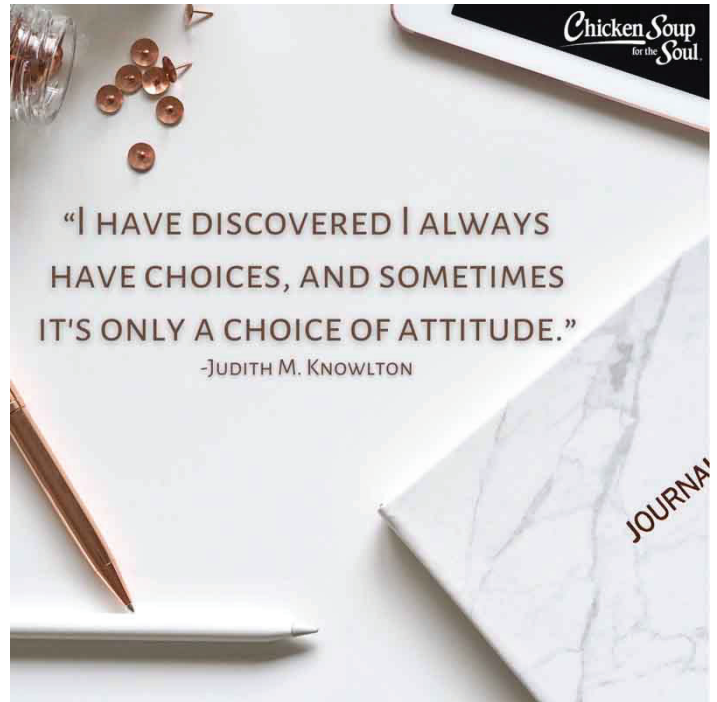


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From a Facebook Post by Desiree Yeigh

Congratulations to Braden Freeman for being accepted into the 2021 South Dakota High School All State Band! From my first year in Groton when you made MS All State Band as a 7th Grader-and now fast forward to your final year of HS! We are so proud of you!!



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Lady Tigers on a 4-game winning streak

Groton Area Lady Tigers are now on a four-game winning streak as they defeated Warner, 43-27. Groton Area held a 10-8 lead after the first quarter and a 26-13 lead at half time. Warner had a 12-point run in the third quarter, making six of 17 shots to close to within two points. Groton Area held a 31-27 lead at the end of the third quarter. Groton Area had a 14-point run that spanned the third and fourth quarters as Warner did not make a point in the fourth quarter.

Groton Area made seven of 19 two-pointers for 37 percent, eight of 23 three-pointers for 35 percent, five of seven free throws for 71 percent, had 33 rebounds, nine turnovers, 10 assists, two steals and 12 team fouls.

Alyssa Thaler led the Tigers with 14 points (making four three-pointers) and six rebounds. Gracie Traphagen had eight points, 10 rebounds, two assists and one steal. Brooke Gengerke had eight points, seven rebounds and one assist. Allyssa Locke had seven points, six rebounds, four assists and one steal. Kenzie McInerney had three points, two rebounds and one assist. Sydney Leight had three points and one rebound. Aspen Johnson had one rebound.

Warner was led by Kendyl Anderson, Summer Scepaniak and Ava Nilsson with six points apiece while Peyton Fisher had five and Lauren Marcus and Savannah Green each had two points.

The Monarchs made 11 of 51 shots for 21 percent, one of two free throws, had six turnovers and 13 team fouls.

Groton Area is now 10-9 on the season and will host Deuel in a double header on Friday.

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

Warner won the junior varsity game, 33-25. Kennedy Hansen and Jerica Locke each had six points, Sydney Leight had five, Faith Traphagen and Laila Roberts each had three and Jaedyn Penning added two. Locke Electric sponsored the game on GDILIVE.COM.

Groton Area won the C game, 33-27. Jerica Locke and Elizabeth Flihs each had six points, Faith Traphagen had five, Brooklyn Hansen and Kennedy Hansen each had three and Jaedyn Penning added two points. Grand Slam Computers sponsored this game on GDILIVE.COM.

- Paul Kosel

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Upcoming Schedule

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 (Bob & Genni Neisen of Mahnomon, Minn., grandparents of Emily Clark) 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 (Kent & Darcy Muller) 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 (Gordon & Dorene Nelson) 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

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#359 in a series ~ Covid-19 Updates: by Marie Miller

Well, it looks like our crazy-low numbers are holding. There were just 59,500 new cases reported today in the US. Until yesterday, we hadn't had a day below 60,000 in 111 days, and now we're on our second day under. The total is up to 27,797,400, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations continue to decrease; we're at 65,455, which is less than half the peak. And there have been 487,628 deaths in the US, 0.3% more than yesterday. Today, 1485 deaths were reported. Let's hope this is a trend.

We've been talking a lot about these variants. Andy Slavitt, White House Covid-19 senior adviser, told MSNBC that the next wave of infection is going to be B.1.1.7, the variant first reported from the UK. He said, "that's something that I think everybody has to be even more cautious about. It's nice to see the numbers of cases drop, but it could be misleading." That's the worry. Best we can do is get the numbers way down so that we're starting from a lower baseline. That's the thing we didn't do at summer's end, and we know where that put us this winter. And we know how to do it—if we just will. Precautions. A little more self-discipline. A bit more sacrifice for the good of the community. And getting vaccinated just as fast as we can.

We'd been getting estimates that the general public—people not in priority groups—would likely be able to receive their vaccinations in late April; but that time line has been revised. The original estimate was predicated on projections for the availability of Janssen/Johnson & Johnson doses that turned out to be overly optimistic. It now looks like there will be fewer than 10 million doses immediately available after emergency use authorization (EUA) is granted (if all goes well with that process). This pushes back the general availability of vaccination to mid-to-late May, soonest. They do expect to deliver 100 million doses by the end of June, and it should be remembered this is a one-dose vaccine, so every dose is a fully immunized person. Keep in mind that it was going to take into late summer or early fall to get a vaccine into all of those folks anyhow; but the later start on the problem is really disappointing.

On the good news end, the supply that ships to states is up to 13.5 million doses per week, according to Jeff Zients, White House Covid-19 coordinator. That's a 57 percent increase in the past four weeks—close to two million per day. And there is another two million per week going out to pharmacies, which puts the total doses available for administration well past two million per day. I hope we can get these into people. The doses themselves should be our only limiting factor at this point, not the administration. That said, we're having some weather-related delays which no one can help. We'll just have to work out of them as we can.

Here's something I do not recall reading about until now: potential eye damage done by the virus in severe cases. I couldn't access the paper here, so I am relying on a summary; but there is a newly published report of MRI studies in 129 patients in France showing nine of them with irregularities at the back of the eyeball, which interfere with vision, all but one in both eyes. These may be caused by damage to or blockage of blood vessels, bleeding, or nerve damage. Considering the widespread clotting seen in these patients, there is some thought that could be a player here; there is also apparently some disruption of a protective enzyme and consideration whether proning patients (placing them face down) while receiving mechanical ventilation might increase pressure in the eyeball, leading to damage. This is from a tiny study, but is a concern. It has been suggested that screening and follow-up for eye damage would make sense in very ill patients.

We are seeing a worrying—and striking—increase in the pediatric incidence of that severe manifestation of Covid-19, multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, or MIS-C. From time to time throughout this pandemic, we've been informed there'd been a spike in cases of Covid-19 among children, generally accompanied by the reassurance that children don't usually get very sick and that they tend to recover well. Seems like that may be shifting a bit. As overall case numbers soared, so did numbers in children relative to what we'd seen earlier in the pandemic and also a spike in severity. Rates have been increasing since the middle of October. To be clear, children are still a very low-risk group overall—this thing is exceedingly rare; but I doubt anyone will be cavalier about really sick kids.

Symptoms include rash, fever, and gastrointestinal problems and progress to heart dysfunction and ar-

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rhythmias. Some of these children have active Covid-19 infections; others appear to have recovered from infections. Previously healthy children and those with mild Covid-19 symptoms or no symptoms at all can develop MIS-C. The vast majority of cases have occurred in Black and Latino populations, but recent reports seem to indicate a growing distribution of cases among children of every ethnicity. As of two months ago (last date for which data are complete), we have seen 2060 cases of MIS-C in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. There have been 30 deaths. The age range is from infants to age 20 with a median age of 9. We're not clear yet on what long-term effects this may be having on those children who recover.

I also picked up an article today from the New York Times about teen-agers who've volunteered for pediatric vaccine trials. Those are underway with the Pfizer trial for ages 12 to 15 (the EUA covers children down to the age of 16) fully enrolled and expecting a read-out by the end of the quarter, at which point they hope to submit their data for FDA review. Moderna is still recruiting and expects data over the summer. There are other companies moving to adolescent trials as well. After that, we can expect trials down to age 5. These trials involve fewer participants than the phase 3 adult trials involve, typically a couple of thousand rather than 30,000. Because we already have a large data set on these authorized vaccines, more like two-thirds, rather than half, of participants will receive vaccine with the rest receiving placebo.

The application process is an interesting one. The child has to give "assent," which is legally a little different from "consent." The parent must also give consent. There are long information sessions aimed at the child and parents understanding exactly what they're getting into, and if either child or parent indicates an objection at any point along the way, then the application is terminated. A fair amount is expected of these teens: a detailed symptom diary, appointments involving a blood draw every couple of months, and of course, the possibility of side effects. But the kids who sign up are experiencing the opportunity to take some sort of control over a situation that has upended their lives, one that has been difficult and damaging for many of them. A 12-year-old told the reporter he wanted to participate "because it would be helping science and beat the pandemic." His 14-year-old sister said, "I thought this would be a really good story I could tell my children and grandchildren—that I tried to help create the vaccine." We're getting something right here.

I'm going to guess that you rarely put opera and Covid-19 in the same thought. Looks like that might need to change. There's an interesting effort underway by the English National Opera that involves collaboration with Imperial College Hospital in London called ENO Breathe. So people at places like the Royal Academy of Music in London or Garsington Opera in Oxford who usually train singers have turned their attention to folks in recovery from Covid-19. Turns out the same warm-up and breathing exercises that have long been used to help singers develop improved breath control have been clinically proven to assist in recovery for those whose lungs have been damaged by infection.

The program involves what the ENO website calls "self-management tools for patients experiencing breathlessness, and the anxiety that this can produce." The website explains there was a six-week trial in the fall which resulted in "participants reporting definite improvements in symptoms and wellbeing," indicating that ENO Breathe has had positive impacts for them both emotionally and physically. With that early success in their pocket, the goal is now to expand to 1000 patients across England.

The "lessons" are delivered by Zoom and include weekly group sessions teaching patients how to use singing as a way to focus on breathing. They start with lullabies because pretty much everyone knows them and they have a tendency to calm people. The idea is to equip patients with exercises they can practice on their own, even as they have access to additional online resources to support their progress. So those who've recovered from acute-stage Covid-19, but still have lingering effects like chest pain and breathlessness can sign up for this specialized training and breathing exercises. The concept includes physical and emotional support. Patients need a physician referral, and the program, supported by donations, is free.

The Chair of the English National Opera's statement on the web site says, "Medicine and the Arts have come to understand that they have more in common than they knew. ENO Breathe, this astonishing project . . . , is the unprecedented interface of the 'Art of Medicine' and the 'Science of the Arts.'" I am amazed. There was some creative thinking applied here.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
▲						
Aurora	452	430	847	15	Minimal	14.29%
Beadle	2664	2560	5677	39	Substantial	12.43%
Bennett	380	364	1152	9	Minimal	2.38%
Bon Homme	1502	1473	2019	25	Minimal	6.25%
Brookings	3542	3399	11483	35	Substantial	3.49%
Brown	5070	4880	12328	83	Substantial	6.53%
Brule	685	669	1828	9	Minimal	17.86%
Buffalo	420	406	886	13	Minimal	0.00%
Butte	967	933	3133	20	Moderate	3.03%
Campbell	129	123	249	4	Minimal	25.00%
Charles Mix	1257	1196	3816	18	Substantial	13.21%
Clark	361	341	926	4	Substantial	6.12%
Clay	1774	1742	5053	15	Moderate	3.55%
Codington	3889	3669	9410	76	Substantial	13.83%
Corson	462	447	992	12	Minimal	13.33%
Custer	739	715	2633	12	Moderate	10.94%
Davison	2926	2831	6324	60	Moderate	4.69%
Day	647	589	1711	28	Substantial	20.00%
Deuel	469	450	1096	8	Moderate	16.13%
Dewey	1395	1367	3734	22	Minimal	2.44%
Douglas	420	406	886	9	Minimal	2.86%
Edmunds	477	447	1009	12	Moderate	5.26%
Fall River	517	493	2532	15	Moderate	4.44%
Faulk	353	326	678	13	Moderate	0.00%
Grant	948	880	2149	37	Substantial	16.67%
Gregory	525	478	1214	27	Substantial	6.38%
Haakon	246	232	519	9	Minimal	14.29%
Hamlin	685	624	1715	38	Moderate	8.82%
Hand	326	313	779	6	Minimal	3.85%
Hanson	351	335	691	4	Moderate	18.42%
Harding	91	90	179	1	Minimal	0.00%
Hughes	2254	2166	6348	34	Substantial	4.84%
Hutchinson	779	732	2270	24	Moderate	9.09%

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Hyde	136	133	397	1	Minimal	0.00%
Jackson	275	254	903	14	Minimal	15.38%
Jerauld	268	249	545	16	Minimal	0.00%
Jones	83	81	213	0	Minimal	0.00%
Kingsbury	624	593	1591	14	Moderate	9.72%
Lake	1166	1124	3174	17	Moderate	7.94%
Lawrence	2792	2708	8309	44	Moderate	6.80%
Lincoln	7609	7402	19640	76	Substantial	5.24%
Lyman	598	577	1839	10	Minimal	8.82%
Marshall	295	283	1140	5	Moderate	2.78%
McCook	732	696	1574	24	Moderate	6.98%
McPherson	237	230	541	4	Minimal	0.00%
Meade	2535	2451	7428	31	Moderate	10.41%
Mellette	241	238	713	2	Minimal	0.00%
Miner	269	251	556	9	None	0.00%
Minnehaha	27575	26728	75550	325	Substantial	5.01%
Moody	608	585	1711	16	Minimal	7.69%
Oglala Lakota	2046	1968	6529	47	Minimal	2.16%
Pennington	12653	12241	38062	184	Substantial	8.18%
Perkins	342	319	778	13	Minimal	12.90%
Potter	363	346	811	3	Moderate	13.33%
Roberts	1134	1078	4011	35	Substantial	4.81%
Sanborn	327	319	664	3	Minimal	0.00%
Spink	792	747	2073	25	Substantial	7.37%
Stanley	325	318	899	2	Minimal	3.70%
Sully	136	131	295	3	Minimal	6.25%
Todd	1218	1178	4059	28	Moderate	9.80%
Tripp	680	644	1443	15	Moderate	18.42%
Turner	1053	986	2634	51	Moderate	8.33%
Union	1949	1860	6051	39	Substantial	9.04%
Walworth	717	686	1785	15	Moderate	14.29%
Yankton	2778	2710	9076	28	Moderate	1.75%
Ziebach	335	325	849	9	None	0.00%
Unassigned	0	0	1809	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	4387	0
10-19 years	12404	0
20-29 years	19762	4
30-39 years	18173	16
40-49 years	15775	34
50-59 years	15581	108
60-69 years	12656	243
70-79 years	6769	419
80+ years	5086	1020

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57671	869
Male	52922	975

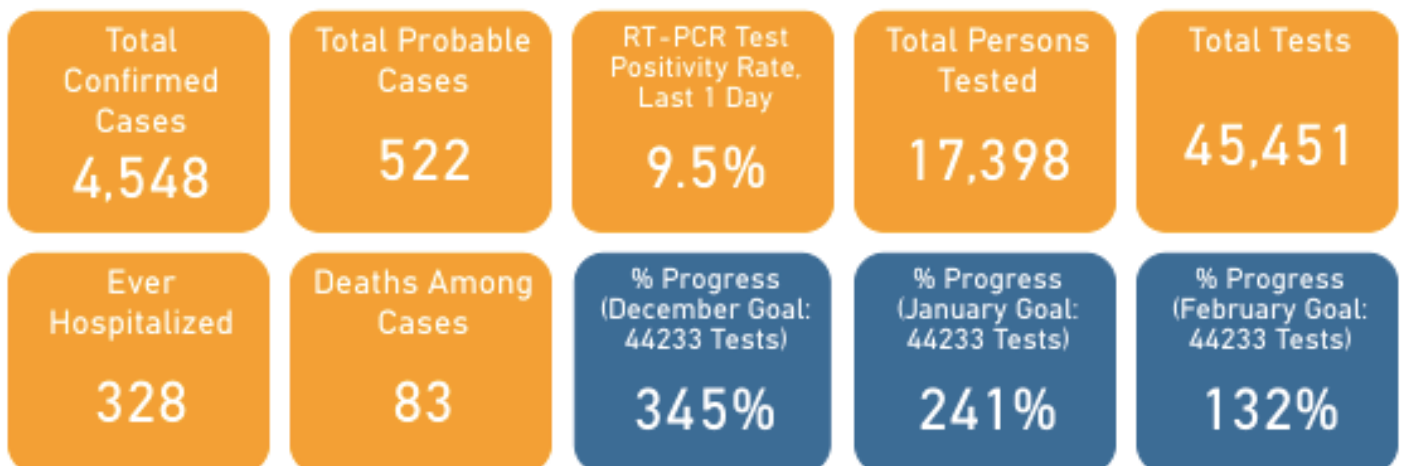
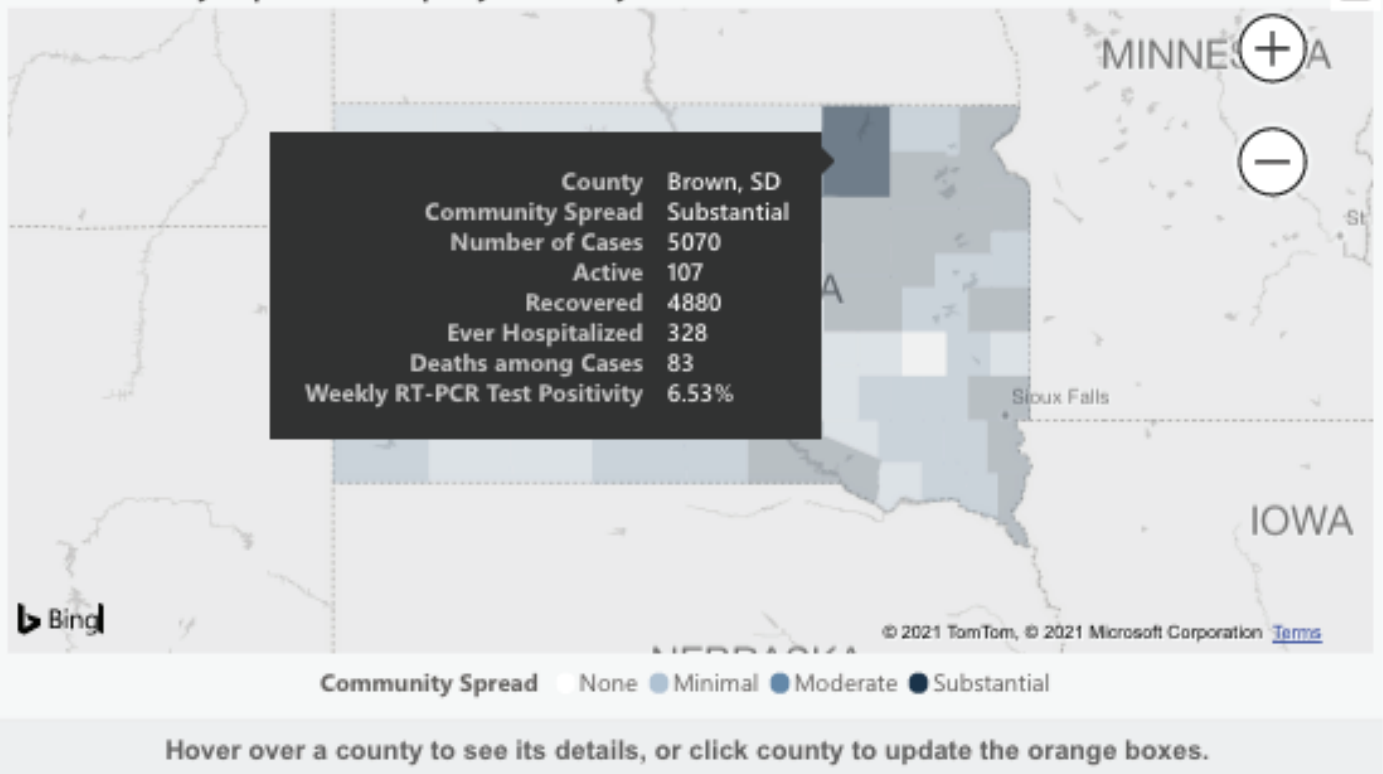
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Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



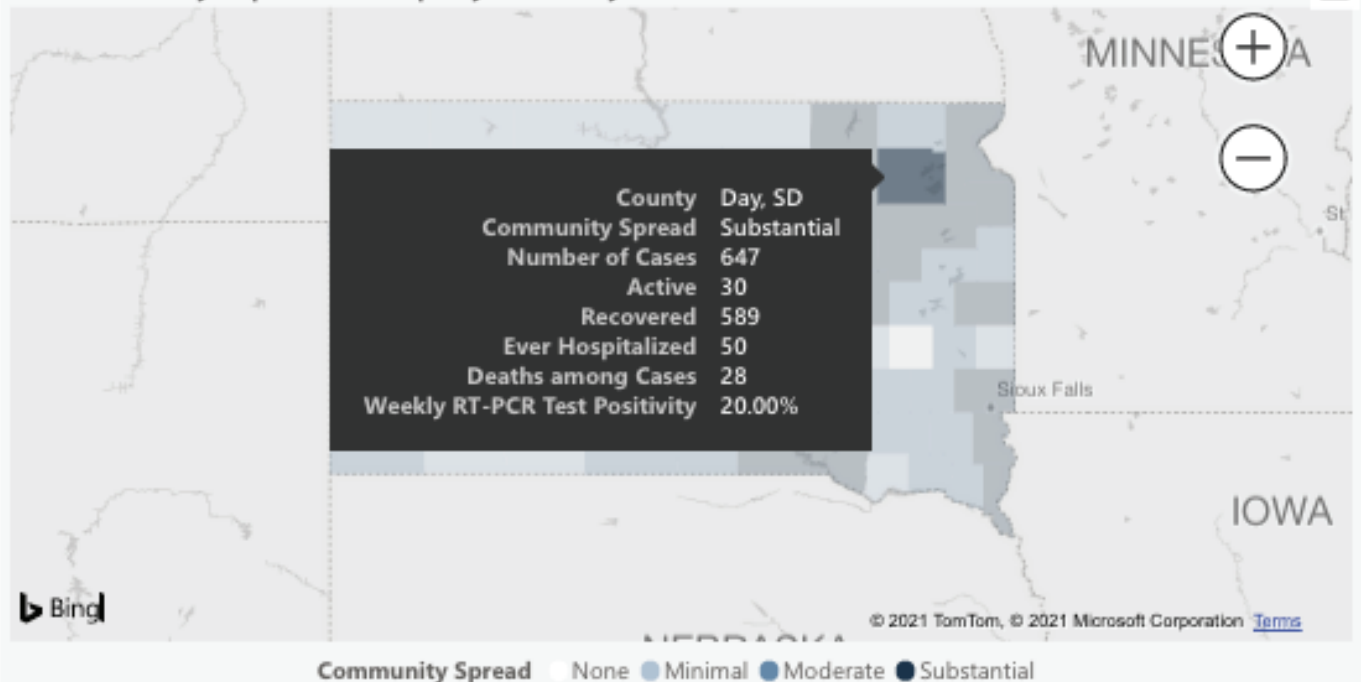
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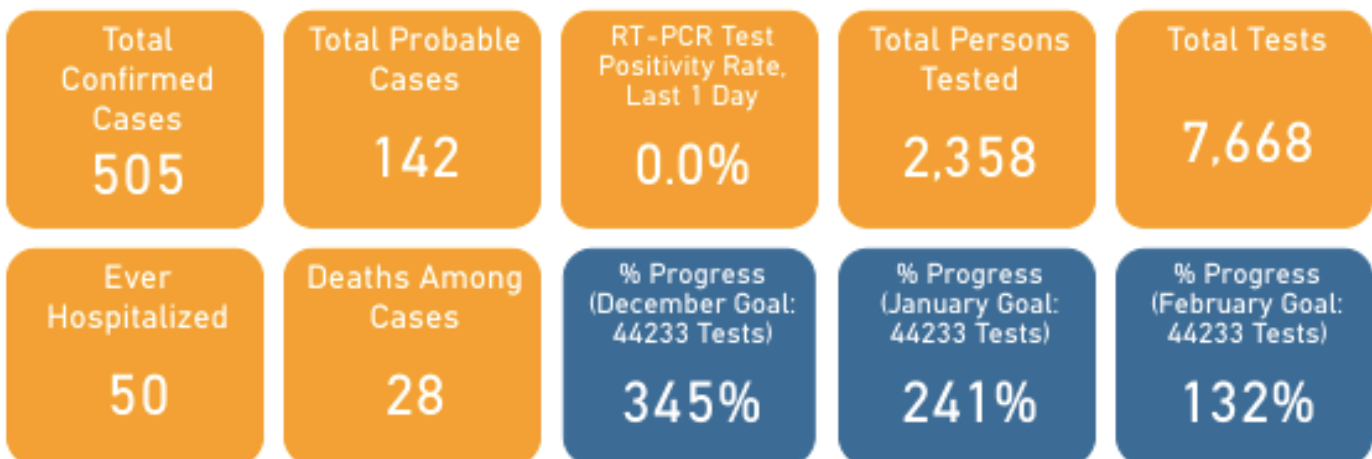
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

155,260

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

104,915

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

15%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	82,257
Pfizer	73,003

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	28,215
Moderna - Series Complete	27,021
Pfizer - 1 dose	26,355
Pfizer - Series Complete	23,324

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	15.21%
Series Complete	7.30%

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	2960	1,262	849	2,111
Bennett*	238	120	59	179
Bon Homme*	1669	779	445	1,224
Brookings	4223	1,549	1,337	2,886
Brown	7423	2,519	2,452	4,971
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	578	264	157	421
Clay	2393	905	744	1,649
Codington*	4782	1,944	1,419	3,363
Corson*	119	85	17	102
Custer*	1260	572	344	916
Davison	4080	1,316	1,382	2,698
Day*	1155	509	323	832
Deuel	645	311	167	478
Dewey*	252	66	93	159
Douglas*	629	195	217	412
Edmunds	607	263	172	435
Fall River*	1259	537	361	898
Faulk	538	184	177	361
Grant*	1193	363	415	778
Gregory*	806	338	234	572
Haakon*	287	117	85	202

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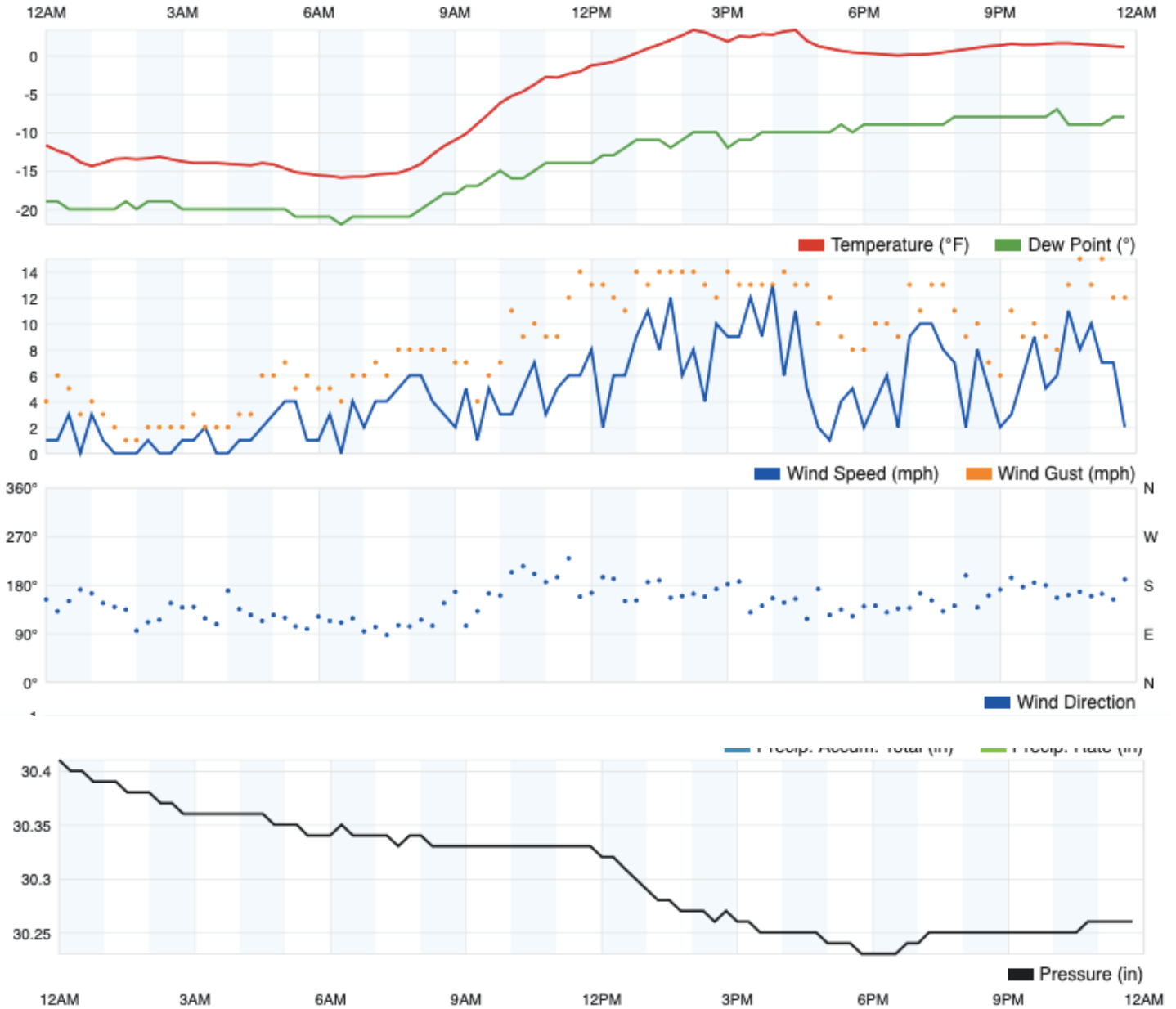
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Hamlin	814	370	222	592
Hand	669	259	205	464
Hanson	227	95	66	161
Harding	28	22	3	25
Hughes*	3961	1,911	1,025	2,936
Hutchinson*	1664	504	580	1,084
Hyde*	300	102	99	201
Jackson*	196	104	46	150
Jerauld	312	170	71	241
Jones*	320	140	90	230
Kingsbury	1061	437	312	749
Lake	1731	671	530	1,201
Lawrence	3290	1,746	772	2,518
Lincoln	14148	3,900	5,124	9,024
Lyman*	337	205	66	271
Marshall*	811	355	228	583
McCook	1130	398	366	764
McPherson	101	53	24	77
Meade*	2806	1,160	823	1,983
Mellette*	20	8	6	14
Miner	440	182	129	311
Minnehaha	41083	13,065	14,009	27,074
Moody*	809	301	254	555
Oglala Lakota*	84	42	21	63
Pennington*	18422	5,528	6,447	11,975
Perkins*	258	132	63	195
Potter	392	154	119	273
Roberts*	2136	966	585	1,551
Sanborn	440	242	99	341
Spink	1478	462	508	970
Stanley*	580	286	147	433
Sully	164	110	27	137
Todd*	82	30	26	56
Tripp*	985	443	271	714
Turner	1766	582	592	1,174
Union	1198	574	312	886
Walworth*	921	427	247	674
Yankton	5176	1,484	1,846	3,330
Ziebach*	38	12	13	25
Other	3505	727	1,389	2,116

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
Snow Likely then Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 9 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 16 °F	Low: -5 °F	High: 21 °F



Today 8 to 18°
Morning Light Snow East.
Coldest Wind Chills 15-20 below.

Tonight -8 to 2°
Partly to Mostly Cloudy.
Coldest Wind Chills 10-15 below.

Thursday 13 to 24°
Partly to Mostly Cloudy.
Warmer!

A Look Ahead...
The gradual warming trend continues through the end of the week into the upcoming weekend. Temps above freezing beginning Saturday. Even warmer early next week.

Visit www.weather.gov/abr for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 2/17/2021 5:15 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Some light snow will continue to move across portions of northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota through the morning hours. Only very light accumulations of a half inch or less are expected. Otherwise, we'll see mostly cloudy skies through the day. High temperatures will be a bit warmer today but still chilly for this time of year. Partly to mostly cloudy skies are anticipated tonight as most areas fall back into the single digits either side of the zero mark. Perhaps a few more sunny breaks will be possible Thursday as daytime readings reach the teens and 20s.

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Today in Weather History

February 17, 1962: Very heavy snow of 20 to 30 inches fell across the southeastern half of South Dakota. One location had 44 inches of snowfall from the storm. Everything was shut-down due to the storm, including roads, schools, and businesses. Some snowfall amounts included, 10 inches at Bryant, 11 inches at Miller, 20 inches at Mitchell, 21 inches at Redfield, 23 inches at Huron, and 32 inches at Sioux Falls.

February 17, 1972: In Minnesota, high winds of 30 to 50 mph across southern and central Minnesota reduced visibilities to zero at times from blowing snow. Wind gusts of 90 mph were reported at Worthington and Fairmont. Snow of 2 to 6 inches fell across the state. The blizzard stopped almost all traffic from west-central through the south-central part of the state. Most schools in the area closed. Dozens to hundreds of people were stranded in nearly every town. Many communities stopped all traffic from leaving town. The snow derailed a train at Butterfield. There were many auto accidents. In South Dakota, freezing rain followed by snow accompanied by winds of over 60 mph produced hazardous driving conditions in the area. Traffic was brought to a standstill in many areas resulting in cancellations of school and other activities. Some accidents occurred due to the icy roads. Although the snowfall was light, strong winds caused drifting with visibilities to near zero at times.

February 17, 1991: On February 17th, a significant snowstorm dumped massive amounts of snow on most of the state from the Black Hills, southwest, central, east-central, and the northeast. At the end of the storm, parts of the black hills received up to 2 feet of snow while the rest of the affected area had between 8 and 15 inches. The heavy snow caused most of Interstate 90 west of the Missouri River to close, as well as many other highways in the central part of the state. Many cars and trucks skidded off the roads, causing many minor injuries. The only serious injury was a man rolled his vehicle over after losing control near Belvidere.

1926: A deadly avalanche, Utah's worst, demolishes 14 miner's cottages and a three-story boarding house in Bingham Canyon. Thirty-six are killed and 13 injured.

1958: From the 14th through the 17th, one of the most significant snowstorms of the mid 20th century struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced 30 inches of snow in the interior of New England, including more than 19 inches in 24 hours at the Boston Airport. The same storm produced up to three feet of snow in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, with 14 inches at Washington D.C., and 15.5 inches in Baltimore, Maryland. The storm resulted in 43 deaths and 500 million dollars damage over the Middle Atlantic Coast States.

1973: Snow showers moved across southeast Texas, with most locations only reporting snow flurries. However, the Houston Intercontinental Airport measured 1.4 inches of snow.

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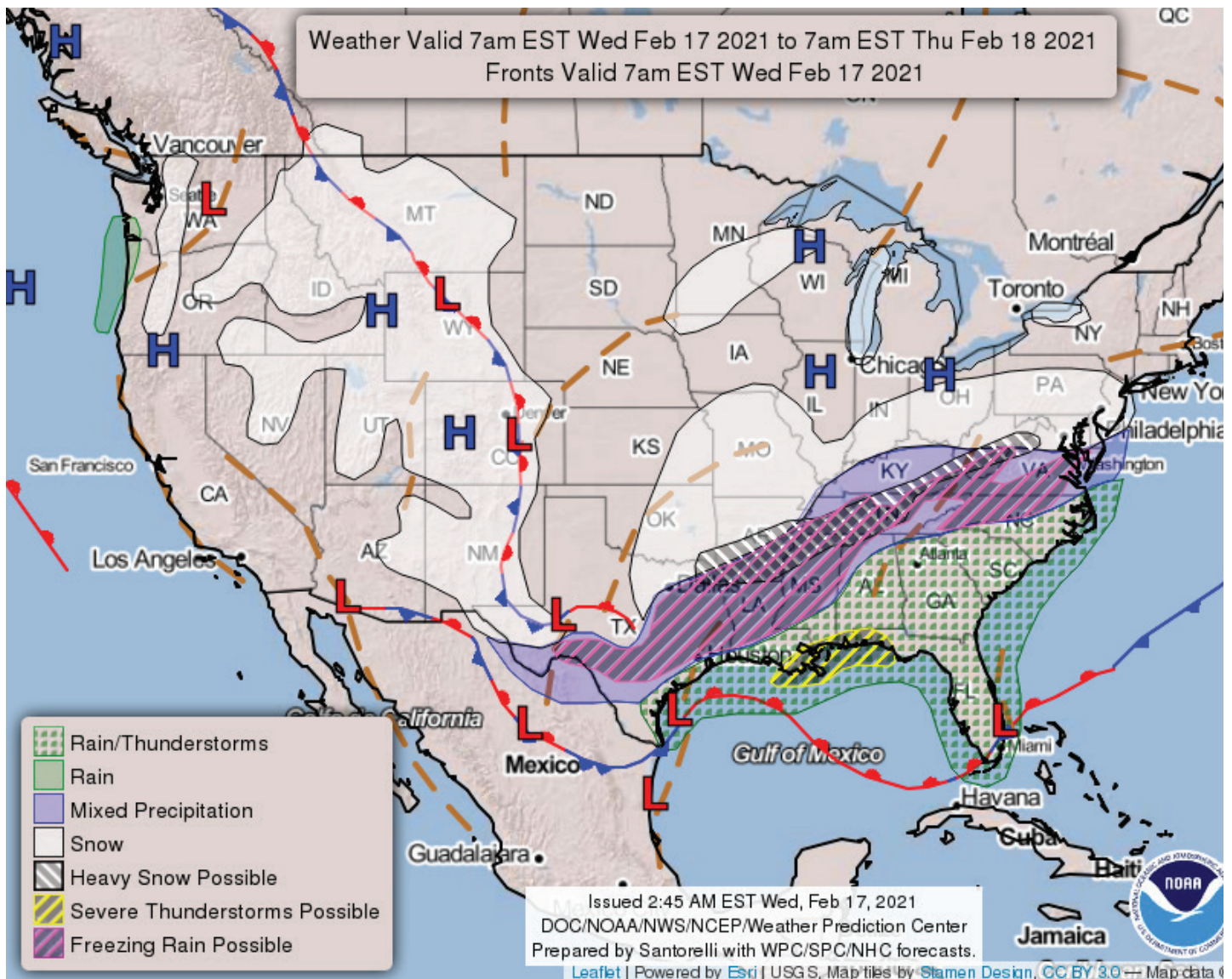
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 3 °F at 2:15 PM
Low Temp: -16 °F at 6:31 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 1:34 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 58° in 1930
Record Low: -39° in 1903
Average High: 29°F
Average Low: 8°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.27
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.77
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 6:04 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:30 a.m.



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SEARCHING FOR GOD

"The heavens proclaim the glory of God!" Do they, really? When the writer looks into the heavens does he really believe that He can actually see God? Does he see an outline of God in a constellation? Are there stars shining somewhere that actually point to God's eternal residence?

No. This psalm, more than any other, reflects the beauty, splendor, power, and handiwork of God. He is speaking of the revelation of God in the world of nature. His belief in God as Creator is not an argument against the theory of evolution. For him, Creation reveals the Lord's royal majesty, sovereignty, power, and design. He simply declares God's existence and presence and wants to praise Him in worship and wonder.

We see God's glory each morning when we are awakened by a majestic sunrise that erupts from the darkness of the night. We see His handiwork each time we look into the face of a rose, watch a bird in flight or see and hear the crashing of waves. All of God's creation clearly and convincingly announces the greatness and glory of God.

This Psalm reveals a God who communicates to us through the majesty of His creation. The fact that He speaks openly to us through the work of His hands is a gracious expression of His love and His desire for us to know Him, to honor Him, and to worship Him. Although sin has attempted to hide His glory, it is still with us and cannot be denied!

Prayer: How great You are, O Lord, our Creator, our Redeemer, our source of hope and eternal life. We thank You for Your salvation and for making Yourself known. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Psalm 19:1

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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)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

01-36-44-54-66, Mega Ball: 10, Megaplier: 3

(one, thirty-six, forty-four, fifty-four, sixty-six; Mega Ball: ten; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$96 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$66 million

Tuesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 51, Langford 42

Brandon Valley 53, Harrisburg 38

Bridgewater-Emery 64, Irene-Wakonda 39

Brookings 37, Huron 36

Chester 52, Arlington 50

Clark/Willow Lake 52, Britton-Hecla 31

Corsica/Stickney 70, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 56

Dakota Valley 100, Sioux City, West, Iowa 60

DeSmet 72, Lake Preston 43

Dell Rapids 55, Sisseton 51

Deubrook 61, Webster 59

Ethan 67, Freeman 23

Faith 71, Lemmon 51

Faulkton 69, Miller 65

Flandreau 55, Baltic 41

Freeman Academy/Marion 72, Alcester-Hudson 49

Garretson 69, Parker 53

Hamlin 50, Deuel 47

Ipswich 56, Hitchcock-Tulare 39

Lennox 49, Beresford 48

Leola/Frederick 80, Iroquois 33

Lyman 50, Chamberlain 49

Mobridge-Pollock 52, Stanley County 48

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 81, Bon Homme 35

New England, N.D. 77, Harding County 46

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 78, Estelline/Hendricks 67

Parkston 65, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 42

Rapid City Christian 67, Lead-Deadwood 34

Redfield 70, Northwestern 40

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 60, Mitchell 42

Sioux Falls Washington 73, Tea Area 61

Sioux Valley 65, Castlewood 50

St. Thomas More 66, Hot Springs 22

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Tri-State, N.D. 64, Wilmot 36
Tri-Valley 65, McCook Central/Montrose 57
Vermillion 73, Wagner 35
Viborg-Hurley 66, Menno 25
Warner 43, Waverly-South Shore 40
Watertown 60, Aberdeen Central 52
Wessington Springs 68, Kimball/White Lake 44
West Central 73, Canton 42
Winner 72, Platte-Geddes 65, 2OT
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Aberdeen Christian 59, Langford 24
Arlington 68, Chester 40
Bridgewater-Emery 63, Irene-Wakonda 37
Castlewood 60, Sioux Valley 43
Centerville 53, Dell Rapids St. Mary 45
Clark/Willow Lake 53, Britton-Hecla 18
Corsica/Stickney 53, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 43
Deubrook 55, Webster 41
Ethan 68, Freeman 31
Faith 45, Philip 44
Faulkton 57, Miller 27
Flandreau 61, Baltic 33
Garretson 66, Parker 37
Groton Area 43, Warner 27
Hamlin 58, Deuel 21
Harrisburg 54, Sioux Falls Lincoln 38
Herreid/Selby Area 54, Potter County 33
Hill City 63, Custer 30
Hot Springs 43, Edgemont 40
Huron 53, Brookings 44
Ipswich 49, Highmore-Harrold 45
Kadoka Area 69, Stanley County 28
Kimball/White Lake 41, Wessington Springs 29
Lennox 52, Beresford 42
Milbank 56, Madison 52, OT
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 68, Bon Homme 37
New Underwood 39, Newell 30
Parkston 57, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 46
Pierre 58, Lakota Tech 48
Rapid City Christian 68, Lead-Deadwood 33
Rapid City Stevens 85, Spearfish 45
Redfield 58, Northwestern 25
Sioux Falls Christian 53, Yankton 28
Sioux Falls Washington 69, Tea Area 43
St. Thomas More 61, Douglas 19
Sully Buttes 69, Sunshine Bible Academy 17
Vermillion 58, Wagner 45
Viborg-Hurley 67, Menno 55
Waubay/Summit 90, Tiospa Zina Tribal 42
West Central 68, Canton 42

White River 67, Jones County 54
Winner 72, Platte-Geddes 28
Wolsey-Wessington 59, Mitchell Christian 27

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

GOP lawmakers try to increase scrutiny on ballot initiatives

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers on Tuesday advanced a pair of proposals aimed at increasing scrutiny on voter-backed ballot initiatives like a recently-passed constitutional amendment that would have legalized marijuana, but was struck down by a circuit court.

Republican legislators argued that a series of proposals would test the initiatives before they make it on the ballot and help make sure that voter-passed laws are not gutted. They pointed to the legal battle over the constitutional amendment legalizing marijuana in which the state was, in essence, suing itself as an example of how messy such measures can become.

In a state that became the first in the nation to allow citizens to propose and vote on laws, the process in recent years has often resulted in lawsuits and tussles between voters and legislators.

"It needs to be done in a healthy way to restore confidence in the system," said Republican Rep. Will Mortensen, who is pushing a bill to require the secretary of state to determine whether a proposed constitutional amendment adheres to the requirement that it addresses a single subject before it goes on the ballot.

But after years of voters wrestling with the Legislature over ballot-passed laws, advocates for ballot initiatives say the proposals threaten the rights of voters to directly shape their government.

"This is a systematic attack by the Republican party to stifle direct democracy in South Dakota," said Sen. Reynold Nesiba, a Sioux Falls Democrat whose involvement with state politics started with a ballot initiative.

He worried that the proposed laws would erode the ballot initiative process, continuing to make it more difficult for voters to directly get their say on laws that are usually shaped by the Republican-dominated Legislature.

The House passed a resolution Tuesday to put a new constitutional amendment to voters that would require ballot initiatives raising taxes or requiring more than \$10 million in state funds in a year to get 60% of the vote before becoming law.

Meanwhile, the Senate has passed bills that include: Requiring comment periods before the attorney general writes an explanation of initiatives that appear on ballots, scrutinizing whether constitutional amendments address a single subject, and requiring petitions to put initiatives on the ballot be printed in 14-point font.

Senate Pro Tem Lee Schoenbeck, a Watertown Republican, described his proposal to require the secretary of state to scrutinize constitutional amendment proposals as "designed to make it way, way fairer on the people that are going to spend the money" in election campaigns.

He said that legal battles that ensue after constitutional amendments are passed would go directly to the Supreme Court. That would help lawmakers avoid the situation they are in this year, in which they are left watching the lawsuit challenging the amendment legalizing marijuana proceed through the court system. If the state Supreme Court overturns a lower court's ruling striking the amendment down, possession of small amounts of marijuana would be legalized on July 1.

Schoenbeck said that efforts to reform the process would help protect the state from becoming the "playground" of groups from outside the state trying to spend money to pass laws in a small media market.

But De Knudson, who perennially launches democratic reform efforts like allowing open voting in primaries and preventing legislative district boundaries from being redrawn for political gain, said that rather than putting further restrictions on the process, the Legislature should be making it easier for citizens like her to get laws passed.

"There are many areas that if the South Dakota Legislature is not comfortable or courageous enough to tackle some of its serious problems, voters should do it," she said.

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.

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

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 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."

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

To contact AP's investigative team, email investigative@ap.org. Follow the reporters @jhdearen @men-

dozamartha @julietlinderman

Police: Rapid City woman, 82, likely targeted in killing

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Police say an 82-year-old Rapid City woman who was found dead in her house was likely killed by someone who targeted her, but they did not provide details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Police spokesman Brendyn Medina said authorities have reason to believe the suspect had a “specific interest” in victimizing Reta McGovern, who was found in her home last Wednesday with a laceration to her throat.

“We are still at a point where we must be purposefully vague about the details of the investigation/case so far,” Medina told the Rapid City Journal. “We are working a variety of different leads in the case, however, we are not in position to be able to go into detail about what we know about the suspect and motive.”

Police are still searching for a suspect. Authorities are asking neighbors to review surveillance footage for anyone who may have been on foot in the area between 7 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Feb. 10.

After delay, Israel allows vaccines into Hamas-run Gaza

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Palestinian Authority sent the first shipment of coronavirus vaccines to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip on Wednesday, two days after accusing Israel of preventing it from dispatching the doses amid objections from some Israeli lawmakers.

Palestinian Health Minister Mai Alkaila said in a statement that the PA sent 2,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. An Associated Press photographer in Gaza saw the shipment arrive midday at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

An Israeli defense official said that authorities approved the delivery, adding that it’s “not in Israel’s interest to have a Gaza health crisis.” The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Gaza is home to more than 2 million Palestinians, many of whom live in close confines. It has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas, an Islamic militant group, seized power from PA forces in 2007. Gaza’s Health Ministry has reported more than 53,000 cases and at least 538 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Israeli lawmakers had debated whether to allow the delivery of vaccines into Gaza. Some had argued that the delivery should be linked to progress on the release of two Israeli captives held by Hamas and the remains of two Israeli soldiers killed in a 2014 war with Palestinian militants. They have also expressed concern that vaccines would go to Hamas members rather than medics.

Russia’s vaccine, which is given in two doses, was initially met with skepticism because it had not undergone the rigorous testing of other vaccines, but a recent study indicates it is safe and effective. Still, the first batch will only allow authorities to vaccinate 1,000 people, and a wider vaccination campaign could take several months.

The Palestinian Authority said the first doses would go to front-line medical workers. But Ashraf al-Qedra, spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry, said they would be administered in two phases, first to vulnerable patients and then to medics.

“The amount is very small and not enough to cover all 12,000 medical workers,” he said. “We think it’s better to first inoculate vulnerable patients, such as organ transplant and dialysis patients.”

Israel has launched one of the world’s most successful vaccination programs, inoculating more than a third of its population of 9.3 million since December.

Rights groups say it has an obligation as an occupying power to share its vaccines with the Palestinians. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state.

Israel denies having such an obligation and says its priority is its own citizens. The Palestinian Authority has not publicly requested vaccines from Israel and says it has secured its own supply through the World

Health Organization and agreements with drug makers.

Still, Israel provided 2,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine to the PA earlier this month, allowing it to begin vaccinating medical workers, and the PA says it independently acquired 10,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine. The PA administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and coordinates with Israel on security and other matters.

Hamas is believed to be holding two captives, an Israeli of Ethiopian descent who entered Gaza shortly after the 2014 war and an Arab Bedouin citizen of Israel. In exchange, Hamas is likely to demand the release of a large number of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, including individuals implicated in deadly attacks.

Associated Press writers Joseph Krauss and Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

Executioners sanitized accounts of deaths in federal cases

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Executioners who put 13 inmates to death in the last months of the Trump administration likened the process of dying by lethal injection to falling asleep and called gurneys “beds” and final breaths “snores.”

But those tranquil accounts are at odds with reports by The Associated Press and other media witnesses of how prisoners’ stomachs rolled, shook and shuddered as the pentobarbital took effect inside the U.S. penitentiary death chamber in Terre Haute, Indiana. The AP witnessed every execution.

The sworn accounts by executioners, which government filings cited as evidence the lethal injections were going smoothly, raise questions about whether officials misled courts to ensure the executions scheduled from July to mid-January were done before death penalty opponent Joe Biden became president.

Secrecy surrounded all aspects of the executions. Courts relied on those carrying them out to volunteer information about glitches. None of the executioners mentioned any.

Questions about whether inmates’ midsections trembled as media witnesses described were a focus of litigation throughout the run of executions. Inmates’ lawyers argued it proved pentobarbital caused flash pulmonary edema, in which fluid rushes through quickly disintegrating membranes into lungs and airways, causing pain akin to being suffocated or drowned. The Constitution prohibits execution methods that are “cruel and unusual.”

The discrepancies could increase pressure on Biden to declare his administration won’t execute any of the roughly 50 federal inmates still on death row. Activists want him to go further by backing a bill abolishing the federal death penalty. Biden hasn’t spoken about any specific action.

During the Sept. 22 execution of William LeCroy, convicted of killing Georgia nurse Joann Lee Tiesler in 2001, the 50-year-old’s stomach area heaved uncontrollably immediately after the pentobarbital injection. It lasted about a minute, according to the AP and other reports.

Executioner Eric Williams stood next to LeCroy as he died. But Williams made only cursory reference to “the rise and fall” of LeCroy’s abdomen in his account. Shortly after serving in five of the recent executions, Williams was named the interim warden of the high-profile New York City lockup where Jeffrey Epstein died in 2019.

“During the entirety of the execution, LeCroy did not appear to be in any sort of distress, discomfort, or pain,” Williams wrote. “A short time after he took a deep breath and snored, it appeared to me that LeCroy was in a deep, comfortable sleep.”

The distinctive jerking and jolting was visible in at least half the executions, according to the AP and other media accounts. Among multiple executioner accounts, none described any such movements. All employed the same sleep metaphors.

When Donald Trump’s Justice Department announced in 2019 it’d resume executions after a 17-year hiatus, it said it would use pentobarbital alone. Manufacturers were no longer willing to supply the combination of drugs used in three federal executions from 2001 to 2003, explaining they didn’t want drugs meant to save lives to be used for killing.

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One point of contention during the litigation was whether, even if pulmonary edema did occur, inmates could feel it after they appeared to be knocked out. Experts for the prisoners said the drug paralyzes the body, masking the pain prisoners could feel as they died.

None of those executed appeared to writhe in pain. But audio from the death chamber to the media viewing room was switched off just prior to the injections, so journalists couldn't hear if inmates groaned or complained of pain.

William Breeden, a spiritual adviser in the chamber when 52-year-old Corey Johnson was executed on Jan. 14 after his 1992 conviction of killing seven people, said in a filing the next day that "Corey said his hands and mouth were burning" after the injection. Federal Bureau of Prisons attorney Rick Winter said in response that neither he nor anyone in a government witness room heard that.

Some pain doesn't necessarily mean an execution method violates prohibitions against "cruel and unusual" punishment, the Supreme Court ruled in 2019. The Constitution, the 5-4 majority opinion said, "does not guarantee a prisoner a painless death — something that, of course, isn't guaranteed to many people."

Government lawyers, eager to carry on and avoid any potential delays, sought to discredit the journalists' accounts.

In an Oct. 8 filing, government expert Kendall Von Crowns, who didn't witness the executions, relied on executioners' descriptions to suggest journalists misperceived what they saw. He noted that LeCroy's executioner "does not state that there was any irregular or uncontrolled heaving." It was more likely, he said, that journalists saw "hyperventilation due to the anxiety associated with his impending death."

In an evidentiary hearing in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 18 — when eight executions had yet to be carried out — government attorneys objected when inmates' lawyers asked Crowns about media reports of midsection movements in three of the first five executions.

After Judge Tanya Chutkan overruled them, Crowns suggested what reporters saw was called agonal breathing — involuntary intakes of air in the final moments before death.

"It has nothing to do with they're drowning in their own fluids or they can't breathe," Crowns testified. He added: "It has no relevance to pulmonary edema whatsoever."

All the journalist reports said the movements happened within minutes of injections, never in the minutes before an inmate was pronounced dead.

What media witnesses described was consistent with pulmonary edema, an expert for inmates' legal teams, Gail Van Norman, argued in a filing after LeCroy's execution. She said that as fluid blocks airways, it throws the chest, diaphragm and abdomen off their usual rhythm, "giving the appearance of the chest and abdomen rocking opposite of one another, or a heaving abdomen."

Authorities also provided no public access to medical records on when inmates' brainwaves or hearts stopped, which could have helped determine whether they were conscious when the distinctive motions occurred.

Chutkan was asked to revisit and rule on the issue repeatedly. At one hearing, she expressed exasperation with the pace of the executions, saying the unrelenting push by government attorneys accorded her little time to digest a deluge of filings on often complex scientific issues.

"I am drinking from a firehose here," she said.

But in a key Sept. 20 decision, Chutkan cited the conflicting witness accounts, dueling experts and the Supreme Court's 2019 ruling in ruling against the inmates — several of whom were scheduled to die, and would die, within days.

"While the court continues to be concerned at the possibility that inmates will suffer excruciating pain during their executions," she said, inmates' attorneys "have not established that flash pulmonary edema is 'certain' or even 'likely' to occur before an inmate is rendered insensate."

Associated Press writer Michael Tarm has witnessed 10 executions since July.

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The Latest: Nadal loses to Tsitsipas in 5 at Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — The Latest on Day 10 of the Australian Open (all times local):
11:55 p.m.

Rafael Nadal's bid for a men's-record 21st Grand Slam title has ended with a five-set loss to Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

It is only the second time in Nadal's career he has lost a Grand Slam match after taking the opening two sets.

He went ahead rather easily against Tsitsipas to run his streak of consecutive sets won at major tournaments to 35.

But a surprisingly poor tiebreaker by Nadal helped give the third set to Tsitsipas and begin the epic comeback.

Now the 22-year-old from Greece will try to reach his first major final by beating Daniil Medvedev on Friday.

11 p.m.

Rafael Nadal's bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title is in trouble.

He has been pushed to a fifth set by Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

Nadal took the first two sets fairly easily to run his streak of consecutive sets won at major tournaments to 35.

But Nadal made some mistakes in a third-set tiebreaker and dropped it.

Tsitsipas then took the fourth set, too.

Nadal only once has lost a Grand Slam match after taking the first two sets.

That happened at the 2015 U.S. Open against Fabio Fognini.

10 p.m.

Rafael Nadal's Grand Slam set streak has ended at 35 after he dropped one against Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

Nadal took the first two sets of their match 6-3, 6-2, giving him 14 in a row at Melbourne Park, on top of the 21 straight he claimed while winning the championship at the French Open in October.

But Tsitsipas grabbed the third set in a tiebreaker with the help of some uncharacteristic mistakes by Nadal.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion flubbed two overheads in the tiebreaker and also framed a backhand. Nadal pushed another backhand long on the last point of that set.

That leaves Nadal one short of Roger Federer's professional era record of 36 sets in a row at major tournaments

7 p.m.

Fans will be allowed back at the Australian Open after a five-day lockdown in Melbourne.

Australia's second-largest city will relax its third lockdown at midnight Wednesday after authorities contained the spread of a COVID-19 cluster centered on hotel quarantine.

Tournament director Craig Tiley said the crowd will be capped at 7,477 — half the capacity of Rod Laver Arena — for each of the last four days of the tournament.

Crowds of up to 30,000 a day were allowed into Melbourne Park for the first five days of the tournament. Those were the first sizable crowds in 12 months at a major. The U.S. Open didn't allow spectators because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the French Open restricted numbers to fewer than 1,000. Wimbledon was canceled.

Tiley said, "We look forward to welcoming fans back ... for the next four days and to finishing the event safely and on a high."

He described the atmosphere as "electric" in the first five days and "the players appreciated the opportunity to compete in front of crowds for the first time in almost a year, and many spoke about how emotional it was to connect with fans again."

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Both women's semifinals and the first of the men's semifinals will be held Thursday. The women's singles final is scheduled for Saturday and the men's singles final on Sunday.

5:45 p.m.

Daniil Medvedev will take a 19-match winning streak into the Australian Open semifinals after beating fellow Russian Andrey Rublev 7-5, 6-3, 6-2.

The pair were teammates when Russia won the ATP Cup team event on the eve of the Australian Open. They were on opposite sides of the net on Wednesday, and Medvedev was dominant.

The No. 4-seeded Medvedev hasn't dropped a set to No. 7-seeded Rublev in four tour-level matches. That includes their meeting in the U.S. Open quarterfinals last year.

He called for the trainer after the match to massage his upper legs as he sat in a court-side chair before a TV interview.

"First time. I think I never saw it also," he said in the on-court interview. "I went to the bench, last game of the match. I started cramping. I knew he was cramping also. At the end, I locked completely ... three last points when I was getting ready for the serve."

Medvedev is into the semifinals of a major for the third time. He will next play either 20-time major winner Rafael Nadal or No. 5-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas.

There's two Russian men in the semifinals. No. 114-ranked Aslan Karatsev will play top-ranked Novak Djokovic for a spot in the final.

4 p.m.

Last year's Australian Open champion, Sofia Kenin, says she had her appendix removed this week.

The 22-year-old American posted on Twitter on Wednesday that she went to see the tournament doctor this week with "acute abdominal pain."

She wrote that the doctor sent her to a hospital, where she was diagnosed with acute appendicitis after a medical scan and had surgery on Monday.

Kenin lost to Kaia Kanepi in straight sets in the second round of her title defense at the Australian Open last week.

Kenin then dropped her opening match at a lower-level WTA event held at the same site in Melbourne against Australian teenager Olivia Gadecki on Saturday.

3:15 p.m.

Jennifer Brady has reached her second Grand Slam semifinal in a row by beating fellow American and good friend Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-2, 6-1 at the Australian Open.

Brady's opponent Thursday will be Karolina Muchova. The No. 25 seed rallied past No. 1 Ash Barty 1-6, 6-3, 6-2. The United States will have a semifinalist in the women's draw at Melbourne for the 11th year in a row.

The No. 22-seeded Brady struggled at times and gave her racket an angry toss midway through the second set. The unseeded Pegula, who advanced beyond the third round at a major for the first time, appeared to tire down the stretch.

Brady is a former UCLA star. She reached her first major semifinal at the U.S. Open in September.

1:20 p.m.

Top-ranked Ash Barty has been upset by No. 25-seeded Karolina Muchova in the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, 1-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Muchova earned her first semifinal berth in a Grand Slam, and her comeback win ended Barty's bid to become the first Australian woman to win the title in Melbourne since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

Early in the second set, Muchova took an injury timeout that lasted nearly 10 minutes. She said her head was spinning, and medical personnel took her pulse and temperature before she left the court. When she

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returned, she played much better.

Muchova's opponent Thursday will be the winner of the last quarterfinal, an all-American matchup between No. 22-seeded Jennifer Brady and unseeded Jessica Pegula.

11:20 a.m.

Play is underway as the quarterfinals resume at the Australian Open, with the first match pitting top-seeded Ash Barty against No. 25 Karolina Muchova.

They'll be followed by an all-American matchup between Jennifer Brady and unseeded Jessica Pegula.

Then come the last two men's quarterfinals. Andrey Rublev faces fellow Russian Daniil Medvedev, and in the night session, Rafael Nadal plays Stefanos Tsitsipas. Nadal is trying to reach a Grand Slam semifinal for the 35th time.

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

100 million Americans brace for more cold, ice and snow

Associated Press undefined

The winter weather that has overwhelmed power grids unprepared for climate change and left millions without electricity in record-breaking cold kept its grip on the nation's midsection Wednesday.

At least 20 people have died, some while struggling to find warmth inside their homes. In the Houston area, one family succumbed to carbon monoxide from car exhaust in their garage; another perished after flames spread from their fireplace.

Blame the polar vortex, a weather pattern that usually keeps to the arctic, but is increasingly visiting lower latitudes and staying beyond its welcome. Scientists say global warming caused by humans is partly responsible for making its southward escapes longer and more frequent.

More than 100 million people live in areas covered Wednesday by some type of winter weather warning, watch or advisory, as yet another winter storm hits Texas and parts of the Southern Plains, the National Weather Service said.

Utilities from Minnesota to Texas and Mississippi have implemented rolling blackouts to ease the burden on power grids straining to meet extreme demand for heat and electricity as record low temperatures were reported in city after city.

Nearly 3 million customers remained without power early Wednesday in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, more than 200,000 more in four Appalachian states, and nearly that many in the Pacific Northwest, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility outage reports.

The latest storm front was predicted to bring snow and ice to east Texas, Arkansas and the Lower Mississippi Valley before moving to the northeast on Thursday. Winter storm watches were in effect from Baltimore to Boston, and Texas braced for more icy rain and possibly more snow.

"There's really no letup to some of the misery people are feeling across that area," said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service.

The weather has threatened to affect the nation's COVID-19 vaccination effort. President Joe Biden's administration said delays in vaccine shipments and deliveries were likely.

After visiting Milwaukee on Tuesday, Biden said the weather was as "cold as the devil up there."

The worst U.S. power outages by far have been in Texas, where officials requested 60 generators from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and planned to prioritize hospitals and nursing homes. The state opened 35 shelters to more than 1,000 occupants, the agency said.

Texas' power grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, said Wednesday morning that electricity had been restored to 600,000 homes and businesses by Tuesday night but that 2.7 million households were still without power.

Blackouts lasting more than an hour had begun before dawn Tuesday in and around Oklahoma City, stopping electric-powered space heaters, furnaces and lights just as temperatures hovered around minus

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8 degrees (minus 22 degrees Celsius). Oklahoma Gas & Electric urged users to set thermostats at 68 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius), avoid using major electric appliances and turn off lights or appliances not in use.

Entergy imposed rolling blackouts Tuesday night in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Southeast Texas at the direction of its grid manager, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, "as a last resort and in order to prevent more extensive, prolonged power outages that could severely affect the reliability of the power grid," according to a statement from the New Orleans-based utility.

The Southwest Power Pool, a group of utilities covering 14 states, said the blackouts were "a last resort to preserve the reliability of the electric system as a whole."

Travel remains ill-advised in much of the nation, with roadways treacherous and thousands of flights canceled. Some of the fatalities involve people dying in their cars in subfreezing temperatures. Many school systems have delayed or canceled face-to-face classes.

But even staying home can be hazardous in places without power.

Authorities said a fire that killed three young children and their grandmother in the Houston area likely spread from the fireplace they were using to keep warm. In Oregon, authorities confirmed on Tuesday that four people died in the Portland area of carbon monoxide poisoning.

At least 13 children were treated for carbon monoxide poisoning at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth and one parent died of the toxic fumes, hospital officials said.

In Texas, at least, temperatures are expected to rise above freezing by the weekend.

"There is some hope on the horizon," Oravec said.

Associated Press staff around the United States contributed to this report.

EU OKs contract for 300 million more Moderna vaccine doses

By FRANK JORDANS and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The EU commission has approved new contract for 300 million additional doses of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine.

The second contract with Moderna provides for an additional purchase of 150 million in 2021 and an option to purchase an additional 150 million in 2022 on behalf of all 27 EU member states. The deal also provides for the possibility of donating the vaccine to lower and middle-income countries if the EU has enough supplies.

"With a portfolio of up to 2.6 billion doses, we will be able to provide vaccines not just to our citizens, but to our neighbors and partners as well," the EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

BERLIN (AP) — Amid signs that more infectious coronavirus variants are spreading unchecked across Europe, countries across the continent are struggling to speed up vaccine efforts, hampered by limited supplies and creeping skepticism about one of the available shots.

Germany's health minister said Wednesday that the virus variant first detected in Britain last year now accounts for more than a fifth of all positive tests in his country. The variant has increased from 6% of the cases to more than 22% in just two weeks.

"That means, as we've seen in other countries as well, the share of infections with this virus variant roughly doubles each week," Health Minister Jens Spahn told reporters in Berlin. "We have to assume that the variant could soon become the dominant one here too."

In Slovakia, which has seen the highest rate of virus deaths per population in the world, authorities said the variant first identified in Britain was found in 74% of its positive samples in a test.

Scientists say the U.K. variant appears to spread more easily and is likely more deadly, but so far the existing vaccines appear to be effective against it. A variant first detected in South Africa and now also found in relatively few cases in Europe, however, has shown signs of being able to evade the immune response generated by AstraZeneca vaccine, adding to fears that some Europeans have expressed about

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that shot.

The vaccine rollout in Germany and the EU as a whole has been slower than in Britain and the United States, but Chancellor Angela Merkel has pledged that everybody who wants to get the shot will be offered one by the end of the summer.

By Tuesday, about 2.9 million people had received their first shot in Germany and some 1.5 million — almost 2% of the population — had received a second dose.

Still, authorities in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, expressed concern that some people appeared less willing to the AstraZeneca vaccine than those made by Moderna or Pfizer.

"The authorized AstraZeneca vaccine isn't a second-class vaccine," the state's health ministry said in a statement. "The vaccine shows a good effectiveness and is well tolerated."

Reticence toward the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is only given to those under 65 in Germany, has been reinforced by reports that some people have complained about fevers and headaches afterward. Officials say such reactions are normal after vaccinations, show that the body's immune system is responding and the symptoms should disappear after a day or two.

Spahn, the health minister, said if people didn't want to get the AstraZeneca shots, he and others would gladly take it.

"If people who are offered it don't take it, then we will offer it to the next person," he said. "We'll have 10 million doses of vaccine by the end of the week, for 80 million citizens. We're still in a period of shortage."

Authorities in Berlin opened the capital's fifth coronavirus vaccination center, located inside an indoor cycling arena, on Wednesday. The vast Velodrom venue, which was built as part of Berlin's failed bid for the 2000 Olympics, started with just 120 vaccinations but officials hope to increase that number to up to 2,200 per day.

Berlin needs to vaccinate more than 200,000 people every week to ensure everybody is immunized by the end of the summer, a target the city's top health official, Dilek Kalayci, said can only be achieved if the supply of vaccine shots increases significantly so doctors' practices can also begin administering shots.

Pfizer and German partner BioNTech said Wednesday they have finalized an agreement to supply the European Union with another 200 million doses of their COVID-19 vaccine.

The two companies said those doses — expected to be delivered this year, an estimated 75 million of them in the second quarter — come on top of the 300 million vaccine doses the bloc initially ordered. The EU's executive Commission has an option to request a further 100 million doses.

Delays to planned deliveries of all three currently authorized vaccines have helped fuel dissatisfaction among European governments.

Last month, Pfizer said it was temporarily reducing deliveries to Europe and Canada while it upgraded production capacity at its plant in Belgium. The EU also had a public spat with AstraZeneca over getting fewer of its vaccine shots than anticipated. AstraZeneca's chief blamed the lag on new factories needing to work out vaccine production issues.

"We are working relentlessly to support the further roll-out of vaccination campaigns in Europe and worldwide by expanding manufacturing capacity," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said Wednesday.

BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin noted that his company will initiate production at its new plant in Marburg, Germany, this month and has strengthened its manufacturing network with further partners.

"We are continuing to evaluate, together with governments, authorities and partners at all levels, how we might address an even higher future supply requirement for our vaccines," he said.

On Tuesday, the European Medicines Agency said it had received a request from Johnson & Johnson for its coronavirus vaccine to be authorized. The EU medicine regulator said it could issue an opinion by mid-March. The J&J vaccine is given in one shot, while the three other vaccines required two shots spaced weeks apart.

At Berlin's Velodrom, Ilse und Dieter Krueger expressed relief at finally getting their shot. The couple, who have been married for more than 60 years, were waiting in a large recovery room after being among the first to receive the Moderna shot.

"We can't complain," sagte Dieter Krueger. "Things are looking up."

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 bill would scale up ability to spot virus mutations

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. scientists would gain vastly expanded capabilities to identify potentially deadlier coronavirus mutations under legislation advancing in Congress. A House bill headed for floor debate would provide \$1.75 billion for genomic sequencing.

The U.S. now maps only the genetic makeup of a minuscule fraction of positive virus samples, a situation some experts liken to flying blind. It means the true domestic spread of problematic mutations first identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa remains a matter of guesswork.

Such ignorance could prove costly. One worry is that more transmissible forms such as the UK variant could move faster than the nation's ability to get the vaccine into Americans' arms.

"You've got a small number of academic and public health labs that have been basically doing the genomic surveillance," said David O'Connor, an AIDS researcher at the University of Wisconsin. "But there is no national coherence to the strategy."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is trying to shepherd those efforts, aligning with the government's own advanced detection work, but the COVID-19 legislation would take the hunt to another level.

Besides money, the House bill that cleared the Energy and Commerce Committee last week calls for the CDC to organize a national network to use the technology to track the spread of mutations and guide public health countermeasures.

In the Senate, Wisconsin Democrat Tammy Baldwin has introduced legislation that would provide \$2 billion. Baldwin says the U.S. should be using gene-mapping technology to analyze at least 15% of positive virus samples. That might not sound like much, but the current rate is believed to be 0.3% to 0.5%. Analyzing 15% of positive samples would expand surveillance by at least 30 times.

"Variants represent a growing threat," said Baldwin. "At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing our testing capacity was essential to our ability to track and slow the spread of the virus — the same is true for finding and tracking these variants."

Genomic sequencing essentially involves mapping the DNA of an organism, the key to its unique features. It's done by high-tech machines that can cost from several hundred thousand dollars to \$1 million or more. Technicians trained to run the machines and computing capacity to support the whole process add to costs.

In the case of the UK variant first detected in England, the changes in the virus allowed it to spread more easily and are also believed to cause deadlier COVID-19 disease. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle reports that transmission of the UK variant has been confirmed in at least 10 U.S. states. CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told governors on Tuesday that it could become dominant by the end of March.

Sequencing 0.3% to 0.5% of virus samples, as the U.S. is now doing, "just doesn't give us the ability to detect strains as they develop and become dominant," said Dr. Phil Febbo, chief medical officer for Illumina, a San Diego-based company that develops genomic sequencing technologies.

The Biden administration has to "set a very clear goal," he added. "What's the hill that we are going to charge?"

"We need that data. Otherwise, in some ways, we're flying blind," said Esther Krofah, who directs the FasterCures initiative of Milken Institute. "We don't understand the prevalence of mutations that we should be worried about in the U.S."

Even more worrisome than the UK variant is a strain first detected in South Africa that scientists suspect may diminish the protective effect of some of the coronavirus vaccines. That variant has also been identi-

fied in the U.S. in a limited number of cases.

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients has called U.S. tracking of virus mutations “totally unacceptable,” saying the nation ranks 43rd in the world. But the Biden administration has not set a target for what level of virus gene mapping the country should be striving for.

At the University of Wisconsin, AIDS scientist O’Connor said he and his colleagues started sequencing coronavirus samples from the Madison area “because that’s where we live.”

His colleague, virology expert Thomas Friedrich, said a national effort will require more than money to purchase new genomic sequencing machines. The CDC will have to set standards for state health officials and academic research institutions to fully share the information they glean from analyzing virus samples. Currently, there’s a hodgepodge of state regulations and practices, and some of them restrict access to key details.

“We need to look at this as a Manhattan Project or an Apollo program,” said Friedrich, invoking the government-led scientific endeavors that developed the atomic bomb and landed men on the moon.

The United Kingdom was able to identify its variant because the national health system there has a coordinated gene mapping program that aims to sequence about 10% of samples, he added. Since that happened, there’s been greater urgency about genetic sequencing on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

“The utility of doing this may not have been as apparent to as many people until these variants started popping up,” Friedrich said.

Japan starts COVID-19 vaccinations with eye on Olympics

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan launched its coronavirus vaccination campaign Wednesday, months after other major economies started giving shots and amid questions about whether the drive would reach enough people quickly enough to save a Summer Olympics already delayed by the pandemic.

Despite a recent rise in infections, Japan has largely dodged the kind of cataclysm that has battered other wealthy countries’ economies, social networks and health care systems. But the fate of the Olympics, and the billions of dollars at stake, makes Japan’s vaccine campaign crucial. Japanese officials are also well aware that rival China, which has had success beating back the virus, will host the Winter Olympics next year, heightening the desire to make the Tokyo Games happen.

Hanging over the rollout of the vaccines — which will go first to medical workers, then the elderly and vulnerable, and then, possibly in late spring or early summer, the rest of the population — are worries about shortages of the imported vaccines Japan relies on, and a long-time reluctance among many Japanese to take vaccines because of fears of rare side effects.

While medical workers say vaccinations will help protect them and their families, and business leaders hope the drive will allow economic activity to return to normal, the late rollout will make it impossible to reach so-called herd immunity before the Olympics begin in July, experts say.

That will leave officials struggling to quell widespread wariness — and even outright opposition — among citizens to hosting the Games. About 80% of those polled in recent media surveys support cancellation or further postponement of the Olympics.

Despite that, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and others in his government are forging ahead with Olympic plans, billing the Games as “proof of human victory against the pandemic.”

Japan has not seen the massive outbreaks that have buffeted the United States and many European countries, but a spike in cases in December and January raised concerns and led to a partial state of emergency that includes requests for restaurants and bars to close early. Suga has seen his support plunge to below 40% from around 70% when he took office in September, with many people saying he was too slow to impose restrictions and they were too lax.

The country is now seeing an average of about 1 infection per 100,000 people — compared with 24.5 in the United States or 18 in the United Kingdom. Overall, Japan has recorded about 420,000 cases and 7,000 deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

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In a room full of journalists Wednesday, Dr. Kazuhiro Araki, president of Tokyo Medical Center, rolled up his sleeve and got a shot, one of the first Japanese to do so.

"It didn't hurt at all, and I'm feeling very relieved," he told reporters while he was being monitored for any allergic reaction. "We now have better protection, and I hope we feel more at ease as we provide medical treatment."

About 40,000 doctors and nurses considered vulnerable to the virus because they treat COVID-19 patients are in the first group slated to be vaccinated using shots from U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany-based BioNTech — after the vaccine was authorized Sunday by Japan's regulator. It requires two doses, though some protection begins after the first shot.

Japan's late authorization of the vaccine means it lags behind many other countries. Britain started inoculations on Dec. 8 and has given at least one shot to more than 15 million people, while the United States began its campaign on Dec. 14 and about 40 million people have received shots. Vaccines were rolled out in many European Union countries in late December, and the campaigns there have come under criticism for being slower.

Japan fell behind other places because it asked Pfizer to conduct clinical trials with Japanese people, in addition to tests already conducted in six other nations. Japanese officials said this was necessary to address worries in a country with low vaccine confidence.

"I think it is more important for the Japanese government to show the Japanese people that we have done everything possible to prove the efficacy and safety of the vaccine to encourage the Japanese people to take the vaccine," Japan's vaccine minister, Taro Kono, said. "So at the end of the day we might have started slower, but we think it will be more effective."

Japan's mistrust of vaccines is decades old. Many people have a vague unease about vaccines, partly because their side effects have often been played up by media here.

Half of the recipients of the first shots will keep daily records of their condition for seven weeks; that data will be used in a health study meant to inform people worried about the side effects. Studies on tens of thousands of people of the Pfizer vaccine — and others being administered currently in other countries — have found no serious side effects.

"We would like to make efforts so that the people can be vaccinated with a peace of mind," Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told reporters.

The development of a Japanese COVID-19 vaccine is still in the early stages, so the country, like many others, must rely on imported shots — raising concerns about supply issues seen in other places as producers struggle to keep up with demand. Suga on Wednesday acknowledged the importance to strengthen vaccine development and production capability as "important crisis management" and pledged to provide more support.

Supplies will help determine the progress of the vaccination drive in Japan, Kono said.

The first batch of Pfizer vaccines that arrived Friday is enough to cover the first group of medical workers. A second batch is set for delivery next week.

To get the most from each vial, Japanese officials are also scrambling to get specialized syringes that can draw six doses per vial instead of five by standard Japanese-made syringes.

After the front-line medical workers will come inoculations of 3.7 million more health workers starting in March, followed by about 36 million people aged 65 and older beginning in April. People with underlying health issues, as well as caregivers at nursing homes and other facilities, will be next, before the general population receives its turn.

Some critics have noted the vaccination drive — which requires medical workers to be carried out — adds to their burden, since Japanese hospitals are already strained by daily treatment of COVID-19 patients. There's an added worry that hospitals will have no additional capacity to cope with the large number of overseas visitors the Olympics would involve.

Protests held across Myanmar despite UN fears of violence

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YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Demonstrators in Myanmar gathered Wednesday in their largest numbers so far to protest the military's seizure of power, even after a U.N. human rights expert warned that troops being brought to Yangon and elsewhere could signal the prospect of major violence.

U.N. rapporteur Tom Andrews had said late Tuesday that he was alarmed by reports of soldiers being transported into Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city.

"In the past, such troop movements preceded killings, disappearances, and detentions on a mass scale," he said in a statement issued by the U.N. Human Rights office in Geneva. "I am terrified that given the confluence of these two developments — planned mass protests and troops converging — we could be on the precipice of the military committing even greater crimes against the people of Myanmar."

In addition to Yangon, fresh protests also roiled Myanmar's second-largest city, Mandalay, and the capital, Naypyitaw, in defiance of an order banning gatherings of five or more people. But as evening approached, there were no reports of major violence.

"Let's march en masse. Let's show our force against the coup government that has destroyed the future of youth and our country," Kyi Toe, a spokesperson for the National League for Democracy party of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, wrote on his Facebook page ahead of the protests.

Wednesday's turnout in Yangon appeared to be one of the biggest so far in the city. Protesters have adopted a tactic of blocking off roads from security forces by parking their vehicles mid-street with their hoods up, using the excuse of having engine trouble.

One motorist, who declined to give his name for fear of repercussions, explained, tongue-in-cheek, that his car had broken down "due to the suffering that our people are undergoing now. We just stopped the cars here on the road to show that we do not want the military regime."

The high turnout was spurred partly by the junta's expectation that the protest movement was running out of steam, said Kyi Pyar, a former lawmaker from Suu Kyi's party.

She referred to the military's claim at a news conference Tuesday that there would be a gradual reduction in the number of protesters.

"This upset the people," she said. "We are not weak, we will never step back in the fight against the military regime. So we are back on the street again."

In Naypyitaw, thousands of people, including private bank employees and engineers, marched down the city's wide boulevards, chanting for the release of Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.

Protesters also poured into the streets of Mandalay, where on Monday security forces had pointed guns at a group of 1,000 demonstrators and attacked them with slingshots and sticks. Local media reported that police also fired rubber bullets into a crowd and that several people were injured.

The marches have been organized as part of a civil disobedience movement, spearheaded by medical workers and supported by many civil servants.

The Feb. 1 coup has brought an abrupt halt to Myanmar's fragile progress toward democracy, as Suu Kyi's party was about to begin a second five-year term after winning a landslide in November's election. The military justified its takeover with allegations of widespread voting irregularities, though the election commission found no evidence of significant fraud. The junta says it will hold power for a year before holding new elections.

Police filed a new charge against Suu Kyi, her lawyer said Tuesday, a move likely to keep her under house arrest and further fuel public anger.

Suu Kyi already faced a charge of illegally possessing walkie-talkies. The new charge concerns 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. It carries a maximum punishment of three years in prison.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson issued a strong denunciation of the legal maneuver against Suu Kyi.

"New charges against Aung San Suu Kyi fabricated by the Myanmar military are a clear violation of her human rights," he tweeted. "We stand with the people of Myanmar and will ensure those responsible for this coup are held to account."

On Tuesday night, the military for a third day in a row ordered an internet blackout — almost entirely blocking online access from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. It has also prepared a draft law that would tighten surveil-

lance of cyberspace and criminalize many online activities.

While the military did not say why the internet was being blocked, there is widespread speculation that the government is installing a firewall system to allow it to monitor or block online activity. Social media users have speculated widely that neighboring China, with extensive experience in censoring the internet, was giving technical assistance for such a project.

China has so far not condemned the takeover. Some protesters have accused Beijing — which has long been Myanmar's main arms supplier and has major investments in the country — of propping up the junta.

China's ambassador to Myanmar, Chen Hai, said Beijing wished the protesters and the military could solve their differences through dialogue, according to the text of an interview posted on the embassy's Facebook page Tuesday.

"The current development in Myanmar is absolutely not what China wants to see," he said.

Chen also denied that China was helping Myanmar to control its internet traffic and that Chinese soldiers were showing up on Myanmar's streets.

"For the record, these are completely nonsense and even ridiculous accusations," Chen said.

Italy's Draghi urges unity, sacrifice in fighting the virus

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italian Premier Mario Draghi urged Italy's polarized politicians to unite behind his new government to confront the coronavirus pandemic and the economic devastation it has wrought, saying Italy has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to create a more sustainable, equitable and healthy world for future generations.

Draghi vowed an environmentally conscious and digitally reformed government program in a 50-minute speech Wednesday before the Senate, which came ahead of a mandatory confidence vote later in the day. Draghi is expected to win votes in both the Senate and lower Chamber of Deputies after securing broad-based support for his government.

"Today unity isn't a emotion, it's a duty," Draghi said to applause as he concluded his speech. "A duty guided by what unites us all: love of Italy."

Draghi, the former European central bank chief who is widely credited with having saved the euro, vowed a similar all-out effort to do whatever it takes to emerge from the pandemic, which first erupted in Italy this time last year. He said the principle aim of his administration was to confront the pandemic and safeguard Italians "with all means," and urged politicians to put aside their political interests in a spirit of sacrifice for future generations.

Draghi's government was sworn in over the weekend, capping a remarkable few weeks that saw the widely popular Premier Giuseppe Conte resign after a key ally yanked his support. After efforts to forge a third Conte government failed, President Sergio Mattarella asked Draghi, 73, to form a high-profile, non-political government.

Draghi's 23-member cabinet includes politicians in most ministries but puts technical experts in key roles, especially those responsible for ensuring that the more than 200 billion euros (\$240 billion) in European Union pandemic recovery funds that Italy expects to receive are spent according to EU criteria, such as for ecological and digital transformations.

Draghi said his government would be "convincingly" pro-EU and pro-U.S., saying he envisaged in particular reinforcing bilateral relations with France and Germany.

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

33 injured, 14 arrested in protests over rapper's jailing

MADRID (AP) — Police in Spain say 14 people were arrested in violent street protests in several cities following the arrest of Spanish rap artist Pablo Hasél, who had barricaded himself at a university with

dozens of supporters to avoid prison and defend his fight for free speech.

Emergency services said Wednesday that 33 people were treated for injuries in the disturbances.

In the northeastern city of Barcelona, thousands of protestors set trash cans on fire and threw rocks at the police. Several stores and a bank were damaged amid chaotic scenes on one of the city's main streets. Spanish National Television cited city authorities as estimating the damages at 70,000 euros (\$84,000).

Smaller demonstrations took place in other Spanish cities. Further protests are planned Wednesday.

A 24-hour standoff between police and Hasél ended early Tuesday when anti-riot officers arrested him in northeastern Lleida University. He was taken to prison to serve a 9-month sentence for insulting the monarchy and glorifying terrorism in a song about former King Juan Carlos I and in 64 tweets.

His case has drawn much attention, with many artists, celebrities and politicians showing their support and demanding a change in the country's so-called "gag law."

Spain's left-wing coalition government last week said it planned to change the country's criminal code to eliminate prison terms for offenses involving freedom of expression.

The rapper has previously faced charges for assault, praising armed extremist groups, breaking into private premises or insulting the monarchy.

Amnesty International said Hasél's case was the latest in a string of trials of artists and social media personalities in Spain under its 2015 Public Security Law, which was put into effect by a conservative government.

Biden reframes his goal on reopening of elementary schools

By AAMER MADHANI and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — President Joe Biden is promising a majority of elementary schools will be open five days a week by the end of his first 100 days in office, restating his goal after his administration came under fire when aides said schools would be considered open if they held in-person learning just one day a week.

Biden's comments, during a CNN town hall in Milwaukee, marked his clearest statement yet on school reopenings. Biden had pledged in December to reopen "the majority of our schools" in his first 100 days but has since faced increasing questions about how he would define and achieve that goal, with school districts operating under a patchwork of different virtual and in-person learning arrangements nationwide.

"I said open a majority of schools in K through eighth grade, because they're the easiest to open, the most needed to be open in terms of the impact on children and families having to stay home," Biden said.

He said comments by White House press secretary Jen Psaki earlier this month that one day a week of in-person learning would meet his goal were "a mistake in the communication."

Asked when the nation would see kindergarten through eighth grades back to in-person learning five days a week, Biden said, "We'll be close to that at the end of the first 100 days." He said he expected many schools would push to stay open through the summer, but suggested reopening would take longer for high schools due to a higher risk of contagion among older students.

The town hall touched on a range of issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, from protections for small businesses to the administration's vaccination plans. Biden said that by the end of July there would be 600 million doses of the vaccine available, enough to vaccinate every American.

But with many of his answers, he sought to emphasize the need for funding to achieve his goals. The town hall was aimed at selling his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid package directly to the American people, part of an effort designed in part to put pressure on Republican lawmakers and refocus Congress on speedy passage of the bill now that his predecessor's impeachment trial is behind him.

Biden underscored how much he wants to move beyond Donald Trump on Tuesday night, repeatedly refusing to talk about the former president and saying at one point, "I'm tired of talking about Donald Trump."

"For four years, all that's been in the news is Trump. For the next four years, I want to make sure all the news is the American people," he said, to applause from the audience.

During the town hall, Biden also offered a flavor of the moderate stance that helped win him purple states

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like Wisconsin in 2020. He resisted a questioner's request for his administration to embrace the progressive goal of forgiving \$50,000 in student loan debt, reiterating his commitment to forgiving just \$10,000. He suggested one of the ways to improve policing was to provide more funding to police departments, running counter to calls from some progressives to defund the police. He also said he was optimistic about passing legislation to study police reforms.

He also weighed in on the immigration bill his administration is expected to unveil this week. Biden affirmed that a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants is essential for any bill he'll support, but also suggested he'd be open to a piecemeal approach to immigration reform rather than a comprehensive bill, if necessary.

"There's things I would do by itself, but not at the expense of saying I'm never going to do the other," he said.

Biden seemed to revel in his first opportunity for extended interaction with ordinary Americans since the inauguration. Comforting a second-grader who hasn't been able to go school and was worried about getting the virus, Biden told the girl that children are less likely to get infected, adding, "I wouldn't worry about it, baby, I promise you."

He also offered an intimate description of living in the White House, expressing his discomfort with being tended to by staff. With about a month of White House living under his belt, Biden joked that he wakes up in the morning, looks at his wife, Jill, and asks, "Where the hell are we?"

Biden stressed that his massive virus aid bill already has broad public support, and noted some analysts have argued in favor of significant government spending to help boost the economy.

"Now is the time we should be spending," Biden said.

The House is expected to vote on the measure next week.

Biden landed on a slick, snow-covered tarmac to below-freezing weather about 90 minutes before the evening program. He took questions from a small audience of Democrats, Republicans and independents invited for a small, socially distant gathering at the historic Pabst Theater.

Biden's trip to Wisconsin, a political battleground state he narrowly won last November, comes as coronavirus infection rates and deaths are falling after the nation endured the two deadliest months so far of the pandemic. The White House is also reporting an increase in the administration of vaccines throughout the country after a slow start.

But Biden has stressed that the nation still has a long road ahead as thousands of Americans die each day in the worst U.S. public health crisis in a century. The virus has killed more than 485,000, and newly emerging variants are complicating the response effort.

The Biden administration is trying to get enough Americans vaccinated to achieve "herd immunity" and allow life to return to a semblance of normalcy. But it's unclear when the vaccination will be widely accessible to Americans.

Biden's team hopes funding provided in the coronavirus aid bill will help accelerate vaccination production and distribution. His team also argues that the federal government must keep open the spigot of government relief to help people who are suffering economically and to get the country back to pre-pandemic employment levels.

But many GOP lawmakers continue to bristle at the price tag of a package that calls for sending \$1,400 checks to most Americans as well as assistance for businesses, schools and homeowners and renters.

Australia's second largest city comes out of 3rd lockdown

By BRUCE MATTHEWS and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Melbourne, Australia's second largest city, will relax its third lockdown on Wednesday and allow spectators to return to the Australian Open tennis tournament after a five-day absence.

Rod Laver Arena will be allowed 7,477 spectators — around 50% of its capacity — for the final four days of the first Grand Slam event for 2021, tournament organizers said.

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Up to 30,000 tennis fans a day had been allowed into three zones in the tournament venue, Melbourne Park, before the statewide Victoria lockdown.

Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews earlier said health authorities would decide the tennis crowd numbers. "We'll finish up with crowds at lots of different places," Andrews said. "We'll finish up with people being able to move freely because this short and sharp circuit-breaker has worked."

The lockdown has been enforced across Victoria, with a population of 6.5 million people, to prevent the virus from spreading from the state capital.

Most restrictions will be lifted from 11:59 p.m. after no new infections were detected in the latest 24-hour period, Andrews said.

Schools and businesses will reopen.

But people will still be required to wear masks and visitors to homes will be limited to five people until Feb. 26, when the last of the state's 25 active COVID-19 cases will no longer be infectious.

All cases have been traced to a Melbourne airport hotel where travelers are quarantined for 14 days on arrival from overseas.

Businesses complained that the lockdown, announced only hours before it took effect last Friday, disrupted Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day festivities.

All tennis spectators were ejected from Melbourne Park at 11:30 p.m. so that they had time to get home before the stay-home order took effect. Many booed as they left. The Australian Open has continued without spectators since.

Some business leaders described the latest lockdown as an overreaction.

"It is clear that testing and tracing were the keys to resolving this potential outbreak, and not the lockdown which was disproportionate to the risk," Australian Industry Group state head Tim Piper said.

"We need to learn from this lockdown and adjust the responses accordingly," Piper added.

Andrews would not guarantee that there would be no further lockdowns announced at short notice.

"I'm not prepared to pretend to the Victorian community that this is over," Andrews said.

Melbourne emerged from a 111-day lockdown in October following a fresh wave of infections that peaked at 725 cases a day. It was largely blamed on lax infection control procedures at two Melbourne quarantine hotels.

At the time, the rest of Australia was relaxing restrictions due to low case numbers after an initial nationwide lockdown.

McGuirk contributed from Canberra, Australia.

Native Americans embrace vaccine, virus containment measures

By SARAH BLAKE MORGAN Associated Press

CHEROKEE, N.C. (AP) — Joyce Dugan did not hesitate before sitting down inside the Cherokee Indian Hospital for her second and final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. "I'm proud of our hospital," the 72-year-old former tribal chief said as a nurse quietly prepped her arm. "I'm proud that we're able to get these shots."

While minority communities across the United States have struggled to trust the vaccine, the opposite is true for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, a Native American tribe of 16,000 in western North Carolina, and other tribes across the country, which were also quick to adopt coronavirus prevention measures.

The federal Indian Health Service said Tuesday that it has administered nearly 385,300 doses of COVID-19 vaccines. At a rate of about 18,490 per 100,000, that's higher than all but five U.S. states, according to an AP analysis of federal data.

The trend owes itself both to a harsh reality — Native Americans and Alaskan Natives are four times more likely to be hospitalized from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — and tradition. Community before self has long been a core principle in Native American culture.

"We already innately have held on to that cultural tradition of taking care of our community," said Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Seattle Urban Indian Health Institute and a citizen of the 3,000-member

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Pawnee Nation. "The rest of the United States could learn from us."

In March, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Principal Chief Richard Sneed made the controversial decision to close Qualla Boundary, the Cherokee name for the tribe's reservation in North Carolina. Only tribal citizens and essential workers were allowed through police barricades, cutting off tourism and shutting down the tribe's casinos, its main source of revenue.

"The data we were looking at told us that if we did nothing, we could expect that by April we would have about 400 positives," Sneed said.

Feeling the financial strain, the reservation opened again after seven weeks — and as expected positivity rates rose steadily. The tribe has lost 10 people to the virus since March, but the majority of the 1,299 members who contracted COVID-19 have recovered.

The Navajo Nation, the country's largest Native American reservation with about 175,000 residents in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, declared a public health emergency in March even before its first positive case was confirmed. A flurry of public health orders followed, including a mask mandate, shelter-in-place orders, daily curfews and weekend lockdowns. Tribal leaders banned mass gatherings and ordered the closure of schools, four casinos and other tribal businesses, along with tribal parks popular with tourists.

The measures have taken an enormous financial toll. The casino enterprise laid off more than 1,100 workers in January after exhausting federal virus relief funding. It said it might be forced to close permanently if it cannot secure additional funding or partially reopen.

The Navajo Nation recently lifted weekend lockdowns so that residents could be vaccinated. So far, the Indian Health Service has administered more than 90,000 doses in the Navajo-area region. With support from the federal government, the tribe hopes to hit 100,000 by the end of this week.

"Everyone is knocking down the door trying to get a vaccine," said the Navajo Nation's health director, Dr. Jill Jim.

In North Carolina, a major reason why members of the Cherokee tribe have not hesitated in stepping forward to get the vaccine is their hospital. Some Native American tribes rely on health care facilities owned and managed by the Indian Health Service, but the Eastern Band took over its health system in 2002.

Inside the lobby of the hospital built in 2015, "Ni-hi tsa-tse-li," one of the Eastern Band's guiding principles, greets guests. In Cherokee, it translates to, "It belongs to you."

The move helped mend a once fractured relationship between providers and patients. The strong bonds between them have paved the way for acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Many of our health care providers have been here for 10, 20 years," Dr. Rick Bunio, the tribe's Clinical Director said. "The community trusts them."

The hospital also didn't wait for people to sign up for vaccines. Instead of requiring them to compete with others on overcrowded websites, which has been the case in most states, hospital staffers identified residents of the reservation most at risk and then called each one of them to schedule an appointment.

Included on the list of high-priority candidates: native Cherokee language speakers.

"Our language is who we are. ... We want to do everything to protect that heritage," said Vickie Bradley, the tribe's Health and Human Services director.

Since mid-December, more than 3,000 residents have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination, according to the tribe's website. More than 800 have gotten two. The tribe would like to vaccinate more but is waiting for more doses from the Indian Health Service, which is working with more than 340 tribes and tribal organizations to distribute vaccines.

Inside the Eastern Band's hospital, Dugan exhaled quietly as a nurse pulled the tiny needle from her arm. "I'm relieved for our people, just as much as I am for myself," she said. "We've had to overcome many obstacles in our history. And each time after each obstacle, we've become stronger."

Associated Press writer Felicia Fonseca in Flagstaff, Arizona, and AP data journalist Angeliki Kastanis in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Pandemic politicking: Israel's election sprint echoes US's

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In Israel, the sprint to the March 23 election is striking a notable resemblance to the American presidential brawl in 2020.

Candidates are holding virtual events or limited in-person gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic. Some have signed up star U.S. advisers who faced off against each other during the contest between Republican incumbent Donald Trump and the Democrat who defeated him, President Joe Biden.

As in the United States, the Israeli race is a referendum on the divisive personality at the top and his stewardship of a nation brutalized by COVID-19.

Many Americans saw the choice as Trump — or almost anyone else. In Israel, the field is divided between those who are for or against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Where Trump had, "Make America Great Again," Netanyahu implores people to, "Come back to life."

The question of moral authority, too, is a common theme. As president, Trump stood accused of a multitude of wrongdoing, including sexual misconduct against more than a dozen women (he denies all of them), questions about his taxes and serial problems telling the truth. Netanyahu last week pleaded not guilty to charges of breach of trust, fraud and accepting bribes.

Both men have cast themselves as victims.

"It's almost verbatim," said Alon Pinkas, Israel's former consul general in New York. "They're both victims of a 'witch hunt,' both running an entire campaign about how 'They're out to get me. And if they're out to get me, they're out to get you.'"

But there is a key difference. While Trump suffered a solid defeat in November, Netanyahu remains Israel's most popular politician and has a strong chance of continuing his 12-year reign.

That stems in part from the two countries' vastly different populations and government systems. The U.S. is home to nearly 330 million people; Israel has just over 9 million. America is a democratic republic, where voters choose both the president and members of Congress on Election Day. Israel holds national elections where an array of political parties compete for proportionally awarded seats in the 120-member parliament, or Knesset.

Since no individual party has ever won a 61-seat majority on its own, that generates relentless coalition-building to form a government.

Netanyahu's Likud party is projected in all opinion polls to emerge as the largest party in the March election. But his hopes of cobbling together a government have been complicated by his legal woes, with a growing number of parties refusing to serve under a prime minister accused of serious crimes. In December, a delicate governing coalition between Netanyahu and his arch-rival collapsed after just seven months, sending the country to its fourth vote in two years.

Netanyahu — unlike his close ally Trump — has taken the virus seriously and made Israel's vaccination campaign the centerpiece of his reelection bid.

Late last year, he personally negotiated what has become the world's speediest coronavirus vaccination drive. As of Tuesday, nearly half of the population had received a first dose of vaccine. Nearly one-third have been inoculated twice and the level of severe infections and deaths has begun to decline.

But other parts of Netanyahu's management of the pandemic have come under heavy criticism. Like Trump's key allies, a bloc of Netanyahu's core supporters, the ultra-Orthodox, are flouting safety guidelines and attending mass events in defiance of the virus threat. Public anger is pronounced, with thousands of protesters gathering outside his residence each week or toting black flags on bridges and overpasses. They want Netanyahu to step down over his legal woes and the deep economic damage caused by a series of lockdowns over the past year.

In a break from Israeli tradition, Netanyahu's toughest opponents are not retired generals but former journalists. Three party leaders are former TV commentators and a fourth opponent, Gideon Saar, is married to one of the country's most famous news anchors.

These media-savvy personalities, backed in some cases by American strategists, have waged impressive pandemic politicking.

Lesson No. 1: Learn effective virtual campaigning, cross-post those events on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and weave them with relentless social media campaigns.

Netanyahu, educated in the U.S. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and deeply familiar with American politics, last month named Philadelphia native Aaron Klein his campaign manager. Klein, 40, is a former U.S. radio show host and ex-Jerusalem bureau chief for Breitbart News. He was appointed by the site's executive chairman at the time, Steven Bannon, who would later become a key strategist to Trump.

The prime minister also has brought back longtime American adviser John McLaughlin, whose banner photo atop his Twitter feed features him shoulder-to-shoulder with Trump. Netanyahu used similar images in recent campaigns. But with Biden in office, he has played down the Trump connection this time around.

Saar, a onetime ally of Netanyahu, is challenging the prime minister now from the right. Last month, he hired several founders of the Lincoln Project — perhaps the best-known anti-Trump group of the 2020 election — that drew Republican voters away from the president by attacking his moral authority. The group is now grappling with allegations over how it handled charges of sexual misconduct of one founder, John Weaver, who has resigned. On Tuesday, Saar's campaign said it was re-evaluating its ties with the group.

The moral questions raised against Trump are similar to Saar's message as head of the New Hope, the party he founded when he broke away from Netanyahu's Likud.

Saar shares the prime minister's hard-line nationalist ideology — he's a strong proponent of West Bank settlements and favors their eventual annexation. But he's trying to create a contrast with Netanyahu, who he said has turned Likud into a "cult of personality," familiar rhetoric to anyone listening to Trump's various opponents.

Saar also is making civility and decency a centerpiece of his campaign, reminiscent of Biden's approach against Trump. In an AP interview, Saar said he was "in a better position" than Netanyahu to have a positive relationship with Biden.

Another Netanyahu challenger, Yair Lapid, is partnering with prominent Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. The Times of Israel reported that Lapid flew to the U.S. last month to meet personally with his longtime ally.

"The situation here in Israel is crazy," Lapid, a former anchorman, said several times during a virtual town hall Feb. 9. "We can have a prime minister with integrity."

Follow Kellman on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

China steps up online controls with new rule for bloggers

By HUIZHONG WU and FU TING Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Ma Xiaolin frequently wrote about current affairs on one of China's leading microblogging sites, where he has 2 million followers. But recently, he said in a post, the Weibo site called and asked him not to post original content on topics ranging from politics to economic and military issues.

"As an international affairs researcher and a columnist, it looks like I can only go the route of entertainment, food and beverage now," the international relations professor wrote on Jan. 31.

Ma, who often posted on developments in the Mideast, is one of many popular influencers working within the constraints of China's heavily censored web who is finding that their space to speak is shrinking even further with the latest policy changes and a clean-up campaign run by the country's powerful censors. He declined an interview request.

Beginning next week, the Cyberspace Administration of China will require bloggers and influencers to have a government-approved credential before they can publish on a wide range of subjects. Some fear that only state media and official propaganda accounts will get permission. While permits have been needed since at least 2017 to write about topics such as political and military affairs, enforcement has not been widespread. The new rules expand that requirement to health, economics, education and judicial matters.

"The regulators want to control the entire procedure of information production," said Titus Chen, an expert in Chinese social media policy at National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan.

The latest move is in line with ever more restrictive regulations under President Xi Jinping that constrict an already narrow space for discourse. The Chinese leader has made "digital sovereignty" a central concept

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of his rule, under which authorities have set limits and increased control of the digital realm.

The new credential requirement could restrict individuals from posting original content, including people like Ma who aren't openly challenging the line of Xi's ruling Communist Party. Weibo CEO Wang Gaofei, responding to Ma on the platform, said commentary on news released by official media was permitted but commentators could not "release news" themselves.

The policy revision is meant "to standardize and steer public accounts and information service platforms to be more self aware in keeping the correct direction of public opinion," according to a statement posted by the Cyberspace Administration.

A week after unveiling the new rules in late January, the administration held a nationwide conference on the importance of "strengthening order in online publishing." The head of the agency, Zhuang Rongwen, said the agency must "let our supervision and management grow teeth."

On Feb. 4, the agency publicly announced a month-long clean-up drive targeting search engines, social media platforms and browsers. Such campaigns, in which companies take steps to meet government demands, aren't new, but enforcement was looser in the past: In 2017, Weibo backed off after complaints it was lumping gay content in with a pornography ban.

It appears to be happening in concurrence with a crackdown to enforce existing rules.

"It is a big deal, it's a massive campaign," said Xiao Qiang, an expert on digital censorship at the University of California at Berkeley. "And these are people who didn't write something sharp. They are intentionally not being edgy about things."

A notice on Sohu in January, which also hosts microblogs, said public accounts without credentials must not issue or republish current affairs news. Banned topics include "articles and commentary on politics, economics, military affairs, diplomatic and public affairs; Taking out of context and distorting the content of the Party and country's history; breaking news and commentary." Internet giant Baidu, which also has a publishing platform, issued a similar notice.

It is unclear to what extent bloggers will be punished if they publish commentary without the credentials.

A current affairs account on Tencent's WeChat messaging app was shut down last week on "suspicion of providing an internet news information service." Called "August Old Yu," it was run by Yu Shenghong, a former journalist at state broadcaster CCTV. He did not respond to a request for comment.

Representatives of Baidu, Sohu, Weibo and Tencent did not respond to requests for comment. The Cyberspace Administration did not respond to a faxed request.

The coronavirus pandemic appears to have in part spurred the tightened regulations. In the early days of China's outbreak much of the news coverage was driven by online accounts and digital-only media outlets which circulated both news and rumors.

During the pandemic, "self-media' maliciously created rumors and casually disregarded others' privacy, severely impacting the stability and harmony of society and damaged the legal rights and interest of others," the Cyberspace Administration said in a notice explaining the new policies.

Ultimately, the new rules reflect the censors' worries, even if it isn't precisely clear what they are so insecure about, said Berkeley's Xiao.

"In the past entire year, the control has been so tight that hardly anyone can speak about anything," Xiao said.

—
Fu reported from Bangkok.

Woman charged in Capitol melee says Proud Boys recruited her

By ROXANA HEGEMAN Associated Press

BELLE PLAINE, Kan. (AP) — An Arizona woman charged in connection with the Jan. 6 onslaught of the U.S. Capitol bragged in a Snapchat video that she was recently recruited by a Kansas City chapter of the Proud Boys, a neofascist organization that describes itself as "Western chauvinists" and has long forbidden female members.

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Felicia Konold's claim that the chapter recruited her and she was "with them now," even though she's not from the Kansas City area, has intrigued experts who study extremist right-wing movements.

"It is ironic that such a deeply misogynistic organization has attracted someone who is a woman to join their organization," said Eric Ward, a senior fellow with the Southern Poverty Law Center. "It tells us there is dissention in the ranks of Proud Boys right now."

Details of the video surfaced last week in a probable cause affidavit against Konold, 26, of Tucson, who is charged with conspiracy, civil disorder and other federal charges stemming from the melee.

Konold sounded almost euphoric in the Snapchat video she posted after the Capitol attack, saying she never could have imagined having such an influence on the events that unfolded that day. She laughingly references "all my boys, behind me, holding me up in the air, pushing back. We (expletive) did it!"

In order to seemingly prove her point that she had just been "recruited into a (expletive) chapter from Kansas City," she displayed on the video a two-sided "challenge coin" that appears to have markings that designate it as belonging to the Kansas City Proud Boys.

The challenge coin denotes membership, something that seems to go against the rhetoric about women from the organization's national leadership, Ward said.

"The fact she has that coin, the challenge coin, tells me there is something happening around gender in the Proud Boys — and it is something worth paying attention to," said Ward, who is also the executive director of the Western States Center, a civil rights advocacy group that works to advance gender equity.

Experts who monitor right-wing extremist groups point to the controversy that erupted when former mixed martial arts fighter Tara LaRosa tried in December to establish a Proud Girls offshoot on the social media app Telegram.

The Proud Boys' social media channels quickly responded, calling auxiliary groups such as Proud Boy's Girls or Proud Girls "ridiculous ideas." "Don't ride our coattails," one post read. "Want to support us? Get married, have babies, and take care of your family."

Alex DiBranco, executive director of the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism, said there are differences among Proud Boys chapters over whether to embrace women as Proud Girls, even as the group as a whole has become more hostile to women's auxiliaries in recent years. Mothers of Proud Boys have posted about Proud Boys gatherings they hosted for their sons.

But DiBranco said the people in her group who have worked on this topic are still unaware of a situation where a woman was actually recruited to be a member of a Proud Boys' chapter itself, which is strictly against the Proud Boys rules.

Cassie Miller, a senior research analyst for the Southern Poverty Law Center, said that for a period of time there were auxiliary groups of Proud Boys' Girls made up of the wives and girlfriends of members, but they were not allowed full membership within the group. She said as far as she knows, none of those auxiliary groups are active right now.

"The group has been very clear from the beginning it is an organization for men only and they hold misogynistic beliefs and believe that women are best suited for domestic labor and should act as mothers and homemakers," Miller said.

Prosecutors allege in a court filing that William Chrestman, who they described as the leader of Kansas City Proud Boys cell, "readily recruited" Felicia Konold and her brother, Cory Konold, from Arizona to join the group of Kansas City Proud Boys.

Neither her defense attorney nor her father immediately responded to messages Tuesday seeking comment.

The Proud Boys have been known to incite street violence with counter-protesters. The group gained widespread attention during a presidential debate in September when then-President Donald Trump famously told them to "stand back and stand by."

Prosecutors allege that that beginning in December, the Proud Boys encouraged its members to attend the Jan. 6 demonstration in Washington, D.C. A large group of them, including Felicia Konold and other members of its Kansas City cell, was captured on video marching together and later entering the U.S.

Capitol.

While there were plenty of white women at the Jan. 6 protests, white supremacists groups generally tend to be dominated by white men, DiBranco said. Groups like QAnon tend to be popular with women, but Proud Boys supporters and QAnon supporters come together at these types of protests. The anti-vaxxer movement against vaccinations is dominated by women.

"Those lockdown protests exposed their members to these elements of a far-right coalition that these women might not otherwise be a part of," DiBranco said. "Women may have moved from anti-vaxxer into QAnon and other kinds of conspiracies."

Biden reframes goal on reopening of elementary schools

By AAMER MADHANI and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — President Joe Biden is promising a majority of elementary schools will be open five days a week by the end of his first 100 days in office, restating his goal after his administration came under fire when aides said schools would be considered open if they held in-person learning just one day a week.

Biden's comments, during a CNN town hall in Milwaukee, marked his clearest statement yet on school reopenings. Biden had pledged in December to reopen "the majority of our schools" in his first 100 days but has since faced increasing questions about how he would define and achieve that goal, with school districts operating under a patchwork of different virtual and in-person learning arrangements nationwide.

"I said open a majority of schools in K through eighth grade, because they're the easiest to open, the most needed to be open in terms of the impact on children and families having to stay home," Biden said.

He said comments by White House press secretary Jen Psaki earlier this month that one day a week of in-person learning would meet his goal were "a mistake in the communication."

Asked when the nation would see kindergarten through eighth grades back to in-person learning five days a week, Biden said, "We'll be close to that at the end of the first 100 days." He said he expected many schools would push to stay open through the summer, but suggested reopening would take longer for high schools due to a higher risk of contagion among older students.

The town hall touched on a range of issues related to the coronavirus, from protections for small businesses to the administration's vaccination plans. Biden said that by the end of July there would be 600 million doses of the vaccine available, enough to vaccinate every American.

But with many of his answers, he sought to emphasize the need for funding to achieve his goals. The town hall was aimed at selling his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid package directly to the American people, part of an effort designed in part to put pressure on Republican lawmakers and refocus Congress on speedy passage of the bill now that his predecessor's impeachment trial is behind him.

Biden underscored how much he wants to move beyond Donald Trump on Tuesday night, repeatedly refusing to talk about the former president and saying at one point, "I'm tired of talking about Donald Trump."

"For four years, all that's been in the news is Trump. For the next four years, I want to make sure all the news is the American people," he said, to applause from the audience.

During the town hall, Biden also offered a flavor of the moderate stance that helped win him purple states like Wisconsin in 2020. He resisted a questioner's request for his administration to embrace the progressive goal of forgiving \$50,000 in student loan debt, reiterating his commitment to forgiving just \$10,000. He suggested one of the ways to improve policing was to provide more funding to police departments, running counter to calls from some progressives to defund the police. He also said he was optimistic about passing legislation to study police reforms.

He also weighed in on the immigration bill his administration is expected to unveil this week. Biden affirmed that a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants is essential for any bill he'll support, but also suggested he'd be open to a piecemeal approach to immigration reform rather than a comprehensive bill, if necessary.

"There's things I would do by itself, but not at the expense of saying I'm never going to do the other,"

he said.

Biden seemed to revel in his first opportunity for extended interaction with ordinary Americans since the inauguration. Comforting a second-grader who hasn't been able to go school and was worried about getting the virus, Biden told the girl that children are less likely to get infected, adding, "I wouldn't worry about it, baby, I promise you."

He also offered an intimate description of living in the White House, expressing his discomfort with being tended to by staff. With about a month of White House living under his belt, Biden joked that he wakes up in the morning, looks at his wife, Jill, and asks, "Where the hell are we?"

Biden stressed that his massive virus aid bill already has broad public support, and noted some analysts have argued in favor of significant government spending to help boost the economy.

"Now is the time we should be spending," Biden said.

The House is expected to vote on the measure next week.

Biden landed on a slick, snow-covered tarmac to below-freezing weather about 90 minutes before the evening program. He took questions from a small audience of Democrats, Republicans and independents invited for a small, socially distant gathering at the historic Pabst Theater.

Biden's trip to Wisconsin, a political battleground state he narrowly won last November, comes as coronavirus infection rates and deaths are falling after the nation endured the two deadliest months so far of the pandemic. The White House is also reporting an increase in the administration of vaccines throughout the country after a slow start.

But Biden has stressed that the nation still has a long road ahead as thousands of Americans die each day in the worst U.S. public health crisis in a century. The virus has killed more than 485,000, and newly emerging variants are complicating the response effort.

The Biden administration is trying to get enough Americans vaccinated to achieve "herd immunity" and allow life to return to a semblance of normalcy. But it's unclear when the vaccination will be widely accessible to Americans.

Biden's team hopes funding provided in the coronavirus aid bill will help accelerate vaccination production and distribution. His team also argues that the federal government must keep open the spigot of government relief to help people who are suffering economically and to get the country back to pre-pandemic employment levels.

But many GOP lawmakers continue to bristle at the price tag of a package that calls for sending \$1,400 checks to most Americans as well as assistance for businesses, schools and homeowners and renters.

'A complete bungle': Texas' energy pride goes out with cold

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Anger over Texas' power grid failing in the face of a record winter freeze mounted Tuesday as millions of residents in the energy capital of the U.S. remained shivering with no assurances that their electricity and heat — out for 36 hours or longer in many homes — would return soon or stay on once it finally does.

"I know people are angry and frustrated," said Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, who woke up to more than 1 million people still without power in his city. "So am I."

In all, between 2 and 3 million customers in Texas still had no power nearly two full days after historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge in demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. More bad weather, including freezing rain, began arriving Tuesday night.

Making matters worse, expectations that the outages would be a shared sacrifice by the state's 30 million residents quickly gave way to a cold reality, as pockets in some of America's largest cities, including San Antonio, Dallas and Austin, were left to shoulder the lasting brunt of a catastrophic power failure, and in subfreezing conditions that Texas' grid operators had known was coming.

The breakdown sparked growing outrage and demands for answers over how Texas — whose Republican

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leaders as recently as last year taunted California over the Democratic-led state's rolling blackouts — failed such a massive test of a major point of state pride: energy independence. And it cut through politics, as fuming Texans took to social media to highlight how while their neighborhoods froze in the dark Monday night, downtown skylines glowed despite desperate calls to conserve energy.

"We are very angry. I was checking on my neighbor, she's angry, too," said Amber Nichols, whose north Austin home has had no power since early Monday. "We're all angry because there is no reason to leave entire neighborhoods freezing to death."

She crunched through ice wearing a parka and galoshes, while her neighbors dug out their driveways from six inches of snow to move their cars.

"This is a complete bungle," she said.

The toll of the outages was causing increasing worry. Harris County emergency officials reported "several carbon monoxide deaths" in or around Houston and reminded people not to operate cars or gasoline-powered generators indoors. Authorities said three young children and their grandmother, who were believed to be trying to keep warm, also died in a suburban Houston house fire early Tuesday. In Galveston, the medical examiner's office requested a refrigerated truck to expand body storage, although County Judge Mark Henry said he didn't know how many deaths there had been related to the weather.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott called for an investigation of the grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas. His indignation struck a much different tone than just a day earlier, when he told Texans that ERCOT was prioritizing residential customers and that power was getting restored to hundreds of thousands of homes.

But hours after those assurances, the number of outages in Texas only rose, at one point exceeding 4 million customers.

"This is unacceptable," Abbott said.

By late Tuesday afternoon, ERCOT officials said some power had been restored, but they warned that even those gains were fragile and more outages were possible.

The grid began preparing for the storm a week ahead of time, but it reached a breaking point early Monday as conditions worsened and knocked power plants offline, ERCOT president Bill Magness said. Some wind turbine generators were iced, but nearly twice as much power was wiped out at natural gas and coal plants. Forcing controlled outages was the only way to avert an even more dire blackout in Texas, Magness said.

"What we're protecting against is worse," he said.

Still, Magness said ERCOT could not offer a firm timetable for when power might be fully restored. The outages are the widest Texas' grid has suffered but hardly a first in winter. A decade ago, another deep February freeze created power shortages in Texas the same week the Super Bowl was played in Arlington. A federal report later flagged failures in the system, including power plants that are unable to stand up to extreme cold.

On Tuesday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency said Texas had requested 60 generators and that hospitals and nursing homes would get priority. Thirty-five warming shelters were opened to accommodate more than 1,000 people around the state, FEMA said during a briefing. But even they weren't spared from the outages, as Houston was forced to close two on Monday because of a loss in power.

Ed Hirs, an energy fellow at the University of Houston, said the problem was a lack of weatherized power plants and a statewide energy market that doesn't incentivize companies to generate electricity when demand is low. In Texas, demand peaks in August, at the height of the state's sweltering summers.

He rejected that the storm went beyond what ERCOT could have anticipated.

"That's nonsense. It's not acceptable," Hirs said. "Every eight to 10 years we have really bad winters. This is not a surprise."

Joshua Rhodes, an energy researcher at the University of Texas in Austin, said the state's electric grid fell victim to a cold spell that was longer, deeper and more widespread than Texas had seen in decades.

Climate change should be factored in too, he said.

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"We're going to have to plan for more of this kind of weather. People said this would never happen in Texas, and yet it has."

Stephanie Murdoch, 51, began bundling up inside her Dallas condominium wearing blankets, two pairs of pants, three pairs of socks, a hat and gloves since the power first went out early Monday. She said she was worried about another blast of wintry weather forecast for Tuesday night and the possibility of her home's pipes bursting.

"There's a serious lack of preparation on the part of the energy companies to not be ready," Murdoch said.

In Houston, Barbara Matthews said she lasted in her home until Monday night. That's when the 73-year-old finally called 911 and was taken to the nearby Foundry Church, where dozens of other people were also taking shelter. On the ride there, she noticed a subdivision just down the road that had power.

"It is aggravating how some parts down the street have lights and then we don't," Matthews said. "When they said rolling blackouts, I took them at their word."

Associated Press writers Jim Vertuno and Acacia Coronado in Austin; Jake Bleiberg and Dave Koenig in Dallas; and Jeff Martin in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 17, the 48th day of 2021. There are 317 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 17, 1815, the United States and Britain exchanged the instruments of ratification for the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812.

On this date:

In 1801, the U.S. House of Representatives broke an electoral tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, electing Jefferson president; Burr became vice president.

In 1863, the International Red Cross was founded in Geneva.

In 1864, during the Civil War, the Union ship USS Housatonic was rammed and sunk in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, by the Confederate hand-cranked submarine HL Hunley in the first naval attack of its kind; the Hunley also sank.

In 1897, the forerunner of the National PTA, the National Congress of Mothers, convened its first meeting in Washington.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. forces invaded Eniwetok (ehn-eh-WEE'-tahk) Atoll, encountering little initial resistance from Imperial Japanese troops. (The Americans secured the atoll less than a week later.)

In 1964, the Supreme Court, in *Wesberry v. Sanders*, ruled that congressional districts within each state had to be roughly equal in population.

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon departed the White House with his wife, Pat, on a historic trip to China.

In 1988, Lt. Col. William Higgins, a Marine Corps officer serving with a United Nations truce monitoring group, was kidnapped in southern Lebanon by Iranian-backed terrorists (he was later slain by his captors).

In 1996, world chess champion Garry Kasparov beat IBM supercomputer "Deep Blue," winning a six-game match in Philadelphia (however, Kasparov lost to Deep Blue in a rematch in 1997).

In 2006, Tanja Frieden of Switzerland won the Olympic women's snowboardcross, speeding past American Lindsey Jacobellis, who'd fallen on her next-to-last jump before the finish line.

In 2015, Vice President Joe Biden opened a White House summit on countering extremism and radicalization, saying the United States needed to ensure that immigrants were fully included in the fabric of American society to prevent violent ideologies from taking root at home.

In 2018, President Donald Trump's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, told a conference in Germany that there was now "incontrovertible" evidence of a Russian plot to disrupt the 2016 U.S. election; the state-

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ment stood in stark contrast to Trump's claim that Russian interference in his election victory was a hoax.

Ten years ago: A group of Democratic Wisconsin lawmakers blocked passage of a sweeping anti-union bill, refusing to show up for a vote and then abruptly leaving the state in an effort to force Republicans to the negotiating table. Iowa high school wrestler Joel Northrup defaulted on his first-round state tournament match rather than face Cassy Herkelman, one of the first girls ever to qualify for the event, saying that wrestling a girl would conflict with his religious beliefs.

Five years ago: A three-way feud among the GOP's leading White House contenders escalated, with Ted Cruz daring Donald Trump to sue him for defamation and dismissing Marco Rubio's charges of dishonesty during a CNN forum just days before South Carolina's high-stakes primary. Travis Hittson, a former Navy crewman, was executed in Georgia for killing a fellow sailor, Conway Utterbeck.

One year ago: More than 300 American cruise ship passengers, including 14 who tested positive for coronavirus, were quarantined at military bases in California and Texas after arriving from Japan on charter flights. A push by Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam to ban the sale of assault weapons failed after some of his fellow Democrats in the state Senate balked at the proposal. Denny Hamlin won the rain-delayed Daytona 500 for a third time, beating Ryan Blaney in the second-closest finish in race history; Ryan Newman suffered a head injury in a spectacular crash on the final lap. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said he planned to spend \$10 billion of his own fortune to help fight climate change. Novelist Charles Portis, whose best-seller "True Grit" was twice adapted into Oscar-nominated films, died at 86. Hall of Fame golfer Mickey Wright, winner of 82 LPGA tournaments including 13 majors, died in Florida; she was 85.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Barry Humphries (aka "Dame Edna") is 87. Actor Christina Pickles is 86. Football Hall of Famer Jim Brown is 85. Actor Brenda Fricker is 76. Actor Becky Ann Baker is 68. Actor Rene Russo is 67. Actor Richard Karn is 65. Actor Lou Diamond Phillips is 59. Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Jordan is 58. Actor-comedian Larry, the Cable Guy is 58. TV personality Rene Syler is 58. Movie director Michael Bay is 57. Singer Chante Moore is 54. Rock musician Timothy J. Mahoney (311) is 51. Actor Dominic Purcell is 51. Olympic gold and silver medal skier Tommy Moe is 51. Actor Denise Richards is 50. Rock singer-musician Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) is 49. Rock musician Taylor Hawkins (Foo Fighters) is 49. Actor Jerry O'Connell is 47. Country singer Bryan White is 47. Actor Kelly Carlson is 45. Actor Ashton Holmes is 43. Actor Conrad Ricamora is 42. Actor Jason Ritter is 41. TV personality Paris Hilton is 40. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt is 40. TV host Daphne Oz is 35. Actor Chord Overstreet is 32. Singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran is 30. Actor Meaghan Martin is 29. Actor Sasha Pieterse is 25.