

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 1 of 66

1- Upcoming Events

1- Finnesand Thank You

2- NEC Champions take down LRC Champions

3- Governor Noem Signs Bills into Law

3- COVID-19 Vaccine Now Offered to Residents

Age 65 and Over

4- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller

8- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE

15- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

16- Weather Pages

19- Daily Devotional

20- 2021 Community Events

21- News from the Associated Press



Region 1A Girls

Milbank at Groton Area
Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021,
7 p.m.

Upcoming Schedule

Tuesday, Feb. 23: GBB Region: Groton Area hosts Milbank, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 25: GBB Region

Thursday-Saturday: State Wrestling Tournament in Rapid City.



Thank You!

A special Thank you to all who remember our 60th Anniversary with cards, letters, gifts and calls. It was greatly appreciated!

Over and Darlene Finnesand

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

NEC Champions take down LRC Champions

It was the battle of the conference champions at the Groton Area Arena Monday night as the Lake Region Conference champions, the Warner Monarchs, came to town to take on the Northeast Conference Champions, the Groton Area Tigers.

Fans were not disappointed in the anticipated, high intense game, but it was the stunning Tiger defence that kept Warner at arm's length late in the game. These two teams battled into overtime the past two years.

The game was tied once in the first quarter before the Tigers took a 13-9 lead at the break. Warner came back and thanks to a nine-point rally, Warner took a 20-15 lead with 2:03 left in the half. Groton Area then rallied to tie the game at 20, but Warner led at half time, 22-20.

Warner took charge early in the third quarter and opened up a 26-20 lead. Groton then had a nine-point rally of its own and took a 29-26 lead with 3:55 left in the third quarter. Groton Area scored the last seven points of the third quarter and took a 38-29 lead into the fourth quarter. Free throws down the stretch for the Tigers iced the game for the Tigers as Groton Area made five of six free throws.

Lane Tietz led the Tigers with 18 points, two rebounds, three assists and four steals. Tate Larson had 12 points, eight rebounds, one assist and three steals. Jayden Zak had 10 points, four rebounds and two steals. Jacob Zak had four points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals. Tristan Traphagen had two points, five rebounds and two blocked shots. Cole Simon had two points, one rebound and one steal. Isaac Smith had one point and one rebound.

Groton Area made 11 of 29 two-pointers for 38 percent, five of 19 three-pointers for 26 percent (Tietz-2, Jayden Zak-2, Larson-1), had 25 rebounds, 11 turnovers, six assists, 17 fouls and two blocked shots.

Warner made 18 of 36 field goals for 50 percent, made six of 18 free throws for 33 percent, had 14 team fouls and 18 turnovers with 12 of them being steals.

Landon Leidholt led the Monarchs with 25 points followed by Hunter Cramer with seven, Alex Braun and Peyton Jung each had four and Chase Braun added three points.

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

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 37-21. Ken and Darcy Muller were the sponsors on GDILIVE.COM. Wyatt Hearnen led the Tigers with 12 points while Cole Simon had eight, Favian Sanchez seven, Tyson Parrow and Jackson Cogley each had three and Colby Dunker and Cade Larson each had two points.

Isaac Hoelt led the Monarchs with five points.

Groton Area made it a clean sweep on the night with a 32-22 C game win, sponsored by Bob and Vicki Walter on GDILIVE.COM.

Colby Dunker led Groton Area with 14 points followed by Taylor Diegel with six, Cade Larson and Braxton Imrie each had four points, Tyson Parrow had three and Dillon Abeln added one free throw.

Zane Baum led Warner with five points.

Governor Noem Signs Bills into Law

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

[SB 3](#) enforces directives regarding contagious disease control.

[SB 5](#) includes a child's legal parents and guardians in the list of parties who may receive information related to reports of the child's abuse or neglect.

[SB 51](#) transfers licensure of individuals who may alter, repair, construct, or install on-site wastewater systems to the Plumbing Commission.

[SB 58](#) removes an outdated cross-reference to the risk pool.

[SB 61](#) revises a cross reference regarding the South Dakota Housing Development Authority's investment agreement.

[SB 62](#) revises certain provisions regarding appeals by the prosecution.

[SB 74](#) revises certain provisions regarding drones.

[HB 1011](#) increases certain boiler inspection fees and dedicates more of the fees to the state's boiler inspection program.

[HB 1014](#) establishes uniform complaint and declaratory ruling procedures for agencies regulating certain professions and occupations.

[HB 1015](#) provides rule-making authority for establishing an appraiser experience training and setting fees.

[HB 1027](#) identifies Water Management Board officers, authorizes appointment of a prehearing officer, and defines the duties of the prehearing officer.

[HB 1028](#) revises petition requirements and the criteria for issuance of a water right permit.

[HB 1071](#) corrects incorrect cross-references dealing with crimes and criminal procedures.

[HB 1078](#) revises certain provisions regarding the South Dakota Historical Society.

Governor Noem has signed seventy-five bills into law this legislative session.

COVID-19 Vaccine Now Offered to Residents Age 65 and Over

PIERRE, S.D. – Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon released the following statement to remind state residents that starting today, the COVID-19 vaccination age statewide has been dropped to those 65 and over in age:

"Starting today, the vaccination age will drop to 65 and over as we continue delivering on the promise of an orderly and efficient vaccine distribution effort statewide," said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. "The progress being made by our phase I vaccinators is making a difference in people's lives and in the fight against COVID-19 in South Dakota."

For more detailed information on that state's vaccination plan, click [here](#). Over the past few weeks, South Dakota has been making considerable progress on its vaccination priority groups in part due to an increase in vaccine allocation from the federal government and continued coordinated efforts. To get the most up to date COVID-19 data, updated daily, please visit the Department of Health dashboard.

For additional information and the latest COVID-19 resources, visit COVID.SD.GOV.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 4 of 66

#365 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

OK, here's the thing: Even though this is #365 in the series, I didn't actually start this a year ago today; that happened a few days later on February 26, 2020. It's difficult and distressing to think back across all of that time and all that has changed—and I am well aware many/most of you haven't been along with us from the beginning. Used to be maybe 10 of my relatives and buddies read most of the dreck I posted on Facebook. When I made that first Covid-19 post, I had no idea what I was getting into; this was supposed to be a one-off to bring those 10 friends up to date on this new virus thing that seemed to be threatening us, although none of us at that time took it seriously enough. In fact, that first post did not originally say "#1 in a series" because I hadn't the slightest there was going to be a series; I only went back and added that language later when it became apparent this was not going to be just a post or two—or five—when I sensed there might be enough of them to make numbering them a smart idea. But 365? Who knew?

I remember being sort of floored when we hit 100 posts, then 200 and 300. I know we'll have 400 before this is done, and I am now hoping we'll be finished before we get to 500; but I don't have a lot of confidence in that estimate either.

In the first few days, there wasn't one post each day as you've come to expect: There were two or three brief posts some days and none at all on others. It wasn't until March 9 that I settled into the current routine of just one post each day. And I think it was more toward the middle or end of March that I wanted to go back and pick up something from a prior post and figured out scrolling through a few weeks of my Facebook feed is not a productive use of my time. That when I conceived the idea of compiling all of this stuff into a single searchable document so I'd be ready in the event that ever came up again. So I scrolled back through my posts and gathered up what I'd done that far, copying and pasting. Already then, this was a sizeable task; I'm glad I thought of it then before it was some insurmountable challenge. My little project has become this behemoth that runs some 1500 pages today. More than a time or two, I've been glad for the search function; so that worked out.

At any rate, I'm not going to observe an anniversary until it's actually been a year—on February 26, the date on my first post. At that point, I'll probably do some looking back—back a half-million lives and a whole lot of suffering ago. That's going to be only for those with strong stomachs: When I've had occasion to read one of those early Updates, I've felt the urge to just sit down and cry. We were so innocent. We had no idea what was coming or all the missteps that were ahead of us. So much misplaced optimism. We hadn't a clue. But we are where we are, and we'll have to go forward from here.

The numbers are steady, not worsening, but not improving either. I'm ready for another move toward declines. There were 56,000 new cases reported today. That brings us to 28,203,800, which is 0.2% more than yesterday's total. Hospitalization numbers continue to decline, today to 56,159. The bad news is deaths: There were 1361 reported today, which is in itself not exceptional. The problem is that, as predicted, the 0.3% increase in total deaths this represents takes us over a half-million, a staggering loss. We have now lost 500,011 to this virus. Here's the history:

May 27 – 100,000 deaths – 111 days

September 23 – 200,000 deaths – 119 days

December 14 – 300,000 deaths – 82 days

January 19 – 400,000 deaths – 36 days

February 22 – 500,000 deaths – 34 days

Vaccination efforts really appear to be smoothing out and picking up speed. The new administration had set a goal of 100 million doses administered in the first 100 days in office. We're going to surpass that, and far ahead of time: We've administered around 45 million doses since January 20, which was 33 days ago; and we were averaging around 1.7 million per day until this ice storm shut down efforts in a large part of the country. We've caught up about a third of those delayed doses already and expect to finish with the rest of them by the end of the month.

We're expecting 145 million doses to be delivered by April 1 or so, another 200 million by the end of May,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 5 of 66

and yet another 200 million by the end of July. All of these projections are without the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson candidate expected to receive emergency use authorization (EUA) within the next couple of weeks. While production of that product has not been huge yet, they expect to ramp up—and importantly, this is a single-dose vaccine, so half as many doses are needed. All of this means well over three million doses per day will soon be available on an ongoing basis. We just need to keep expanding our ability to deliver that to arms and to persuade the hesitant of the value and importance of being vaccinated. As for administration, we are in the process of standing up more and more vaccination sites with the potential for high capacity and to deliver more and more vaccine to retail pharmacies which already administer other vaccines and have the infrastructure for that in place; the idea is to have them ready to go before the increased vaccine supply arrives so there is no delay in getting underway. Now we need educational programs to help deal with hesitance; I read an interesting piece today in the business news that companies are putting money behind these efforts. Makes sense when you consider that the pandemic is bad for business; anything that promotes ending the pandemic would be a good investment. I do think the more people are vaccinated, loudly proclaiming this in public, as so many do, and then being just fine afterward, the softer the resistance will become. It's hard to argue the evidence of your own eyes.

Pfizer announced today they are actively engaged in investigating the effectiveness of a third dose of vaccine to cover variants. They made clear that they still expect their current vaccine is effective: "We have seen no real-world evidence to date that suggest a significant reduction in protection provided by our current vaccine. However, we are preparing to respond quickly and initiating a study to investigate the effectiveness of a third-dose booster of our current vaccine in trial participants who have already received 2 doses." They added that they are discussing clinical study designs with the FDA. This is a very good place to be; if we get an immune escape at some point, it's best to be ready to roll with the next step.

We should note here that the FDA issued new policies today to manufacturers of any product dealing with Covid-19 who want to modify or update their products to account for variants. Among the notable tidbits is that large clinical trials will not be required for vaccine modifications; the agency will, instead, look for earlier-stage data that provides evidence of the immune response seen to the altered vaccine. The purpose of this new guidance was to provide manufacturers with the information they need to quickly gain FDA authorization for these modified products. Janet Woodcock, acting commissioner, said, "We want the American public to know that we are using every tool in our toolbox to fight this pandemic, including pivoting as the virus adapts." While no one is doing more than noodling around at the edges so far—I think Pfizer, as noted above is as far along as anyone—it's good to be prepared. While it appears current vaccines still cover all the known variants, if we can't get transmission under control across the world, not just in the US, there will be more mutations. No one doubts that. It is very good to hear the agency is prepared to be nimble without abdicating its critical regulatory role.

Meanwhile, Novavax announced today that its phase 3 vaccine candidate trial in the US and Mexico is fully enrolled. This is a two-dose protein subunit candidate, that is, it contains fragments of viral protein to which the host produces an immune response. There are 30,000 volunteers in 118 locations. We know about the participants that 20 percent are LatinX, 13 percent are Black, six percent are Native American, and five percent are Asian-American. Thirteen percent are over 65. I would expect this may take longer than the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna trials took because the rate of community transmission is declining; that could mean it will take longer for a sufficient number of infections to develop so they can apply their statistical tools to the data set. We can hope to see results like they saw in the UK where the candidate had an efficacy of 89.2 percent. I still am having trouble believing how well the vaccine development process has gone; it's been quite remarkable to see.

And we're still not done. Also today, Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline announced their 720-participant phase 2 trial in the US, Honduras, and Panama for their candidate is underway; they expect to begin phase 3 in the second quarter. This one's also a protein subunit vaccine; the current plan is to test a two-dose regimen. Earlier trials did not elicit the desired level of response in older adults, so there's been some reformulation done to try to boost those responses. That's what early trials are for, after all. The companies said they are working on the new variants "which will be used to inform next stages of the Sanofi/GSK development

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 6 of 66

program." They are hoping they can have a vaccine on the market by the fourth quarter if things go well. More vaccines is better. There's a whole world out there waiting for vaccines.

I am once again seeing a new round of the rumors about these vaccines causing infertility in women—or more specifically, causing early pregnancy loss, presumably by interfering with the formation of a normal placenta during pregnancy. They do not do this. How do we know? Short version: (a) There is no mechanism of action by which they could cause infertility or pregnancy loss; there's nothing in them that causes it—and these are not novel or unknown substances. (b) There are zero reports of women who have received vaccine having an increased rate of infertility or early pregnancy loss. (c) There are zero reports of an increased rate of infertility or early pregnancy loss in Covid-19 survivors, and there would be if the stories you're hearing are true because the virus would cause the same problem the vaccines are alleged to cause. This is pure fantasy.

I provided the long version a few months back in my Update #287 posted December 6 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4237138519635855>. In this I explained in some detail just what claims are being made and why they are wildly inaccurate. This particular fairy tale is causing fear in young women; many health care workers in all sorts of facilities, people at risk, are refusing vaccination because of these fears. Please share this explanation with anyone you know who might have doubts or fears or who knows someone with doubts or fears. Last thing I want to see in the paper is the obituary for some young mother who refused vaccine because she so wanted to have a child and then died from Covid-19, leaving behind that child to be raised by others. This is important in order to protect the young women who need to be vaccinated and to protect the rest of us too.

Those of you who've been hanging around here for a while may remember reading about Kevin, the pandemic peacock, who took up residence in a British schoolyard last March, strolling through the school at will and bringing hope and cheer to the children and an entire hard-hit neighborhood in the depths of the first wave of illness. (If you were not here for that and are interested, you can find the story in my Update #269 posted November 18 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/4184566558226385>.)

Kevin was quite famous—even had his own Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/chingfordpeacock>). Sadly, yesterday the school reported that their janitor who cared for and had really bonded with Kevin, found his remains in the schoolyard. He was, apparently, killed by the foxes that also frequent the neighborhood.

The Washington Post, reporting his death, mentioned, "Nobody ever did discover where Kevin came from," and also noted photos have surfaced of another peacock walking the streets of the same town. There was some brief controversy about whether Kevin had, indeed, died or was still roaming his territory; but the school confirmed the death. That confirmation in hand, folks have dubbed the other peacock "Not Kevin." We'll see how he fares.

As we're all well aware, Texas suffered a serious winter storm last weekend, one that brought sleet, snow, and unusually cold temperatures for the region—cold enough that, with widespread power outages and loss of water supply, people suffered and some died. Some residents hunkered down at home to wait things out, but others couldn't: They needed to get to a safe place or they needed food and water or they had to get to essential jobs. Now what usually happens in a place like this where winters run to the mild end of the spectrum is that folks don't really know how to drive on ice and in snow, so they get stuck quite easily. That happened. A lot.

And then, there's Ryan Sivley in his big truck, a dual-rear-wheeled, four-wheel-drive built for roughing it. He likes to go off-roading, and he travels equipped for that sort of terrain, including hooks, chains, and heavy-duty tow straps. So when he was on his way to the corner store to pick up some supplies last Sunday, just as the storm was moving in, he saw what he described to the Washington Post as "a sea of cars," stuck in snowbanks and stuck in ditches and stranded on ice. He said, "I had all my gear, so I thought, 'let me just help.'" And so he went to work, pulling cars to a clear area where they could safely resume driving and sometimes towing folks all the way to their destinations. But he said the task was never-ending; "As fast as I was clearing cars out, people were pulling in and getting stuck." So he kept it up: "I went from helping one person, to three people, to five people. At 434 cars, I stopped counting. So

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 7 of 66

many people are still left stranded.”

As the storm developed and driving became more treacherous, Sivley added to his efforts driving health-care workers to and from work and taking people without power or water to other locations with utilities. He took patients home from the hospital. He did not accept payment for his services, but he did accept money for gas, saying he went through three tanks of fuel just last Monday. He’s been out most days from around 4:00 am until midnight.

Why does someone do that? This guy suffered serious injuries in an accident almost a year ago and is still not able to return to work. While his ability to move around is limited, he says driving is easy, adding in an interview with KVUE TV, “Well, put yourself in their shoes. If you were sitting on the side of the road with your wife and your kids and you’re freezing in the car and it’s not running and you don’t have anywhere to go and you don’t have anyone to call, what do you do? If I was in that spot I would beg and hope that somebody would help me. So that’s what I’m doing.” He added to that in an interview with the Washington Post, that since he’s been unable to work since his accident, “being able to do something to help others makes me feel like I’m part of something again.”

And turns out he really is part of something because, after his story hit the local news where he gave out his cellphone number so people needing help could call him, he started getting two kinds of calls. One kind was what he’d expected, requests for rides, as many as 300 per day, he reports. The other kind was a surprise: people calling to pitch in. “People started messaging me saying ‘I have a four-wheel-drive truck; how can I help?’” So he organized a network, passing along requests to almost a dozen other volunteers. He said on Saturday that his group of Good Samaritans plans to continue as long as help is needed. “I’ll just keep going. They need help, and I won’t say no.” Quite a guy.

No one relishes adversity. No one enjoys suffering. But adversity and suffering, while painful and difficult, can have the quite inspiring effect of making visible the beauty in ordinary people. I don’t think I fully appreciated that until I made it a point to go looking for it during this challenging time. I’m not glad we have a pandemic—I don’t relish adversity either—but I am glad to have the beauty. I’ll take that with me into the After Times.

Be well. We’ll talk again.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 8 of 66

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	452	431	851	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2687	2574	5726	39	Substantial	18.3%
Bennett	381	367	1166	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1502	1474	2031	25	Minimal	0.0%
Brookings	3564	3456	11627	36	Substantial	2.6%
Brown	5090	4940	12445	85	Moderate	3.8%
Brule	688	673	1838	9	Moderate	9.1%
Buffalo	420	406	889	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	972	934	3162	20	Moderate	7.7%
Campbell	129	125	254	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1270	1207	3843	20	Substantial	9.4%
Clark	362	348	934	5	Moderate	12.5%
Clay	1781	1752	5109	15	Moderate	2.1%
Codington	3927	3748	9484	77	Substantial	13.5%
Corson	467	449	990	12	Minimal	21.1%
Custer	744	721	2651	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2940	2848	6374	60	Moderate	9.8%
Day	654	602	1730	28	Substantial	17.6%
Deuel	471	454	1111	8	Moderate	10.3%
Dewey	1403	1369	3756	23	Moderate	13.5%
Douglas	424	408	886	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	479	454	1020	12	Moderate	8.3%
Fall River	520	497	2547	15	Moderate	6.0%
Faulk	356	330	681	13	Moderate	4.5%
Grant	954	891	2175	37	Substantial	9.5%
Gregory	533	485	1227	27	Moderate	12.5%
Haakon	246	236	526	9	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	695	635	1733	38	Substantial	23.3%
Hand	331	315	787	6	Minimal	4.8%
Hanson	355	342	694	4	Moderate	22.2%
Harding	91	90	179	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2288	2198	6426	34	Substantial	1.9%
Hutchinson	783	738	2294	24	Moderate	19.6%

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 9 of 66

Hyde	136	134	399	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	277	260	902	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	268	249	546	16	None	0.0%
Jones	85	83	214	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	631	599	1619	14	Substantial	11.9%
Lake	1176	1134	3203	17	Moderate	4.2%
Lawrence	2806	2735	8358	44	Moderate	5.2%
Lincoln	7668	7464	19805	77	Substantial	9.4%
Lyman	597	579	1846	10	Minimal	0.0%
Marshall	304	288	1157	5	Moderate	2.8%
McCook	738	704	1583	24	Moderate	12.5%
McPherson	237	231	544	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2558	2479	7512	31	Substantial	12.0%
Mellette	245	239	716	2	Minimal	16.7%
Miner	270	251	560	9	Minimal	16.7%
Minnehaha	27740	26970	76255	329	Substantial	6.9%
Moody	612	588	1726	16	Moderate	9.5%
Oglala Lakota	2051	1971	6570	49	Moderate	6.3%
Pennington	12754	12340	38429	185	Substantial	9.6%
Perkins	344	319	787	13	Minimal	11.8%
Potter	367	353	817	3	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1158	1086	4040	35	Substantial	12.7%
Sanborn	326	320	668	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	796	755	2082	25	Moderate	11.1%
Stanley	327	319	909	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	136	132	299	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1218	1181	4085	28	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	688	655	1448	16	Substantial	21.3%
Turner	1060	992	2648	53	Moderate	3.4%
Union	1960	1889	6091	39	Substantial	9.6%
Walworth	717	692	1799	15	Moderate	3.6%
Yankton	2789	2725	9149	28	Moderate	6.6%
Ziebach	336	325	853	9	Minimal	8.3%
Unassigned	0	0	1805	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 10 of 66

South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4438	0
10-19 years	12492	0
20-29 years	19851	5
30-39 years	18296	17
40-49 years	15892	35
50-59 years	15697	109
60-69 years	12748	245
70-79 years	6823	422
80+ years	5097	1030

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	58034	879
Male	53300	984

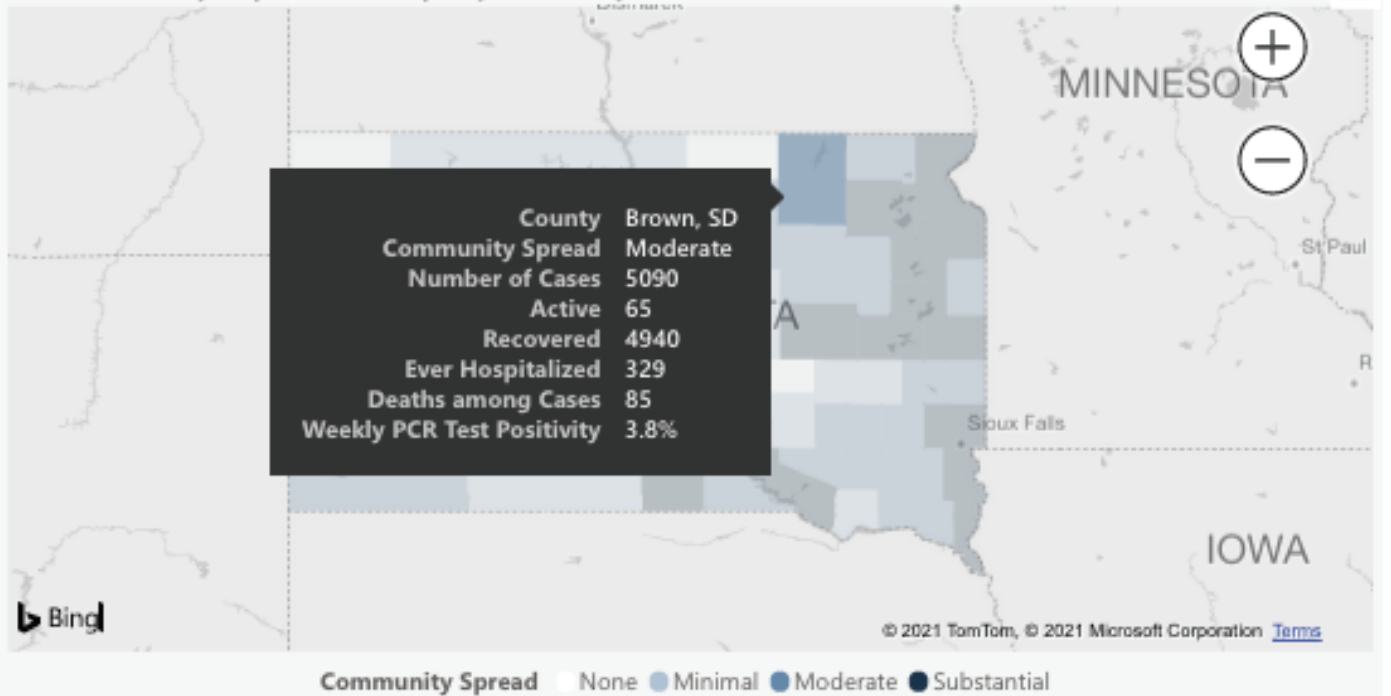
Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 11 of 66

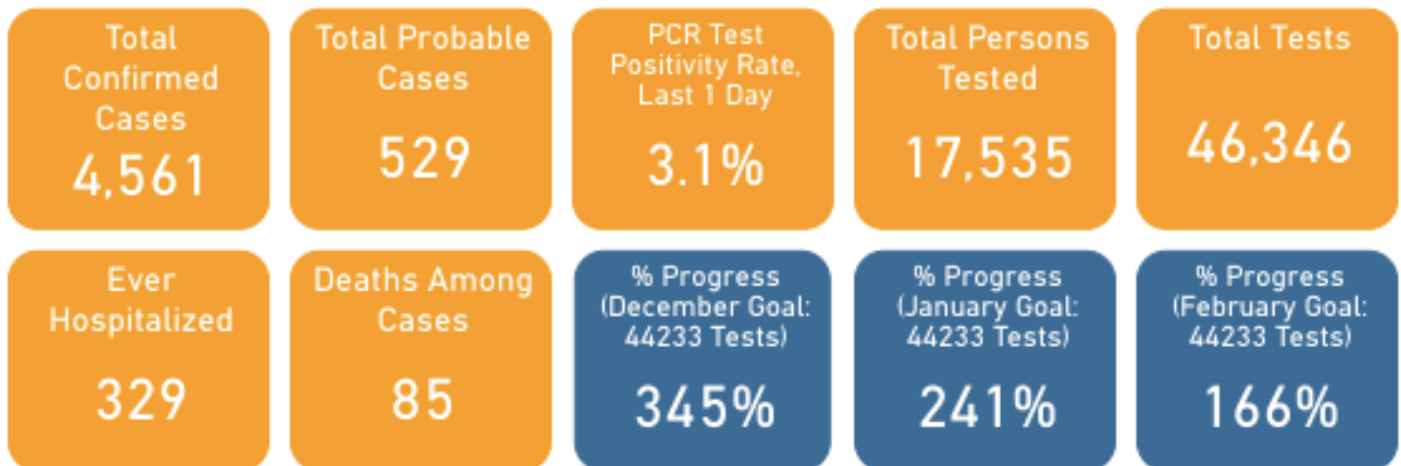
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



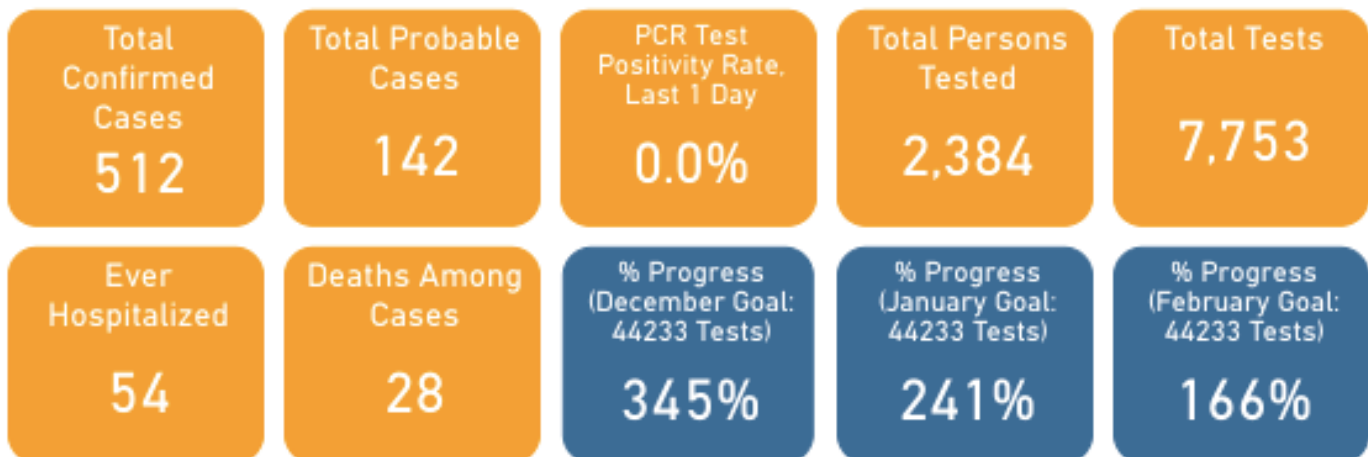
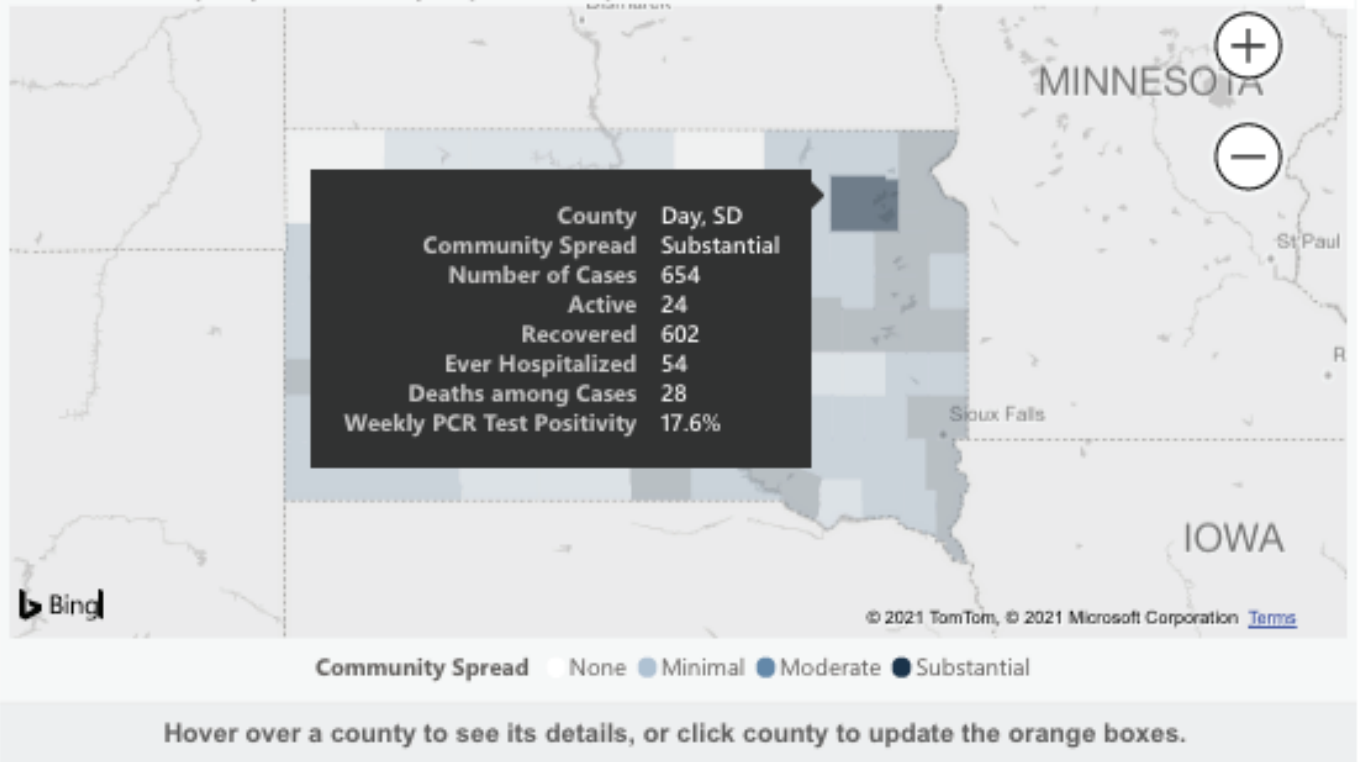
Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 12 of 66

Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 13 of 66

Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

185,635

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

123,049

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

18%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	97,706
Pfizer	87,929

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - Series Complete	32,708
Moderna - 1 dose	32,290
Pfizer - Series Complete	29,878
Pfizer - 1 dose	28,173

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	17.83%
Series Complete	9.07%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	465	241	112	353
Beadle	3597	1,683	957	2,640
Bennett*	346	84	131	215
Bon Homme*	2048	1,120	464	1,584
Brookings	4863	1,663	1,600	3,263
Brown	8716	2,724	2,996	5,720
Brule*	1136	450	343	793
Buffalo*	99	75	12	87
Butte	1080	508	286	794
Campbell	676	224	226	450
Charles Mix*	1809	833	488	1,321
Clark	711	259	226	485
Clay	2924	1,032	946	1,978
Codington*	5898	2,112	1,893	4,005
Corson*	168	72	48	120
Custer*	1589	625	482	1,107
Davison	4624	1,616	1,504	3,120
Day*	1510	578	466	1,044
Deuel	863	353	255	608
Dewey*	294	56	119	175
Douglas*	754	262	246	508
Edmunds	750	276	237	513
Fall River*	1569	635	467	1,102
Faulk	617	217	200	417
Grant*	1357	495	431	926
Gregory*	984	396	294	690
Haakon*	345	113	116	229

Groton Daily Independent

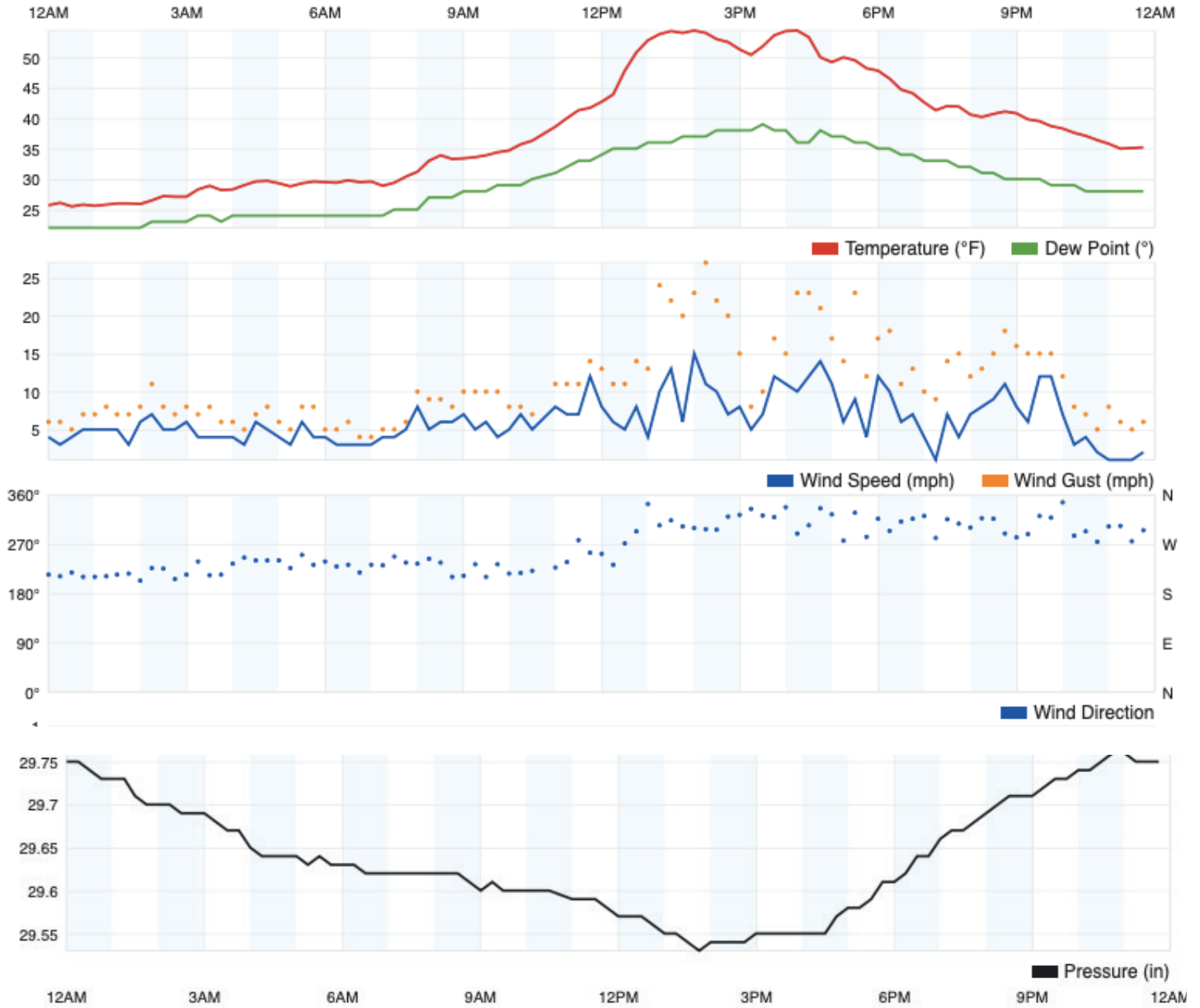
Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 14 of 66

Hamlin	1011	419	296	715
Hand	771	347	212	559
Hanson	264	122	71	193
Harding	39	27	6	33
Hughes*	4956	1,606	1,675	3,281
Hutchinson*	2144	778	683	1,461
Hyde*	331	117	107	224
Jackson*	255	95	80	175
Jerauld	450	256	97	353
Jones*	377	141	118	259
Kingsbury	1263	547	358	905
Lake	2105	787	659	1,446
Lawrence	4366	1,962	1,202	3,164
Lincoln	16175	4,137	6,019	10,156
Lyman*	438	218	110	328
Marshall*	970	418	276	694
McCook	1247	463	392	855
McPherson	131	57	37	94
Meade*	3451	1,427	1,012	2,439
Mellette*	30	12	9	21
Miner	499	185	157	342
Minnehaha*	48203	13,705	17,249	30,954
Moody*	924	348	288	636
Oglala Lakota*	101	41	30	71
Pennington*	22037	6,391	7,823	14,214
Perkins*	326	164	81	245
Potter	456	196	130	326
Roberts*	2642	1,178	732	1,910
Sanborn	581	227	177	404
Spink	1875	669	603	1,272
Stanley*	742	270	236	506
Sully	216	90	63	153
Todd*	101	37	32	69
Tripp*	1337	477	430	907
Turner	2138	598	770	1,368
Union	1507	709	399	1,108
Walworth*	1299	375	462	837
Yankton	6124	1,382	2,371	3,753
Ziebach*	43	13	15	28
Other	3918	770	1,574	2,344

Groton Daily Independent






Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 15 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

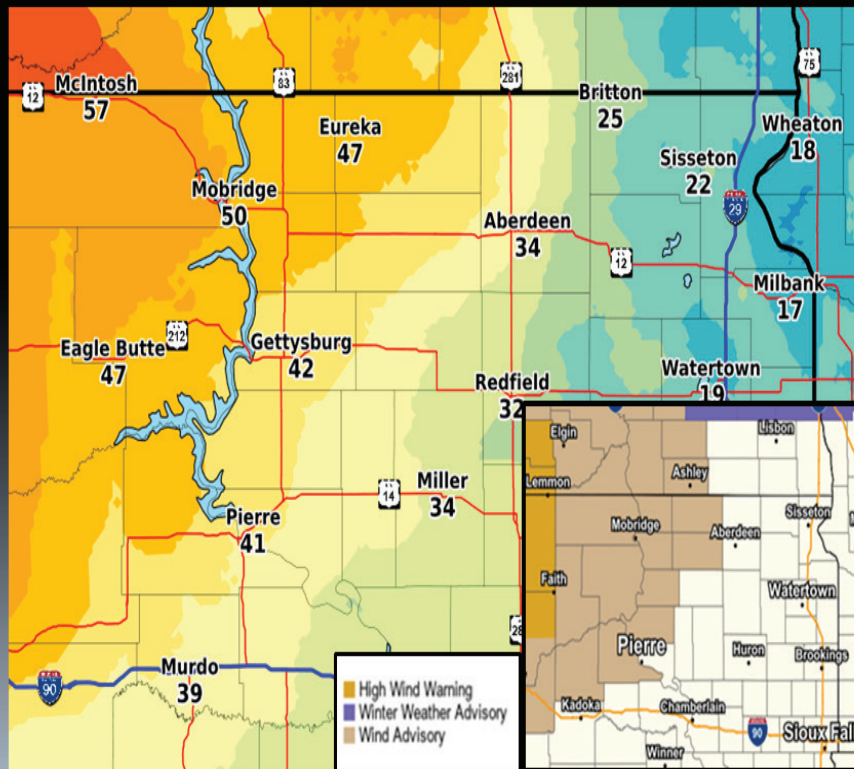


Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 16 of 66

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
40%	30%			
Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy and Breezy	Chance Rain/Snow and Blustery then Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy
High: 48 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 41 °F	Low: 19 °F	High: 42 °F

Peak Wind Gusts This Afternoon



National Weather Service - Aberdeen, SD

Created: 2/23/2021 4:55 AM

www.weather.gov/abr
US National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
@NWSAberdeen

Very strong winds are expected again this afternoon for the western half of South Dakota and thus wind headlines are in effect for much of the area. In addition to strong winds this afternoon, light mixed precipitation is also possible this morning and light snow again tonight mainly for the northern half of South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Generally speaking, total accumulations are unlikely to exceed a couple tenths of an inch, though may reach as much as half an inch on the northern edge of the Prairie Coteau.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 17 of 66

Today in Weather History

February 23, 1977: A storm center developed over Colorado the morning of the 22nd and moved to southeast Nebraska by midnight Wednesday the 23rd with snow and rain entering southern Minnesota. The low-pressure center advanced to Iowa by sundown and weakened somewhat with precipitation across all of Minnesota. Snow fell over the north, and a combination of rain and freezing rain were in the south. The low then intensified over southeast Minnesota during the nighttime of Thursday the 24th before continuing northeast into Wisconsin with snow and blowing snow continuing over much of the state before ending on the 26th. There was a combination of rain, freezing rain, and the winds over southern Minnesota with 4 to 12 inches of snow in the north. Freezing rain and the heavy icing on power lines caused the worst power failure in a decade in the twin cities with 125,000 homes affected. Power outages occurred over numerous areas of southern and central Minnesota. Many roads were ice-covered with multiple vehicle accidents and many cars in the ditch. Many roads were blocked or closed, with numerous schools closed. The ice storm also damaged many trees.

February 23, 2007: A strong area of low pressure tracking across the central plains brought widespread snowfall to parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota along with west-central Minnesota. The precipitation initially began as freezing rain and sleet late in the evening of the 23rd as it lifted across the area through the morning of the 24th. The freezing rain and sleet then changed over to snow during the morning hours of the 24th. Thundersnow also occurred at some locations across the area. Snowfall amounts of 6 to 15 inches occurred by the end of the storm. With the roads slippery from the freezing rain and then the heavy snow, travel conditions became tough. The South Dakota State Emergency Management, Highway Patrol, and Department of Transportation issued a travel advisory for no travel for Interstate-90 and many highways in central South Dakota. There were numerous accidents along the interstate. Some snowfall amounts included, 7 inches at Browns Valley, 9 inches at Bryant, Webster, Wheaton, Artichoke Lake, and Tintah, 10 inches at Toronto, Roy Lake, Garden City, and Ortonville, 11 inches at Faulkton, 12 inches at Watertown, and 15 inches at Clear Lake.

February 23, 2010: Pierre sets a new record with a streak of 84 consecutive days with high temperatures failing to reach 40 degrees.

February 23, 2012: An area of low pressure sliding across the region brought heavy snow to much of central and north-central South Dakota. Travel became difficult, with many schools canceled.

1887: The Central Bureau of Meteorology of Rome began receiving the first reports of a massive earthquake from northern Italy Observers. This estimated magnitude earthquake of 6.0 kills more than 2,000 people in southern France and northern Italy.

1977: A very rare February tornado touched down briefly in Mason City, Iowa, inflicting F1 damage on a home and injuring one person inside. This is the only known February tornado on record in Iowa.

1995: Cyclone Bobby slams into the Western Australia coast, causing widespread flooding. Some areas report up to 12 inches of rain from the storm.

Groton Daily Independent

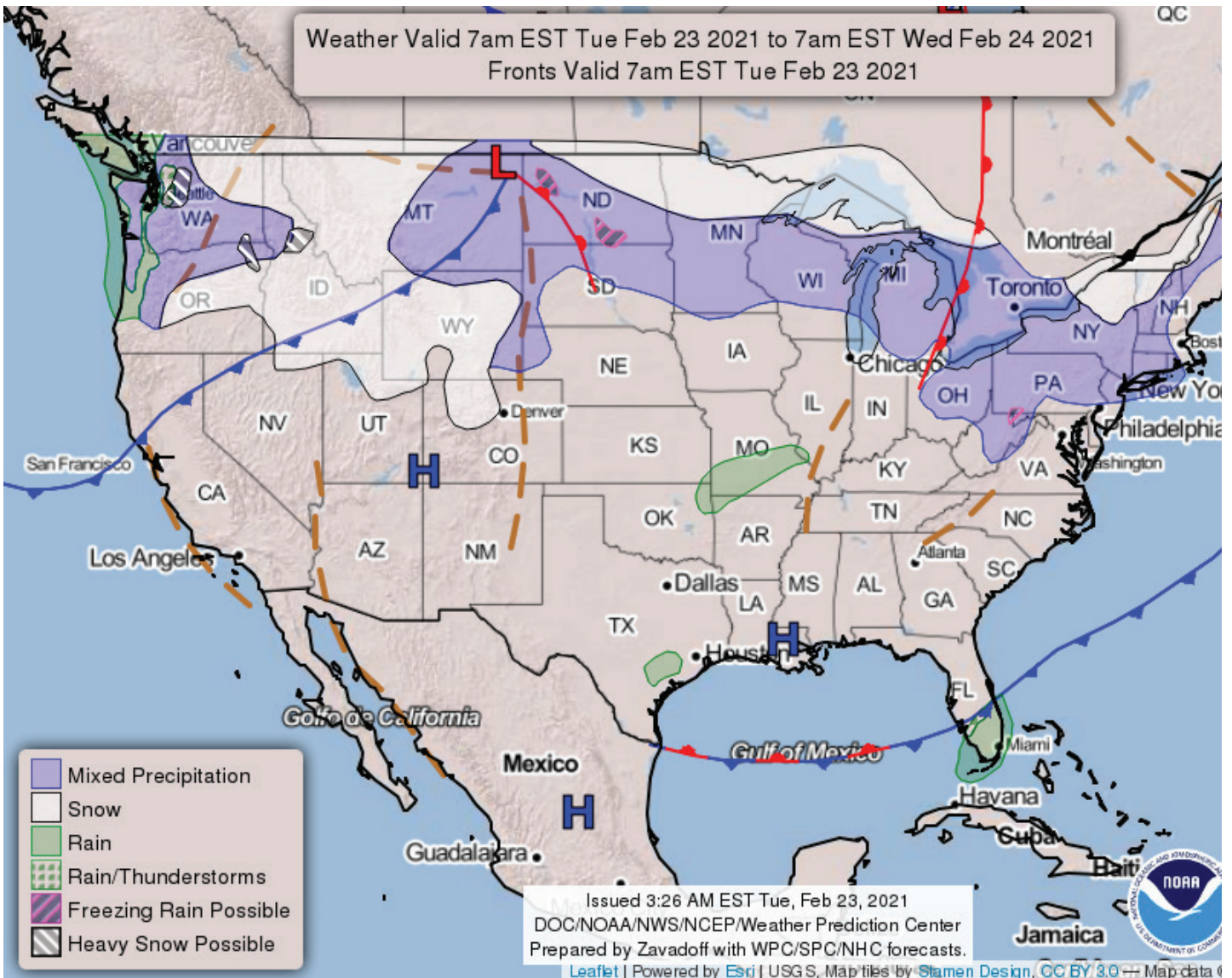
Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 18 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 55 °F at 2:06 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 12:26 AM
Wind: 28 mph at 2:02 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1905, 1976
Record Low: -25° in 1910
Average High: 31°F
Average Low: 11°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.340
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 0.87
Precip Year to Date: 0.14
Sunset Tonight: 6:13 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:20 a.m.



Issued 3:26 AM EST Tue, Feb 23, 2021
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Zavadoff with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts.

Leaflet | Powered by Esri | USGS, Map tiles by Stamen Design, CC BY 3.0 | Map data ©

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 19 of 66



IT DEPENDS ON THE NAME

Albert's dad thought it was time he understood how to write checks. So, he took him to the bank, took his checkbook from his coat pocket and said, "Son, I want you to learn how to write and cash checks today."

He then began to complete the "blank" check and explained every step to Albert. When he finished, he said, "Now, I'm going to go to the cashier and give her this check, and she will give me the amount of money I requested and I am going to withdraw it. There's a rather long line waiting for the cashier, so you stay here and wait for me."

Albert watched others do the same thing: give the cashier a piece of paper and get money in return. Amazed, he decided to do the same with a check from his father's checkbook.

Very carefully, he completed a check the way his father had taught him. However, when it was his turn at the "window," the cashier said, "I'm sorry, but your check is no good."

"But," Albert protested, "It's the same as my Dad's."

"Not quite," she responded. "His check has value because his name is on it, and he has money in the bank that we can give him in exchange for the check."

When you think about it, prayer is like going to the bank and exchanging our needs for God's "gifts." But, unlike a bank, the "gifts" are in God's name, and He is waiting for us to ask Him to exchange our requests for His gifts so He can give them to us.

Jesus said, "Ask anything in My Name, and I will do it." The Psalmist said, "Remember the Name of the Lord."

Prayer: Father, whatever we need is in Your hands. May we "remember" what wonderful gifts You have waiting for us – if only we ask in Your Name. In Jesus's Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Some nations boast of their chariots and horses, but we boast in the name of the Lord our God. Psalm 20:7

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 20 of 66

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 21 of 66

News from the  Associated Press

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Burke 74, Colome 45

Corsica/Stickney 63, Parkston 60

Custer 75, Hill City 42

Dell Rapids 62, Garretson 54

Flandreau 56, Sioux Falls Christian 55

Groton Area 49, Warner 43

Hanson 55, Colman-Egan 21

Herreid/Selby Area 56, Highmore-Harrold 50

Hot Springs 76, Edgemont 44

Lower Brule 63, Mobridge-Pollock 50

Madison 69, Milbank 52

Marty Indian 76, Andes Central 74

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 57, McCook Central/Montrose 47

New Underwood 66, Bennett County 53

Sisseton 58, Redfield 55

St. Thomas More 50, Belle Fourche 27

Stanley County 68, Miller 42

Tri-Valley 61, Baltic 46

Vermillion 82, Canton 36

Wagner 68, Beresford 47

West Central 75, Elk Point-Jefferson 51

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Bison vs. McIntosh, ccd.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Brandon Valley 50, Watertown 47

Class B Region 1=

First Round=

Langford 47, Great Plains Lutheran 43

Class B Region 2=

First Round=

Potter County 58, Sunshine Bible Academy 15

Class B Region 3=

First Round=

Arlington 65, Iroquois 37

Estelline/Hendricks 54, Wessington Springs 22

Class B Region 4=

First Round=

Elkton-Lake Benton 49, Chester 39

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 38, Mitchell Christian 35

Class B Region 5=

First Round=

Alcester-Hudson 44, Freeman Academy/Marion 20

Centerville 58, Gayville-Volin 45

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 22 of 66

Freeman 55, Canistota 40
Class B Region 6=
First Round=
Avon 51, Gregory 40
Marty Indian 75, Colome 50
Platte-Geddes 47, Bon Homme 34

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

State senate urges inquiry into Wounded Knee Medals of Honor

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate on Monday unanimously supported a resolution urging the U.S. Congress to launch an investigation into Medals of Honor given to soldiers who participated in the Wounded Knee Massacre.

Congress has the authority to rescind the medals. A bipartisan group of state lawmakers, advocating both for Native American tribes and military veterans, said their action would give momentum to a years-long effort to rescind Medals of Honor from 20 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment who participated in the December 29, 1890, massacre on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation near Wounded Knee Creek. An estimated 250 Native Americans were killed, many of whom were women and children.

"It's not going to change the stain of what happened there today," said Democratic Sen. Troy Heinert, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. "This will give us a chance to start a new history — that will recognize what we did that day was wrong."

Heinert recounted the history of the massacre, telling the Senate chamber how Chief Big Foot's band of Minneconjou Lakota had sought to take refuge on the Pine Ridge Reservation but were intercepted by U.S. soldiers. After the Lakota surrendered, the soldiers led them to an encampment. As soldiers finished disarmed the Lakota, a shot was fired, and "what ensued was a massacre," Heinert said.

Bernardo Rodriguez Jr., an Army veteran who is now a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council representing the Wounded Knee District, made the trip to Pierre to urge lawmakers to pass the resolution. He said the massacre was something he lived with every day, passing by what locals refer to as "the big sign" for how the site is marked. Human remains from the massacre are still found to this day, he said.

For Rodriguez Jr. and other military veterans who are tribal council members, the resolution was a sign of progress in a sometimes-uneasy relationship between tribal and state governments.

"It feels good to be heard by our state Senate," said Kevin Killer, the president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

While Congress has apologized for the massacre, previous efforts to rescind the Medals of Honor have failed in Congress. But South Dakota Republican lawmakers argued that the medals given to the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment tarnished Medals of Honor given to soldiers for genuine acts of courage.

"That wasn't a battle, that was a slaughter," said Republican Sen. V.J. Smith.

Medical pot advocates ask lawmakers for 'compromise'

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Supporters of a successful ballot measure to make medical marijuana legal in South Dakota urged state lawmakers on Monday to allow users to avoid criminal charges during any delay in implementing the program.

Voters passed a law in November legalizing marijuana for medical use in the state starting in July. But Gov. Kristi Noem and Republican legislative leaders are pushing to delay the law for a year, arguing they need the time to study the issue and set up a comprehensive medical pot program.

The Republican governor's proposal to delay was another setback for pro-pot groups after they saw a voter-passed constitutional amendment legalizing recreational marijuana struck down by a circuit court judge as unconstitutional.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 23 of 66

But the groups that spearheaded the ballot initiatives have sought to cajole lawmakers to move on medical marijuana by pointing out that voters approved it by nearly 70%. Some Republican lawmakers have acknowledged they are under pressure from their constituents.

"For them to come in the last three weeks of session and to overturn the will of voters is very frustrating," said Melissa Mentele, who organized the ballot initiative to legalize medical pot.

In a proposal Mentele cast as a "compromise," the group called for lawmakers to allow people who are charged with marijuana possession beginning July 1 to avoid convictions by presenting a statement from a medical practitioner showing they have a "debilitating medical condition" and could benefit from medical pot. They also pushed lawmakers to move up the proposed deadline to implement the program to the end of January 2022.

Noem's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the proposal.

Meanwhile, several marijuana bills making their way through the Legislature remained in flux. The House is set to debate Noem's proposal to delay medical marijuana implementation this week. The Senate is considering a proposal that would set up parameters for recreational pot under certain conditions: If the state Supreme Court reverses the decision to strike down legalized marijuana, if the federal government decriminalizes marijuana or if voters were to pass recreational marijuana once again.

"It is important that we don't have an unregulated industry here in South Dakota," said Republican Sen. Brock Greenfield, who is pushing the proposal to create a tentative recreational pot program.

Girl's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press

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

Class AA

1. Washington (18) 13-2 90 1
2. Harrisburg 16-2 72 3
3. Aberdeen Central 16-2 50 1
4. O'Gorman 14-5 37 4
5. Brandon Valley 12-5 14 5

Others receiving votes: Stevens 5, Mitchell 2.

Class A

1. St. Thomas More (10) 19-1 80 T1
- (tie) West Central (7) 18-2 79 T1
3. Winner (1) 18-2 56 3
4. Hamlin 18-2 37 4
5. SF Christian 17-3 18 5

Others receiving votes: None.

Class B

1. Corsica-Stickney(11) 18-2 82 1
2. Castlewood (6) 17-0 76 2
3. White River (1) 18-1 57 3
4. Ethan 17-3 35 4
5. Hanson 16-3 16 RV

Others receiving votes: Viborg-Hurley 2, Howard 1, Herreid-Selby Area 1.

Boy's Basketball Polls

By The Associated Press \

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 24 of 66

Class AA

1. Washington (17)	13-1	88	1
2. Yankton (1)	15-3	73	3
3. Roosevelt	12-5	51	5
4. O'Gorman	11-6	29	NR
5. Brandon Valley	12-6	15	RV

Others receiving votes: Mitchell 8, Harrisburg 6.

Class A

1. Vermillion	(18)	19-0	90	1
2. Sioux Valley	19-1	71	3	
3. SF Christian	14-4	46	2	
4. Dakota Valley	17-2	44	4	
5. Winner	18-2	17	5	

Others receiving votes: St. Thomas More 2.

Class B

1. De Smet (18)	19-1	85	1
2. Canistota 18-2	40	4	
3. Howard 17-3	41	3	
4. Viborg-Hurley	14-4	65	2
5. Dell Rapids St. Mary	15-4	15	5

Others receiving votes: White River 4, Platte-Geddes 1, Potter County 1.

South Dakota House leaders weigh impeachment of AG in crash

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers are considering impeaching the state's attorney general as he faces misdemeanor charges for striking and killing a man with his car, Republican legislative leaders said Monday.

Jason Ravensborg, the state's top law enforcement officer, indicated he will not step down while he waits for the case against him to proceed. Prosecutors have charged him with three misdemeanors but no felonies in the September death of 55-year-old Joseph Boever.

Rep. Tim Goodwin, a Republican whip whose job is to gain support from his fellow lawmakers, said Ravensborg should resign and that lawmakers are considering impeachment if he doesn't.

"I think what's best for everybody is that he just does the honorable thing and steps down," Goodwin said, adding that the crash was tragic for both Boever's family and Ravensborg.

South Dakota law allows officials like the attorney general to be impeached for conduct that includes a "misdemeanor in office."

Republican House Speaker Spencer Gosch acknowledged that impeachment was being weighed by lawmakers, but said that the legislative resolution that would start such proceedings has not been filed.

If the House initiates Ravensborg's impeachment, it would require a vote from at least half of House lawmakers to advance the impeachment resolution to the Senate. There, it would require two-thirds of senators to convict and remove him from office. Gov. Kristi Noem would get to appoint a replacement if Ravensborg was removed from office or resigned.

"The investigators have presented their findings and recommended misdemeanor infractions in a wholistic process they described as going 'above and beyond,' and we look forward to the continued due process of law," said Mike Deaver, a spokesperson for Ravensborg.

He added that Ravensborg is focused on his present duties as attorney general, especially during the legislative session.

The Republican attorney general, who was elected to his first term in 2018, initially told authorities that he thought he had struck a deer or another large animal as he was driving home to Pierre from a Republican

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 25 of 66

fundraiser late on Sept. 12. He said he 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.

After an investigation that stretched over five months, prosecutors said they still had questions about the crash but were unable to file more serious criminal charges against Ravensborg. They charged him with careless driving, driving out of his lane and operating a motor vehicle while on his phone.

Though prosecutors said he was not using his phone at the time of the crash, he had been using it while driving about one minute before. The attorney general could face up to 30 days in jail and up to a \$500 fine on each charge, if convicted.

Michael Moore, the Beadle County State's Attorney who is assisting in the case, said Monday that when Ravensborg was interviewed by law enforcement after the crash, he gave "varying examples of possibly what could have happened" to cause him to swerve on to the highway shoulder where he hit Boever. But Moore said he expected more details to emerge with Noem promising to release more information this week and Boever's widow planning to file a civil lawsuit against Ravensborg.

Moore said of the crash investigators' interview, "We have to live with what information they give us."

A year on, India's riot victims say justice still unserved

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The shooter shouted "Victory to Lord Ram," the Hindu god, before pulling the trigger that sent a bullet into Muhammad Nasir Khan's left eye.

Khan placed his trembling hand on his bloody eye socket and his fingers slipped deep into the wound. At that moment, Khan was sure he would die.

Khan ended up surviving the violence that killed 53 others, mostly fellow Muslims, when it engulfed his neighborhood in the Indian capital 12 months ago.

But a year after India's worst communal riots in decades, the 35-year-old is still shaken and his attacker still unpunished. Khan says he's been unable to get justice due to a lack of police interest in his case.

"My only crime is that my name identifies my religion," Khan said at his home in New Delhi's North Ghonda neighborhood.

Many of the Muslim victims of last year's bloody violence say they have run repeatedly into a refusal by police to investigate complaints against Hindu rioters. Some hope the courts will still come to their help. But others now believe the justice system under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist government has become stacked against them.

Adding to the sense of injustice is that accounts from Muslim victims as well as reports from rights groups have indicated that leaders of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party and the New Delhi police force tacitly supported the Hindu mobs during the fevered violence.

New Delhi police did not respond to repeated requests for comment, but they insisted last year that their investigation had been fair and that nearly 1,750 people had been booked in relation to the riots — half of them Hindus. Junior Home Minister G. Kishan Reddy has likewise told Parliament that police acted swiftly and impartially.

But a letter one senior police officer sent to investigators five months after the riots appeared to suggest them they go easy on Hindus suspected of violence, prompting criticism from the Delhi High Court.

Communal clashes in India are not new, with periodic violence breaking out ever since the British partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. But in the last seven years, observers say, religious polarization fueled by the Hindu nationalist base of Modi's party has further deepened the fault lines and raised tensions.

Many believe the catalyst for last year's riots was a fiery speech by Kapil Mishra, a leader from Modi's party. On Feb. 23, 2020, he gave police an ultimatum, warning them to break up a sit-in by demonstrators protesting against a new citizenship law Muslims say is discriminatory, or he and his supporters would do it themselves.

When his supporters moved in it triggered pitched street battles that quickly turned into riots. For the next three days, Hindu mobs rampaged through streets hunting down Muslims — in some cases burning

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 26 of 66

them alive in their homes — and torching entire neighborhoods, including shops and mosques.

Mishra rejects the idea that he's responsible for the riots, calling the claims "propaganda" to cover up the "pre-planned genocide of Hindus by Muslims." On Monday, he said his party had no links to the violence, but added, "what I did last year I will do it again if needed," referring to his speech hours before the riots started.

Many in the area's Hindu community accuse Muslims of starting the violence in a bid to make India look bad.

A year on, many Muslim victims of the riots are still cowering in fear of further bloodletting. Hundreds have abandoned their gutted homes and moved elsewhere. Those who chose to stay have fortified their neighborhoods with metal gates in case of more mob attacks. Many say they fear those responsible will never be held to account.

"Everything has changed since the riots," Khan said. "I think I am slowly losing all my hopes of justice."

Khan spent 20 days recovering in the hospital after being shot. Since then, he has been on a search for justice that he says has been impeded by police at every turn.

Khan's official police complaint, seen by The Associated Press, named at least six Hindus from his neighborhood whom he said participated in the violence.

"The accused still come to my home and threaten me with killing my entire family," Khan said in the complaint, adding that he was willing to identify them in court.

His complaint was never officially accepted.

Police, however, filed a complaint on their own. It gave a different version of events and places Khan at least a kilometer (0.6 mile) from where he was shot, suggesting he was injured in the crossfire between the two clashing groups. It didn't identify his attackers.

The stories of many other Muslim victims follow a similar pattern. Police and investigators have dismissed hundreds of complaints against Hindu rioters, citing a lack of evidence despite multiple eyewitness accounts.

They include a man who saw his brother fatally shot, a father of a 4-month-old baby who witnessed his home being torched and a young boy who lost both his arms after Hindu mobs threw a crude bomb at him.

Now, many make weekly trips to lawyer Mehmood Pracha's office, hoping for justice. Very few have seen their attackers put behind bars. Many others are still waiting for their cases to be heard in court.

Pracha, a Muslim, is representing at least 100 riot victims for free. He said there were multiple instances in which police were provided videos of Hindu mobs, many with links to Modi's party, "but it seems that police were eager to implicate Muslims" in the riots.

He said in many cases Muslims were also "threatened to withdraw their complaints."

"The police have acted as partners in crime," Pracha said.

Multiple videos of the riots seen by the AP show police egging on Hindu mobs to throw stones at Muslims, destroying surveillance cameras and beating a group of Muslim men — one of whom later died.

Multiple independent fact-finding missions and rights groups have documented the role of police in the riots.

In June 2020, Human Rights Watch said "police failed to respond adequately" during the riots and were at times "complicit" in attacks against Muslims. It said authorities "failed to conduct impartial and transparent investigations."

On a recent night, Haroon, who goes by one name, said he was "still scared of going out in the evening."

He saw his brother Maroof fatally shot by his Hindu neighbors during the riots. The police never identified the accused in his complaint despite multiple eyewitnesses.

In turn, Haroon said, he was threatened by the police and the accused to withdraw his complaint.

"We were alone then and we are alone now," he said nearly in tears as his dead brother's two children sat beside him.

Haroon looked at them and said: "I don't know what to do."

Wife of drug kingpin El Chapo arrested on US drug charges

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 27 of 66

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The wife of Mexican drug kingpin Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman was arrested in the United States and accused of helping her husband run his multibillion-dollar cartel and plot his audacious escape from a Mexican prison in 2015.

Emma Coronel Aispuro, a 31-year-old former beauty queen, was arrested at Dulles International Airport in Virginia on Monday and is expected to appear in federal court in Washington on Tuesday. She is a dual citizen of the United States and Mexico.

Her arrest is the latest twist in the bloody, multinational saga involving Guzman, the longtime head of the Sinaloa drug cartel. Guzman, whose two dramatic prison escapes in Mexico fed into a legend that he and his family were all but untouchable, was extradited to the United States in 2017 and is serving life in prison.

And now his wife, with whom he has two young daughters, has been charged with helping him run his criminal empire. In a single-count criminal complaint, Coronel was charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and marijuana in the U.S. The Justice Department also accused her of helping her husband escape from a Mexican prison in 2015 and participating in the planning of a second prison escape before Guzman was extradited to the U.S.

Coronel’s attorney Jeffrey Lichtman declined to comment Monday night.

As Mexico’s most powerful drug lord, Guzman ran a cartel responsible for smuggling mountains of cocaine and other drugs into the United States during his 25-year reign, prosecutors said in recent court papers. They also said his “army of sicarios,” or “hit men,” was under orders to kidnap, torture and kill anyone who got in his way.

His prison breaks became the stuff of legend and raised serious questions about whether Mexico’s justice system was capable of holding him accountable. In one case, he escaped through an entry under the shower in his cell to a milelong (1.6-kilometer-long) lighted tunnel with a motorcycle on rails. The planning for the escape was extensive, prosecutors say, with his wife playing a key role.

Court papers charge that Coronel worked with Guzman’s sons and a witness, who is now cooperating with the U.S. government, to organize the construction of the underground tunnel that Guzman used to escape from the Altiplano prison to prevent his extradition to the U.S. The plot included purchasing a piece of land near the prison, firearms and an armored truck and smuggling him a GPS watch so they could “pinpoint his exact whereabouts so as to construct the tunnel with an entry point accessible to him,” the court papers say.

Guzman was sentenced to life behind bars in 2019.

Coronel, who was a beauty queen in her teens, regularly attended Guzman’s trial, even when testimony implicated her in his prison breaks. The two, separated in age by more than 30 years, have been together since at least 2007, and their twin daughters were born in 2011.

Her father, Ines Coronel Barreras, was arrested in 2013 with one of his sons and several other men in a warehouse with hundreds of pounds of marijuana across the border from Douglas, Arizona. Months earlier, the U.S. Treasury had announced financial sanctions against her father for his alleged drug trafficking.

After Guzman was rearrested following his escape, Coronel lobbied the Mexican government to improve her husband’s prison conditions. And after he was convicted in 2019, she moved to launch a clothing line in his name.

Mike Vigil, the Drug Enforcement Administration’s former chief of international operations, said Coronel “has been involved in the drug trade since she was a little girl. She knows the inner workings of the Sinaloa cartel.”

He said she could be willing to cooperate.

“She has a huge motivation, and that is her twins,” Vigil said.

Associated Press writers Christopher Sherman and Mark Stevenson in Mexico City contributed to this report.

Facebook says it will lift its Australian news ban soon

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Facebook said on Tuesday it will lift its ban on Australians sharing news after it struck a deal with Australia's government on legislation that would make digital giants pay for journalism.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Facebook confirmed that they have agreed on amendments to proposed legislation to require the social network and Google to pay for Australian news that they feature.

Facebook's cooperation is a major victory in Australian efforts to make the two gateways to the Internet pay for the journalism that they use. The company had blocked Australian users from accessing and sharing news last week after the House of Representatives passed the draft law late Wednesday.

The amended version of the proposed legislation would give digital platforms one month's notice before they are formally designated under the code. That would give those involved more time to broker agreements before they are forced to enter the binding arbitration arrangements required by the proposed law.

Initially, the Facebook news blockade cut access — at least temporarily — to government pandemic, public health and emergency services, sparking public outrage.

A statement Tuesday by Campbell Brown, Facebook's vice president for news partnerships, said the deal allows the company to choose which publishers it will support, including small and local ones.

"We're restoring news on Facebook in Australia in the coming days. Going forward, the government has clarified we will retain the ability to decide if news appears on Facebook so that we won't automatically be subject to a forced negotiation," Brown said.

Frydenberg described the agreed upon amendments as "clarifications" of the government's intent. He said his negotiations with Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg were "difficult."

"There is no doubt that Australia has been a proxy battle for the world," Frydenberg said.

"Facebook and Google have not hidden the fact that they know that the eyes of the world are on Australia and that is why they have sought to get a code here that is workable," he added, referring to the proposed News Media Bargaining Code.

The code was designed to curb the bargaining dominance of Facebook and Google in their negotiations with Australian news providers by requiring a negotiation safety net in the form of an arbitration panel. The digital giants would not be able to abuse their overwhelming negotiating positions by making take-it-or-leave-it payment offers to news businesses for their journalism. In case of a standoff, the panel would make a binding decision on a winning offer.

Swinburne University senior lecturer on media Belinda Barnet said the proposed amendments guarantee Facebook time to strike deals before the arbitration panel decides on a price for news.

Peter Lewis, director of the Australia Institute's Center for Responsible Technology, a think tank, said in a statement that the "amendments keep the integrity of the media code intact."

Google also had threatened to remove its search functions from Australia because it said the proposed law was unworkable. But that threat has faded.

Google has been signing up Australia's largest media companies in content licensing deals through its News Showcase model.

The platform says it has deals with more than 50 Australian titles through Showcase and more than 500 publishers globally using the model which was launched in October.

Facebook said it will now negotiate deals with Australian publishers under its own model, Facebook News.

"We are satisfied that the Australian government has agreed to a number of changes and guarantees that address our core concerns about allowing commercial deals that recognize the value our platform provides to publishers relative to the value we receive from them," Facebook regional managing director William Easton said.

"As a result of these changes, we can now work to further our investment in public interest journalism and restore news on Facebook for Australians in the coming days," Easton added.

Biden attempt to resurrect Iran nuke deal off to bumpy start

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 29 of 66

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration's early efforts to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are getting a chilly early response from Tehran. Though few expected a breakthrough in the first month of the new administration, Iran's tough line suggests a difficult road ahead.

Having made several significant overtures to Iran in its first weeks in office, the administration's outreach has been all but shunned by the Iranians. They had already rejected Biden's opening gambit: a U.S. return to the deal from which President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018 if Iran resumes full compliance with its obligations under the accord.

Iran is shaping up to be a major test of the Biden administration's overall approach to foreign policy, which the president has said will realign itself with the kind of multilateral diplomacy that Trump shunned. Although there are other hot-button issues — Russia, China and North Korea among them — Iran has a particular significance for Biden's top national security aides. They include Secretary of State Antony Blinken, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and special envoy for Iran Rob Malley, all of whom were intimately involved in crafting the 2015 deal under President Barack Obama and may have personal stakes in salvaging it.

Biden took office pledging to reverse Trump's pullout from the deal, which gave it billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. Just last week, Biden delivered in at least three ways: agreeing to return to multinational talks with Iran about reviving the deal, rescinding Trump's determination that all U.N. sanctions on Iran must be restored, and easing onerous travel restrictions on Iranian diplomats posted to the United Nations.

Yet, Iran has held firm to demands that it will not respond to anything less than a full lifting of the sanctions Trump reimposed. Over the weekend, Iran made good on a threat to suspend adherence to a U.N. agreement allowing intrusive inspections of its declared nuclear sites. Although it stopped short of ordering the removal of international inspectors, Iran reduced cooperation with them and vowed to revisit the step in three months if sanctions aren't removed.

The Iranians' hard-nosed stance has left the administration at the cusp of a difficult choice: move ahead with sanctions relief before Iran resumes full compliance and risk losing the leverage it has or double down on demands for full compliance first and risk Tehran walking away from the deal completely.

It's a delicate balance and one the administration is loathe to admit it faces, given the politically sensitive nature of Iran in Washington — Republicans strongly oppose the nuclear deal — and in Europe and the Middle East itself, particularly in Israel and the Gulf Arab states that are most directly threatened.

On Monday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed that the U.S. is prepared to return to the nuclear deal provided Tehran shows "strict compliance" with it. Speaking to the U.N.-backed Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Blinken said the U.S. is committed to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon and pledged to work with allies and partners to "lengthen and strengthen" the deal struck between Iran and Germany, France, Britain, Russia, China and the U.S.

"Diplomacy is the best path to achieve that goal," he said.

Just 24 hours earlier, though, Iran on Sunday rejected entreaties to suspend cooperation with the U.N. nuclear watchdog. While Iran did not expel the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is charged with monitoring Iranian compliance with the deal, it did end the agency's access to video from cameras installed at a number of sites.

There was no immediate response to that development from the U.S., but on Monday the White House and State Department both downplayed the significance of the move.

"Our view is that diplomacy is the best path forward to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters. "That does not mean they have clearly not taken the steps needed to comply and we have not taken any steps or made any indication that we are going to meet the demands that they are putting forward either."

At the State Department, spokesman Ned Price addressed the IAEA mission more directly, praising the agency for its "professionalism" in keeping inspectors and their apparatus in the country despite Iran's

early threat to expel them on Tuesday. He said the U.S. supports IAEA chief Rafael Grossi's success in reaching a temporary deal with Iran but lamented that Tehran remains out of compliance.

Price said the the administration was concerned that Iran appeared to be going in the wrong direction but would not comment on the administration's view of whether its outreach to date had achieved results. Nor was he prepared to say what the administration might do to push Iran back into compliance with the deal considering its continued threat to abandoned all restrictions it imposed.

"The United States is willing to meet with the Iranians to hash out these difficult complex questions," Price said, alluding to phrases that administration officials have used to refer to their initial aim of "compliance for compliance" and then "compliance for compliance-plus."

"Compliance-plus," according to administration officials, would include limits on Iran's non-nuclear activities, including missile development and support for Mideast rebel groups and militias. A main reason Trump gave for withdrawing from the nuclear deal was that it did not address those issues and his administration has tried for more than a year to expand the deal to include them.

Lam backs Hong Kong electoral changes excluding opponents

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam gave her clear support Tuesday to electoral reforms that would likely further exclude opposition voices and cement Beijing's control over the semi-autonomous Chinese city's politics.

Her comments came a day after a top Beijing official signaled major changes would be coming to ensure Hong Kong is run by "patriots," a sign that China intends to no longer tolerate dissenting voices, 23 years after the former British colony was handed over to Chinese rule with a promise it could maintain its own rights and freedoms for 50 years.

Following China's imposition of a sweeping national security law on the city last year, authorities have moved to expel members of the city's Legislative Council deemed insufficiently loyal and rounded up veteran opposition leaders on charges including illegal assembly and colluding with foreign forces. Government critics and Western governments accuse Beijing of going back on its word and effectively ending the "one country, two systems" framework for governing the dynamic Asian financial hub.

Lam said political strife and unrest in the city, including anti-government protests in 2019 as well as protests in 2014, showed there were always some people who are "rather hostile" to the central authorities in China.

"I can understand that the central authorities are very concerned, they do not want the situation to deteriorate further in such a way that 'one country, two systems' cannot be implemented," Lam said at a regular news briefing.

The Hong Kong government on Tuesday also said it plans to require district councilors — many of whom are directly elected by their constituents and tend to be more politically independent — to pledge allegiance to Hong Kong as a special region of China. Currently, only the chief executive, high officials, executive council members, lawmakers and judges are required to take an oath of office.

Those who are found to take the oath improperly or who do not uphold the city's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, will be disqualified and barred from running for office for five years, according to the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Erick Tsang.

Opposition figures swept district council elections following the 2019 protests and the Beijing authorities have since sought to prevent them from exerting influence on other aspects of the political system.

The move comes after an oath-taking controversy in 2016 in which six pro-democracy lawmakers were expelled from the legislature after court rulings that they had not properly pledged allegiance because they mispronounced words, added words or read the oath extremely slowly.

Hong Kong's legislature is expected to deliberate the draft legal amendments on March 17.

On Monday, Xia Baolong, director of Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, said Hong Kong could only be ruled by "patriots," which exclude those who lobby other countries for foreign

sanctions and “troublemakers.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin added to those assertions Tuesday, saying that “people in important positions, holding important powers and shouldering important administration responsibilities must be staunch patriots. It is a matter of course.”

The electoral changes are expected to be discussed and possibly passed at next month’s meeting of the National People’s Congress, China’s rubber-stamp legislature, and its advisory body, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

They will likely take the form of a redistribution of votes in the 1,200-member electoral commission that selects Hong Kong’s chief executive, subject to Beijing’s veto. The commission is composed of voting blocs intended to represent Hong Kong’s various economic, educational and social sectors, along with its largely Beijing-dominated political institutions. The one exception is the 117 commission members drawn from among the city’s 458 local district councilors.

With all other commission members deemed to be firmly under Beijing’s control, speculation has risen that the 117 district council votes will be transferred to another bloc, possibly that of Hong Kong’s representatives to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, ensuring that they will follow Beijing’s directives.

It remains unclear whether Lam, who is deeply unpopular among Hong Kong’s population, will seek a second five-year term in next year’s poll.

Another possibility is that China will close what it calls “loopholes” in the election for members of the Legislative Council, now entirely dominated by pro-Beijing legislators since opposition deputies resigned en masse last year after four were expelled for being insufficiently loyal to the government. Lam postponed elections for the council last year, citing concerns over COVID-19, in a move largely seen as designed to prevent an opposition victory.

Of the 70 members of the council, half are directly elected from geographic constituencies while the rest are drawn from trade and other special interest groups. Changes could include preventing district councilors from also sitting in the body or simply raising the requirements for loyalty and patriotism above the already stringent levels they are set at now.

Security officials to answer for Jan. 6 failures at Capitol

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is set to hear from former U.S. Capitol security officials for the first time about the massive law enforcement failures on Jan. 6, the day a violent mob laid siege to the building and interrupted the presidential electoral count.

Three of the four scheduled to testify Tuesday before two Senate committees resigned under pressure immediately after the deadly attack, including the former head of the Capitol Police.

Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault, and lawmakers are expected to aggressively question the former officials about what went wrong. How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public? How did the agencies share that information with each other? And how could the Capitol Police have been so ill-prepared for a violent insurrection that was organized online, in plain sight?

The rioters easily smashed through security barriers on the outside of the Capitol, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with police officers, injuring dozens of them, and broke through multiple windows and doors, sending lawmakers fleeing from the House and Senate chambers and interrupting the certification of the 2020 presidential election. Five people died as a result of the violence, including a Capitol Police officer and a woman who was shot by police as she tried to break through the doors of the House chamber with lawmakers still inside.

Former Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Stenger and former House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving will speak publicly for the first time since their resignations at the hearing, which is part of a joint investigation by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Senate Rules Committee.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 32 of 66

They will be joined by former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund and Robert Contee, the acting chief of police for the Metropolitan Police Department, who sent additional officers to the scene after the rioting began.

The hearing is expected to be the first of many examinations of what happened that day, coming almost seven weeks after the attack and over one week after the Senate voted to acquit former President Donald Trump of inciting the insurrection by telling his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his election defeat. Thousands of National Guard troops still surround the Capitol in a wide perimeter, cutting off streets and sidewalks that are normally full of cars, pedestrians and tourists.

Congress is also considering a bipartisan, independent commission to review the missteps, and multiple congressional committees have said they will look at different aspects of the siege. Federal law enforcement have arrested more than 230 people who were accused of being involved in the attack, and President Joe Biden's nominee for attorney general, Judge Merrick Garland, said in his confirmation hearing Monday that investigating the riots would be a top priority.

Congress needs to know, quickly, how failed security preparations and delays in the response led to "a mad, angry mob invading this temple of our democracy," Senate Rules Committee Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Klobuchar, D-Minn., said senators will be especially focused on the timing of the deployment of the National Guard, which eventually arrived to help the overwhelmed police, how security agencies shared information ahead of the attack and if the command structure of the Capitol Police Board, which includes the House and Senate sergeants-at-arms, contributed to the failures. She said there may be legislation to address any inadequacies.

"We are on a fast track here simply because decisions have to be made about the Capitol," Klobuchar said.

Klobuchar said Tuesday's hearing will be the first of at least two public examinations of what went wrong that day as the Senate panels undertake a joint investigation into the security failures. A second hearing, expected to be held in the next few weeks, will examine the response of the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI.

While there is broad agreement that security measures were inadequate that day, officials have pointed the blame at each other for the causes and disputed each others' accounts. The day after the riot, Sund said that his force "had a robust plan established to address anticipated First Amendment activities." It soon became clear that while the Capitol Police had prepared for protests, they were vastly unprepared for a violent insurrection — and many were beaten as they tried in vain to keep rioters from entering the building.

Interim Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman, who has temporarily replaced Sund, last month apologized for failing to prepare despite warnings that white supremacists and far-right groups would target Congress. But she also said that Sund had asked the Capitol Police Board, which oversees the department, to declare a state of emergency beforehand and allow him to request National Guard support, but the board declined. The Defense Department has said it asked the Capitol Police if it needed the Guard, but the request was denied.

A third member of the Capitol Police Board denied Pittman's claim hours after her testimony was released. J. Brett Blanton, who serves as the architect of the Capitol, said that Sund did not ask him for help and that there was "no record of a request for an emergency declaration."

Lawmakers hope to resolve some of those discrepancies by questioning the witnesses together on Tuesday. Klobuchar said she is pleased that they are all appearing voluntarily and hopes that the hearing will have a "constructive" tone.

"It was a horror what happened, we all know that," she said. "But if we are going to have solutions and a safer Capitol going forward, we have to identify what went wrong, what the issues were, and the answers we'll get are part of that solution."

Southern Poverty: 160 Confederate symbols taken down in 2020

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 33 of 66

NEW YORK (AP) — When rioters tore through the U.S. Capitol last month, some of them gripping Confederate battle flags, they didn't encounter a statue of the most famous rebel general, Robert E. Lee.

The Lee statue, which represented the state of Virginia as part of the National Statuary Hall Collection in the Capitol for 111 years, had been removed just weeks before — one of at least 160 public Confederate symbols taken down or moved from public spaces in 2020, according to a new count the Southern Poverty Law Center shared with The Associated Press ahead of releasing it.

The law center, which keeps a raw count of nearly 2,100 statues, symbols, placards, buildings and public parks dedicated to the Confederacy, plans to release the latest figures from its "Whose Heritage?" database on Tuesday. It has been tracking a movement to take down the monuments since 2015, when a white supremacist entered a South Carolina church and killed several Black parishioners.

"These racist symbols only serve to uphold revisionist history and the belief that white supremacy remains morally acceptable," SPLC chief of staff Lecia Brooks said in a statement. "This is why we believe that all symbols of white supremacy should be removed from public spaces."

Sometime after visitors and tourists are welcomed back to the U.S. Capitol, there will be a statue saluting Virginia's Barbara Johns, a 16-year-old Black girl who staged a strike in 1951 over unequal conditions at her segregated high school in Farmville. Her actions led to court-ordered integration of public schools across the U.S. via the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Each state legislature can choose up to two representatives to honor in the Capitol's collection. In December, a state commission recommended replacing Lee's statue with a statue of Johns. Supporters told the AP that Virginia's legislature has nearly finalized her elevation alongside George Washington.

Joan Johns Cobbs, Barbara Johns' younger sister, is ecstatic about the coming honor. She's also happy it hadn't happened before Jan. 6, when the Capitol was breached.

"You can't imagine how sad I was seeing what was happening in the Capitol building," Cobbs said. "I was saying to myself, 'Oh, my God. I'm kind of glad her statue wasn't there already.' I wondered what would have happened."

Long seen as offensive to Black Americans, Lee's Capitol statue wasn't the only one representing a figure from the Lost Cause, a term referring to a belief that fighting on the side of slaveholders in the Civil War was just and heroic. Jefferson Davis, who served as president of the Confederate States of America before becoming a U.S. senator from Mississippi, is one of two figures representing that state in the Capitol.

The SPLC says there are 704 Confederate monuments still standing across the U.S. And taking some of them down may be difficult, particularly in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee — states where lawmakers have enacted policies protecting these monuments.

The movement to remove these symbols from public spaces became part of the national reckoning on racial injustice following the May death of George Floyd, a Black man who died after a white Minneapolis officer pressed his knee into his neck for several minutes. Although activists have called for lowering Confederate flags and taking down monuments for decades, a broader push was sparked after a white supremacist gunned down nine Black parishioners during a June 2015 Bible study meeting at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

"Exposing children to anything that falsely promotes the idea of white superiority and Black inferiority is dehumanizing," Brooks of the SPLC said in her statement.

That's why the honor for Johns couldn't come at a better time, said Cameron Patterson, executive director of the Robert Russa Moton Museum, a caretaker of Johns' legacy.

Johns moved from New York City to live with her grandmother in Virginia's Prince Edward County during World War II. She attended Moton High School in Farmville where, according to her memoir, the segregated school had poor facilities, lacked science laboratories and had no gymnasium.

On April 23, 1951, at age 16, Johns led her classmates in a strike against the substandard conditions at Moton High, drawing the attention of civil rights lawyers at the NAACP. Attorneys filed a federal case that became one of five the U.S. Supreme Court reviewed in the *Brown* decision. In 1954, the high court declared segregation unconstitutional.

This year will mark the 70th anniversary since Johns' protest. She died in 1991, at age 56.

"There's real recognition that her inclusion in the Statuary Hall collection really will be a great opportunity for folks to more fully come to understand the Moton story in full," Patterson said. "So not only are they learning about Barbara and who she was, they're learning about her classmates. They're learning about those that continue to labor in this community, as it relates to the fight for educational equality."

Cobbs, Johns' sister, agreed.

"I hope that young people will see it as something that they could emulate," she said. "Being that young, seeing an injustice, and deciding to do something about it is pretty remarkable."

Morrison is a member of the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

Not to be sniffed at: Agony of post-COVID-19 loss of smell

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

NICE, France (AP) — The doctor slid a miniature camera into the patient's right nostril, making her whole nose glow red with its bright miniature light.

"Tickles a bit, eh?" he asked as he rummaged around her nasal passages, the discomfort causing tears to well in her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

The patient, Gabriella Forgione, wasn't complaining. The 25-year-old pharmacy worker was happy to be prodded and poked at the hospital in Nice, in southern France, to advance her increasingly pressing quest to recover her sense of smell. Along with her sense of taste, it suddenly vanished when she fell ill with COVID-19 in November, and neither has returned.

Being deprived of the pleasures of food and the scents of things that she loves are proving tough on her body and mind. Shorn of odors both good and bad, Forgione is losing weight and self-confidence.

"Sometimes I ask myself, 'Do I stink?'" she confessed. "Normally, I wear perfume and like for things to smell nice. Not being able to smell bothers me greatly."

A year into the coronavirus pandemic, doctors and researchers are still striving to better understand and treat the accompanying epidemic of COVID-19-related anosmia — loss of smell — draining much of the joy of life from an increasing number of sensorially frustrated longer-term sufferers like Forgione.

Even specialist doctors say there is much about the condition they still don't know and they are learning as they go along in their diagnoses and treatments. Impairment and alteration of smell have become so common with COVID-19 that some researchers suggest that simple odor tests could be used to track coronavirus infections in countries with few laboratories.

For most people, the olfactory problems are temporary, often improving on their own in weeks. But a small minority are complaining of persistent dysfunction long after other COVID-19 symptoms have disappeared. Some have reported continued total or partial loss of smell six months after infection. The longest, some doctors say, are now approaching a full year.

Researchers working on the vexing disability say they are optimistic that most will eventually recover but fear some will not. Some doctors are concerned that growing numbers of smell-deprived patients, many of them young, could be more prone to depression and other difficulties and weigh on strained health systems.

"They are losing color in their lives," said Dr. Thomas Hummel, who heads the smell and taste outpatients clinic at University Hospital in Dresden, Germany.

"These people will survive and they'll be successful in their lives, in their professions," Hummel added. "But their lives will be much poorer."

At the Face and Neck University Institute in Nice, Dr. Clair Vandersteen wafted tube after tube of odors under Forgione's nose after he had rooted around in her nostrils with his camera.

"Do you perceive any smell? Nothing? Zero? OK," he asked, as she repeatedly and apologetically responded with negatives.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 35 of 66

Only the last tube provoked an unequivocal reaction.

"Urgh! Oh, that stinks," Forgione yelled. "Fish!"

Test complete, Vandersteen delivered his diagnosis.

"You need an enormous amount of an odor to be able to smell something," he told her. "You haven't completely lost your sense of smell but nor is it good."

He sent her away with homework: six months of olfactory rehab. Twice daily, choose two or three scented things, like a sprig of lavender or jars of fragrances, and smell them for two to three minutes, he ordered.

"If you smell something, great. If not, no problem. Try again, concentrating hard on picturing the lavender, a beautiful purple bloom," he said. "You have to persevere."

Losing the sense of smell can be more than a mere inconvenience. Smoke from a spreading fire, a gas leak, or the stink of rotten food can all pass dangerously unnoticed. Fumes from a used diaper, dog's dirt on a shoe or sweaty armpits can be embarrassingly ignored.

And as poets have long known, scents and emotions are often like lovers entwined.

Evan Cesa used to relish meal times. Now they're a chore. A fish dinner in September that suddenly seemed flavorless first flagged to the 18-year-old sports student that COVID-19 had attacked his senses. Foodstuffs became mere textures, with only residual hints of sweet and saltiness.

Five months later, breakfasting on chocolate cookies before classes, Cesa still chewed without joy, as though swallowing cardboard.

"Eating no longer has any purpose for me," he said. "It is just a waste of time."

Cesa is among the anosmia sufferers being studied by researchers in Nice who, before the pandemic, had been using scents in the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. They also used comforting fragrances to treat post-traumatic stress among children after a truck terror attack in Nice in 2016, when a driver plowed through holiday crowds, killing 86 people.

The researchers are now turning their expertise to COVID-19, teaming up with perfumers from the nearby fragrance-producing town of Grasse. Perfumer Aude Galouye worked on the fragrant waxes that were wafted under Cesa's nose to measure his olfactory impairment, with scents at varying concentrations.

"The sense of smell is a sense that is fundamentally forgotten," Galouye said. "We don't realize the effect it has on our lives except, obviously, when we no longer have it."

The examinations on Cesa and other patients also include language and attention tests. The Nice researchers are exploring whether olfactory complaints are linked to COVID-related cognitive difficulties, including problems with concentrating. Cesa stumbled by picking the word "ship" when "kayak" was the obvious choice on one test.

"That is completely unexpected," said Magali Payne, a speech therapist on the team. "This young man shouldn't be experiencing linguistic problems."

"We have to keep digging," she said. "We are finding things out as we see patients."

Cesa longs to have his senses restored, to celebrate the taste of pasta in carbonara sauce, his favorite dish, and a run through the fragrant wonders of the great outdoors.

"One might think that it is not important to be able to smell nature, trees, forests," he said. "But when you lose the sense of smell, you realize how truly lucky we are to be able to smell these things."

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>, <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Jews split over storied charity's support for settlements

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Generations of Jews have dropped spare change into the iconic blue boxes of the Jewish National Fund, a 120-year-old Zionist organization that acquires land, plants trees and carries out development projects in the Holy Land.

But the Israeli group, known by its Hebrew acronym KKL, is now considering formally expanding its

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 36 of 66

activities into the occupied West Bank. That has sparked fierce opposition from left-leaning Jewish groups in the United States, deepening a rift with the increasingly right-wing Israeli government.

The debate has drawn attention to the fact that the KKL, which owns more than a tenth of all the land in Israel, has been quietly operating in the West Bank for decades, building and expanding settlements that most of the international community considers a violation of international law.

A separate New York-based organization, also known as the Jewish National Fund, does not take a position on the settlements and mostly operates within Israel.

The controversy erupted earlier this month when the Axios news website reported that the KKL was considering a proposal to openly fund land purchases from Palestinians in the West Bank. The move could potentially channel hundreds of millions of dollars into the expansion of settlements, some of them deep inside the occupied territory.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state. They view the settlements — which house nearly 500,000 Israelis — as the main obstacle to a two-state solution to the conflict.

Israel views the West Bank as the biblical heartland of the Jewish people and says any partition should be negotiated in peace talks, which have been largely moribund for more than a decade.

The proposal would need to be approved by the KKL's board of directors, which includes representatives from several Jewish organizations and is not expected to decide before the country holds nationwide elections on March 23.

"Throughout the years and till this very day, KKL-JNF has been operating in all parts of the Land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria," it said, using the biblical name of the West Bank. "At this stage, there is no intention of opening up a new area in Judea and Samaria."

It added that all projects are confirmed with donors in advance, suggesting that funds intended for projects inside Israel would not be diverted to occupied territory.

But Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement watchdog, says the KKL has been quietly operating in the West Bank for decades, acquiring at least 65,000 dunams (16,000 acres) of land for settlements, mainly through a subsidiary.

"This has happened before and so this isn't a sea change," Peace Now spokesman Brian Reeves said. "But this would be the first time that they are officially endorsing this in the open, the idea of purchasing land in the West Bank, and essentially saying 'we don't agree with international law, or that there's occupation, or that the two-state solution matters.'"

Palestinians view the sale of land to settlers as a betrayal of their national cause, so such transactions are usually carried out in secret or through middlemen, opening them up to allegations of fraud. In some cases, they result in the eviction of Palestinian families who say they never sold their property.

While the settlements enjoy broad support within Israel, they have come to be seen as an obstacle to peace by many Jews in the West, who are also at odds with the Israeli government on religious matters. Most American Jews belong to the more liberal streams of Judaism and feel alienated by Israel's ultra-Orthodox authorities, who question their faith and practices.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the head of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest Jewish movement in North America, says the KKL's shift stems from recent elections at the World Zionist Congress that brought to power right-wing leaders more closely aligned with the Israeli government.

His group and others that are opposed to settlements denounced the KKL's proposal and have vowed to oppose it when the board meets, but it's unclear whether they have enough votes. Jacobs is concerned the move could tar the KKL for many in the West or spark tensions with the new U.S. administration, which is also opposed to settlement expansion.

He acknowledged the KKL has operated in the West Bank in the past, but says its activities dramatically dropped off over the last two decades before resuming and accelerating in secret in recent years, prompting opposition from the URJ and other groups.

"We basically blew the whistle and said wait a minute, there's a whole lot of land purchasing going on

under the table, under the radar without oversight, and frankly, without even the formal permission to do so," he said.

"Here in North America, the majority of Jews are opposed to the proliferation of the settlement enterprise," he added. "That's something that American Jews feel very strongly about."

The U.S.-based JNF is a separate entity with its own board and its own offices in New York and Jerusalem. CEO Russell Robinson said it doesn't involve itself in politics and focuses on projects in the Negev and Galilee regions of Israel.

"Politics is not where the majority of people want to be involved in," he said. "They want to be involved in making the world a better place, and we give them that opportunity."

The U.S. JNF contracts out forestry and reservoir-building to the KKL, in what Robinson refers to as a "vendor service." It has also funded some small projects in the occupied territories, including a heritage museum in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc.

Robinson dismisses the infighting within the major Zionist organizations and says it's had no impact on his group's fundraising. But Jacobs says Israelis should be concerned about the fraying relations between their hawkish government and their allies abroad.

"American Jews are very involved in the political life of the United States," he said. "We are working overtime to bridge the differences and to establish more commonality, but we're not going to forsake our core commitments to do so."

What NY prosecutors could learn from Trump's tax records

By JIM MUSTIAN and DAVID B. CARUSO undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. fought for a year and a half to get access to former President Donald Trump's tax records.

Now, thanks to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, he will soon have them. But what will that mean for the Democrat's investigation into Trump's business affairs?

Former prosecutors say the trove of records could give investigators new tools to determine whether Trump lied to lenders or tax officials, before or after he took office.

"Prosecutors look for discrepancies in paperwork. For example, if Trump told the IRS he's broke and lenders that he's rich that's just the type of discrepancy they could build a case around," said Duncan Levin, a former federal prosecutor who worked on a wide range of white collar cases as Vance's chief of asset forfeiture.

"These documents are a very important piece of the jigsaw puzzle," Levin said.

Whether Trump's records will contain evidence of a crime is uncertain. The former president has argued for years that he broke no laws and has been unfairly targeted by Democrats for political reasons.

Here is a look at where the tax records might be helpful, and where they might not help much, in the district attorney's investigation:

MORE THAN JUST RETURNS

Trump went to extraordinary lengths to keep his federal income tax returns from becoming public, but those aren't the only valuable documents included in this haul.

Trump's accounting firm, Mazars USA, is supposed to turn over not only the final versions of Trump's tax returns, but also draft versions of those returns and "any and all statements of financial condition, annual statements, periodic financial reports, and independent auditors' reports" held by the company.

That could give state prosecutors an "open book" into Trump's finances, said Adam D. Citron, a former state prosecutor and partner at Davidoff Hutcher & Citron. "It's really the kitchen sink."

Examining those other documents could be key to determining whether Trump or his companies gave tax authorities different information about his income than they presented to other officials, like banks and business partners.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 38 of 66

HUSH MONEY

When the district attorney's investigation first began, one of the initial subpoenas sent to the Trump Organization asked for information about payments Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, arranged to women who had claimed to have had extramarital sexual encounters with Trump.

Cohen has said Trump's company later reimbursed him for one of those payments, to the adult film actress Stormy Daniels, disguising it in the form of a legal fees.

It isn't clear, though, whether Trump's tax records will add much to that part of the probe. The New York Times, which obtained years of Trump's tax data, wrote that it contained "no new revelations" about the payment to Daniels and didn't include any itemized payments to Cohen.

TAX BREAKS

The district attorney's office has been investigating some of the arrangements Trump made to reduce his tax bill. Data in the returns could be essential in analyzing whether any of those maneuvers crossed legal lines.

One of the breaks under scrutiny is the one that Trump got for donating part of his Seven Springs estate, north of New York City, to a conservation trust. Some experts have questioned whether Trump overvalued the land to get a bigger break than he deserved.

Investigators have already subpoenaed and received many documents related to the land deal. Trump benefited from a similar conservation donation in California.

STATEMENTS TO LENDERS

Vance's office hasn't disclosed the full nature of its inquiry. But in court filings, prosecutors have pointed to news articles that questioned whether Trump had chronically exaggerated the value of his assets to banks and insurance companies. The Associated Press reported last month that Vance's office recently interviewed Cohen for hours, asking him, among other things, about Trump's relationship with Deutsche Bank, his biggest and longest standing creditor.

One Washington Post story cited by prosecutors detailed how various Trump Organization financial disclosures inflated the number of home lots for sale at a California golf course, the acreage at one of his vineyards and the number of stories in Trump Tower while excluding information about debts at his Chicago and Las Vegas hotel projects.

Tax records will only be one tool prosecutors will use to examine whether any of those statements amounted to fraud.

"They're going to look at valuations and property values," Citron said of state prosecutors. "They'll look at the billings of attorneys to see what their expenses were for."

Monday's ruling does not ensure the public will see Trump's financial records. For now, they are protected by grand jury secrecy rules. Even if charges are brought in the case, those documents likely would be heavily redacted if filed into the record.

"Even then, I'm sure there will be tons of litigation about that," Citron said.

Deb Haaland hearing is Indian Country's Obama moment

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — For Native Americans, Deb Haaland is more than an elected official on track to become the first Indigenous secretary of the Interior Department. She is a sister, an auntie and a fierce pueblo woman whose political stances have been molded by her upbringing.

News of her historic nomination electrified Indian Country. Tribal leaders and organizations for weeks have urged people to write and call U.S. senators who will decide if she'll lead the agency that has broad oversight over Native American affairs and energy development.

On Tuesday, Haaland's confirmation hearing will be closely watched in tribal communities across the U.S., with virtual parties amid a pandemic. A day before, a picture of the New Mexico congresswoman

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 39 of 66

was projected on the side of the Interior building with text that read "Our Ancestors' Dreams Come True."

Many Native Americans see Haaland as a reflection of themselves, someone who will elevate their voices and protect the environment and tribes' rights. Here are stories of her impact:

ALETA 'TWEETY' SUAZO, 66, LAGUNA AND ACOMA PUEBLOS IN NEW MEXICO

Suazo first met Haaland when they were campaigning for Barack Obama, walking door to door in New Mexico's pueblos.

When Haaland herself was chosen to represent New Mexico as one of the first two Native American women ever elected to Congress, she turned to Suazo and the state's Native American Democratic Caucus to make treats to hand out for a reception.

They made hundreds of pueblo pies, or pastelitos, and cookies, froze them and took them to Washington, D.C. Wearing traditional black dresses, they handed out the goodies with a thank-you note from Haaland.

Suazo said she admired Haaland because she is eloquent and smart, "no beating around the bush," and she is a member of Laguna Pueblo who has returned there to dance as a form of prayer.

When she heard Haaland was nominated as Interior secretary shortly after winning a second term in Congress, Suazo wasn't overjoyed.

"Oh my gosh, she is going to go there, and who is going to represent us?" said Suazo, who lives in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. "Who is going to represent New Mexico? There goes our one and only Indian representative."

She wanted to be assured that Haaland would be replaced by someone just as dynamic, who would work hard to protect the environment, address an epidemic of missing and slain Indigenous women and expand broadband, she said.

"I was happy, but I was afraid. I didn't want to lose her," Suazo said.

But she sees the significance and importance, she said, in having a Native American oversee an agency that touches nearly every aspect of Native American life. Suazo said she'll be watching, ready to yell at the screen if anyone questions Haaland's qualifications.

And to Haaland, she sends the message: Gume'h, or be a strong woman.

BRANDI LIBERTY, 41, IOWA TRIBE OF KANSAS AND NEBRASKA

When Liberty saw a picture of Haaland in a traditional ribbon skirt and moccasins for Joe Biden's inauguration, she cried.

She thought about her grandmother Ethil Simmonds Liberty, who didn't become a U.S. citizen until she was 9 despite being born in the U.S. on her tribe's reservation that straddles Kansas and Nebraska. Her grandmother was a powerful advocate for her people, petitioning to turn a pigpen into a playground, writing letters to U.S. presidents and leading the way to get a road paved to the reservation, she said.

Brandi Liberty thought about her own daughter, who she is hopeful will carry on her legacy in working with tribes and embracing their heritage.

She thought about her time in college earning a master's degree and seeing single mothers bring their children to class, each of them understanding that it wasn't a burden but a necessity. She later became a single mother like Haaland, who has often spoken about the experience, relying on food stamps and amassing debt working through college.

Liberty also thought about other tribal nations and what Haaland could do in terms of moving them in the right direction and connecting them to Washington, D.C. Essentially, Liberty's grandmother on a larger scale.

"This is no different than when Obama became the first Black president and what that signified," said Liberty, who lives in New Orleans. "This is a historical mark for Indian Country as a whole."

ZACHARIAH RIDES AT THE DOOR, 21, BLACKFEET TRIBE OF MONTANA

Rides At The Door is studying environmental sciences and sustainability, and fire science as a third-year

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 40 of 66

student at the University of Montana in Missoula.

He brings a perspective to his studies that Haaland has been touting as unique from Indian Country — that everything is alive and should be treated with respect and that people should be stewards of the land, rather than have dominion over it.

In high school, he learned about the mining industry and how it has impacted sites that are part of the Blackfeet creation story. He learned about the stances the American Indian Movement has taken to fight for equality and recognition of tribal sovereignty. He's also recently learned that the United States had a Native American vice president from 1929 to 1933, Charles Curtis.

Seeing Haaland's political rise is inspiring, he said.

"It's a great way for younger Natives to say, 'Alright, our foot is in the door. There's a chance we could get higher positions,'" he said.

He's not yet certain what he wants to do when he's done with college. But he knows he wants to learn the Blackfeet language, and maybe become a firefighter or work on projects that route buffalo to the Blackfeet Reservation.

He plans to catch at least part of Haaland's confirmation hearing from home, hopeful she's successful and can challenge Western ideology.

DEBBIE NEZ-MANUEL, 49, NAVAJO NATION IN ARIZONA, NEW MEXICO AND UTAH

During her recent campaign for an Arizona legislative seat, Nez-Manuel sought an endorsement from Haaland. She was looking for someone whose values aligned with hers: grounded in beliefs, connected to the land, a consistent and strong leader unchanged by politics.

After layers of vetting, she got the endorsement and planned to announce it at a get-out-the-vote rally at the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona, featuring Haaland. It also was a chance for the two women to take a picture together.

Then, the event was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic. Nez-Manuel was devastated.

Days before she was supposed to meet Haaland, Nez-Manuel was sitting at home when her phone rang. She didn't recognize the number but answered anyway.

"Hey Debbie, this is Deb," the voice on the phone said.

"Who?" Nez-Manuel asked.

The caller replied: "Deb Haaland. Good morning. I'm calling from New Mexico. I'm sitting in my kitchen."

Nez-Manuel's heart was racing, and she struggled to put all her thoughts she had so carefully scripted for that meeting into words. Haaland, she said, was patient and shared stories about life on and off a reservation — something that resonated with Nez-Manuel — and reaffirmed that Haaland hasn't forgotten her roots.

"It's like talking to an auntie," she said. "She's very matter of fact."

Nez-Manuel joked about getting a plane ticket to watch Haaland's confirmation hearing in person to get that elusive picture.

Instead, she and her husband, Royce, will be watching from home on the Salt-River Pima Maricopa Community northeast of Phoenix. They've encouraged their children's teachers to incorporate the hearing into lesson plans and tribes to help answer questions about the process.

Half a million dead in US, confirming virus's tragic reach

By ADAM GELLER Associated Press

For weeks after Cindy Pollock began planting tiny flags across her yard — one for each of the more than 1,800 Idahoans killed by COVID-19 — the toll was mostly a number. Until two women she had never met rang her doorbell in tears, seeking a place to mourn the husband and father they had just lost.

Then Pollock knew her tribute, however heartfelt, would never begin to convey the grief of a pandemic that has now claimed 500,000 lives in the U.S. and counting.

"I just wanted to hug them," she said. "Because that was all I could do."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 41 of 66

After a year that has darkened doorways across the U.S., the pandemic surpassed a milestone Monday that once seemed unimaginable, a stark confirmation of the virus's reach into all corners of the country and communities of every size and makeup.

"It's very hard for me to imagine an American who doesn't know someone who has died or have a family member who has died," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics at the University of Washington in Seattle. "We haven't really fully understood how bad it is, how devastating it is, for all of us."

Experts warn that about 90,000 more deaths are likely in the next few months, despite a massive campaign to vaccinate people. Meanwhile, the nation's trauma continues to accrue in a way unparalleled in recent American life, said Donna Schuurman of the Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families in Portland, Oregon.

At other moments of epic loss, like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Americans have pulled together to confront crisis and console survivors. But this time, the nation is deeply divided. Staggering numbers of families are dealing with death, serious illness and financial hardship. And many are left to cope in isolation, unable even to hold funerals.

"In a way, we're all grieving," said Schuurman, who has counseled the families of those killed in terrorist attacks, natural disasters and school shootings.

In recent weeks, virus deaths have fallen from more than 4,000 reported on some days in January to an average of fewer than 1,900 per day.

Still, at half a million, the toll recorded by Johns Hopkins University is already greater than the population of Miami or Kansas City, Missouri. It is roughly equal to the number of Americans killed in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined. It is akin to a 9/11 every day for nearly six months.

"The people we lost were extraordinary," President Joe Biden said Monday, urging Americans to remember the individual lives claimed by the virus, rather than be numbed by the enormity of the toll.

"Just like that," he said, "so many of them took their final breath alone in America."

The toll, accounting for 1 in 5 deaths reported worldwide, has far exceeded early projections, which assumed that federal and state governments would marshal a comprehensive and sustained response and individual Americans would heed warnings.

Instead, a push to reopen the economy last spring and the refusal by many to maintain social distancing and wear face masks fueled the spread.

The figures alone do not come close to capturing the heartbreak.

"I never once doubted that he was not going to make it. ... I so believed in him and my faith," said Nancy Espinoza, whose husband, Antonio, was hospitalized with COVID-19 last month.

The couple from Riverside County, California, had been together since high school. They pursued parallel nursing careers and started a family. Then, on Jan. 25, Nancy was called to Antonio's bedside just before his heart beat its last. He was 36 and left behind a 3-year-old son.

"Today it's us. And tomorrow it could be anybody," Nancy Espinoza said.

By late last fall, 54 percent of Americans reported knowing someone who had died of COVID-19 or had been hospitalized with it, according to a Pew Research Center poll. The grieving was even more widespread among Black Americans, Hispanics and other minorities.

Deaths have nearly doubled since then, with the scourge spreading far beyond the Northeast and North-west metropolitan areas slammed by the virus last spring and the Sun Belt cities hit hard last summer.

In some places, the seriousness of the threat was slow to sink in.

When a beloved professor at a community college in Petoskey, Michigan, died last spring, residents mourned, but many remained doubtful of the threat's severity, Mayor John Murphy said. That changed over the summer after a local family hosted a party in a barn. Of the 50 who attended, 33 became infected. Three died, he said.

"I think at a distance people felt 'This isn't going to get me,'" Murphy said. "But over time, the attitude has totally changed from 'Not me. Not our area. I'm not old enough,' to where it became the real deal."

For Anthony Hernandez, whose Emerson-Bartlett Memorial Chapel in Redlands, California, has been overwhelmed handling burial of COVID-19 victims, the most difficult conversations have been the ones

without answers, as he sought to comfort mothers, fathers and children who lost loved ones.

His chapel, which arranges 25 to 30 services in an ordinary month, handled 80 in January. He had to explain to some families that they would need to wait weeks for a burial.

"At one point, we had every gurney, every dressing table, every embalming table had somebody on it," he said.

In Boise, Idaho, Pollock started the memorial in her yard last fall to counter what she saw as widespread denial of the threat. When deaths spiked in December, she was planting 25 to 30 new flags at a time. But her frustration has been eased somewhat by those who slow or stop to pay respect or to mourn.

"I think that is part of what I was wanting, to get people talking," she said, "Not just like, 'Look at how many flags are in the yard today compared to last month,' but trying to help people who have lost loved ones talk to other people."

Associated Press video journalist Eugene Garcia contributed to this story.

EXPLAINER: Why a plane's engine exploded over Denver

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The investigation into an engine explosion on a jetliner taking off from Denver is focusing on a fan blade that appeared to be weakened by wear and tear, a development reminiscent of a fatal failure on board another plane in 2018.

These and other recent engine failures raise questions over long-held assumptions about how long fan blades last and whether they are being inspected often enough.

A Boeing 777 operated by United Airlines had to make an emergency landing in Denver after one of its engines blew apart, spewing huge chunks of wreckage that landed in neighborhoods and sports fields. Passengers captured video of the crippled engine, wobbling and still on fire, as pilots made a safe return to the airport minutes after the plane bound for Hawaii took off.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Investigators said late Monday that two fan blades in the Pratt & Whitney engine broke off and one of them showed signs of metal fatigue, or hairline cracks from the stress of wear and tear. They believe the weakened blade broke off first, then chipped off half of an adjacent blade.

Robert Sumwalt, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, said the agency's investigators will examine maintenance records for the engine and fan blades. He said fan blade pieces — including one found on a soccer field in a Denver suburb — will be examined Tuesday in a Pratt & Whitney laboratory.

Federal Aviation Administration head Stephen Dickson said inspectors quickly determined that inspections should be done more frequently for the type of hollow fan blades in certain Pratt & Whitney engines that are used on some Boeing 777s.

As a result, 69 planes and another 59 in storage were grounded in the U.S., Japan and South Korea, the only countries with planes using this particular engine. United, the only U.S. carrier with affected planes, said it grounded 24 Boeing 777s and 28 others will remain parked. Japanese regulators ordered Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways to ground 32 planes, and South Korea's Korean Air and Asiana Airlines said Monday they will ground their Boeing 777s.

WHAT ARE INVESTIGATORS LOOKING INTO?

Safety experts said the investigation will focus on why the fan blades snapped — whether mistakes were made in manufacturing or maintenance or if problems were missed during inspections — and whether blade inspections need to be done differently or more often. They will compare Saturday's incident with similar ones in December in Japan and in 2018 on another United flight to Hawaii.

Investigators will also look at why the cowling, which covers the front of the engine, broke off along with other parts. Photos showed a large gash in the fairing, a piece of composite material that makes planes more aerodynamic by smoothing out joints where the body meets the wings.

"That was a substantial hit," said John Goglia, a former member of the National Transportation Safety

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 43 of 66

Board, which is investigating Saturday's incident. "If that had hit the wing, things might have been different because the wing is full of fuel" and the broken engine was still on fire.

Sumwalt said, however, that "there was no structural damage" to the plane.

Another concern: The engine remained on fire even after pilots presumably shut off its fuel supply. That could indicate a fuel leak, said Todd Curtis, a former Boeing engineer and now a safety consultant.

HOW MUCH DANGER WERE PASSENGERS IN?

Safety experts were alarmed because debris blew off the disintegrating engine, creating shrapnel that can damage key systems like hydraulic lines or hit the passenger cabin.

The last accident-related death on a U.S. airline flight occurred in 2018, when a broken fan blade triggered an engine breakup on a Southwest Airlines Boeing 737. Part of the engine housing struck and broke a window. The passenger in the window seat was blown halfway outside and died of her injuries. That engine was made by a different company, CFM International, a joint venture of General Electric and France's Safran S.A.

On Saturday, none of the 231 passengers or 10 crew members were hurt.

HAVE THERE BEEN SIMILAR INCIDENTS?

Hours before the Denver flight, a Boeing 747 cargo plane in the Netherlands suffered an engine failure that resulted in engine parts falling to the ground. Although the plane has Pratt & Whitney engines, they are different from those on some Boeing 777s, and nothing yet shows any similarity to the problem on the United plane, said Janet Northcote, a spokeswoman for the European Aviation Safety Agency.

Other mishaps appear to be closely related to the Denver incident, however.

In December, a Japan Airlines Boeing 777 with the same series Pratt & Whitney engines suffered fan blade damage and lost a large panel but was able to land safely.

In 2018, another United Airlines Boeing 777 suffered an engine failure that caused parts of the housing to break off and fall into the Pacific Ocean as the plane flew from San Francisco to Honolulu. In a report last year on the incident, the NTSB said Pratt & Whitney missed signs of cracking in previous inspections of the fan blade that broke, and it faulted the company's training. The company told the NTSB it was fixing the shortcomings.

WILL THIS HURT BOEING?

Cai von Rumohr, an aviation analyst with Cowen, said events around Saturday's flight will be a bigger issue for Pratt & Whitney's parent company, Raytheon, than for Boeing. Still, he said, it's "probably not a major negative" for Raytheon because it affects a relatively small number of planes and the engines have been used for many years.

Other experts said Boeing could be in the spotlight too as investigators look into why the cowling separated from the engine. "That cowling is a Boeing design, it's not the engine manufacturer's design," said Jeff Guzzetti, former director of the FAA's accident investigation division.

Boeing's reputation has been battered since 2018 by two deadly crashes of another plane, the 737 Max.

David Koenig can be reached at twitter.com/airlinewriter

City probe faults overall police treatment of Elijah McClain

By PATTY NIEBERG and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — The results of an investigation into the fatal arrest of Elijah McClain in suburban Denver released Monday criticizes how police handled the entire incident, faulting officers for their quick, aggressive treatment of the 23-year-old Black man and the department for having a weak accountability system that failed to press for the truth about what happened.

The investigation commissioned by the city of Aurora found "two contrasting stories" of what happened to McClain in August 2019 after someone reported him as suspicious. One, based on officers' statements to investigators, where police describe a violent, relentless struggle. And another based on body camera footage in which McClain can be heard crying out in pain, apologizing, explaining himself, and pleading

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 44 of 66

with the officers as they restrained him, applied "pain compliance" techniques, and sat or kneeled on him.

"Forgive me ... you all are phenomenal, you are beautiful," McClain said at one point, the report said.

Police also put McClain in a neckhold that stops the flood of blood to the brain, rendering him temporarily unconscious, and paramedics injected him with 500 milligrams of ketamine as a sedative. He suffered cardiac arrest and later was taken off life support.

The report also suggests that District Attorney Dave Young's review of the case failed to assess the officer's conduct and "did not reflect the rigor" of a police investigation "that one would expect" when assessing whether a crime was committed.

Young's review of the case did not find sufficient evidence to press criminal charges in McClain's death.

The district attorney didn't consider Colorado's statutory requirement that officers must have "reasonable suspicion" of a previous or impending crime in order to stop someone, relying only on the fact that McClain was in a "high crime area" and that he was wearing a ski mask and a coat on a summer night, the report found.

"Neither the neighborhood nor the ski mask by themselves or together are sufficient to create reasonable suspicion without more," the report states.

His family said McClain wore the mask because he had a blood condition that caused him to get cold easily.

His death drew renewed attention last year amid the national reckoning over police brutality and racial injustice and prompted several investigations, including a probe into possible criminal charges by the Colorado Attorney General's Office that remains in progress.

In the Aurora investigation, the city asked outside investigators to look into the actions of police, firefighters and paramedics in McClain's arrest but not to duplicate the attorney general's criminal investigation. They were also asked to review policies and practices relevant to McClain's arrest, like the use of force and the use of ketamine. The city banned the use of ketamine as it awaited the results of the investigation.

The investigation found there was no attempt to examine McClain before paramedics administered ketamine. The report suggested policy should be changed so paramedics prioritize patient safety rather than act as an "arm" of the police department.

It also recommended the police department review how officers are trained to decide whether they have a legal reason to stop, frisk and arrest people, and urges the city to consider overhauling how it reviews incidents. It said department investigators who questioned the three officers who stopped and arrested McClain "failed to ask basic, critical questions" needed by any prosecutor to determine if their use of force was legally justified.

"Instead, the questions frequently appeared designed to elicit specific exonerating 'magic language' found in court rulings," it said.

Lawyers representing McClain's parents in a lawsuit against Aurora said the investigation's findings backed up their claims that he should never have been stopped, subjected to force and injected with ketamine.

"That's the thing about the truth — it's consistent," said lawyer Mari Newman, who represents McClain's father, LaWayne Mosley.

Lawyers for mother Sheneen McClain she was grateful the report "laid bare" the wrongdoing of city employees.

"Elijah committed no crime on the day of his death, but those who are responsible for Elijah's death certainly did," they said in a statement.

Following a presentation of the investigation's findings to city councilors, about a half dozen people who signed up to speak in the subsequent online council meeting Monday evening demanded justice for McClain. Most called for firing or prosecuting the three officers who stopped McClain along with the firefighter who approved the use of ketamine and the paramedic who administered it.

In January, Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser announced he opened a grand jury investigation into McClain's death as part of his investigation, saying it provided an "investigative tool" to compel testimony and require the production of documents. Weiser's office is also conducting a civil rights investigation into Aurora police, its first one under a police reform law passed after George Floyd's death in Minneapolis set off protests.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 45 of 66

Last year, the U.S. Department of Justice and FBI also announced they had been reviewing McClain's case for a potential federal civil rights investigation since 2019.

An autopsy could not determine how McClain died, which the local prosecutor said was a key reason he declined to charge any of the three police officers who arrested McClain. The lawsuit filed by McClain's family alleges he died as a result of a dramatic increase of lactic acid in his blood caused by excessive force used by police over about 18 minutes combined with the ketamine suppressing his respiratory system. They claim that police continued to "torture" McClain even after he was restrained, treatment they say is a result of the department's history of "unconstitutional racist brutality."

Biden mourns 500,000 dead, balancing nation's grief and hope

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

With sunset remarks and a national moment of silence, President Joe Biden on Monday confronted head-on the country's once-unimaginable loss — half a million Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic — as he tried to strike a balance between mourning and hope.

Addressing the "grim, heartbreaking milestone" directly and publicly, Biden stepped to a lectern in the White House Cross Hall, unhooked his face mask and delivered an emotion-filled eulogy for more than 500,000 Americans he said he felt he knew.

"We often hear people described as ordinary Americans. There's no such thing," he said Monday evening. "There's nothing ordinary about them. The people we lost were extraordinary."

"Just like that," he added, "so many of them took their last breath alone."

A president whose own life has been marked by family tragedy, Biden spoke in deeply personal terms, referencing his own losses as he tried to comfort the huge number of Americans whose lives have been forever changed by the pandemic.

"I know all too well. I know what it's like to not be there when it happens," said Biden, who has long addressed grief more powerfully than perhaps any other American public figure. "I know what it's like when you are there, holding their hands, as they look in your eye and they slip away. That black hole in your chest, you feel like you're being sucked into it."

The president, who lost his first wife and baby daughter in a car collision and later an adult son to brain cancer, leavened the grief with a message of hope.

"This nation will smile again. This nation will know sunny days again. This nation will know joy again. And as we do, we'll remember each person we've lost, the lives they lived, the loved ones they left behind."

He said, "We have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow. We have to resist viewing each life as a statistic or a blur or, on the news. We must do so to honor the dead. But, equally important, to care for the living."

The president ordered flags on federal property lowered to half staff for five days and then led the moment of communal mourning for those lost to a virus that often prevents people from gathering to remember their loved ones. Monday's bleak threshold of 500,000 deaths was playing out against contradictory crosscurrents: an encouraging drop in coronavirus cases and worries about the spread of more contagious variants.

Biden's management of the pandemic will surely define at least the first year of his presidency, and his response has showcased the inherent tension between preparing the nation for dark weeks ahead while also offering optimism about pushing out vaccines that could, eventually, bring this American tragedy to a close.

After he spoke, the president along with first lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff stood outside the White House for a moment of silence at sundown. Black bunting draped the doorway they walked through. Five hundred brilliantly lit candles — each standing for 1,000 people lost — illuminated the stairways on either side of them as the Marine Band played a mournful rendition of "Amazing Grace."

The milestone comes just over a year after the first confirmed U.S. fatality from the coronavirus. The pandemic has since swept across the world and the U.S., stressing the nation's health care system, rat-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 46 of 66

ting its economy and rewriting the rules of everyday society.

In one of his many symbolic breaks with his predecessor, Biden has not shied away from offering remembrances for the lives lost to the virus. His first stop after arriving in Washington on the eve of his inauguration was to attend a twilight ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool to mourn the dead.

That somber moment on the eve of Biden's inauguration — typically a celebratory time when America marks the democratic tradition of a peaceful transfer of power — was a measure of the enormity of loss for the nation.

The COVID-19 death total in the United States had just crossed 400,000 when Biden took the oath of office. An additional 100,000 have died in the past month.

Former President Donald Trump invariably looked to play down the total, initially claiming the virus would go away on its own and later locking into a prediction that America would suffer far fewer than 100,000 deaths. Once the total eclipsed that mark, Trump shifted gears again and said that scale of loss was actually a success story because it could have been much worse.

Outside of perfunctory tweets marking the milestones of 100,000 and 200,000 deaths, Trump oversaw no moment of national mourning, no memorial service. At the Republican National Convention, he made no mention of the suffering, leaving that to first lady Melania Trump.

And at campaign rallies across the nation, he erroneously predicted that the nation was "rounding the corner" on the virus while he disregarded safety measures such as masks and pushed governors to lift restrictions against public health advice. In audio tapes released last fall, it was revealed that Trump told journalist Bob Woodward in March that "I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down because I don't want to create a panic."

Biden, by contrast, has long drawn on his own personal tragedy as he comforts those who grieve. He has pledged to level with the American public on the severity of the crisis and has repeatedly warned that the nation was going through a "very dark winter," one now challenged by the arrival of more contagious virus variants.

Biden also has deliberately set expectations low — particularly on vaccinations and when the nation can return to normal — knowing he could land a political win by exceeding them. He is on track to far exceed his initial promise to deliver 100 million vaccinations in his first 100 days, with some public health experts now urging him to set a far more ambitious goal. The administration says it expects to have enough vaccine available for every American by the end of July.

Biden's reference to next Christmas for a possible return to normalcy raised eyebrows across a pandemic-weary nation and seemed less optimistic than projections made by others in his own administration, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has suggested a summer comeback.

Lemire reported from New York.

Interior nominee Haaland vows 'balance' on energy, climate

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Oil and natural gas will continue to play a major role in America for years to come, even as the Biden administration seeks to conserve public lands and address climate change, President Joe Biden's nominee to head the Interior Department pledges.

Deb Haaland, a New Mexico congresswoman named to lead the Interior Department, said she is committed to "strike the right balance" as the agency manages energy development and seeks to restore and protect the nation's sprawling federal lands.

Biden's agenda, including the possible creation of a Civilian Climate Corps, "demonstrates that America's public lands can and should be engines for clean energy production" and "has the potential to spur job creation," Haaland said in testimony prepared for her confirmation hearing Tuesday. Haaland's remarks are intended to rebut criticism from some Republicans who have complained that her opposition to drilling on federal lands will cost thousands of jobs and harm economies throughout the West.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 47 of 66

Haaland, 60, would be the first Native American to lead a Cabinet agency. The Laguna Pueblo member and two-term congresswoman often draws on her experience as a single mother and the teachings of her ancestors as a reminder that action the U.S. takes on climate change, the environment and sacred sites will affect generations to come.

Native Americans see Haaland's nomination as the best chance to move from consultation on tribal issues to consent and to put more land into the hands of tribal nations either outright or through stewardship agreements. The Interior Department has broad oversight of tribal affairs and energy development.

"The historic nature of my confirmation is not lost on me, but I will say that it is not about me," Haaland said in her prepared testimony. "Rather, I hope this nomination would be an inspiration for Americans — moving forward together as one nation and creating opportunities for all of us."

As the daughter of a Pueblo woman, Haaland says she learned early to value hard work. Her mother is a Navy veteran and worked for a quarter-century at the Bureau of Indian Education, an Interior Department agency. Her father was a Marine who served in Vietnam. He received the Silver Star and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

"As a military family, we moved every few years when I was a kid, but no matter where we lived, my dad taught me and my siblings to appreciate nature, whether on a mountain trail or walking along the beach," Haaland said.

The future congresswoman spent summers with her grandparents in Mesita, a Laguna Pueblo village. "It was in the cornfields with my grandfather where I learned the importance of water and protecting our resources and where I gained a deep respect for the Earth," she said.

Haaland pledged to lead the Interior Department with honor and integrity and said she will be "a fierce advocate for our public lands."

She promised to listen to and work with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle and ensure that the Interior Department's decisions are based on science. She also vowed to "honor the sovereignty of tribal nations and recognize their part in America's story."

She said she fully understands the role the Interior Department must play in Biden's "build back better" plan for infrastructure and clean energy and said she will seek to protect natural resources for future generations "so that we can continue to work, live, hunt, fish, and pray among them."

Haaland's nomination has stirred strong opposition from some Republicans who say her "radical ideas" don't fit in with a rural way of life, particularly in the West. They cite her support for the Green New Deal and Biden's recent moratorium on oil and gas drilling on federal lands — which doesn't apply to tribal lands — and her opposition to fracking and the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., said Haaland will have to convince him she's willing to break from what he called her "radical views" as a lawmaker, including opposition to the oil industry and to the lifting of federal protections for grizzly bears.

"Her record speaks for itself. She's a die-hard, far-left ideologue," Daines said in an interview.

Some Native American advocates called the description of Haaland as "radical" a loaded reference to her tribal status.

"That kind of language is sort of a dog whistle for certain folks that see somebody who is an Indigenous woman potentially being in a position of power," said Ta'jin Perez with the group Western Native Voice. "Folks to some degree are afraid of change."

Daines called the notion of racial overtones in his remarks outrageous.

He is a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which will consider Haaland's nomination at a hearing Tuesday. The panel's chair, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., has not said how he will vote on Haaland's nomination, which Democrats generally support. Manchin, a moderate, said he plans to oppose Biden's choice for budget director, Neera Tanden, a crucial defection that could sink her nomination in the evenly divided Senate.

National civil rights groups have joined forces with tribal leaders and environmental groups in supporting Haaland. A joint statement by the NAACP, UnidosUS and Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

praised her nomination as “historic” and called Haaland “a proven civil rights/racial justice advocate.”

A letter signed by nearly 500 national and regional organizations representing Native Americans, environmental justice groups and outdoor businesses called Haaland “a proven leader and the right person to lead the charge against the existential threats of our time: tackling the climate, biodiversity, extinction and COVID-19 crises and racial justice inequities on our federal public lands and waters.”

Associated Press writer Matthew Brown in Billings, Mont., contributed to this report.

NASA releases Mars landing video: ‘Stuff of our dreams’

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA on Monday released the first high-quality video of a spacecraft landing on Mars, a three-minute trailer showing the enormous orange and white parachute hurtling open and the red dust kicking up as rocket engines lowered the rover to the surface.

The footage was so good — and the images so breathtaking — that members of the rover team said they felt like they were riding along.

“It gives me goose bumps every time I see it, just amazing,” said Dave Gruel, head of the entry and descent camera team.

The Perseverance rover landed last Thursday near an ancient river delta in Jezero Crater to search for signs of ancient microscopic life. After spending the weekend binge-watching the descent and landing video, the team at Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, shared the video at a news conference.

“These videos and these images are the stuff of our dreams,” said Al Chen, who was in charge of the landing team.

Six off-the-shelf color cameras were devoted to entry, descent and landing, looking up and down from different perspectives. All but one camera worked. The lone microphone turned on for landing failed, but NASA got some snippets of sound after touchdown: the whirring of the rover’s systems and wind gusts.

Flight controllers were thrilled with the thousands of images beamed back — and also with the remarkably good condition of NASA’s biggest and most capable rover yet. It will spend the next two years exploring the dry river delta and drilling into rocks that may hold evidence of life 3 billion to 4 billion years ago. The core samples will be set aside for return to Earth in a decade.

NASA added 25 cameras to the \$3 billion mission — the most ever sent to Mars. The space agency’s previous rover, 2012’s Curiosity, managed only jerky, grainy stop-motion images, mostly of terrain. Curiosity is still working. So is NASA’s InSight lander, although it’s hampered by dusty solar panels.

They may have company in late spring, when China attempts to land its own rover, which went into orbit around Mars two weeks ago.

Deputy project manager Matt Wallace said he was inspired several years ago to film Perseverance’s harrowing descent when his young gymnast daughter wore a camera while performing a backflip.

Some of the spacecraft systems — like the sky crane used to lower the rover onto the Martian surface — could not be tested on Earth.

“So this is the first time we’ve had a chance as engineers to actually see what we designed,” Wallace told reporters.

Thomas Zurbuchen, NASA’s science mission chief, said the video and also the panoramic views following touchdown “are the closest you can get to landing on Mars without putting on a pressure suit.”

The images will help NASA prepare for astronaut flights to Mars in the decades ahead, according to the engineers.

There’s a more immediate benefit.

“I know it’s been a tough year for everybody,” said imaging scientist Justin Maki, “and we’re hoping that maybe these images will help brighten people’s days.”

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 49 of 66

Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

US tops 500,000 virus deaths, matching the toll of 3 wars

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

The COVID-19 death toll in the U.S. topped 500,000 Monday, a staggering number that all but matches the number of Americans killed in World War II, Korea and Vietnam combined.

President Joe Biden held a sunset moment of silence and a candle-lighting ceremony at the White House and ordered American flags lowered at federal buildings for the next five days.

"We have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow," Biden said. "We have to resist viewing each life as a statistic or a blur."

The half-million milestone, as recorded by Johns Hopkins University, comes as states redouble efforts to get the coronavirus vaccine into arms after last week's winter weather closed clinics, slowed vaccine deliveries and forced tens of thousands of people to miss their shots.

Despite the rollout of vaccines since mid-December, a closely watched model from the University of Washington projects more than 589,000 dead by June 1.

The U.S. toll is by far the highest reported in the world, accounting for 20 percent of the nearly 2.5 million coronavirus deaths globally, though the true numbers are thought to be significantly greater, in part because many cases were overlooked, especially early in the outbreak.

The first known deaths from the virus in the U.S. were in early February 2020. It took four months to reach the first 100,000 deaths. The toll hit 200,000 in September and 300,000 in December, then took just over a month to go from 300,000 to 400,000 and another month to climb from 400,000 to 500,000.

The U.S. recorded an estimated 405,000 deaths in World War II, 58,000 in the Vietnam War and 36,000 in the Korean War.

Average daily deaths and cases have plummeted in the past few weeks. Virus deaths have fallen from more than 4,000 reported on some days in January to an average of fewer than 1,900 per day.

But experts warn that dangerous variants could cause the trend to reverse itself. And some experts say not enough Americans have been inoculated yet for the vaccine to be making much of a difference.

Instead, the drop-off in deaths and cases has been attributed to the passing of the holidays; the cold and bleak days of midwinter, when many people stay home; and better adherence to mask rules and social distancing.

Dr. Ryan Stanton, an emergency room physician in Lexington, Kentucky, who has treated scores of COVID-19 patients, said he never thought the U.S. deaths would be so high.

"I was one of those early ones that thought this may be something that may hit us for a couple months ... I definitely thought we would be done with it before we got into the fall. And I definitely didn't see it heading off into 2021," Stanton said.

Kristy Sourk, an intensive-care nurse at Hutchinson Regional Medical Center in Hutchinson, Kansas, said she is encouraged by the declining caseload and progress in vaccinating people, but "I know we are so far from over."

People "are still dying, and families are still isolated from their loved ones who are unable to be with them so that is still pretty heart-wrenching," she said.

Snow, ice and weather-related power outages closed some vaccination sites and held up shipments across a large swath of the nation, including in the Deep South.

As a result, the seven-day rolling average of administered first doses fell by 20 percent between Feb. 14 and Feb. 21, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The White House said that about a third of the roughly 6 million vaccine doses delayed by bad weather were delivered over the weekend, with the rest expected to be delivered by mid-week, several days earlier than originally expected. White House coronavirus response coordinator Andy Slavitt on Monday attributed the improved timeline to an "all-out, round-the-clock" effort over the weekend that included employees at one vaccine distributor working night shifts to pack vaccines.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 50 of 66

In Louisiana, state health officials said some doses from last week's shipments were delivered over the weekend and were expected to continue arriving through Wednesday. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said last week's supply arrived Monday. And in Nashville, Tennessee, health officials were able to vaccinate more than 2,300 senior citizens and teachers over the weekend after days of treacherous weather.

Mary Pettersch, an 80-year-old Overland Park, Kansas, retiree who is spending the winter with her 83-year-old husband in Palmhurst, Texas, anticipated that the second dose they were supposed to get on Tuesday will be delayed because of last week's harsh weather.

She made multiple calls to health officials Monday, but they weren't returned. Still, she wasn't too worried. "Oh, I would like to get it, but if I can't get it here, I will get it back home," she said, noting that she is returning to Kansas in April. "At 80 you don't get frustrated anymore," she said.

Some hospitals, clinics, community sites and pharmacies that are in Louisiana's vaccination network will get double allocations of doses this week — just as Gov. John Bel Edwards starts offering shots to teachers, daycare workers, pregnant women and people age 55 to 64 with certain preexisting conditions.

New York City officials expected to catch up on vaccinations after being forced to delay scheduling tens of thousands of appointments last week, the mayor said Monday.

"That means we've basically lost a full week in our vaccination efforts," DeBlasio said.

More than 44 million Americans have received at least one dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, and about 1.6 million per day received either first or second dose over the past seven days, according to the CDC.

The nation's supply could expand significantly if health regulators approve a single-shot COVID-19 vaccine developed by drugmaker Johnson & Johnson.

The company said it will be able to provide 20 million U.S. doses by the end of March if it gets the green light, and would have capacity to provide 100 million vaccine doses to the U.S. by the end of June.

That supply will help government officials reach the goal of having enough injections to vaccinate most adult Americans later this year. On a global scale, the company aims to produce 1 billion doses this year.

J&J disclosed the figures in written testimony ahead of a congressional hearing on Tuesday looking at the country's vaccine supply. White House officials cautioned last week that initial supplies of J&J's vaccine would be limited.

U.S. health regulators are still reviewing the safety and effectiveness of the shot, and a decision to allow its emergency use is expected later this week.

The J&J vaccine would be the first in the U.S. that requires only a single shot. The vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna require two doses spaced several weeks apart.

Hollingsworth reported from Kansas City, Kansas. Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan. Associated Press writers Brian Hannon in Salt Lake City, Utah; John Antczak in Long Beach, California; Jonathan Mattise in Nashville, Tennessee; Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; Sophia Tareen in Chicago; Wayne Parry in Atlantic City, New Jersey; and Matthew Perrone and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

In Texas, attention turns to storm repairs, political peril

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The seam that split in a pipe under Nora Espinoza's sink during the frigid cold that gripped Texas was narrower than the edge of a dime.

Her kitchen appeared mostly undamaged, but the plumber that cut into Espinoza's wall found water had been pouring in underneath the floor. She expects the repairs to cost \$15,000.

Espinoza, a 56-year-old Dallas resident, is among those still getting a sense of the wreckage left by the icy blast that hit Texas and much of the Deep South last week, knocking out power to millions and contributing to nearly 80 deaths. Soaked drywall and carpet is being pulled back to give a fuller view of the destruction, and the political peril for elected leaders and energy officials who were unable to keep

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 51 of 66

the heat on in places unaccustomed to freezing cold.

Snow and ice melted across Texas over the weekend, but plumbers are still racing from home to home to patch uncounted stretches of burst pipe. Many residents are unsure when they'll be able to make permanent repairs, what they'll have to pay out of pocket or even when they'll be able to go home.

Roberto Valerio, a plumber in North Texas, said the broken pipes and other problems caused by the storm had led to "big chaos."

"We can't find what we need easily," he said. "There's a great shortage of supplies."

In the Houston area, officials on Monday announced they have set up a relief fund to help cover the cost of repairs and temporary housing for vulnerable families. Gov. Greg Abbott has indicated his fiercely independent state needs help. His office encouraged out-of-state plumbers to come fix Texas pipes.

For Espinoza, who said her home dropped to 38 degrees Fahrenheit (3.33 degrees Celsius) before the power was restored and the pipe burst Friday, it's far too little, far too late

"Your job is to protect us. That's why we voted you in," Espinoza said of Abbott as she fought tears while waiting for a plumber. "My pipes would have never burst, never, if I had power."

A rushing sound could be heard in Espinoza's kitchen Saturday night, when Valerio turned the water back on. He made temporary repairs, but it'll be weeks before he can come back to do more work and determine whether the floor needs to be replaced.

Espinoza fears the spread of mold may do more damage in that time and is unsure what her insurance will cover. But she is nonetheless grateful: She can take hot showers and her small dogs have emerged from the pile of blankets where they spent last week's days of frigid cold.

"I do consider myself to be very lucky," she said Monday.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has delivered more than 1 million meals to Texas, the Defense Department has delivered more than 4 million liters of water and it continues to deliver water in bulk to multiple locations in the state, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday. The federal government also delivered dozens of emergency generators and more than 120,000 blankets to Texans over the weekend. President Joe Biden hopes to visit Texas as early as this week, Psaki said.

Tens of thousands of people in Mississippi and Louisiana also still lacked water or had very low water pressure Monday, even with weather warming up days after a winter storm.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said about \$2.25 million has so far been raised to help pay for repairs and housing for Houston-area families who lack insurance or who don't qualify for federal assistance. That includes a \$1 million donation from the foundation of CenterPoint Energy, the utility that provides electricity for the Houston area, she said.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner asked area residents with the means to donate to the fund.

"Many families through no fault of their own have homes that are uninhabitable because their pipes froze during the arctic blast," said Turner.

Associated Press journalists Nomaan Merchant and Juan A. Lozano in Houston and Aamer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

Garland vows sharp focus on Capitol riot as attorney general

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, ERIC TUCKER and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Merrick Garland, President Joe Biden's attorney general nominee, vowed Monday to prioritize combating extremist violence with an initial focus on the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol as he sought to assure lawmakers that the Justice Department would remain politically independent on his watch.

A federal appeals court judge who was snubbed by Republicans for a seat on the Supreme Court in 2016, Garland is now among Biden's most widely supported nominees, putting him on track for a quick confirmation potentially within days. He will inherit a Justice Department that endured a tumultuous era under former president Donald Trump — rife with political drama and controversial decisions — and that faced abundant criticism from Democrats over what they saw as the politicizing of the nation's top law

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 52 of 66

enforcement agencies.

Garland sought repeatedly Monday to assure members of the Senate Judiciary Committee that he would stay above the fray of politics. He emphasized that he had never spoken to Biden about the federal tax investigation into his son, Hunter Biden, and pledged to resign as attorney general if needed to stand up to the White House — though he said he didn't expect that would be necessary "with this president."

"I have grown pretty immune to any kind of pressure, other than the pressure to do what I think is the right thing, given the facts and the law. That is what I intend to do as the attorney general," Garland said. "I don't care who pressures me in whatever direction."

The positive reception for Garland illustrated that senators are ready to move forward after his name became synonymous with a bitter, four year partisan battle over Supreme Court nominations during the Trump presidency. But while praising Garland for his record and his temperament, Republicans who denied Garland a seat on the high court made clear that they will not give him a free pass if he is confirmed as attorney general.

"I just want to say I like you, I respect you, and I think you are a good pick for this job," said Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the top Republican on the panel and the former chairman who refused to hold confirmation hearings for Garland in 2016. "But I have a lot of questions about how you are going to run the Department of Justice."

Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas said he intends to vote for Garland and called him a "fundamentally decent human being." Still, Cornyn said, "he's also made clear that he's going to advance the policies of the Biden administration. And I have a sneaking suspicion I'm not going to like some of those."

Garland faced sustained questioning from senators about his plans to handle specific investigations and politically sensitive cases, like the Hunter Biden investigation and the special counsel's inquiry started by former Attorney General William Barr into the origins of the Trump-Russia investigation. The latter investigation, led by U.S. Attorney John Durham, also remains open.

Under questioning from Grassley, Garland said he had not spoken to Durham yet but had no reason to second-guess Barr's decision to give him special counsel status. Still, while expressing support for transparency at the Justice Department's decision-making, Garland declined to commit to making public the results of the Durham investigation.

To date, Durham has interviewed officials from the FBI, Justice Department and the CIA regarding the early days of the Russia investigation, and has produced criminal charges against just one person — a former FBI lawyer who pleaded guilty to altering an email. Garland said "there were certainly serious problems" with applications for surveillance during the FBI's Russia investigation, and that he intended as attorney general to speak more deeply about the issue with the Justice Department's inspector general and with the FBI director.

"I am always concerned and have always been concerned that we be very careful about FISA," Garland said, using the acronym for the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

An experienced judge, Garland held senior positions at the Justice Department decades ago, including as a supervisor in the prosecution of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which led to the execution of Timothy McVeigh. But he is set to return to a department that is radically different from the one he left. His experience prosecuting domestic terrorism cases could prove exceptionally valuable as investigations into the Capitol insurrection progress.

Garland said his first briefing as attorney general would be focused on the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. He promised to provide prosecutors with whatever resources they need to bring charges over the attack.

"I will supervise the prosecution of white supremacists and others who stormed the Capitol on January 6 — a heinous attack that sought to disrupt a cornerstone of our democracy: the peaceful transfer of power to a newly elected government," Garland said in his opening statement.

Garland also emphasized his commitment to combating racial discrimination in policing — he said America doesn't "yet have equal justice" — as well as confronting the rise in extremist violence and domestic terror

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 53 of 66

threats. "Communities of color and other minorities still face discrimination in housing, education, employment, and the criminal justice system; and bear the brunt of the harm caused by pandemic, pollution, and climate change," Garland said.

With civil rights groups and activists pushing Biden, a death penalty foe, to take immediate action to halt federal executions after an unprecedented run of capital punishment during the Trump administration, Garland described his reservation about the death penalty and its impact.

He said he believes it is likely the Biden administration could issue a moratorium on the death penalty after 13 federal executions were carried out in the final six months of the Trump administration, the first federal executions in nearly 20 years. Garland said the death penalty gives him "great pause" and is concerned about what he sees as the "almost randomness or arbitrariness of its application" and the "disparate impact" the death penalty has on Black Americans.

At one point in the hearing, Garland held back tears as Sen. Cory Booker asked him about the hate and discrimination faced by his family.

"I come from a family where my grandparents fled antisemitism and persecution. The country took us in, and protected us, and I feel an obligation to the country to pay back, and this is the highest, best use of my own set of skills to pay back," Garland said. "So I very much want to be the kind of attorney general that you're saying I could become, and I'll do my best to become that kind of attorney general."

More than 150 former Justice Department officials have written to Congress supporting Garland's nomination, including former attorneys general Loretta Lynch, Michael Mukasey and Alberto Gonzales, along with 61 former federal judges. Other backers include two sons of former Attorney General Edward Levi.

"There have been few moments in history where the role of attorney general — and the occupant of that post — have mattered more," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the Senate Judiciary chairman.

Virginia lawmakers vote to abolish the death penalty

By DENISE LAVOIE and SARAH RANKIN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — State lawmakers gave final approval Monday to legislation that will end capital punishment in Virginia, a dramatic turnaround for a state that has executed more people in its long history than any other.

The legislation repealing the death penalty now heads to Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam, who has said he will sign it into law, making Virginia the 23rd state to stop executions.

"There's a realization that it is time to end this outdated practice that tends to bring more harm to victims' family members than providing us any comfort or solace," said Rachel Sutphin, whose father, Cpl. Eric Sutphin, was fatally shot in 2006 while working for the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office.

William Morva, the man convicted of killing Eric Sutphin, was executed in 2017. Two years later, Rachel Sutphin was one of 13 family members of murder victims who sent a letter to the General Assembly asking lawmakers to abolish the death penalty.

"By voting for abolition, we are showing the way, that if Virginia — the state with the longest history and the most people executed — if we can do it, so can other states," Rachel Sutphin said.

Virginia's new Democratic majority, in full control of the General Assembly for a second year, pushed the repeal effort, arguing that the death penalty has been applied disproportionately to people of color, the mentally ill and the indigent.

"It is vital that our criminal justice system operates fairly and punishes people equitably. We all know the death penalty doesn't do that. It is inequitable, ineffective, and inhumane," Northam, House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn and Senate Majority Leader Dick Saslaw said in a joint statement after the votes.

Republicans raised concerns about justice for victims and their family members, and said there are some crimes that are so heinous that the perpetrators deserve to be executed.

Only two men remain on Virginia's death row. Anthony Juniper was sentenced to death in the 2004 slayings of his ex-girlfriend, two of her children, and her brother. Thomas Porter was sentenced to die for the 2005 killing of a Norfolk police officer. The repeal legislation would convert their sentences to life in

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 54 of 66

prison without parole.

During a virtual House debate Monday, Republican Del. Rob Bell described those killings in gruesome detail, and said Porter and Juniper would be watching the vote from prison with special interest.

"We have five dead Virginians that this bill will make sure that their killers will not receive justice," Bell said.

Porter, Juniper and their families have declined to comment through their attorney, Rob Lee, executive director of the Virginia Capital Representation Resource Center.

"By eliminating the death penalty, governmental, political, and moral leaders have taken a long overdue action needed to make Virginia a fairer and more just Commonwealth," Lee said in a statement.

The passage of the legislation was just the latest in a long list of sweeping policy changes enacted by Democrats, who have increasingly reshaped the Old Dominion into an outlier in the South on racial, social and economic issues.

Last year, lawmakers passed some of the region's strictest gun laws, broadest LGBTQ protections, its highest minimum wage and some of its loosest abortion restrictions. This year too, lawmakers have been passing one progressive measure after another.

But the death penalty bill marks a particularly stark reversal in a state where executions proceeded in the past decade under both Republican and Democratic governors. The state legislature and state officials have also acted in recent years to preserve Virginia's ability to carry out executions and limit transparency around the process.

Even last year, death penalty abolition bills in the General Assembly went nowhere.

On Monday, both chambers approved separate but identical repeal bills. The Senate approved a House bill, advancing it to Northam on a 22-16 vote. Republican Sen. Jill Vogel joined with Democrats in the chamber in voting for passage. Later Monday, House Democrats and two GOP members, Del. Jeff Campbell and Del. Carrie Coyner, voted to approve the Senate version, 57-43.

No date has been set yet for when the governor will sign it, according to his spokeswoman.

Historically, Virginia has used the death penalty more than any other state, executing nearly 1,400 people since its days as a colony, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, Virginia, with 113 executions, is second only to Texas.

Michael Stone, executive director of Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, called the vote to abolish capital punishment a landmark moment in the state's history.

"We hope that Virginia will set an example for other states from the old Confederacy to take this bold step toward the humane reform of our legal justice system," Stone said.

Things to Know: US COVID-19 death toll tops 500,000

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Monday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 has topped 500,000. The virus has reached into all corners of the country and communities of every size. At the same time, many families are left to cope in isolation, unable even to hold funerals. Experts warn that over 90,000 more deaths are likely in the coming months, despite the vaccination campaign.

— President Joe Biden is targeting federal pandemic assistance to those firms with fewer than 20 employees, the nation's smallest businesses and ventures owned by women and people of color.

— A new study finds that teachers may be more important drivers of COVID-19 transmission in schools than students. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studied nine transmission clusters in elementary schools in the Atlanta suburb of Marietta, and in only one was a student clearly the first documented case. The CDC advises schools to cut down on teacher-to-teacher meetings, ensure that masks are worn correctly and increase physical distancing. Teacher vaccinations also might be desirable, the CDC says, although it adds they aren't required for schools to reopen.

THE NUMBERS: According to data through Feb. 21 from Johns Hopkins University, the seven-day roll-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 55 of 66

ing average for daily new cases in the U.S. fell over the past two weeks, from roughly 117,222 on Feb. 7 to 69,986 on Feb. 21. Over the same period, the seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths also fell from 2,813 on Feb. 7 to 1,872 on Feb. 21.

QUOTABLE: "It's very hard for me to imagine an American who doesn't know someone who has died or have a family member who has died," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics at the University of Washington in Seattle. "We haven't really fully understood how bad it is, how devastating it is, for all of us."

ICYMI: Health officials in Washington, D.C., hope religious leaders will serve as community influencers to overcome what officials say is a persistent vaccine reluctance in the Black community. Blacks make up a little under half of the district's population but constitute nearly three-fourths of the COVID-19 deaths. The city is offering vaccinations to any resident over 65 and giving priority status for vaccine registration to those in predominantly Black ZIP codes.

ON THE HORIZON: Rhode Island's largest health care organization started allowing patients to have visitors again, in line with state Department of Health guidelines announced last week, including maternity services to allow for a birthing partner only. All visitors must stick to designated visiting hours and be screened for symptoms or potential exposure.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic: <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Centrist Democrats flex muscles, create headaches for Biden

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A moderate Democratic senator from West Virginia is suddenly one of the most powerful people in Washington.

Sen. Joe Manchin has had multiple one-on-one phone calls with President Joe Biden. He can send the White House into a tailspin with a single five-minute interview or three-sentence statement. And he may have already derailed some of the administration's policy priorities and a Cabinet nominee.

And it's not just Manchin who's wielding outsize influence over Biden's agenda. With a 50-50 split in the Senate leaving little room for error on tough votes, other moderate Democrats like Sens. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Jon Tester of Montana also hold significant political clout in Biden's Washington, making for a muscular counterweight to the progressives who make up the party's base.

"Each and every one of these members has the ability to be the king- or queen-maker on Capitol Hill," said Jim Manley, a longtime aide to former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "If they stick together, and flex their muscles — especially given the tight margins in both the House and the Senate — they can have a real impact."

While Biden spent much of the 2020 Democratic primary and general election campaigns being hounded by progressives for not embracing far-left positions on everything from criminal justice to health care, his first month in office has won praise from some of his most prominent former antagonists on the left like Vermont Independent Sen. Bernie Sanders.

Now it's the moderates who are creating headaches for the Democratic president.

Late last week, Manchin all but tanked the Biden administration's nominee for Office of Management and Budget director, Neera Tanden, when he issued a brief statement opposing her nomination because of her controversial tweets attacking members of both parties. Tanden's prospects for approval immediately sank. Political observers are also waiting to see if Manchin will support Surgeon General nominee Vivek Murthy, whom he opposed in 2014.

A few weeks back, Manchin created a stir when he publicly criticized Vice President Kamala Harris for doing a TV interview with a local West Virginia station that was seen as an effort to pressure him to support the COVID-19 bill. He received a call from the White House shortly after his complaint to try to smooth things over.

Manchin is one of a handful of centrist Democrats who have expressed skepticism about Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 bill, threatening to derail the president's top priority if they don't win concessions. Man-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 56 of 66

chin, Sinema and Tester have all called for more targeted aid for Americans, and they, along with five other centrist Democrats and seven Republicans, all signed onto an amendment barring "upper-income taxpayers" from being eligible to receive stimulus checks.

"The challenge here is, I don't want to do too much, and I don't want to do too little," Tester said. "I want to make sure it's targeted and justified."

Manchin and Sinema also oppose Biden's proposal to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, likely ensuring that it's removed from the final COVID-19 bill even if the Senate parliamentarian rules it can be included. They've also both drawn the ire of progressives for their refusal to support eliminating the 60-vote threshold for approving most legislation, with one progressive group threatening to recruit primary challengers to oppose them.

Moderates are certain to influence the Biden administration's next big legislative push as well, a major infrastructure and jobs bill that will include climate planks. Manchin and others from rural states want to see money commitments for rural infrastructure and investments to offset any oil and gas industry job losses.

Neither Manchin nor Sinema are seen as particularly vulnerable to a primary challenge. The political realities of a red-leaning state like West Virginia, or a purple state like Arizona, are in fact what guide the senators' staunch centrism, says former Manchin chief of staff Chris Kofinis.

"Every one of these senators are still going to sit there and think, what do my constituents want? What do they need? And I think moderates in general tend to be much more sensitive to that because of the unique nature of politics in their states, which are by nature usually more divided," Kofinis said.

The White House shares those political concerns.

To defend and expand their majorities in the House and Senate in the 2022 midterm elections, Democrats will need to win over suburban moderate voters in tough, Republican-leaning House districts and in states like Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Ohio, where they hope to win statewide. Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Raphael Warnock of Georgia will also need to maintain support among moderate voters if they hope to win reelection in tough states.

Their significance to the final vote on the COVID-19 bill means some moderates are already getting extra attention from the White House.

Biden has spoken to Manchin multiple times, according to a Manchin aide, including at least once right after the president was sworn in. Sometimes Manchin reaches out to the president, while sometimes the president reaches out to him.

But moderates don't always get — and aren't always looking for — personal attention from the president.

Some of those who come from deep-red states, where being seen as too cozy with a Democratic president would be politically problematic, avoid saying whether they've spoken to Biden at all.

Some, like Sinema and Maine Sen. Angus King, an independent who caucuses with Democrats, say their staffs are in almost daily touch with the White House.

"I suspect they have Joe Manchin on speed dial," King joked. But he said the dynamic varies from member to member depending on where they stand on the COVID relief bill.

Tester said he's not yet at the point where he's looking for personal calls from the president because his staff members are the ones deeply involved in the details of the negotiations, and they're in frequent contact with their White House counterparts.

But he was aware of the power he wields to get the president on the phone if he needs to.

"I'm not going to ring his doorbell every time I have an urge to ring his doorbell," he said. "I'm going to use that ability to contact him when it's of highest value."

Supreme Court won't halt turnover of Trump's tax records

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a significant defeat for former President Donald Trump, the Supreme Court on Monday declined to step in to halt the turnover of his tax records to a New York state prosecutor.

The court's action is the apparent culmination of a lengthy legal battle that had already reached the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 57 of 66

high court once before.

Trump's tax records are not supposed to become public as part of prosecutors' criminal investigation, but the high court's action is a blow to Trump because he has long fought on so many fronts to keep his tax records shielded from view. The ongoing investigation that the records are part of could also become an issue for Trump in his life after the presidency.

In a statement, the Trump blasted prosecutors and said the "Supreme Court never should have let this 'fishing expedition' happen, but they did." The Republican claimed the investigation is politically motivated by Democrats in "a totally Democrat location, New York City and State." And he said he would "fight on" and that "We will win!"

The Supreme Court waited months to act in the case. The last of the written briefs in the case was filed Oct. 19. But a court that includes three Trump appointees waited through the election, Trump's challenge to his defeat and a month after Trump left office before issuing its order.

The court offered no explanation for the delay, and the legal issue before the justices did not involve whether Trump was due any special deference because he was president.

The court's order is a win for Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., who has been seeking Trump's tax records since 2019 as part of an investigation. Vance, a Democrat, had subpoenaed the records from the Mazars accounting firm that has long done work for Trump and his businesses. Mazars has said it would comply with the subpoena, but Trump sued to block the records' release.

Vance's office had said it would be free to enforce the subpoena and obtain the records in the event the Supreme Court declined to step in and halt the records' turnover, but it was unclear when that might happen. In a three-word statement Monday, Vance said only: "The work continues."

The court's action Monday wasn't the only defeat for Trump, the court also declined to get involved in a handful of cases related to the 2020 election.

The records Vance has been after are more than eight years of Trump's personal and corporate tax records. Vance has disclosed little about what prompted him to seek them. In one court filing last year, however, prosecutors said they were justified in demanding the records because of public reports of "possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization."

Part of the probe involves payments to two women — porn actress Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal — to keep them quiet during the 2016 presidential campaign about alleged extramarital affairs with Trump. Trump has denied the affairs.

In July, the justices in a 7-2 ruling rejected Trump's argument that the president is immune from investigation while he holds office or that a prosecutor must show a greater need than normal to obtain the tax records.

Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, whom Trump nominated to the high court, joined that decision. It was issued before Trump's third nominee, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, replaced the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the court.

As part of its July decision, the high court returned the Vance case and a similar case involving records sought by Congress to lower courts. And the court prevented the records from being turned over while the cases proceeded.

Since the high court's ruling, in the Vance case, Trump's attorneys made additional arguments that his tax records should not be turned over, but they lost again in federal court in New York and on appeal. It was those rulings that Trump had sought to put on hold.

Associated Press reporter Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Supreme Court won't halt turnover of Trump's tax records

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a significant defeat for former President Donald Trump, the Supreme Court on Monday declined to step in to halt the turnover of his tax records to a New York state prosecutor.

The court's action is the apparent culmination of a lengthy legal battle that had already reached the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 58 of 66

high court once before.

Trump's tax records are not supposed to become public as part of prosecutors' criminal investigation, but the high court's action is a blow to Trump because he has long fought on so many fronts to keep his tax records shielded from view. The ongoing investigation that the records are part of could also become an issue for Trump in his life after the presidency.

In a statement, the Trump blasted prosecutors and said the "Supreme Court never should have let this 'fishing expedition' happen, but they did." The Republican claimed the investigation is politically motivated by Democrats in "a totally Democrat location, New York City and State." And he said he would "fight on" and that "We will win!"

The Supreme Court waited months to act in the case. The last of the written briefs in the case was filed Oct. 19. But a court that includes three Trump appointees waited through the election, Trump's challenge to his defeat and a month after Trump left office before issuing its order.

The court offered no explanation for the delay, and the legal issue before the justices did not involve whether Trump was due any special deference because he was president.

The court's order is a win for Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., who has been seeking Trump's tax records since 2019 as part of an investigation. Vance, a Democrat, had subpoenaed the records from the Mazars accounting firm that has long done work for Trump and his businesses. Mazars has said it would comply with the subpoena, but Trump sued to block the records' release.

Vance's office had said it would be free to enforce the subpoena and obtain the records in the event the Supreme Court declined to step in and halt the records' turnover, but it was unclear when that might happen. In a three-word statement Monday, Vance said only: "The work continues."

The court's action Monday wasn't the only defeat for Trump, the court also declined to get involved in a handful of cases related to the 2020 election.

The records Vance has been after are more than eight years of Trump's personal and corporate tax records. Vance has disclosed little about what prompted him to seek them. In one court filing last year, however, prosecutors said they were justified in demanding the records because of public reports of "possibly extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization."

Part of the probe involves payments to two women — porn actress Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal — to keep them quiet during the 2016 presidential campaign about alleged extramarital affairs with Trump. Trump has denied the affairs.

In July, the justices in a 7-2 ruling rejected Trump's argument that the president is immune from investigation while he holds office or that a prosecutor must show a greater need than normal to obtain the tax records.

Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, whom Trump nominated to the high court, joined that decision. It was issued before Trump's third nominee, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, replaced the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the court.

As part of its July decision, the high court returned the Vance case and a similar case involving records sought by Congress to lower courts. And the court prevented the records from being turned over while the cases proceeded.

Since the high court's ruling, in the Vance case, Trump's attorneys made additional arguments that his tax records should not be turned over, but they lost again in federal court in New York and on appeal. It was those rulings that Trump had sought to put on hold.

Associated Press reporter Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

Europe-bound migrants found amid broken glass, toxic ash

By RENATA BRITO and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Something seemed wrong to the guard inspecting sealed bags of toxic ash in the port of Melilla, one of Spain's two small territories in North Africa. So he pulled a knife, cut the bag open and

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 59 of 66

found a motionless leg, confirming his suspicion that a person was inside.

He lifted and dropped the leg a few times, with no reaction. A few moments passed. Suddenly the leg pulled back, and a young man emerged from the ashes — frightened and disoriented, but alive.

The disturbing scene from a video released Monday by Spain's Civil Guard highlighted the great lengths and risks that migrants and asylum seekers take in their desperate attempts to reach Europe.

The survivor was among 41 people found hiding amid cargo in Melilla's port area on Friday, attempting to sneak aboard a ship that would take them across the Mediterranean Sea to mainland Spain.

Four of them were discovered buried in recycling containers beneath glass bottles, some broken with sharp edges.

Surrounded by Morocco, the tiny enclaves of Melilla and nearby Ceuta have been a target for many African migrants for years. But the two territories fall outside the Schengen area of free mobility across much of Europe, so many of them become trapped in their effort to reach European soil.

The port of Melilla, where trucks and containers begin a trip to Spain that can take up to seven hours, gives many a way to escape. Some try to enter the fenced area of the harbor by swimming there or by hiding underneath vehicles, jumping onto them when they slow down or stop at the gates of the port.

Others try to climb the perimeter fences and walls, sometimes falling and getting seriously injured.

With the help of search dogs and microphones to detect heartbeats, police often find people hiding amid the cargo, from containers to cement mixers. This year alone, the Civil Guard said it has identified 1,781 migrants trespassing in Melilla port's security perimeter; last year, the number was 11,700.

Still, discoveries like those last week are unsettling for the most experienced officers.

"We'll never get used to it," said Juan Antonio Martín, a spokesman with the Civil Guard in Melilla.

Because the border between Spain's North African territories and Morocco has been closed since the pandemic began in March, it is more difficult for migrants to slip in. According to Spain's Interior Ministry, nearly 1,500 people crossed illegally into Melilla last year, down from more than 5,800 in 2019.

But those who tried to leave Melilla last week were already in the enclave, Martín said. They were unable to take the passenger ferries or the flights to reach the mainland, either because they didn't have travel documents or because they entered Spain illegally in the first place.

Their nationality was not released, but the spokesperson said most were of Moroccan origin.

While Morocco's closure of the land border with Ceuta and Melilla came on the heels of years of stepping up border security, which had already led to a big drop in illegal crossings, Spain's Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean have emerged as the main landing point for people fleeing North and West Africa to Europe.

Last year, some 23,000 people reached the archipelago, most of them plucked from the waters by Spain's Maritime Rescue Service, and more than 500 died or disappeared in the attempt.

And there, too, rescuers sometimes faced the unthinkable. In December, Spain's El País newspaper reported how a 14-year-old from Nigeria spent two weeks clinging to an oil tanker's rudder before he was found by a patrol boat near the port of Las Palmas, Gran Canaria island.

—
Brito reported from Barcelona, Spain.

Grammy-winning duo Daft Punk break up after 28 years

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Grammy-winning electronic music pioneers Daft Punk have announced that they are breaking up after 28 years.

The helmet-wearing French duo shared the news Monday in an 8-minute video called "Epilogue." Kathryn Frazier, the band's longtime publicist, confirmed the break up for The Associated Press.

Daft Punk, comprised of Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo, have had major success over the years, winning six Grammy Awards and launching international hits with "One More Time," "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger" and "Get Lucky."

Bangalter and de Homem-Christo met at a Paris school in 1987. Prior to Daft Punk, they formed an indie

rock band named Darling.

They officially formed Daft Punk in 1993, and the helmeted, mute and mysterious musicians released their debut album, "Homework," in 1997. They first found success with the international hit "Da Funk," which topped the Billboard dance charts and earned them their first Grammy nomination. A second No. 1 hit and Grammy nomination followed with "Around the World."

Daft Punk spent time touring around the world and reached greater heights with their sophomore album, 2001's "Discovery." It included the infectious smash "One More Time" and "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger," which Kanye West famously flipped into his own hit "Stronger," released in 2007. It won West the best rap solo performance Grammy at the 2008 show, where West and Daft Punk performed together onstage.

A year later, a live version of "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger" won Daft Punk the best dance recording Grammy — their first win — and their "Alive 2007" album picked up best electronic/dance album.

But it was the 2014 Grammys where Daft Punk really took the spotlight, winning album of the year for "Random Access Memories" and making history as the first electronic act to win the highest honor at the Grammys. The duo won four awards that night, including record of the year for their bombshell hit "Get Lucky," featuring Pharrell Williams and Nile Rodgers.

"Random Access Memories" was regarded as a genre-bending album highlighted by its mix of live instrumentation, disco sounds, funk, rock, R&B and more. Rolling Stone ranked it No. 295 on their list of the "500 Greatest Albums of All Time" last year.

Norway museum: Munch wrote 'madman' sentence on 'The Scream'

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Norway's National Museum says a small, barely visible sentence written with a pencil on Edvard Munch's 1893 masterpiece "The Scream" was penned by the Norwegian painter himself.

The painting which shows a waif-like figure cradling its head in its hands with its mouth agape, has become a global icon for the expression of human anxiety. The sentence — "can only have been painted by a madman" — was scribbled in the top left-hand corner.

The painting is being prepared to be exhibited at the new National Museum of Norway that is due to open in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, in 2022. In this connection, the canvas has undergone research and conservation.

"The writing is without a doubt Munch's own," Mai Britt Guleng, curator at the National Museum, said in a statement Monday, adding it was compared to the painter's own scribbling in diaries and letters.

"The handwriting itself, as well as events that happened in 1895, when Munch showed the painting in Norway for the first time, all point in the same direction," Guleng said.

The writing on the canvas was added after Munch had completed the painting but for years it has been a mystery, the museum said in a statement. Speculation has ranged from it being an act of vandalism by an outraged viewer to something written by Munch himself.

Guleng said the inscription was likely made "in 1895, when Munch exhibited the painting for the first time."

The painting at the time caused public speculation about Munch's mental state. During a discussion night when the artist was present, a young medical student questioned Munch's mental health and claimed his work proved he was not sound.

"It is likely that Munch added the inscription in 1895, or shortly after, in response to the judgment on his work," the statement read.

Munch was profoundly hurt by the accusations, returning to the incident again and again in letters and diary entries. Both his father and sister suffered bouts of depression and Munch was finally hospitalized after a nervous breakdown in 1908, Guleng said.

The National Gallery was temporarily closed in 2019 to secure a safe moving process to the new National Museum, which is currently under construction in downtown Oslo. The museum will exhibit 400,000 objects ranging from antiquity to the present day and includes paintings, sculpture, drawings, textiles, furniture

and architectural models.

UK data: COVID-19 vaccines sharply cut hospitalizations

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Two U.K. studies released Monday showed that COVID-19 vaccination programs are contributing to a sharp drop in hospitalizations, boosting hopes that the shots will work as well in the real world as they have in carefully controlled studies.

Preliminary results from a study in Scotland found that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine reduced hospital admissions by up to 85% four weeks after the first dose, while the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot cut admissions by up to 94%. In England, preliminary data from a study of health care workers showed that the Pfizer vaccine reduced the risk of catching COVID-19 by 70% after one dose, a figure that rose to 85% after the second.

"This new evidence shows that the jab protects you, and protects those around you," U.K. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said. "It is important that we see as much evidence as possible on the vaccine's impact on protection and on transmission and we will continue to publish evidence as we gather it."

The studies were released as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson laid out plans Monday to ease a lockdown that has shuttered pubs, schools and nonessential shops since early January. The vaccine rollout is critical to returning the country to some sense of normalcy. More than 17.5 million have received one vaccine dose so far — more than a third of the U.K.'s adult population.

Britain has had Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 120,000 deaths.

Public Health England said its study of health-care workers suggest the vaccine may help prevent virus transmission "as you cannot spread the virus if you do not have infection." The findings are based on COVID-19 testing conducted every two weeks that detects infections whether or not someone shows symptoms.

Broader testing in the overall population showed that the Pfizer vaccine was 57% effective in preventing symptomatic illness in people over 80 three to four weeks after the first dose. That rose to more than 85% after the second dose. Overall, hospitalizations and death should be reduced by over 75% after one dose of the vaccine, Public Health England said.

The agency said it is still monitoring the impact of the AstraZeneca vaccine, but "early signals in the data suggest it is providing good levels of protection from the first dose."

U.K. regulators authorized widespread use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Dec. 30, almost a month after they approved the Pfizer vaccine.

The Scotland study was conducted by scientists at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Strathclyde and Public Health Scotland.

The preliminary findings were based on a comparison of people who had received one dose of vaccine and those who hadn't been inoculated yet. The data was gathered between Dec. 8 and Feb. 15, a period when 21% of Scotland's population received their first vaccine shot.

"These results are very encouraging and have given us great reasons to be optimistic for the future," said Professor Aziz Sheikh, director of the University of Edinburgh's Usher Institute. "We now have national evidence — across an entire country — that vaccination provides protection against COVID-19 hospitalizations."

About 650,000 people in Scotland received the Pfizer vaccine during the study period and 490,000 got the AstraZeneca shot, the Usher Institute said. Because hospitalization data was collected 28 days after inoculation, the data on hospital admissions came from a subset of 220,000 people who received the Pfizer vaccine and 45,000 who got the AstraZeneca shot.

Outside experts said while the findings in Scotland are encouraging, they should be interpreted with caution because of the nature of this kind of observational study. In particular, relatively few people were hospitalized after receiving the vaccines during the study period.

Stephen Evans, a professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, urged those making political decisions about the pandemic to be cautious.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 62 of 66

"It will be important that euphoria, especially from political sources that do not understand the uncertainty in the numerical values, does not cause premature decisions to be made," he said "Cautious optimism is justified."

Earlier this month, Israel reported encouraging results from people receiving the Pfizer vaccine. Six weeks after vaccinations began for people over age 60, there was a 41% drop in confirmed COVID-19 infections and a 31% decline in hospitalizations, according to the country's Ministry of Health.

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>

That 70s Show: Loss by loss, a unique era of baseball fades

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

The affection engulfs Clint Hurdle's voice as he appraises the list of those recently gone — childhood idols who became teammates and opponents, teammates and opponents who became acquaintances, acquaintances who became dear friends.

The 1970s memories surface fast for the man who has spent his entire adult life in baseball, as player and manager. Bob Watson, whom he first met while serving as a batboy for the Class-A Cocoa Astros. Claudell Washington: "We used to just laugh." Bob Gibson, as nice off the field as he was menacing on it. Lindy McDaniel's big windup. The distinctive way Joe Morgan pumped his elbow at bat: "I watched him as a kid. I used to try to re-create the chicken wing for hitting."

All are members of a list disquieting in its length — those from the ranks of 1970s baseball rosters who have died in the past year alone.

The list: Perhaps it's no longer than any other list of those who were dying at other moments in baseball's history. But against the past year's backdrop — of pandemic-inflected grief, of baseball withering and coming back smaller, of a truncated season and crowdless stands — it feels unremitting. Just part of it:

Watson.Washington.Gibson.McDaniel.Morgan.Al Kaline.Lou Brock.Don Sutton.Hank Aaron.Dick Allen.Jay Johnstone.Phil Niekro.Tom Seaver.Biff Pocoroba.Billy Conigliaro.Tommy Lasorda. And now, three weeks ago, from COVID-19 complications: Grant Jackson, who won the final Major League Baseball game of the decade as the 1979 Pittsburgh Pirates took the World Series.

Theirs were the names etched on the Topps cards. The names that crackled from plastic, fruit-colored transistor radios. The names that shouted from the pages of Baseball Digest and hometown newspapers at a moment in the game's history that can seem like yesterday but, propelled by the past year's losses, is starting its inexorable fade.

"Every one of these guys, there's a memory," says Hurdle, now 63. "We all learn lessons different ways. And the one I keep learning — it seems like every week now — is take nothing for granted."

"I like to say, 'Hey, I grew up in the greatest era of baseball,'" Gary Matthews, who played in the big leagues from 1972 to 1987, is saying one recent day. He is just back from the funeral of his friend, Henry Aaron, in Atlanta — one of the most towering baseball losses of the past year.

"When I was facing J.R. Richard in the Dome, or even Nolan Ryan, I was like, 'OK, don't let this guy hit you in the head.' I'm defeated already," Matthews says. "A good day against those guys was two strikeouts and two walks."

Pete Rose, one of the decade's most storied players, agrees. "You wanna know the truth? I faced 19 Hall of Fame pitchers in the 1970s and 1980s," he says. "I don't know if guys today are facing 19 Hall of Fame pitchers."

Rose tells of road trips in the early 1970s in which he'd face Sutton in Los Angeles, then go north to San Francisco to oppose Gaylord Perry and Juan Marichal, then swing back to St. Louis to confront Gibson and Steve Carlton.

Legends all — and part of a unique epoch. In the 1970s, baseball opened up and let its hair down.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 63 of 66

Color television's spread meant that when a game was aired, suddenly it felt more like being at the ballpark. Incandescent, stretchy uniforms followed, featuring hues fresh from psychedelic album covers and bubble-gum wrappers. Bright yellows. Solid blacks. Deep blues offset by vibrant reds. Shorts, in one fleeting case. In Houston, an entire spectrum of oranges festooned every player from chest to navel.

It was an era of the downright idiosyncratic — orange baseballs and orange-striped catcher's mitts and synthetic fields, Reggie! bars and stick-on Stargell stars and mustache upon carefully cultivated mustache (talkin' to you, Rollie Fingers and Sparky Lyle).

It was an era of substantive change, too. The designated hitter took root. The reserve clause ended, free agency began and the players' union found its voice, setting the table for the high salaries of today. The number of players of color grew as they finally stepped into a full-on spotlight, albeit one still pocked with ugly obstacles.

And though games unfolded in some of the most impersonal stadiums ever, baseball was still — perhaps for a final time — being played at human scale. Small ball remained the rule; home runs and strikeouts, though growing, weren't yet the entire point.

"If you stuck a DVD in of a game from the 1970s, I think a 15-year-old would be very surprised," says Cait Murphy, who chronicled one early 20th-century season in "Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History."

The players of the 1970s, too, felt more accessible, less members of another breed. They'd come home and manage a supermarket or open a beer distributor or sell insurance. Pocaroba owned a business called Sausage World. For many, this second career wasn't a choice; baseball's pay then created a standard of living very different from today's.

"The younger people who are into this era, they kind of marvel at how MLB players from the 70s, they look like they could have been your math teacher or the guy working down at the auto-parts shop," says Dan Epstein, author of "Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s."

"They weren't these perfect physical specimens," he says. "These were guys you might see playing softball in the park somewhere."

There's a contradiction there, though. At the same time 1970s players felt more accessible, they felt less so, too. There was no MLB.tv offering every game live, with permanent HD playback. You couldn't see your favorite DH's late-night Taco Bell run or watch a rival catcher dance on Instagram. Players didn't get into real-time back-and-forths with fans — for better and worse — on Twitter.

The 1970s were, arguably, the final decade in which the illusion of baseball so carefully crafted by its forefathers could thrive largely unchallenged.

"Sure, now you can get tweets directly from the players, but it all seems to be in a very slick context. It doesn't have that same intimacy of a shoddy broadcast or an off-center card. And I think that was the key. That was part of how we got close to the game," says Josh Wilker, whose book "Cardboard Gods" examines the lives of 1970s players and his own childhood through the lens of the era's baseball cards.

"If someone had said, you can watch every game and see what Carl Yastrzemski thinks about his breakfast, I would have thought it was cool," Wilker says. "But it wouldn't have been the same experience."

The 2020s will mark the 50th anniversary of so many milestones in 1970s baseball. The inevitable retrospectives will reveal a decade still near enough to seem recent, but different enough to feel utterly alien. And the distance grows each time a voice from that decade — a great arm, a formidable bat, a distinctive personality — goes silent.

There will be no Hank Aaron around to comment on the anniversary of his 715th home run in 2024. In 2027, Lou Brock will not be there to talk about the day he broke Ty Cobb's stolen-base record. No new words from Joe Morgan will illuminate remembrances of the Big Red Machine's domination of the National League in the mid-1970s.

All the weirdness, the lurching forward, that seemed so fresh and so unmoored when it burst forth is

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 64 of 66

now carried in the memories of older men. And as the past year has shown, the clock is ticking.

"These guys who have been dying, they felt like friends," Epstein says. "Even if I didn't know these people, I was glad they were out there in the world and I wanted to know what they were up to even after they played. Just thinking about them made me smile."

Inevitably, the list will grow. And as time moves forward, the 1980s will lose their heroes, too. And the 1990s after that. So it goes — all quite natural, really. But far too unsettling for our current moment, already one of modern American life's bumpiest periods.

"It's kind of like I lost all of my baseball cards again," says Clint Hurdle, whose rookie year was 1977.

"I was one of those kids who collected every card. And somehow all my cards got lost," he says. "Well, I was fortunate enough to live and love and play against and meet those people and have dinner and lunch and have a conversation with or get hit by a pitch from or get struck out by them. It was an accumulation of hopes and dreams put into real time, and now they're being taken away again."

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

National Spelling Bee to return in mostly virtual format

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

The Scripps National Spelling Bee will return this year in a mostly virtual format, with the in-person competition limited to a dozen finalists who will gather on an ESPN campus at Walt Disney World in Florida, Scripps announced Monday.

Last year's bee was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic, the first time since World War II it had been called off. Organizers said they did not believe a large gathering at the bee's longtime venue — a convention center outside Washington — would be possible this year for the competition's usual date around Memorial Day.

Instead of compressing the entire competition into a week — spellers routinely refer to Bee Week as a highlight of their young lives — the bee will be stretched over several weeks. The preliminary rounds will be held in mid-June, the semifinals on June 27 and the ESPN-televised finals on July 8.

"We gave up on the idea of Bee Week early on because we knew we couldn't bring hundreds of people to one location safely," Carolyn Micheli, the bee's interim executive director, told The Associated Press ahead of the announcement.

"We came up with what I think is a pretty exciting and creative way of structuring the competition across several weeks that will be fun for the kids, build excitement, and I think it's a great way to cope with a difficult situation," she added.

The cancellation of last year's bee was a particularly cruel blow to eighth-graders who missed out on their final chance to compete after years of preparation. Top spellers routinely study obscure words, roots and language patterns for hours a day, sacrificing other activities and social life for a chance to become the national champion. Spellers are no longer eligible after they reach high school.

"A lot of spellers, including me, were really heartbroken when we couldn't get the chance to actually go to Scripps and experience that entire week, that amazing experience again," said Harini Logan, a 12-year-old seventh-grader from San Antonio who hopes to contend this year.

Several online bees were held last summer by other organizations to give opportunities to those eighth-graders, but none of those events held the prestige of the ESPN-televised Scripps competition, with its \$50,000 top prize, national media exposure and nearly 100 years of history.

"I have never really stopped or slowed down," Harini said of her bee preparation. "I have tried to keep my pace of work and study as consistent as I can keep it throughout these uncertain times."

Scripps surveyed spellers and their families about what they'd like to see in the 2021 bee, and the overwhelming majority said they just wanted assurances that the competition would be held in some form,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 65 of 66

said Corrie Loeffler, the bee's editorial director.

The bee will be limited to about 200 spellers — a 64% reduction from the 2019 event, which had 562 participants, and about half the number that had been planned for 2020. A wild-card program introduced in 2018 as an opportunity to bring in more spellers from highly competitive regions has been discontinued, meaning most spellers will have to use the traditional qualification route of winning regional bees.

Spellers who live in areas that lack sponsored regional bees can compete and earn a spot at nationals through online qualifying bees organized by Cincinnati-based Scripps.

Another change: There will be no written spelling and vocabulary test to narrow the field to 50 or so semifinalists. Virtual format notwithstanding, the bee will return to its roots as a purely oral spelling competition. That means Scripps will have to use more challenging words in the early rounds.

In the 2019 bee, the words used in the final rounds became a major issue. Scripps had to use the most difficult words on its list just to identify a group of prime-time finalists, and the bee ended in an eight-way tie because organizers didn't want the competition to be decided by physical endurance as it dragged late into the night. That result drew criticism from those who said Scripps relies too heavily on words that entertain the TV audience but don't present meaningful challenges to the spellers.

Follow Ben Nuckols at <https://twitter.com/APBenNuckols>

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 23, the 54th day of 2021. There are 311 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 23, 1836, the siege of the Alamo began in San Antonio, Texas.

On this date:

In 1861, President-elect Abraham Lincoln arrived secretly in Washington to take office, following word of a possible assassination plot in Baltimore.

In 1870, Mississippi was readmitted to the Union.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an agreement with Cuba to lease the area around Guantanamo Bay to the United States.

In 1942, the first shelling of the U.S. mainland during World War II occurred as a Japanese submarine fired on an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California, causing little damage.

In 1945, during World War II, U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima captured Mount Suribachi, where they raised two American flags (the second flag-raising was captured in the iconic Associated Press photograph.)

In 1954, the first mass inoculation of schoolchildren against polio using the Salk vaccine began in Pittsburgh as some 5,000 students were vaccinated.

In 1965, film comedian Stan Laurel, 74, died in Santa Monica, California.

In 1981, an attempted coup began in Spain as 200 members of the Civil Guard invaded Parliament, taking lawmakers hostage. (However, the attempt collapsed 18 hours later.)

In 1995, the Dow Jones industrial average closed above the 4,000 mark for the first time, ending the day at 4,003.33.

In 1998, 42 people were killed, some 2,600 homes and businesses damaged or destroyed, by tornadoes in central Florida.

In 2007, a Mississippi grand jury refused to bring any new charges in the 1955 slaying of Emmett Till, the Black teenager who was beaten and shot after being accused of whistling at a white woman, declining to indict the woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, for manslaughter.

In 2006, Japan's Shizuka Arakawa (shih-ZOO'-kuh ah-rah-KAH'-wah) stunned favorites Sasha Cohen of the United States and Irina Slutskaya (sloot-SKY'-yah) of Russia to claim the ladies' figure skating gold medal at the Turin Winter Olympics.

Ten years ago: In a major policy reversal, the Obama administration said it would no longer defend the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 233 ~ 66 of 66

constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act, a federal law banning recognition of same-sex marriage.

Five years ago: Donald Trump won the Nevada Republican caucuses; Marco Rubio finished second while Ted Cruz placed third. A 26-year-old gunman killed four family members and torched their house in Phoenix before being shot dead by authorities.

One year ago: Chinese President Xi Jinping defended the Communist Party's response to the coronavirus as "timely and effective," but warned that the epidemic was still "grim and complex." Japan reported the third fatality from among those who'd been aboard a quarantined cruise ship. Iran raised its death toll to eight, the highest toll outside China; Italy reported 152 cases, the largest number outside of Asia, including three deaths. Italian authorities said they would shut down Venice's famed Carnival events in a bid to stop the spread of the virus.

Today's Birthdays: Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Fred Biletnikoff is 78. Author John Sandford is 77. Country-rock musician Rusty Young is 75. Actor Patricia Richardson is 70. Former NFL player Ed "Too Tall" Jones is 70. Rock musician Brad Whitford (Aerosmith) is 69. Singer Howard Jones is 66. Rock musician Michael Wilton (Queensryche) is 59. Country singer Dusty Drake is 57. Actor Kristin Davis is 56. Former tennis player Helena Sukova is 56. Actor Marc Price is 53. TV personality/businessman Daymond John (TV: "Shark Tank") is 52. Actor Niecy Nash is 51. Rock musician Jeff Beres (Sister Hazel) is 50. Country singer Steve Holy is 49. Rock musician Lasse (loss) Johansson (The Cardigans) is 48. Film and theater composer Robert Lopez is 46. Actor Kelly Macdonald is 45. Rapper Residente (Calle 13) is 43. Actor Josh Gad is 40. Actor Emily Blunt is 38. Actor Aziz Ansari is 38. Actor Tye White (TV: "Greenleaf") is 35. Actor Dakota Fanning is 27.