key player in Kabul, whose group brought al-Qaida's Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan from Sudan in May 1996. Sayyaf was the inspiration behind the Philippine terrorist group Abu Sayyaf.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, another warlord in Kabul, briefly gave bin Laden a safe haven following the 2001 U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban, who had up to that point sheltered the al-Qaida leader. In 2017, Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and is now a member of the country's wider peace reconciliation council.

Back in 2012, Human Rights Watch warned NATO that unless it held government forces as well as the Taliban accountable for abuses, the alliance's "legacy would be a country run by abusive warlords — including the Taliban — and unaccountable security forces," said Patricia Gossman, associate director for Asia at the New York-based group.

Analysts agree there is no easy solution to Afghanistan's deteriorating conditions, regardless of whether NATO stays or goes.

"Let's be very clear: A fragile peace process meant to stabilize the security environment hangs in the balance against the backdrop of a rogue's gallery of spoilers," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center.

Some say NATO and the U.S. should send a strong message for peace to all sides in Afghanistan's protracted conflict.

"The U.S. and NATO must be very clear ... that they do not wish more war in Afghanistan, that they want a political settlement between the warring parties and that those leaders who shout for more war, on both sides, are no longer good partners with the international community," said Torek Farhadi, political

analyst and former adviser to the Afghan government.

"Absent a political settlement, Afghanistan is headed for a bitter civil war and potentially the country being fractured in the longer run," he added.

Associated Press news director for Afghanistan and Pakistan Kathy Gannon has been covering Afghanistan for The Associated Press since 1988. Follow her on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Kathygannon](https://www.twitter.com/Kathygannon)

## South Africa's health care workers eager for first vaccines

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

ELANDSDOORN, South Africa (AP) — After testing thousands of people for coronavirus, South African nurse Asnath Masango says she can't wait to get vaccinated.

"So many people, I test them and within days they have passed away," said Masango. "I want protection."

C.J. Umunnakwe, a virologist running a lab that has performed more than 40,000 virus tests, says he "wholeheartedly believes in vaccinations. Vaccines save lives." He plans to talk to those who may be skeptical.

Health care workers at the Ndlovu Care Group in rural northeastern South Africa are eagerly awaiting the first jabs of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which will be given out to medical staff starting this week.

That's despite the fact that the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine — unlike the two-shot Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines — has not been approved for general use anywhere in the world.

No matter, say many South African health workers who are enthusiastic about getting the J&J jab, which comes amid a huge shift in the government's vaccination strategy.

South Africa, with nearly 1.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 including more than 47,000 deaths, has had 41% of Africa's reported cases.

Last week South Africa controversially decided to drop the AstraZeneca vaccine — which had been already purchased, delivered and approved in the country -- from the first phase in which 1.25 million health care workers will be vaccinated.

The last-minute decision was made after a small test showed the AstraZeneca vaccine offered minimal protection against mild to moderate cases of the variant dominant in South Africa. Although preliminary and not peer-reviewed, the results raised serious questions about how effective the AstraZeneca vaccine would be specifically in South Africa, even though the vaccine has been approved in over 50 other countries around the world.

Health officials decided to change to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which tests show is safe and effective against the variant here. A one-shot vaccine is also easier for many countries to implement.

"The switch has emboldened the skeptics, who say the vaccines have problems," Umunnakwe said of those who alleged that big pharmaceutical firms are using Africans as guinea pigs.

"I am telling people that the change shows that decisions are being made transparently, that it was driven by science," he said. "It is proof that we are putting the public as first priority."

South Africa has purchased 9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and 80,000 will be delivered this week to kick off the inoculation campaign, the president says. South Africa's regulatory body has approved the J&J shot for testing purposes. Until that vaccine receives full approval, it will be given as part of an "implemented study," officials say.

At the Ndlovu Care Group, in the small town of Elandsdoorn in Limpopo province, 200 kilometers (124 miles) north of Johannesburg, medical workers have seen the devastation wrought by the virus up close. When COVID-19 hit, the center quickly ramped up its laboratory to do PCR tests.

The protective gear that cloaks Masango cannot hide her empathy as she welcomes people who come for a COVID-19 test.

"I'm so skilled at this, you won't even feel it!" she said to a visitor.

Masango, 56, said she has tested more people than she can count.

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"What depresses me the most is when I must tell someone that they are positive," she said. "They are so frightened ... Grandparents die. Breadwinners die. How will their children get food?"

The prospect of getting vaccinated excites her.

"Yo!" she says, eyes widening. "I want that vaccine!"

The Ndlovu Care Group has done more than 40,000 tests in the rural community, including workers at large mines and commercial farms. More than 20,000 of those tests were in January alone, when South Africa was hit by a dramatic resurgence of the disease, driven by the more contagious variant that is now dominant.

The Ndlovu laboratory can carry out the PCR virus tests and get the results within hours. In the January resurgence, it was averaging about 1,600 tests per day.

"We were busy, very busy," said Umunnakwe, a 35-year-old virologist who came to the center to study HIV and is now studying coronavirus too. He is keenly watching the genomic sequencing in South Africa that identified the new variant.

"By doing sequencing, we don't just see what is present in the virus today, we can detect what may happen in the future," said Umunnakwe, adding that he hoped Ndlovu will get the equipment to do sequencing, rare for a rural health center.

Most South Africans are looking forward to getting vaccinated. An impressive 67% of adults said they would definitely or probably take a vaccine, according to a survey by the University of Johannesburg and the Human Sciences Research Council.

Dr. Rebone Maboja, who is running a study of the J&J vaccine at the Ndlovu center, was excited to hear that it will be used in South Africa.

"I'm actually ecstatic!" said Maboja. "I think it's actually a better vaccine for us here in South Africa, looking at our variant."

The 42-year-old doctor said 602 people in the community are participating in the test and half were injected with the J&J vaccine in November. She also said her recent recovery from COVID-19 makes her a stronger advocate for getting vaccinated.

"Lack of knowledge makes people much, much more anxious," said Maboja. "Those who get the vaccine will be role models, vaccine ambassadors who will encourage others."

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>

## India's dramatic fall in virus cases leaves experts stumped

By KRUTIKA PATHI and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — When the coronavirus pandemic took hold in India, there were fears it would sink the fragile health system of the world's second-most populous country. Infections climbed dramatically for months and at one point India looked like it might overtake the United States as the country with the highest case toll.

But infections began to plummet in September, and now the country is reporting about 11,000 new cases a day, compared to a peak of nearly 100,000, leaving experts perplexed.

They have suggested many possible explanations for the sudden drop — seen in almost every region — including that some areas of the country may have reached herd immunity or that Indians may have some preexisting protection from the virus.

The Indian government has also partly attributed the dip in cases to mask-wearing, which is mandatory in public in India and violations draw hefty fines in some cities. But experts have noted the situation is more complicated since the decline is uniform even though mask compliance is flagging in some areas.

It's more than just an intriguing puzzle; determining what's behind the drop in infections could help authorities control the virus in the country, which has reported nearly 11 million cases and over 155,000 deaths. Some 2.4 million people have died worldwide.



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"If we don't know the reason, you could unknowingly be doing things that could lead to a flare-up," said Dr. Shahid Jameel, who studies viruses at India's Ashoka University.

India, like other countries, misses many infections, and there are questions about how it's counting virus deaths. But the strain on the country's hospitals has also declined in recent weeks, a further indication the virus's spread is slowing. When recorded cases crossed 9 million in November, official figures showed nearly 90% of all critical care beds with ventilators in New Delhi were full. On Thursday, 16% of these beds were occupied.

That success can't be attributed to vaccinations since India only began administering shots in January — but as more people get a vaccine, the outlook should look even better, though experts are also concerned about variants identified in many countries that appear to be more contagious and render some treatments and vaccines less effective.

Among the possible explanations for the fall in cases is that some large areas have reached herd immunity — the threshold at which enough people have developed immunity to the virus, by falling sick or being vaccinated, that the spread begins to slacken, said Vineeta Bal, who studies immune systems at India's National Institute of Immunology.

But experts have cautioned that even if herd immunity in some places is partially responsible for the decline, the population as a whole remains vulnerable — and must continue to take precautions.

This is especially true because new research suggests that people who got sick with one form of the virus may be able to get infected again with a new version. Bal, for instance, pointed to a recent survey in Manaus, Brazil, that estimated that over 75% of people there had antibodies for the virus in October — before cases surged again in January.

"I don't think anyone has the final answer," she said.

And, in India, the data is not as dramatic. A nationwide screening for antibodies by Indian health agencies estimated that about 270 million, or one in five Indians, had been infected by the virus before vaccinations started — that's far below the rate of 70% or higher that experts say might be the threshold for the coronavirus, though even that is not certain.

"The message is that a large proportion of the population remains vulnerable," said Dr. Balram Bhargava, who heads India's premier medical research body, the Indian Council of Medical Research.

But the survey offered other insight into why India's infections might be falling. It showed that more people had been infected in India's cities than in its villages, and that the virus was moving more slowly through the rural hinterland.

"Rural areas have lesser crowd density, people work in open spaces more and homes are much more ventilated," said Dr. K. Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India.

If some urban areas are moving closer to herd immunity — wherever that threshold lies — and are also limiting transmission through masks and physical distancing and thus are seeing falling cases, then maybe the low speed at which the virus is passing through rural India can help explain sinking numbers, suggested Reddy.

Another possibility is that many Indians are exposed to a variety of diseases throughout their lives — cholera, typhoid and tuberculosis, for instance, are prevalent — and this exposure can prime the body to mount a stronger, initial immune response to a new virus.

"If the COVID virus can be controlled in the nose and throat, before it reaches the lungs, it doesn't become as serious. Innate immunity works at this level, by trying to reduce the viral infection and stop it from getting to the lungs," said Jameel, of Ashoka University.

Despite the good news in India, the rise of new variants has added another challenge to efforts here and around the globe to bring the pandemic under control. Scientists have identified several variants in India, including some that have been blamed for causing new infections in people who already had an earlier version of the virus. But they are still studying the public health implications.

Experts are considering if variants may be driving a surge in cases in the the southern state of Kerala, which had previously been hailed as a blueprint for tackling the virus. Kerala now accounts for nearly half

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of India's current COVID-19 cases. Government-funded research has suggested that a more contagious version of the virus could be at play, and efforts to sequence its genome are ongoing.

With the reasons behind India's success unclear, experts are concerned that people will let down their guard. Large parts of India have already returned to normal life. In many cities, markets are heaving, roads are crowded and restaurants nearly full.

"With the reducing numbers, I feel that the worst of COVID is over," said M. B. Ravikumar, an architect who was hospitalized last year and recovered. "And we can all breathe a sigh of relief."

Maybe not yet, said Jishnu Das, a health economist at Georgetown University who advises the West Bengal state on handling the pandemic.

"We don't know if this will come back after three to four months," he warned.

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

## Muted Mardi Gras: Closed bars, barricaded Bourbon Street

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Coronavirus-related limits on access to Bourbon Street, shuttered bars and frigid weather all were expected to prevent what the city usually craves at the end of Mardi Gras season — streets and businesses jam-packed with revelers.

Parades and parties on Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) and the days leading up to the annual pre-Lenten bash usually draw more than a million people to the streets.

But parades were canceled and Mayor LaToya Cantrell recently ordered bars closed. Even bars that had been allowed to operate as restaurants with "conditional" food permits were shuttered for five days that began Friday. Take-out drinks in "go-cups" also are forbidden — no more strolling the French Quarter with a drink in hand.

Bourbon Street was to be blocked to automobile and foot traffic at 7 a.m., with access limited to residents, business managers and employees, hotel guests and restaurant patrons.

Various estimates showed hotels were likely to be anywhere from one-third to more than half full — far below the 90%-plus bookings of most years. And city and state officials all but warned tourists away.

"If people think they're going to come to Louisiana, anywhere, or New Orleans and engage in the kind of activities they would have pre-pandemic then they are mistaken and quite frankly they are not welcome here to do that," Gov. John Bel Edwards said at a recent news conference.

Freezing or near-freezing temperatures were in the Tuesday forecast.

If the crowd control measures work, the scene will be in stark contrast to Mardi Gras crowds last year that were later blamed for an early Louisiana outbreak of COVID-19.

Parades also were canceled this year in Mobile, Alabama, which boasts the nation's oldest Mardi Gras celebrations. There was no plan to close bars there, but some streets were to be shut down Tuesday to control traffic and allow for more outdoor seating and service at restaurants and bars.

## Dozens charged in Capitol riots spewed extremist rhetoric

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP) — In a text message, a radicalized Trump supporter suggested getting a boat to ferry "heavy weapons" across the Potomac River into the waiting arms of their members in time for Jan. 6, court papers say.

It wasn't just idle talk, authorities say. Investigators found invoices for more than \$750 worth of live ammunition and for a firearm designed to look like a cellphone at the Virginia home of Thomas Caldwell, who's charged with conspiring with members of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group in one of the most sinister plots in the U.S. Capitol siege.

Right-wing extremists, blessed by Donald Trump, were unleashed last month, and their menacing pres-

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ence has reignited the debate over domestic extremism and how law enforcement should be handling these groups.

Their talk of civil war, traitors and revolution mirrored fighting words echoed by right-wing social media personalities and websites for months as Trump spread bogus claims about a rigged presidential election.

In nearly half of the more than 200 federal cases stemming from the attack on the Capitol, authorities have cited evidence that an insurrectionist appeared to be inspired by conspiracy theories or extremist ideologies, according to an Associated Press review of court records.

The FBI has linked at least 40 defendants to extremist groups or movements, including at least 16 members or associates of the neo-fascist Proud Boys and at least five connected to the anti-government Oath Keepers. FBI agents also explicitly tied at least 10 defendants to QAnon, a pro-Trump conspiracy theory that has grown beyond its fringe origins to penetrate mainstream Republican politics.

In at least 59 other cases, authorities link defendants to violent or extremist rhetoric, conspiracy theories or other far-right connections on social media and other forums before, during or after the Jan. 6 siege, a deeper review by the AP found.

The AP's review found that in many of those cases the defendants repeated false claims, made by Trump for months of his presidency, that the U.S. election was rigged. Some broadcast death threats at Democrats on their social media accounts or in messages. Others were deeply entwined in a world of far-right conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic. And dozens of the alleged rioters echoed words used by QAnon supporters, who push a baseless belief that Trump is a secret warrior fighting to expose a cabal of Satan-worshipping bureaucrats and celebrities who traffic children.

On Saturday, the Senate acquitted Trump in his second impeachment trial. A leading liberal advocacy group is urging its supporters to call on attorney general nominee Merrick Garland to "investigate and prosecute Trump and his entire criminal network for law breaking."

The U.S. attorney's office in Washington has assigned a special task force of prosecutors examining whether to bring sedition charges against some of the rioters, as prosecutors and federal agents across the country develop more cases against extremists who plotted to attack the Capitol. Prosecutors have another task force examining attacks targeting journalists.

President Joe Biden, in office not yet a month, has already ordered law enforcement and intelligence officials to investigate domestic terrorism. But increased enforcement is not so simple. Much of the inflammatory rhetoric is protected by the First Amendment.

And some civil rights groups have expressed hesitation over any expansion by law enforcement, because Black and Latino communities have borne the brunt of security scrutiny and they fear new tools to target extremism will end up tracking them.

Meanwhile, conspiracy theories proliferate. Conservative social media app Parler doubled its userbase, adding 8.7 million users, after the election when Facebook and Twitter cracked down on accounts spreading misinformation about the election.

Calls on the conservative platform for users to revolt or launch a war over the election results also grew, according to the AP's analysis of an archived Parler dataset of 183 million posts and 13 million user profiles.

The archive, which was captured between August 2018 and Jan. 10, when Parler was taken offline, was provided in advance of publication to the AP by researcher Max Aliapoulos at New York University.

Parler posts containing the word "revolution" grew by five times as much as the overall rate of message traffic after the election, the analysis found.

About 84% of posts referring to the hashtag "#1776" occurred on or after Election Day, according to AP's analysis. Post-election references to "treason" and the QAnon slogan "trust the plan" both increased by about 10 times the overall rate, the data showed.

From Jan. 6 through Jan. 8 the terms "civil war," "trust the plan" and "hold the line" were mentioned more than 250,000 times across online media, including Twitter, Redditt and Instagram, according to an analysis by media intelligence firm Signal Labs.

As well, Trump supporters who flooded the Capitol were quick to co-opt lingo from the American Revolution and the nation's founding documents to paint themselves as patriots instead of extremists. In the

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federal cases, the FBI quotes at least 11 defendants referring to "we the people," at least 10 referring to "1776," at least nine using "revolution" and at least eight using some variation of "traitor" or "treason."

"Everybody in there is a treasonous traitor," defendant Peter Stager, a resident of Arkansas, said of the Capitol, on a video posted on Twitter. "Death is the only remedy for what's in that building." A lawyer for Stager did not respond to a request for comment.

A Georgia lawyer's Parler posts became increasingly paranoid and angry after the presidential election began to shift to Biden's favor. William Calhoun of Americus, Georgia, posted about storming the Capitol on the eve of the insurrection, warned of an impending "civil war" and threatened to "slaughter" Democrats.

"For my part, I'll be slinging enough hot lead to stack you commies up like cordwood," he wrote.

Calhoun returned home after the siege and resumed representing clients at court hearings. Federal agents say he had at least two rifles, four shotguns, a pistol and hundreds of rounds of ammunition in his possession when they arrested him. A magistrate judge ordered Calhoun detained in custody. His lawyer had no comment.

The Oath Keepers prepared in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6 as if they were going to war, investigators say. One advised another extremist to be "fighting fit" by the inauguration and discussed holding "2 days of wargames" as part of a larger "combat" training for "urban warfare, riot control, and rescue operations," according to court papers.

A judge late last week ruled against releasing Caldwell, who authorities say conspired with members of the Oath Keepers to undo Biden's victory. In urging the judge to keep Caldwell locked up, the prosecutor said authorities found a "death list" at his Virginia home with the name of an election official in another state who gained notoriety around the presidential election.

Caldwell's lawyer said prosecutors have no evidence that his client, who denies being a member of the Oath Keepers, ever entered the Capitol. He called the indictment "imaginative."

"These things were taken out of context!" Caldwell interjected at the hearing.

Seitz reported from Chicago. Associated Press data journalist Larry Fenn in New York and AP writers Alanna Durkin Richer in Boston and Garance Burke in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Right-wing friendly Parler announces re-launch

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The right-wing friendly social network Parler, which was forced offline following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump, says it is re-launching.

The Twitter alternative has been struggling to return online since Amazon stripped it of web-hosting service on Jan. 11 over its unwillingness to remove posts inciting violence. Google and Apple removed Parler's app from their online stores for the same reason.

Parler said in an emailed statement Monday that it would be led by an interim CEO, Mark Meckler of the Tea Party Patriots movement. It said the service would be brought back online for current users this week with new users being able to sign up next week — and would not be reliant on "Big Tech."

The site's homepage, however, was a single, static page whose lead post reminded viewers of "technical difficulties." While it was possible to log in via a different variation of that URL, Parler's iPhone app did not work, yielding a "networking error" when an Associated Press reporter tried it. Among new posters was Fox News personality Sean Hannity.

Guidelines accessible on the site, dated Feb. 14, said Parler would use technology and human review to remove "threatening or inciting content." They said a "community jury" headed by a Parler employee would hear appeals.

Parler was being hosted by a Los Angeles cloud services company, SkySilk. Ron Guilmette, a California-based internet researcher and activist, said SkySilk appeared to be a small outfit and that it was not clear to him whether it could provide adequate security for the site. In particular, Guilmette cited the need for robust defense against denial-of-service attacks, which flood a site with data traffic to make it inaccessible.



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Such attacks are a threat to any major internet site — especially if their content is at all controversial.

SkySilk did not respond to questions about the level of support the company is providing.

Its CEO, Kevin Matossian, said in a statement that the company “does not advocate nor condone hate, rather it advocates the right to private judgment and rejects the role of being the judge, jury and executioner. Unfortunately, too many of our fellow technology providers seem to differ in their position on this subject.”

Matossian added that his company applauded Parler’s new community guidelines.

For a time after Amazon dropped it, Parler received denial-of-service protection from a Russian-based outfit called DDoS-Guard. That ended following revelations that DDoS-Guard had provided services to shady operations, including online forums popular with credit card thieves.

In a lawsuit seeking to force Amazon to restore its service, Parler’s management claimed that Amazon aimed to deny Trump “a platform on any large social-media service.” That followed Twitter’s decision to permanently ban the former president from its service and similar indefinite bans by Facebook and Instagram.

Parler’s previous CEO, John Matze, says he was fired on Jan. 29 by the Parler board, which is controlled by conservative donor Rebekah Mercer. At the time, Matze told The New York Times that he’d told Mercer that Parler needed to consider preventing domestic terrorists, white supremacists and followers of QAnon, a baseless conspiracy theory, from posting on the platform.

The 2 1/2-year-old social media site claims 20 million users. Trump never established an account there, although BuzzFeed reported that he considered buying a stake in Parler while he was president.

## **Biden faces pressure as US sets new course on immigration**

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and BEN FOX Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — After a weeklong bus ride from Honduras, Isabel Osorio Medina arrived in northern Mexico with the hope President Joe Biden would make it easier for people like him to get into the United States.

“It seems the new president wants to help migrants,” Osorio said as he got ready to check in to a cheap hotel in downtown Tijuana before heading to the U.S. “They’re saying he is going to help, but I don’t know for sure how much is true or not.”

The 63-year-old is among thousands of people who have come to the U.S.-Mexico border with the hope they will be able to ask for asylum and make their way into the U.S. now that former President Donald Trump is no longer in office.

While Biden has taken some major steps in his first weeks in office to reverse Trump’s hardline immigration policies, his administration hasn’t lifted some of the most significant barriers to asylum-seekers.

In fact, it’s discouraging people from coming to the country, hoping to avoid what happened under both Trump and former President Barack Obama — border agents getting overwhelmed by migrants, including many Central Americans with children.

“Now is not the time to come,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at a recent briefing, “and the vast majority of people will be turned away.”

Secretary of State Antony Blinken struck a similar tone on Feb. 6 as he announced official steps to end Trump-era agreements with Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala that required many asylum-seekers to seek refuge in one of those countries instead of the U.S.

“To be clear, these actions do not mean that the U.S. border is open,” Blinken said. “While we are committed to expanding legal pathways for protection and opportunity here and in the region, the United States is a country with borders and laws that must be enforced.”

That message hasn’t reached everyone.

More people have been arriving at an encampment in Matamoros, Mexico, a dangerous city just south of the Texas border where hundreds of asylum-seekers have been waiting under Trump’s “Remain in Mexico” program.

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It's possible even more may come after the Biden administration announced Friday that it would slowly allow an estimated 25,000 people to enter the U.S. as their cases are reviewed. The first wave is expected Feb. 19.

Walter Valenzuela, a 37-year-old Honduran, said he had been waiting in Tijuana, across the border from San Diego, for months for a chance to either seek asylum or risk an illegal crossing.

For years, asylum-seekers who met the initial threshold of demonstrating a "credible fear" of persecution in their homeland could generally stay in the U.S. until an immigration judge decided whether they qualified for permanent residency, which can take years.

Trump administration officials believed many asylum claims were fraudulent or lacked merit, submitted by people simply looking to remain in the U.S. But the issue is murky as tens of thousands flee violent gangs, natural disasters and political upheaval.

The Biden administration has signed several executive orders on immigration, including allowing in more refugees and establishing a task force to find the parents of about 600 children who were separated under Trump and still haven't been reunited.

But it hasn't ended a public health order Trump issued at the start of the coronavirus pandemic that allows U.S. Customs and Border Protection to immediately expel nearly everyone, including asylum-seekers.

Psaki said the government is still working to develop a "humane, comprehensive process" to evaluate people coming to the U.S.

"Asylum processes at the border will not occur immediately," she said. "It will take time to implement."

Alan Bersin, who held top positions dealing with border security during the Clinton and Obama administrations, warned that Biden is headed for a crisis if he releases all asylum-seekers into the United States in the short term.

Meanwhile, pressure is mounting.

The number of people apprehended at the border has increased since January, though it's below some previous periods. Authorities say many are getting caught and returned multiple times.

Complicating matters, a law has taken effect in Mexico that prohibits holding children in migrant detention centers, and the U.S. has stopped sending back some families along parts of the border. CBP, which doesn't have capacity to hold families because of COVID-19, in recent weeks has released dozens of people into the U.S. with instructions to appear in court later.

Authorities fear that as word spreads of those releases, more people will come. And asylum is not the only immigration issue creating headwinds for Biden's administration.

Texas and Arizona have both sued to stop Biden's 100-day deportation moratorium, which a judge temporarily put on hold. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement officers are complaining about proposed rules to focus on detaining and removing people in the country illegally who pose national security threats or have been convicted of more serious crimes.

Jon Feere, a senior adviser to ICE under Trump, said such moves are part of a larger pattern that the Biden administration will come to regret.

"When you send the message that you are not serious about immigration enforcement, you can't act surprised when you see a massive influx of people that you have to manage," he said.

Raul Ortiz, deputy chief of the Border Patrol, said last week that as a liaison to the Biden transition team, he found the staff to be "very attentive" to the issues. Some had experience with surges of asylum-seekers under Obama.

"This wasn't uncharted waters," Ortiz said in an interview produced by the Border Patrol. "It wasn't like we were starting from scratch."

The larger debate is lost on Osorio, who came to Tijuana because he heard Biden wants to help people like him. He says he intended to seek asylum based on the dangers he faced as an environmental activist protesting illegal logging in Honduras.

But because he can't seek asylum at the official border crossing in San Diego, other migrants told him about a place he could try to cross illegally. He said if he encountered the Border Patrol, he would ask for

asylum and see what happens.

"They already told us more or less how to do it," Osorio said. "We're going to take a look."

Fox reported from Washington.

## WHO authorizes AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine for emergency use

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

TORONTO (AP) — The World Health Organization has granted an emergency authorization to AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine, a move that should allow the U.N. agency's partners to ship millions of doses to countries as part of a U.N.-backed program to tame the pandemic.

In a statement Monday, the WHO said it was clearing the AstraZeneca vaccines made by the Serum Institute of India and South Korea's AstraZeneca-SKBio.

The WHO's green light for the AstraZeneca vaccine is only the second one the U.N. health agency has issued after authorizing the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in December. Monday's announcement should trigger the delivery of hundreds of millions of doses to countries that have signed up for the U.N.-backed COVAX effort, which aims to deliver vaccines to the world's most vulnerable people.

"Countries with no access to vaccines to date will finally be able to start vaccinating their health workers and populations at risk," said Dr. Mariângela Simão, the WHO's Assistant-Director General for Access to Medicines and Health Products.

The coronavirus has infected more than 109 million people and killed at least 2.4 million of them. But many countries have not yet started vaccination programs and even rich nations are facing shortages of vaccine doses as manufacturers struggle to ramp up production.

The AstraZeneca vaccine has already been authorized in more than 50 countries, including Britain, India, Argentina and Mexico. It is cheaper and easier to handle than the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which needs deep-cold storage that is not widespread in many developing nations. Both vaccines require two shots per person, given weeks apart.

Last week, WHO vaccine experts recommended the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for people over age 18, including in countries that have detected variants of COVID-19.

But that was contrary to the recommendation from the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which said countries that had identified a virus variant first seen in South Africa should be "cautious" in their use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, suggesting that other shots be prioritized instead.

The AstraZeneca vaccine forms the bulk of COVAX's stockpile and concerns were recently raised after an early study suggested it might not prevent mild and moderate disease caused by the variant first seen in South Africa. Last week, South Africa scaled back its planned rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine, opting instead to use an unlicensed shot from Johnson & Johnson for its health care workers.

COVAX has already missed its own goal of beginning coronavirus vaccinations in poor countries at the same time that shots were rolled out in rich countries. Numerous developing countries have rushed in recent weeks to sign their own private deals to buy vaccines, unwilling to wait for COVAX.

WHO and its partners, including the vaccines alliance GAVI, have not said which countries will receive the first doses from COVAX. But an initial plan showed a handful of rich countries that have signed multiple private vaccine deals, including Canada, South Korea and New Zealand, are also scheduled to receive early doses from COVAX.

Some public health experts called that "very problematic" and attributed it to COVAX's flawed design, which allowed donor countries to double dip by purchasing vaccines from the program while also signing their own commercial deals.

"Canada has ordered enough doses to supply their population about five times over and now they're looking to accept their share of doses from COVAX, which would otherwise be given to poor nations," said Anna Marriott, health policy lead for Oxfam International.

WHO chief scientist Dr. Soumya Swaminathan has said rich countries that have signed up to receive

vaccines from COVAX won't have their requests denied.

"The COVAX facility is not going to penalize countries," she said in early February.

After pledging more than \$400 million to COVAX last year, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said it was always his country's intention to get vaccines through COVAX.

Marriott said rich countries planning to take doses from COVAX should reconsider their intentions, given their earlier calls of support for the effort's goal of equal access to vaccines for all the world's nations, rich or poor.

"It seems quite hypocritical," she said. "Rich countries with their own supplies should make the right call and not take vaccines from countries who are really in a dire situation."

This story corrects that doses will be shipped by the WHO's partners, not AstraZeneca's partners.

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>

## Former NFL receiver Vincent Jackson found dead in hotel room

BRANDON, Fla. (AP) — Former NFL wide receiver Vincent Jackson was found dead Monday at a Florida hotel room, days after authorities spoke with him as part of a welfare check, according to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

A housekeeper discovered the 38-year-old's body at around 11:30 a.m. Monday, official said.

There were no signs of trauma and the medical examiner's office was looking into a cause of death at the Homewood Suites in Brandon, near Tampa.

Sheriff's officials said his family initially reported Jackson missing on Wednesday. Deputies tracked him down to the hotel two days later, spoke with him and canceled the missing persons case.

Sheriff Chad Chronister said his department has opened an investigation.

"My heart aches for the many loved ones Vincent Jackson leaves behind, from his wife and children to the Buccaneers nation that adored him," Chronister said in a statement posted on social media.

"Mr. Jackson was a devoted man who put his family and community above everything else," the sheriff said, noting that Jackson, a South Tampa resident, was made an honorary deputy.

Jackson played for the San Diego Chargers for seven seasons before becoming a free agent because of a contract dispute. He then went on to play five seasons with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, making his last appearance in 2016. He recorded 57 receiving touchdowns and was selected to the Pro Bowl three times.

The son of military parents, Jackson founded the Jackson In Action 83 Foundation, a nonprofit to support military families.

"We are all mourning the loss of our beloved @VincentTJackson. His wife and family ask that everyone respect their privacy at this time," the foundation tweeted Monday.

Mourning his death, Jackson's former teams highlighted his dedication to community service.

"During his five seasons with our franchise, Vincent was a consummate professional, who took a great deal of pride in his performance on and off the football field," Buccaneers owner and co-chairman Bryan Glazer said in a statement, noting Jackson's work in the community.

"His greatest achievements as a Buccaneer were the four consecutive nominations he earned as our Walter Payton Man of the Year," the team said, referring to the award given to NFL players for their service to the community.

The Chargers, now based in Los Angeles, said Jackson was "gone too soon."

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by news of Vincent Jackson's sudden passing. Vincent was a fan favorite not only for his Pro Bowl play on the field but for the impact he made on the community off of it," the team said on Twitter.

An outpouring of appreciation flowed on social media.

"I started crying holding his jersey. I grew up a chargers fan," said one fan who identified himself as



YungEazy on Twitter. "Great personality and no hate in the world. This is very sad. Rest In Peace King."

## Deaths highlight once-in-a-decade Rockies avalanche danger

By JAMES ANDERSON Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The deaths of two Colorado men caught in avalanches and a third in Montana over the frigid Presidents Day weekend show how backcountry skiers and others in the Rocky Mountain wilderness risk triggering weak layers of snow that have created the most hazardous conditions in a decade, forecasters say.

At least 25 people have been killed in avalanches in the United States so far this year — more than the 23 who died last winter. Typically, 27 people die in avalanches in the U.S. annually.

Avalanche forecasters say they have rarely seen the danger as high as it is now — and it will grow as more snow moves into the Rockies, adding weight and stress on a weak, granular base layer of snow that's susceptible to breaking apart and triggering especially wide slides on steep slopes.

The main culprit is that ground layer of snow that dropped in October. A dry November weakened it, which is anywhere from several inches (centimeters) to several feet (meters) thick, and despite more snow falling, it's stayed the consistency of granular sugar, said Dave Zinn, an avalanche forecaster for the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center in southwestern Montana.

"That layer consists of large, sugary crystals that don't bond together well. It's impossible to make a snowball from it. And when it becomes weighted down, it becomes fragile and breaks," bringing down the heavier layers on top of it, Zinn said.

"It's the weakest link in the chain. When you pile on more snow, there's always one spot that's going to break," said Ethan Greene, director of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center.

On Sunday, backcountry skier Craig Kitto, 45, of Bozeman, Montana, was fatally injured when the forest slope he and a companion were climbing cracked without warning, collapsed and swept him downhill into a tree. The other person wasn't hurt.

Similar conditions may have led to the death of 57-year-old David Heide, a backcountry skier whose body was found in an avalanche debris field Sunday in central Colorado's Clear Creek County. In neighboring Grand County, an avalanche carried a snowmobiler onto a frozen lake Sunday, and his body was found buried in snow. A coroner is investigating.

On Feb. 6, Utah saw its deadliest avalanche in about 30 years when four backcountry skiers in their 20s died and another four dug themselves out of a 1,000-foot (300-meter) slide east of Salt Lake City.

Several factors are at play in the rash of deaths: The snowpack, which can be affected by windstorms shifting and piling snow atop weak layers; weather conditions that can change rapidly in the high altitudes of the Rockies; and the availability of public lands in the U.S. West, where people often take advantage of easily accessible national forest.

In contrast, ski areas have long ensured their slopes are groomed, potential avalanches in their areas are triggered, and nearby backcountry areas are closed before the first customers hit the lift lines. It's not uncommon for skiers at Colorado's Loveland Ski Area to hear an occasional howitzer targeting danger-prone areas on wind-blown peaks approaching 13,000 feet (3,950 meters) along the Continental Divide.

"The ski patrols do lots of work to mitigate hazards," Zinn said. "But in the backcountry, we have to be our own avalanche experts."

Avalanche centers in Colorado, Montana and Utah, as well as the U.S. Forest Service National Avalanche Center, issue daily advisories on conditions and risk levels, as well as safety and training resources.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and the state parks and wildlife agency urged residents to check conditions this holiday weekend, citing the high danger. The Colorado Avalanche Information Center issued a special advisory Monday, warning that "large, wide and long-running natural and human-triggered avalanches are likely."

Are people getting the message?

"That's a hard one to answer," Greene acknowledged Monday. "Yesterday was tragic, a horrible thing."

We don't know how many got the messages and pursued some other type of recreation. We don't know how many made it out safely."

Forecasters emphasize standard precautions before heading into the backcountry:

- Have rescue gear: A beacon, a probe to check snow conditions, a shovel. Know how to use them.
- Check daily forecasts.
- Keep an eye out for recent avalanche activity.
- Take a guided tour.
- Don't go it alone if possible. Make sure only one person in your party is in exposed terrain at any given time.

"The bottom line is that partner rescue is the only way we have positive outcomes in the backcountry," Zinn said.

Record cold temperatures in much of the Rockies "reduce your margin for error," Zinn added. "If you have an accident, minor injuries become serious ones, and serious ones become deadly with the compounding factor of hypothermia."

Greene said that while there's adventure in the wildest parts of public lands, "having the freedom to go where you want comes the responsibility of taking care of yourself."

## **Pelosi says independent commission will examine Capitol riot**

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Monday that Congress will establish an independent, Sept. 11-style commission to look into the deadly insurrection that took place at the U.S. Capitol.

Pelosi said the commission will "investigate and report on the facts and causes relating to the January 6, 2021, domestic terrorist attack upon the United States Capitol Complex ... and relating to the interference with the peaceful transfer of power."

In a letter to Democratic colleagues, Pelosi said the House will also put forth supplemental spending to boost security at the Capitol.

After former President Donald Trump's acquittal at his second Senate impeachment trial, bipartisan support appeared to be growing for an independent commission to examine the deadly insurrection.

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

In her letter Monday, Pelosi said, "It is clear from his findings and from the impeachment trial that we must get to the truth of how this happened."

She added, "As we prepare for the Commission, it is also clear from General Honoré's interim reporting that we must put forth a supplemental appropriation to provide for the safety of Members and the security of the Capitol."

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. Still, such a panel would pose risks of sharpening partisan divisions or overshadowing President Joe Biden's legislative agenda.

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"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 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."

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

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

## Okonjo-Iweala is 1st woman, African to lead world trade body

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed Monday to head the World Trade Organization, becoming the first woman and first African to take on the role amid rising protectionism and disagreement over how the body decides cases involving billions in sales and thousands

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of jobs.

Okonjo-Iweala, 66, was named director-general by representatives of the 164 countries that make up the WTO, which deals with the rules of trade between nations based on negotiated agreements.

She said during an online news conference that she was taking over at a time when the WTO "is facing so many challenges, and it's clear to me that deep and wide-ranging reforms are needed... it cannot be business as usual."

Her first priority would be quickly addressing the economic and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as by lifting export restrictions on supplies and vaccines and encouraging the manufacturing of vaccines in more countries. Other big tasks include reforming the organization's dispute resolution process and finding ways for trade rules to deal with change such as digitalization and e-commerce.

She takes over after four turbulent years in which U.S. President Donald Trump used new tariffs, or import taxes, against China and the European Union to push his America first trade agenda.

"It will not be easy because we also have the issue of lack of trust among members which has built up over time, not just among the U.S. and China and the U.S. and the EU ... but also between developing and developed country members, and we need to work through that," she said.

She said that as the first woman and first African to hold the post, "I absolutely do feel an additional burden, I can't lie about that. Being the first woman and the first African means that one really has to perform."

"All credit to members for electing me and making that history, but the bottom line is that if I want to really make Africa and women proud I have to produce results, and that's where my mind is at now."

The appointment, which takes effect March 1, came after U.S. President Joe Biden endorsed her candidacy, which had been blocked by Trump. Biden's move was a step toward his aim of supporting cooperative approaches to international problems after Trump's go-it-alone approach that launched multiple trade disputes.

But unblocking the appointment is only the start in dealing with U.S. concerns about the WTO that date to the Obama administration. The United States had blocked the appointment of new judges to the WTO's appellate body, essentially freezing its ability to resolve extended and complex trade disputes.

The U.S. government has argued that the trade organization is slow-moving and bureaucratic, ill-equipped to handle the problems posed by China's state-dominated economy and unduly restrictive on U.S. attempts to impose sanctions on countries that unfairly subsidize their companies or export at unusually low prices.

Okonjo-Iweala has been Nigeria's finance minister and, briefly, foreign minister, and had a 25-year career at the World Bank as an advocate for economic growth and development in poorer countries. She rose to the No. 2 position of managing director, where she oversaw \$81 billion in development financing in Africa, South Asia, Europe and Central Asia. In 2012 she made an unsuccessful bid for the top post with the backing of African and other developing countries, challenging the traditional practice that the World Bank is always headed by an American.

She has a bachelor's degree in economics from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in regional economics and development from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

South Korean trade minister Yoo Myung-hee had withdrawn her candidacy, leaving Okonjo-Iweala as the only choice. Her predecessor, Roberto Azevedo, stepped down Aug. 31, a year before his term expired.

Trump repeatedly accused the WTO of unfair treatment of the U.S., started a trade war with China in defiance of the WTO system, and threatened to pull the U.S. out of the trade body altogether. Trump also imposed 25% steel and aluminum tariffs that hit European allies on national security grounds, a justification that went beyond trade measures normally used within the WTO rules framework.

So far, Biden has not said whether the U.S. will unblock the appellate appointments, and he has not withdrawn the steel tariffs either, which are backed by industry and union groups.

Chad P. Bown, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said unblocking Okonjo-Iweala's appointment was "a very good first step" in re-engaging with the WTO, "but that's the easy one. The rest are hard."

In particular, the WTO faces "a ticking time bomb" in the form of other countries' challenges to Trump's



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use of national security as a justification for imposing tariffs, a little-used provision in U.S. law rejected by key US trading partners in Europe.

Bown said any decision would be a lose-lose dilemma for the WTO. Ruling against Trump's move could provide a rallying cry for WTO skeptics in the U.S., while a ruling in favor could lead to other countries using national security justification as well. And that "opens a giant loophole in the trading system whereby all rules are meaningless," Bown said. Biden's administration therefore has an incentive to take the dispute off the table before a decision, expected this summer.

"If you're the Biden administration what you want to do is settle this thing, so you don't put the WTO in this awkward position," Bown said.

AP Business Writer Paul Wiseman contributed from Washington.

## Royal occasion: Oprah Winfrey to interview Meghan and Harry

NEW YORK (AP) — Prince Harry and Meghan Markle will be speaking with Oprah Winfrey, their first major television interview since quitting royal duties and buying a home last year in the U.S.

The 90-minute "Oprah With Meghan and Harry: A CBS Primetime Special" will air March 7, CBS announced Monday. Winfrey knows the couple well. She attended their wedding in 2018 and lives near them in Montecito, California.

"Winfrey will speak with Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex, in a wide-ranging interview, covering everything from stepping into life as a Royal, marriage, motherhood, philanthropic work to how she is handling life under intense public pressure," according to CBS. "Later, the two are joined by Prince Harry as they speak about their move to the United States and their future hopes and dreams for their expanding family."

On Sunday, a spokesperson for Meghan and Harry confirmed that they were expecting a second child. Their first son, Archie, was born in 2019.

## Luxury car brand Jaguar to go all-electric by 2025

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Struggling luxury car brand Jaguar will be fully electric by 2025, the British company said Monday as it outlined a plan to phase out internal combustion engines.

Jaguar Land Rover, which is owned by Indian conglomerate Tata Motors, hopes the move will help turn around the fortunes of the 86-year-old Jaguar brand, which for many epitomizes class but has struggled in recent years.

The switch to an electric future will involve moving car production from JLR's Castle Bromwich factory east of the central England city of Birmingham to nearby Solihull.

Chief Executive Thierry Bollore said the firm is "exploring opportunities to repurpose" the Castle Bromwich plant, leading to speculation it could be used for battery production.

Jaguar Land Rover also said that the far more profitable Land Rover brand will produce its first all-electric model in 2024 as it, too, phases out internal combustion engines.

"We have all the ingredients at our disposal to reimagine the business and the experiences our customers seek, to reimagine to benchmark of luxury," Bollore said.

The move was welcomed by British Transport Secretary Grant Shapps as "a huge step for British car manufacturing."

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the British car industry's lobby group, said the announcement represents "an injection of confidence" into the sector, which has suffered over the past year during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Its roadmap to a future that is built around sustainability, with electrified and hydrogen models as well as investment in connected and digital technologies, aligns with government ambition and increasing consumer expectations," said the SMMT's chief executive, Mike Hawes.

However, he said the U.K. will need to improve its competitiveness in light of the "fierce" global competi-

tion going on in the shift to electric cars, not least from the likes of Tesla.

"Government must ensure advanced manufacturing has its full support, with a policy framework and plan for growth that reduces costs, accelerates domestic battery production and electrified supply chains, and incentivises R&D and skills development," he said.

## 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.

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.

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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 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

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university's faculty. The university did not respond to an email asking about Romanoff's employment. 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.



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

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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.

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.

Follow Klepper on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DavidKlepper>

Follow Amiri on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FarnoushAmiri>

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## Germany ekes some fun out of a quiet Carnival

DUESSELDORF, Germany (AP) — A few Carnival floats poking fun at the likes of Russian President Vladimir Putin, former U.S. President Donald Trump, German politicians and the fight against coronavirus made their way Monday through the largely empty streets of Duesseldorf, which would usually be the site of raucous celebrations.

Parades, street festivals and other large gatherings have all been cancelled this year.

But organizers in Duesseldorf, one of the German Rhineland's main Carnival strongholds, didn't want to let Rose Monday in 2021 go completely without the traditional caricatures of current events.

They sent eight floats through the city — separately, rather than in a parade, and on routes that were kept secret in advance to prevent crowds from gathering.

"It's a small signal that we're alive," float builder Jacques Tilly told the German news agency dpa.

This year's offerings included a depiction of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny kicking a much larger Putin, both dressed in judo outfits, and a caricature of Trump on a spit over a fire marked with the words "Make America Great Again!"

There was also a float showing the Earth trying to hold off a virus while a monster painted with the word "Climate" rears up behind it. Another depicted the brain flying out of the head of an activist against coronavirus restrictions.

Armin Laschet, the newly chosen leader of Chancellor Angela Merkel's party and a contender to succeed her after an election in September, was depicted as Merkel — a reference to the two politicians' perceived ideological closeness — with the words "Carry on Merkeling with Armin Laschet."

One of Germany's first superspreader events stemmed from a Carnival celebration in a town west of Cologne in February 2020, where many people came into contact with an infected man. This year authorities are taking no chances, with public consumption of alcohol banned in some places.

Germany has seen over 65,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths during the pandemic and just put restrictions on its borders with Austria and the Czech Republic to keep out the new virus variants circulating in those countries.

— 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>

## COVID-19 shots might be tweaked if variants get worse

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

The makers of COVID-19 vaccines are figuring out how to tweak their recipes against worrisome virus mutations — and regulators are looking to flu as a blueprint if and when the shots need an update.

"It's not really something you can sort of flip a switch, do overnight," cautioned Richard Webby, who directs a World Health Organization flu center from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

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Viruses mutate constantly and it takes just the right combination of particular mutations to escape vaccination. But studies are raising concern that first-generation COVID-19 vaccines don't work as well against a mutant that first emerged in South Africa as they do against other versions circulating around the world.

The good news: Many of the new COVID-19 vaccines are made with new, flexible technology that's easy to upgrade. What's harder: Deciding if the virus has mutated enough that it's time to modify vaccines — and what changes to make.

"When do you pull the trigger?" asked Norman Baylor, a former Food and Drug Administration vaccine chief. "This is a moving target right now."

## FLU OFFERS A MODEL

The WHO and FDA are looking to the global flu vaccine system in deciding how to handle similar decisions about COVID-19 shots.

Influenza mutates much faster than the coronavirus, and flu shots have to be adjusted just about every year. National centers around the globe collect circulating flu viruses and track how they're evolving. They send samples to WHO-designated labs for more sophisticated "antigenic" testing to determine vaccine strength. The WHO and regulators then agree on the year's vaccine recipe and manufacturers get to work.

For COVID-19 vaccines, Webby said a critical step is establishing a similar surveillance and testing network to flag the mutations that matter. Today, there's wide geographic variability in tracking and testing mutated versions. For example, Britain does more testing of the changing viral genome than the U.S.

Three variants first discovered in Britain, South Africa and Brazil are worrisome because of combinations of mutations that make them more contagious.

On Sunday, U.S. researchers reported a still different mutation found in seven variants that have cropped up in several states. No one yet knows if this mutation makes the virus easier to spread but the report, not yet vetted by other scientists, urges further research to find out.

## HOW COVID-19 SHOTS ARE HOLDING UP

Just because a variant is more contagious doesn't mean it also will be impervious to vaccination. But the variant first identified in South Africa is raising concerns. Columbia University's David Ho put blood samples from people given the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines into lab dishes with the mutated virus. Vaccine-produced antibodies still protected, but they were much less potent.

Preliminary test results of two other vaccine candidates — from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson — soon backed up those findings. Both still protected but were weaker when tested in South Africa, where that variant dominates, than when tested elsewhere. A far smaller test of the AstraZeneca vaccine in South Africa has raised questions about its effect.

"If the virus were able to make an additional mutation or two, it could escape even more," Ho warned.

## THE REAL RED FLAG

If fully immunized people start getting hospitalized with mutated virus, "that's when the line gets crossed," said Dr. Paul Offit, a Children's Hospital of Philadelphia vaccine expert who advises the FDA.

That hasn't happened yet, but "we should get ready," he added.

Moderna is about to explore one option: Could a third dose of the original vaccine boost immunity enough to fend off some variants even if it's not an exact match?

Columbia's Ho said it's a good idea to test because people may "still have plenty of cushion" if their overall antibody levels are very high.

## ADJUSTING THE RECIPES

Major manufacturers also are developing experimental variant vaccines, just in case.

COVID-19 vaccines produce antibodies that recognize the spike protein that coats the coronavirus. When the virus mutates, sometimes the spike protein is changed in key areas so the vaccine-produced antibodies have a harder time recognizing it.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are made with a piece of genetic code called messenger RNA that tells the body how to make some harmless copies of the spike protein that train immune cells. To update the vaccine, they can simply change the payload: swap out the original genetic code with mRNA for the

mutated spike protein.

The AstraZeneca vaccine and the Johnson & Johnson shot expected to roll out soon are made with cold viruses engineered to sneak a spike protein gene into the body. Adjusting their vaccines requires growing cold viruses with the mutated gene, a little more complex than the mRNA approach but not nearly as laborious as reformulating old-fashioned flu shots.

The Novavax vaccine also in final-stage testing is made with a lab-grown copy of the spike protein that also could be tweaked to match mutations.

## TESTING VACCINES 2.0

First-generation COVID-19 vaccines were tested in tens of thousands of people to be sure they work and are safe — research that took many months.

Simply changing the recipe to better target virus mutations won't require repeating those studies in thousands of people, Dr. Peter Marks, the FDA's vaccine chief, recently told the American Medical Association.

FDA still is finalizing requirements, but Marks said the agency intends to "be pretty nimble." If an updated vaccine is needed, tests in a few hundred people likely would be enough to tell if it triggers a good immune response, he said.

But an even bigger question: If only some places face vaccine-resistant virus mutants, would authorities want variant-only shots or vaccines that protect against two kinds in one jab? After all, flu vaccines protect against three or four different types in one shot.

Companies would first have to perform some basic research to be sure a variant-only version properly revs up the immune system, said the Immunization Action Coalition's John Grabenstein, a former Merck vaccine executive. Then a combination shot would need more testing to be sure there's an equal response to both types.

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## France fights hold of Islamist radicals with dragnets, laws

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — More than three dozen French 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 the school director.

"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 — which is forbidden in French public schools — and to pray during breaks. Unlike private Muslim schools in France, where headscarves are also allowed, MHS did not offer religion 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 for President Emmanuel Macron in a nation bloodied by terror attacks, including the beheading of a teacher outside his school in a Paris suburb 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.



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The legislation, expected to pass Tuesday's vote in the lower house of parliament, will also expand 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 fire hazard problems her school faced 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.

Dragnet raids like those unleashed against Loukili's school have been unearthing soft spots on a local level to nip Islamist 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, according to Interior Ministry figures. Since November 2019, 3,881 establishments have been inspected and 126 closed, mostly small businesses but also two schools.

One was an underground school with no windows or educational program, along with sports clubs that included preaching and obligatory prayer. 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, 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.

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 its large building. Loukili, its director and a math teacher, was ordered to close the school, stop teaching and 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.

"I was afraid ... we didn't understand," said Omar, a 17-year-old MHS student who was in class when the police arrived. "They were taking pictures" and some officers insulted the teenagers, he said.

Omar was among those who took part in a Paris protest Sunday against the draft law.

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 wears a headscarf, 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.

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."

Masha Macpherson in Paris contributed to this report.

## After shooting, unrest, Wyoming gets its first Black sheriff

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

LARAMIE, Wyo. (AP) — As a student at the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy, Aaron Appelhans used to look at the photos of past graduating classes hanging on the wall.

"I got to see, for the most part, ain't a whole lot of people that looked like me around here," he recalled of the mainly white faces.

A decade later, Appelhans was appointed Wyoming's first Black sheriff, a post he took months after fury over racist policing roiled U.S. cities. His turf includes one of Wyoming's last Democratic strongholds, but the state is overwhelmingly conservative and white and he's already faced a racist remark from a lawmaker.

It didn't surprise him. Wyoming has made progress but remains "very racist," said Stephen Latham, president of the state NAACP.

Like other parts of the country struggling with police violence, a deputy's fatal shooting of an unarmed, mentally ill man played a major role in Appelhans' appointment to Albany County sheriff. The death of 39-year-old Robbie Ramirez during a traffic stop two years ago stoked fierce backlash that carried over into last summer's protests over racial injustice and police brutality.

The group Albany County for Proper Policing formed after the shooting and pushed for Appelhans to take over when his predecessor, Dave O'Malley, retired.

"Let's take this anger and pain and turn it into progress in our community," said Democratic state Rep. Karlee Provenza, the group's executive director.

Appelhans, 39, grew up near Denver experiencing racism and had relatives in the criminal justice system. He understands both sides of the Black Lives Matter movement, he recently told The Associated Press.

"I am one of those people who do feel that law enforcement really needs to take a good, hard look at what we do," Appelhans said. "Are we serving our community?"

Formerly a University of Wyoming Police Department sergeant, Appelhans in December became the top law enforcement officer for a county more than three times the size of Rhode Island yet has just 650 African Americans out of 39,000 people.

The county seat is Laramie, home to the University of Wyoming and a liberal city still associated with the killing of gay college student Matthew Shepard in 1998. Ramirez's killing 20 years later drew less attention but fresh soul-searching.

A grand jury declined to indict sheriff's Deputy Derek Colling for shooting Ramirez. Colling, who grew up in Laramie and knew Ramirez from school, had killed two people as a Las Vegas police officer before being fired there.

A lawsuit accuses Colling of killing Ramirez needlessly. It alleges O'Malley, the former sheriff, overlooked Colling's "out-of-control temper" and hired him in part because his father was a friend.

Appelhans declined to speak about Colling or the shooting, citing department policy not to comment on pending litigation.

He's hopeful, though, that grant funding and working with local groups means fewer confrontations.

"We've got 'cops' as a nickname," Appelhans said. "We're not 'cops.' I'm listed, just like every other deputy here is listed, as a peace officer. We're here to keep the peace. And so that's really kind of one of the big changes I've wanted to have law enforcement focus on."

His work with the university force to try to reduce crimes like sexual assault was encouraging, said Provenza, the lawmaker who helped local Democrats vet sheriff applicants.

"There's a lot of opportunity for the sheriff's office to grow and kind of change and evolve into something this community will feel safer working with," Provenza said.

Appelhans' leadership training and experience as a detective and in crime prevention point to "likely success" as sheriff, University of Wyoming Police Chief Mike Samp said.

O'Malley, however, said Democrats didn't put forth anybody qualified for sheriff. Reached in Florida where he lives now, O'Malley said, "I think he's in way over his head, but, you know, that remains to be seen."

Because O'Malley was a Democrat, the Albany County Democratic Party recommended three sheriff

finalists to the county commission, but not O'Malley's top pick, an undersheriff.

O'Malley declined to comment on Ramirez's shooting or the lawsuit. Colling didn't return a message, and his attorney declined to comment.

Ramirez's relatives and attorneys didn't return messages seeking comment on Appelhans' appointment.

Appelhans said he wasn't sure he wanted to be sheriff because he will need to campaign next year to keep the job. The rare chance to run a law enforcement agency and make reforms changed his mind, he said.

In December, Republican state Rep. Cyrus Western responded to news of Appelhans' appointment by posting a clip online that showed a Black character from the movie "Blazing Saddles" asking, "Where the white women at?" In the film, a former slave serves as sheriff of an all-white town.

Western apologized publicly and in a call to Appelhans.

"It was one of the things I knew that would come with the territory of getting this job," Appelhans said. "I don't look like everybody else, I don't think like everybody else. Some people are going to have some problems with that, just based on the way I look. That's a problem in America."

Wyoming's capital and largest city, Cheyenne, got its first Black police chief, James "Jim" Byrd, in 1966. But considering people of color for top law enforcement jobs remains the exception rather than standard practice, said Latham with the Wyoming NAACP.

"You have to bring it to their minds and then they start thinking about it. But in this day and age, it shouldn't be something that's on the back burner," Latham said.

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## Late ice cramps anglers' appetite, research of crucial fish

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

BOWDOINHAM, Maine (AP) — A lack of ice in cold weather states this year has made it difficult for scientists to study the population of an ecologically important fish.

Rainbow smelts, which are small fish that are very popular with ice anglers, have been a focus of conservationists for many years. The federal government listed the fish as a species of special concern more than 15 years ago due to declines in its population.

In Maine, a late arriving winter has made it difficult to collect data about the health of the smelt population. The weather had been warmer than typical until early February, so there hadn't been enough ice to attempt to catch them.

Other states where ice fishing is a winter tradition, such as New Hampshire and Michigan, have had similar problems. The ice is hardening in many states now, but the season is likely to be shorter than typical.

"With the season starting so late we have not had many opportunities to sample the commercial and recreational catches this year," said Michael Brown, a fisheries scientist with the state of Maine.

The smelts are important because they are a key piece of the food chain in coastal areas, lakes and rivers. The cause of their population decline is the subject of ongoing scientific study. Loss of habitat and climate change have the biggest impact on smelt populations, Brown said. Over-fishing has also played a role, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and other authorities have reported.

Recreational anglers who seek smelts through the ice, such as at smelt camps that line Maine waterways in the winter, are fond of frying and eating them with the head still on. Others use the fish as bait.

The lack of ice has also been a blow for businesses that depend on winter fishing. On Lake Erie, ice fishing charter boat captain Tony Muscioni said thick ice finally arrived about three weeks ago, which was about four weeks later than normal. Muscioni, who owns Air1Airboats, which leads charters from Port Clinton, Ohio, said it was a continuance of a troubling trend from recent years.

"These last couple years were bad," said Muscioni, whose customers are mostly seeking walleye. "This year came in late — we didn't think we were going to get it, but we got it. You've just got to watch where you're going now."

Steve Leighton, owner of Leighton Smelt Camps in Bowdoinham, Maine, said he's looking at a difficult year financially as well.

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"Just going to try to pay for expenses right now, and I don't know if I can even do that," Leighton said. "If I get to the 27th, I'll be happy."

State wildlife departments have warned people to exercise precautions on the ice this year.

In Maine, the city of Bangor was more than 7 degrees Fahrenheit above normal in January, said Tom Hawley, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service.

Rivers in the state that would normally have 20 inches (51 centimeters) of ice, such as the Piscataquis and Meduxnekeag, have less than 10 inches this year, Hawley said. It adds up to a rough year for fishing, he said.

"On the lakes, they probably have enough ice to do it, but even there they don't have nearly as much as they normally would," Hawley said.

Commercial fishermen in America caught millions of pounds of rainbow smelts in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, but the catch collapsed in the 2000s.

Fishermen caught less than 50,000 pounds in 2018, the most recent year for which statistics are available, federal data state. Most of the commercial catch was located in Michigan, though Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Minnesota have also recorded catches in recent years.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 16, the 47th day of 2021. There are 318 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 16, 1959, Fidel Castro became premier of Cuba a month and a-half after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista.

On this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Fort Donelson in Tennessee ended as some 12,000 Confederate soldiers surrendered; Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's victory earned him the moniker "Unconditional Surrender Grant."

In 1868, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was organized in New York City.

In 1945, American troops landed on the island of Corregidor in the Philippines during World War II.

In 1948, N-B-C T-V began airing its first nightly newscast, "The Camel Newsreel Theatre," which consisted of Fox Movietone newsreels.

In 1960, the nuclear-powered radar picket submarine USS Triton departed New London, Conn., on the first submerged circumnavigation by a vessel.

In 1961, the United States launched the Explorer 9 satellite.

In 1968, the nation's first 911 emergency telephone system was inaugurated in Haleyville, Alabama, as the speaker of the Alabama House, Rankin Fite, placed a call from the mayor's office in City Hall to a red telephone at the police station (also located in City Hall) that was answered by U.S. Rep. Tom Bevill.

In 1996, eleven people were killed in a fiery collision between an Amtrak passenger train and a Maryland commuter train in Silver Spring, Md.

In 1998, a China Airlines Airbus A300 trying to land in fog near Taipei, Taiwan, crashed, killing all 196 people on board, plus seven on the ground.

In 2001, the United States and Britain staged air strikes against radar stations and air defense command centers in Iraq.

In 2006, Russia's Evgeni Plushenko beat world champion Stephane Lambiel of Switzerland by 27.12 points to win the gold medal in men's figure skating at the Winter Games in Turin, Italy.

In 2019, the Vatican announced that former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who served as archbishop of Washington, D.C., had been found guilty by the Vatican of sex abuse and had been defrocked; McCarrick was the highest-ranking churchman and the first cardinal to face that punishment as the church dealt with clerical sex abuse.

Ten years ago: Bookstore chain Borders filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and said it would



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close nearly a third of its stores. (Borders closed all of its remaining stores in Sept. 2011.) Huge crowds called for a political overhaul in Bahrain, and leaders appeared to shift tactics after attempts to crush the uprising stoked protesters' rage.

Five years ago: Former U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 93, died in Cairo. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's courtroom chair was draped in black to mark his death, a tradition dating to the 19th century. The Czech Museum of Music presented a cantata, "A Salute to the Recuperating Ophelia," a rare piece of music written in three parts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Antonio Salieri and an unknown composer, Cornetti, that was considered lost for more than 200 years. CJ the German shorthaired pointer won best in show at the Westminster Kennel Club.

One year ago: Hundreds of Americans from a quarantined cruise ship in Japan took charter flights home, as Japan announced that another 70 coronavirus infections had been confirmed on the ship. The Chinese province of Hubei, the epicenter of the virus, announced that vehicle traffic would be banned, with some exceptions. Anthony Davis made a game-ending free throw to give Team LeBron a 157-155 win over Team Giannis in the revamped NBA All-Star Game.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz/pop singer-actor Peggy King is 91. Actor William Katt is 70. Actor LeVar Burton is 64. Actor-rapper Ice-T is 63. Actor Lisa Loring is 63. International Tennis Hall of Famer John McEnroe is 62. Rock musician Andy Taylor is 60. Rock musician Dave Lombardo (Slayer) is 56. Actor Sarah Clarke is 50. Olympic gold medal runner Cathy Freeman is 48. Actor Mahershala Ali is 47. Singer Sam Salter is 46. Electronic dance music artist Bassnectar is 43. Rapper Lupe Fiasco is 39. Actor Chloe Wepper is 35. Pop-rock singer Ryan Follese (FAHL'-eh-say) (Hot Chelle (SHEL) Rae) is 34. Rock musician Danielle Haim (HYM) is 32. Actor Elizabeth Olsen is 32. Actor Mike Weinberg is 28.