

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Update on Carter Jondahl

February 18, 2021

Journal Entry by Samantha Jondahl — 18 hours ago

Carter had a much more restful night and so far a pretty low-key day. The medical staff plans on letting him rest and relax so the medications can do their job. Thankfully, not much to report on his condition today. A big thanks to everyone who is following his story and offering support!

## Junior High Teams Win

Groton Area's junior high boys basketball teams posted a pair of wins over Moberidge-Pollock. The games were played in Groton on Thursday and were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by The Johnson Agency.

The seventh graders won their game, 52-13. Keegen Tracy led Groton Area with 30 points followed by Ryder Johnson with 10, Gage Sippel six, JD Schwan four and Logan Warrington and Karter Moody each had one.

Moberidge-Pollock led for most of the eight grade game, but Groton Area rallied with a eight straight points to tie the game at 20 and then it was a battle to the end. The game was tied six more times and Groton Area got the lead, 25-23, and hung on to win, 37-36. Teylor Diegel led Groton Area with 20 points



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

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

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## Democratic Party calls for the resignation of Attorney General Ravensborg

Sioux Falls, SD (February 18, 2021) – South Dakota Democratic Party today called on Attorney General, Jason Ravensborg to resign. Today’s press conference left more questions than answers in this tragedy.

“This was not an accident. This was criminal conduct that resulted in the death of Joe Beaver – a husband – a brother and a fellow South Dakotan. Let’s face facts: Jason Ravensborg’s criminal conduct killed a man. Three Class II misdemeanors, which is the same level of seriousness of a speeding ticket, is not being held accountable. You cannot serve as the Chief Prosecutor, Chief Law Enforcement Officer, and South Dakota’s lawyer when your careless and negligent conduct caused the death of another person. Mr. Ravensborg’s Office prosecutes people across South Dakota. Do they get off with a slap on the wrist – do they get to walk away without being held accountable? In our justice system, it should not matter how important you are or what position you have been elected to – you should be held accountable the same as every other person in South Dakota. Accountability for his actions means Mr. Ravensborg must resign. Like all of us, he must accept responsibility for his actions – acceptance of responsibility, in this case, means respect for the victim and his family and resigning as our Attorney General.” – Nikki Gronli, Vice Chair

Ravnsborg has failed to address the public and is instead hiding behind a Utah-based public relations company. It is our view that the people of South Dakota deserve better.

## Groton Prairie Mixed

**Team Standings:** Jackelopes 10, Shih Tzus 9, Cheetahs 7, Chipmunks 6

**Men’s High Games:** Roger Spanier 204, 197, Brad Waage 195, 186, 183, Doug Jorgensen 178

**Women’s High Games:** Sue Stanley 179, Dar Larson 152, Nicole Kassube 150, Darci Spanier 150

**Men’s High Series:** Roger Spanier 575, Brad Waage 564, Tony Madsen 491

**Women’s High Series:** Sue Stanley 448, Darci Spanier 421, Karen Spanier 394

## Governor Noem Signs SB 87 into Law

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed [Senate Bill 87](#) into law. This bill exempts health benefit plans sponsored by nonprofit agricultural organizations from insurance regulation.

Governor Noem has signed sixty-one bills into law this legislative session.

### Girls NEC Standings

Hamlin.....	10-0
Roncalli .....	9-1
Redfield .....	6-2
Sisseton .....	5-3
Groton .....	5-4
Webster.....	5-4
Clark/Willow Lake ...	4-5
Milbank .....	4-6
Deuel .....	1-8
Tiospa Zina .....	1-8
Britton-Hecla.....	0-8

### Boys NEC Standings

Groton .....	7-2
Clark/Willow Lake ...	8-2
Tiospa Zina .....	5-2
Sisseton .....	5-3
Milbank .....	5-3
Roncalli .....	5-4
Hamlin.....	6-4
Redfield .....	4-4
Deuel .....	2-8
Webster.....	1-8
Britton-Hecla.....	0-9

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## Upcoming Schedule

### 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

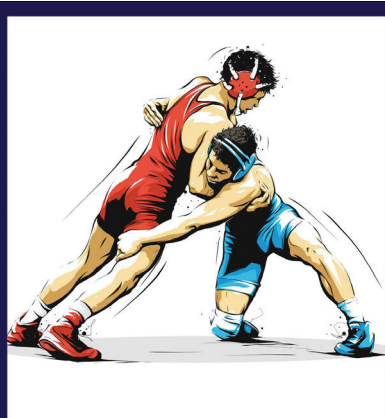
March 18-20: State Boys Basketball Tournament in Sioux Falls

## Coming up on GDLIVE.COM

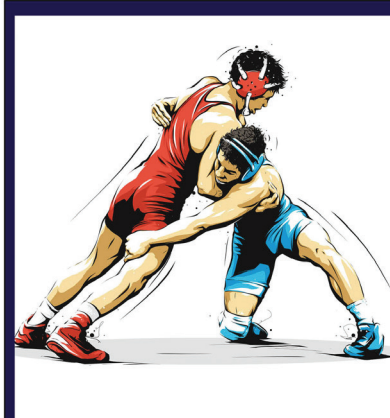


**Doubleheader**

Deuel at Groton Area  
Friday, Feb. 19, 2021, 4 p.m.  
JV Girls, JV Boys, Varsity Girls, Varsity Boys



**Region 1B  
Wrestling  
Tournament  
Sat., Feb. 20  
10 a.m.  
Mat A**



**Region 1B  
Wrestling  
Tournament  
Sat., Feb. 20  
10 a.m.  
Mat B**

## Unemployment Claims Filed for Week Ending Feb. 13

PIERRE, S.D. – During the week of Feb. 7-13, a total of 542 initial weekly claims for state unemployment benefits were processed by the Department of Labor and Regulation. This is a decrease of 104 claims from the prior week's total of 646.

A total of \$1.3 million was paid out in state benefits, in addition to \$1.4 million in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), \$71,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and \$293,000 in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) benefits.

The Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund balance was \$156.3 million on Feb. 14.

The latest number of continued state claims is 5,640 for the week ending Feb. 6, an increase of 61 from the prior week's total of 5,579. This indicates the number of unemployed workers eligible for and receiving benefits after their initial claim.

Benefits paid since March 16, 2020:

- Regular State = \$101.2 million
- FPUC = \$217.7 million
- PUA = \$19.0 million
- PEUC = \$5.7 million

Total = Approximately \$343.6 million

## Governor Noem Signs Senate Bill 32

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem has signed [Senate Bill 32](#) that allows for the expansion of the access critical nursing facility program which has been in effect since 2011.

South Dakota Department of Human Services Cabinet Secretary Shawnie Rechtenbaugh said, "This bill provides assurance to families that they will be able to choose nursing facility services close to home and avoid lengthy trips to visit loved ones."

Senate Bill 32 allows for the expansion of the program with the addition of three nursing facilities:

Bethel Lutheran Home – Madison, S.D.  
Platte Healthcare – Platte, S.D.  
Tekawitha – Sisseton, S.D.

Rechtenbaugh added, "Nursing facility care can be more expensive to deliver in smaller, more rural areas due to availability of staffing and delivery of goods and services to the location. An enhanced reimbursement process helps to make sure that these services remain available."

Currently, the program includes facilities in Eureka, Gettysburg, Martin, Lemmon, Miller, Philip, Chamberlain, Hot Springs, and Britton.

The new legislation is effective July 1, 2021



## #361 in a series

### Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Not much change from yesterday. We're up to 27,939,200 reported cases in the US, which is 0.3% more than yesterday; we could well hit 28 million tomorrow. That a lot slower than we've been seeing, but still 28 million. There were 71,200 new case reports today. Hospitalizations continue to decline, now at 63,405. And there were 2684 deaths reported today. We have now lost 492,738 lives to this virus, 0.5% more than yesterday. We're probably 2-3 days away from that half-million mark no one thought was possible when this whole thing started.

It will probably come as no surprise that the brutal winter weather in much of the country has delayed vaccination plans. Shipments of vaccine have been delayed by storms, and vaccination clinics have also been postponed. Shipment delays are being experienced in Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, and Florida. Where doses are at risk of expiring, officials are encouraging local administration teams to shift it to places that can use it or to get the vaccine into someone—anyone. Excellent plan.

Yesterday during a White House briefing, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, CDC director, talked about the new variants of the virus, especially B.1.351, the variant first reported in South Africa, the one that is most likely to give us trouble with existing immunity whether from natural infection or from vaccination. She said, "The continued spread of variants that are more transmissible could jeopardize the progress we have made in the last month if we let our guard down." There is modeling data which indicate this variant may become the dominant variant in the US some time next month.

The CDC published in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report a study that discusses new cases associated with the B.1.1.7 variant first reported in the UK and "highlights the importance of mitigation measures such as mask use, physical distancing, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, isolation of persons with diagnosed COVID-19, quarantine of close contacts of persons with diagnosed COVID-19, quarantine of close contacts of persons with COVID-19, and adherence to CDC travel guidance." This is amid general concern that this variant will alter the trajectory of the pandemic in the US for the worse.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, spoke at a White House briefing yesterday in which she pointed out that there are new variants which make it "more important than ever for us to do everything we can to decrease the spread." She also mentioned that reducing transmissions reduces the spread of these variants and the chance more new variants emerge.

This is in line with an article she, along with Dr. Henry Walke, also from the CDC and Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, detailing the variants of concern (VOC) circulating in the world today. They write of the rapid expansion of B.1.1.7 (first reported in the UK) and B.1.351 (first reported in South Africa) in some countries, adding, "However, such an outcome is not inevitable; the US and other countries have the capability to prevent this outcome from occurring with a strong and immediate public health response." They also address something we haven't emphasized enough here: the risk for the "evolution of domestic VOC given the high levels of transmission in much of the nation." They list the elements in the necessary public health response to this threat, including decreasing community transmission using "demonstrated effective prevention practices," increased genomic sequence surveillance, and accelerated vaccination programs nationally.

They go on to discuss the vaccination program that is ongoing across the country, including the effort to "assess the actual effectiveness of these vaccines in non-clinical trial settings among the first populations for whom vaccination was recommended," investigations of "breakthrough" infections following vaccination, and investigation of "the ability of postvaccination serum to neutralize novel variant viruses." They conclude that we need a well-coordinated public health effort along with good uptake of vaccines to stay ahead of emerging variants that have the potential to "dangerously accelerate the trajectory of the pandemic." I hope enough of us get this memo.

I've seen a summary of a paper published two days ago. I was unable to access the paper, so the sum-

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mary is all I have. It addresses the Covid-19 infection rate among pregnant people in Washington state between March and June of 2020, finding that it is 70 percent higher in them than in similarly-aged adults. The rate of infection is even higher in pregnant people of color who were two to four times higher than in nonpregnant people. The researchers say, "Higher infection rates in pregnant patients may be due to the overrepresentation of women in many professions and industries considered essential during the COVID-19 pandemic—including healthcare, education, service sectors." They also say this is good reason to add pregnant people to priority lists for vaccination.

We've talked about the commencement of pediatric trials for vaccines. Pfizer/BioNTech have announced they'll be starting studies in children ages five to 11 soon with plans to study even younger children later in the year. Their age 12 to 15 trial is fully enrolled with the expectation for a data readout before mid-year. This is the vaccine already approved for children as young as 16. Sooner is better as long as supply can be produced to cover these age groups once the trials are complete.

They also have a trial underway for pregnant people with the first participants receiving their doses today. While the first doses were administered in the US, the trial will include nine countries: the US, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mozambique, South Africa, the UK, and Spain. The study will include the adults and their infants who will be monitored to the age of six months. One of the topics of interest is transfer of antibodies from mother to fetus.

The CDC, USDA, and FDA got together today to remind us all that food and its packaging are highly unlikely to act as a source of spread for this coronavirus. The FDA statement said, "Consumers should be reassured that we continue to believe, based on our understanding of currently available reliable scientific information, and supported by overwhelming international scientific consensus, that the foods they eat and food packaging they touch are highly unlikely to spread SARS-CoV-2." They go on to mention the respiratory nature of the disease and the respiratory routes of spread, adding, "Given that the number of virus particles that could be theoretically picked up by touching a surface would be very small and the amount needed for infection via oral inhalation would be very high, the chances of infection by touching the surface of food packaging or eating food is considered to be extremely low," adding that with more than 100 million cases to draw on thus far in the pandemic, "we have not seen epidemiological evidence of food or food packaging as the source of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to humans." It appears this statement is in response to the recent allegations by the Chinese government that perhaps the real source of the virus was frozen foods. No one seriously believes that, and these agencies just want you to know it.

I am not, generally speaking, in favor of coercive employer decisions, but I have to say I am not upset with the governor of the Vatican, one Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, who signed a decree in the last couple of weeks that says Vatican employees who refuse vaccination against Covid-19 without legitimate health reasons may lose their jobs. The decree says vaccination is a responsible act because "refusal of the vaccine constitutes a risk for others," and it is certainly in line with the Pope's January statement in an interview with Canale 5 in Italy, which says, "I believe that ethically everyone should take the vaccine. It is not an option, it is an ethical choice because you are gambling with your health, with your life, but you are also gambling with the lives of others."

We talked a few days ago about the RECOVERY (Randomized Evaluation of COVID-19 Therapy) Trial in the UK, billed as the world's largest randomized controlled clinical trial for Covid-19 therapeutics, which looks at existing drugs to determine whether any of them have benefit with Covid-19 patients. This is the trial that gave us dexamethasone, which has made a substantial difference in our treatment of this infection. While the trial includes 36,000 hospitalized patients in the UK, it is now expanding internationally with the goal of getting results more quickly because we know the more patients we have, the sooner we get answers. There is also a goal of finding solutions that will work in "less well-resourced settings." This is a sound and well-regarded trial, so we'll wish them well.

I'm not sure whether it bring comfort or not, but I'll share with you what I gathered from a short piece I read from CNN indicating that the US is not the only place in the world where people are awful when it comes to showing any degree of caring for their fellow citizens. Turns out Belgium, with a population just under 12 million, has had 185,000 violations of their pandemic rules since they imposed restrictions. Here

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is a sampling of offenses and fines imposed:

-“Residents breaking quarantine or violating ban on small gatherings - \$300

-“Returning travelers not getting a Covid-19 test - \$300

-“Businesses caught breaking Covid-19 restrictions - \$900

-“People attending a large gathering or party - \$900 (organizers pay around \$5000)”

I don’t know about you, but I think that does help me feel better. I was thinking we were somehow uniquely terrible people. Thanks, Belgium!

I’ve been following the stories of friends in Texas as they’ve suffered through a polar vortex and the concomitant cold spell that was accompanied by a power grid failure. You can argue all you’d like about policy; the fact is that folks have been cold, without power, without water in some cases, and suffering. We hardy northern types like to scoff at southerners who are all wimpy about the cold and about driving on ice; but the fact is that homes aren’t always constructed to deal with the cold in places where it doesn’t typically get cold; and people who live in warm climates aren’t so much constructed to deal with it either. And if it’s 45 degrees inside your house, you’re cold, no matter what you’re used to, because (spoiler alert) we northerners don’t hang out in 45-degree temperatures for long periods of time either, however tough we like to talk; we go indoors when it’s cold.

Utility crews rushed to restore power over the last couple of days, but their efforts were hampered by the low temperatures. Turns out taking shortcuts in building power plants and wind farms without sufficient safeguards against the cold was only a good idea in the summer. Houston was one epicenter of the trouble this time around, and there were not enough places for folks to go to warm up. This is a particular problem for those who are vulnerable—older folks, children, sick people. And so a crisis was born.

Some residents viewed this disaster as an opportunity to make a killing; I’ve heard tales of price gouging for sandwiches and drinks. And other residents viewed this disaster as an opportunity to make a difference. Jim McIngvale, the owner of Gallery Furniture, was one such. He opened his store in north Houston as a shelter. Think about it: all that display furniture. Places to sit, places to sleep, places to warm up, all in one big old furniture store. One grateful resident said to the AP reporter, “We came in and they welcomed us with open arms.”

McIngvale told reporters that Houston had been good to his business and he was just doing his part in return. Of course, this is the same guy who opened up his store after flooding from Hurricane Harvey and provided meals to hungry people during the pandemic; so clearly, he was pretty public-spirited already. He said, “We all have a responsibility for the well-being of the community and we think this is our responsibility.” He walked around the store offering pastries to those sheltering there. With a generator that can power the store for days, he is in the perfect position to help. And so he did. Just like that.

The store did require masks and offer lots of hand sanitizer to all comers. There were foods served out of a kitchen and chips and snacks set out. There was a playground for children, and there were power outlets to charge up mobile devices. Understand, this is pretty high-end furniture, and random people were spending the night on three-to five-thousand-dollar sofas and beds. I don’t know what that does to the market value of those items; but I can’t imagine it’s good. More than 300 people spent the night Tuesday.

McIngvale indicated he’d continue as long as necessary. “We’ve been through tougher fights than this. We’ll get through this.”

And once again, I am humbled by the offerings of those who can afford to ignore the troubles of others, but choose not to. There really are still good people in the world.

Take care. We’ll talk again.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	452	430	850	15	Minimal	14.3%
Beadle	2674	2566	5695	39	Substantial	12.4%
Bennett	380	364	1157	9	Minimal	2.4%
Bon Homme	1502	1474	2021	25	Minimal	6.3%
Brookings	3548	3424	11543	35	Substantial	3.5%
Brown	5076	4910	12383	84	Substantial	6.5%
Brule	686	670	1831	9	Minimal	17.9%
Buffalo	420	406	889	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	968	933	3148	20	Moderate	3.0%
Campbell	129	123	254	4	Minimal	25.0%
Charles Mix	1261	1197	3823	18	Substantial	13.2%
Clark	363	343	929	4	Substantial	6.1%
Clay	1777	1745	5085	15	Moderate	3.6%
Codington	3912	3698	9430	76	Substantial	13.8%
Corson	462	448	991	12	Minimal	13.3%
Custer	739	717	2639	12	Moderate	10.9%
Davison	2932	2838	6351	60	Moderate	4.7%
Day	650	594	1718	28	Substantial	20.0%
Deuel	471	452	1103	8	Moderate	16.1%
Dewey	1397	1369	3747	22	Minimal	2.4%
Douglas	422	407	884	9	Minimal	2.9%
Edmunds	477	451	1017	12	Moderate	5.3%
Fall River	517	494	2535	15	Moderate	4.4%
Faulk	354	328	679	13	Moderate	0.0%
Grant	948	883	2157	37	Substantial	16.7%
Gregory	527	480	1220	27	Substantial	6.4%
Haakon	246	233	522	9	Minimal	14.3%
Hamlin	689	628	1724	38	Moderate	8.8%
Hand	327	314	782	6	Minimal	3.8%
Hanson	352	337	693	4	Moderate	18.4%
Harding	91	90	179	1	Minimal	0.0%
Hughes	2263	2180	6378	34	Substantial	4.8%
Hutchinson	782	736	2279	24	Moderate	9.1%



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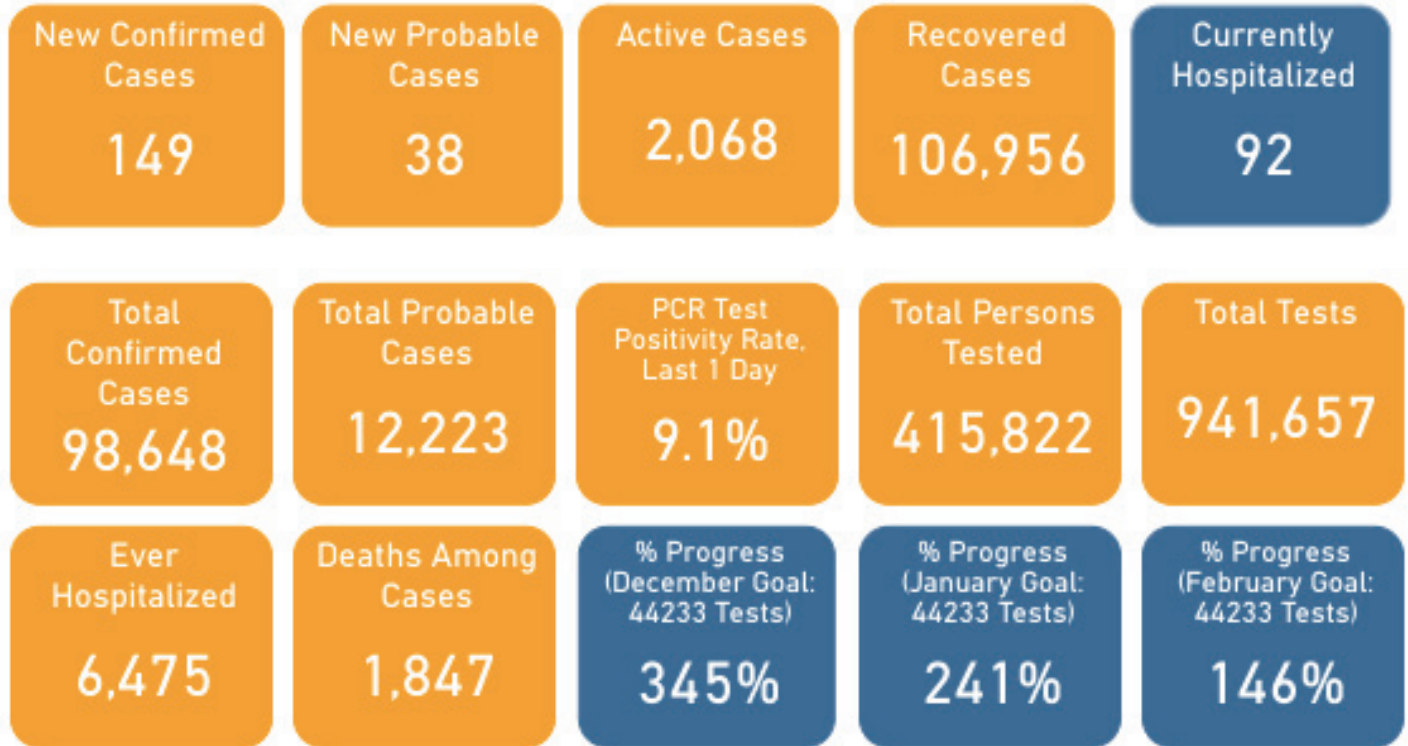
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Hyde	136	133	398	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	276	259	902	14	Minimal	15.4%
Jerauld	268	249	546	16	Minimal	0.0%
Jones	84	82	212	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	626	595	1599	14	Moderate	9.7%
Lake	1169	1130	3181	17	Moderate	7.9%
Lawrence	2795	2719	8327	44	Moderate	6.8%
Lincoln	7629	7425	19724	76	Substantial	5.2%
Lyman	597	577	1840	10	Minimal	8.8%
Marshall	298	286	1142	5	Moderate	2.8%
McCook	734	698	1575	24	Moderate	7.0%
McPherson	237	231	542	4	Minimal	0.0%
Meade	2549	2464	7457	31	Moderate	10.4%
Mellette	242	238	713	2	Minimal	0.0%
Miner	269	251	559	9	None	0.0%
Minnehaha	27640	26828	75822	326	Substantial	5.0%
Moody	612	585	1714	16	Minimal	7.7%
Oglala Lakota	2049	1969	6543	47	Minimal	2.2%
Pennington	12691	12283	38189	184	Substantial	8.2%
Perkins	343	319	781	13	Minimal	12.9%
Potter	365	349	814	3	Moderate	13.3%
Roberts	1144	1080	4027	35	Substantial	4.8%
Sanborn	326	319	665	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	795	749	2070	25	Substantial	7.4%
Stanley	326	319	901	2	Minimal	3.7%
Sully	136	132	295	3	Minimal	6.3%
Todd	1218	1179	4083	28	Moderate	9.8%
Tripp	682	649	1447	16	Moderate	18.4%
Turner	1055	991	2637	51	Moderate	8.3%
Union	1952	1871	6063	39	Substantial	9.0%
Walworth	716	689	1792	15	Moderate	14.3%
Yankton	2783	2721	9091	28	Moderate	1.7%
Ziebach	335	325	852	9	None	0.0%
Unassigned	0	0	1812	0		

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## South Dakota



### AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4410	0
10-19 years	12434	0
20-29 years	19797	4
30-39 years	18224	16
40-49 years	15816	34
50-59 years	15618	108
60-69 years	12692	244
70-79 years	6791	419
80+ years	5089	1022

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	57803	871
Male	53068	976

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## Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

3

New Probable Cases

2

Active Cases

82

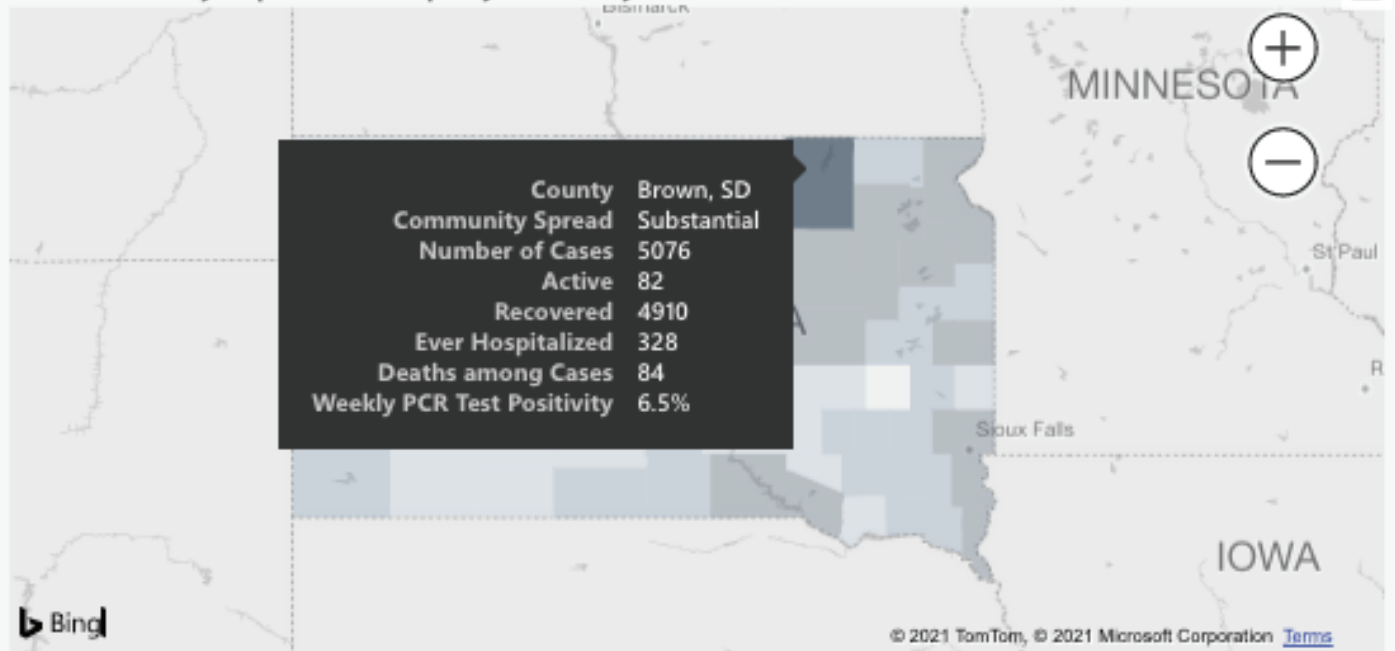
Recovered Cases

4,910

Currently Hospitalized

92

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: None, Minimal, Moderate, Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases

4,552

Total Probable Cases

524

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

7.0%

Total Persons Tested

17,459

Total Tests

45,867

Ever Hospitalized

328

Deaths Among Cases

84

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

345%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

241%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

146%

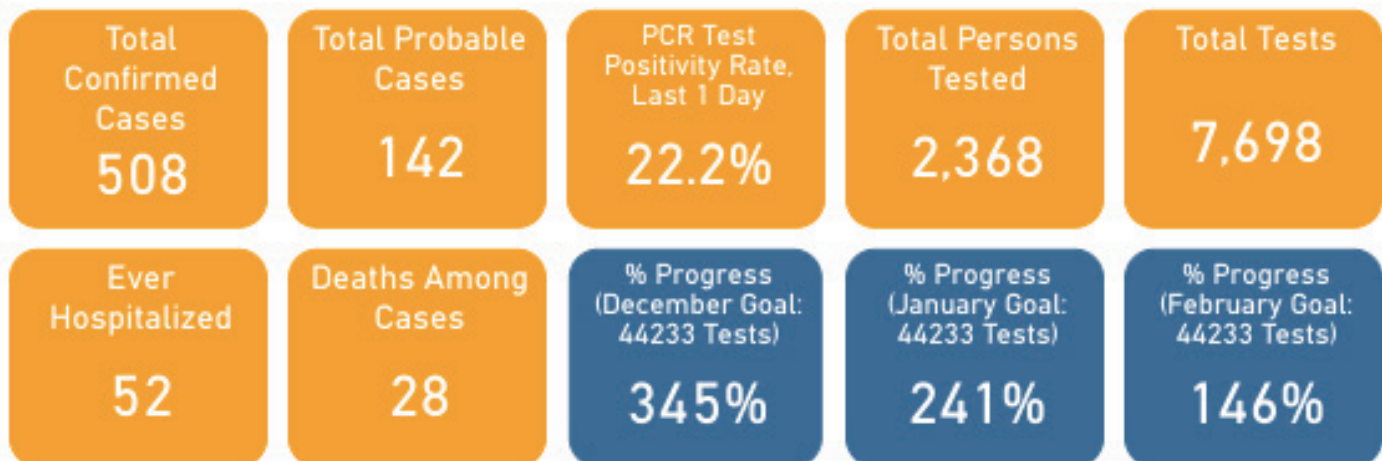
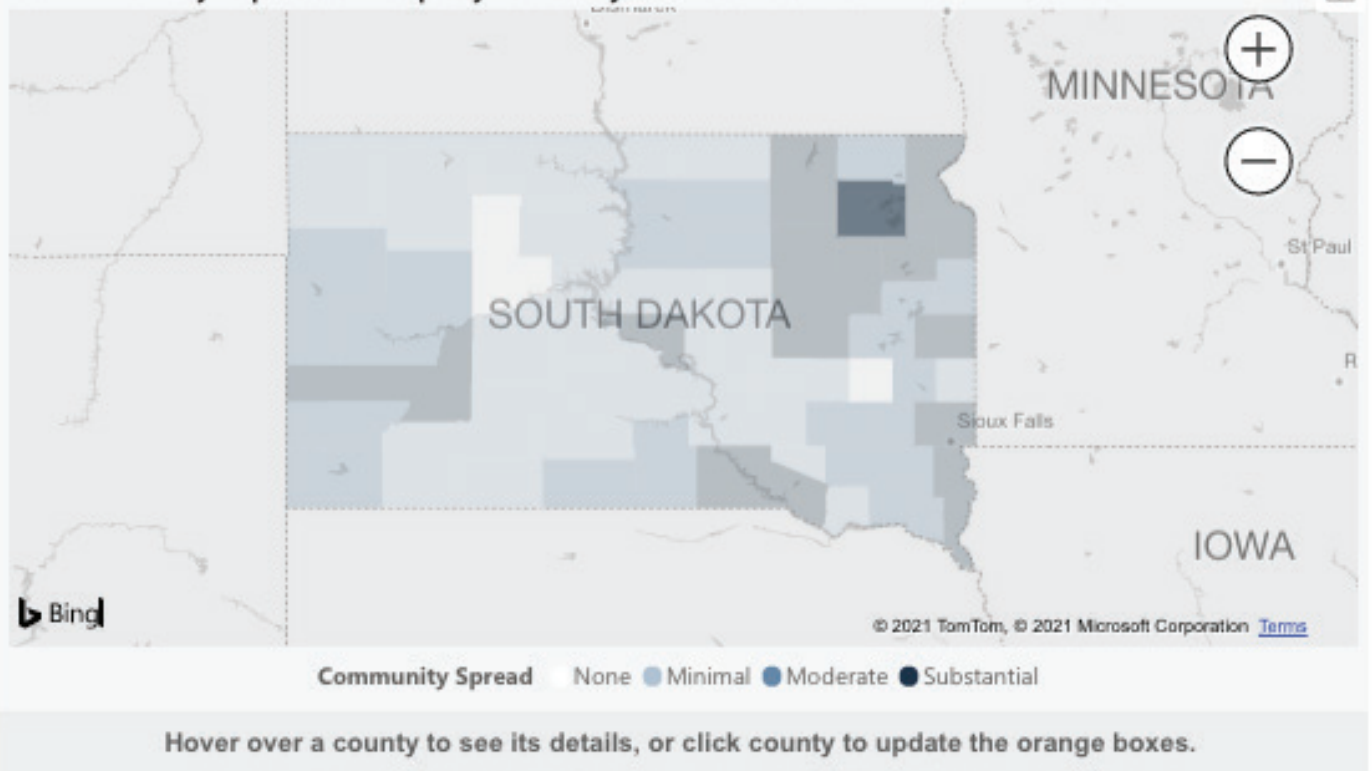
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## Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence





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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

164,399

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

110,759

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

16%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	86,672
Pfizer	77,727

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	29,914
Moderna - Series Complete	28,379
Pfizer - 1 dose	27,205
Pfizer - Series Complete	25,261

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	16.05%
Series Complete	7.77%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	404	200	102	302
Beadle	3122	1,404	859	2,263
Bennett <sup>*</sup>	268	94	87	181
Bon Homme <sup>*</sup>	1680	790	445	1,235
Brookings	4314	1,608	1,353	2,961
Brown	8036	2,844	2,596	5,440
Brule <sup>*</sup>	1039	529	255	784
Buffalo <sup>*</sup>	91	81	5	86
Butte	897	443	227	670
Campbell	543	163	190	353
Charles Mix <sup>*</sup>	1689	781	454	1,235
Clark	598	254	172	426
Clay	2466	886	790	1,676
Codington <sup>*</sup>	5151	2,009	1,571	3,580
Corson <sup>*</sup>	124	88	18	106
Custer <sup>*</sup>	1362	650	356	1,006
Davison	4208	1,362	1,423	2,785
Day <sup>*</sup>	1190	510	340	850
Deuel	677	337	170	507
Dewey <sup>*</sup>	254	66	94	160
Douglas <sup>*</sup>	693	259	217	476
Edmunds	661	269	196	465
Fall River <sup>*</sup>	1272	544	364	908
Faulk	558	192	183	375

# Broton Daily Independent

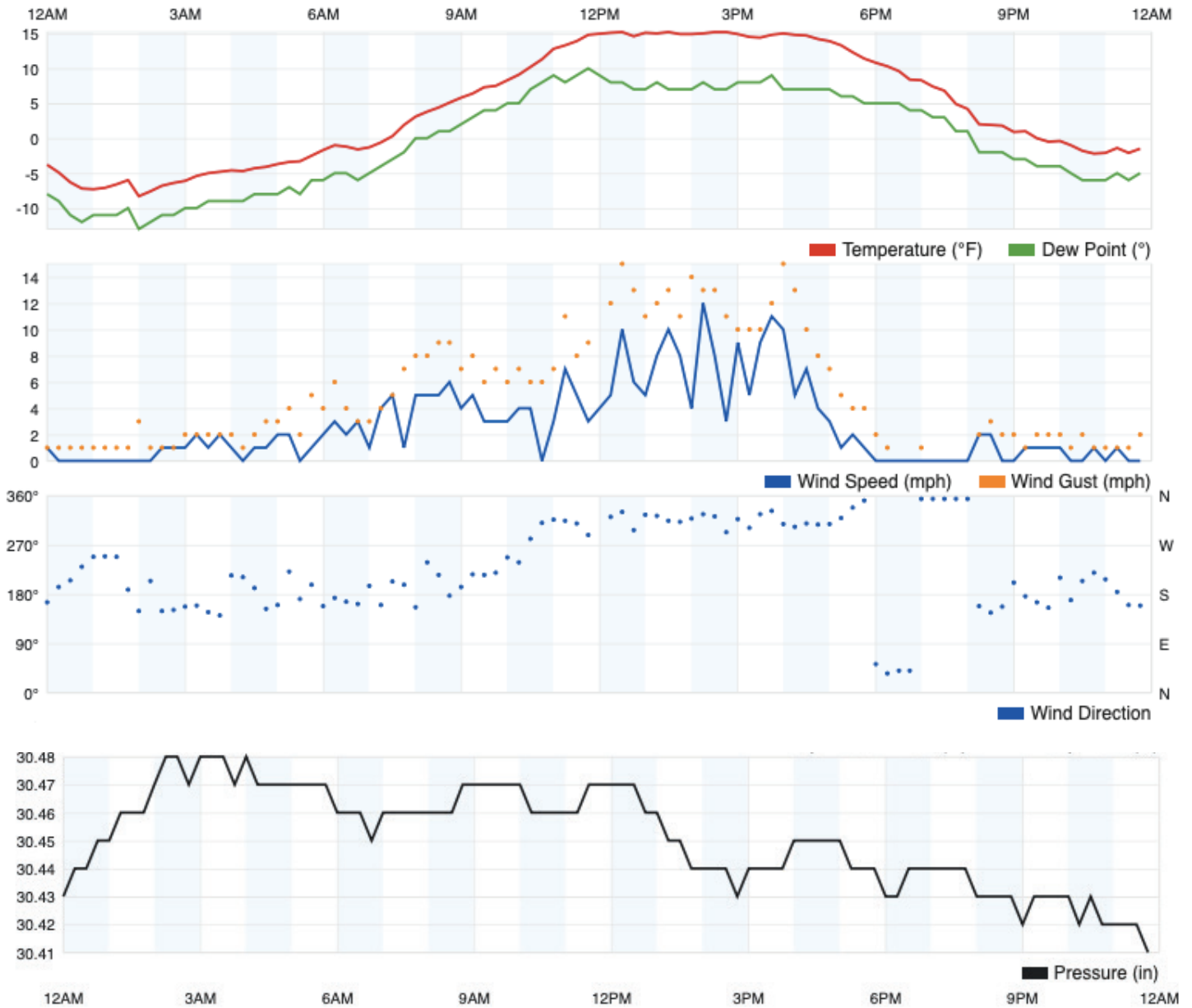
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Grant*	1206	370	418	<b>788</b>
Gregory*	889	403	243	<b>646</b>
Haakon*	316	114	101	<b>215</b>
Hamlin	907	455	226	<b>681</b>
Hand	749	335	207	<b>542</b>
Hanson	234	100	67	<b>167</b>
Harding	28	22	3	<b>25</b>
Hughes*	4031	1,933	1,049	<b>2,982</b>
Hutchinson*	2069	749	660	<b>1,409</b>
Hyde*	312	114	99	<b>213</b>
Jackson*	219	95	62	<b>157</b>
Jerauld	434	242	96	<b>338</b>
Jones*	326	142	92	<b>234</b>
Kingsbury	1114	484	315	<b>799</b>
Lake	1867	777	545	<b>1,322</b>
Lawrence	3666	1,804	931	<b>2,735</b>
Lincoln	14764	4,046	5,359	<b>9,405</b>
Lyman*	367	225	71	<b>296</b>
Marshall*	817	357	230	<b>587</b>
McCook	1172	418	377	<b>795</b>
McPherson	107	57	25	<b>82</b>
Meade*	3001	1,211	895	<b>2,106</b>
Mellette*	24	12	6	<b>18</b>
Miner	445	183	131	<b>314</b>
Minnehaha*	43420	12,938	15,241	<b>28,179</b>
Moody*	845	331	257	<b>588</b>
Oglala Lakota*	88	44	22	<b>66</b>
Pennington*	19757	5,949	6,904	<b>12,853</b>
Perkins*	275	147	64	<b>211</b>
Potter	396	154	121	<b>275</b>
Roberts*	2202	1,006	598	<b>1,604</b>
Sanborn	506	210	148	<b>358</b>
Spink	1557	469	544	<b>1,013</b>
Stanley*	587	285	151	<b>436</b>
Sully	165	111	27	<b>138</b>
Todd*	86	30	28	<b>58</b>
Tripp*	1130	388	371	<b>759</b>
Walworth*	952	458	247	<b>705</b>
Yankton	5200	1,494	1,853	<b>3,347</b>
Ziebach*	41	11	15	<b>26</b>
Other	3595	735	1,430	<b>2,165</b>

# Groton Daily Independent

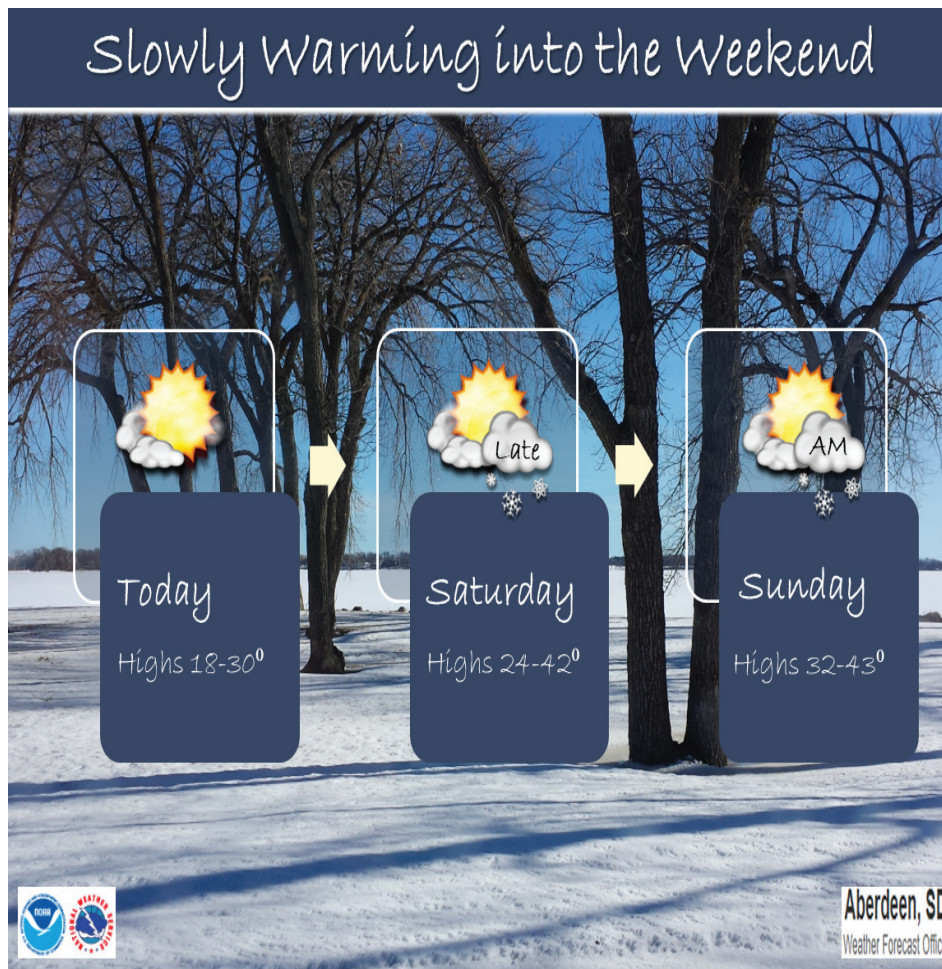
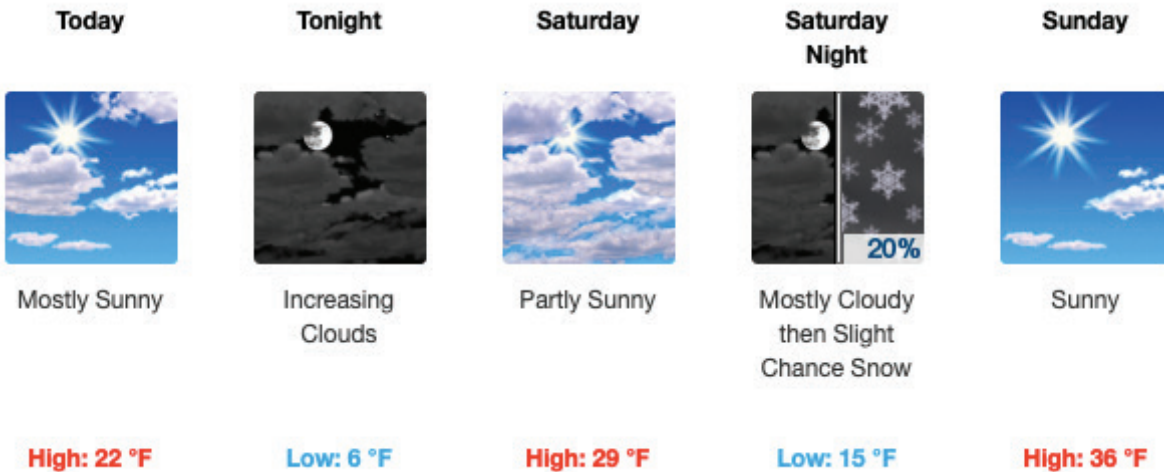
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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A gradual warming trend will continue to take place across the region during the course of the next couple days. Temperatures at or above freezing will return along with better chances to see more sunshine. A disturbance moving through the region Saturday night through Sunday morning will bring light snow chances to mainly portions of southern and eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. At this point, accumulations look to be on the light side with perhaps only minor or nuisance impacts at best.



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## Today in Weather History

February 19, 2000: Due to the arid and windy conditions, a fire believed to be started by a discarded cigarette, burnt about 1,300-acre of grassland between Kennebec and Lower Brule. The fire threatened a ranch but changed directions before anyone had to be evacuated.

February 19, 2008: An Arctic air mass along with blustery northwest winds brought extreme wind chills during the evening and early morning hours to northeast South Dakota. Wind chills ranged from 35 to 50 degrees below zero. The winds diminished in the early morning hours of the 20th, allowing air temperatures to fall to record or near-record lows across northeast South Dakota. Ten new record lows, ranging from 23 to 30 degrees below zero, were set for February 20th. Several water pipes were broken in Aberdeen and Roslyn. Also, many vehicles did not start along with late school starts or closings.

1884: Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 people and causing three million dollars damage. The tornado outbreak hit Georgia and the Carolinas the hardest.

1888: Severe thunderstorms over southern Illinois spawned a violent tornado in Jefferson County and devastated the southeast half of Mount Vernon. The tornado killed 24 people, injured 80 others, and destroyed or damaged 300 homes and 50 businesses. Overturned wood stoves ignited many fires in the wreckage. This tornado currently stands as the 9th deadliest Illinois tornado on record. This event was one of the first disasters to which the American Red Cross responded.

1884 - Severe thunderstorms spawned sixty tornadoes in the southeastern U.S., killing more than 420 persons and causing three million dollars damage. Georgia and the Carolinas hardest were hit in the tornado outbreak. (David Ludlum)

1888 - A tornado struck Mount Vernon IL. The tornado killed sixteen persons along its 62 mile path. (David Ludlum)

1954 - High winds across the southern half of the Great Plains, gusting to 85 mph, caused the worst duststorms since the 1930s. Graders were needed in places to clear fence high dirt drifts. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A winter storm over the southern and central Rockies produced 28 inches of snow at Echo Lake CO, and two feet of snow at Gascon NM and Los Alamos NM. Mora County NM was declared a disaster area following the storm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Showers and thunderstorms in the southeastern U.S. drenched Valdosta GA with more than five inches of rain, and the 24 hour rainfall total of 7.10 inches at Apalachicola FL more than doubled their previous 24 hour record for February. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - An upper level weather disturbance brought heavy snow to parts of Nebraska, with six inches reported at Loup City and Surprise. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A moist Pacific storm worked its way into New Mexico and southern Colorado. Up to 36 inches of snow blanketed the Wolf Creek and Red Mountain passes of southwest Colorado, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported around Trinidad. In New Mexico, the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains were blanketed with 9 to 28 inches of snow, and 50 to 60 mph wind gusts were reported from Taos to Albuquerque. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 - Strong winds reaching as high as 40 mph with gusts to 53 mph topple the 48 year old National Christmas tree. The 42 foot tall Colorado blue spruce sat just south of the White House on the Ellipse. It was transplanted there from York, Pennsylvania in 1978. The Weather Doctor

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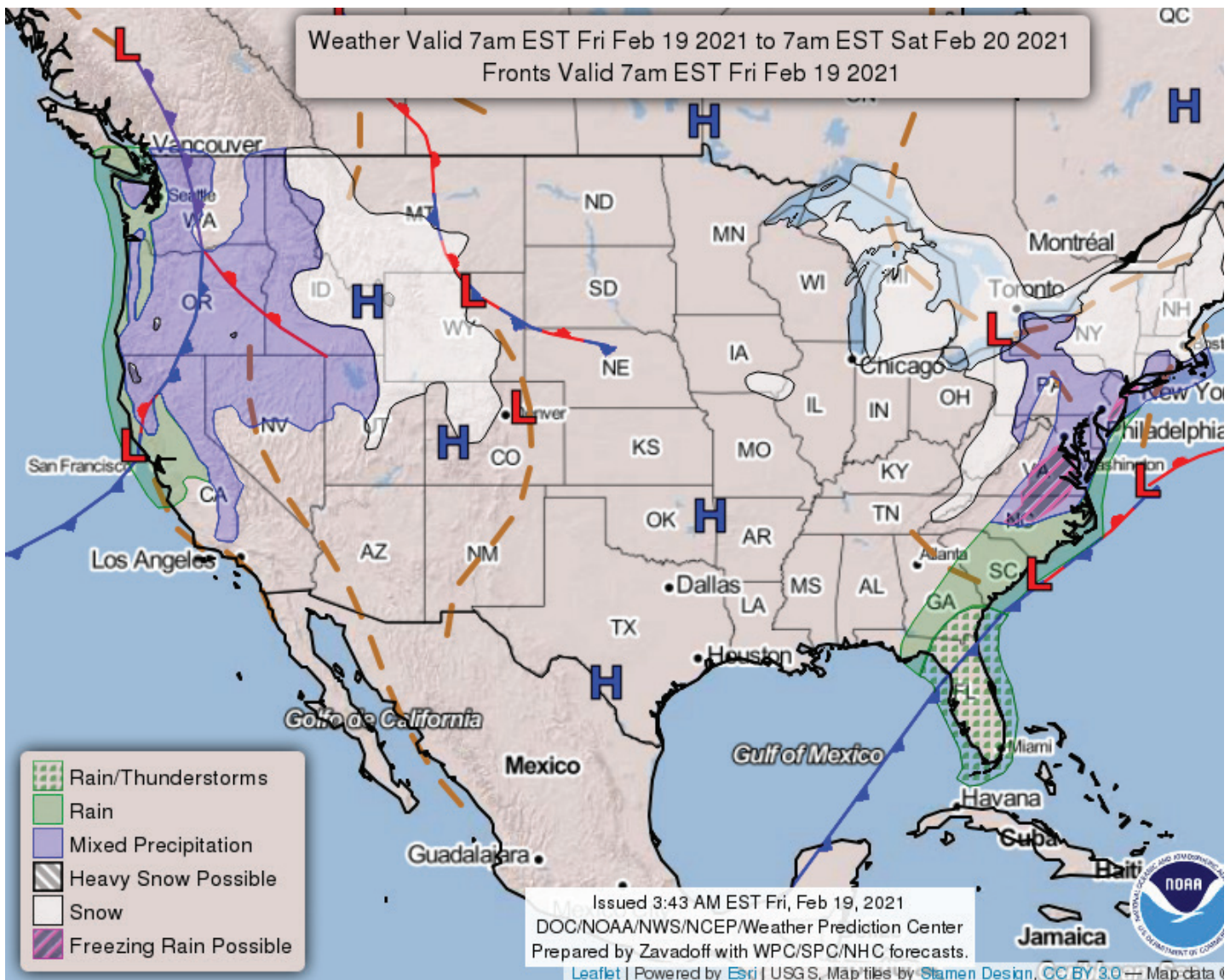
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 16 °F at 11:58 AM**  
**Low Temp: -8 °F at 1:59 AM**  
**Wind: 15 mph at 12:30 PM**  
**Precip:**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 62° in 1930**  
**Record Low: -34° in 1929**  
**Average High: 29°F**  
**Average Low: 9°F**  
**Average Precip in Feb.: 0.31**  
**Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14**  
**Average Precip to date: 0.78**  
**Precip Year to Date: 0.14**  
**Sunset Tonight: 6:07 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27 a.m.**



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## THE BOOK!

Sir Walter Scott was a prominent novelist and poet whose writings were well known, respected, and read throughout the world. As he approached death, he called for his son-in-law and said, "Bring me the Book!"

Knowing that he had a massive library, he was completely puzzled by the request and had no idea what the title of "the Book" might be. Realizing that there were more than 20,000 volumes in Scott's library, he asked, "What book?"

"Need you ask?" replied the literary genius. "There is only one Book, the Bible!" Sir Walter Scott, the author of many books and owner of thousands of books, spoke wisely. He knew personally the Author of the Book of books, the message it contained, and its importance.

In this psalm the writer declares convincingly that "The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul." Perfect because it contains God's message of love, forgiveness, and redemption and in it, we find everything that is necessary for our salvation.

The author also wants us to know that it can be trusted – that its contents are reliable and dependable. So, he adds that "the decrees – or teachings – of the Lord can be trusted...to revive the soul." Only God's Word can bring joy to our hearts, guidance for our journey, light for our path, wisdom for our decisions, and eternal life through Christ.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, we stand in awe before You, rejoicing in Your Word and the hope we have in You. Thanks for allowing us to know You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. Psalm 19:7

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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

### Airman convicted of killing his 6-month-old son

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A military jury has convicted a senior airman at Ellsworth Air Force Base of killing his 6-month-old son.

The jury found 26-year-old James Cunningham guilty of murder Thursday in the March 2020 death of his son, Zachariah, following a four-day trial at the Air Force base.

Cunningham can decide whether the military judge or the jury will impose his sentence, which is a maximum of life in prison without parole. If he chooses the latter option, three-fourths of the jury must agree on the sentence. Cunningham would serve time in a federal military prison.

Prosecutors said Cunningham lied three times before confessing to punching his son and that medical evidence showed the baby died from being shaken and hit multiple times.

The defense argued the baby suffered injuries when he fell from a kitchen counter where Cunningham had placed him.

The jury made its decision after hearing testimony from Zachariah's mother Caitlynn Merhoff, law enforcement, Cunningham's co-workers and medical experts, including some who treated the child, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Jurors listened to the 911 call, viewed body camera footage from officers responding to the house and hospital, and watched the video of Cunningham's interview with Rapid City police officers. Cunningham did not testify.

### Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 55, Aberdeen Roncalli 45

Burke 71, Wagner 58

Canistota 55, Irene-Wakonda 40

Canton 69, Alcester-Hudson 56

Clark/Willow Lake 49, Sisseton 46

Corsica/Stickney 68, Hanson 58

Custer 63, Lead-Deadwood 26

Dakota Valley 68, Sioux City, East, Iowa 60

Dupree 66, Newell 44

Elkton-Lake Benton 61, Arlington 57

Ethan 58, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 53

Faulkton 62, Sully Buttes 36

Florence/Henry 51, Warner 49

Freeman Academy/Marion 74, Menno 48

Gayville-Volin 65, Freeman 35

Howard 63, Viborg-Hurley 52

Kimball/White Lake 68, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 67

Lake Preston 52, Colman-Egan 44

Leola/Frederick 66, North Central Co-Op 30

Lower Brule 74, Philip 40

Madison 61, Beresford 33

Marty Indian 62, Colome 58

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 75, Parkston 54

North Border 72, Hillsboro/Central Valley, N.D. 47

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Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 83, Centerville 65  
Potter County 61, Ipswich 37  
Rapid City Christian 62, Hill City 48  
Rapid City Stevens 69, Rapid City Central 60  
Redfield 64, Webster 37  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 54, Mitchell Christian 50, OT  
Sioux Falls Christian 58, Harrisburg 57, OT  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 65, Sioux Falls Washington 62  
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 71, Brandon Valley 58  
Sioux Valley 69, Garretson 38  
Tiospa Zina Tribal 60, Britton-Hecla 30  
Vermillion 65, Flandreau 49  
Waubay/Summit 64, Northwestern 32  
West Central 61, McCook Central/Montrose 43  
GIRLS BASKETBALL=  
Aberdeen Roncalli 39, Aberdeen Christian 23  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 51, Kimball/White Lake 28  
Arlington 50, Elkton-Lake Benton 45  
Belle Fourche 52, New Underwood 39, OT  
Bridgewater-Emery 63, DeSmet 47  
Burke 62, Gregory 50  
Canton 46, Alcester-Hudson 37  
Castlewood 63, Estelline/Hendricks 28  
Centerville 55, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 14  
Colome 63, Marty Indian 52  
Custer 62, Lead-Deadwood 25  
Dell Rapids 51, Madison 46  
Ethan 61, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 36  
Faulkton 53, Sully Buttes 47  
Freeman 70, Gayville-Volin 47  
Garretson 69, Sioux Valley 67  
Hanson 55, Chamberlain 50  
Harding County 54, Hulett, Wyo. 10  
Herreid/Selby Area 66, Northwestern 21  
Hill City 71, Rapid City Christian 63  
Howard 65, Viborg-Hurley 55  
Ipswich 55, Potter County 47  
Jones County 61, Lyman 39  
Kadoka Area 60, Bennett County 58  
Lemmon 76, McIntosh 24  
Leola/Frederick 39, North Central Co-Op 36  
McCook Central/Montrose 72, Chester 25  
Menno 48, Freeman Academy/Marion 13  
Miller 51, Highmore-Harrold 46  
Mobridge-Pollock 68, Stanley County 32  
Newell 54, Dupree 49  
Parkston 54, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 42  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 36, Mitchell Christian 27  
Scotland 45, Canistota 32  
Sioux Falls Washington 64, Brandon Valley 44

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Spearfish 56, Douglas 27  
Sturgis Brown 54, Hot Springs 36  
Tea Area 70, Parker 40  
Tri-Valley 57, Lennox 38  
Vermillion 55, Irene-Wakonda 53  
West Central 54, Baltic 30  
White River 75, Lakota Tech 61  
Wolsey-Wessington 58, Hitchcock-Tulare 57

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

## **GOP's Thune says Trump allies engaging in 'cancel culture'**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — U.S. Sen. John Thune is criticizing Republican activists and party leaders for engaging in "cancel culture" by rushing to censure GOP senators who found former President Donald Trump guilty of inciting an insurrection.

In his first interview since he voted to acquit Trump, the Senate's No. 2 Republican on Thursday defended fellow Republicans who sided with Democrats on the "vote of conscience" and warned against shutting out dissenting voices in the party.

"There was a strong case made," Thune said of the Democrats' impeachment presentation. "People could come to different conclusions. If we're going to criticize the media and the left for cancel culture, we can't be doing that ourselves."

Thune's remarks were his first explaining his vote in Trump's trial and assessing the turbulent GOP politics the former president has left behind. Thune, who is facing reelection next year in deeply conservative South Dakota, is among several establishment Republicans grappling with how to reclaim control of a party dominated by Trump and his most ardent supporters for years.

The senator only rarely criticized Trump while he was in office. But he called the former president's actions after the election "inexcusable" and accused him of undermining the peaceful transfer of power.

Still, Thune last week sided with most Republican senators and GOP Senate leader Mitch McConnell in voting to acquit anyway. Thune and others argued that Trump could not be impeached because he was already out of office. Thune said after his vote that he was concerned with the idea of "punishing a private citizen with the sole intent of disqualifying him from holding future office." Democrats fell 10 votes short of the 67 need to convict.

Since then, Trump has lashed out at McConnell and repeated the baseless claim that he won the election. The comments have inflamed a feud that is likely to play out in GOP primaries between Trump-backed candidates and those supported by the establishment wing.

Thune suggested he would be taking steps to assist candidates "who don't go off and talk about conspiracies and that sort of thing." He praised Rep. Liz Cheney, a Wyoming Republican, who was censured by the Wyoming GOP for voting to impeach Trump, for doing an "exceptional job on most issues" and said he was ready to jump into primary battles like the one she is sure to face.

"At the grassroots level, there's a lot of people who want to see Trump-like candidates," he said. "But I think we're going to be looking for candidates that are electable."

Thune himself was hit by Trump last year after he said efforts by some GOP members in the U.S. House to reject Electoral College results would "go down like a shot dog" in the Senate. Trump called Thune a "RINO," meaning Republican In Name Only, and "Mitch's boy," in reference to McConnell. The attacks inspired some Trump loyalists in South Dakota to huddle for a primary challenge to the state's senior senator, whose candidacy has gone unchallenged in previous elections.

On Thursday, the senator attempted to downplay those attacks, likening them to "food fights within the family" that hurt Republicans' goals. He noted there was no evidence to support Trump's claim of voter

fraud.

"You've got to face the music, and at some point, it's got to be over and you've got to move on," he said, adding, "I think it's just important to tell people the truth. The most important responsibility of any leader is to define reality."

## South Dakota's AG charged with 3 misdemeanors in fatal crash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's Republican attorney general was charged Thursday with three misdemeanors for striking and killing a man with his car last summer, avoiding more serious felony charges in a case that raised questions about how the state's top law enforcement official first reported the crash.

Jason Ravensborg could face up to 30 days in jail and up to a \$500 fine on each charge: careless driving, driving out of his lane and operating a motor vehicle while on his phone.

Ravensborg said he was grateful that the legal system assumes his innocence — for now — while relatives of the man killed in the collision, 55-year-old Joseph Boever, said they were disappointed but not surprised that the attorney general was only facing misdemeanor charges.

Hyde County Deputy State's Attorney Emily Sovell said the evidence simply didn't support felony charges of vehicular homicide or manslaughter, which could have meant years of prison time. She noted Ravensborg wasn't intoxicated, and that a manslaughter charge would have required the state to show he "consciously and unjustifiably" disregarded a substantial risk.

"At best, his conduct was negligent, which is insufficient to bring criminal charges in South Dakota," Beadle County State's Attorney Michael Moore, who helped handle the case, said.

Ravensborg, who was elected to his first term in 2018, initially told authorities he thought he had struck a deer or another large animal as he drove home to Pierre from a Republican fundraiser late on Sept. 12. He said he had searched the unlit area with a cellphone flashlight and didn't realize he had killed a man until the next day when he returned to the accident scene on U.S. 14 near Highmore.

Crash investigators said in November that Ravensborg was distracted when he veered onto the shoulder of the highway where Boever was walking. But prosecutors took months more to make a charging decision in the crash, launching an investigation that considered cellphone GPS data, video footage from along Ravensborg's route and DNA evidence.

Ravensborg said he had not been drinking before the crash, and he handed over his electronic devices to investigators. A toxicology report from a blood sample taken roughly 15 hours after the crash showed no alcohol in Ravensborg's system. Investigators said Thursday that they found no evidence he was drinking alcohol in the hours before the crash.

Boever's family had questioned Ravensborg's account and expressed frustration as five months passed while they waited for a charging decision.

Nick Nemeč, Boever's cousin, said Thursday he was "disappointed, but not surprised" at the charges. He called South Dakota's manslaughter law "weak" and that he expected his family to take civil action against Ravensborg.

"I was afraid the charge would be something on the order of crossing the white line," Nemeč said. "And that's exactly what the charge was."

Ravensborg said in a statement, "I appreciate, more than ever, that the presumption of innocence placed within our legal system continues to work."

He added that he could not imagine the "pain and loss" of Boever's family.

Moore, the state's attorney, said the misdemeanor charges were the "right decision" but that he didn't feel good about it.

"Obviously when a person dies, we want to know what happened. But we're limited by the investigation and by the facts," he said. "And we can't compel someone to tell us. I mean, there's just nowhere else to go."

Despite the charge accusing Ravensborg of being on his cellphone, he was not actually on his device at



the time of the crash, authorities said. They said phone records showed he had been using his phone about one minute before.

Prosecutors determined from cellphone records that Ravensborg walked by Boever's body while he walked the crash scene with his cellphone flashlight. But Sovell noted that it was a "very dark night" with no lighting on the road and that there was no evidence that either Ravensborg or the sheriff who responded to the crash saw Boever's body.

A crash reconstruction expert from Wyoming and the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation assisted the South Dakota Highway Patrol in the investigation. Such accidents would ordinarily be investigated by the South Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, which answers to the attorney general's office. The other agencies took on the investigation to avoid a conflict of interest.

This story has been corrected to delete an erroneous mention that Ravensborg could face up to a year in jail; prosecutor said each of the three misdemeanors is punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a fine.

## **South Dakota's attorney general charged with misdemeanor careless driving after he struck, killed pedestrian on highway**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's attorney general charged with misdemeanor careless driving after he struck, killed pedestrian on highway.

## **45 years in prison for assault case solved with genealogy**

BELLE FOURCHE, S.D. (AP) — A man has been sentenced to 45 years in prison for sexually assaulting a woman in a 2012 Butte County case that was solved using forensic genealogy.

Shane Boice, 34, pleaded guilty to second-degree rape as part of a plea deal with prosecutors. Two burglary counts were dropped as part of the agreement.

Prosecutors said Boice had seen the victim outside her home and knew she lived alone. Wearing a mask, Boice broke into the victim's home and sexually assaulted her, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Police tested DNA obtained from the crime scene at the time but found no match within DNA databases.

The police department and South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation continued to investigate the case and in 2018 decided to send a DNA sample to a genetic genealogy company.

The company found individuals in its database who were related to the person who contributed the DNA sample. Investigators found those people had a relative who lived in Belle Fourche at the time, which was Boice.

Officers used DNA from Boice's trash and found it matched the original DNA evidence, officials said.

## **Bankers say economy is improving in rural parts of 10 states**

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy is slowly improving in rural parts of 10 Plains and Western states, but employment remains below the level it was at before the coronavirus pandemic began last year, according to a new monthly survey of bankers released Thursday.

The overall index for the region increased to 53.8 in February from January's 52. Any score above 50 suggests a growing economy, while a score below 50 suggests a shrinking economy.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey, said the number of jobs in the region is down roughly 146,000, or 3.3%, from the level it was at before the pandemic began. The survey's hiring index hit 51.9 in February, up from January's weak 46, to suggest businesses are now hiring, but Goss said it will take several months of steady growth to get back to pre-COVID-19 levels.

The bankers surveyed are optimistic about the economy as grain prices and exports continue to increase. The survey's confidence index increased to 64 in February from January's 60. Goss said the Federal Reserve's current record low short-term interest rates are also helping the economy.

Bankers from Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Da-

kota and Wyoming were surveyed.

## Arrest made in fatal Sioux Falls shooting last October

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police have made an arrest in a fatal shooting in Sioux Falls last October.

A 32-year-old man was taken into custody Wednesday on possible manslaughter charges. According to police, he shot and killed 31-year-old Jarell Lavell King after the victim showed up at his home to see his 3-year-old son Oct. 21.

The suspect lived at the residence with King's former girlfriend, the mother of the boy.

According to police, the two men argued and got into a physical fight. The suspect says he saw King pull out a handgun, took it from him and shot him in the shoulder. King died about a week later, the Argus Leader reported.

Lt. Terrance Matia says police did not make an arrest until now because they needed to look into the "circumstances surrounding the disagreement and wait for forensic evidence."

## Old habits imperil Iraq as doctors warn of second virus wave

By ABDULRAHMAN ZEYAD Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — In the busy emergency room of Baghdad's main public hospital, Ali Abbas stood face uncovered, waiting for his sickly father. Dozens of other patients and their relatives mingled without masks.

It's a scene that confounds health workers in Iraq, who warn that the country is entering a new wave of coronavirus cases, in part because many shirk precautions.

"I don't believe in the coronavirus, I believe in God," the 21-year-old Abbas said in the middle of the hospital floor, defying the facility's rules requiring masks.

On Friday, Iraq was under its first full day of a new curfew imposed by the government in response to infection rates that have shot back up again after easing last autumn. The curfew runs all day Friday to Sunday, and from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. the rest of the week. Mosques and schools are closed, large gatherings prohibited, and the wearing of masks and other protective gear will be enforced, according to a statement from the government.

A complete lockdown, including closing airports and borders, is also being considered, two government officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

New cases, down under 600 a day just a month ago, have sharply increased, reaching 3,896 a day on Feb. 18 and approaching September's daily peak of more than 5,000. The Health Ministry says 50% of the new cases are from the new, more infectious strain that first broke out in the U.K. More than 657,000 people have been infected by the virus in Iraq and 13,220 have died since February.

Doctors told The Associated Press they've seen the flare-up coming for weeks. They blame a careless public and a government unable to fully enforce virus protocols.

"I am a doctor fighting public ignorance, not the pandemic," said Mohammed Shahada, a pulmonologist at Baghdad's al-Zahra Hospital.

At al-Zahra Hospital, the year began with just four patients in the 90-bed isolation ward. By the start of February, that jumped to 30 severe virus patients. Shahada expects more in the coming weeks.

At his private clinic, some patients have walked out rather than abide by his strict face mask requirement, he said.

Ismail Taher, a doctor at Baghdad's Sheikh Zayed hospital, estimated that only one in 10 people walking into his hospital wear masks.

The Health Ministry said earlier this month that a new wave was being driven by religious activities -- including Friday prayers and visits to shrines -- and large crowds in markets, restaurants, malls and parks, where greetings with handshakes and kisses are the norm.

The ministry also blamed "some people who are openly questioning the existence of the pandemic."

That's a common sentiment.

"It's just the flu," said Yahya Shammari, a 28-year old college graduate. "I went to the hospital twice

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with no mask on and I didn't get infected."

Rahem Shabib, 32, said he noticed how infection rates dipped following the Shiite Muslim Arbaeen pilgrimage in October. "So God is stronger than COVID-19," he said.

The Arbaeen brings millions from around the world to Iraq for commemorations connected to the 7th century killing of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Islam's Prophet Muhammad. This year, Iraq banned foreign pilgrims from attending, considerably reducing the numbers.

Mac Skelton, a medical sociologist at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimaniyah, said the dismissive attitude was not so much rooted in ignorance as in the realities Iraqis face.

Iraqis have endured so many calamities the past few decades, including wars, political violence and sanctions, that COVID-19 "may not stack up as a major problem," he said.

Also government pandemic policies, centered on hospitals, don't mesh with how Iraqis cope with illness, said Skelton. Amid years of instability, Iraqis had to come up with their own strategies, because health care was either not available or they distrusted hospitals, which at the height of sectarian fighting became dangerous places to go to.

So they seek out pharmacists, nurses, help from neighbors, or even cross borders to treat illness.

"Most doctors are not that surprised, they know patients would refuse to go to hospital unless they were gasping for air and had no choice," said Skelton, director of the university's Institute of Regional and International Studies.

This also suggests Health Ministry statistics, based on tests at government labs, are an undercount, as many Iraqis may forgo testing altogether and opt to recover at home.

Iraq's centralized health system, largely unchanged since the 1970s, has been ground down by decades of wars, sanctions, and prolonged unrest since the 2003 U.S. invasion. Successive governments have invested little in the sector.

The mingling of virus patients with others has also exacerbated case numbers, doctors said. Shahada's hospital was once reserved solely for virus patients; but no longer, and COVID-19 patients and others share rooms where CT scans, MRIs and X-rays are taken, Shahada said.

So far, Iraq has not faced shortages in medical supplies or ICU capacity. But that could change if cases soar, doctors said.

The Health Ministry said it plans to begin administering vaccines by the end of March. The government has allocated funds to secure 1.5 million vaccines from Pfizer and signed a contract for 2 million more from AstraZeneca. Little has been announced about how inoculation will proceed.

Now more than ever, government officials worry it will be difficult to change entrenched habits.

As restrictions eased after September, life returned to Iraq. In Baghdad, restaurants are packed and face masks seldom seen. Further south in Basra, residents go about the day as though the pandemic never reached the southern shores, sharing meals in crowded cafes and shaking hands.

"Changing public awareness is the only way to stop another lethal virus outbreak," Health Minister Hasan al-Tamimi told the AP at the sidelines of a recent press conference.

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Associated Press writer Samya Kullab in Baghdad contributed to this report.

## UK top court gives Uber drivers benefits in landmark ruling

By KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Uber drivers in Britain should be classed as "workers" and not self-employed, the U.K. Supreme Court ruled Friday, in a decision that threatens the company's business model and holds broader implications for the so-called gig economy.

The ruling paves the way for Uber drivers to get benefits such as paid holidays and the minimum wage, handing defeat to the ride-hailing giant in the culmination of a long-running legal battle.

The Supreme Court's seven judges unanimously rejected Uber's appeal against an employment tribunal ruling, which had found that two Uber drivers were "workers" under British law.

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Yaseen Aslam and James Farrar, the two drivers, cheered the outcome.

"This ruling will fundamentally re-order the gig economy and bring an end to rife exploitation of workers by means of algorithmic and contract trickery," Farrar said by email. The pair took Uber to the tribunal in 2016, which ruled in their favor. The decision was upheld in two rounds of appeals before it arrived at the Supreme Court.

Uber, which has 65,000 active drivers in the U.K., had argued that Aslam and Farrar were independent contractors. The company said it respected the court's decision, which it argued focused on a small number of drivers who used the Uber app in 2016.

"Since then we have made some significant changes to our business, guided by drivers every step of the way," Jamie Heywood, Uber's regional general manager for Northern and Eastern Europe, said in a statement. "These include giving even more control over how they earn and providing new protections like free insurance in case of sickness or injury."

Heywood said the company would consult with its U.K. drivers to understand the changes they want.

The ruling clarified that drivers are considered to be on the job when they are logged in to the Uber app in their territory and ready and willing to accept rides, which could be used to calculate minimum wage and holiday pay. Uber had argued that drivers were only working when they were making a journey with a paying passenger.

The case is now expected to return to the employment tribunal for decisions on compensation for drivers over lost pay. Drivers could be entitled to an average of 12,000 pounds (\$16,800), estimated law firm Leigh Day, which is representing drivers.

Uber driver Conrad Delphine looked forward to getting paid time off after years of working without holiday or sick pay.

"I am very pleased. It means I can go on holiday without having to worry about how to pay for it," Delphine said. "Things have been worse because of coronavirus. If we catch the virus we should be entitled to sick pay. It's about time we had some decent pay and conditions."

Last year, Uber and other app-based ride-hailing services avoided a similar attempt in California to classify drivers as employees eligible for benefits and job protections. The companies bankrolled Proposition 22, a ballot measure exempting them from the state's gig-economy laws by keeping drivers classified as independent contractors able to set their own hours. Voters approved it in November.

The British judges on Friday cited a number of factors in their decision: Uber sets fares and contract terms and limits drivers' choice in whether to reject or cancel rides. It also uses passenger ratings to control drivers and minimizes communications between drivers and passengers, which results in the service being "very tightly defined and controlled by Uber."

"Drivers are in a position of subordination and dependency to Uber," with little ability to improve their economic position and the only way to increase their earnings is by "working longer hours while constantly meeting Uber's measures of performance," said judge George Leggatt, as he read out a summary of the ruling on a court livestream.

Uber said some features cited in the ruling no longer exist, noting that since 2017 drivers face no repercussion for rejecting multiple consecutive trips.

The decision comes as Uber faces drastic changes to its operating environment amid the coronavirus pandemic. The company slashed more than 6,000 jobs last year as the virus decimated demand for trips while boosting demand for its Uber Eats food delivery service. The ruling doesn't affect Uber Eats couriers.

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## **It's final: Harry and Meghan won't return as working royals**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press



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LONDON (AP) — Buckingham Palace confirmed Friday that Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, will not be returning to royal duties, and Harry will give up his honorary military titles — a decision that makes formal, and final, the couple's split from the royal family.

When Harry and Meghan stepped away from full-time royal life in early 2020, it was agreed the situation would be reviewed after a year.

Now it has, and the palace said in a statement that the couple, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, have verified "they will not be returning as working members of The Royal Family."

It said Queen Elizabeth II had spoken to Harry and confirmed "that in stepping away from the work of the Royal Family, it is not possible to continue with the responsibilities and duties that come with a life of public service."

The palace said Harry's appointment as captain general of the Royal Marines and titles with other military groups would revert to the queen before being distributed to other members of the family.

Harry, who served in the British army for a decade and has a close bond with the military, founded the Invictus Games competition for wounded troops.

"While all are saddened by their decision, the Duke and Duchess remain much loved members of the family," the palace statement said.

American actress Meghan Markle, a former star of the TV legal drama "Suits," married Harry, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son, Archie, was born a year later.

In early 2020, Meghan and Harry announced they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America, citing what they said were the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. They live in Santa Barbara, California and are expecting their second child.

They recently announced that they will speak to Oprah Winfrey in a TV special to be broadcast next month.

A spokesperson for the couple hit back at suggestions that Meghan and Harry were not devoted to duty.

"As evidenced by their work over the past year, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex remain committed to their duty and service to the U.K. and around the world, and have offered their continued support to the organizations they have represented regardless of official role," the spokesperson said in a statement. "We can all live a life of service. Service is universal."

## Lights come back on in Texas as water woes rise in the South

By PAUL J. WEBER and JILL BLEED Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Many of the millions of Texans who lost power for days after a deadly winter blast overwhelmed the electric grid now have it back, but the crisis was far from over in parts of the South, with many people lacking safe drinking water.

About 325,000 homes and businesses remained without power in Texas on Thursday, down from about 3 million a day earlier, though utility officials said limited rolling blackouts were still possible.

The storms also left more than 450,000 from West Virginia to Louisiana without power and 100,000 in Oregon were still enduring a weeklong outage following a massive ice and snow storm.

The snow and ice moved into the Appalachians, northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania, and later the Northeast as the extreme weather was blamed for the deaths of at least 56 people, with a growing toll of those who perished trying to keep warm.

In and around the western Texas city of Abilene, authorities said six people died of the cold — including a 60-year-old man found dead in his bed in his frigid home. In the Houston area, a family died from carbon monoxide as their car idled in their garage.

Utilities from Minnesota to Texas used rolling blackouts to ease strained power grids. But the remaining Texas outages were mostly weather-related, according to the state's grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas.

Federal Emergency Management Agency acting administrator Bob Fenton said Friday that teams were

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in Texas with fuel, water, blankets and other supplies.

"What has me most worried is making sure that people stay warm," Fenton said on "CBS This Morning," while urging people without heat to go to a shelter or warming center.

Rotating outages for Texas could return if electricity demand rises as people get power and heating back, said Dan Woodfin, the council's senior director of system operations.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott warned that residents "are not out of the woods," with temperatures still well below freezing statewide, south central Texas threatened by a winter storm and disruptions in food supply chains.

Adding to the misery: The weather jeopardized drinking water systems. Authorities ordered 7 million people — a quarter of the population of the nation's second-largest state — to boil tap water before drinking it, following the record low temperatures that damaged infrastructure and pipes. In Abilene, a man who died at a health care facility when a lack of water pressure made medical treatment impossible.

Water pressure dropped after lines froze and because many people left faucets dripping to prevent pipes from icing, said Toby Baker, executive director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Abbott urged residents to shut off water to prevent more busted pipes and preserve municipal system pressure.

President Joe Biden said he called Abbott on Thursday evening and offered additional support from the federal government to state and local agencies.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said residents will probably have to boil tap water in the fourth-largest U.S. city until Sunday or Monday.

Federal emergency officials sent generators to support water treatment plants, hospitals and nursing homes in Texas, along with thousands of blankets and ready-to-eat meals, officials said. The Texas Restaurant Association was coordinating food donations to hospitals.

Two of Houston Methodist's community hospitals had no running water and still treated patients but canceled most non-emergency surgeries and procedures for Thursday and possibly Friday, said spokeswoman Gale Smith.

As of Thursday afternoon, more than 1,000 Texas public water systems and 177 of the state's 254 counties had reported weather-related operational disruptions, affecting more than 14 million people, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

About 260,000 homes and businesses in Tennessee's largest county, which includes Memphis, were told to boil water after cold temperatures led to water main ruptures and problems at pumping stations. Memphis International Airport canceled all incoming and outgoing passenger flights Friday due to water pressure issues.

In Texas, more than 300 flights in and out of Dallas and Houston were canceled Friday, according to flightaware.com. Particularly affected was American Airlines, headquartered in Fort Worth. The website's "misery map" showed even more delays and cancellations at airports from Washington, D.C., to Boston as the latest winter storm front moved through the Northeast.

In Jackson, Mississippi, Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said most of the city of about 150,000 was without water Thursday night. Crews pumped water to refill city tanks but faced a shortage of chemicals to treat the water, she said.

"We are dealing with an extreme challenge with getting more water through our distribution system," Lumumba said.

About 85 seniors in a Jackson apartment building lost water service Monday and were relying on deliveries from a building manager, said resident Linda Weathersby.

Weathersby went outside collecting buckets of ice to melt it so she could flush her toilet and said "my back's hurting now."

Before the wintry weather moved from Texas, the city of Del Rio along the U.S.-Mexico border, got nearly 10 inches (25.4 cm) of snow on Thursday, surpassing the city's one-day record for snowfall.

Bleed reported from Little Rock, Arkansas. Associated Press journalists Terry Wallace in Dallas; Juan Lozano in Houston; Leah Willingham in Jackson, Mississippi; Rebecca Reynolds in Louisville, Kentucky;

Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama; Kevin McGill in New Orleans; Darlene Superville in Washington; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed.

## Massive breach fuels calls for US action on cybersecurity

By BEN FOX and ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jolted by a sweeping hack that may have revealed government and corporate secrets to Russia, U.S. officials are scrambling to reinforce the nation's cyber defenses and recognizing that an agency created two years ago to protect America's networks and infrastructure lacks the money, tools and authority to counter such sophisticated threats.

The breach, which hijacked widely used software from Texas-based SolarWinds Inc., has exposed the profound vulnerability of civilian government networks and the limitations of efforts to detect threats.

It's also likely to unleash a wave of spending on technology modernization and cybersecurity.

"It's really highlighted the investments we need to make in cybersecurity to have the visibility to block these attacks in the future," Anne Neuberger, the newly appointed deputy national security adviser for cyber and emergency technology said Wednesday at a White House briefing.

The reaction reflects the severity of a hack that was disclosed only in December. The hackers, as yet unidentified but described by officials as "likely Russian," had unfettered access to the data and email of at least nine U.S. government agencies and about 100 private companies, with the full extent of the compromise still unknown. And while this incident appeared to be aimed at stealing information, it heightened fears that future hackers could damage critical infrastructure, like electrical grids or water systems.

President Joe Biden plans to release an executive order soon that Neuberger said will include about eight measures intended to address security gaps exposed by the hack. The administration has also proposed expanding by 30% the budget of the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency, or CISA, a little-known entity now under intense scrutiny because of the SolarWinds breach.

Republicans and Democrats in Congress have called for expanding the size and role of the agency, a component of the Department of Homeland Security. It was created in November 2018 amid a sense that U.S. adversaries were increasingly targeting civilian government and corporate networks as well as the "critical" infrastructure, such as the energy grid that is increasingly vulnerable in a wired world.

Speaking at a recent hearing on cybersecurity, Rep. John Katko, a Republican from New York, urged his colleagues to quickly "find a legislative vehicle to give CISA the resources it needs to fully respond and protect us."

Biden's COVID-19 relief package called for \$690 billion more for CISA, as well as providing the agency with \$9 billion to modernize IT across the government in partnership with the General Services Administration.

That has been pulled from the latest version of the bill because some members didn't see a connection to the pandemic. But Rep. Jim Langevin, co-chair of the Congressional Cybersecurity Caucus, said additional funding for CISA is likely to reemerge with bipartisan support in upcoming legislation, perhaps an infrastructure bill.

"Our cyber infrastructure is every bit as important as our roads and bridges," Langevin, a Rhode Island Democrat, said in an interview. "It's important to our economy. It's important to protecting human life, and we need to make sure we have a modern and resilient cyber infrastructure."

CISA operates a threat-detection system known as "Einstein" that was unable to detect the SolarWinds breach. Brandon Wales, CISA's acting director, said that was because the breach was hidden in a legitimate software update from SolarWinds to its customers. After it was able to identify the malicious activity, the system was able to scan federal networks and identify some government victims. "It was designed to work in concert with other security programs inside the agencies," he said.

The former head of CISA, Christopher Krebs, told the House Homeland Security Committee this month that the U.S. should increase support to the agency, in part so it can issue grants to state and local governments to improve their cybersecurity and accelerate IT modernization across the federal government, which is part of the Biden proposal.

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"Are we going to stop every attack? No. But we can take care of the most common risks and make the bad guys work that much harder and limit their success," said Krebs, who was ousted by then-President Donald Trump after the election and now co-owns a consulting company whose clients include SolarWinds.

The breach was discovered in early December by the private security firm FireEye, a cause of concern for some officials.

"It was pretty alarming that we found out about it through a private company as opposed to our being able to detect it ourselves to begin with," Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence, said at her January confirmation hearing.

Right after the hack was announced, the Treasury Department bypassed its normal competitive contracting process to hire the private security firm CrowdStrike, U.S. contract records show. The department declined to comment. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has said that dozens of email accounts of top officials at the agency were hacked.

The Social Security Administration hired FireEye to do an independent forensic analysis of its network logs. The agency had a "backdoor code" installed like other SolarWinds customers, but "there were no indicators suggesting we were targeted or that a future attack occurred beyond the initial software installation," spokesperson Mark Hinkle said.

Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the hack has highlighted several failures at the federal level but not necessarily a lack of expertise by public sector employees. Still, "I doubt we will ever have all the capacity we'd need in-house," he said.

There have been some new cybersecurity measures taken in recent months. In the defense policy bill that passed in January, lawmakers created a national director of cybersecurity, replacing a position at the White House that had been cut under Trump, and granted CISA the power to issue administrative subpoenas as part of its efforts to identify vulnerable systems and notify operators.

The legislation also granted CISA increased authority to hunt for threats across the networks of civilian government agencies, something Langevin said they were only previously able to do when invited.

"In practical terms, what that meant is they weren't invited in because no department or agency wants to look bad," he said. "So you know what was happening? Everyone was sticking their heads in the sand and hoping that cyberthreats were going to go away."

Suderman reported from Richmond, Va.

## 'Alone': How Italian town with 1st known virus death fared

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VO, Italy (AP) — Italy delivered the first shocking confirmation of locally transmitted coronavirus infections outside of Asia a year ago Sunday, with back-to-back revelations of cases more than 150 kilometers (nearly 100 miles) apart in the country's north.

First, a 38-year-old man in Codogno, an industrial town in the Lombardy region, tested positive for COVID-19, sending panicked residents to pick up their children from school, stock up on provisions at grocery stores and search in vain for surgical masks at pharmacies.

By the evening of Feb. 21, a 77-year-old retired roofer from Vo, a wine-making town in the Veneto region, had died — at the time, the first known fatality from a locally transmitted case of the virus in the West, setting off alarm bells far and wide.

In the days and weeks that followed, densely populated Lombardy would become the epicenter of Italy's outbreak and, by the end of March, countries the world over would be under lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus that has now taken 2.4 million lives. But Vo, as one of the first towns in the West to be isolated, has a unique story, providing some of the first scientific insights into the deadly virus.

Adriano Trevisan's death sent shockwaves through the town west of Venice. Trevisan, well-known around Vo and a regular at a card game in a local bar, had been hospitalized for two weeks with circulatory issues related to a heart condition that could not be resolved with drugs, according to his physician, Dr. Carlo



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Petruzzi. There was no reason to suspect the coronavirus — as the retiree had had no contact with China, until then a key element in diagnosis.

After being advised of the death, Mayor Giuliano Martini, who doubles as the town's chief pharmacist, ordered schools and nonessential businesses to close and forbade residents from leaving the town, even for work. He asked local volunteer groups to help ensure food and pharmaceutical supplies entering the town were ferried to shelves. The town's three family doctors were put into quarantine because of suspected contact, and the closest hospital, a 30-minute drive away, was closed.

"It was like a war film," Martini said. "We were completely alone."

Surrounded by vineyards and farmland, the town of 3,270 people nestled against Monte Venda has long enjoyed bucolic isolation. But by three days after Trevisan's death, its isolation was ensured by government decree: Rome dispatched soldiers to seal the town's 12 access roads. Blockades were also set up around the 10 towns near Milan where the other early case of local transmission was confirmed.

"There was a sense of bewilderment, I would call it," said Dr. Luca Rossetto, one of the practitioners in Vo. "Even myself, with an old specialization in preventative hygiene, should have the right mindset. But there was an absolute disorientation."

Rossetto reviewed his recent cases and realized he had seen seven people in the previous days with pneumonia-like symptoms. A week later, the 69-year-old physician himself was hospitalized with the virus, a light case from which he recovered.

Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia, meanwhile, instinctively ordered blanket testing for all of the residents of Vo, with the aim of understanding the outbreak's origin. That he was even able to make such a call is thanks to the foresight of University of Padua virologist Andrea Crisanti, who had ordered the necessary tools after the virus appeared in China. Many places around the world struggled to institute testing so quickly.

Crisanti recognized that there would be value in testing the entire town immediately after the contagion was confirmed and then again after two weeks. And his work offered early insight into how the virus spread — clarity that Crisanti said was never properly translated into action.

The results of the first round of nasal swab tests, available on Feb. 27, showed that nearly 3% of the population had been infected. That indicated that the virus had been circulating in the town since the end of January, according to Crisanti.

"With that data, we should have closed both Veneto and Lombardy, immediately," Crisanti said. But decision-makers, he said, "didn't perceive the extent of the problem."

The question of whether more more restrictions on movement should have been instituted sooner has been hotly debated in Italy, with many politicians noting that such decisions were extremely difficult given that the measures come with a heavy economic and social cost and infringe on freedoms. There is even a criminal investigation into whether officials waited too long to lock down two towns in Lombardy.

Shutting down Vo proved remarkably effective in stopping the transmission. When Crisanti conducted the second round of testing on March 7, no new cases were detected.

Crisanti said that the findings — which were published by the journal *Nature* in June but known to Italian officials immediately — made clear that isolation and mass testing were the best way to contain the virus before vaccines.

While Crisanti succeeded in persuading the Veneto region to increase testing, it wasn't until March 9 — 17 days after the virus had been simultaneously detected in two Italian regions, with cases multiplying and a mass exodus toward the south under way — that then-Premier Giuseppe Conte ordered the entire country on a near-total lockdown that would last seven weeks.

By the end of May, as cases began to recede in Italy, more than 232,684 people had been infected, mostly in the north, and 33,415 had died.

Scientists still don't know how the virus arrived in Vo.

Though struck at the same time, Veneto fared much better than Lombardy, which became the epicenter of both of Italy's surges. It has half the population and its industry is more spread out, but experts have also credited its health system, which enables close contact among family doctors, district administrators

and hospital officials and which is less reliant on private facilities. Another key element in its virus fight was the testing system created by Crisanti.

Crisanti urged the government in Rome in August to expand its capacity for nasal swab tests in the hopes of keeping transmission low after a successful lockdown. While the government has, Crisanti is disappointed that it has relied heavily on rapid tests — as many other places have and as some experts have recommended — rather than strategically deploying more reliable nasal swabs to isolate outbreaks.

By October, Italy was battling a resurgence that has proved even deadlier than the spring peak, with the toll now at nearly 95,000. New clusters of a variant first found in Britain have led to localized lockdowns around the country, forcing the cancellation of one of the virus anniversary commemorations this weekend in Lombardy.

If the virus' arrival last February caught the country off-guard, the long-predicted fall resurgence was "madness," Crisanti said.

Vo, too, suffered a resurgence that is only now abating. The town's pandemic death toll doubled, to 6.

Boasting an unusually high number of restaurants per capita at 45 eateries, Vo is now an echo of its former self. The weddings, baptisms and first communions that drew dwellers of nearby cities to the hill-side town have been limited by restrictions. Restaurant closures also forced the Vo wine cooperative to reduce 2020 production. The local dance hall has never reopened.

Things might have been different, Martini believes.

"The virus in Vo arrived in Vo and died in Vo," the mayor said of the first cases a year ago. The failure to repeat the model: "Ruinous," he said.

## **Biden repudiates Trump on Iran, ready for talks on nuke deal**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration says it's ready to join talks with Iran and world powers to discuss a return to the 2015 nuclear deal, in a sharp repudiation of former President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure campaign" that sought to isolate the Islamic Republic.

The administration also took two steps at the United Nations aimed at restoring policy to what it was before Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018. The combined actions were immediately criticized by Iran hawks and drew concern from Israel, which said it was committed to keeping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Besides signaling Thursday a willingness to talk with Iran, the administration also reversed Trump's determination that all U.N. sanctions against Iran had been restored. And, it eased stringent restrictions on the domestic travel of Iranian diplomats posted to the United Nations.

The State Department announced the moves following discussions between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his British, French and German counterparts and as Biden prepares to participate, albeit virtually, in his first major international events with world leaders.

The announcement came a day before Biden is to speak to leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies and later in the day address the annual Munich Security Conference. At both Friday, Biden is expected to discuss his commitment to multilateral diplomacy and his desire to undo damage that Trump's positions may have caused over the previous four years. He's expected to address the U.S. stance on the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear deal, the war in Afghanistan and the economic and national security challenges posed by Russia and China.

In a statement, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. would accept an invitation from the European Union to attend a meeting of the participants — the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany, along with Iran — in the original nuclear agreement.

"The United States would accept an invitation from the European Union High Representative to attend a meeting of the P5+1 and Iran to discuss a diplomatic way forward on Iran's nuclear program," he said. The U.S. has not participated in a meeting of those participants since Trump withdrew from the deal and began steadily ramping up sanctions on Iran.

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Such an invitation has not yet been issued but one is expected shortly, following Blinken's talks with the British, French and German foreign ministers.

In Iran, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Friday the Biden administration action meant that the U.S. had acknowledged moves made under Trump "had no legal validity."

"We agree," he added, urging the Biden administration to lift U.S. sanctions "imposed, reimposed or re-labeled by Trump. We will then immediately reverse all remedial measures."

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office expressed worry, saying it believes that "going back to the old agreement will pave Iran's path to a nuclear arsenal." It said in a statement on Friday that it remains "committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons" and was in close contact with the United States on the matter.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations, the Biden administration notified the Security Council that it had withdrawn Trump's September 2020 invocation of the so-called snapback mechanism under which it maintained that all U.N. sanctions against Iran had been reimposed. Those sanctions included a conventional arms embargo against Iran that had been set to expire.

Trump's determination had been vigorously disputed by nearly all other U.N. members and had left the U.S. isolated at the world body. Thus, the reversal is unlikely to have any immediate practical effect other than to bring the U.S. back into line with the position of the vast majority of U.N. members, including some of its closest allies.

Acting U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Mills sent a letter to the Security Council saying the United States "hereby withdraws" three letters from the Trump administration that culminated in its Sept. 19 announcement that the United States had re-imposed U.N. sanctions on Tehran due to its "significant non-performance" with its obligations.

Trump's move had been ignored by the rest of the Security Council and the world, and the overwhelming majority of members in the 15-nation council had called the action illegal because the U.S. was no longer a member of the nuclear deal.

At the same time, officials said the administration has eased extremely strict limits on the travel of Iranian diplomats accredited to the United Nations. The Trump administration had imposed the severe restrictions, which essentially confined them to their U.N. mission and the U.N. headquarters building in New York.

The top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, quickly denounced the steps. "It is concerning the Biden Administration is already making concessions in an apparent attempt to re-enter the flawed Iran deal," he said. "The Trump Administration created leverage for President Biden on Iran — we should not squander that progress."

Earlier Thursday, Blinken and his European counterparts had urged Iran to allow continued United Nations nuclear inspections and stop nuclear activities that have no credible civilian use. They warned that Iran's actions could threaten delicate efforts to bring the U.S. back into the 2015 deal and end sanctions damaging Iran's economy.

Iran is "playing with fire," said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who took part in the talks Thursday in Paris with his British and French counterparts. Blinken had joined via videoconference.

Iran has said it will stop part of International Atomic Energy Agency inspections of its nuclear facilities next week if the West doesn't implement its own commitments under the 2015 deal. The accord has been unraveling since Trump pulled the U.S. out of the agreement.

Blinken reiterated that "if Iran comes back into strict compliance with its commitments ... the United States will do the same," according to a joint statement after Thursday's meeting that reflected closer trans-Atlantic positions on Iran since President Joe Biden took office.

The diplomats noted "the dangerous nature of a decision to limit IAEA access, and urge Iran to consider the consequences of such grave action, particularly at this time of renewed diplomatic opportunity."

They said Iran's decision to produce uranium enriched up to 20% and uranium metal has "no credible" civilian use.

The 2015 accord is aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Tehran denies it is seek-

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ing such an arsenal.

"We are the ones who have kept this agreement alive in recent years, and now it's about supporting the United States in taking the road back into the agreement," Maas told reporters in Paris.

"The measures that have been taken in Tehran and may be taken in the coming days are anything but helpful. They endanger the Americans' path back into this agreement. The more pressure that is exerted, the more politically difficult it will be to find a solution," he said.

Iran's threats are "very worrying," British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said, stressing the need "to re-engage diplomatically in order to restrain Iran, but also bring it back into compliance."

The diplomats also expressed concern about human rights violations in Iran and its ballistic missile program.

In Iran, President Hassan Rouhani expressed hope Thursday that the Biden administration will rejoin the accord and lift the U.S. sanctions that Washington re-imposed under Trump, according to state television.

Tehran has been using its violations of the nuclear deal to put pressure on the remaining signatories — France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China — to provide more incentives to Iran to offset the crippling sanctions.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the president of the European Council spoke with Rouhani this week to try to end the diplomatic standoff. The head of the IAEA is scheduled to travel to Iran this week-end to find a solution that allows the agency to continue inspections.

Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Geir Moulson in Berlin and Angela Charlton and Masha Macpherson in Paris contributed.

## **Biden to lay out his foreign policy at G-7, Munich summit**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden will make his first big appearance on the global stage as president on Friday, offering Group of Seven allies and other foreign leaders a glimpse into his plans to dramatically reshape U.S. foreign policy even as he deals with a number of international crises that are coming to a head.

In advance of Biden's virtual appearances at a G-7 meeting and the Munich Security Conference, the White House sought to underscore that the new administration will move quickly to reorient the U.S. away from Donald Trump's "America First" mantra by announcing major reversals of Trump administration policies.

Biden was expected to use his address to the Munich conference to stress that the U.S. stands ready to rejoin talks about reentering the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear deal abandoned by the Trump administration. The Biden administration announced Thursday its desire to reengage Iran, and it took action at the United Nations aimed at restoring policy to what it was before President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018.

Biden was also expected to address economic and national security challenges posed by Russia and China, as well as the two-decade war in Afghanistan, where he faces a May 1 deadline to remove the remaining 2,500 U.S. troops under a Trump administration negotiated peace agreement with the Taliban.

His message was to be girded by an underlying argument that democracies -- not autocracies -- are models of governance that can best meet the challenges of the moment, according to a senior administration official who previewed the president's speech for reporters.

At the G-7, administration officials said, Biden was to focus on what lies ahead for the international community as it tries to extinguish the public health and economic crises created by the coronavirus pandemic. White House officials said Biden would announce at the G-7 that the U.S. will soon begin releasing \$4 billion for an international effort to bolster the purchase and distribution of coronavirus vaccine to poor nations, a program that Trump refused to support.

Both the G-7 and the annual security conference are being held virtually because of the pandemic.

Biden's turn on the world stage comes as the U.S. on Friday officially rejoins the Paris climate agreement, the largest international effort to curb global warming. Trump announced in June 2017 that he was pulling



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the U.S. out of the landmark accord, arguing that it would undermine the American economy.

Biden announced the U.S. intention of rejoining the accord on the first day of his presidency, but he had to wait 30 days for the move to go into effect. He has said that he will bake considerations about climate change into every major domestic and foreign policy decision his administration faces.

His first foray into international summity will inevitably be perceived by some as simply an attempted course correction from Trump's agenda. The new president, however, has made clear that his domestic and foreign policy agenda won't be merely an erasure of the Trump years.

"I'm tired of talking about Donald Trump," Biden lamented earlier this week at a CNN town hall in Milwaukee.

Biden on the campaign trail vowed to reassert U.S. leadership in the international community, a role that Trump often shied away from while complaining that the U.S. was too frequently taken advantage of by freeloading allies.

To that end, the White House said Biden would be encouraging G-7 partners to make good on their pledges to COVAX, an initiative by the World Health Organization to improve access to vaccines, even as he reopens the U.S. spigot.

Trump had withdrawn the U.S. from WHO and refused to join more than 190 countries in the COVAX program. The Republican former president accused WHO of covering up China's missteps in handling the virus at the start of the public health crisis that unraveled a strong U.S. economy.

It remains to be seen how G-7 allies will take Biden's calls for greater international cooperation on vaccine distribution given that the U.S. refused to take part in the initiative under Trump and that there are growing calls for the Democrat's administration to distribute some U.S.-manufactured vaccine supplies overseas.

French President Emmanuel Macron, in an interview Thursday with the Financial Times, called on the U.S. and European nations to allocate up to 5% of current vaccine supplies to developing countries — the kind of vaccine diplomacy that China and Russia have begun deploying.

And earlier this week, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sharply criticized the "wildly uneven and unfair" distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, noting 10 countries have administered 75% of all vaccinations.

Biden, who announced last week that the U.S. will have enough supply of the vaccine by the end of July to inoculate 300 million people, remains focused for now on making sure every American is vaccinated, administration officials say.

Allies will also be listening closely to hear what Biden has to say about a looming crisis with Iran.

Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency this week that it would suspend voluntary implementation next week of a provision in the 2015 deal that allowed U.N. nuclear monitors to conduct inspections of undeclared sites in Iran at short notice unless the U.S. rolled back sanctions by Feb. 23.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday told his counterparts from France, Germany and the U.K. that the U.S. is prepared to engage in discussions with Iran in an attempt to reach an agreement on returning to full compliance of the 2015 nuclear deal, according to a joint statement by the three nations.

Trump withdrew the United States from the pact negotiated by the Obama administration and renewed sanctions against Tehran, a step that Biden as a candidate said was shortsighted and dangerous.

But the joint statement from Blinken and the other ministers made clear that the Biden administration continues to expect Iran to return to full compliance with the 2015 deal before the U.S. reengages. It also urged Iran to "consider the consequences of such grave action, particularly at this time of renewed diplomatic opportunity."

Biden has participated in the Munich Security Conference several times as a senator, vice president and most recently as a private citizen.

When Biden last addressed the conference two years ago, he sought to assure allies shell-shocked by Trump's "America First" policies that "this, too, shall pass."

"We will be back," Biden told attendees. "Don't have any doubt about that."

**Africa reaches 100,000 known COVID-19 deaths as danger grows**

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By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Africa has surpassed 100,000 confirmed deaths from COVID-19 as the continent praised for its early response to the pandemic now struggles with a dangerous resurgence and medical oxygen often runs desperately short.

"We are more vulnerable than we thought," the director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, John Nkengasong, told The Associated Press in an interview reflecting on the pandemic and a milestone he called "remarkably painful."

He worried that "we are beginning to normalize deaths," while health workers are overwhelmed.

The 54-nation continent of some 1.3 billion people has barely seen the arrival of large-scale supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, but a variant of the virus dominant in South Africa is already posing a challenge to vaccination efforts. Still, if doses are available, the continent should be able to vaccinate 35% to 40% of its population before the end of 2021 and 60% by the end of 2022, Nkengasong said.

In a significant development on Friday, an African Union-created task force said Russia has offered 300 million doses of the country's Sputnik V vaccine, to be available in May. The AU previously secured 270 million doses from AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

Health officials who breathed a sigh of relief last year when African countries did not see a huge number of COVID-19 deaths are now reporting a jump in fatalities. The Africa CDC on Friday said overall deaths are at 100,294.

Deaths from COVID-19 increased by 40% in Africa in the past month compared to the previous month, the World Health Organization's Africa chief, Matshidiso Moeti, told reporters last week. That's more than 22,000 people dying in the past four weeks.

The increase is a "tragic warning that health workers and health systems in many countries in Africa are dangerously overstretched," she said, and preventing severe cases and hospitalizations is crucial.

But the latest trend shows a slowdown. In the week ending on Sunday, the continent saw a 28% decrease in deaths, the Africa CDC said Thursday.

Africa has reached 100,000 confirmed deaths shortly after marking a year since the first coronavirus infection was confirmed on the continent, in Egypt on Feb. 14, 2020.

But many more people across Africa have died of COVID-19, even though they are not included in the official toll.

South Africa, the hardest-hit country on the continent, saw over 125,000 excess deaths from natural causes between May 3 and Jan. 23. While it is not clear how many were from the virus, there was a "close correspondence of the time of the excess deaths with the increases in confirmed COVID-19 cases in each province," the South African Medical Research Council said.

Since most countries in Africa lack the means to track mortality data, it is not clear how many excess deaths have occurred across the continent since the pandemic began.

"We are definitely not counting all the deaths, especially in the second wave," the Africa CDC's Nkengasong told reporters last week.

While the continent is not seeing a "massive" number of deaths, he asserted that most people in Africa now know someone who has died of COVID-19. "People are dying because of a lack of basic care," he said, citing medical oxygen as a critical need.

Twenty-one countries in Africa now have case fatality rates that are higher than the global average, Nkengasong said, including Sudan, Egypt, Liberia, Mali and Zimbabwe. The case fatality rate continent-wide remains higher than the global average at 2.6%.

"The second wave came with full might, partly because of this new variant (in South Africa), partly because we created superspreading opportunities" such as holiday parties, said Salim Abdool Karim, the top COVID-19 advisor to South Africa's government. "The virus adapts and gets better with time because it's mutating progressively to be better adapted."

In the unusual case of Tanzania, no one knows how many deaths, or even infections, have occurred since the country of some 60 million people stopped updating its number of cases in April.

But while populist President John Magufuli claims that COVID-19 has been defeated in Tanzania and

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questions the new vaccines without offering evidence, social media in recent days has seen a worrying increase in death notices by families saying loved ones died while struggling to breathe. Some had otherwise been healthy.

"He complained of fast-diminishing air in his respiratory system," one death notice in Dar es Salaam said this month.

Tanzania is now one of eight African countries with the more infectious variant of the virus that was first found in South Africa, according to the WHO, citing travelers from Tanzania who were discovered to have the variant overseas.

Nkengasong told the AP that Tanzania's influential first president Julius Nyerere, once declared that if Africa is not united, it's doomed.

"If we cannot exercise unity in this period of critical threat of COVID-19, then I don't know what else unity means for the continent," Nkengasong said.

Another place where COVID-19 deaths are going uncounted is Ethiopia's Tigray region, where a conflict between Ethiopian and Tigray forces has entered a fourth month and the health system has collapsed amid looting and artillery attacks. The United Nations has warned of "massive community transmission" of the virus.

Gerald Imray in Cape Town, South Africa, contributed.

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>.

## Woman shot protesting Myanmar military takeover dies

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — A young woman who was shot in the head by police last week during a protest against the military coup in Myanmar died Friday, her family said.

It was the first confirmed death among thousands of protesters who have faced off against security forces since the junta took power on Feb. 1, detained the country's elected leaders and prevented Parliament from convening.

Mya Thwet Thwet Khine was shot during a demonstration in the capital, Naypyitaw, on Feb. 9, two days before her 20th birthday. Video showed her sheltering from water cannons and suddenly dropping to the ground after a bullet penetrated the motorcycle helmet she was wearing. She had been on life support in a hospital with what doctors said was no chance of recovery.

Her sister, speaking from the hospital's mortuary, urged people not to give up their struggle to restore democracy.

"Please participate and continue fighting until we achieve our goal," said Mya Thatoe Nwe. She said the funeral will be held Sunday.

Protesters have hailed Mya Thwet Thwet Khine as a hero and commemorated her during demonstrations earlier this week. News of her death is likely to inflame passions in the protest movement, which has embraced nonviolent civil disobedience.

A spokesman for the ruling military did not deny that she had been shot by security forces, but said at a news conference this week that she was in a crowd that had thrown rocks at police and the case was under investigation. There were no independent accounts of her taking part in any violence.

Human Rights Watch accused the police in Naypyitaw of having "blood on their hands."

"The officer who pulled the trigger must be investigated, arrested, and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of the New York-based group. "That's the only suitable way to honor the memory of this brave young woman."

Demonstrations continued Friday in Yangon, the country's biggest city, and elsewhere.

Security forces have been relatively restrained so far in confronting protesters in Yangon, but appeared to be toughening their stance in areas where there is less media presence.

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Police used force for a second day to arrest protesters in Myitkyina, the capital of the remote northern state of Kachin. The Kachin ethnic minority has long been in conflict with the central government, and there has been intermittent armed struggle against the army there for decades.

On Thursday night in the southeastern city of Dawei, several people were wounded by rubber bullets when police staged nighttime raids to try to arrest activists, local media reported. Large but peaceful protest marches have taken place in the city, with negotiations between the demonstrators and the authorities to avoid confrontations.

Tom Andrews, the independent U.N. human rights expert on Myanmar, told The Associated Press this week that the initial restraint of police in dealing with "robust citizen opposition to the coup" has moved in some instances to use of rubber bullets, real ammunition and water cannons.

Speaking from the United States, he also said "hardened" troops were being deployed from border areas to some cities, raising the possibility of bloodshed and "a tragic loss of life."

The junta says it took power — after detaining national leader Aung San Suu Kyi and preventing Parliament from convening — because elections last November were tainted by voting irregularities. The election outcome, in which Suu Kyi's party won by a landslide, was affirmed by an election commission that has since been replaced by the military. The junta says it will hold new elections in a year's time.

The U.S., Britain and Canadian governments have imposed sanctions on the new military leaders, and they and other governments have called for Suu Kyi's administration to be restored.

The coup was a major setback to Myanmar's transition to democracy after 50 years of army rule. Suu Kyi came to power after her National League for Democracy party won a 2015 election, but the generals retained substantial power under the constitution, which was adopted under a military regime.

## Facebook makes a power move in Australia - and may regret it

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writers

For years, Facebook has been in a defensive crouch amid a slew of privacy scandals, antitrust lawsuits and charges that it was letting hate speech and extremism destroy democracy. Early Thursday, though, it abruptly pivoted to take the offensive in Australia, where it lowered the boom on publishers and the government with a sudden decision to block news on its platform across the entire country.

That power play — a response to an Australian law that would compel Facebook to pay publishers for using their news stories — might easily backfire, given how concerned many governments have grown about the company's unchecked influence over society, democracy and political discourse. But it's still a startling reminder of just how much power CEO Mark Zuckerberg can wield at the touch of a figurative button.

"Zuckerberg's flex here shows how he can disrupt global access to the news in a heartbeat," said Jennifer Grygiel, a social media expert and professor at Syracuse University. "No company should have this much influence over access to journalism."

Facebook's move means people in Australia can no longer post links to news stories on Facebook. Outside Australia, meanwhile, no one can post links to Aussie news sources such as the Sydney Morning Herald.

Facebook said the proposed law "ignores the realities" of its relationship with publishers that use its service to propel their stories across the world. Technology and media experts have also raised serious concerns. Timothy Berners-Lee, the British computer scientist known as the inventor of the World Wide Web, told an Australian Senate committee in January that the law's precedent could ultimately wreck the internet by requiring payment for links that have always been free.

The law hasn't gone into effect. Negotiations between the tech companies, the Australian government and the country's media giants — most notably, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. — may result in changes to the final version.

What can't be changed, though, is Facebook's dramatic, if ham-handed, attempt to force the issue. The company provided no warning of its decision to block Australian news and applied the ban so clumsily that it blocked many innocent bystanders.



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"As the law does not provide a clear guidance on the definition of news content, we have taken a broad definition in order to respect the law as drafted," said Facebook spokeswoman Mari Melguizo, who added that the company would unblock any pages that were blocked by accident.

Facebook's reaction was not justified even if there are issues with the law, including the fact that it stands to benefit media giants like News Corp., said Elizabeth Renieris, director of the Notre Dame-IBM Technology Ethics Lab. Facebook's show of strength, she said, is "really going to wake up regulators around the world."

"If it is not already clear, Facebook is not compatible with democracy," Rep. David Cicilline, a Rhode Island Democrat who heads a House subcommittee that has urged antitrust action against the company, wrote on Twitter. "Threatening to bring an entire country to its knees to agree to Facebook's terms is the ultimate admission of monopoly power."

On Thursday, Democrats announced they would hold new hearings to curb online platforms and update antitrust laws.

Billions of people around the world rely on Facebook for essential information — not just news, but charity and government pages, emergency announcements and other important channels. Facebook's news blackout swept up many of these, including humanitarian organizations like Foodbank Australia and Doctors without Borders in Australia, who found their pages temporarily disabled.

The ban affected articles from large international news organization and small community newspapers or radio stations alike. Those restrictions potentially deprived many Australians of basic information on Facebook about COVID-19 or the country's fire season — from a company that bills itself as committed to building "connection and community."

The tech company has faced years of criticism for allowing misinformation around politics and the coronavirus to fester on its site. Critics said they fear that stripping Australian users of legitimate news sources will only worsen that problem.

"Playing this game in Australia is going to fill peoples' feed with misinformation," Tama Leaver, an internet studies and social media expert at Curtin University in Australia, said during an interview Wednesday with Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio Perth.

But a news-free Facebook might also be a more pleasant experience for many people, said Drew Margolin, a professor of communication at Cornell University. Facebook would have been better off if it had given Australians a choice to opt out of news, he suggested. If many did, the company could have used that for leverage with the government and publishers.

"What happens when they say we're ready to turn it back on and we say please don't?" he said.

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Associated Press Writer Amanda Seitz contributed to this story.

## Doctors race to find, vaccinate vulnerable homebound people

By TOM MURPHY AP Health Writer

A group of health care workers hurried out of a Boston hospital on a recent weekday morning, clutching small red coolers filled with COVID-19 vaccines.

Their challenge: Beat traffic, a looming snowstorm and the clock. They had to get shots in the arms of their homebound patients before the vaccines expired in a few hours.

"That clock is in the back of my mind the whole time," said Dr. Won Lee, a home care specialist at Boston Medical Center.

Millions of U.S. residents will need COVID-19 vaccines brought to them because they rarely or never leave home. Doctors and nurses who specialize in home care are leading this push and starting to get help from state and local governments around the country.

But they face several challenges. Researchers say many homebound people don't receive regular medical care, which makes it hard to identify everyone who needs a vaccine.

Supplies also are limited, and both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines expire a few hours after syringes pull the vaccine from vials.

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That makes it tough for one doctor to see many patients when they must also stay in someone's home for at least 15 minutes after the shot in case an allergic reaction develops.

"They don't live next door to each other," said Dr. David Moen of Prospero Health Partners, which delivers care to patients in several states. "It's challenging to go to multiple locations."

Even so, health care providers report progress. Lee figures she can deliver five or six doses during an average day. That will be her main focus the next several weeks.

One of her recent stops was at the second-floor apartment of a regular patient, 106-year-old Domingas Pina, who hasn't left home in about a year.

Lee sat with Pina at her dining room table, swabbed the patient's shoulder and then swiftly administered the shot as Pina looked away.

The patient then smiled beneath her surgical mask and flashed a thumbs up. Pina, who speaks mostly Portuguese Creole, will get her second dose of the vaccine next month, right around her 107th birthday.

"She misses all her grandchildren and her friends that used to come all the time," daughter Maria Lopes said. "We don't want to lose her."

After giving Pina the shot, Lee asked how she was doing and about her blood pressure medication. She then slipped off Pina's Darth Vader slippers to exam her feet.

Before long, the doctor had left for her next patient.

Lee's office sets up the appointments and explains the vaccine in advance. That helps the visit go smoothly, and Lee tries to see patients who live near each other to conserve time.

She also tells them she can't stay too long after the shots "because I have to make sure I get these vaccines to all the patients that need them today."

Dr. Karen Abrashkin hopes to take a similar approach. She will use mapping software to plan stops among clusters of patients who live near each other in the New York City area.

But the director of Northwell Health's House Calls program is still waiting for the vaccine.

"We get many questions each day about when we're going to have vaccines to give in the home," she said. "The supply just isn't there yet."

One of her patients, 103-year-old Ida Sobel, has no plans to leave her apartment building until she gets vaccinated.

While she waits, Sobel, who is legally blind and lives with a home health aide, has food delivered. She walks the hallway outside her front door for exercise and opens a window when she wants fresh air.

"I am in a very crowded area," the Floral Park, New York, resident said. "People are not conscious enough to avoid you and stay far away, so I avoid them."

Harvard Medical School professor Dr. Christine Ritchie estimates that about 2 million U.S. residents are homebound. Another 5 million have trouble leaving home or need help doing so. Many of them may need vaccines brought to them as well.

This population generally includes older people with lower-than-average income levels and serious medical problems like dementia, advanced heart conditions or arthritis.

Ritchie noted that homebound people draw less attention from public health officials than those who live in group settings like nursing homes, which are receiving vaccines from major drugstore chains.

Homebound people, Ritchie said, "tend to be sort of invisible to society."

On Staten Island, James De Silva has grown frustrated because he has no good vaccine options for his 96-year-old mother, but people much younger than her can get shots if they leave home. Mary Stella De Silva is mostly bedbound and receives around-the-clock home care.

That care doesn't include the vaccine, and De Silva will need to arrange an ambulance or special transportation to take her to an appointment, if he lands one.

"I think the homebound should be given a little bit more priority than someone who is just 65 and might not have an underlying illness," he said. "It's not being given the attention it deserves, frankly."

That appears to be changing. Fire departments around the country have started delivering vaccines.

In the Gulf Coast city of Corpus Christi, Texas, the fire department has used a list of Meals on Wheels recipients to deliver more than 2,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine since late January. Chief Robert Rocha

said they've also set up a hotline for anyone who still needs a vaccination.

Last week, New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio said his city would start sending medical personnel to the apartments of homebound people as soon as a one-shot vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson is available. Federal regulators may approve that vaccine in a few weeks.

Deliveries like that can't start soon enough for De Silva and his mother.

"If she was in a nursing home or a long-term care facility, she would have been vaccinated by now," he said. "She's really in the same situation, but she's at home."

Associated Press video journalist Rodrique Ngowi contributed to this report.

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## World leaders applaud US formal return to Paris climate pact

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The United States is back in the Paris climate accord, just 107 days after it left.

While Friday's return is heavily symbolic, world leaders say they expect America to prove its seriousness after four years of being pretty much absent. They are especially anticipating an announcement from the U.S. in coming months on its goal for cutting emissions of heat-trapping gases by 2030.

The U.S. return to the Paris agreement became official Friday, almost a month after President Joe Biden told the United Nations that America wants back in. "A cry for survival comes from the planet itself," Biden said in his inaugural address. "A cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear now."

Biden signed an executive order on his first day in office reversing the pullout ordered by his predecessor, President Donald Trump. The Trump administration had announced its withdrawal from the Paris accord in 2019 but it didn't become effective until Nov. 4, 2020, the day after the election, because of provisions in the agreement.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Thursday that the official American re-entry "is itself very important," as is Biden's announcement that the U.S. will return to providing climate aid to poorer nations, as promised in 2009.

"It's the political message that's being sent," said Christiana Figueres, the former United Nations climate chief. She was one of the leading forces in hammering out the 2015 mostly voluntary agreement where nations set their own goals to reduce greenhouse gases.

One fear was that other nations would follow America in abandoning the climate fight, but none did, Figueres said. She said the real issue was four years of climate inaction by the Trump administration. American cities, states and businesses still worked to reduce heat-trapping carbon dioxide, but without the federal government.

"From a political symbolism perspective, whether it's 100 days or four years, it's basically the same thing," Figueres said. "It's not about how many days. It's the political symbolism that the largest economy refuses to see the opportunity of addressing climate change."

"We've lost too much time," Figueres said.

United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen said America has to prove its leadership to the rest of the world, but she said she has no doubt it will when it submits its required emissions cutting targets. The Biden administration promises to announce them before an Earth Day summit in April.

"We hope they will translate into a very meaningful reduction of emissions and they will be an example for other countries to follow," Guterres said. Already more than 120 nations, including No. 1 emitter China, have promised to have net zero carbon emissions around midcentury.

University of Maryland environment professor Nate Hultman, who worked on the Obama administration's official Paris goal, said he expects a 2030 target of cutting carbon dioxide emissions between 40% and 50% from the 2005 baseline levels.

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Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Senate energy panel, has criticized Biden for rejoining Paris, tweeting: "Returning to the Paris climate agreement will raise Americans' energy costs and won't solve climate change. The Biden administration will set unworkable targets for the United States while China and Russia can continue with business as usual."

A longtime international goal, included in the Paris accord with an even more stringent target, is to keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. The world has already warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) since that time.

The U.S. rejoining the Paris accord and coming up with an ambitious target for emissions cuts would make limiting warming "to well below 2 degrees — not just to 2 degrees but below 2 degrees — a lot more likely," said climate scientist Zeke Hausfather, energy and climate director for the Breakthrough Institute.

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Associated Press writer Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

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Read stories on climate issues by The Associated Press at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate>

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Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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## 10 years after Christchurch quake, survivors share stories

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand (AP) — One woman channeled her anger to ensure buildings are safer. Others have found peace after heartbreaking losses. Ten years after an earthquake killed 185 people and devastated Christchurch, New Zealand, some of those profoundly affected are sharing their journeys.

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### 'NOT THE STORY OF MY LIFE'

Ann Brower was taking a bus from the seaside suburb of Sumner into the central city when the magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck. Bricks rained down as a building facade collapsed, crushing the roof of the bus and killing all 12 others on board, as well as four more people nearby. Brower was in excruciating pain, pinned under the collapsed roof. The pressure kept building until her pelvis snapped and she passed out.

Originally from North Carolina, Brower, an associate professor of environmental science, had been shaken awake years earlier by the 1994 Los Angeles quake when she was living in Claremont, California. In Christchurch, she awoke on the bus, realizing she was trapped and alone.

"I thought, this is not an acceptable situation. This is not the story of my life," she said. "And so I did what any rational person would do, and I screamed at the top of my lungs."

A man with bright blue eyes appeared. Others came, digging through the rubble, pulling up the roof with their bare hands, talking to her about fishing, asking her about her hopes and dreams, anything to take her mind off what was happening.

Strangers took her in the back of a truck to a hospital, where she would stay for two months. After surgeries and rehabilitation, she was finally able to walk again without crutches.

Brower sometimes wonders why she survived when all those around her died. A visit from the Dalai Lama to her and a half-dozen other survivors four months after the quake helped her put things in perspective.

"You all have something to give," Brower recalls the Dalai Lama saying. "You just need to let go of the shoulda-woulda-coulda, and figure out what that something is."

In Brower's case, part of the answer lay in making buildings safer. She was furious to learn the city council had inspected the building after a previous earthquake five months earlier and found the facade was unsafe, but hadn't enforced a fix.

"Anger can be constructive," Brower said. "When Parliament started thinking about changing the Building Act, I said, 'Right. OK. This is something that I can participate in. I have a few things to say about this.'"



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Brower also remains concerned after touring the U.S. that cities from Seattle to Charleston, South Carolina, face similar problems with their older buildings, which can lend character to cities but also danger.

In New Zealand, Brower wanted older buildings to be covered by building codes and for regulators to prioritize fixing those parts that would fall off first in a quake, like parapets and unreinforced masonry. But she ran into resistance. She wrote opinion pieces, did radio and TV interviews but it seemed lawmakers wouldn't budge.

She finally got a five-minute meeting with the minister in charge at the time, Nick Smith, and he ended up agreeing a higher priority was needed for unsafe facades. In what lawmakers called the "Brower Amendment," New Zealand cut in half the time owners had to get dangerous buildings fixed. Smith called Brower a true New Zealand hero.

"I didn't get everything I wanted, but I got pretty close," Brower said. "And you've got to celebrate that."

## A KINDER CITY

After the earthquake, Prue Taylor wasn't unduly worried at first when she didn't hear from her husband Brian. She knew he had a lunchtime meeting in town and loved to linger and chat. She thought he would be busy helping people after the quake.

But it turned out Brian had left the meeting promptly that day to see off a group of Japanese students at the CTV building where he worked as director of the English language school King's Education. The building collapsed, killing 115 people, including Brian.

When Prue Taylor arrived at the building it was a surreal sight, a huge pile of rubble with smoke rising and an elevator shaft still standing. She stayed there with her son Hamish for hours as rescuers searched for survivors.

"It was hard to leave the place, not having found him or knowing whether he was alive or dead or anything about him," Taylor said.

Brian and Prue met as undergraduates and had been married more than 40 years. Prue was principal of Christchurch Girls' High School but she and Brian had been talking about retiring, about traveling more.

After Brian died, Prue focused on work.

"I keep thinking, what would Brian have done if it was me who died?" Taylor said. "And I think we both would have felt the same, that there were things we could do with our communities. In my case, my school community."

Taylor remains angry about the construction of the CTV building, after an investigation found its design was fundamentally flawed and should never have been approved.

"Cheap and shoddy really is the way to describe it," she says.

She unexpectedly lost a grandson a year after the quake, which caused the family additional grief.

"You just start to think, this is life," she said. "It made me more aware of what people have in their lives, the tragedies that people endure."

She says the sense of communal mourning in Christchurch after the quake helped her get through. People became kinder and friendlier to one another, she says, greeting neighbors they'd never met, bringing over baking, empathizing over those they had lost.

## THE LONG JOURNEY OF GRIEF

Jonathan Manning had been keeping vigil near the collapsed CTV building with his children Kent, who was 15 at the time, and Liz, 18, when a police officer told them she had horrible news.

Until then, the kids had held out hope that Donna Manning was somehow still alive: "My mum is super-woman," Liz had told a reporter moments earlier. But the officer told them there was no more hope of finding survivors.

"That's the moment when it really sunk in for all three of us," said Jonathan Manning. "The kids fell apart. I did, too."

Jonathan and Donna, a television presenter and producer, had separated nine years earlier. Now Jonathan felt the responsibility of helping guide his children through their grief. He wished he could shield them

from it but knew he couldn't.

He rented a place so they could all live together, something Liz initially opposed but eventually accepted. He said the next two years were tough, as Kent finished high school and Liz ventured into paid work.

"They very much struggled in a fog, in a malaise," Manning said. "And then over time, slowly, things just began to move forward and pick up. Grief is a very personal journey, a long journey, and recovery takes time."

Manning, who works with bequests at the Salvation Army, said he's incredibly proud of the adults his children have become. Liz is now living in Western Australia, studying to be a counselor, and engaged to be married. Kent is an apprentice joiner in Christchurch and has just bought his first home with his partner.

Manning says he's grateful to his family and friends, and Donna's siblings, who have helped them since the quake, and to people from around the world who contributed to a trust fund which helped the kids get started in their adult lives.

"I think their grief never leaves them, but their life gets bigger around it," Manning said. "They still miss their mother."

He thinks his children have become more empathetic since the tragedy. Each anniversary brings up emotions, he says, but these days they are all feeling more at peace.

## 'Obviously a mistake': Cruz returns from Cancun after uproar

By STEVE PEOPLES and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said his family vacation to Mexico was "obviously a mistake" as he returned stateside Thursday following an uproar over his disappearance during a deadly winter storm.

The Republican senator said he began second-guessing the trip since the moment he first got on the plane Wednesday. "In hindsight, I wouldn't have done it," he told reporters.

The Associated Press and other media outlets reported that he had traveled out of the country with his family as hundreds of thousands of Texans were still grappling with the fallout of a winter storm that crippled the state's power grid. The trip drew criticism from leaders in both parties and was seen as potentially damaging to his future political ambitions.

Cruz said in an earlier statement Thursday that he accompanied his family to Cancun a day earlier after his daughters asked to go on a trip with friends, given that school was canceled for the week.

"Wanting to be a good dad, I flew down with them last night and am flying back this afternoon," Cruz wrote.

"My staff and I are in constant communication with state and local leaders to get to the bottom of what happened in Texas," he continued. "We want our power back, our water on, and our homes warm."

Cruz told reporters Thursday night that he returned to the U.S. because he realized he needed to be in Texas. He said he had originally been scheduled to stay in Mexico through the weekend.

"I didn't want all the screaming and yelling about this trip to distract even one moment from the real issues that I think Texans care about, which is keeping all of our families safe," Cruz said.

"It was obviously a mistake, and in hindsight, I wouldn't have done it," he said.

The fierce political backlash comes as Cruz eyes a second presidential run in 2024. He was already one of the most villainized Republicans in Congress, having created adversaries across the political spectrum in a career defined by far-right policies and fights with the establishment.

More recently, he emerged as a leader in former President Donald Trump's push to overturn the results of the November election. Billboards calling for his resignation stood along Texas highways earlier in the month.

Even the state Republican Party chair declined to come to Cruz's defense on Thursday.

"That's something that he has to answer to his constituents about," Texas GOP Chair Allen West said when asked whether Cruz's travel was appropriate while Texans are without power and water.

"I'm here trying to take care of my family and look after my friends and others that are still without power," West said. "That's my focus."

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Hundreds of thousands of people in Texas woke up Thursday to a fourth day without power, and a water crisis was unfolding after winter storms wreaked havoc on the state's power grid and utilities.

Texas officials ordered 7 million people — one-quarter of the population of the nation's second-largest state — to boil tap water before drinking the water, after days of record low temperatures that damaged infrastructure and froze pipes.

In Austin, some hospitals faced a loss in water pressure and, in some cases, heat.

News of Cruz's absence quickly rippled across the state.

Livia Trevino, a 24-year-old whose Austin home was still without water Thursday, said she felt abandoned by government leaders.

"They are taking vacations and leaving the country, so they don't have to deal with this, and we are freezing to death. We don't have water and we don't have food," she said.

In his statement, Cruz said that his family had lost heat and power as well.

"This has been an infuriating week for Texans," he said.

While the situation will not help Cruz's political future, the two-term senator is not in any immediate political danger. His current term expires in early 2025, and the unofficial beginning of the next Republican presidential primary election is two years away.

Still, Democrats across Washington were eager to talk about the controversy.

One of Cruz's most aggressive critics on the left, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, encouraged her supporters on Thursday to volunteer for a "welfare check phone bank" to help Texans affected by the storm.

"So many elected leaders in Texas have failed their constituents," the New York Democrat wrote in an email. "Instead of focusing on relief, they've chosen to go on Fox News to spread lies or to board a plane to Cancun."

Earlier in the day, White House press secretary Jen Psaki leaned into a question about Cruz's "whereabouts."

"I don't have any updates on the exact location of Sen. Ted Cruz nor does anyone at the White House," Psaki said, adding that President Joe Biden's administration is focused on "working directly with leadership in Texas and surrounding states on addressing the winter storm and the crisis at hand."

Cruz's office declined to answer specific questions about the family vacation, but his staff reached out to the Houston Police Department on Wednesday afternoon to say the senator would be arriving at the airport, according to department spokesperson Jodi Silva. She said officers "monitored his movements" while Cruz was at the airport.

Silva could not say whether such requests are typical for Cruz's travel or whether his staff had made a similar request for his return flight.

U.S. Capitol Police officials and the Senate sergeant-at-arms have encouraged lawmakers and their staff to be conscious of potential threats and to consider advising law enforcement about their travel at airports and other transportation hubs.

Cruz's office did not immediately say whether the senator would self-quarantine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises people who have traveled during the pandemic to get a coronavirus test three to five days after their return and to quarantine for a full week, regardless of the test results.

Cruz checked in for his return flight Thursday afternoon in Cancun and walked briskly through the terminal pulling a roller bag to security. He wore a golf shirt, jeans and a face mask in the style of the Texas state flag.

The senator was accompanied by a Spanish-speaking man wearing a black polo shirt with the name and logo of The Ritz-Carlton hotel chain.

Cruz told reporters that he planned to "go home and keep working to get the grid reopened, to get power restored, to get the water back on."

"A lot of Texans are hurting and this crisis is frustrating. It's frustrating for millions of Texans. It shouldn't happen," he said.

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Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writers Dan Christian Rojas in Cancun, Mexico, Darlene Superville in Washington and Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas, contributed to this report.

## Texas crisis has governor facing big backer: energy industry

By PAUL J. WEBER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — As frozen Texas reels under one of the worst electricity outages in U.S. history, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has blamed grid operators and iced-over wind turbines but gone easier on another culprit: an oil and gas industry that is the state's dominant business and his biggest political contributor.

And as the toll deepened Thursday from a week of historic winter storms, which have killed more than 20 people in Texas, the dogpiling on a power grid that is proudly isolated from the rest of the country ignores warnings known by the state's GOP leaders for years.

"It's almost like a murder suspect blaming their right hand for committing the crime," said Democratic state Rep. James Talarico. His suburban Austin home lost power for 40 hours and had no working faucets Thursday, when roughly 1 in 4 people in Texas woke up under instructions to boil water.

Like most of the state's 30 million residents, Talarico's power is controlled by grid managers at the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which Abbott again laid into Thursday after more than 4 million people at one point were enduring outages in subfreezing temperatures.

But that is not where the responsibility ends, as power plants that feed the grid were knocked offline by the extreme cold, and natural gas producers didn't protect wellheads from freezing. "ERCOT is a convenient whipping boy," Talarico said.

The crisis has put the fossil fuel industry that lavishes the Texas Capitol with money in the crosshairs in ways that Abbott has not had to navigate when steering America's second-largest state through other disasters, including hurricanes and the ongoing pandemic. For the first time Thursday, Abbott called on Texas to mandate that power plants be winterized.

Oil and gas built and enriched Texas, and with that its politicians, including those who became president. But none has reaped campaign contributions on the scale of Abbott, who in six years in office has raised more than \$150 million from donors, more than any governor in U.S. history.

Texas' energy interests are the biggest backers of his political rise, and he has not ruled out a White House run in 2024. More than \$26 million of his contributions have come from the oil and gas industry, more than any other economic sector, according to an analysis by the National Institute on Money in Politics.

As Texas' grid first began buckling early Monday, Abbott drew overnight backlash after going on Fox News and laying fault on solar and wind producers, at a time when natural gas, coal and nuclear energy systems were responsible for nearly twice as many outages.

Pressed on those comments later, Abbott took a softer tone and acknowledged every source of power had been compromised. But he accused ERCOT of misleading the public with messages that the grid was ready for the storm.

"It's especially unacceptable when you realize what ERCOT told the state of Texas," Abbott said.

ERCOT is overseen by the Texas Public Utility Commission, whose three members are appointed by Abbott. While ERCOT manages most of Texas' power grid, the commission and the Texas Legislature make key policy decisions that have factored into the ongoing crisis.

After the state's last major freeze, during the 2011 Super Bowl held in Arlington, Texas, a federal analysis found that energy producers' procedures for winterizing their equipment "were either inadequate or were not adequately followed" in many cases. The report repeatedly cites another Texas freeze, in 1989, as a clear warning.

Girding power generators against fierce winter weather is essential in colder climates. In Iowa, where wind farms supply 40% of the state's electricity, windmills have been turning all week despite temperatures that dropped to minus 17 degrees in Des Moines. In Texas, grid officials say they can't speak for why power generators here don't do the same.



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A decade ago, the report on the last Texas failure lists a number of ways to winterize an oil well or a natural gas device and the estimated costs: installing a cold-weather production unit (\$23,000), collecting gas vented from an injection pump to supply a heater (\$675), or building a fiberglass hut to enclose the production equipment (\$1,500).

Winterizing 50,000 wells — just under a third of the number of total natural gas wells active in Texas — was estimated in 2011 to cost as much as \$1.75 billion, a figure that would almost certainly be higher today due to inflation. By comparison, the Texas oil and natural gas industry paid \$13.9 billion in taxes and royalties last year alone, according to figures from the Texas Oil & Gas Association.

Republican Ryan Sitton, the former commissioner of the peculiarly named Texas Railroad Commission that regulates the state's oil and gas industry, said an issue with bolstering power plants is the cost passed on to electric customers. Of Abbott's focus on ERCOT, Sitton said, "Calling for an investigation is easy. Actually performing a good investigation and taking ownership of the results is where the rubber meets the road."

He said oil and gas interests, which generously funded his own political campaigns, don't hold the sway the public imagines.

"They make donations, sure. But unless the entire energy industry is speaking with a unified voice, which almost never happens, there's not that much influence," Sitton said.

Merchant reported from Houston. Associated Press writer Scott McFetridge in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

## Democrats consider piecemeal approach to immigration reform

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After decades of failed attempts to pass comprehensive immigration legislation, congressional Democrats and President Joe Biden are signaling openness to a piece-by-piece approach.

They unveiled a broad bill Thursday that would provide an eight-year pathway to citizenship for 11 million people living in the country without legal status. There are other provisions, too, but the Democrats are not talking all-or-nothing.

"Even though I support full, comprehensive immigration reform, I'm ready to move on piecemeal, because I don't want to end up with good intentions on my hands and not have anything," said Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar. "I'd rather have progress."

The pragmatic approach is a clear recognition of the past failures to deliver on a large-scale immigration overhaul — and how success could be even more difficult in a highly polarized, closely divided Congress.

The Democrats' legislation reflects the broad priorities for immigration changes that Biden laid out on his first day in office, including an increase in visas, more money to process asylum applications, new technology at the southern border and funding for economic development in Latin American countries.

But advocates for expansive immigration say they could pursue smaller bills focused on citizenship for groups such as young immigrants brought to the U.S. by their parents as children, for agricultural workers and other essential labor.

"I know what it's like to lose on big bills and small bills. The fear that people have experienced in the last four years deserves every single opportunity, every single bill to remedy," said Greisa Martinez Rosas, executive director for United We Dream, an immigration advocacy group.

"The biggest thing here is that we're going to get something across the finish line, because not doing so is not an option."

The broad legislation — which includes a pathway to citizenship, but not much in the way of the enhanced border security that's typically offered to win Republican votes — faces long odds with Democrats holding only a slender majority in Congress.

Even before the new bill was unveiled, Democrats were reining in expectations for their final result. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin has said that any final Senate bill likely "will not reach the same levels" as Biden's proposal.

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Indeed, comprehensive bills negotiated by bipartisan teams of lawmakers failed multiple times during Republican George W. Bush's administration and again in 2013 during Democrat Barack Obama's.

Republican Donald Trump signed legislation that increased border security, and took executive action to restrict legal immigration to the U.S. and remove some protections for immigrants living in the country set by Obama. Biden has signed a number of executive orders rolling back some of the Trump restrictions, but he promised throughout his campaign and transition that immigration overhaul would be a top priority.

The White House insisted Thursday there have been no decisions on strategy. But multiple immigration organizations said administration officials had signaled in recent conversations that they were open to a multilevel approach in which lawmakers would press forward on the comprehensive bill while also pursuing individual pieces.

Cuellar, who was in office for most of those early, failed attempts, said many in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus are still committed to a comprehensive overhaul. He said the White House reached out to him and he advised them to start with a broad bill, but he added that "reality is going to hit people, hopefully," and more lawmakers will get on board with a more incremental approach.

Indeed, Biden himself suggested in a CNN town hall Tuesday night that "there's things I would deal by myself." One of the lead sponsors of the bill, New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez, seemed to suggest Thursday he was open to a less expansive approach.

"If we can get certain elements of this standing up and passed individually both in the House and the Senate, that's great," he said.

Tom Jawetz, vice president for immigration policy at the Center for American Progress, said that Biden's decades of experience in the Senate have given him a realistic view of what's possible.

"He also knows how to count votes, and he knows what it takes to get legislation across the line," he said. "And so I think there is real energy behind pressing forward on all fronts and seeing what shakes out."

Democrats have a third option: using a parliamentary maneuver to attach some immigration items to a budget bill, which would then require just 51 votes to pass. Advocates have been pressing the new administration to consider attaching a pathway to citizenship for some to an economic stimulus package that they're expected to introduce after they've passed the COVID-19 bill. That approach would almost certainly face a strong procedural challenge.

"The ultimate goal is to make sure that 2022 doesn't come around, and we have done nothing on immigration for another Congress," said Jawetz.

Democrats have expressed optimism that this time will be different not just because of the shift in strategy, but also because they say the politics of the issue have changed. They point to support from business groups for reform, and they note that Latinos are not a monolithic Democratic voting bloc, given that Trump improved his showing with Latino voters in the 2020 election.

Martinez Rosas said that if Congress fails to take action on reform, it will "absolutely" be a problem for Democrats in elections in 2022 and beyond.

"This will be the fight, the defining fight," she said. "The difference between now and in 2013, is that the progressive movement is unified around the acknowledgment that immigration is a must-fix issue."

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AP writer Alan Fram contributed reporting.

## Some electricity restored in Texas, but water woes grow

By PAUL J. WEBER and JILL BLEED Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Power was restored to more homes and businesses Thursday in states hit by a deadly blast of winter that overwhelmed the electrical grid and left millions shivering in the cold this week. But the crisis was far from over in parts of the South, where many people still lacked safe drinking water.

In Texas on Thursday, about 325,000 homes and businesses remained without power, down from about 3 million a day earlier, though utility officials said limited rolling blackouts were still possible.

The storms also left more than 320,000 homes and businesses without power in Louisiana, Mississippi

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and Alabama. About 70,000 power outages persisted after an ice storm in eastern Kentucky, while nearly 67,000 were without electricity in West Virginia.

And more than 100,000 customers remained without power Thursday in Oregon, a week after a massive snow and ice storm. Maria Pope, the CEO of Portland General Electric, said she expects power to be restored by Friday night to more than 90% of the customers still in the dark.

Meanwhile, snow and ice moved into the Appalachians, northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania, and later the Northeast. Back-to-back storms left 15 inches (38 centimeters) of snow in Little Rock, Arkansas, tying a 1918 record, the National Weather Service said.

The extreme weather was blamed for the deaths of more than four dozen people, some while trying to keep warm. In the Houston area, one family died from carbon monoxide as their car idled in their garage. A woman and her three grandchildren were killed in a fire that authorities said might have been caused by a fireplace they were using.

Utilities from Minnesota to Texas implemented rolling blackouts to ease strained power grids. Southwest Power Pool, a group of utilities covering 14 states from the Dakotas to the Texas Panhandle, said rolling blackouts were no longer needed, but asked customers to conserve energy until at least Saturday night.

Texas' remaining outages were mostly weather-related, rather than forced blackouts, according to the state's grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas. ERCOT Senior Director of System Operations Dan Woodfin said rotating outages could return if electricity demand rises as people get power and heating back, though they wouldn't last as long as outages earlier this week.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott warned that state residents "are not out of the woods," with temperatures still well below freezing statewide, south central Texas threatened by a winter storm and disruptions in food supply chains.

Adding to the state's misery, the weather jeopardized drinking water systems. Authorities ordered 7 million people — a quarter of the population of the nation's second-largest state — to boil tap water before drinking it, following record low temperatures that damaged infrastructure and pipes.

Water pressure dropped after lines froze, and because many people left faucets dripping to prevent pipes from icing over, said Toby Baker, executive director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Abbott urged residents to shut off water to their homes to prevent more busted pipes and preserve pressure in municipal systems.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said he expects that residents in the nation's fourth-largest city will have to boil tap water before drinking it until Sunday or Monday.

FEMA sent generators to support water treatment plants, hospitals and nursing homes in Texas, along with thousands of blankets and ready-to-eat meals, officials said. The Texas Restaurant Association also said it was coordinating donations of food to hospitals.

Some Austin hospitals lost water pressure and heat. But because the problem was statewide and affected other facilities, "no one hospital currently has the capacity to accept transport of a large number of patients," said David Huffstutler, CEO of St. David's South Austin Medical Center.

Two of Houston Methodist's community hospitals had no running water but still treated patients, with most non-emergency surgeries and procedures canceled for Thursday and possibly Friday, said spokeswoman Gale Smith.

Emergency rooms were crowded "due to patients being unable to meet their medical needs at home without electricity," Smith said.

Texas Children's Hospital's main campus at the Texas Medical Center and another location had low water pressure, but the system was adequately staffed and patients had enough water and "are safe and comfortable," spokeswoman Jenn Jacome said.

The next phase of the state's disaster response will be to test drinking water from systems knocked offline by the cold. As of Thursday afternoon, more than 1,000 Texas public water systems and 177 of the state's 254 counties had reported weather-related operational disruptions, affecting more than 14 million people, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

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The weather also disrupted water systems in Southern cities, including New Orleans, and Shreveport, Louisiana, where fire trucks delivered water to hospitals and bottled water was brought in for patients and staff, Shreveport television station KSLA reported.

Power was cut to a New Orleans facility that pumps drinking water from the Mississippi River and generators were used until electricity was restored.

And in Jackson, Mississippi, Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said almost the entire city of about 150,000 was without water Thursday night.

Crews were pumping water to refill city's tanks but faced a shortage of chemicals to treat the water, Lumumba said.

"We are dealing with an extreme challenge with getting more water through our distribution system," he said.

Drinking water was made available at fire stations throughout Jackson and officials also planned to set up bottled water pickup sites.

About 85 seniors in one Jackson apartment building haven't had water since Monday and were relying on deliveries from a building manager, said resident Linda Weathersby.

Weathersby said she spent part of Thursday outside collecting buckets of ice to melt it so she could flush her toilet and said "my back's hurting now."

As the storms headed east, 12 people had to be rescued Wednesday night from boats after a dock weighed down by snow and ice collapsed on Tennessee's Cumberland River, the Nashville Fire Department said. Elsewhere in the state, a 9-year-old boy was killed when the tube his father was pulling behind an ATV slammed into a mailbox.

In and around the western Texas city of Abilene, authorities said six people died of the cold — including a 60-year-old man found dead in his bed in his frigid home and a man who died at a health care facility when a lack of water pressure made medical treatment impossible.

A 69-year-old Arkansas man was found dead Wednesday after falling into a frozen pond while trying to rescue a calf. In Kentucky, a 77-year-old woman was found dead of likely hypothermia Wednesday night after two days without power and heat.

And a man fell through the ice on the Detroit River on Wednesday night and likely drowned, a U.S. Coast Guard spokesman said.

Before the wintry weather moved from Texas, the city of Del Rio along the U.S.-Mexico border, got nearly 10 inches (25.4 cm) of snow on Thursday, surpassing the city's one-day record for snowfall. Up to 3 inches (7.6 cm) were forecast for San Antonio, and Mayor Ron Nirenberg urged residents to stay off treacherous roads.

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Bleed reported from Little Rock, Arkansas. Associated Press journalists Terry Wallace in Dallas; Juan Lozano in Houston; Leah Willingham in Jackson, Mississippi; Rebecca Reynolds in Louisville, Kentucky; Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama; Kevin McGill in New Orleans; Darlene Superville in Washington; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed.

## **Biden repudiates Trump on Iran, ready for talks on nuke deal**

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Thursday it's ready to join talks with Iran and world powers to discuss a return to the 2015 nuclear deal, in a sharp repudiation of former President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure campaign" that sought to isolate the Islamic Republic.

The administration also took two steps at the United Nations aimed at restoring policy to what it was before Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018. The combined actions were immediately criticized by Iran hawks and are likely to draw concern from Israel and Gulf Arab states.

In addition to signaling a willingness to talk with Iran, the administration also reversed Trump's determination that all U.N. sanctions against Iran had been restored. And, it eased stringent restrictions on the



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domestic travel of Iranian diplomats posted to the United Nations.

The State Department announced the moves following discussions between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his British, French and German counterparts, and as Biden prepares to participate, albeit virtually, in his first major international events with world leaders.

The announcement came a day before Biden is to speak to leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized democracies and later in the day address the annual Munich Security Conference. At both, Biden is expected to discuss his commitment to multilateral diplomacy and his desire to undo damage that Trump's positions may have caused over the previous four years.

In a statement, State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. would accept an invitation from the European Union to attend a meeting of the participants — the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany, along with Iran — in the original nuclear agreement.

"The United States would accept an invitation from the European Union High Representative to attend a meeting of the P5+1 and Iran to discuss a diplomatic way forward on Iran's nuclear program," he said. The U.S. has not participated in a meeting of those participants since Trump withdrew from the deal and began steadily ramping up sanctions on Iran.

Such an invitation has not yet been issued but one is expected shortly, following Blinken's talks with the British, French and German foreign ministers.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations, the administration notified the Security Council that it had withdrawn Trump's September 2020 invocation of the so-called "snapback" mechanism under which it maintained that all U.N. sanctions against Iran had been re-imposed. Those sanctions included a conventional arms embargo against Iran that had been set to expire.

Trump's determination had been vigorously disputed by nearly all other U.N. members and had left the U.S. isolated at the world body. Thus, the reversal is unlikely to have any immediate practical effect other than to bring the U.S. back into line with the position of the vast majority of U.N. members, including some of its closest allies.

Acting U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Mills sent a letter to the Security Council saying the United States "hereby withdraws" three letters from the Trump administration that culminated in its Sept. 19 announcement that the United States had re-imposed U.N. sanctions on Tehran due to its "significant non-performance" with its obligations.

Trump's move had been ignored by the rest of the Security Council and the world, and the overwhelming majority of members in the 15-nation council had called the action illegal because the U.S. was no longer a member of the nuclear deal.

At the same time, officials said the administration has eased extremely strict limits on the travel of Iranian diplomats accredited to the United Nations. The Trump administration had imposed the severe restrictions, which essentially confined them to their U.N. mission and the U.N. headquarters building in New York.

The top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Michael McCaul of Texas, quickly denounced the steps. "It is concerning the Biden Administration is already making concessions in an apparent attempt to re-enter the flawed Iran deal," he said. "The Trump Administration created leverage for President Biden on Iran — we should not squander that progress."

Earlier Thursday, Blinken and his European counterparts had urged Iran to allow continued United Nations nuclear inspections and stop nuclear activities that have no credible civilian use. They warned that Iran's actions could threaten delicate efforts to bring the U.S. back into the 2015 deal and end sanctions damaging Iran's economy.

Iran is "playing with fire," said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who took part in the talks Thursday in Paris with his British and French counterparts. Blinken had joined via videoconference.

Iran has said it will stop part of International Atomic Energy Agency inspections of its nuclear facilities next week if the West doesn't implement its own commitments under the 2015 deal. The accord has been unraveling since Trump pulled the U.S. out of the agreement.

Blinken reiterated that "if Iran comes back into strict compliance with its commitments ... the United

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States will do the same," according to a joint statement after Thursday's meeting that reflected closer trans-Atlantic positions on Iran since President Joe Biden took office.

The diplomats noted "the dangerous nature of a decision to limit IAEA access, and urge Iran to consider the consequences of such grave action, particularly at this time of renewed diplomatic opportunity."

They said Iran's decision to produce uranium enriched up to 20% and uranium metal has "no credible" civilian use.

The 2015 accord is aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Tehran denies it is seeking such an arsenal.

"We are the ones who have kept this agreement alive in recent years, and now it's about supporting the United States in taking the road back into the agreement," Maas told reporters in Paris.

"The measures that have been taken in Tehran and may be taken in the coming days are anything but helpful. They endanger the Americans' path back into this agreement. The more pressure that is exerted, the more politically difficult it will be to find a solution," he said.

Iran's threats are "very worrying," British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said, stressing the need "to re-engage diplomatically in order to restrain Iran, but also bring it back into compliance."

The diplomats also expressed concern about human rights violations in Iran and its ballistic missile program.

In Iran, President Hassan Rouhani expressed hope Thursday that the Biden administration will rejoin the accord and lift the U.S. sanctions that Washington re-imposed under Trump, according to state television.

Tehran has been using its violations of the nuclear deal to put pressure on the remaining signatories — France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China — to provide more incentives to Iran to offset the crippling sanctions.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the president of the European Council spoke with Rouhani this week to try to end the diplomatic standoff. The head of the IAEA is scheduled to travel to Iran this week-end to find a solution that allows the agency to continue inspections.

Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Geir Moulson in Berlin and Angela Charlton and Masha Macpherson in Paris contributed.

## **NASA rover lands on Mars to look for signs of ancient life**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A NASA rover streaked through the orange Martian sky and landed on the planet Thursday, accomplishing the riskiest step yet in an epic quest to bring back rocks that could answer whether life ever existed on Mars.

Ground controllers at the space agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, leaped to their feet, thrust their arms in the air and cheered in both triumph and relief on receiving confirmation that the six-wheeled Perseverance had touched down on the red planet, long a deathtrap for incoming spacecraft.

"Now the amazing science starts," a jubilant Thomas Zurbuchen, NASA's science mission chief, said at a news conference, where he theatrically ripped up the contingency plan in the event of a failure and threw the document over his shoulders.

The landing marks the third visit to Mars in just over a week. Two spacecraft from the United Arab Emirates and China swung into orbit around Mars on successive days last week. All three missions lifted off in July to take advantage of the close alignment of Earth and Mars, journeying some 300 million miles in nearly seven months.

Perseverance, the biggest, most advanced rover ever sent by NASA, became the ninth spacecraft since the 1970s to successfully land on Mars, every one of them from the U.S.

The car-size, plutonium-powered vehicle arrived at Jezero Crater, hitting NASA's smallest and trickiest target yet: a 5-by-4-mile strip on an ancient river delta full of pits, cliffs and rocks. Scientists believe that if life ever flourished on Mars, it would have happened 3 billion to 4 billion years ago, when water still

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flowed on the planet.

Over the next two years, Percy, as it is nicknamed, will use its 7-foot (2-meter) arm to drill down and collect rock samples containing possible signs of bygone microscopic life. Three to four dozen chalk-size samples will be sealed in tubes and set aside to be retrieved eventually by another rover and brought homeward by another rocket ship.

The goal is to get them back to Earth as early as 2031.

Scientists hope to answer one of the central questions of theology, philosophy and space exploration.

"Are we alone in this sort of vast cosmic desert, just flying through space, or is life much more common? Does it just emerge whenever and wherever the conditions are ripe?" said deputy project scientist Ken Williford. "We're really on the verge of being able to potentially answer these enormous questions."

China's spacecraft includes a smaller rover that will also seek evidence of life, if it makes it safely down from orbit in May or June. Two older NASA landers are still humming along on Mars: 2012's Curiosity rover and 2018's InSight.

Perseverance was on its own during its descent, a maneuver often described by NASA as "seven minutes of terror."

Flight controllers waited helplessly as the preprogrammed spacecraft hit the thin Martian atmosphere at 12,100 mph (19,500 kph), or 16 times the speed of sound, slowing as it plummeted. It released its 70-foot (21-meter) parachute and then used a rocket-steered platform known as a sky crane to lower the rover the final 60 or so feet (18 meters) to the surface.

It took a nail-biting 11 1/2 minutes for the signal confirming the landing to reach Earth, setting off back-slapping and fist-bumping among flight controllers wearing masks against the coronavirus.

Perseverance promptly sent back two grainy, black-and-white photos of Mars' pockmarked, pimply-looking surface, the rover's shadow visible in the frame of one picture.

"Take that, Jezero!" a controller called out.

NASA said that the descent was flawless and that the rover came down in a "parking lot" — a relatively flat spot amid hazardous rocks. Hours after the landing, Matt Wallace, NASA deputy project manager, reported that the spacecraft was in great shape.

Mars has proved a treacherous place for the world's spacefaring nations, the U.S. included. In the span of less than three months in 1999, a U.S. spacecraft was destroyed upon entering orbit because engineers had mixed up metric and English units, and an American lander crashed on the surface after its engines cut out prematurely.

President Joe Biden tweeted congratulations over the landing, saying: "Today proved once again that with the power of science and American ingenuity, nothing is beyond the realm of possibility."

NASA is teaming up with the European Space Agency to bring the rocks home. Perseverance's mission alone costs nearly \$3 billion.

The only way to confirm — or rule out — signs of past life is to analyze the samples in the world's best labs. Instruments small enough to be sent to Mars wouldn't have the necessary precision.

"It's really the most extraordinary, mind-bogglingly complicated and will-be history-making exploration campaign," said David Parker, the European agency's director of human and robotic exploration.

Former astronaut and one-time NASA science chief John Grunsfeld tweeted that Perseverance's landing was "exactly the good news and inspiration we need right now."

"Reminds us all that we will persevere COVID and political turmoil and that the best is yet to come," he said.

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## 'Mercenary' donor gets 12 years in campaign finance scheme

By BRIAN MELLEY, ALAN SUDERMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — A once high-flying political fundraiser who prosecutors said gave illegal campaign contributions to Joe Biden, Lindsey Graham and a host of other U.S. politicians was sentenced Thursday to 12 years behind bars.

Imaad Zuberi, who was accused of ingratiating himself with politicians in both major parties and peddling the resulting influence to foreign governments, pleaded guilty to charges of tax evasion, campaign finance violations and failing to register as a foreign agent.

He also was ordered to pay nearly \$16 million in restitution and a nearly \$2 million fine. Federal prosecutors described Zuberi, who reports to prison May 25, as a “mercenary” political donor who gave to anyone he thought could help him. Pay to play, he explained to clients, was just “how America work(s).”

Prosecutors asked U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips for a stiff sentence, calling the scope of Zuberi’s scheme unprecedented. The Los Angeles businessman’s crimes included unregistered lobbying for governments with spotty human rights records like Sri Lanka and Turkey as well as a Ukrainian oligarch close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, prosecutors said.

Phillips noted the sophistication of Zuberi’s straw donor scheme and also spoke of the role such campaign finance investigations play in preserving the integrity of American elections.

The sentence comes after former President Donald Trump recently pardoned others who had been convicted or pleaded guilty to similar foreign-influence-related crimes, including his former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, and Elliott Broidy, a major Trump fundraiser.

Zuberi’s hefty sentence “sent a loud message that we have to stop such conduct to restore the public faith in our institutions,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel J. O’Brien told The Associated Press.

“This case shows that foreign influence extends well beyond what has been frequently discussed in public discourse,” he added.

Zuberi, 50, maintained that his wrongdoing had been limited and asked to be credited for years of cooperation with federal and local law enforcement. His attorneys noted he already has paid more than \$10 million in restitution.

“I’m deeply sorry and, of course, humiliated,” Zuberi told the judge. “I have no excuse for what I’ve done.”

Some of Zuberi’s cooperation remains under seal. Phillips, citing national security interests, closed the courtroom for part of Thursday’s proceedings to discuss classified information Zuberi filed in an effort to reduce his sentence. Zuberi’s attorneys asked Phillips to credit him for a list of law enforcement leads and intelligence he provided to the federal government, according to people familiar with the court filings.

Zuberi, a Pakistani-American who has extensive business dealings overseas, was in frequent contact with a CIA officer over the years and bragged to associates of his ties to the intelligence community, the AP reported last year.

The sentencing came just days after hundreds of pages of previously sealed court filings in the case were made public at the behest of the AP and other media organizations.

The trove of court documents offered new details about how prosecutors unraveled Zuberi’s scheme and also include photographs of him rubbing shoulders with then-Vice President Biden and other prominent officeholders.

Zuberi had been planning to assist federal authorities in a corruption investigation of an unnamed mayor in California, his attorneys wrote in a newly unsealed memo. He was even “preparing at an FBI office for a recorded conversation” when that effort was called off after news broke that federal prosecutors in New York were investigating the \$900,000 contribution Zuberi made to Trump’s inaugural committee, the records say. Zuberi has admitted obstructing that federal investigation.

Portions of the newly unsealed documents were redacted, in part, because of ongoing criminal investigations. Prosecutors revealed last year that there is an investigation into Zuberi’s ties to Qatar. Zuberi secretly lobbied the Trump White House and Congress on behalf of the small gas-rich monarchy, which has paid him \$9.8 million, prosecutors have alleged in court papers.

The documents also demonstrate how Zuberi built a widespread network of contacts, thanks in part to his prodigious political giving. That included six-figure donations to the Obama-Biden ticket in 2012 and Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign in 2016.



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No one who accepted tainted money from Zuberi has been accused of wrongdoing, and Biden, through a spokesman, has said he had no knowledge of Zuberi's illegal acts when they met, mostly at donor roundtables when Biden was vice president.

The new records show that Zuberi donated to or hired several Washington advocacy groups, lobbying shops and public relations firms. He also had well-connected people on his payroll for various business projects, including former NATO supreme commander Gen. Wesley Clark.

Emails obtained by the AP show Zuberi sought Clark's help for work related to a company owned by Dmitry Firtash, a Putin-friendly oligarch fighting extradition to the United States on federal bribery and racketeering charges. Prosecutors say Zuberi made \$1 million doing unregistered lobbying work for Firtash. Zuberi has said the money was for legitimate business transactions.

Clark did not respond to requests for comment.

The AP previously reported that Zuberi used a straw donor scheme in which he paid for others' donations with his credit cards and used cutouts that included a dead person and names of people prosecutors say he made up. The AP's investigation found several instances where Zuberi-linked donations to members of Congress occurred within a few weeks or even days of him receiving something he sought in return.

For example, Zuberi gave \$5,200 to U.S. Rep. Tony Cardenas around the time his office sent an official letter in late 2013 to the National Archives expressing support for a Zuberi associate seeking to do business there, according to emails obtained by the AP.

"This is why you are getting the letter," Zuberi wrote to his associate. "Just want to make sure you realize it."

Cardenas, a California Democrat, declined to comment.

Suderman reported from Richmond, Virginia, and Mustian from New York.

## Texas prices for lodging, necessities skyrocket amid storm

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

Hotel rooms for \$1,000 a night. Gasoline prices spiking. Even bottled water prices doubling or tripling overnight.

Officials in Texas say the winter storm that knocked out power and water to millions of residents is providing an opportunity for some unscrupulous merchants to take advantage of the situation by charging exorbitant prices for essential supplies.

A system set up Wednesday in Houston for residents to report incidents of price gouging received more than 450 complaints in less than 20 hours, said Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee, the chief civil attorney for Texas' largest county.

"The main types of things we're seeing is hotels setting prices at ridiculous rates," Menefee said. "We've seen allegations of packs of water being sold for two to three times the normal price, or packs of water being divvied up and the individual bottles being sold at excessive prices."

Dashawn Walker, 33, searched for a hotel room Tuesday night to avoid the cold of his powerless Dallas apartment. After finding all the rooms in Dallas booked, he ended up driving to an extended stay hotel in the suburb of Lewisville only to pay \$474 for a one-night stay.

"It's crazy," he said. "I mean why would y'all go up on the hotels in the middle of a crisis? Like, dude, come on now. Everyone is just trying to make it and they're capitalizing off a crisis, and that's so unfair to people who really can't afford it."

Such price spikes are illegal under Texas law, which prohibits selling fuel, food, medicine, lodging, building materials or other necessities "at an exorbitant or excessive price" during a state or federal disaster declaration.

The Texas Attorney General's Office urged residents who suspect they are victims of price gouging to file a complaint with their office. Violators may be required to reimburse consumers and can face civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per violation. Additional penalties of up to \$250,000 can be imposed if the victims are elderly.

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Dallas hotelier Larry Hamilton said that while there may be legitimate complaints of price gouging, he also wondered if some complaints lacked merit. He said prices at his 193-room Aloft Hotel in downtown Dallas are averaging \$94 per night, and that a customer became irate when he was quoted a price of \$109.

"He called my general manager and was threatening to report us for gouging," Hamilton said. "Moreover, and this is Economics 101, price is what creates equilibrium between supply and demand, and it's an important regulator. Price is something that fluctuates, and it should."

The hospitality business has taken a financial beating in the last year, in large part because of government-mandated closures and the hesitancy of people to travel during a pandemic. Hamilton, who had to close another boutique hotel in Dallas because of power outages, said hotels in the area have been running at less than 10% occupancy during the pandemic.

"It's been a bloodbath," he said.

In Missouri, Gov. Mike Parson said he's asked the attorney general there to investigate complaints of price gouging related to natural gas, which has spiked amid supply problems and the extreme cold snap that's enveloped a wide swathe of central and southern U.S.

"I realize the shortages of whether it's fuel, whether it's natural gas or whatever it might be, but I don't want anybody taking advantage of that either," Parson said, adding he found it frustrating that prices are "skyrocketing" after just a few days of bitter cold temperatures.

"I can't imagine what it's going to be like for sticker shock when a lot of people get their bills. It's going to be a tough environment," Parson said.

In Houston, Menefee encouraged businesses to take a neighborly approach and that "we should be looking out for each other." If not, a visit from a state or local investigator to a company accused of price gouging is usually all it takes for prices to return to normal.

"If you're raising prices, you may end up on our list," he said. "If you're raising them at a level that really raises eyebrows, you can count on one of our investigators knocking on your front door."

Murphy reported from Oklahoma City. Associated Press reporters Jake Bleiberg in Dallas and Jim Salter in St. Louis contributed to this report.

## Spain arrests 80 in 3 nights of riots over rapper's jailing

By RENATA BRITO and HERNÁN MUÑOZ Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Protests over the imprisonment of a rapper convicted of insulting the Spanish monarchy and praising terrorist violence were marred by rioting for the third night in a row Thursday.

The plight of Pablo Hasél, who began this week to serve a 9-month sentence in a northeastern prison, has triggered a heated debate over the limits of free speech in Spain and a political storm over the use of violence by both the rapper's supporters and the police.

The ruling coalition's junior partner, the far-left United We Can (Unidas Podemos) party, on Thursday filed a petition for a "total pardon" for Hasél and another rapper, Valtònyc, who fled to Belgium in 2018 to avoid trial on charges of "glorifying" terrorism.

But potentially deepening the tension, court authorities in the northeastern Catalonia region announced that Hasél lost a recent appeal and is looking at an additional prison sentence of 2 1/2 years for obstructing justice and assault in 2017. The sentence can be appealed again before the country's Supreme Court.

Like the two previous nights, the protests began Thursday with large gatherings in several cities that were, at first, mostly peaceful.

In Catalonia's regional capital, Barcelona, hundreds sang songs, rapped and shouted "Pablo Hasél, freedom!" and "Spanish media, manipulators!" at a central square before dozens broke off the main group to set alight a barricade of trash containers and a construction skip that blocked a main city artery, hurling stones, bottles and other objects at riot police.

There were moments of tension as flames threatened to extend to nearby buildings before firefighters arrived.

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In the eastern coastal city of Valencia, police used batons to disperse protesters and arrested at least eight people, according to the Spanish government's regional delegation.

Nearly 80 people have been arrested and more than 100 injured since Hasél was taken away from a university where he had sought refuge after refusing to show up at prison voluntarily.

The facades of several political parties' headquarters have been graffitied, a police station in the town of Vic was battered and protesters significantly damaged shop fronts and bank offices in several cities, including the capital, Madrid.

The Catalan regional police has also launched an internal investigation to establish whether one of their foam bullets hit a youth who lost an eye in the protests.

The rapper and his supporters say Hasél's nine-month sentence for writing a critical song about former King Juan Carlos I, and for dozens of tweets that judges said glorified some of Spain's defunct terrorist groups, violates free speech rights.

Besides that case, the rapper has previously faced other charges or has pending trials for assault, praising armed extremist groups, breaking into private premises and insulting the monarchy.

His legal situation has drawn considerable public attention because it comes after a string of other artists and social media personalities have been put on trial for violating Spain's 2015 Public Security Law, which was enacted by a previous conservative-led government and criticized by human rights organizations.

One of them was Valtòny, who has so far avoided extradition from Belgium.

United We Can parliamentary spokesman Jaume Asens said Thursday the party had triggered the first step to demand an "urgent" and "total" pardon of both rappers. Pardons are a bureaucratic process and need the final approval from the Spanish government, which is currently in the hands of a left-wing coalition led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Asens' party.

And although both parties have agreed to amend the criminal code to eliminate prison terms for offenses involving freedom of speech, the protests have also opened the latest divide in the shaky partnership after the opposition lambasted United We Can for not publicly condemning the violent protests.

Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo, a member of the center-left Socialist Party, also criticized a United We Can spokesman who expressed support for what he called "antifascist protesters fighting for freedom of expression."

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Associated Press journalists Ciarán Giles and Aritz Parra in Madrid contributed to this report.

## Massive storms, outages force tough decisions amid pandemic

By JAKE BLEIBERG, LEAH WILLINGHAM and JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Ashley Archer, a pregnant, 33-year-old Texas financial adviser, and her husband have been cautious about the coronavirus. They work from home, go out mostly just to get groceries and wear masks whenever they are in public.

But when a friend lost power amid the winter storms that have left millions of Texans without heat in freezing temperatures, the couple had to make a decision: Should they take on additional risk to help someone in need?

Archer said they didn't hesitate. They took her husband's best friend into their suburban Dallas home. "He's like family," she said. "We weren't going to let him freeze at his place. We figured, 'OK, we're willing to accept a little bit of risk because you're not in our little pandemic group.'"

Weighing the risks in the pandemic era is fraught enough. But the storms and outages that have hit a big swath of the U.S. over the past several days have added a whole new layer of complexity.

Do we open doors to the neighbors? Should we stay in a hotel or go to a shelter? And what to do about hand-washing, the most basic of precautions, when there is no running water?

The last few months have been challenging enough for Jonathan Callahan. He lost his job cleaning mail trucks in Jackson, Mississippi, and soon found himself homeless, sleeping in an abandoned church at night. Then the storm hit Mississippi this week, bringing bouts of snow and freezing cold.

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Callahan, 40, was one of 14 people staying at a warming shelter at a community center in Jackson, with cots spread around the gym. He said the space has been comfortable, meals have been provided, and he and some others played a game of pickup basketball, which "warmed us right up."

He said he felt comfortable with the coronavirus precautions; he and most everyone else were wearing masks and there was room for distancing.

"I'm grateful they let us be here," he said. "If we weren't here, where would we be?"

Public health experts say that crowding people into shelters can contribute to the spread of COVID-19, but that there are ways to lower the risks, through masks and distancing.

"The ethics of the situation are simple enough," said Dr. Stefan Kertesz, a University of Alabama at Birmingham professor of medicine and a homeless health researcher who runs a clinic for homeless veterans. "We can't protect people tomorrow if they die today. Warming stations are needed."

The storms that have disrupted social distancing precautions and thrown people from different households together have also undermined the nation's vaccination drive, with tens of thousands of vaccine doses stranded and inoculations canceled. Concern is mounting in some places.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker said Thursday he is thinking of sending the National Guard into the South to bring back held-up shipments of vaccine earmarked for the state. He said the state can't afford to go a week without getting any new doses.

And North Carolina vaccine providers have yet to receive tens of thousands of doses the federal government was set to deliver this week, state officials said.

Like Archer, Ella Ewart-Pierce, a public health analyst, said her family has been especially cautious about the coronavirus because her husband is in a vulnerable group. The Dallas couple has been working from home, avoiding places where people gather and getting groceries delivered.

But when they lost power, the risk calculation shifted. Ewart-Pierce said they decided to take their young kids to a hotel Monday after their home became so cold they had to shut off the water to keep the pipes from bursting.

"It was 13 degrees outside and our house was 38 degrees inside," Ewart-Pierce said. "The kids were already crying because they were cold even though they were wearing all their clothes."

When the family arrived at the hotel they plan to stay at until Sunday, "it was a scene," said Ewart-Pierce.

"There was one lady trying to figure out where to buy formula for her baby. There are families and a lady in a wheelchair with a blanket. It's a hotel that has pets, so there were dogs," she said.

They're taking precautions while there, she said, including wearing two face masks each and keeping their distance from other people. With the hotel's restaurant open but dining in prohibited, they're eating on the floor of their room.

In Austin, Anissa Ryland also was forced to move her family to a hotel. She, her husband and their five children lost power at their 115-year-old home around 2 a.m. Monday and left following a frigid night.

When they returned Tuesday to pick up supplies, the thermostat read just 7 degrees above freezing, and icicles had begun to form.

Under normal circumstances, the family could stay with neighbors or family, but the pandemic has made that harder. For one thing, one of her children has a compromised immune system, she said.

"You have to weigh the risks and say, 'Danger now versus a theoretical risk,'" Ryland said. "How do you do that? It's a hard discussion."

Despite the weather challenges, people still need to try to take precautions amid the coronavirus fatigue they have endured and continue wearing masks while trying to social distance, said Roopa Kalyanaraman Marcello, a New York-based public health expert who has worked in the field for two decades.

"If you have no heat in your home and it's 40 degrees in your home, in those situations, it is not necessarily safe for you to be in your own home so you may be forced to go to someone else's home," she said. "I think it's challenging, it's a balance. I think if people are gathering with people they know are vaccinated, there may be less of a risk there."

Bleiberg reported from Dallas, Willingham from Jackson, Mississippi, and Noveck from New York. Associ-



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ated Press writers Carla K. Johnson in Washington state; Bryan Anderson in Raleigh, N.C.; Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas; Andrew Dalton in Los Angeles; and Mark Pratt in Boston also contributed.

## **"Mr. Kitty" goes virtually to Washington over GameStop saga**

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

The social media movement that made a beloved icon of GameStop enthusiast Keith Gill continued to rally behind the YouTube personality known as Roaring Kitty as he testified to Congress on Thursday about his role in last month's stock market frenzy.

"Today, the world shall know his name," cheered one online fan on the social media website Reddit, superimposing a headshot of Gill over a boxer's body.

The 34-year-old Gill became the most visible face of the GameStop rally largely because of his videos, where he wore a red headband and colorful, cat-themed T-shirts as he spent hours each week talking about the stock from the basement of his home in a suburb of Boston.

For the virtual hearing of the House Committee on Financial Services, Gill wore a jacket and tie, although the headband could be seen hanging on a poster of a kitten with the words "Hang in There!" — a crowd-pleasing reference to people still holding onto GameStop shares after its remarkable rollercoaster rise and fall.

Gill reaped a big profit in the troubled video-game company after months talking about GameStop stock on his YouTube channel and on the Reddit forum WallStreetBets, where he went by the pseudonym DFV, for 'deep value' plus an expletive.

But on Thursday he rejected suggestions that he played a key role in the GameStop frenzy, arguing his social media conversations sharing analysis of company fundamentals were no different than what people do at bars, golf courses or with family members at home.

"The idea that I used social media to promote GameStop stock to unwitting investors and influence the market is preposterous," Gill told lawmakers. "My posts did not cause the movement of billions of dollars into GameStop shares."

Gill did acknowledge that some investors jumped in too late. GameStop shares soared as high as \$483 in January but have since fallen back, trading Thursday afternoon at around \$45.

"It is tragic that some people lost money and my heart goes out to them," Gill said.

Gill's testimony won plaudits Thursday from WallStreetBets members on Reddit and the live-chatting service Discord.

"A congressman is now on record congratulating DFV for his DIAMOND HANDS," one Reddit user posted, referring to an exchange between Gill and Republican Rep. Warren Davidson from Ohio, alluding to Wall-StreetBets lingo — typically accompanied with diamond emojis — for when an investor perseveres with a stock despite big risks.

Lawmakers on Thursday seemed far less interested in probing Gill than in other panelists representing Wall Street hedge funds and other bigger players. Some of the toughest questions went to the CEO of smartphone-based investment service Robinhood, which was widely criticized for restricting trading of GameStop and other volatile stocks for more than a day.

But along with congressional scrutiny, Gill is now facing an investigative inquiry from a Massachusetts state regulator and a class-action lawsuit claiming he misrepresented himself as an amateur investor while convincing other investors to buy GameStop shares. Gill was registered as a broker-dealer and worked as a "financial wellness educational director" for insurance company MassMutual while he was sharing his thoughts on GameStop online.

Gill emphasized to lawmakers his humble upbringing in Brockton, Massachusetts, where his father was a truck driver, his mother a nurse, and Gill was the first in his family to get a 4-year college degree but then struggled to keep steady work as he attempted a career in finance.

He said he began analyzing stocks as a hobby and to supplement his income. He took to social media to trade tips and help work out his ideas with other individual investors about stocks like GameStop, a

phenomenon he said is helping to level the playing field for smaller investors.

"Ultimately my GameStop investment was a success," he wrote in prepared written remarks. "But the thing is, I felt that way in December far before the peak, when the stock was at \$20 a share. I was so happy to visit my family in Brockton for the holidays and give them the great news — we were millionaires."

Gill said he analyzed stocks on his own time and got curious about GameStop in June 2019, after it began trading at a deep discount after a poor quarterly earnings report. He bought call options and increased his position throughout 2019 and 2020, convinced that the stock price was "dramatically undervalued."

With options, an investor can pay a few dollars for the right to buy a stock at a later date at a certain price. If the stock hits or surpasses that target, investors can reap a bigger return than if they simply bought a share.

One Redditor going by the name Bruchtime27 penned an ode to Gill that began: "I love you man."

"You did your homework for years, learning about the market and understanding what your strategy would be, all while talking care of your family and no doubt just being an all-around good dude through some incredibly difficult times since '08," the user wrote.

As they celebrated Gill, many commenters on Reddit and Discord launched profanity-ridden tirades against the other panelists testifying at the hearing, particularly Vlad Tenev, Robinhood's CEO, and executives from short-selling hedge funds that lost big after placing bets that the stock would drop.

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AP reporters Marcy Gordon and Alex Veiga contributed to this report.

## **Widespread power outages, icy conditions hobble food supply**

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

A series of winter storms and widespread power outages gripping Texas and other states not used to such extreme low temperatures are creating big challenges in the nation's food supply networks.

Grocery chains like Walmart and Publix have been forced to close some stores either because of lack of power or lack of workers. And at locations that remain open, customers complain of long lines outside and then empty shelves once brimming with water, bread and milk when they get inside. Texas grocery chain H-E-B, for example, closed some stores and is limiting customer purchases of items like brisket and propane tanks.

The power outages have caught plenty of people unprepared, like Jon Reilly, who says he always keeps a month's supply of canned food on hand for hurricanes. But on Wednesday, his daughter and wife waited 20 minutes in line outside of a grocery store in Corpus Christi, Texas, only to come out with bread and water. They found no milk, cheese or meat. He's also running low on propane, which he's using to power up the outdoor grill for cooking.

"We thought it was going to be cold," said Reilly. "We didn't expect to not have power for a week."

Rodney Giles, 35, of the Woodlands, Texas, went out to get steak to grill for his family on Tuesday. But he ended up waiting in line for two hours outside his local H-E-B. When he got inside, the only things available were tofu, oat milk and other things he didn't want. But after living through several hurricanes and the pandemic, he hopes the store's stock will improve soon.

"Even during the pandemic here in March, the first day the shelves were empty, but the next day they were fully stocked," Giles said.

Grocery retailers in Texas and in other parts of the South are used to hurricanes that can force them to shut down for a few days. But this week's massive winter storms are wider reaching, wreaking havoc on roads and the entire transportation infrastructure. The coronavirus pandemic is only exacerbating the issue as stores have to limit the number of customers.

Michael Zimmerman, a partner in the strategic operations practice of global management consulting firm Kearney, predicts it will take another two weeks before grocery shelves in the affected areas "look normal" again. He noted that grocery chains run a very efficient operation, keeping in stock what they need and relying on continuous flows of deliveries. But that can backfire in situations like snowstorms and power

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outages when it helps to have the extra inventory.

"Supermarkets just don't have room, even if they could store garlic for three years," he said.

Meanwhile, food suppliers are having to scale back their operations or close down farms and plants because of the outages. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller issued a red alert earlier this week, noting he's getting calls from farmers and ranchers across the state reporting that the interruptions in electricity and natural gas are having a "devastating effect on their operations."

In just one example, dairy operations are dumping \$8 million worth of milk down the drains every day because the plants that process that milk don't have power, Miller cited in his statement.

"We're looking at a food supply chain problem like we've never seen before, even with COVID-19," he said.

Tyson Foods says it has temporarily scaled back or suspended production at some facilities to save energy costs.

Sanderson Farms Inc., one of the largest U.S. chicken companies, estimated Tuesday that as many as 200 of its roughly 1,900 Texas chicken houses don't have power. But the Mississippi-based company's chairman and CEO Joe F. Sanderson Jr. remained optimistic.

"This experience is similar to a hurricane," said Sanderson, Jr., in a statement. "We have experience managing through catastrophic weather events, and this will be no different."

The supply problems have extended to food banks, hampering their ability to feed those most in need. Celia Cole, the CEO of hunger-relief organization Feeding Texas, said most of the 21 food banks the organization runs across the state have been closed due to the weather, power issues or people being unable to come into work. But several have been providing food to warming stations in more urban areas of the state.

"I don't think there's a single community that hasn't been touched," she said. "The biggest challenge we're facing in terms of being able to help people is the supply chain disruption."

Amid the chaos, however, are a few bright spots, like for Bruna Villalon, 24, who lives with her husband and three dogs in Austin, Texas. She went to Walmart on Monday to stock up on essentials when the power went out.

"The store manager had to ask each individual shopper how much they thought groceries were, and if we didn't have cash, we could just leave with the groceries," said Villalon, who paid \$20 in cash for about \$35 worth of groceries.

D'Innocenzio and Anderson are based in New York. AP Business Writer Dee-Ann Durbin in Ann Arbor, Michigan contributed to this report.

## SC governor signs abortion ban; Planned Parenthood sues

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina's governor on Thursday signed a bill banning most abortions, one of his top priorities since he took office more than four years ago. Planned Parenthood immediately sued, effectively preventing the new law from taking effect.

The "South Carolina Fetal Heartbeat and Protection from Abortion Act, is similar to abortion restriction laws that a dozen states have previously passed. All are tied up in court. Federal law, which takes precedence over state law, currently allows abortion.

"There's a lot of happy hearts beating across South Carolina right now," Republican Gov. Henry McMaster proclaimed during a ceremony at the Statehouse attended by lawmakers who made the proposal a reality.

Immediately after he signed the bill, a group of legislators and members of the public, standing shoulder to shoulder and wearing masks to protect against the coronavirus, began singing the words "Praise God" to the tune of "Amazing Grace."

The House passed the bill by a 79-35 vote on Wednesday after hours of emotional speeches from both supporters and opponents, and gave the measure final approval on Thursday. Moments after the Thursday vote, Planned Parenthood announced that it was filing a lawsuit. The South Carolina law, like those of other

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states that are currently being challenged, is “blatantly unconstitutional,” said Jenny Black, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood South Atlantic.

Supporters of restrictive abortion laws are trying to get the issue before the U.S. Supreme Court in the hopes that — with three justices appointed by Republican former President Donald Trump — the court could overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision supporting abortion rights. The Supreme Court has previously ruled that abortion is legal until a fetus is viable outside the womb — months after a heartbeat can be detected, Black noted.

State bills to restrict or ban abortion “are plainly absurd,” she said. “There is no other way around it.”

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson issued a statement Thursday saying that his office “will vigorously defend this law in court because there is nothing more important than protecting life.” He stood near McMaster as the governor signed the bill.

Abortion opponents have pushed for the ban for years, but it got stuck on a procedural hurdle in the Senate. Republicans gained three seats in the Senate in November’s election and the bill was tabbed “Senate Bill No. 1” to show it was the top priority.

“We’re about to do what I’ve been trying to do for 25 years: shut down the abortion industry in South Carolina,” Republican Sen. Larry Grooms said moments before the governor signed the bill.

Democrats say Republicans wasted taxpayer money by passing a bill that everyone knew would be challenged in court. They also argue that there are more important issues needing their attention, such as COVID-19, health care and education.

“We’re tired of the hypocrisy,” said House Minority Leader Todd Rutherford. Rutherford said Democrats have also had enough of lawmakers across the aisle telling them they don’t care about life.

“We care about life until death. We care about birth. ... We care about people eating, people not dying because they can’t get vaccines,” he said.

The lawsuit by Planned Parenthood and The Center for Reproductive Rights argues that South Carolina’s new law “is in flagrant violation of nearly five decades of settled Supreme Court precedent.” The suit says a high rate of women, especially African Americans, die during or immediately after childbirth in South Carolina. The abortion ban would fall hardest on low-income women, who wouldn’t be able to travel to a nearby state where abortion is still permitted, the suit says.

A hearing to determine if the law should be suspended while the lawsuit is being heard is scheduled for Friday afternoon.

Like Democratic lawmakers, Black said the focus on abortion not only wastes money by fighting established law, but also ignores a host of other important issues.

“If lawmakers are really interested in making lives better, we have a long list of priorities they can focus on,” she said.

South Carolina’s law requires doctors to perform ultrasounds to check for a heartbeat in the fetus. If one is detected, the abortion can only be performed if the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest or the mother’s life is in danger.

The measure does not punish a pregnant woman for getting an illegal abortion, but the person who performed the abortion could be charged with a felony, sentenced up to two years and fined \$10,000 if found guilty.

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Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>.

## **UN: Huge changes in society needed to keep nature, Earth OK**

BY SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Humans are making Earth a broken and increasingly unlivable planet through climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. So the world must make dramatic changes to society, economics and daily life, a new United Nations report says.

Unlike past U.N. reports that focused on one issue and avoided telling leaders actions to take, Thursday’s



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report combines three intertwined environment crises and tells the world what's got to change. It calls for changing what governments tax, how nations value economic output, how power is generated, the way people get around, fish and farm, as well as what they eat.

"Without nature's help, we will not thrive or even survive," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. "For too long, we have been waging a senseless and suicidal war on nature. The result is three interlinked environmental crises."

Thus the 168-page report title is blunt: "Making Peace With Nature."

"Our children and their children will inherit a world of extreme weather events, sea level rise, a drastic loss of plants and animals, food and water insecurity and increasing likelihood of future pandemics," said report lead author Sir Robert Watson, who has chaired past UN science reports on climate change and biodiversity loss.

"The emergency is in fact more profound than we thought only a few years ago," said Watson, who has been a top level scientist in the U.S. and British governments.

This year "is a make-it or break-it year indeed because the risk of things becoming irreversible is gaining ground every year," Guterres said. "We are close to the point of no return."

The report highlighted what report co-author Rachel Warren of the University of East Anglia called "a litany of frightening statistics that hasn't really been brought together:"

- Earth is on the way to an additional 3.5 degrees warming from now (1.9 degrees Celsius), far more than the international agreed upon goals in the Paris accord.
- About 9 million people a year die from pollution.
- About 1 million of Earth's 8 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction.
- Up to 400 million tons of heavy metals, toxic sludge and other industrial waste are dumped into the world's waters every year.
- More than 3 billion people are affected by land degradation, and only 15% of Earth's wetlands remain intact.
- About 60% of fish stocks are fished at the maximum levels. There are more than 400 oxygen-depleted "dead zones" and marine plastics pollution has increased tenfold since 1980.

"In the end it will hit us," said biologist Thomas Lovejoy, who was a scientific advisor to the report. "It's not what's happening to elephants. It's not what's happening to climate or sea level rise. It's all going to impact us."

The planet's problems are so interconnected that they must be worked on together to be fixed right, Warren said. And many of the solutions, such as eliminating fossil fuel use, combat multiple problems including climate change and pollution, she said.

The report "makes it clear that there is no time for linear thinking or tackling problems one at a time," said University of Michigan environment professor Rosina Bierbaum, who wasn't part of the work.

In another break, this report gives specific solutions that it says must be taken.

This report uses the word "must" 56 times and "should" 37 times. There should be 100 more because action is so crucial, said former U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres, who wasn't part of the report.

"Time has totally ran out. That's why the word 'must' is in there," Figueres said.

The report calls for an end to fossil fuel use and says governments should not tax labor or production, but rather use of resources that damages nature.

"Governments are still playing more to exploit nature than to protect it," Guterres said. "Globally, countries spend some 4 to 6 trillion dollars a year on subsidies that damage the environment."

Scientists should inform leaders about environmental risks "but their endorsement of specific public policies threatens to undermine the credibility of their science," said former Republican Rep. Bob Inglis, who founded the free market climate think tank RepublicEn.org.

The report also tells nations to value nature in addition to the gross domestic product when calculating how an economy is doing.

Getting there means changes by individuals, governments and business, but it doesn't have to involve sacrifice, said UN Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen.

"There's a country that has been on that path for 25 years: Costa Rica," Andersen said. "Yes, these are difficult times, but more and leaders are stepping in."

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears.

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

## **Astros' Baker gets COVID-19 vaccine after initial reticence**

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston Astros manager Dusty Baker said he had been vaccinated against COVID-19 as the team began spring training Thursday.

But the 71-year-old Baker, who is Black, understands the reticence of some in his community to get the vaccine because of this country's history with medical studies on Black people without permission.

Baker was only convinced to get the vaccine after seeing a television interview with a Black doctor connected to one of the vaccines who guaranteed this would not be "another Tuskegee Experiment."

The Tuskegee Experiment was a study of syphilis conducted on Black men in Tuskegee, Alabama, from 1932-72. It provided no treatment for the disease and was done without the informed consent of its participants.

"I was very aware of the experiment and so was my mom and dad," Baker said. "And so, I was a little leery about getting the vaccine."

Baker, the second-oldest manager in the majors, also noted that getting the vaccine was important for him because his age makes him more susceptible to severe complications from the coronavirus.

He received the second dose of the vaccine about two weeks ago before he traveled from his home in California to West Palm Beach, Fla. to begin his second season with the Astros.

Though Baker decided getting the vaccine was right for him, he won't try to change the mind of people who are "staunchly against" getting it. That includes his elderly mother.

"It's their decision," he said. "My mom will be 90 on March 1 and she's not going to get it. She refused to get it."

He won't press those who are strongly against getting it to change their minds. But he is comfortable with encouraging people who aren't sure about it to be vaccinated.

"So, I'm urging people to try to sort of take care of themselves," he said. "And I know it's a kind of touchy situation. A lot of people don't trust the vaccine... you do what you've got to do. But my suggestion was for those that are on the fence, get the vaccine."

Also on Thursday, the team announced that third base coach Gary Pettis, who missed the end of last season after being diagnosed with cancer, would miss spring training and re-join the team for the regular season.

"I'm doing very well, but my doctors felt that due to some potential logistical issues caused by the ongoing pandemic, it made sense for me to continue with my treatments here at home," Pettis said in a release. "They are being cautious with me, which I understand. I'm doing great and will be back with the ball club, but it will be later than we had thought."

Pettis, who has been the team's third base coach since 2015, was diagnosed with multiple myeloma last year and left the team in September to undergo treatment.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/MLB> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## **'Horrible': Witnesses recall massacre in Ethiopian holy city**

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Bodies with gunshot wounds lay in the streets for days in Ethiopia's holiest city.

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At night, residents listened in horror as hyenas fed on the corpses of people they knew. But they were forbidden from burying their dead by the invading Eritrean soldiers.

Those memories haunt a deacon at the country's most sacred Ethiopian Orthodox church in Axum, where local faithful believe the ancient Ark of the Covenant is housed. As Ethiopia's Tigray region slowly resumes telephone service after three months of conflict, the deacon and other witnesses gave The Associated Press a detailed account of what might be its deadliest massacre.

For weeks, rumors circulated that something ghastly had occurred at the Church of St. Mary of Zion in late November, with estimates of several hundred people killed. But with Tigray cut off from the world and journalists blocked from entering, little could be verified as Ethiopian and allied fighters pursued the Tigray region's fugitive leaders.

The deacon, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he remains in Axum, said he helped count the bodies — or what was left after hyenas fed. He gathered victims' identity cards and assisted with burials in mass graves.

He believes some 800 people were killed that weekend at the church and around the city, and that thousands in Axum have died in all. The killing continues: On the day he spoke to the AP last week he said he had buried three people.

"If we go to the rural areas, the situation is much worse," the deacon said.

The atrocities of the Tigray conflict have occurred in the shadows. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for making peace with neighboring Eritrea, announced the fighting as the world focused on the U.S. election. He accused Tigray's regional forces, whose leaders dominated Ethiopia for nearly three decades before he took office, of attacking the Ethiopian military. Tigray's leaders called it self-defense after months of tensions.

While the world clamors for access to Tigray to investigate suspected atrocities on all sides and deliver aid to millions of hungry people, the prime minister has rejected outside "interference." He declared victory in late November and said no civilians had been killed. His government denies the presence of thousands of soldiers from Eritrea, long an enemy of the Tigray leaders.

Ethiopia's narrative, however, has crumbled as witnesses like the deacon emerge. The foreign ministry on Thursday acknowledged that "rape, plunder, callous & intentional mass killings" could occur in a conflict where "many are illegally armed." Its statement blamed Tigray forces for leaving the region "vulnerable" and said any serious offense will be investigated. It did not mention Eritrean soldiers.

Axum, with its ancient ruins and churches, holds major significance for the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, who believe that the Ark of the Covenant, built to hold the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, is located there.

"If you attack Axum, you attack first of all the identity of Orthodox Tigrayans but also of all Ethiopian Orthodox Christians," said Wolbert Smidt, an ethnohistorian who specializes in the region. "Axum itself is regarded as a church in the local tradition, 'Axum Zion.'"

In a normal year, thousands of people would have gathered at the Zion church in late November to celebrate the day Ethiopians believe the Ark of the Covenant was brought there after it disappeared from Jerusalem in ancient times.

Instead, the church had become a refuge for people who fled the fighting elsewhere in Tigray. They sheltered there as worship services were underway two days before the anniversary.

Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers had arrived in Axum more than a week earlier, with heavy bombardment. But on Nov. 28 the Eritrean soldiers returned in force to hunt down members of the local militia who had mobilized against them in Axum and nearby communities.

The deacon recalled soldiers bursting into the church, cornering and dragging out worshippers and shooting at those who fled.

"I escaped by chance with a priest," he said. "As we entered the street, we could hear gunfire all over." They kept running, stumbling over the dead and wounded along with others trying to find places to hide.

Most of the hundreds of victims were killed that day, he said, but the shooting and looting continued the following day.

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"They started to kill people who were moving from church to home or home to home, simply because they were on the street," another witness, visiting university lecturer Getu Mak, told the AP. "It was a horrible act to see." He watched the fighting from his hotel room, then ventured out as it eased.

"On every corner, almost, there was a body," he said. "People were crying in every home."

Another witness, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation, said soldiers killed a man at his home near the Zion church. "How can I tell you? So many dead," said the man, who has since escaped to the Tigray capital, Mekele.

After the killings in Axum came an uneasy period with soldiers roaming the streets and families searching for loved ones. At night, hyenas descended from nearby hills.

The city began to smell of death as some bodies went untouched for days.

"I saw a horse cart carrying around 20 bodies to the church, but Eritrean soldiers stopped them and told people to throw them back on the street," said Getu, the university lecturer.

Witnesses elsewhere in Tigray have reported being unable to bury bodies, calling it an added insult. They say soldiers tell them that "no one mourned our fighters, so why should we let you mourn?"

Finally, when the soldiers left the city to pursue other fighters, residents mobilized to bury the bodies, the deacon said.

"We could not do a formal burial," he said. "We buried them en masse" in graves near the Zion church and others.

Some of the dead were among the hundreds of thousands of people in Tigray displaced by the conflict and not known to Axum residents. Their identity cards were collected in churches, where they await the discovery of loved ones.

The deacon said residents believe the Eritrean soldiers were taking revenge for the two-decade border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea that played out nearby and ended after Abiy became prime minister. Some of the soldiers told residents they had been instructed to kill people as young as 12, he said.

Another witness, a 39-year-old who gave only his first name, Mhretab, and escaped weeks ago to the United States, asserted that Ethiopian federal police did nothing to rein in the Eritrean soldiers.

"I said to them, 'Listen, you're Ethiopian, they're destroying Ethiopian cities. How is this possible?'" Mhretab recalled.

"They said, 'What can we do? This shouldn't have happened from the beginning. This is from above,'" indicating that it had been decided by senior officials, he said.

He said he ferried bodies to a mass grave by the Zion church and estimated that he saw 300 to 400 there.

The deacon believes that the Eritrean soldiers, in their hunt for Tigray fighters, have killed thousands more people in villages outside Axum. "When they fight and lose, they take revenge on the farmers and kill everyone they can find," he said. "This is what we've seen in the past three months."

Getu echoed that belief, citing his uncle, who survived such a rural confrontation.

The deacon has not gone to the villages outside Axum. His work remains with his church, where services continue even as he says the Tigray conflict is as fierce as ever.

"We're also protecting the church," he said. "Even now, I'm talking to you from there. We are not armed. What we do is mostly watching. And, of course, praying that God protects us."

## **VIRUS TODAY: Unemployment applications in U.S. up this week**

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Wednesday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

### **THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY**

— The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid rose last week to 861,000, evidence that layoffs remain painfully high despite a steady drop in the number of confirmed coronavirus infections. Applications from laid-off workers rose 13,000 from the previous week, which was revised sharply higher, the Labor Department said Thursday. Before the virus erupted in the United States last March, weekly applications for unemployment benefits had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession of



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2008-2009. The figures underscore that the job market has stalled, with employers having added a mere 49,000 jobs in January after cutting workers in December. Nearly 10 million jobs remain lost to the pandemic.

— Thousands of U.S. service members are refusing or putting off the COVID-19 vaccine as frustrated commanders scramble to knock down internet rumors and find the right message that will persuade troops to get the shot. Some Army units are seeing as few as one-third agree to the vaccine. Military leaders searching for answers believe they have identified one potential convincer: an imminent deployment. Navy sailors on ships heading out to sea last week, for example, were choosing to take the shot at rates exceeding 80% to 90%. Air Force Maj. Gen. Jeff Taliaferro, vice director of operations for the Joint Staff, told Congress on Wednesday that “very early data” suggests that just up to two-thirds of the service members offered the vaccine have accepted.

— A rush of people seeking online vaccination appointments in Massachusetts crashed the system on Thursday morning. More than one million additional state residents had become eligible for a shot. Several who went to [vaxfinder.mass.gov](https://vaxfinder.mass.gov) received the message “This application crashed” with a drawing of an octopus, and were urged to try again later. The site appeared to be working again by about 10 a.m. Gov. Charlie Baker said Wednesday that more than 70,000 appointments would be made available at 8 a.m. Thursday, including for those age 65 and older, for people with two or more certain medical conditions, and for residents and staff of low income and affordable senior housing. But people were warned that it could take up to a month to book an appointment.

**THE NUMBERS:** According to data from Johns Hopkins University, there were 70,188 new COVID-19 cases and 2,366 deaths in the United States on Wednesday. The record high for new cases was 300,282 on Jan. 2 and the record high for deaths was 5,443 on Feb. 12.

**DEATH TOLL:** The total number of deaths from COVID-19 in the U.S. reached 490,718.

**QUOTABLE:** “Unfortunately, we have a slight setback in vaccination progress this week,” said Michele Bever, executive director of the South Heartland District Health Department in Hastings, Nebraska. “Vaccine shipments are being delayed across the country due to the weather and we have lost hope that we will receive our allotment in time for some ‘first dose’ clinics this week. We will be rescheduling appointments to next week.”

**ICYMI:** Maine’s annual celebration of clams has been canceled for the second straight year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Organizers spoke with local officials and decided the only smart thing was to call off the Yarmouth Clam Festival, which dates to the 1960s and is a beloved tradition in southern Maine. It typically includes races, rides, music and a shucking contest. Organizers in a Facebook post that they were concerned about the “ability to facilitate an event within unknown state regulations.” They also said “that with the love and support of our many fans we will return bigger and better when the time is right.” The most recent Yarmouth Clam Festival took place in July 2019.

**ON THE HORIZON:** For a second straight year, the coronavirus pandemic has upended the daily routines of the tradition-bound Virginia General Assembly. Lawmakers have been working under extraordinary circumstances, legislating to a substantial degree by video conference. It’s a setup that has led to technical difficulties, an uncharacteristically profane hot mic situation and more serious complaints from lawmakers and advocates alike. They say legislating by Zoom has limited transparency, stifled public participation and diluted the democratic process. Legislative leaders say the adjustments are necessary for public health in a pandemic.

Find AP’s full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

## Experts warn against COVID-19 variants as states reopen

By MARION RENAULT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As states lift mask rules and ease restrictions on restaurants and other businesses because of falling case numbers, public health officials say authorities are overlooking potentially more

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dangerous COVID-19 variants that are quietly spreading through the U.S.

Scientists widely agree that the U.S. simply doesn't have enough of a handle on the variants to roll back public health measures and is at risk of fumbling yet another phase of the pandemic after letting the virus rage through the country over the last year and kill nearly 500,000 people.

"Now is not the time to fully open up," said Karthik Gangavarapu, a researcher at Scripps Research Institute whose team works closely with San Diego health officials to watch for mutant versions of the coronavirus. "We need to still be vigilant."

Over the past two weeks, the daily averages for both coronavirus cases and deaths have dropped by about half in the U.S., according to data from Johns Hopkins University. And as of Wednesday, over 40 million people — about 12% of the population — had received at least one dose of a vaccine.

But experts including Dr. Anthony Fauci and CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky say the downward trend could reverse itself if new variants take hold.

The problem, as experts see it, is that the U.S. has been slow to ramp up a rigorous genetic surveillance system for tracking the variants' spread and measuring how much of a foothold they have gained here.

"The fact of the matter is we're kind of in the dark," said Dr. Diane Griffin, who studies infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins. She said the variants are "probably widespread even if we don't know it."

On Wednesday, the Biden administration announced it will spend \$200 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to triple its levels of genetic sequencing to identify mutations that might make the coronavirus more infectious or more deadly. Separately, Congress is considering a bill that would provide \$1.75 billion for such work.

A more contagious and possibly more deadly variant that was first identified in Britain has been found in at least 42 states. Other variants first detected in South Africa and Brazil have been reported across the U.S. in low numbers. The South Africa one is especially worrisome because of evidence it may diminish the effectiveness of the vaccines.

"We're chasing a moving target. It's changing a little too fast for comfort," said Dr. Lucio Miele a geneticist at LSU Health Sciences in New Orleans. "We need to be proactive. We're not invulnerable."

Detecting variants and knowing where and how widely they are spreading could be critical to preventing another deadly wave of COVID-19 like the one that overwhelmed hospitals this winter.

In Europe in late 2020, once surveillance began flagging variants like the one that was causing cases to rage out of control and overwhelm hospitals in England, governments across the continent responded by imposing strict travel restrictions and lockdowns.

But in the U.S., the emergence of variants has been met with a shrug among many state and local officials amid the overall drop-off in confirmed infections.

Florida, for example, has the country's highest tally of cases of the British variant, according to the CDC. But state leaders seem to have already moved on from the coronavirus, including Gov. Ron DeSantis.

When asked about the rise of new strains last week, DeSantis told reporters, "The media is worried about that, obviously. You guys really love that."

Florida has repealed many restrictions and hosted 25,000 fans for the Super Bowl in Tampa and 30,000 spectators at the Daytona 500 a week later in what was the largest sporting event in the nation since the start of the pandemic.

Restrictions are also being eased in California, which is recovering from a surge of COVID-19 that overran its hospital system in recent months. California officials expect a substantial number of counties to be allowed to offer limited-capacity indoor dining and open up theaters, museums and gyms. The state is also reporting the country's second-highest case count for the British variant.

Elsewhere, states such as North Dakota, Montana, Iowa have lifted mask mandates in recent weeks, and many more have eased restrictions on businesses like restaurants, bars and stores.

Public health experts say part of the problem is that the latest statistics may be misleading. The CDC, for example, has reported only about 1,300 cases of emerging variants nationwide.

"That is an undercount," said Johns Hopkins epidemiologist Dr. Caitlin Rivers. She and others say that figure reflects the country's underdeveloped genetic surveillance system.

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Local health authorities are facing the same statistical problem.

Last month, Minnesota was the first state to detect the COVID-19 variant identified in Brazil. By testing about 2% to 3% of the state's positive COVID-19 samples, Minnesota's Department of Health has since identified two cases of the Brazilian variant and 40 of the British one.

"It is somewhat a meaningless number," said Kathy Como-Sabetti, an epidemiology manager for the health department. "It is a small fraction of our total number of cases."

Como-Sabetti said the state is bracing for a potential wave of illness if variants proliferate unchecked.

Some scientist have called for the U.S. to test about about 5% of positive COVID-19 samples — which, this week, would represent about 3,900 sequences — to stay on top of variants. Currently, the U.S. sequences between 0.3% to 0.5% of virus samples. Britain sequences about 8% of its positive cases and Denmark around 12%.

"We are woefully behind when it comes to sequencing technology," Miele said.

In the meantime, Chicago and surrounding suburbs allowed indoor dining to resume in January for the first time since October and reopened, with crowd limits, major cultural attractions including the Field Museum and Shedd Aquarium. Boston opened up gyms, movie theaters and sightseeing harbor cruises this month.

New York City restaurants got the green light to open for indoor dining last week, despite concern from some local officials.

"Are we defying the global pattern of variants doubling every 10 days?" tweeted City Council member Mark D. Levy. "Or are variants in fact growing here and we just aren't being told?"

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AP Medical Writer Mike Stobbe in New York contributed to this report.

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## Even without listening, US lives in Limbaugh's media world

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — You didn't have to like or even listen to Rush Limbaugh to be affected by what he did. Conservative talk radio wasn't a genre before him. Without Limbaugh, it's hard to imagine a Fox News Channel, or a President Donald Trump, or a media landscape defined by shouters of all stripes that both reflect and influence a state of political gridlock.

To his fans, Limbaugh's death Wednesday of lung cancer at the age of 70 was an occasion for deep mourning. For his foes, it was good riddance. Somewhere, Rush could surely appreciate it.

He left a legacy.

"He was the most important individual media figure of the last four decades," said Ian Reifowitz, professor of historical studies at the State University of New York and author of "The Tribalization of Politics: How Rush Limbaugh's Race-Baiting Rhetoric on the Obama Presidency Paved the Way for Trump."

That assessment was freely offered even though Reifowitz, as the title of his book suggests, isn't a fan. He blames Limbaugh for setting a blueprint for white identity politics and the dividing of the nation into uneasy tribes.

Limbaugh's death led Trump to call in to Fox News Channel for his first television interview since leaving office — and he did it twice.

Former Vice President Mike Pence told Fox he was inspired by Limbaugh to become a talk radio host himself, which launched his political career. Ex-White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany reminisced about riding as a child in her father's pick-up truck as Limbaugh's show played on the radio.

"I am the definition of a 'Rush baby,' and it's not just me," McEnany said on Twitter. "There are tens of thousands of us all across the conservative movement."

Radio hosts talked politics before Limbaugh, men like Jerry Williams in Boston and Barry Farber in New York.

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But the idea of conservative talk radio didn't take hold until Limbaugh, after bouncing through DJ jobs in Pittsburgh, Kansas City and Sacramento, went national from a perch at New York's WABC in 1988, said Michael Harrison, publisher of Talkers magazine.

Limbaugh was a sensation among people who liked to tweak liberals, outraging with political incorrectness. Before Limbaugh, only 30 or 40 stations did "talk radio," and many weren't political, Harrison said. Now there are thousands.

To the end, Limbaugh led the field. He reached an estimated 15.5 million people each week and lost in the ratings for three months only once in some three decades, to advice host Laura Schlessinger, Harrison said. Bumper stickers proclaimed, "Rush is Right."

"There is no talk radio as we know it without Rush Limbaugh. It just doesn't exist," said Sean Hannity, who has 15 million radio listeners beyond his Fox News Channel show. "And I'd even make the argument in many ways: there's no Fox News or even some of these other opinionated cable networks."

Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes launched Fox News in 1996. MSNBC started the same year.

Politics seemed second to entertainment in Limbaugh's early years.

"I'm trying to attract the largest audience I can and hold it for as long as I can so that I can charge advertisers confiscatory advertising rates," Limbaugh told Steve Kroft of "60 Minutes" in 1991. "This is a business."

But he soon became more than a business leader. Republicans credited Limbaugh for helping them win the House majority in 1994.

"It wasn't just that he transformed the media landscape, but he transformed the Republican Party," said Nicole Hemmer, author of "Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics." "He became a power player and someone who could move voters."

Conservative radio host Mark Levin called Limbaugh "a tremendous patriot." Once a universally accepted compliment, the term "patriot" has become more complicated through its use by some of the rioters at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

"He refused to accept the attacks that came against this country from within," Levin said on Fox News. "He refused to accept the ideological changes in this country. He defended the traditions of this country. And he spoke for tens of millions of us."

To SUNY's Reifowitz, Limbaugh led the way in getting people "scared about the browning of the country."

Some of Limbaugh's language was downright ugly. He invented the term "feminazi," called Chelsea Clinton a "dog" when she was 12 years old and had to apologize for calling a young woman a "slut" for arguing that birth control be covered by health insurance. He mocked the death of AIDS victims and played the parody song "Barack the Magic Negro" when Barack Obama was elected president.

The headline on HuffPost's obituary on Wednesday said Limbaugh "saturated America's airwaves with cruel bigotries, lies and conspiracy theories." The Root called him a "spouter of racist, hate-filled garbage."

On Foxnews.com, Limbaugh's obituary's headline was "Greatest of All Time."

Limbaugh didn't embrace Trump right away, but soon fell in line. Trump's appeal mystified many in politics at first, but "if you had been listening to Rush Limbaugh for 20 years, he sounded very familiar," Hemmer said.

As Limbaugh's political strength became evident, many Republican politicians felt they couldn't cross him, or run the risk of alienating his millions of listeners, Hemmer said.

"Many of these listeners didn't care if Rush Limbaugh crossed the line (of propriety)," she said. "They cared more about loyalty to him than any kind of underlying set of principles."

The economic lessons taught by Limbaugh are clear each night on Fox, CNN and MSNBC, routinely the three most-watched cable networks. They're not really news networks in prime time; they present political talk.

"It's hard," Hemmer said, "to overstate his importance."

Harrison, who interviewed Limbaugh several times over the years, said the talk show host "began to take himself more seriously" in his later years.



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Limbaugh even appeared to measure words more carefully. After receiving social media blowback in December for suggesting that the nation was “trending toward secession,” he later made clear he wasn’t advocating that.

To the end, however, he remained loyal to Trump, who awarded Limbaugh a Presidential Medal of Freedom at the State of the Union address last year.

Limbaugh supported Trump’s false claims that the election was stolen and, on Jan. 7, compared rioters at the Capitol to people who sparked the Revolutionary War.

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This story corrects the spelling of Laura Schlessinger.

## US jobless claims rise to 861,000 as layoffs stay high

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid rose last week to 861,000, evidence that layoffs remain painfully high despite a steady drop in the number of confirmed viral infections.

Applications from laid-off workers rose 13,000 from the previous week, which was revised sharply higher, the Labor Department said Thursday. Before the virus erupted in the United States last March, weekly applications for unemployment benefits had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

The figures underscore that the job market has stalled, with employers having added a mere 49,000 jobs in January after cutting workers in December. Nearly 10 million jobs remain lost to the pandemic. Though the unemployment rate fell last month from 6.7%, to 6.3%, it did so in part because some people stopped looking for jobs. People who aren’t actively seeking work aren’t counted as unemployed.

Still, fraudulent claims for jobless aid in some states and other issues, including potential backlogs of claims, may be elevating the totals. Last week, for example, Ohio reported a huge increase in applications and said it had set aside about half that increase for further review out of concern about fraud. And this week, Ohio reported that applications under a federal program that covers self-employed and gig workers jumped from about 10,000 to over 230,000. That could reflect a backlog of applications, because Ohio hadn’t reported data under that program until two weeks ago.

Likewise, Illinois reported this week that jobless claims under its regular state program doubled — from 34,000 to nearly 68,000.

“The unemployment claims data remain a mess,” said Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont.

Applications may rise in the coming weeks, economists said, because of ice storms that have caused business shutdowns across the country. Yet economists are generally optimistic that as the weather improves, COVID vaccines are more widely administered and further federal aid is distributed, the economy will pick up in the spring and summer.

The surge in claims may also reflect, in part, the extension of two federal jobless benefit programs under an aid package that Congress enacted late last year. The extension of those programs meant that some people who had used up all their unemployment aid were eligible to reapply. The federal aid package also provided a \$300-a-week unemployment benefit on top of regular state benefits.

Thursday’s report showed that a total of 18.3 million people were receiving unemployment aid as of Jan. 30, down from 19.7 million the previous week. About three-quarters of those recipients are receiving checks from federal benefit programs, including programs that provide jobless aid beyond the 26 weeks given by most states. That trend suggests that a sizable proportion of the unemployed have been out of work for more than six months, reflecting a bleak job market for many.

Yet the two federal unemployment aid programs — one that provides up to an extra 24 weeks of support and another that covers self-employed and gig workers — are scheduled to expire in about a month.

President Joe Biden is proposing to extend both programs through August as part of his \$1.9 trillion

package now before Congress. The legislation would also provide an additional \$400 a week in federal jobless aid, on top of state benefits. That money would replace a \$300-a-week benefit that was included in the relief package approved last year.

Some industry data suggests that hiring remains weak. UKG, a company that provides time management software, estimates that among its mostly small-business clients, the number of shifts worked nationally has risen just 0.2% in the past month. That tepid increase signals that hiring has been sluggish so far this month.

Still, the economy has shown signs of picking up as states and cities have eased some business restrictions and the most recent round of \$600 stimulus checks have made their way through the economy. Sales at retail stores and restaurants soared in January, jumping 5.3% from December, the government said Wednesday.

Furniture and electronic and appliance stores recorded some of the strongest increases, likely a result of last year's healthy gain in home sales.

Factory output also rose last month, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday, its fourth straight increase, led by greater production of steel and other metals.

## Killings surge in Syria camp housing Islamic State families

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The deaths stacked up: a policeman shot dead with a pistol equipped with a silencer, a local official gunned down, his son wounded, an Iraqi man beheaded. In total, 20 men and women were killed last month in the sprawling camp in northeastern Syria housing families of the Islamic State group.

The slayings in al-Hol camp — nearly triple the deaths in previous months — are largely believed to have been carried out by IS militants punishing perceived enemies and intimidating anyone who wavers from their extremist line, say Syrian Kurdish officials who run the camp but say they struggle to keep it under control.

The jump in violence has heightened calls for countries to repatriate their citizens languishing in the camp, home to some 62,000 people. Those repatriations have slowed dramatically because of the coronavirus epidemic, officials say. If left there, the thousands of children in the camp risk being radicalized, local and U.N. officials warn.

"Al-Hol will be the womb that will give birth to new generations of extremists," said Abdullah Suleiman Ali, a Syrian researcher who focuses on jihadi groups.

It has been nearly two years since the U.S.-led coalition captured the last sliver of territory held by the Islamic State group, ending their self-declared caliphate that covered large parts of Iraq and Syria. The brutal war took several years and left U.S.-allied Kurdish authorities in control of eastern and northeast Syria, with a small presence of several hundred American forces still deployed there.

Since then, remaining IS militants have gone underground in the Syrian-Iraqi border region, continuing an insurgency. Though attacks in Syria are lower than they were in late 2019, IS sleeper cells continue to strike Syrian government troops, forces of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and civilian administrators.

Al-Hol houses the wives, widows, children and other family members of IS militants — more than 80% of its 62,000 residents are women and children. The majority are Iraqis and Syrians, but it includes some 10,000 people from 57 other countries, housed in a highly secured separate area known as the Annex. Many of them remain die-hard IS supporters.

The camp has long been chaotic, with the hardcore militants among its population enforcing their will on others and seeking to prevent them from cooperating with Kurdish authorities guarding it.

IS cells in Syria are in contact with residents of the camp and support them, said a senior Kurdish official Badran Cia Kurd. "Anyone who tries to reveal these contacts or stops dealing with Daesh is subjected to death," he said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

The U.S.-backed SDF tweeted last week that, backed by air surveillance from the coalition, they detained an IS family smuggler in the area of Hadadia near the camp.

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"There are several reasons behind the increase of crime including attempts by Daesh members to impose their ideology in the camp against civilians who reject it," said Ali, the researcher.

Of the 20 killings at al-Hol in January, at least five of the dead were female residents of the camp, according to the Rojava Information Center, an activist collective that tracks news in areas controlled by the SDF. All the victims were Syrian or Iraqi citizens, including a member of the local police force, and most were killed in their tents or shelters at night, RIC said.

Most of the victims were shot in the back of their heads at close range, according to RIC and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor.

On Jan. 9, a gunman killed a policeman in the camp using a silencer-equipped pistol, then as other police chased him, he threw a hand grenade that seriously wounded the patrol commander, the Observatory said. The same day, an official with a local council dealing with Syrian civilians in the camp was shot to death and his son critically wounded.

In another case, an Iraqi camp resident was decapitated, his head found some distance from his body, RIC reported. It is believed he was killed on suspicion he was cooperating with authorities.

Kurdish security officials did not respond for questions from The Associated Press about the situation.

The immediate cause for the jump in killings was not known. In November, Kurdish authorities began an amnesty program for the 25,000 Syrian citizens in the camp, allowing them to leave. Some speculate that, since those taking amnesty must register and work with authorities, the program may have prompted slayings to keep residents in line. Many Syrians fear leaving the camp because they may face revenge attacks in their hometowns from those who suffered under IS rule.

Whatever the cause, the bloodshed points to the IS strength within the camp. The local civilian Kurdish authority known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria warned in late January that some sides are trying to revive IS and the authority cannot face this crisis on its own.

IS supporters in the camp carry out trials against residents suspected of opposing them and kill defendants, and authorities have uncovered several IS cells inside, it said. "Contacts are ongoing between the camp and Daesh commanders outside who direct their members inside," it said.

Some 27,000 non-Syrian children are stranded in al-Hol, including some 19,000 Iraqi children and 8,000 from other countries. On Jan. 30, U.N. counterterrorism chief Vladimir Voronkov urged home countries to repatriate the children, warning that they are at risk of radicalization.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought a drop in the already slow process of repatriation. Many countries have been reluctant to bring back their citizens, though France repatriated seven children in January and Britain one child in September.

Iraq has taken back very few. Repatriation by other countries dropped in 2020 to only 200 children, from 685 in 2019, according to Save the Children.

"These new figures show that before the outbreak of the virus, things were finally starting to move in the right direction," said Save the Children's Syria Response Director Sonia Khush.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Feb. 19, the 50th day of 2021. There are 315 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Feb. 19, 1942, during World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which paved the way for the relocation and internment of people of Japanese ancestry, including U.S.-born citizens. Imperial Japanese warplanes raided the Australian city of Darwin; at least 243 people were killed.

On this date:

In 1807, former Vice President Aaron Burr, accused of treason, was arrested in the Mississippi Territory, in present-day Alabama. (Burr was acquitted at trial.)

In 1846, the Texas state government was formally installed in Austin, with J. Pinckney Henderson taking

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the oath of office as governor.

In 1878, Thomas Edison received a U.S. patent for "an improvement in phonograph or speaking machines."

In 1945, Operation Detachment began during World War II as some 30,000 U.S. Marines began landing on Iwo Jima, where they commenced a successful month-long battle to seize control of the island from Japanese forces.

In 1968, the children's program "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," created by and starring Fred Rogers, made its network debut on National Educational Television, a forerunner of PBS, beginning a 31-season run.

In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford, calling the issuing of the internment order for people of Japanese ancestry in 1942 "a sad day in American history," signed a proclamation formally confirming its termination.

In 1986, the U.S. Senate approved, 83-11, the Genocide Convention, an international treaty outlawing "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group," nearly 37 years after the pact was first submitted for ratification.

In 1992, Irish Republican Army member Joseph Doherty (DAWK'-ur-tee) was deported from the United States to Northern Ireland following a nine-year battle for political asylum. (Doherty was imprisoned for the killing of a British army commando in 1980; he was freed in 1998 under the Good Friday Agreement.)

In 1997, Deng Xiaoping (dung shah-oh-ping), the last of China's major Communist revolutionaries, died at age 92.

In 2003, an Iranian military plane carrying 275 members of the elite Revolutionary Guards crashed in southeastern Iran, killing all on board.

In 2008, an ailing Fidel Castro resigned the Cuban presidency after nearly a half-century in power; his brother Raul was later named to succeed him.

In 2019, President Donald Trump directed the Pentagon to develop plans for a new Space Force within the Air Force, accepting less than the full-fledged department he had wanted.

Ten years ago: Security forces in Libya and Yemen fired on pro-democracy demonstrators as the two hard-line regimes struck back against the wave of protests that had already toppled autocrats in Egypt and Tunisia. The world's dominant economies, meeting in Paris, struck a watered-down deal on how to smooth out trade and currency imbalances blamed for a global financial crisis.

Five years ago: Harper Lee, author of "To Kill a Mockingbird," died in Monroeville, Alabama, at age 89.

One year ago: About 500 passengers left the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan at the end of a two-week quarantine that failed to stop the spread of the coronavirus among passengers and crew; the number of confirmed cases aboard the ship topped 600. The number of deaths in China from the virus rose past 2,000. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency said the virus had killed two Iranian citizens. President Donald Trump announced that Richard Grenell, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, would become acting director of national intelligence. A man who had posted an online rant calling for the "complete extermination" of various races and cultures shot and killed nine people, most of them Turkish, in an attack on a hookah bar and other sites near Frankfurt, Germany; he was later found dead at his home along with his mother.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Smokey Robinson is 81. Actor Carlin Glynn is 81. Former Sony Corp. Chairman Howard Stringer is 79. Singer Lou Christie is 78. Actor Michael Nader is 76. Rock musician Tony Iommi (Black Sabbath, Heaven and Hell) is 73. Actor Stephen Nichols is 70. Author Amy Tan is 69. Actor Jeff Daniels is 66. Rock singer-musician Dave Wakeling is 65. Talk show host Lorianne Crook is 64. Actor Ray Winstone is 64. Actor Leslie David Baker is 63. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is 62. Britain's Prince Andrew is 61. Tennis Hall of Famer Hana Mandlikova is 59. Singer Seal is 58. Actor Jessica Tuck is 58. Country musician Ralph McCauley (Wild Horses) is 57. Rock musician Jon Fishman (Phish) is 56. Actor Justine Bateman is 55. Actor Benicio Del Toro is 54. Actor Bellamy Young is 51. Rock musician Daniel Adair is 46. Pop singer-actor Haylie Duff is 36. Actor Arielle Kebbel is 36. Christian rock musician Seth Morrison (Skillet) is 33. Actor Luke Pasqualino is 31. Actor Victoria Justice is 28. Actor David (dah-VEED') Mazouz (TV: "Gotham") is 20. Actor Millie Bobby Brown is 17.