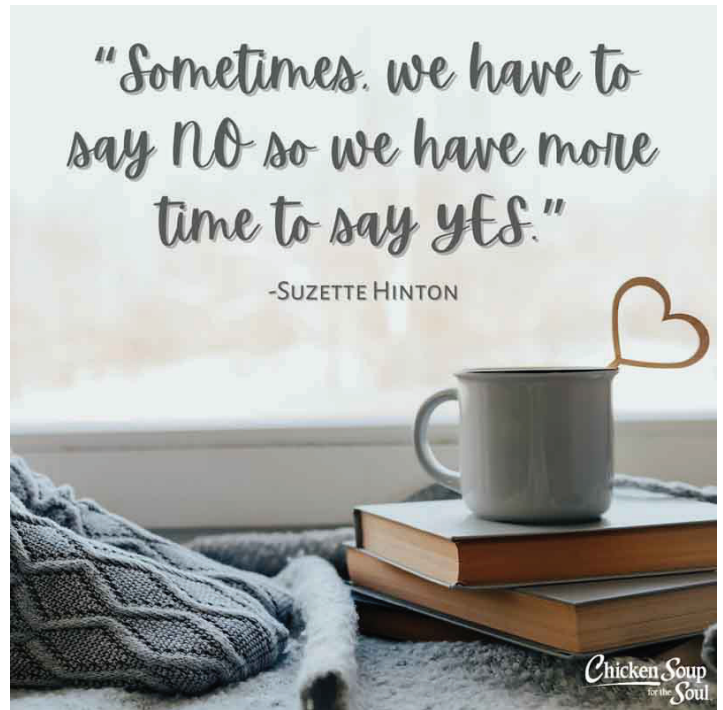


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Upcoming Schedule

Thursday, Feb. 25: GBB Region

Thursday-Saturday: State Wrestling Tournament in Rapid City.

Friday, Feb. 26

Boys Basketball hosts Aberdeen Christian. JV (Gordon & Dorene Nelson) at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity.

Tuesday, March 2: BBB Region

Thursday, March 4: GBB SoDAK 16

Friday, March 5: BBB Region

Tuesday, March 9: BBB SoDAK 16

March 11-13: State Girls Basketball Tournament in Watertown

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



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton Area February Students of the Month



Isaac Smith
Senior



Madisen Bjerke
Junior



Shaylee Peterson
Sophomore



Emily Clark
Freshman



Emma Kutter
Eighth Grade



Talli Wright
Seventh Grade



Carlee Johnson
Sixth Grade

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

Governor Noem Signs Born-Alive Legislation

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed [House Bill 1051](#), which requires medical professionals to offer any baby born alive the same medical care they would offer for any other child – regardless of the circumstances of the child’s birth.

“The pro-life cause continues even after a child is born, and this bill will guarantee the right to life for every baby that is born alive,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “We expect doctors to treat all children equally, even those born in horrific circumstances. That’s basic human decency.”

The law requires medical professionals to provide the same means, medical skills, and treatment to every child born alive immediately following an attempted abortion as they would any other child. Further, the law allows a mother to sue any doctor or abortion facility that violates the law, imposes financial penalties on those who violate the law, and requires certain reporting to the Department of Health for any births that arise following a failed abortion. This law, like many South Dakota laws that protect the right to life, ensures that the most vulnerable members of our society are fully protected by law.



2021 Groton Area Elementary Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning 5 on or before September 1, 2021

Friday, March 12, 2021

If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten at Groton Area Elementary school, please **DISREGARD** this notice. Your teacher will be sending information if necessary.

Packets are being sent home this week with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for KG and JK this coming 2021-2022 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet by the end of this week.



#367 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today looks like yesterday. There were 71,800 new cases reported today. That brings us to 28,348,100 total cases in the pandemic, 0.3% more than yesterday's total. Hospitalizations are still declining at 55,058. And we have now lost 504,662 lives to this virus, which is 0.5% more than yesterday. There were 2321 new deaths reported today.

The CDC's new ensemble forecast for deaths is out, and while we've already lost far too many lives to this disease, there is good news here. Each new projection goes a week past where the previous one ends, and that means every week, the projected number is higher than the last projection. Until today. Last week's ensemble forecast projected up to 559,000 deaths by March 13. This week's ensemble forecast projects up to 548,000 deaths by March 20. Do you see what happened here? The projection was adjusted downward, even though it covers an additional week. That means the dying's expected to slow down. Finally.

It's going to get really important really soon that we're driving transmission down and that we continue to do so. At a briefing at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center at the University of Washington yesterday, Dr. Trevor Bedford, professor of epidemiology and genomic sciences at the University, explained we're likely to see a surge fueled by B.1.1.7 in a few weeks. "It could result in more of a wave in, say, April or May than we would have expected otherwise." This cloud has a silver lining if we can hold things together until then: "But I still do suspect that things will be brought under control in the summer and there will be very little virus circulating."

Even so, Dr. Josh Schiffer, infectious diseases specialist at Hutchinson, said these new variants make it "difficult to prevent a fourth wave altogether." It's up to us to see that this wave is as small as possible, and we can. Faster and more widespread vaccination will be critical, and if you were hesitating about a vaccine, this would be a good time to gather as much information as you can to make a decision. Then, if we can just get the baseline transmission rate low, low, low before the expected surge, then we can limit the damage this time. Be nice to win one of these surges, wouldn't it? We all know what we need to do, just have to summon the will to do it a while longer. Are you in there to try?

The FDA experts have finished their analysis of the phase 3 clinical trial data submitted by Janssen/Johnson & Johnson, and as expected, it looks good. Importantly, this data set is not directly comparable to the those generated in the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna trials because this candidate was tested against several new variants which were not much—or any—issue during the earlier trials. It was tested in the US, but also in Brazil where B.1.1.28.1 arose and in South Africa where B.1.351 arose; B.1.351 is the variant against which we've been seeing reduced immunological effectiveness. This is a one-dose adenovirus-vectored DNA vaccine which ships and stores under standard refrigeration temperatures—no fancy-pants ultra-low temperature freezers needed here.

In an over-40,000-participant trial, this candidate showed just over 66 percent efficacy overall in preventing moderate to severe disease; the vaccine had 86 percent efficacy against severe disease in the US and 82 percent in South Africa where that difficult variant constituted nearly 95 percent of cases seen in the trial. That is a critical factor since the two currently-authorized vaccines didn't have that variant to contend with in their trials. Most important, the candidate "demonstrated complete protection against COVID-related hospitalization and death, 28 days post-vaccination." That means no one needed to be hospitalized and no one died in any arm of the trial, including South Africa and Brazil where these worrisome variants were so prevalent. The immune response elicited by this candidate was sufficient to produce these outcomes. Those are the big-deal stats for me.

As for safety, the analysis said, "There were no specific safety concerns identified in subgroup analyses by age, race, ethnicity, medical comorbidities, or prior SARS-CoV-2 infection," and that the analysis "supported a favorable safety profile with no specific safety concerns identified that would preclude issuance of an EUA." The most common side effects were pain at the injection site, headache, fatigue, and muscle pain. I haven't seen the actual data, but it appears by what I glean from company announcements that

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this candidate may be somewhat better tolerated than the two vaccines currently in use. No cases of anaphylaxis—that very serious allergic reaction—were reported in the trial; but I'll remind us all that none were seen in the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna trials either. Sometimes it takes a few hundred-thousand or million doses before rare side effects show up. The good news is that, with the benefit of experience, all of the vaccination sites keep treatments for anaphylaxis and people qualified to administer them available at all times.

We also have some sort-of preliminary data from a smaller group of participants on that nagging question of whether vaccines prevent asymptomatic infections which can lead to transmission. These show "modest" protection against asymptomatic infection on days one through 29, but 74 percent protection after that. We need to keep in mind that the numbers were small, so as the analysis says, "definitive conclusions cannot be drawn at this time." I will also note that the viral load was not quantified, so we don't know whether, perhaps, the viral numbers were very small even in the 26 percent who showed evidence of asymptomatic infection. That would be important information, especially as the evidence slowly accumulates to support leaning in the direction that vaccines might, indeed, reduce or prevent transmission. That would really be the holy grail. Time will tell.

We just did this in December, but to refresh your memory, now that the FDA analysis is complete, the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee will meet at its already-scheduled time on Friday for public discussion of these data. Before the end of the day, that Committee will vote on its formal recommendation to the Agency, which issues the actual emergency use authorization (EUA). No one expects a recommendation against authorization: Dr. Jeffrey Carson, the lead investigator for one arm of this trial, told CNN today, "I would be very surprised if they don't approve this. The safety parameters look really good and the overall efficacy is over their criteria (sic) of 50% without a lot of serious side effects." I tend to agree.

It is quite rare for the FDA to act contrary to that Advisory Committee recommendation. Once this is complete, then the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet to discuss and vote. This group has an emergency meeting scheduled for Sunday and Monday to formulate official federal recommendations for the use of the vaccine. Once again, it would be most unusual for the CDC director to act contrary to the Advisory Committee's recommendation. If the director accepts the recommendation, vaccine can ship. As I understand it, only about three to four million doses will go out pretty immediately with a total of 20 million coming by the end of March and 100 million by the end of July. Jeff Zeints, White House Covid-19 response coordinator, said today in a briefing that they've been working with Johnson & Johnson to help out with equipment and raw materials acquisition in the interest of resolving some production difficulties the company was having, indicating, "I think they're in a better place now." I hope so; it does seem highly likely our vaccine supply is about to get better fast.

We should keep in mind that EUA is not licensure, or full approval, of a vaccine. That comes only later after more data on efficacy and safety are available. What we've been seeing right along is that the companies have been feeding additional data to the FDA as they become available, and even this early, we've seen some modifications in the EUAs. For example, Pfizer/BioNTech was approved to label its vials as containing six doses after the original EUA specified five doses per vial, and then Moderna more recently received a modification to its EUA to permit packaging up to 14 doses in a vial after receiving initial authorization for just 10.

Speaking of which, it appears the FDA is prepared to approve Pfizer/BioNTech's latest request for a modification to their EUA to permit storing their vaccine at standard freezer temperatures instead of requiring ultra-low-temperature freezing. This would mean it could be stored in regular pharmacy freezers and would no longer require the specialized shipping containers designed to keep the vaccine at -80 to -60 Celsius (-112 to -76 Fahrenheit). This simplifies the logistics of shipping and distribution significantly.

And in further vaccine news, Moderna announced today they have a booster designed against B.1.351 (South African variant). We've talked before about the agility of the mRNA vaccine platform and how quickly a vaccine can be formulated on the platform. You may recall the initial Moderna vaccine was designed over a weekend last January; speed is one of the great advantages of this particular approach. The company

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has already shipped initial doses of the modified vaccine to the NIH for a clinical study to evaluate it as a booster for those who have already been vaccinated and as a primary vaccine for those who have not yet been infected or vaccinated. That evaluation will take some time; but the FDA has indicated a willingness to be nimble in responding to requests for modifications like this one, so the regulatory process will likely be as streamlined for this as it has been for the early vaccine candidates. This is a very good thing.

We talked a couple of days ago about the fact that the Novavax phase 3 trial for its protein subunit vaccine candidate in the US and Mexico was fully enrolled. I said at that time I expected this to take somewhat longer than earlier phase 3 trials because of the reduced transmission rate we're seeing. We have sort of an estimate for that now. Dr. Gregory Glenn, president of research and development for the company, did a live Q&A with the Washington Post earlier today. I caught part of it and then relied on a summary for the rest. The big news here is this: "[W]e're expecting that result right at the beginning maybe of quarter two—so pretty soon—and shortly thereafter we would be filing for what we call EUA or emergency use authorization in the US. So, we're thinking quarter two and then deployment could come fairly quickly. The vaccine we expect to be deployed widely." This is also very good news.

Meanwhile, the vaccine supply continues to increase for the two already authorized vaccines. We've mentioned various figures over the past several days, but there were some more solid numbers mentioned at today's White House briefing by Jeff Zients. He said that in just over a month, the supply has increased from 8.6 million doses per week to 14.5 million doses per week; that translates to an increase from 1.2 million to 2.1 million doses every day. With the accompanying massive improvements we've been seeing in vaccination programs nationwide, we are looking at a rapidly improving picture.

It appears the issue of long Covid, those lingering, troubling, and frequently debilitating symptoms seen in as many as 30 percent of recovered individuals, is finally going to receive some high-powered attention. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and White House coronavirus adviser, announced in a briefing today that the NIH is launching a new initiative to study the condition. He indicated that the work would include trying to get a handle on the

"scope of this, and not only the . . . depth and breadth of the symptoms, but also to try and have some correlate that actually is a path of physiological correlate." For the record, in this context, a correlate is some measurable sign of the condition—a clinical sign or lab value or imaging result or some such that correlates with symptoms experienced by the patient, something you could measure as an indication of the condition and/or its seriousness. The big goal here, of course, would be to "design therapeutic approaches," with luck, repurposing currently-approved medication and just figuring out how to use them productively.

We all know the vaccination program rollout in the US has been spotty, although it has recently been improving. A key part of the effort is the ability to make vaccination appointments online; this is faster and requires fewer workers from cash- and staffing-strapped local and state health departments in order to operate. This technology has been an enormous boon; it has also been a major obstacle to scheduling an appointment for people who don't know how to navigate the technology, who have slow Internet connections, have slower fingers on the keyboard, who are using older equipment to access the Web, and/or who don't have anyone to help them—primarily the elderly and the disadvantaged.

There's a Facebook group in the Chicago area called Vaccine Hunters. Its more than 24,000 members include a lot of seniors and others who are struggling because there are so many different systems for making appointments and so many different web pages to visit; they've tried to share hints and tips, but it's been slow going. The whole operation is confusing even for seasoned denizens of the Internet; someone who isn't technologically savvy doesn't have much chance at all. People have been getting frustrated and desperate with nowhere to turn.

Enter Benjamin Kagan and his Vaccine Angels. From his Chicago home in his spare time, he helped his grandparents in Florida to get registered and to make their appointments. After that, he learned about the Vaccine Hunters and realized the skills he'd developed helping his grandparents might be useful. He started sharing ideas in the group, and before he knew it, he was swamped with messages from people who wanted his help because they were too slow or lacked the skills to sign up. When he realized the magnitude of the problem, Kagan founded the Vaccine Angels, a group of about 50 volunteers who help

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people to make appointments. He constructed a Google form people fill out to ask for help, and then a volunteer takes things from there.

According to his local CBS affiliate, in the week they've been in operation, the Angels have secured 370 appointments; Kagan has personally made about 120 of those. These folks are just getting started, and they're totally getting things done.

So has Kagan made his own appointment? Not exactly. You see, he's not eligible to receive vaccine—not because his group hasn't come up yet, but because the vaccines haven't been authorized for his age. He's a high school freshman, 14 years old. He did all of that on his week-long winter vacation from school. Now that he's about to return to the classroom, he checks out the websites just before midnight each night and again in the morning to pick up anything that's newly opened, fitting it in around algebra homework and normal high-school-kid things.

Kagan's becoming known: The Washington Post writes that local nurses reach out to him to let him know when there's additional supply somewhere. He is working to coordinate a mass vaccination event with a local health-care system. Please remember he's 14.

He explained to the Post why he does this: "The problem with the equity piece is that if you don't have four computers open and crazy-fast WiFi speed and you're not technologically savvy . . . you're going to lose the appointments." He can do this, and so he does, but he also points out, "Really, this is an effort that shouldn't have had to be taken care of by a 14-year-old. It should have been taken care of by the federal government or a state government or a county government." You think? It all happens between homework assignments. This is a kid who's going places—good ones, I trust.

Stay safe. I'll be back.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	453	431	855	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2704	2589	5748	39	Substantial	18.3%
Bennett	382	368	1169	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1503	1476	2037	25	Minimal	0.0%
Brookings	3571	3476	11689	36	Substantial	2.6%
Brown	5107	4961	12503	85	Moderate	3.8%
Brule	689	675	1853	9	Moderate	9.1%
Buffalo	420	406	889	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	973	938	3182	20	Moderate	7.7%
Campbell	129	125	256	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1276	1214	3864	20	Substantial	9.4%
Clark	366	353	938	5	Moderate	12.5%
Clay	1786	1752	5139	15	Moderate	2.1%
Codington	3965	3780	9511	77	Substantial	13.5%
Corson	467	451	994	12	Minimal	21.1%
Custer	748	724	2663	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2941	2859	6413	60	Moderate	9.8%
Day	662	610	1738	28	Substantial	17.6%
Deuel	472	457	1119	8	Moderate	10.3%
Dewey	1411	1372	3780	23	Moderate	13.5%
Douglas	433	410	887	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	482	457	1027	12	Moderate	8.3%
Fall River	524	501	2556	15	Moderate	6.0%
Faulk	358	336	685	13	Moderate	4.5%
Grant	962	900	2192	37	Substantial	9.5%
Gregory	538	490	1239	27	Moderate	12.5%
Haakon	248	236	527	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	701	644	1751	38	Substantial	23.3%
Hand	335	317	794	6	Minimal	4.8%
Hanson	356	344	699	4	Moderate	22.2%
Harding	91	90	180	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2295	2207	6458	34	Substantial	1.9%
Hutchinson	786	744	2313	24	Moderate	19.6%

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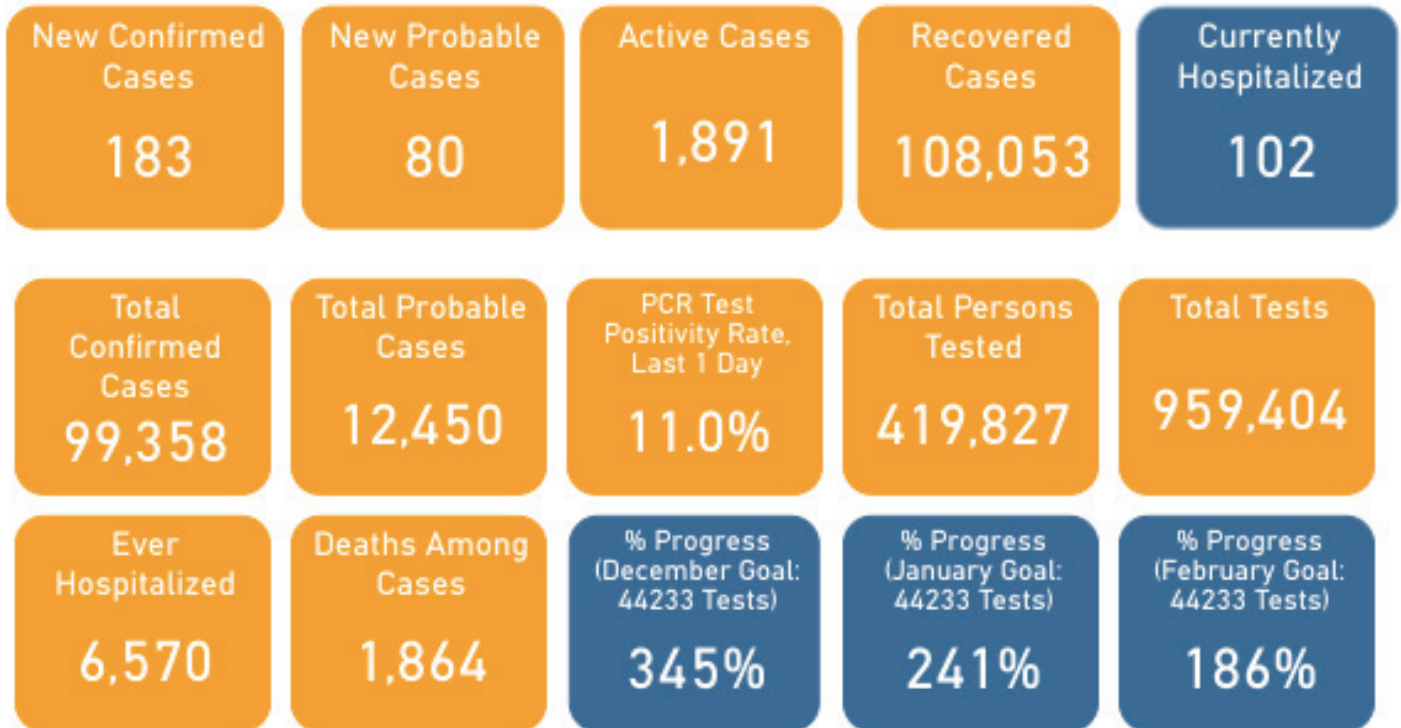
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Hyde	136	134	400	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	279	260	901	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	271	249	547	16	None	0.0%
Jones	85	83	216	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	636	604	1643	14	Substantial	11.9%
Lake	1183	1137	3234	17	Moderate	4.2%
Lawrence	2813	2739	8374	44	Moderate	5.2%
Lincoln	7696	7496	19886	77	Substantial	9.4%
Lyman	597	583	1849	10	Minimal	0.0%
Marshall	307	289	1168	5	Moderate	2.8%
McCook	739	705	1601	24	Moderate	12.5%
McPherson	238	231	543	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2572	2491	7539	31	Substantial	12.0%
Mellette	246	240	721	2	Minimal	16.7%
Miner	271	252	563	9	Minimal	16.7%
Minnehaha	27837	27083	76660	329	Substantial	6.9%
Moody	614	590	1732	16	Moderate	9.5%
Oglala Lakota	2056	1982	6577	49	Moderate	6.3%
Pennington	12827	12402	38575	185	Substantial	9.6%
Perkins	345	325	795	13	Minimal	11.8%
Potter	371	356	818	3	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1169	1098	4071	35	Substantial	12.7%
Sanborn	328	321	672	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	796	762	2088	25	Moderate	11.1%
Stanley	328	320	909	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	137	132	305	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1218	1185	4086	28	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	693	660	1456	16	Substantial	21.3%
Turner	1064	995	2669	53	Moderate	3.4%
Union	1971	1903	6112	39	Substantial	9.6%
Walworth	721	693	1805	15	Moderate	3.6%
Yankton	2794	2734	9178	28	Moderate	6.6%
Ziebach	336	326	861	9	Minimal	8.3%
Unassigned	0	0	1817	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4464	0
10-19 years	12550	0
20-29 years	19906	5
30-39 years	18377	17
40-49 years	15968	35
50-59 years	15764	109
60-69 years	12820	246
70-79 years	6851	422
80+ years	5108	1030

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	58269	880
Male	53539	984

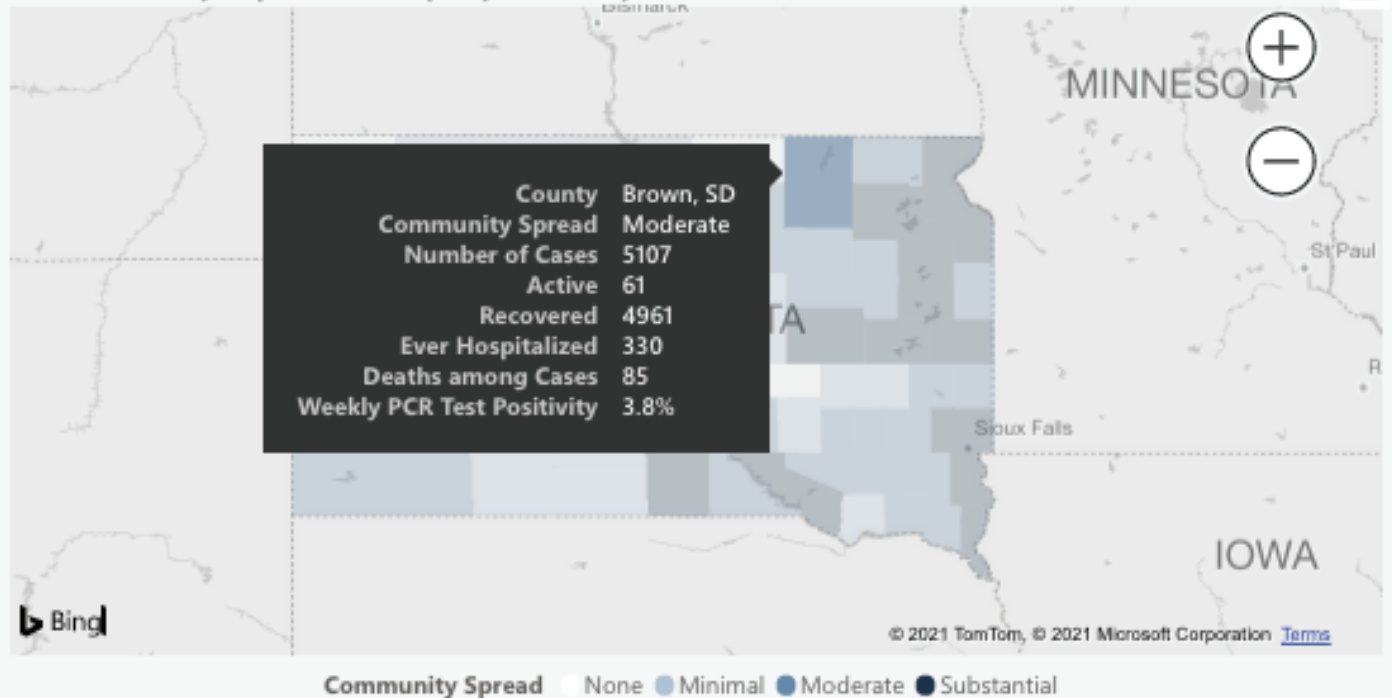
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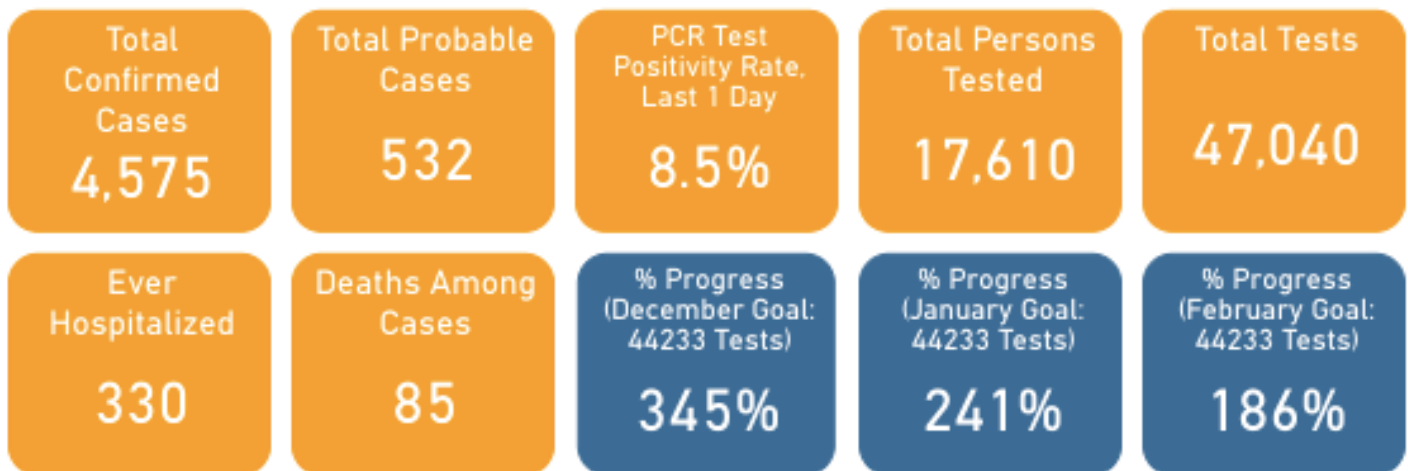
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



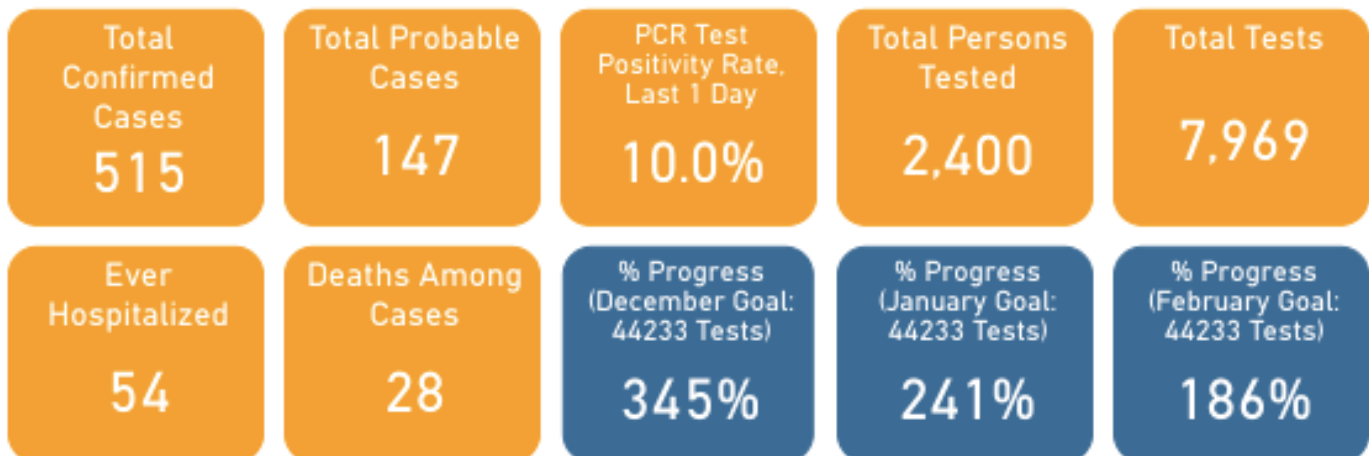
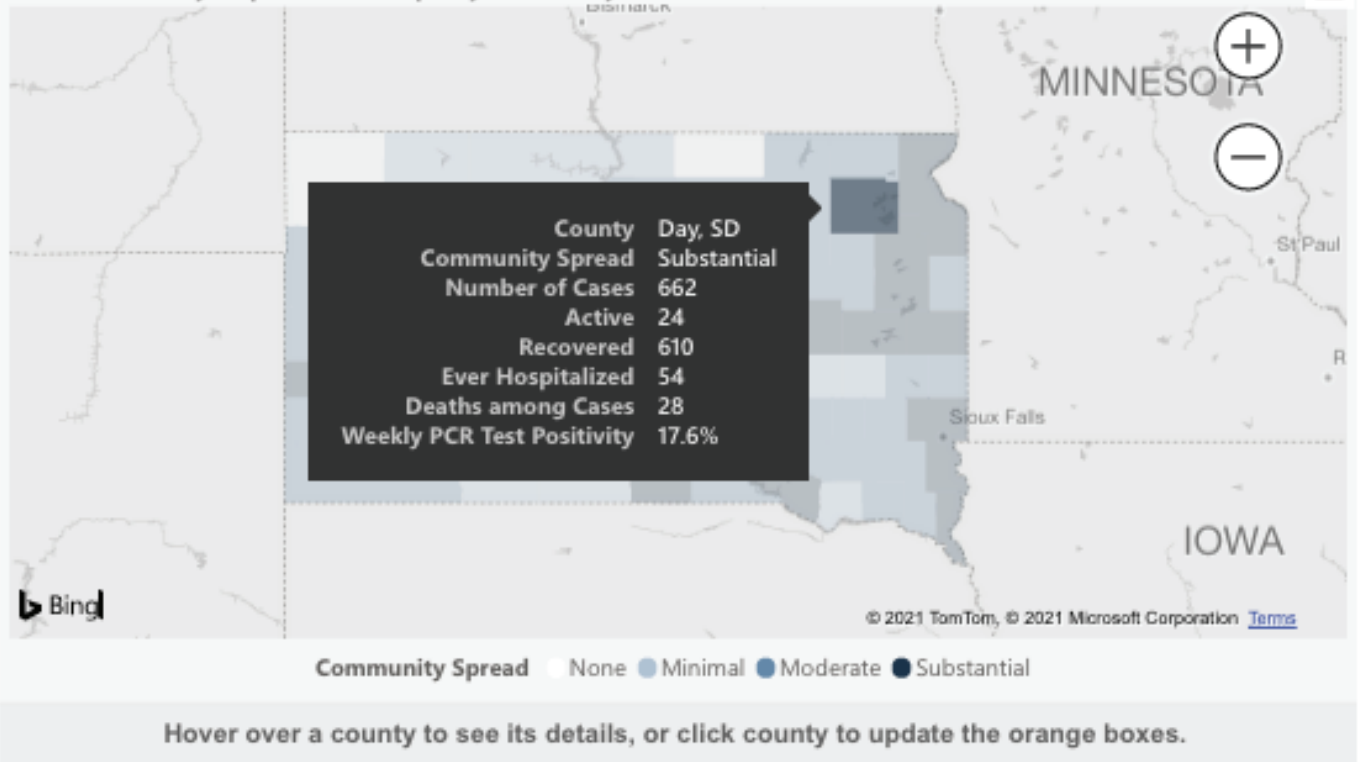
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

191,874

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

127,096

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

22%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	99,895
Pfizer	91,979

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	33,199
Moderna - Series Complete	33,348
Pfizer - 1 dose	29,119
Pfizer - Series Complete	31,430

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	21.97%
Series Complete	10.91%

Based on 2019 Census Estimate for those aged 16+ years. Includes

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	467	243	112	355
Beadle	3683	1,711	986	2,697
Bennett*	348	82	133	215
Bon Homme*	2053	1,125	464	1,589
Brookings	4898	1,668	1,615	3,283
Brown	9190	3,074	3,058	6,132
Brule*	1182	448	367	815
Buffalo*	101	77	12	89
Butte	1156	522	317	839
Campbell	738	286	226	512
Charles Mix*	1862	848	507	1,355
Clark	719	267	226	493
Clay	3073	985	1,044	2,029
Codington*	6033	2,229	1,902	4,131
Corson*	170	70	50	120
Custer*	1651	671	490	1,161
Davison	4662	1,652	1,505	3,157
Day*	1528	580	474	1,054
Deuel	866	352	257	609
Dewey*	294	56	119	175
Douglas*	767	253	257	510
Edmunds	780	306	237	543
Fall River*	1585	643	471	1,114
Faulk	636	218	209	427
Grant*	1363	497	433	930
Gregory*	1040	384	328	712
Haakon*	357	111	123	234

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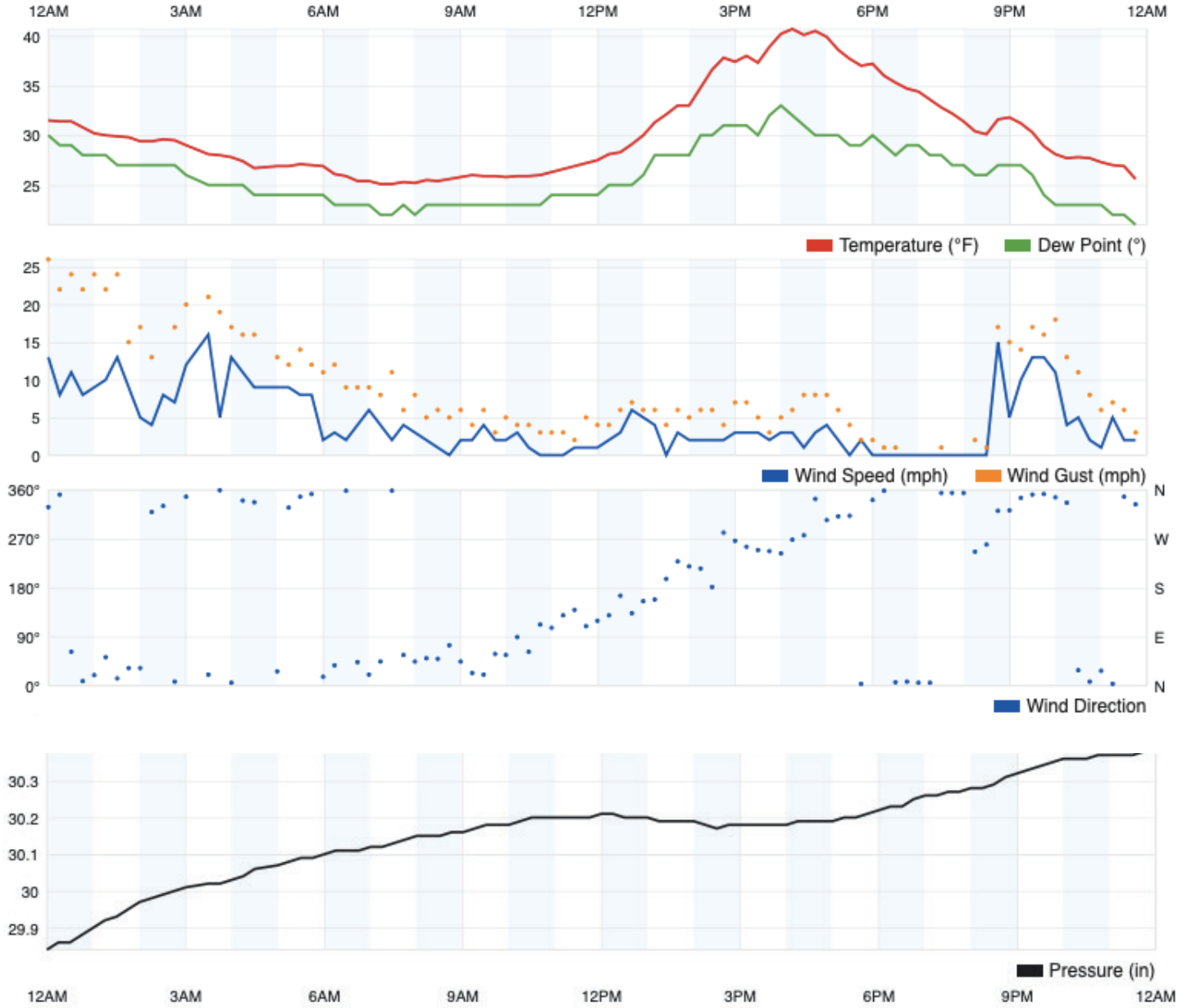
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Hamlin	1062	468	297	765
Hand	851	385	233	618
Hanson	270	128	71	199
Harding	41	27	7	34
Hughes*	4995	1,607	1,694	3,301
Hutchinson*	2169	791	689	1,480
Hyde*	357	141	108	249
Jackson*	264	90	87	177
Jerauld	452	258	97	355
Jones*	388	136	126	262
Kingsbury	1285	559	363	922
Lake	2246	916	665	1,581
Lawrence	4556	1,948	1,304	3,252
Lincoln	16767	4,197	6,285	10,482
Lyman*	454	214	120	334
Marshall*	973	419	277	696
McCook	1269	467	401	868
McPherson	144	70	37	107
Meade*	3530	1,444	1,043	2,487
Mellette*	30	12	9	21
Miner	508	192	158	350
Minnehaha*	50143	14,049	18,047	32,096
Moody*	957	375	291	666
Oglala Lakota*	104	40	32	72
Pennington*	23027	6,647	8,190	14,837
Perkins*	327	165	81	246
Potter	462	202	130	332
Roberts*	2722	1,180	771	1,951
Sanborn	594	240	177	417
Spink	1891	677	607	1,284
Stanley*	749	275	237	512
Sully	216	90	63	153
Todd*	102	38	32	70
Tripp*	1341	477	432	909
Turner	2169	601	784	1,385
Union	1704	878	413	1,291
Walworth*	1301	375	463	838
Yankton	6182	1,396	2,393	3,789
Ziebach*	43	13	15	28
Other	4027	773	1,627	2,400

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 46 °F

Tonight



Increasing
Clouds and
Breezy

Low: 31 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny

High: 48 °F

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 21 °F

Saturday



Mostly Sunny

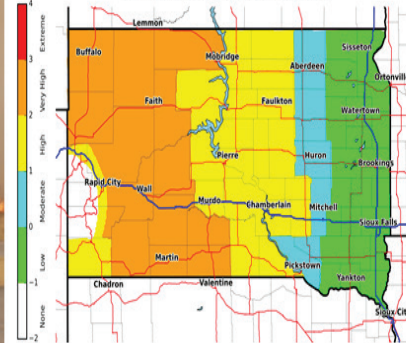
High: 34 °F

Elevated Fire Danger This Afternoon

- Highs today in the upper 40s to lower 50s
- Highest Wind Gusts 30 to 35 mph

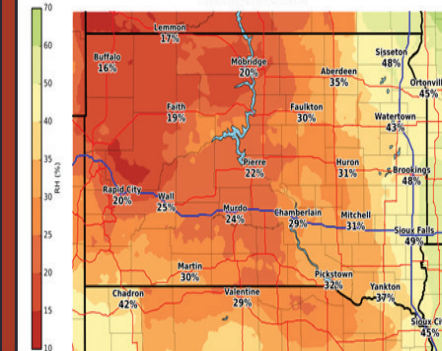
SD Grassland Fire Danger Thursday Evening

Valid: 02/25/2021 12:00 PM - 02/25/2021 06:00 PM CST



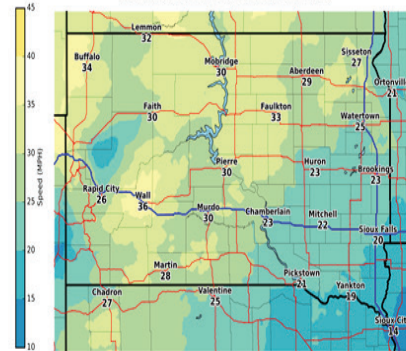
Thursday Daytime Minimum Relative Humidity (%)

Valid: February 25, 2021



Maximum Wind Gust (mph)

Valid: 02/25/2021 06:00 AM - 02/25/2021 06:00 PM CST



weather.gov/Aberdeen

National Weather Service Aberdeen

@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 2/25/2021 5:35 AM Central

Strong winds, low relative humidity values and dry grassland fine fuels will create high to very high fire danger indices today. As a result, consider postponing any outdoor burning today in an effort to avoid creating difficult to contain grassland wildfires!

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Today in Weather History

February 25, 1987: Six to thirty inches of snow fell on this date in 1987 across much of western and central South Dakota. Three to six inches of snow fell in the northeast part of South Dakota. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts reported were 30 inches at Phillip, 26 inches at Murdo, and Timber Lake, with 15 inches at Rapid City. Numerous accidents occurred in the western and central sections of the state. Many roads were closed, including interstate 90 for most of the 27th. Slippery roads were a major factor in the vehicle injuries of three women on Highway 12, six and one-half miles east of Ipswich in the late afternoon of the 27th. The storm began on the 24th and lasted until the 28th.

February 25, 2000: Unusual February severe thunderstorms produced nickel to quarter size hail in Lyman and Hand counties on this date in 2000.

1934: An outbreak of six tornadoes killed nineteen in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Hardest hit was Bowden, GA, and Shady Grove, AL. One home in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, was picked up, thrown 400 feet, and blown to bits. Six family members were killed in the house. Click [HERE](#) for more information about the tornadoes in Lauderdale County, Mississippi.

1991: Black rain fell over southeastern Turkey for 10-hours, causing panic among people. The black rain was the result of soot from burning oil fields in Kuwait.

2010: A powerful nor'easter spread significant snow and windy conditions across the Middle Atlantic region from Thursday, February 25th into Friday, February 26th. An area of low pressure developed off the Carolina coast late Wednesday night February 24th and then strengthened as it tracked northward to near Long Island, New York by Thursday evening. As low pressure aloft deepened over the Mid-Atlantic coast Thursday night into Friday, the surface low retrograded and moved westward into northern New Jersey and southern New York. By Saturday, February 27th, the low pushed into southern New England and gradually weakened over the weekend. Strong wind gusts were measured throughout the Middle Atlantic region as a result of this coastal storm. Some of the highest wind gusts recorded include 62 mph measured at Cape May, New Jersey; 52 mph at the Atlantic City Marina; 51 mph at the Mount Pocono Airport and Lewes, Delaware; and 50 mph at Dover Air Force Base. Wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were also recorded at Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Allentown. Considerable blowing and drifting snow resulted, especially from the Poconos eastward into northern New Jersey. Snow drifts as high as 3 to 5 feet were seen across portions of Warren and Sussex counties in New Jersey. Total accumulations of 20 inches or more were recorded from Morris and Sussex counties in New Jersey westward into Monroe County, Pennsylvania. A band of 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation was measured from Warren and Morris counties in New Jersey westward to Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In addition to snow that accumulated during the daytime on Thursday, many locations across the region experienced a heavier burst of snow with gusty winds Thursday night into early Friday thanks to additional moisture that wrapped around the low-pressure system. Some areas saw snowfall rates of 1 to 2 inches per hour, especially from northern New Jersey and into the Poconos. Central Park ended the month with a total of 36.9 inches of snow, making this the snowiest month since records began in 1869.

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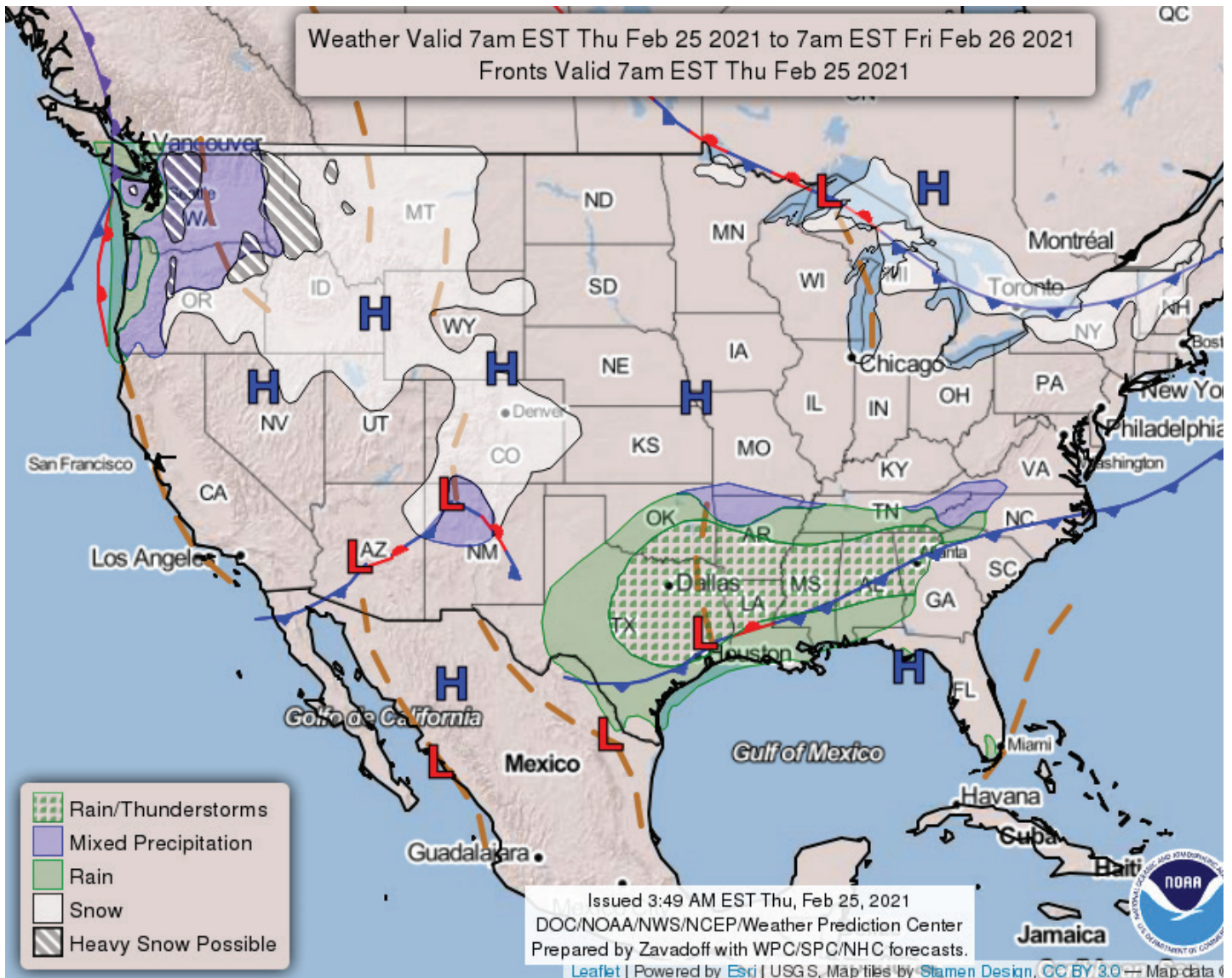
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 4:13 PM
Low Temp: 24 °F at 11:59 PM
Wind: 25 mph at 12:03 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 70° in 1958
Record Low: -29° in 1919
Average High: 31°F
Average Low: 12°F
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.45
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.18
Average Precip to date: 0.92
Precip Year to Date: 0.18
Sunset Tonight: 6:16 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17 a.m.



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WHO'S IN CONTROL?

No matter where we look - within our borders or around the planet - things seem to be spinning out of control. Each day, perhaps even twice a day, a different nation seems to surface, demanding one thing or another. From hostages to ransoms, from earthquakes to floods, from kidnappings to suicide bombings, there is no way to predict what the next crisis will be or where it will occur or what it will cost someone, everyone.

The Psalmist wrote, "Dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations." There are times when it is difficult to believe that he knew what he was writing about. Yet, it has to be true if we are to believe His Word. In the final analysis, if we cannot believe that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is inspired, infallible, and inerrant in its entirety, there is nothing left for us to believe in.

Accepting God at His Word and accepting His Word as truth are what makes being a Christian unique. When we invest and put on display for others to see our faith, our love, our time, our energy, and our finances into serving Him, we are not only preparing for eternity with Him, we are, in another way, actually beginning our eternity with Him now because we are building His Kingdom on earth at this very moment.

If we look at what Jesus did and think about what He has challenged and charged us to do, we can, if we choose to, do many of the things He did. We can feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, extend a hand to lift the fallen, share our clothes with the naked, encourage the hopeless, and give help to the sick. If we do as He did, we are working with Him to establish His rule in hearts and lives now.

Prayer: Father, may we accept Your challenge and our obligation to work with You to build Your Kingdom on earth. If we love You, it's what we will do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations. Psalm 22:28

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Father/Daughter Dance (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (Halloween)
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

07-10-11-12-23

(seven, ten, eleven, twelve, twenty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$43,000

Lotto America

05-07-24-39-50, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 2

(five, seven, twenty-four, thirty-nine, fifty; Star Ball: ten; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.1 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$30 million

Powerball

04-33-43-53-65, Powerball: 21, Power Play: 3

(four, thirty-three, forty-three, fifty-three, sixty-five; Powerball: twenty-one; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$90 million

Wednesday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Class A Region 3=

First Round=

Garretson 63, Dell Rapids 37

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

Police grilled South Dakota AG on phone use before crash

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Investigators questioning South Dakota's attorney general after a fatal car crash pressed him on how he did not realize he had struck a man and whether he had been reading email and checking news sites on his phone immediately before, according to videos of their interviews.

In two videos released by Gov. Kristi Noem late Tuesday, criminal investigators confront the state's top law enforcement officer, Jason Ravensborg, with gruesome details of the crash, at one point telling him: "His face was in your windshield, Jason, think about that."

Ravensborg appeared unsure of how he had swerved onto a highway shoulder and killed 55-year-old Joseph Boever, but detectives told him Boever's glasses had been found inside his Ford Taurus and that bone scrapings were found on the rumble strip of the highway shoulder. Investigators said they found one part of Boever's severed glasses on the front, passenger-side floorboard and the other part in the back seat.

The Republican attorney general is facing three misdemeanor charges in the Sept. 12 crash, as well as calls for his resignation from Gov. Kristi Noem and impeachment proceedings in the Legislature.

Noem made the extraordinary move of releasing over three hours of video from two separate interviews, the Argus Leader reported. One took place two days after the crash, while the other was weeks later, after investigators had determined more details about what happened.

In the interview, Ravensborg insisted he wasn't looking at his phone at the moment his car struck and killed Boever. Ravensborg appeared distressed as he heard how the impact with Boever's body had left an

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imprint on the car hood and smashed the windshield.

"I never saw him," he told the investigators. "I never saw him."

The detectives pressed Ravensborg on whether he was distracted when he hit Boever. After he said he was not using his phone before the crash, they confronted him with phone records, telling him they show he logged into his Yahoo email account and accessed a news website minutes before he called 911 to report the crash.

"So when we look at that, our concern is everything we are seeing here is it's appearing you were on your phone reading political stuff at the time," the detective told Ravensborg, adding, "People make mistakes."

They pointed out that he had previously been called out for using Twitter while driving in the Black Hills, but Ravensborg insisted that he had set the phone down before he hit Boever.

He said the last thing he remembered before the crash was turning off the radio and looking down at the speedometer. He had been accelerating after passing through the town of Highmore, but said he had not yet set his cruise control. Prosecutors said they determined Ravensborg was driving 67 mph (108 kph) — just 2 mph over the speed limit — when he struck Boever.

The attorney general has been charged with using his phone while driving, but prosecutors said his phone records show he had locked the device about a minute before the crash.

The detectives also questioned how Ravensborg could have searched the area with his cellphone flashlight, at one point walking right by Boever's body, and not seen his body. They pointed out that part of Boever's white skin was exposed and a flashlight he had been carrying was still on. The detectives said it would have been hard to miss both Boever's body, lying in the grass near the highway pavement, and a flashlight shining on a dark night.

Ravnsborg insisted he saw neither and pointed out that the sheriff and tow truck driver who arrived later also had not spotted Boever's body or the flashlight. Earlier in the interview, the attorney general told detectives that he had no idea he had killed a man until the next day when he stopped by the accident scene with his chief of staff, Tim Bormann.

He said, "I found the body and I just came to Tim, and I said: 'Tim, Tim, Tim, you've got to come here. I found a body.'"

In a statement calling for Ravensborg's resignation, Noem said she would be releasing video of the interviews. Ravensborg has indicated he has no intention of stepping down.

Meanwhile, prosecutors who charged the attorney general had asked the Department of Public Safety to not release the videos.

Michael Moore, the Beadle County State's Attorney, said Wednesday that the videos' release defies open records laws that exempt such information from being made publicly available, could influence potential jurors, and violates "the rules of professional responsibility" for criminal cases.

"Every defendant has the right to a fair and impartial trial," Moore said.

House lawmakers push office for missing Indigenous people

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House on Tuesday passed a proposal to create an office under the attorney general to coordinate tribal, state and local law enforcement agencies in tackling the crisis of missing Indigenous people.

Democrat Rep. Peri Pourier, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, proposed the office as part of an effort to solve how a disproportionate number of Indigenous people go missing and are murdered in the state. She said that of 109 missing people statewide, 77 are Indigenous.

Pourier's bill would create a one-person office within the attorney general's office to specialize in coordinating law enforcement efforts across agencies. The attorney general's office assisted in writing the bill, but had concerns about funding, Pourier said. However, the lawmaker said that tribal governments have committed to seeking federal funding for the office.

She pointed out that the federal government and tribes have made the issue a priority, saying, "This is an opportunity for the state to come to the table."

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Oglala Sioux Tribal President Kevin Killer said there is an "epidemic" of women and girls going missing from Native communities, both on reservations and in urban areas.

The bill will next proceed to the Senate.

This story was first published Feb. 23, and has been updated to correct the overall number of missing people statewide to 109, not 179, and delete a reference to the attorney general's office not supporting the bill due to concerns about funding. The attorney general's office did not publicly testify in support of the bill due to those concerns, but was generally supportive.

House passes legislation for additional civics instruction

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota House has passed a bill that directs \$900,000 to Gov. Kristi Noem's plan to increase classroom instruction of the state's history, government and economics.

The legislation passed Tuesday evening would create instructional materials and classroom resources for elementary, middle and high school students.

The Republican governor has talked in the past about what she says is the nation's "failure to educate generations of our children about what makes America unique," the Argus Leader reported.

"We can and should do a better job of educating the next generation on what makes America and South Dakota great," said Rep. Scott Odenbach, a Spearfish Republican.

The push for additional civics curriculum follows the 2019 session in which lawmakers weighed Noem's idea of requiring a civics test to graduate from high school, and putting patriotic displays, including the words "In God We Trust" in every school.

School districts select curriculum according to state standards, and in the case of this bill, specific schools or districts may choose to take part in a pilot program to introduce the curriculum. Rep. Lana Greenfield said the curriculum wouldn't be mandated.

House passes recreational marijuana in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The Republican-controlled House has passed legislation to legalize recreational marijuana in North Dakota.

Lawmakers also passed a related bill Tuesday setting up a tax policy for marijuana. Both bills now go to the Senate.

The legislation restricts recreational marijuana to people 21 and older, limits possession to 1 ounce, restricts its use to private property and bans growing it at home.

The bill to legalize and restrict recreational marijuana mirrors much of the state's medical marijuana program, which the 2017 Legislature implemented after voters approved it in 2016.

"You can't be walking down the street smoking a joint," said Rep. Robin Weisz, who chairs the House Human Services Committee, which handled the bill.

Republican Reps. Jason Dockter and Craig Headland said that although they are personally opposed to recreational marijuana, they proposed the bills to head off citizen efforts to legalize marijuana through the constitution as South Dakota voters did last year, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

North Dakota voters defeated a measure to legalize marijuana in 2018 and two measures last year fell short of signatures for ballot placement. But backers had already been gearing up for a 2022 measure to put marijuana legalization in the state constitution.

The bill also limits the number of growers in North Dakota to seven and dispensaries to 18, all must be registered with the state.

Medical oxygen scarce in Africa, Latin America amid virus

By CARLEY PETESCH and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — A crisis over the supply of medical oxygen for coronavirus patients has struck

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nations in Africa and Latin America, where warnings went unheeded at the start of the pandemic and doctors say the shortage has led to unnecessary deaths.

It takes about 12 weeks to install a hospital oxygen plant and even less time to convert industrial oxygen manufacturing systems into a medical-grade network. But in Brazil and Nigeria, as well as in less-populous nations, decisions to fully address inadequate supplies only started being made last month, after hospitals were overwhelmed and patients started to die.

The gap in medical oxygen availability "is one of the defining health equity issues, I think, of our age," said Peter Piot, director of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, who said he survived a severe coronavirus infection thanks to the oxygen he received.

Doctors in Nigeria anxiously monitor traffic as oxygen deliveries move through the gridlocked streets of Lagos. Desperate families of patients around the world sometimes turn to the black market. Governments take action only after hospitals are overwhelmed and the infected die by the dozens.

In Brazil's Amazonas state, a pair of swindlers were caught reselling fire extinguishers painted to look like medical oxygen tanks. In Peru, people camped out in lines to get cylinders for sick relatives.

Only after the lack of oxygen was blamed for the deaths of four people at an Egyptian hospital in January and six people at one in Pakistan in December did governments address the problems.

John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said medical oxygen is a "huge critical need" across the continent of 1.3 billion people and is a main reason that COVID-19 patients are more likely to die there during surges.

Even before the pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa's 2,600 oxygen concentrators and 69 functioning oxygen plants met less than half the need, leading to preventable deaths, especially from pneumonia, said Dr. John Adabie Appiah of the World Health Organization.

The number of concentrators has grown to about 6,000, mostly from international donations, but the oxygen produced isn't pure enough for the critically ill. The number of plants that can generate higher concentrations is now at 119.

Yet without formal requests from governments, nearly \$20 billion in World Bank coronavirus funds for the world's poorest countries has been left unspent, the organization told The Associated Press.

Nigeria was "struggling to find oxygen to manage cases" in January, said Chikwe Ihekweazu, head of its Centre for Disease Control.

A main hospital in Lagos, a city of 14.3 million, saw its January virus cases increase fivefold, with 75 medical workers infected in the first six weeks of 2021. Only then did President Muhammadu Buhari release \$17 million to set up 38 more oxygen plants and another \$670,000 to repair plants at five hospitals.

Some oxygen suppliers have dramatically raised prices, according to a doctor at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not allowed to talk to reporters. That has driven up the cost of a cylinder by 10 times, to \$260 — more than the average monthly wage — and a critically ill patient could need up to four cylinders a day.

Money and influence don't always help.

Femi Odekunle, a Nigerian academic and close ally of the president, went without adequate oxygen for nearly 12 days at the Abuja University Teaching Hospital until two state governors and Ministry of Health officials intervened. He died anyway, and relatives and friends blame the oxygen shortage, the Premium Times newspaper reported. The hospital attributed his death to his severe infection.

In Malawi, the president promised funding for protective gear for medical workers and the immediate purchase of 1,000 oxygen cylinders.

Corruption was blamed for defects in a new oxygen plant at a hospital in Uganda's capital of Kampala, the Daily Monitor newspaper reported. Workers had to rely on rusty oxygen cylinders that were blamed for the deaths of at least two patients.

"While top health officials basked in the oxygen of good publicity, patients were literally choking to death," the newspaper said. "It appears that behind the delays and the funding gaps, corners were being cut."

Leith Greenslade, coordinator of the Every Breath Counts Coalition, which advocates for wider access to

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medical oxygen, said the looming shortages were apparent last spring.

"Very little was done. Now you have a second wave, not just in Africa but in Latin America and Asia, and the oxygen shortages are becoming at crisis levels," she said.

The World Bank has set aside \$50 billion for the world's poorest countries alone during the pandemic, but only \$30.8 billion has been allocated, including \$80 million for oxygen-related upgrades.

"We make money available for countries, but it's countries, governments who have to make a decision about how much they spend and what they spend it on," said Dr. Mickey Chopra, who helps with the World Bank's global medical logistics response.

A global task force focusing on oxygen was formally announced Thursday and will include the World Health Organization and World Bank, among others. Already, \$90 million was identified in immediate oxygen funding needs for 20 developing countries, including Nigeria and Malawi.

Many countries view oxygen supplies primarily as an industrial product for more lucrative sectors such as mining, not health care, and it has not been a focus of many international donors. Oxygen manufacturing plants require technicians, good infrastructure and electricity — all in short supply in developing nations.

The main provider of medical oxygen to Brazil's Amazonas state, White Martins, operated at half capacity before the pandemic. The first infections hit the isolated city in March and led to so many deaths that a cemetery was carved out of the jungle.

Doctors in its capital of Manaus were forced last month to choose which patients to treat as oxygen supplies dwindled.

Brazil's Supreme Court began an investigation into management of the crisis after White Martins said an "unexpected increase in demand" led to shortages.

"There was a lack of planning on behalf of the government," said Newton de Oliveira, president of Indústria Brasileira de Gases, a major oxygen supplier.

Only after deaths averaged 50 a day did the government say it would build 73 oxygen plants in the state. Within a month, 26 were up and running.

Oxygen shortages remain critical in Peru, where Dani Luz Llamocca waited five days outside a distribution center in Lima, saying her virus-stricken father was down to less than half a tank of oxygen. She was willing to wait as long as it took. "If not, my father will die," said Llamocca.

The WHO's Appiah said countries with mining industries could, with few changes, convert their systems to produce medical-grade oxygen.

India's national trade body for gas makers suggested just that last April, when the virus caseload was relatively low. Industrial storage tanks were repurposed at hospitals, said Surendra Singh, a manager for the Indian division of the multinational Linde corporation.

"It's not rocket science," said Saket Tiku, president of the All India Industrial Gases Manufacturers Association. "The decision saved thousands of lives."

Hinnant reported from Paris. Sam Olukoya and Lekan Oyekanmi in Lagos, Nigeria, Aniruddha Ghosal in New Delhi, Franklin Briceño in Lima, Peru; Sam Magdy in Cairo, Diane Jeantet in Rio de Janeiro, Cara Anna in Nairobi, Kenya, Riaz Khan in Peshawar, Pakistan, and Rodney Muhumuza in Kampala, Uganda, contributed.

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

EXPLAINER: Why is Facebook banning Myanmar military pages?

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

Facebook announced Thursday that it is removing all remaining Myanmar military and military-controlled pages from its site and from Instagram, which it also owns.

It said it will also block advertising from military-linked businesses.

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The decision follows a Feb. 1 coup in which the military removed elected leaders from power and jailed others. Days after the coup the military temporarily blocked access to Facebook because it was being used to share anti-coup comments and organize protests.

Here's a look at Facebook's role in Myanmar and what the banning of the military pages means.

WHAT IS FACEBOOK'S ROLE IN MYANMAR?

For decades Myanmar was one of the least-connected countries in the world, with less than 5% of the population using the internet in 2012, according to the International Telecommunication Union. When telecommunications began to be deregulated by a quasi-civilian government in 2013, the price of SIM cards for cellphones plummeted, opening a new market of users.

Facebook was quick to capitalize on the changes, and soon began to be used by government agencies and shopkeepers alike to communicate.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, had over 22.3 million Facebook users in January 2020, more than 40% of its population, according to social media management platform NapoleonCat. For many in the country, Facebook effectively is the internet.

"The role of Facebook is vital in the country," said Nickey Diamond, a Myanmar human rights specialist with the group Fortify Rights. "In Myanmar, Facebook is one of the most important communication platforms to the people."

WHAT ISSUES HAS FACEBOOK FACED IN MYANMAR?

The social media platform has faced accusations of not doing enough to quell hate speech in the country.

In a 2018 report on army-led violence which forced more than 700,000 ethnic Rohingya Muslims to flee to neighboring Bangladesh, Marzuki Darusman, head of the U.N. Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, said Facebook "substantively contributed to the level of acrimony and dissension and conflict." He added, "Hate speech is certainly of course a part of that."

Under pressure from the U.N. and international human rights groups, Facebook banned about 20 Myanmar military-linked individuals and organizations in 2018, including Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing, for involvement in severe human rights violations.

WHY IS FACEBOOK BANNING MORE MILITARY-LINKED PAGES NOW?

After the coup, Facebook said it would reduce distribution of all content from Myanmar's military, called the Tatmadaw, on its site, while also removing content that violates its community standards, including hate speech.

Facebook announced Thursday that it will ban all remaining Myanmar military-related entities from Facebook and Instagram, as well as ads from military-linked businesses.

"Events since the February 1 coup, including deadly violence, have precipitated a need for this ban. We believe the risks of allowing the Tatmadaw on Facebook and Instagram are too great," the company said a statement.

The ban covers the air force, the navy, the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Border Affairs, Facebook Policy Communications Manager Amy Sawitta Lefevre said.

Facebook said it will leave up pages contributing to public welfare, including those of the Ministry of Health and Sports and the Ministry of Education.

WHAT IMPACT WILL IT HAVE?

The decision deprives the military of its largest communication platform.

"This is a welcome and long overdue step by Facebook," Mark Farmaner, director of Burma Campaign UK, said in an emailed statement. "In a country where Facebook has been so incredibly popular, it's a psychological blow for the military. They have put a lot of resources into using Facebook for propaganda purposes, to recruit soldiers and to raise funds."

Facebook said it expects the military will attempt to regain a presence on the platform.

"In cases like these, we're working to be as precise as possible, but we know we may miss some and we'll keep refining our enforcement," Lefevre said.

Facebook declined to say how much revenue it expects to forgo from the loss of advertising from military-linked companies.

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

Italy honors slain ambassador, bodyguard and prays for Congo

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Italy paid tribute Thursday to its ambassador to Congo and his bodyguard who were killed in an attack on a U.N. convoy, honoring them with a state funeral and prayers for peace in Congo and all nations “torn by war and violence.”

Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, the pope's vicar for Rome, presided over the solemn funeral at the Santa Maria degli Angeli basilica that was attended by Premier Mario Draghi, top lawmakers, representatives of the armed forces and relatives of the young men.

Ambassador Luca Attanasio and Carabinieri paramilitary officer Vittorio Iacovacci were killed Monday north of Goma when an armed group stopped them as they travelled in a two-car convoy to a World Food Program school feeding project. WFP's Congolese driver, Moustapha Milambo, was also killed in the attack.

Italy has formally asked the U.N. for an inquiry into what happened amid questions about whether the U.N. security arrangements were sufficient for the mission.

In his eulogy, De Donatis decried the “stupid and ferocious” attack and said it was right that Italy, Congo and the community of nations weep over such violence that “tore Luca and Vittorio from this world.”

“Let us pray together that today is a day in which the prayer for peace in Congo and in all nations torn by various forms of war and violence is raised to heaven,” he said.

He denounced how so many Congolese feel the constant threat of danger from rebel groups “knocking at their door,” saying the country had been “cruelly devastated by violence that sees their children die every day.”

But he praised the men for working for peace and looking out for others “even at the cost of their own lives.”

“If this the fate of peace workers, what will be the fate of the rest of us?” he asked.

The funeral, carried live on state RAI television, featured masked Carabinieri officers as pallbearers and altar servers, with a military band performing Chopin's haunting “Funeral March” as the flag-draped coffins were carried in and out of the basilica.

After the service, the socially-distanced crowd applauded as the two hearses pulled out of the piazza carrying the coffins for burial, flanked by a police escort.

Attanasio is survived by his wife and three young daughters, at least one of whom attended the funeral, as well as his parents and siblings. Iacovacci is survived by his fiancée and other family members.

Watchdog reviews complaint about FBI surveillance warrant

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department's internal watchdog is reviewing a former Boeing engineer's allegations that he was unfairly investigated by the FBI on suspicion that he was spying for China, according to correspondence and court filings reviewed by The Associated Press. It's the latest challenge related to secretive surveillance powers used in some terrorism and espionage cases.

The inspector general review is unfolding amid broader scrutiny of the FBI's process for applying for court-authorized surveillance in national security investigations. Errors in applications submitted during the Russia investigation of Donald Trump's first presidential campaign, as well as in a larger sample of applications subsequently scrutinized by the watchdog office, have spurred bipartisan concerns about government surveillance powers and yielded rare alignment from pro-security and pro-privacy voices in Congress.

Concerns about the accuracy of surveillance applications sought under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, were a prominent theme in Monday's confirmation hearing of attorney general nominee Merrick Garland. Under repeated questioning from Republican senators, Garland stressed his belief in the

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need to be "careful" and precise in representations made in applications.

At issue in this case is a warrant the FBI obtained in 2014 from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to search the computers of Keith Gartenlaub as agents investigated whether he had leaked to the Chinese design plans for a C-17 military transport plane.

Gartenlaub was never charged with any espionage-related crimes, but the Justice Department did bring child pornography charges after finding images on his hard drive. He was convicted in federal court in California and sentenced to more than three years in prison.

He has long maintained his innocence, insisting that the files were not his, were never opened and date to a period in his life when numerous people had access to his computer while he lived at a beach house. In any event, he argues, the FBI had no basis to search his computers in the first place since there was no evidence he had conspired with China.

Having now completed his sentence, he sued last year to vacate his conviction and his lifetime probation, alleging that he was victimized by an error-tainted investigation and that there was no basis to suspect him of espionage. As part of the lawsuit, Justice Department lawyers have revealed that the inspector general is reviewing Gartenlaub's complaint, acting on his request that it do so.

In a January court filing, lawyers said the inspector general anticipated that it would take at least six additional months to finish reviewing the issues that Gartenlaub raised. In addition, an August letter from the inspector general's office to Gartenlaub's lawyer said his allegations were being looked at by the inspections and review division. A separate letter last year to Rep. Ted Lieu, D-Calif., also disclosed a review by the office.

"To me, this is a canary in a coal mine case," said Gartenlaub's lawyer Tor Ekeland.

A spokeswoman for the inspector general declined to comment.

Gartenlaub has publicly maintained for at least five years that he was unfairly targeted by the FBI and that the allegations in the original application were mistaken. He has said, for instance, that the FBI misstated his position at Boeing and that he didn't have access to the information that was obtained by the Chinese so he could not have disclosed it.

"It's an entirely different thing to take a national security warrant and then use it to prosecute a domestic, criminal crime," Ekeland said. "Without that FISA search warrant, they have no case. It's not some ancillary thing."

Though Gartenlaub was convicted of unrelated crimes, his underlying allegations about flaws in the FISA process have gained traction over the last year following revelations by the inspector general of 17 significant errors and omissions in four applications submitted to surveil a former Trump campaign aide during a probe into between the 2016 campaign and Russia.

The FBI in response issued dozens of corrective actions designed to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of its FISA applications.

Months later, the inspector general office revealed that a broader audit of 29 FISA applications had turned up problems in each, including apparent errors or inadequately supported facts. The FBI has said that most of the errors were minor and would not have affected a judge's decision that there was probable cause for the surveillance.

"I'm no Trump fan, but I thank him for this one," Ekeland said. "He shined attention onto this bloated national security apparatus that is unaccountable."

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>.

GOP rallies solidly against Democrats' virus relief package

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans rallied solidly against Democrats' proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill as lawmakers awaited a decision by the Senate's parliamentarian that could bolster or potentially kill a pivotal provision hiking the federal minimum wage.

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Despite their paper-thin congressional majorities, Democratic leaders were poised to push the sweeping package through the House on Friday. They were hoping the Senate, where changes seem likely, would follow quickly enough to have legislation on President Joe Biden's desk by mid-March.

By late Wednesday, not one Republican in either chamber had publicly said he or she would back the legislation. GOP leaders were honing attacks on the package as a job killer that does too little to reopen schools or businesses shuttered for the coronavirus pandemic and that was not only wasteful but also even unscrupulous.

"I haven't seen a Republican yet that's found something in there that they agree with," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "I think all Republicans believe in three simple things: They want a bill that puts us back to work, back to school and back to health. This bill is too costly, too corrupt and too liberal."

The hardening opposition suggested that Biden's first major legislative initiative could encounter unanimous GOP opposition. That was a counterpoint to the new president's refrain during his campaign about bringing the country together and a replay of the Republican wall that new President Barack Obama encountered in 2009 and most of his administration.

Democrats showed no signs of backing down, citing the assistance the measure would spread to people, businesses and state and local governments.

"If congressional Republicans want to oppose all that, my response is: Good luck," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on the Senate floor.

By Wednesday evening, the most suspense was over a decision anticipated from Elizabeth MacDonough, the Senate's nonpartisan arbiter of its rules, that promised enormous political and legislative consequences.

The relief bill includes a provision that over five years would hike the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The parliamentarian is involved because Democrats are pushing the overall \$1.9 trillion measure through Congress under special rules that will let them avoid a Senate filibuster by Republicans.

Those same rules prohibit provisions with only an "incidental" impact on the federal budget because they are chiefly driven by other policy purposes. The parliamentarian decides if a provision passes that test.

With Republicans strongly against a minimum wage increase, the only way for it to survive is by including it in a filibuster-proof bill like the COVID-19 relief measure. To end a filibuster, Democrats would need 60 votes, an impossibility for them in the evenly divided 50-50 Senate.

If the parliamentarian decides the minimum wage provision can remain in the bill, it would be a major boost for its proponents. But there would be no guarantee the measure would survive because some moderates oppose it or want it dialed back. That suggests grueling bargaining on its final form would lie ahead.

A decision by the parliamentarian that the minimum wage hike must fall from the bill could be fatal, but not necessarily. Democrats could employ a rarely used procedural move to muscle the minimum wage provision into the bill with just 51 votes anyway, but it was unclear if they could muster enough support to do that.

The minimum wage has stood at \$7.25 since 2009. Winning the increase is a top priority for progressives at a time when Democrats control Congress and the White House.

The overall bill would provide millions of Americans with \$1,400 direct payments to help them weather the pandemic that's stalled much of the economy for a year and killed half a million people. It contains billions of dollars for vaccines and COVID-19 testing, schools, state and local governments and emergency jobless benefits while providing tax cuts or payments for many families with children.

In a sign of hardball politics ahead, top Republicans suggested that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Schumer squeezed money into the bill for their own states.

McCarthy said the bill had \$100 million to help extend the San Francisco area's BART commuter rail system south to San Jose. That project was approved previously by the Trump administration and is not in Pelosi's San Francisco district, a top Democratic aide said.

McCarthy and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., suggested Schumer had won money for

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a bridge connecting upstate New York to Canada. A senior Democratic aide said the bill contains \$1.5 million for the bridge, which is in the district of Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y. The aide said it was requested in 2020 by the Trump administration's Transportation Department, which was headed by Elaine Chao, McConnell's wife.

For Israel's allies, road to vaccines runs through Jerusalem

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — When it comes to obtaining hard-to-get coronavirus vaccines, Israel's friends are discovering the road appears to run through Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday acknowledged sharing coronavirus vaccines with a number of friendly countries that have given favors to Israel in the past. Although he did not identify the countries, a list obtained by an Israeli TV station suggested that a number of them have supported Israel's claim to the contested city of Jerusalem as its capital.

The comments came at a time when Israel faces international criticism for not doing more to share its vast stockpile of vaccines with the Palestinians. They also illustrated how at a time of global shortages, the vaccine has become an asset that can be used for diplomatic gain.

"As the occupying power, Israel is responsible for the health of all the people under its control," tweeted U.S. Sen Bernie Sanders. "It is outrageous that Netanyahu would use spare vaccines to reward his foreign allies while so many Palestinians in the occupied territories are still waiting."

Although Israel does not make its own vaccines, Netanyahu has overseen one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns by securing millions of doses from drug makers Pfizer and Moderna. Speaking at a news conference, he said Israel has already vaccinated over 5 million people with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and could complete the task of inoculating its 6.2 million adults within weeks.

He also said Israel has an excess supply of hundreds of thousands of Moderna vaccines.

After determining that Israel has "more than enough" vaccines for its own population, he said he personally decided to share what he called a symbolic number of doses with some of Israel's allies.

He said it was done "in return for things we have already received, through many contacts in various areas that I will not detail here," Netanyahu said. "I think it absolutely buys goodwill."

Israeli public broadcaster Kan said a total of roughly 100,000 Moderna vaccines are being shipped to some 15 allies.

They include Honduras, Guatemala, Hungary, Uganda and the Czech Republic — countries that have recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital or expressed interest in opening diplomatic offices there following the Trump administration's move of the U.S. Embassy to the city in 2018.

Chad, which established diplomatic ties with Israel in 2019, Mauritania, which is believed to be on the cusp of restoring relations, and several other African countries that have close security ties with Israel, including Ethiopia and Kenya, also appeared on the list.

Asked about Netanyahu using their vaccines as a diplomatic tool, Moderna declined comment.

The Palestinians claim east Jerusalem, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed, as the capital of a future state. The competing claims to the city lie at the heart of the decades-long conflict, and most of the international community says the fate of Jerusalem must be resolved through negotiations.

Netanyahu noted that Israel has also pledged to share some vaccines with the Palestinians. Israel has delivered just 2,000 Moderna doses to the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority to inoculate West Bank medical workers.

Otherwise, the Palestinians have struggled to procure their own vaccines. The Palestinian Authority received 10,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, while a rival of President Mahmoud Abbas this week delivered an additional 20,000 Sputnik vaccines to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip after arranging delivery from the United Arab Emirates.

Together, these vaccines will cover just a tiny fraction of the millions of Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority has said it expects to receive more vaccines through the World Health Organization's COVAX

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program and other deals, but it remains unclear when the medicines will arrive.

Wasel Abu Yusuf, a senior Palestinian official, accused Netanyahu of playing politics with a humanitarian issue.

"He is using the vaccines needed by some countries to get political support for his policies, like moving embassies to Jerusalem," he said. "The amounts of vaccines he is talking about giving to Palestinians in the West Bank is very small."

The inequity has drawn attention to the global disparity in obtaining vaccines between rich and poor nations and prompted some international criticism.

Lawrence Gostin, professor of global health law at Georgetown University, said it's understandable that Israel would want to take care of its own citizens first. But "at some point it becomes ethically grotesque," he said.

He said that beyond having a moral responsibility to the Palestinians, it would be smart to help them.

"The reason it's a smart thing is that it would gain Israel enormous benefits in its reputation in the region and globally," he said. "Failing to share the vaccine won't be forgotten because so many people needlessly die from preventable disease."

U.N. officials and human rights groups have voiced concerns about the inequity and said that Israel is an occupying power responsible for providing vaccines to the Palestinians.

Israel says that under interim peace agreements from the 1990s it has no such responsibility. Israel has vaccinated its own Arab population, including Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

But Israeli public health experts have called on the government to share the vaccines, given the widespread contact between Israelis and Palestinians. Tens of thousands of Palestinian laborers work inside Israel or its West Bank settlements.

The Biden administration has refrained from criticizing Israel, but expressed support for sharing vaccines with the Palestinians. "We believe it's important for Palestinians to achieve increased access to COVID vaccine in the weeks ahead," State Department spokesman Ned Price said. "It's important for Israel, Israel's health and security as well."

Netanyahu's decision to share the vaccines with allies has come under fire at home. His main rival and governing partner, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, said Netanyahu unilaterally made the decision without any deliberations or oversight.

"The fact that Netanyahu trades in vaccines of Israeli citizens that were paid for from their tax money without any accountability shows that he thinks he is running a kingdom and not a state," Gantz said this week.

AP correspondents Laurie Kellman in Tel Aviv and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed reporting.

Pro-military marchers in Myanmar attack anti-coup protesters

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Members of a group supporting Myanmar's military junta attacked and injured people protesting Thursday against the army's Feb. 1 seizure of power that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. At least several people were injured in the attacks in Myanmar's largest city.

The chaos complicates an already intractable standoff between the military and a protest movement that has been staging large-scale demonstrations daily to have Suu Kyi's government restored to power.

Fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are urging Myanmar's military to make some concessions to help ease tensions. The 10-country regional grouping views dialogue with the generals as a more effective method of achieving compromises than more confrontational methods, such as the sanctions often advocated by Western nations.

Photos and videos on social media showed the attacks and injured people in downtown Yangon as police stood by without intervening. The attackers fired slingshots and carried iron rods, knives and other sharp implements.

A widely-circulated video showed one man stabbed in front of an office building near a major downtown

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intersection on the road to Sule Pagoda, a major venue for anti-coup protests. The number of injured people and their condition could not immediately be learned.

According to accounts and photos posted on social media, the situation began with a march of hundreds of people in support of the coup. They carried banners in English with the slogans "We Stand With Our Defense Services" and "We Stand With State Administration Council," which is the official name of the new junta.

English has been widely used for signs and posters and online memes by the anti-coup demonstrators in an evident effort to win international support.

Reports said the pro-military marchers were jeered by bystanders near the city's Central Railway station and responded by firing slingshots, throwing stones at them and then chasing them down. Video shows pro- and anti-coup crowds at that location.

Supporters of the military have gathered in the streets before, especially in the days immediately before and after the coup, but had not used violence so openly.

Critics of the military charge it pays people to engage in violence, allegations that are hard to verify. But they were raised during earlier spells of unrest, including a failed anti-military uprising in 1988 and an ambush of Suu Kyi's motorcade in a remote rural area in 2003, when she was seeking to rally her supporters against the military regime then in power.

Such confrontations jeopardize outside diplomatic efforts to help resolve Myanmar's crisis through dialogue.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi visited the Thai capital, Bangkok, on Wednesday and held three-way talks with her Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai and Myanmar's new foreign minister, retired army colonel Wunna Maung Lwin, who also traveled to Thailand. The meeting was part of Marsudi's efforts to coordinate a regional response to the situation in Myanmar.

"We asked all parties to exercise restraint and not use violence . . . to avoid casualties and bloodshed," Marsudi said in a virtual news conference after her return to Indonesia, emphasizing the need for dialogue, reconciliation and trust-building.

Marsudi said she had conveyed the same message to a group of elected members of Myanmar's Parliament who have formed a self-styled alternative government after being barred by the military coup from taking their seats. The lawmakers are from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, which won a landslide victory in elections last November that would have given it a second five-year term in office.

Social media giant Facebook announced Thursday it was banning all accounts linked to Myanmar's military as well as ads from military-controlled companies in the wake of the army's seizure of power on Feb. 1.

It said in a statement that it was treating the post-coup situation in Myanmar as an "emergency," explaining that the ban was precipitated by events since the coup, including "deadly violence."

Facebook already has banned several military-linked accounts since the coup, including army-controlled Myawaddy TV and state television broadcaster MRTV.

The bans also apply to Instagram, which is owned by Facebook.

Facebook and other social media platforms came under enormous criticism in 2017 when right groups said they failed to act enough to stop hate speech against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya minority.

The army launched a brutal counterinsurgency operation that year that drove more than 700,000 Rohingya to seek safety in neighboring Bangladesh, where they remain in refugee camps. Myanmar security forces burned down villages, killed civilians and engaged in mass rape, actions the World Court is investigating as constituting genocide.

The junta has tried to block Facebook and other social media platforms, but its efforts have proven ineffective. For more than a week it has also turned off access to the internet nightly from 1 a.m.

The military says it took power because last November's election was marked by widespread voting irregularities, an assertion that was refuted by the state election commission, whose members have since been replaced by the ruling junta.

The junta has said it will rule for a year under a state of emergency and then hold fresh elections.

Southern exposure: Cold wreaks havoc on aging waterworks

By MELINDA DESLATTE and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The sunshine is back and the ice has melted. But more than a week after a deep freeze across the South, many communities are still grappling with getting clean water to their citizens.

For years, experts have warned of the need to upgrade aging and often-neglected waterworks. Now, after icy weather cracked the region's water mains, froze equipment and left millions without service, it's clear just how much work needs to be done.

Families stood for hours in lines to get drinking water. They boiled it to make it safe to drink or brush their teeth. They scooped up snow and melted it in their bathtubs. Hospitals collected buckets of water to flush toilets.

"You don't realize how much you use water until you don't have it," said Brian Crawford, chief administrative officer for the Willis-Knighton Health System in the northwestern Louisiana city of Shreveport, where water pressure at one hospital only started returning to normal Wednesday. Tanker trucks had supplied it with water since last week.

The still-unfolding problems have exposed extensive vulnerabilities. Many water systems have decades-old pipes, now fragile and susceptible to breaking. White flight dropped tax revenue in some cities, and a lack of investment has caused problems to become even costlier to fix. Many systems in the South were not built with such low temperatures in mind. But with climate change projected to bring more extreme weather, problems like those seen last week could return.

A 2018 survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimated \$473 billion was needed over 20 years to maintain and improve water infrastructure. In a 2020 report, the American Society of Civil Engineers said a water main breaks every two minutes on average in the U.S., and described "chronic, long-term and insufficient investment." The report warned that the "nation's public health and the economy will be at risk."

Actually, it's already happening.

The Mississippi capital of Jackson struggled to fix its damaged water grid, with thousands still facing outages. In Memphis, residents in the city of 650,000 have been told for nearly a week to boil water for three minutes if they plan to use it for drinking, cooking or brushing their teeth. More than 40,000 Louisianans still had water outages Wednesday, and hundreds of thousands more were under boil advisories.

In Texas, more than 2 million remained under boil water notices Wednesday and 40 public water systems are "nonoperational," affecting 25,000 people, state officials said. At the height of the problems last week, at least 7 million Texans were told to boil their water. The order was finally lifted Sunday for Houston, where millions had endured power and water outages in the nation's fourth-largest city that is more accustomed to hurricanes than winter storms.

As temperatures fell below freezing across the South, residents kept their faucets open to prevent pipes from freezing. But the increased demand taxed the already-struggling systems, and the low water pressure meant that boil advisories were needed until safety tests could be completed.

Charles Williams, director of public works for the city of Jackson, said that as frozen machinery at the water plant began to thaw with rising temperatures, dozens of water mains broke.

Old pipes in the city have a history of breaking after cold weather, but a declining tax base has Jackson struggling to maintain its infrastructure. Following integration, affluent white families moved to the suburbs, taking their tax dollars with them. Now, more than a quarter of residents in Mississippi's majority-Black capital live in poverty.

James Williams, 67, went eight days without water at his house and called Jackson's water problem a public health crisis.

"The wealthy taxpayers left, so they left Jackson to suffer," the retired public works department employee said. "It's not their concern because they don't live here no more."

Voters in 2014 overwhelmingly approved an extra 1% sales tax for infrastructure repairs, but the \$15

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million a year raised is only a fraction of what Jackson needs. Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said close to \$2 billion is required to modernize its water system.

"These pipes are, described by the people who jump in the holes to repair them, like peanut brittle," he said. "They'll repair a pipe in one area and just sit back and wait, and sometimes they'll see a break happen almost immediately a few yards away."

Monday was the first time in a week that residents could line up for water outside of Madonna Manor, a 13-floor apartment complex for seniors and people with disabilities. People brought laundry pails, bowls, buckets and wastebaskets.

Helen Scott, 68, collecting water in a pink trash can, said people with cars can leave to get water, but those who have the least are struggling the most.

"The vulnerable are left behind," she said.

In Shreveport, where about 200,000 people were being told to boil their water, Mayor Adrian Perkins pointed to "old, aging infrastructure, just like most American cities."

Voters in 2019 rejected Perkins' bond proposal to raise \$186 million for infrastructure, including water system repairs and upgrades.

In Tennessee, Memphis Light, Gas & Water said the cold led to problems at pumping stations and ruptures in water mains and service lines. Crews were making repairs and testing for contaminants was being done, but no timetable has been set for a return to normal service.

Problems arose at some of the city's 140 wells that deliver water to reservoirs at eight main pumping stations. Wells failed, several reservoirs froze and engines and motors at pumping stations overheated. The persistent freezing temperatures exposed problems at pumping stations and other parts of the system, some of which dates to the 1930s.

The utility is in the second year of a five-year, \$105 million plan to update and strengthen infrastructure. At a news conference Tuesday, utility President and CEO J.T. Young said the plan will be reassessed in light of the recent freeze to make sure it matches the needs that have arisen.

Deslatte reported from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Associated Press reporters Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee, and Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas, contributed.

BLM launches Survival Fund amid federal COVID-19 relief wait

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is formally expanding a \$3 million financial relief fund that it quietly launched earlier this month, to help people struggling to make ends meet during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The foundation, which grew out of the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement nearly eight years ago, said Thursday that it plans to make up to 3,000 microgrants of \$1,000 each to people who it believes need it most. The BLM foundation has already begun asking recipients to apply for the Survival Fund grants as it builds out its philanthropic arm.

If approved, the money is deposited directly into recipients' bank accounts or made available on prepaid debit cards, the foundation said — no strings attached.

"This came from a collective conversation with BLM leadership that Black folks are being hurt the most financially during the pandemic," BLM co-founder Patrisse Cullors told The Associated Press.

"I believe that when you have resources, to hoard them is a disservice to the people who deserve them," she said.

Cullors, the foundation's executive director, said that so far the Survival Fund's first recipients have included the families of people killed by police or who died while incarcerated, grassroots community organizers, people who identify as transgender, single parents and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Before Thursday, at least 300 people had been approved for grants. The fund is being administered through UpTogether, a project of the Family Independence Initiative, which works to disrupt the cycle of

poverty through direct investment to low-income families and budding entrepreneurs.

One Survival Fund recipient, Kusema Thomas, said he has been earning \$1,500 less in monthly income since the start of the pandemic. The 45-year-old Los Angeles resident and father of 11-year-old and 4-year-old sons had been working as a community organizer and mental health specialist at a shelter for youth victims of domestic violence. His hours were cut back due to the pandemic.

Thomas, who was also formerly incarcerated, said that when he was asked to apply for BLM's Survival Fund, he thought he was being pranked. But when the \$1,000 grant showed up, he said it reminded him of the value of communities collectively pooling resources to bring relief and aid to their own.

"It reinforces some of the things that have just been natural to us as a community," Thomas told the AP. "It's a point of pride, that's connected to our history of being able to support each other. It's how we show love."

Thomas said he is using the money to teach his sons how to begin saving, something that he wasn't taught as a child.

The Survival Fund is part of the foundation's 2021 focus on economic justice, particularly as it relates to the ongoing socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Black communities. On Tuesday, the BLM foundation revealed that it had raised \$90 million last year, much of it after the May 2020 death of George Floyd, a Black man whose last breaths under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer sparked protests across the U.S. and around the world.

And it comes as the nation awaits Congress to take action on a nearly \$2 trillion relief package that includes \$1,400 direct stimulus payments to individuals who earn less than \$75,000 in annual income. The House of Representatives was expected to approve the package this week and send it over to the Senate, which is narrowly controlled by Democrats.

President Joe Biden has pledged to pass a new round of COVID-19 relief legislation within the first 100 days of his administration. He's about 35 days in.

Still, Cullors criticized the effort, saying it was "unacceptable" that moving relief dollars into Americans' hands was not the first thing the Biden administration did when it took over.

However, passage of the aid bill, expected next month, is happening far faster than earlier relief efforts during the Trump administration, which languished for months as Republicans and Democrats failed to reach agreement.

During that time, mutual aid and direct assistance programs like BLM's Survival Fund have increased in popularity. According to the nonprofit Town Hall Project, which created the Mutual Aid Hub to track various collective efforts last March, the number of mutual aid groups in the U.S. grew from 50 to more than 800 in 48 states by last May.

Black mutual aid efforts, in particular, date back to the 1700s, when enslaved Americans pooled their money to buy each other's freedom from bondage. In the late 1960s, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense created survival programs in which members provided groceries and breakfasts to the elderly and schoolchildren, as well as health care screenings through community clinics.

Cullors said the Survival Fund is a tribute to that legacy.

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

Secretive Israeli nuclear facility undergoes major project

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A secretive Israeli nuclear facility at the center of the nation's undeclared atomic weapons program is undergoing what appears to be its biggest construction project in decades, satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show.

A dig about the size of a soccer field and likely several stories deep now sits just meters (yards) from the aging reactor at the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center near the city of Dimona. The facility is

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already home to decades-old underground laboratories that reprocess the reactor's spent rods to obtain weapons-grade plutonium for Israel's nuclear bomb program.

What the construction is for, however, remains unclear. The Israeli government did not respond to detailed questions from the AP about the work. Under its policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel neither confirms nor denies having atomic weapons. It is among just four countries that have never joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a landmark international accord meant to stop the spread of nuclear arms.

The construction comes as Israel — under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — maintains its scathing criticism of Iran's nuclear program, which remains under the watch of United Nations inspectors unlike its own. That has renewed calls among experts for Israel to publicly declare details of its program.

What "the Israeli government is doing at this secret nuclear weapons plant is something for the Israeli government to come clean about," said Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association.

With French assistance, Israel began secretly building the nuclear site in the late 1950s in empty desert near Dimona, a city some 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of Jerusalem. It hid the military purpose of the site for years from America, now Israel's chief ally, even referring to it as a textile factory.

With plutonium from Dimona, Israel is widely believed to have become one of only nine nuclear-armed countries in the world. Given the secrecy surrounding its program, it remains unclear how many weapons it possesses. Analysts estimate Israel has material for at least 80 bombs. Those weapons likely could be delivered by land-based ballistic missiles, fighter jets or submarines.

For decades, the Dimona facility's layout has remained the same. However, last week, the International Panel on Fissile Materials at Princeton University noted it had seen "significant new construction" at the site via commercially available satellite photos, though few details could be made out.

Satellite images captured Monday by Planet Labs Inc. after a request from the AP provide the clearest view yet of the activity. Just southwest of the reactor, workers have dug a hole some 150 meters (165 yards) long and 60 meters (65 yards) wide. Tailings from the dig can be seen next to the site. A trench some 330 meters (360 yards) runs near the dig.

Some 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) west of the reactor, boxes are stacked in two rectangular holes that appear to have concrete bases. Tailings from the dig can be seen nearby. Similar concrete pads are often used to entomb nuclear waste.

Other images from Planet Labs suggest the dig near the reactor began in early 2019 and has progressed slowly since then.

Analysts who spoke to the AP offered several suggestions about what could be happening there.

The center's heavy-water reactor has been operational since the 1960s, far longer than most reactors of the same era. That raises both effectiveness and safety questions. In 2004, Israeli soldiers even began handing out iodine pills in Dimona in case of a radioactive leak from the facility. Iodine helps block the body from absorbing radiation.

Those safety concerns could see authorities decommission or otherwise retrofit the reactor, analysts say.

"I believe that the Israeli government is concerned to preserve and maintain the nation's current nuclear capabilities," said Avner Cohen, a professor of nonproliferation studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, who has written extensively on Dimona.

"If indeed the Dimona reactor is getting closer to decommissioned, as I believe it is, one would expect Israel to make sure that certain functions of the reactor, which are still indispensable, will be fully replaced."

Kimball, of the Arms Control Association, suggested Israel may want to produce more tritium, a relatively faster-decaying radioactive byproduct used to boost the explosive yield of some nuclear warheads. It also could want fresh plutonium "to replace or extend the life of warheads already in the Israeli nuclear arsenal," he added.

Israel built its nuclear weapons as it faced several wars with its Arab neighbors since its founding in 1948 in the wake of the Holocaust. An atomic weapons program, even undeclared, provided it an edge to deter enemies.

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As Peres, who led the nuclear program and later served as prime minister and president of Israel, said in 1998: "We have built a nuclear option, not in order to have a Hiroshima, but to have an Oslo," referring both to the first U.S. nuclear bomb drop in World War II and Israel's efforts to reach a peace deal with Palestinians.

But Israel's strategy of opacity also draws criticism from opponents. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif seized on the work at Dimona this week as his country prepared to limit access by the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency amid tensions with the West over its collapsing 2015 nuclear deal.

"Any talk about concern about Iran's nuclear program is absolute nonsense," Zarif told Iranian state television's English-language arm Press TV. "Let's be clear on that: It's hypocrisy."

The timing of the Dimona construction surprised Valerie Lincy, executive director of the Washington-based Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control.

"I think the most puzzling thing is ... you have a country that is very aware of the power of satellite imagery and particularly the way proliferation targets are monitored using that imagery," Lincy said. "In Israel, you have one known nuclear target for monitoring, which is the Dimona reactor. So you would think that anything that they wanted to keep under the radar would be kept under the radar."

In the 1960s, Israel used its claims about adversary Egypt's missile and nuclear efforts to divert attention from its work at Dimona — and may choose to do the same with Iran now.

"If you're Israel and you are going to have to undertake a major construction project at Dimona that will draw attention, that's probably the time that you would scream the most about the Iranians," said Jeffrey Lewis, a professor also teaching nonproliferation issues at Middlebury.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

Backlogged cases push California COVID-19 deaths past 50,000

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles County on Wednesday reported another 806 deaths from coronavirus during the winter surge, pushing California's toll above 50,000, or about one-tenth of the U.S. total from the pandemic.

The county, which has a quarter of the state's 40 million residents, said the deaths mainly occurred between Dec. 3 and Feb. 3. The Department of Public Health identified them after going through death records that were backlogged by the sheer volume of the surge's toll.

"It is heartbreaking to report on this large number of additional deaths associated with COVID-19 and a devastating reminder of the terrible toll the winter surge has taken on so many families across the county," Barbara Ferrer, Los Angeles County's health director, said in a statement.

Johns Hopkins University put California's overall COVID-19 death toll at 50,890.

The grim figure comes days after the U.S. recorded a half-million deaths.

While the nation's most populous state has the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the U.S., it is ranked 25th in the number of cases per capita because of its large population.

The death toll climbed precipitously amid a fall and winter surge that has begun to taper off as cases and hospitalizations drop. Los Angeles County on Wednesday reported an additional 136 deaths, accounting for nearly half of the state's 314 additional deaths.

The state has begun to ease more restrictions on businesses after lifting a stay-home order about a month ago. Gov. Gavin Newsom has vowed to reopen schools soon despite opposition from teachers unions.

It took 10 months for the state to hit 25,000 deaths on New Year's Eve and less than two months for that number to double.

When the state hit the 40,000 death mark on Jan. 30, it had recorded 3,800 deaths in the previous week. In state figures reported through Tuesday, it recorded 2,370 deaths over the past week.

Because of a lag from infection to illness to hospitalization and death, the number of deaths have fallen more slowly than infections. But deaths are expected to continue to drop.

Deaths have hit the poor, and Latino and Black communities especially hard. People working essential jobs have greater exposure to the virus and are more likely to bring it home to others who share crowded living quarters.

The death rate for Latinos is 21% higher than the statewide figure and 7% higher for Black people, according to the state Department of Public Health.

Latinos comprise a plurality of the population — 39% — but 55% of cases and 46% of deaths. Black people make up 6% of the state's population and account for 4% of cases and 6% of deaths. Whites, by comparison, make up 37% of the population but only 20% of cases and 32% of deaths.

Case rates are 38% higher in communities where the median annual income is less than \$40,000.

Amid COVID-19 pandemic, flu has disappeared in the US

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — February is usually the peak of flu season, with doctors' offices and hospitals packed with suffering patients. But not this year.

Flu has virtually disappeared from the U.S., with reports coming in at far lower levels than anything seen in decades.

Experts say that measures put in place to fend off the coronavirus — mask wearing, social distancing and virtual schooling — were a big factor in preventing a "twindemic" of flu and COVID-19. A push to get more people vaccinated against flu probably helped, too, as did fewer people traveling, they say.

Another possible explanation: The coronavirus has essentially muscled aside flu and other bugs that are more common in the fall and winter. Scientists don't fully understand the mechanism behind that, but it would be consistent with patterns seen when certain flu strains predominate over others, said Dr. Arnold Monto, a flu expert at the University of Michigan.

Nationally, "this is the lowest flu season we've had on record," according to a surveillance system that is about 25 years old, said Lynnette Brammer of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hospitals say the usual steady stream of flu-stricken patients never materialized.

At Maine Medical Center in Portland, the state's largest hospital, "I have seen zero documented flu cases this winter," said Dr. Nate Mick, the head of the emergency department.

Ditto in Oregon's capital city, where the outpatient respiratory clinics affiliated with Salem Hospital have not seen any confirmed flu cases.

"It's beautiful," said the health system's Dr. Michelle Rasmussen.

The numbers are astonishing considering flu has long been the nation's biggest infectious disease threat. In recent years, it has been blamed for 600,000 to 800,000 annual hospitalizations and 50,000 to 60,000 deaths.

Across the globe, flu activity has been at very low levels in China, Europe and elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere. And that follows reports of little flu in South Africa, Australia and other countries during the Southern Hemisphere's winter months of May through August.

The story of course has been different with coronavirus, which has killed more than 500,000 people in the United States. COVID-19 cases and deaths reached new heights in December and January, before beginning a recent decline.

Flu-related hospitalizations, however, are a small fraction of where they would stand during even a very mild season, said Brammer, who oversees the CDC's tracking of the virus.

Flu death data for the whole U.S. population is hard to compile quickly, but CDC officials keep a running count of deaths of children. One pediatric flu death has been reported so far this season, compared with 92 reported at the same point in last year's flu season.

"Many parents will tell you that this year their kids have been as healthy as they've ever been, because they're not swimming in the germ pool at school or day care the same way they were in prior years," Mick said.

Some doctors say they have even stopped sending specimens for testing, because they don't think flu

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is present. Nevertheless, many labs are using a CDC-developed "multiplex test" that checks specimens for both the coronavirus and flu, Brammer said.

More than 190 million flu vaccine doses were distributed this season, but the number of infections is so low that it's difficult for CDC to do its annual calculation of how well the vaccine is working, Brammer said. There's simply not enough data, she said.

That also is challenging the planning of next season's flu vaccine. Such work usually starts with checking which flu strains are circulating around the world and predicting which of them will likely predominate in the year ahead.

"But there's not a lot of (flu) viruses to look at," Brammer said.

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

GOP rallies solidly against Democrats' virus relief package

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans rallied solidly Wednesday against Democrats' proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill as lawmakers awaited a decision by the Senate's parliamentarian that could bolster or potentially kill a pivotal provision hiking the federal minimum wage.

Despite their paper-thin congressional majorities, Democratic leaders were poised to push the sweeping package through the House on Friday. They were hoping the Senate, where changes seem likely, would follow quickly enough to have legislation on President Joe Biden's desk by mid-March.

By late Wednesday, not one Republican in either chamber had publicly said he or she would back the legislation. GOP leaders were honing attacks on the package as a job killer that does too little to reopen schools or businesses shuttered for the pandemic and that was not only wasteful but also even unscrupulous.

"I haven't seen a Republican yet that's found something in there that they agree with," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "I think all Republicans believe in three simple things: They want a bill that puts us back to work, back to school and back to health. This bill is too costly, too corrupt and too liberal."

The hardening opposition suggested that Biden's first major legislative initiative could encounter unanimous GOP opposition. That was a counterpoint to the new president's refrain during his campaign about bringing the country together and a replay of the Republican wall that new President Barack Obama encountered in 2009 and most of his administration.

Democrats showed no signs of backing down, citing the assistance the measure would spread to people, businesses and state and local governments.

"If congressional Republicans want to oppose all that, my response is: Good luck," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on the Senate floor.

By Wednesday evening, the most suspense was over a decision anticipated from Elizabeth MacDonough, the Senate's nonpartisan arbiter of its rules, that promised enormous political and legislative consequences.

The relief bill includes a provision that over five years would hike the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The parliamentarian is involved because Democrats are pushing the overall \$1.9 trillion measure through Congress under special rules that will let them avoid a Senate filibuster by Republicans.

Those same rules prohibit provisions with only an "incidental" impact on the federal budget because they are chiefly driven by other policy purposes. The parliamentarian decides if a provision passes that test.

With Republicans strongly against a minimum wage increase, the only way for it to survive is by including it in a filibuster-proof bill like the COVID-19 relief measure. To end a filibuster, Democrats would need 60 votes, an impossibility for them in the evenly divided 50-50 Senate.

If the parliamentarian decides the minimum wage provision can remain in the bill, it would be a major boost for its proponents. But there would be no guarantee the measure would survive because some moderates oppose it or want it dialed back. That suggests grueling bargaining on its final form would lie ahead.

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A decision by the parliamentarian that the minimum wage hike must fall from the bill could be fatal, but not necessarily. Democrats could employ a rarely used procedural move to muscle the minimum wage provision into the bill with just 51 votes anyway, but it was unclear if they could muster enough support to do that.

The minimum wage has stood at \$7.25 since 2009. Winning the increase is a top priority for progressives at a time when Democrats control Congress and the White House.

The overall bill would provide millions of Americans with \$1,400 direct payments to help them weather the pandemic that's stalled much of the economy for a year and killed half a million people. It contains billions of dollars for vaccines and COVID-19 testing, schools, state and local governments and emergency jobless benefits while providing tax cuts or payments for many families with children.

In a sign of hardball politics ahead, top Republicans suggested that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Schumer squeezed money into the bill for their own states.

McCarthy said the bill had \$100 million to help extend the San Francisco area's BART commuter rail system south to San Jose. That project was approved previously by the Trump administration and is not in Pelosi's San Francisco district, a top Democratic aide said.

McCarthy and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., suggested Schumer had won money for a bridge connecting upstate New York to Canada. A senior Democratic aide said the bill contains \$1.5 million for the bridge, which is in the district of Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y. The aide said it was requested in 2020 by the Trump administration's Transportation Department, which was headed by Elaine Chao, McConnell's wife.

New Zealand's virus success unleashes runaway housing prices

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand's success in battling the coronavirus has unleashed an unanticipated problem: skyrocketing house prices.

When the pandemic first hit, most experts predicted house prices would fall. Instead, prices have risen by more than 19% over the past year, putting them out of reach for many people wanting to buy their first home.

The government, which has come under increasing criticism for its response to the housing squeeze, on Thursday announced the first of what it says will be a series of moves to address the issue by ordering the nation's central bank to consider the impact on house prices when making decisions.

Reserve Bank Governor Adrian Orr said it welcomed the new directive, which is "in tune" with its own advice to the government. The central bank has also recently announced its own moves to restrict lending to housing investors.

But some observers say the moves announced so far will have little impact on upward price momentum, which is being driven by undersupply and record low interest rates.

"It's very pleasing to see movement in the right direction," said Shamubeel Eaqub, an economist with Sense Partners who has written extensively about New Zealand's housing problems. But, he added, he expects house prices to "keep going up at a great rate of knots" without further strong intervention.

Eileen Donovan, 25, told radio station RNZ last week that she and her fiancé have been house-hunting near Wellington for six months. They've gone to 35 open homes and put in four unsuccessful offers, despite having a substantial deposit saved from an inheritance.

"It's a nightmare," she said.

Eaqub said that over the past 30 years, New Zealand hasn't built enough homes, especially rental units. And he said politicians find themselves in a paradox — they want prices to keep rising for those who own homes, and to fall for those who don't.

New Zealand has managed to stamp out community spread of the virus, allowing most aspects of life to return to normal, and its economy has rebounded strongly as a result. GDP grew by a record 14% in the December quarter, erasing most of the virus-induced contraction from earlier last year. Unemployment

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remains at a relatively low 4.9%.

The nation's sovereign credit rating was this week raised by Standard & Poors, making it the first developed nation to get such a vote of confidence since the pandemic began.

But that success has helped fuel the housing market.

The median price of a home in January jumped to 730,000 New Zealand dollars (\$544,000), a 19.3% increase from a year earlier, according to the latest figures from the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand. In Auckland, the biggest city, the median price hit an eye-watering NZ\$1 million.

Those prices are high under almost any comparison with other developed nations, especially considering most New Zealand homes do not come with double glazing, central heating or other features considered standard in much of North America and Europe.

Finance Minister Grant Robertson said those kind of rises can't continue.

"We've been very clear that what happened in the last three months of last year is not sustainable," he said. "And that's why we need to change the settings."

Australia passes law to make Google, Facebook pay for news

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's law forcing Google and Facebook to pay for news is ready to take effect, though the laws' architect said it will take time for the digital giants to strike media deals.

The Parliament on Thursday passed the final amendments to the so-called News Media Bargaining Code agreed between Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg on Tuesday.

In return for the changes, Facebook agreed to lift a ban on Australians accessing and sharing news.

Rod Sims, the competition regulator who drafted the code, said he was happy that the amended legislation would address the market imbalance between Australian news publishers and the two gateways to the internet.

"All signs are good," Sims said.

"The purpose of the code is to address the market power that clearly Google and Facebook have. Google and Facebook need media, but they don't need any particular media company, and that meant media companies couldn't do commercial deals," the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chair added.

The rest of the law had passed in Parliament earlier, so it can now be implemented.

Google has already struck deals with major Australian news businesses in recent weeks including News Corp. and Seven West Media.

Frydenberg said he was pleased to see progress by Google and more recently Facebook in reaching commercial deals with Australian news businesses.

But Country Press Australia, which represents 161 regional newspapers across the country, has raised concerns that tiny publications outside large cities might miss out.

Sims said he was not surprised that the platforms would strike deals with the large city businesses first.

"I don't see any reason why anybody should doubt that all journalism will benefit," Sims said.

"There things take time. Google and Facebook don't have unlimited resources to go around talking to everybody. I think this has got a long way to play out," he added.

Chris Moos, a lecturer at Oxford University's Business School, said the latest amendments amounted to a "small victory" for Zuckerberg.

Moos said the legislation would likely result in small payouts for most Australian news publishers. But Facebook could again block Australian news if negotiations broke down.

The legislation was designed to curb the outsized bargaining power of Facebook and Google in their negotiations with Australian news providers. The digital giants would not be able to abuse their positions by making take-it-or-leave-it payment offers to news businesses for their journalism. Instead, in the case of a standoff, an arbitration panel would make a binding decision on a winning offer.

Frydenberg and Facebook confirmed that the two sides agreed to amendments to the proposed legislation. The changes would give digital platforms one month's notice before they are formally designated

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under the code. That would give those involved more time to broker agreements before they are forced to enter binding arbitration arrangements.

Facebook Vice President of Global Affairs Nick Clegg said on Wednesday that the Australian law, without this week's amendments, would have enabled media conglomerates to "demand a blank check."

"Thankfully, after further discussion, the Australian government has agreed to changes that mean fair negotiations are encouraged without the looming threat of heavy-handed and unpredictable arbitration," Clegg, a former British deputy prime minister, wrote in a Facebook post.

Facebook last week prevented Australians from sharing news, but also blocked access to pandemic, public health and emergency services.

The blockade was a response the House of Representatives passing the code last week in a form that Facebook considered "unworkable."

Clegg said Facebook had "erred on the side of over-enforcement" and "some content was blocked inadvertently."

Both Google and Facebook are pursuing Australian media deals under their own licensing models, Google News Showcase and Facebook News.

But media executives argue such deals would not be possible without the threat of an arbitration panel making final decisions.

Frydenberg said his department will review the code within a year to "ensure it is delivering outcomes that are consistent with government's policy intent."

Prude's family says videos show crime; Officers say no

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Joe Prude watched in angry disbelief as New York state's top prosecutor announced there would be no criminal charges against the police officers seen on video pinning his younger brother to the street until he was on the cusp of death.

Prude said Wednesday that videos recorded by Rochester Police officers' body cameras after they caught up with Daniel Prude, naked on a frigid night last March, are irrefutable proof of a crime.

But attorneys for the seven police officers applauded a grand jury's decision Tuesday not to charge them, and insisted the videos are only evidence of the officers doing their jobs correctly.

"Murder, manslaughter, something," is what Joe Prude said he wanted to hear from Attorney General Letitia James nearly a year after his brother died following the fatal encounter with police. Daniel Prude, who was visiting from Chicago, had irrationally bolted from his brother's home, under the influence of PCP, and it was Joe Prude who called police asking for their help.

"How are you the attorney general and there's still no charges brought up?" Prude said he recalled thinking as he watched James' announcement Tuesday, livestreamed from Rochester's Aeon Missionary Baptist Church, not far from where Daniel Prude died.

The police officers' body camera footage shows Officer Mark Vaughn assuming a pushup stance and pressing Prude's head to the pavement while others immobilize his legs and Officer Troy Taladay kneels on Prude's back — what police union officials say is a standard restraining technique known as "segmenting." Prude is lying face down, handcuffed, with a mesh "spit hood" on his head. After about two minutes, he vomits and stops breathing. He was taken to hospital and put on life support but died a week later.

During a telephone interview with The Associated Press, Joe Prude pointed to what he believes is a particularly damning moment in the video, one in which he said he could hear the fear in his brother's voice. It's when Daniel Prude remarks, "They're trying to kill me."

"And then they end up killing him," Prude said.

The seven police officers remain suspended pending an internal investigation. The U.S. Justice Department said Tuesday that it will review the attorney general's findings.

The officers' attorneys said Daniel Prude's use of PCP, which caused irrational behavior, was "the root cause" of his death. Officer Taladay's attorney, Dan Mastrella, said Wednesday that he agrees the video

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footage "isn't pretty," but he said it shows officers did nothing wrong.

"What a terribly unfortunate result that Daniel Prude did not survive," Mastrella said. "What the police officers could have done differently escapes me."

Officer Vaughn's attorney, James Nobles, agreed.

"I know what it looks like and I understand why people are upset (but) what I saw on that tape that night was cops doing their jobs," he said.

James issued a report recommending, among other things, that officers be trained to recognize the symptoms of "excited delirium syndrome," which can make people vulnerable to cardiac arrest. The medical examiner and the attorney general's expert both concluded that Prude was in a state of excited delirium because of his drug use.

The attorney general also called for communities to minimize or eliminate police responses to mental health calls.

"If there's training available that lends itself to a different outcome, of course anybody would be in favor of it," Mastrella said.

A bigger problem, said Nobles, is that police are being asked to do too much.

"They're not just law enforcement officers anymore trying to detect crime and apprehend criminals. They're asked to be mental health professionals and domestic violence counselors and peer mentors," he said.

Nathaniel McFarland, one of Daniel Prude's five children, said he was not surprised that the officers weren't charged. He noted it was similar to other findings in police deaths involving Black people, his attorney Stephen Schwarz said.

"He was hopeful this would be different," Schwarz said, especially given the video footage.

On Tuesday, Attorney General James said that while she was bound to respect the grand jury's decision, she also condemned a system that she said had "frustrated efforts to hold law enforcement officers accountable for the unjustified killing of African Americans. ... Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd. And now Daniel Prude."

Schwarz said it was hard for McFarland and his siblings "not only to learn about their father's death, but to watch it."

"The fact that it was all captured on video makes it all the more difficult for them to accept this outcome," he said.

AP FACT CHECK: Biden on virus deaths, Kerry's climate crisis

By HOPE YEN and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and his team are getting the numbers wrong when they talk about the enormity of the mounting COVID-19 death toll and the looming climate change threat.

A look at the claims:

BIDEN: "Each day, I receive a small card in my pocket that I carry with me in my schedule. It shows the number of Americans who have been infected by or died from COVID-19. Today, we mark a truly grim, heartbreaking milestone: 500,071 dead. That's more Americans who have died in one year in this pandemic than in World War One, World War Two and the Vietnam War combined." — remarks Monday.

BIDEN: "As of yesterday, there are 500,071 people who have died from this — 500. That's more people that died in World War One, World War Two and Vietnam combined, in a year — in a year." — remarks Tuesday in roundtable with Black essential workers.

THE FACTS: His list of three wars is wrong. Based on conventional measures, coronavirus deaths in the U.S. currently do not exceed those from World War I, World War II and the Vietnam conflict.

According to the Congressional Research Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs, there were 116,516 U.S. deaths in World War I, 405,399 in World War II — which includes both battle deaths and other deaths in service but not in theater — and 58,220 in the Vietnam conflict. That adds up to about 580,000, exceeding the half million COVID-19 deaths as of Monday.

The virus death toll instead all but matched the number of Americans killed in World War II, Korea and

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Vietnam combined. With 36,574 deaths in the Korean War, the total number of casualties from those military conflicts was 500,193.

Asked for Biden's accounting, a White House official said Biden had meant in his speeches to say "combat" deaths in World War I, World War II and Vietnam — which totaled a more modest 390,000.

JOHN KERRY, Biden's climate envoy: "Well, the scientists told us three years ago we had 12 years to avert the worst consequences of climate crisis. We are now three years gone, so we have nine years left." — interview with CBS News on Feb. 19.

KERRY: "Three years ago, scientists gave us a stark warning. They said we have 12 years to avoid the worst consequences of climate change." — virtual climate adaptation summit, hosted by the Netherlands on Jan. 25.

THE FACTS: He's incorrect that 2030 is a drop-dead date to avert the "worst consequences" of climate change, though it's true that the planet will get progressively worse with each passing year. It's not an all-or-nothing type of situation that his comments imply, according to climate scientists.

A report by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, drawn from the work of hundreds of scientists, uses 2030 as a prominent benchmark because signatories to the Paris climate change agreement have pledged voluntary emission cuts by then. The date is not a last-chance, hard deadline for action.

The report "did not ever say we had '12 years left' in 2018," said Jim Skea, an IPCC co-chair and one of the report's lead authors. He said Kerry and others are wrongly interpreting references to the year 2030 in the report, which was used as a goal post "for no other reason than it marked the transition from one decade to the next" and was when government pledges to cut emissions aimed to act.

Climate scientists certainly see the necessity for broad and immediate action to address global warming, but they do not agree that 2030 is a point of no return.

The 2018 report had scientists detailing the differences between the two global warming-fighting goals agreed upon in the Paris climate agreement. The two goals are limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) and 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. The goals were set by diplomats based on scientific reports.

"Every bit of warming had consequences and there will be significant differences in impacts between 1.5 and 2 degrees warming," Skea, an energy professor at Imperial College in London, said in an email.

"That being said, we do not 'fall off a cliff' at 1.5 degrees — it just gets progressively worse."

Duke University Earth scientist Drew Shindell, another report co-author, said "Kerry isn't wildly wrong, but is a bit overly focused on specific numbers." He said there is "nothing special about 12 years or 2030. If we cut emissions by 2029 or 2031 the necessary cuts would be similar, but we only had years that were even multiples of 10 to look at."

Yen reported from Austin, Texas.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

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El Chapo's wife goes from obscurity to celebrity to arrest

By ANDRÉS VILLARREAL, CLAUDIA TORRENS and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press
CULIACAN, Mexico (AP) — Despite her status as the wife of the world's most notorious drug boss, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Emma Coronel Aispuro lived mostly in obscurity -- until her husband went to prison for life.

Then, suddenly, she was a presence on social media. There was talk of launching a fashion line. Even an appearance on a reality show dedicated to the families of drug traffickers.

Coronel's actions did not go unnoticed. And in the wake of her arrest Monday on charges that she had

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conspired to distribute drugs, there were those who wondered: In embracing the limelight, had Coronel put a target on her own back?

Her behavior was notable in part because she had lived a relatively sheltered life until her part in a grueling trial that drew international attention. But her actions violated unwritten rules about family members, especially wives, keeping a low profile.

Until the trial, "Emma had remained anonymous like practically all of partners of Sinaloa cartel capos," said Adrián López, executive editor of Sinaloa's *Noroeste* newspaper. Then, "she begins to take on more of a celebrity attitude. ... This breaks a tradition of secrecy and a style specifically within the leadership of the Sinaloa cartel."

Late last year, the Mexican investigative journalist Anabel Hernández — who has written extensively about the Sinaloa cartel, including a 2019 book about the diary of cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada's son — said a source told her that Coronel's mother, Blanca Aispuro, was worried about the turn her daughter's life was taking.

Concern was also building among Guzmán's sons and Sinaloa cartel leader Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, said Hernández, who was the first journalist to ever interview Emma Coronel.

"Her mother was also worried that an enemy cartel could harm Emma because she was unleashed, was out in the street a lot, the clubs, excessive in her social life," Hernández said the source told her. "Her mother worried something like that could happen or she could become a target of the government."

Guzmán has been married numerous times; as was made clear in his trial in New York, he has been far from faithful. Sitting in the courtroom, Coronel heard a woman testify to how she and Guzmán made a dramatic escape from a middle-of-the-night raid on one of his hideouts by Mexican marines.

She described hopping out of bed, locating a secret hatch and running through a drainage tunnel, a naked Guzmán leading the way.

"Sometimes I loved him and sometimes I didn't," the woman said, tearfully.

Coronel was there each day smiling, blowing kisses to Guzmán, "but in reality they tell me that Emma was very, very mad and very hurt," Hernández said. "And so, when the trial ended she decided to take revenge and the way to get revenge was to make her husband see what he was losing."

Coronel, 31, was born in San Francisco, but grew up in the mountains of Durango bordering Guzmán's Sinaloa state in an impoverished area known as the Golden Triangle.

She and Guzmán married in 2007 when she 18 years old. He was 50 and one of the world's most powerful drug traffickers. "I don't imagine she really had many options to say no, I won't marry you," Hernández said.

For a time, Coronel's father, Ines Coronel Barreras, allegedly took charge of moving the Sinaloa cartel's marijuana across the border into Arizona. In 2013, he was arrested with one of his sons and other men in a warehouse with guns and hundreds of pounds of marijuana across the border from Douglas, Arizona.

For years, Emma Coronel's only public image was a photograph from 2007, when she was crowned the beauty queen of the festival in Canelas, the town where she grew up. She wore an enormous crown and a closed mouth smile, and looked directly at the camera.

After their wedding, she disappeared from public view until it was reported in 2011 that she had given birth to their twin daughters in Los Angeles County. On Feb. 22, 2014, she was with Guzmán and their daughters in the Pacific resort town of Mazatlan when he was captured by Mexican marines.

Guzmán was sent to the maximum security Altiplano prison outside Mexico City while his lawyers fought his extradition. On July 11, 2015, Guzmán escaped through a milelong tunnel that had been dug to the shower in his cell.

In January 2016, Mexican marines recaptured Guzman in Los Mochis, Sinaloa. The next month, Coronel gave her first ever interview to Hernández, complaining repeatedly about the conditions in which Guzmán was being held.

Coronel told Hernández she had learned of his escape from the Altiplano prison from television.

"If I had known something I wouldn't have been able to sleep or eat from desperation," she said. "I had no idea."

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Guzmán was extradited to the United States -- but not before Coronel was involved in planning yet another escape attempt that never came to fruition, U.S. prosecutors say.

Coronel and her designer wardrobe made a splash at the El Chapo trial. Photographers elbowed each other to capture her arrivals and departures.

At one point, she wore a burgundy velvet blazer that matched one she had sent to Guzmán to wear that day. Afterward, she commissioned a courtroom artist to recreate the show of solidarity -- a souvenir.

Coronel strode the courtroom confidently. She played with her hair while waiting for proceedings to start and chatted amicably with reporters sitting behind her. She carried crackers and cookies in her purse, sometimes offering snacks to reporters.

Every morning, Guzmán sought her out as he entered the courtroom. He smiled and waved hello.

One day she chatted and laughed in the courtroom with Mexican actor Alejandro Edda, who played Guzmán in the Netflix series "Narcos: México." In the trial's sixth week, she brought her 7-year-old twin daughters, dressed in matching jeans and white jackets; their father clapped to them softly, as if to play with them.

After Guzmán was convicted -- he would be sent away for life plus 30 years -- Coronel posted a statement thanking Guzmán's attorneys, and her mother and sister for taking care of the twins while she was attending the trial.

She said the trial had been difficult. Her name had come up in testimony: Dámaso López, one of Guzmán's former lieutenants, testified that he met several times with Coronel and Guzmán's sons to plan the drug boss' escape from the Altiplano prison. And he said Coronel had relayed messages from her husband.

Coronel was unrepentant. "What I can only say about that is that I have nothing to be ashamed of," she wrote. "I am not perfect but I consider myself a good human being and I have never hurt anyone intentionally."

López, the editor of *Noroeste*, and Ismael Bojórquez, editor of *Riodoce*, a news outlet known for its investigations into Sinaloa's underworld, both expressed shock that Coronel had traveled to and from the U.S. after the trial.

Hernández suspects U.S. authorities noticed Coronel's change in lifestyle and spotted an opportunity to pressure her at a moment when she may be more open to betraying her husband.

Although Coronel has posted only five photos on Instagram (@therealemmacoronel), she has more than 563,000 followers.

For her last photo, posted in December, she posed in a white wedding dress, part of a fashion collection. And for a photo posted on her July birthday, she was resplendent in red lipstick, a black leather jacket -- and a crown in her long, dark hair, an echo of the small-town beauty queen she was so long ago.

"Happy birthday to me," she wrote.

Torrens reported from New York and Sherman from Mexico City. AP writers Tom Hays in New York and E. Eduardo Castillo in Mexico City contributed to this report.

Left out of MeToo: New initiative focuses on Black survivors

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

It's been more than three years since the #MeToo movement launched a culture-shifting conversation about sexual violence. But Tarana Burke, the activist who gave the movement its name, says concrete change has been incremental at best — and especially for Black survivors.

Now, Burke is part of a new initiative — called "We, As Ourselves" — in which three prominent groups are focusing on those survivors, who she says often feel that #MeToo has passed them by.

In an interview, Burke said that when #MeToo exploded into view in 2017, a result of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, "Black women just kept saying, 'Where are WE? Where ARE we? Where do we show up?'"

"The world was changing but we weren't being swept up in those changes," she said. "It's almost like

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trickle-down theory: 'Let's just hope some of this goodness will trickle down to Black folks and they will benefit from it.' Well, that's not going to happen unless we are intentional" about addressing the issue.

The initiative, announced Wednesday, is a collaboration between 'me too.' International, the group founded by Burke; the National Women's Law Center; and the TIME'S UP Foundation.

In a statement, the groups said they were working together to create safe spaces for Black survivors; to confront narratives "that harm and silence Black survivors;" and lastly to come up with new practices that will help get Black survivors "believed, heard, and supported."

Burke said the most important immediate impact will simply be that a national conversation is being had.

"The biggest part is there IS an initiative," Burke said. "There's been work done on local levels, by grassroots community organizations. But we've never had a national campaign specific to Black survivors of sexual violence."

She added that few people realize just how little the issue is spoken about in the Black community. "So raising the flag and having decided to talk about it alone is a big deal."

Among the initiative's concrete plans: narrative research; conversation guides; a five-part event series; and "rapid-response tools" to support Black survivors who come forward. A week of action is planned for Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April. The coalition also released a "Love Letter to Survivors," a video tribute from activists and celebrities like Gabrielle Union-Wade, Jurnee Smollett, Tamron Hall and Valerie Jarrett, the former adviser to President Barack Obama.

"The labor of Black women lies at the core of our culture, our economy, and our democracy, yet our voices and our needs are continually sidelined and ignored both by the media and our institutions writ large," said Fatima Goss Graves, president and CEO of the National Women's Law Center, in a statement. "Safety begins by listening to Black survivors and trusting them to know the conditions that will allow them to rise to the fullest of their potential, above the harm and trauma that continually tries to silence them."

Added Monifa Bandele, chief operating officer for TIME'S UP Foundation: "For generations, Black women have been excluded from the conversation and, when they are included, the narratives created around Black survivors, women, and girls are dangerous, destructive, and undermine their credibility and experiences at every turn ... We will no longer allow this to happen under our watch."

Burke noted that one of the main obstacles for Black survivors of sexual violence is the fact that conversation is dominated in the media by accusations against powerful and famous men — and little else.

"We had the R. Kelly documentary, the Russell Simmons documentary," she said, "and we were, like, 'OK that's not really our stories. That's A story, but it's not representative of most people's lives and experiences.'"

She also said that during the conversations about racial equality that dominated the national stage in recent months, there had been little mention of sexual violence, and that when she tried to raise it she was told by some: "This is not the time."

"We tend to segment things," she said, but "these things are inextricably linked to me."

Chief: Capitol Police were warned of violence before riot

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Capitol Police knew armed extremists were primed for violence at the iconic building on Jan. 6 and even provided officers with assault rifles to protect lawmakers, the acting chief acknowledged Wednesday. But the wild invasion of the Capitol was far worse than police expected, leaving them unprepared to fight it off.

A day earlier, her predecessor as chief testified that police expected an enraged but more typical protest crowd of Donald Trump supporters. But Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman said intelligence collected ahead of the riot prompted the agency to take extraordinary measures, including the special arming of officers, intercepting radio frequencies used by the invaders and deploying spies at the Ellipse rally where President Donald Trump was sending his supporters marching to the Capitol to "fight like hell."

Pittman's testimony, submitted ahead of a House hearing on Thursday, provides the most detailed

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account yet of the intelligence and preparations by U.S. Capitol Police ahead of the insurrection when thousands of pro-Trump rioters invaded the Capitol aiming to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election victory over Trump.

Three days earlier, On Jan. 3, Capitol Police distributed an internal intelligence assessment warning that militia members, white supremacists and other extremist groups were likely to participate, that demonstrators would be armed and that it was possible they would come to the Capitol to try to disrupt the vote, Pittman says.

"Based on the assessment, the Department understood that this demonstration would be unlike the previous demonstrations held by protesters with similar ideologies in November and December 2020," Pittman says in her prepared remarks.

But at the same time, she argues police didn't have enough intelligence to predict the violent insurrection that resulted in five deaths, including that of a Capitol Police officer. They prepared for trouble but not an invasion.

"Although the Department's January 3rd Special Assessment foretold of a significant likelihood for violence on Capitol grounds by extremists groups, it did not identify a specific credible threat indicating that thousands of American citizens would descend upon the U.S. Capitol attacking police officers with the goal of breaking into the U.S. Capitol Building to harm Members and prevent the certification of Electoral College votes," Pittman says in her testimony.

Steven Sund, the police force's former chief who resigned after the riot, testified Tuesday that the intelligence assessment warned white supremacists, members of the far-right Proud Boys and leftist antifa were expected to be in the crowd and might become violent.

"We had planned for the possibility of violence, the possibility of some people being armed, not the possibility of a coordinated military style attack involving thousands against the Capitol," Sund said.

The FBI also forwarded a warning to local law enforcement officials about online postings that a "war" was coming. But Pittman said it still wasn't enough to prepare for the mob that attacked the Capitol.

Officers were vastly outnumbered as thousands of rioters descended on the building, some of them wielding planks of wood, stun guns, bear spray and metal pipes as they broke through windows and doors and stormed through the Capitol. Officers were hit with barricades, shoved to the ground, trapped between doors, beaten and bloodied as members of Congress were evacuated and congressional staffers cowered in offices.

Should police have been better prepared?

With the amount of information available to the Capitol Police, it's surprising that they didn't take additional steps to reinforce security and protect their officers, said Tom Warrick, a former counterterrorism official who served in the Obama administration.

"On Jan. 6, the one strategic location in the entire U.S. national capital region that had to be defended was the U.S. Capitol," said Warrick, now with the Atlantic Council. "So it was really disappointing you have people testifying that 'we didn't know there would be violence.' When you are the target, you assume that things like that can happen even if you don't have the intel."

Even without access to secure intelligence, there were months of warning signs in public view that rioters would try to do what they did, said Bruce Hoffman, a former commissioner on the 9/11 Review Commission and a senior fellow for counterterrorism and homeland security for the Council on Foreign Relations.

A plot uncovered by federal law enforcement to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer was a major red flag, and many of the rioters went on social media to echo Trump's calls to "stop the steal" and speculate about violence.

"Historically, the default is always to blame it on an intelligence failure when often there may well be other reasons," Hoffman said. "I think it was very obvious to anyone that a confrontation was going to occur."

Pittman also says the department faced "internal challenges" as it responded to the riot. Officers didn't properly lock down the Capitol complex, even after an order had been given over the radio to do so. She also says officers didn't understand when they were allowed to use deadly force, and that less-than-lethal

weapons that officers had were not as successful as they expected.

While Pittman says in her testimony that that sergeants and lieutenants were supposed to pass on intelligence to the department's rank and file, many officers have said they were given little or no information or training for what they would face. Four officers told The Associated Press shortly after the riot that they heard nothing from Sund, Pittman, or other top commanders as the building was breached. Officers were left in many cases to improvise or try to save colleagues facing peril.

Pittman also faces internal pressure from her rank and file, particularly after the Capitol Police union issued a vote of no confidence against her last week. She must also lead the department through the start of several investigations into how law enforcement failed to protect the building.

Capitol Police are investigating the actions of 35 police officers on the day of the riot; six of those officers have been suspended with pay, a police spokesman said.

Merchant reported from Houston. Associated Press writers Ben Fox and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

Biden nominates 3 to postal board as delays persist

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

President Joe Biden on Wednesday nominated three postal experts to the governing board of the U.S. Postal Service, a move that could alter the course of an agency grappling with delivery delays and rumored cuts under its embattled Republican leader.

If confirmed by the Senate, the Board of Governors nominees would bring additional Democratic scrutiny on Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a major GOP donor whose tenure has been mired by slow service and politicization.

The nominees are Ron Stroman, a former deputy postmaster general; Amber McReynolds, a mail voting advocate who leads the nonprofit National Vote at Home Institute; and Anton Hajjar, the former general counsel of the American Postal Workers Union. A White House announcement of the move came just after a long and sometimes tense congressional hearing with DeJoy about the agency's ailing financial health.

"President Biden is committed to the USPS' success, and these experienced and tested leaders will ensure the USPS is running at the highest of service standards and that it can effectively and efficiently serve all communities in our country," a White House statement read.

Democrats have been pressing Biden to nominate a slate of potential governors who could oust DeJoy. The six members who currently comprise the board were nominated by President Donald Trump. A spokesman for the Postal Service said it "will welcome all qualified members to the Board of Governors."

DeJoy, a prominent supporter of Trump, has come under heavy criticism for a series of operational changes that slowed mail before the 2020 elections. The policy shifts fueled fears that DeJoy was attempting to sabotage the agency on the behalf of Trump, a vocal critic of mail voting, before it handled unprecedented numbers of mail-in ballots. Despite the worries, the agency said, it delivered more than 99% of ballots within five days.

After the election, the Postal Service again came into the spotlight as it struggled to handle the holiday season surge of packages and mail, leading to additional condemnation. DeJoy and other postal leaders have acknowledged and pledged to attend to the delays, saying the agency fell short of expectations.

DeJoy and the board are finalizing a 10-year plan to revitalize the Postal Service, an independent agency with roots to the 18th century. Asked about rumored cuts during the congressional hearing Wednesday, DeJoy told lawmakers that postal officials are "evaluating all service standards" but declined to offer many specifics.

"We need to, frankly, confront the problems we face, be candid and realistic about the magnitude of the solutions we require, and embrace the few, crucial, elements of legislative help we need from the Congress," DeJoy said.

Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, praised the nominees and said

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they represent an experienced group who will oversee any potential changes to the agency's operations.

"The board has the right to hire and to fire postmaster generals, so DeJoy's certainly going to have to function in a way that he keeps the support of the board," Dimondstein said. "He's going to be dealing with some changing dynamics on the board."

Izaguirre reported from Lindenhurst, New York.

Associated Press coverage of voting rights receives support in part from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Facebook says it will pay \$1B over 3 years to news industry

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

Facebook, following in Google's footsteps, says it plans to invest \$1 billion to "support the news industry" over the next three years.

The social networking giant, which has been tussling with Australia over a law that would make social platforms pay news organizations, said it has invested \$600 million since 2018 in news.

Google said in October that it would pay publishers \$1 billion over the next three years.

News companies want Google and Facebook to pay for the news that appears on their platforms. Governments in Europe and Australia are increasingly sympathetic to this point of view. The two tech companies suck up the majority of U.S. digital advertising dollars, which — among other problems — has hurt publishers.

Facebook said on Tuesday it would lift a ban on news links in Australia after the government agreed to tweak proposed legislation that would help publishers negotiate payments with Facebook and Google. Facebook was criticized for its ban, which also temporarily cut access to government pandemic, public health and emergency services on the social networking site.

Facebook said Tuesday that the changes allow it to choose which publishers it will support and indicated that it will now start striking such deals in Australia.

Google had already been signing content licensing deals with Australian media companies, and says that it has arrangements with more than 50 publishers in the country and more than 500 globally.

There may be more such regulation in other countries. Microsoft is working with European publishers to push big tech platforms to pay for news. European Union countries are working on adopting copyright rules that allow news companies and publishers to negotiate payments.

Golf without Woods? Battered leg brings it closer to reality

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

The PGA Tour without Tiger Woods was always inevitable purely because of age. His shattered right leg from his SUV flipping down a hill on a sweeping road through coastal Los Angeles suburbs only brings that closer.

Golf wasn't ready Wednesday to contemplate the future of its biggest star after the 10th and most complicated surgery on the 45-year-old Woods. There was more relief that he was alive.

"Listen, when Tiger wants to talk about golf, we'll talk about golf," Commissioner Jay Monahan said at the World Golf Championship in Florida. "When you're going to overcome what he needs to overcome, I think the love of all of our players and everybody out here, it's going to come forward in a big way and across the entire sporting world.

"I think he'll feel that energy and I think that's what we should all focus on."

Woods made it clear what he faces with an update posted early Wednesday to social media by his team that outlined the "long surgical procedure" at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.

Anish Mahajan, the chief medical officer, said Woods shattered tibia and fibula bones on his right leg in multiple locations. Those were stabilized by a rod in the tibia. He said a combination of screws and pins

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were used to stabilize additional injuries in the ankle and foot.

Four previous surgeries to repair ligaments were done on the left knee. This is the first major trauma to the right leg. Woods has had five surgeries on his lower back in the last seven years. The most recent was in December, a microdiscectomy to remove a pressurized disk that was pinching a nerve.

"I would say, unfortunately, it's very, very unlikely that he returns to be a professional golfer after these injuries," said Dr. Michael Gardner, chief of orthopedic trauma at Stanford Medical Center. "His age, his multiple back issues, this is going to be a very long road ahead if he chooses to attempt to return to his previous level of golfing."

Can golf do without the player singularly responsible for its growth?

His watershed victory in the 1997 Masters sent media interest in golf soaring. More than just the first player of Black heritage in a green jacket, he won at a more prolific rate than anyone in history. The timing was impeccable, for the PGA Tour negotiated a television contract that made prize money spike.

Woods won his first tournament as a 20-year-old in the 1996 Las Vegas Invitational, where the total purse was \$1.65 million. At the World Golf Championship this week, first place alone is worth \$1.82 million.

Woods made everyone rich.

What now?

The PGA Tour has been down this road before.

Ten years ago, when Woods was still smarting from the sordid revelations of serial adultery and missed three months with more injuries, the PGA Tour negotiated a nine-year television deal with increased rights fees. There was no assurance Woods could get back to the top of his game.

Woods was playing a small schedule even when he was younger and healthier. He has never played more than 21 times in a year on the PGA Tour, which stages events in 46 weeks this season.

He also tends to return to the same courses. But when he plays, and there isn't a pandemic, no one needs to study TV ratings to measure his impact. Fans often stand six and seven rows deep behind tees and greens to get a look. No other player attracts that kind of attention. The top 10 in the world combined don't do that.

Woods doesn't move the needle. Woods is the needle.

"It's always great when he plays at a tournament or is out here because it gives that tournament an extra dimension that it usually doesn't," four-time major champion Rory McIlroy said. "We were all sort of heading towards that day that Tiger wasn't going to be a part of the game."

Woods had only one top-10 finish last year, and that was before the pandemic. Even after golf returned, he waited an additional month to get started. He played only seven times since July and never cracked the top 35. He remains one victory short of his 83rd victory, which would set a PGA Tour record, the one most reasonable for him to break. That was before the crash.

McIlroy already has seen one comeback. He often talks about having lunch one day with Woods in Florida, right after Woods' fourth back surgery to fuse his lower spine. He saw the pain. And two years later, he saw Woods win the Masters for a fifth time, his 15th major.

"I don't want to take anything away from what Ben Hogan did after his car crash or any of the other comebacks that athletes have had in other sports, but right now I can't think of any greater comeback in sports than the journey that he made from that lunch we had in 2017 to winning the Masters a couple years later," McIlroy said.

Hogan threw himself in front of his wife right before they were struck by a Greyhound bus in 1949. He broke his pelvis, collarbone and left ankle, chipped a rib and had blood clots that left him with circulation problems the rest of his life. Hogan was 36 at the time.

What the future holds for Woods and for the tour is not anything players were ready to embrace.

"At this stage, I think everyone should just be grateful that he's here, that he's alive, that his kids haven't lost their dad," McIlroy said. "That's the most important thing. Golf is so far from the equation right now, it's not even on the map."

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

Former aide says Cuomo kissed her, suggested strip poker

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A former member of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration who previously accused him of sexual harassment offered new details Wednesday, saying he once kissed her on the lips without consent.

Lindsey Boylan said that during her more than three years in the Democrat's administration, Cuomo "would go out of his way to touch me on my lower back, arms and legs," compared her to one of his rumored ex-girlfriends and once remarked they should play strip poker.

Cuomo's spokesperson Caitlin Girouard said that all Boylan's "claims of inappropriate behavior are quite simply false."

But the state legislature's two top leaders criticized Cuomo's alleged conduct Wednesday as calls grew for an investigation.

Boylan, a Democrat running for Manhattan borough president, made the new allegations in a post on the website Medium more than two months after she first spoke up about alleged mistreatment by Cuomo. At the time, she hadn't provided details, saying she had "no interest in speaking to journalists."

But on Wednesday, she attributed her decision to say more to Assembly member Ron Kim levying public accusations of bullying and threats from Cuomo and his aides last week.

She wrote the kiss happened at the end of a one-on-one meeting with Cuomo at his New York City office. "As I got up to leave and walk toward an open door, he stepped in front of me and kissed me on the lips. I was in shock, but I kept walking," she wrote. "The idea that someone might think I held my high-ranking position because of the Governor's 'crush' on me was more demeaning than the kiss itself."

Boylan, a former deputy secretary for economic development and special adviser to the governor, confirmed to The Associated Press that she'd written the blog entry but declined to be interviewed.

When Boylan initially tweeted in December that Cuomo sexually harassed her, the governor denied he did anything inappropriate.

"Look, I fought for and I believe a woman has the right to come forward and express her opinion and express issues and concerns that she has," Cuomo told reporters then. "But it's just not true."

Not quite a year ago, the three-term governor was at the height of his popularity during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, holding widely watched daily briefings where he implored people to take the virus seriously. In recent weeks, however, criticism about the work culture around Cuomo and how he wields his power has mounted, while his support has eroded over his imperious style and revelations that his administration withheld details from the public about the pandemic's death toll in nursing homes.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, a Democrat, called Boylan's account "deeply disturbing."

"Harassment in the workplace of any kind should not be tolerated," said Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, also a Democrat.

Boylan, who joined the administration economic development agency in the spring of 2015, said she first met Cuomo at a Madison Square Garden event in January 2016.

"My boss soon informed me that the Governor had a 'crush' on me," Boylan wrote. "It was an uncomfortable but all-too-familiar feeling: the struggle to be taken seriously by a powerful man who tied my worth to my body and my appearance."

Boylan included a screenshot of Nov. 4, 2016, text message exchange with her mother, in which Boylan said Cuomo was being "creepy" and "has a crush on me." She also wrote the governor's staff needlessly inquired about whether she planned to go to events he was attending.

She also posted a screenshot of a Dec. 14, 2016, email in which an aide wrote the governor had compared Boylan to a woman he was rumored to have dated.

"You could be sisters. Except you're the better looking sister," the aide wrote.

Boylan wrote that after a December 2016 holiday party in Albany, the governor summoned her to his

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office, where Cuomo showed her a cigar box he'd received from former President Bill Clinton.

Cuomo "didn't touch me," Boylan wrote, but the one-on-one encounter made her uncomfortable.

During an October 2017 flight, she said Cuomo said, "Let's play strip poker" as they sat with a press aide and a state trooper. She said she brushed it off by sarcastically saying, "That's exactly what I was thinking," but privately found the comment upsetting.

The governor's office confirmed that Boylan flew with Cuomo on four occasions that month, but that other aides present disputed the account.

"We were on each of these October flights and this conversation did not happen," said a statement attributed to former senior adviser John Maggiore, former Empire State Development CEO Howard Zensky, former Cuomo press secretary Dani Lever and former first deputy press secretary Abbey Fashouer Collins.

Boylan asserted Cuomo created a culture of pervasive sexual harassment, including making unflattering comments about female colleagues' weight, ridiculing their romantic relationships and having roses delivered to them on Valentine's Day.

"His inappropriate behavior toward women was an affirmation that he liked you, that you must be doing something right," Boylan said.

Boylan said two other former Cuomo staffers have privately confided in her that they were also sexually harassed by the governor, but did not identify them.

The Sexual Harassment Working Group, an advocacy group launched by former state legislative employees who experienced sexual harassment, called for an independent investigation into Cuomo's workplace behavior.

Cuomo was in a long-term relationship with Food Network star Sandra Lee throughout the timeframe laid out in Boylan's accusations. The couple split in 2019.

Personnel memos written in 2018, obtained by the AP, indicate Boylan resigned after she was confronted about complaints she belittled and yelled at her staff.

Boylan said those records "were leaked to the media in an effort to smear me."

In her post, she offered a different reason for her departure, saying her relationship with Cuomo's "senior team — mostly women — grew hostile after I started speaking up for myself. I was reprimanded and told to get in line by his top aides, but I could no longer ignore it."

Bats, birds among wildlife pummeled during Southern freeze

By JOHN FLESHER and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — As many people in the southern U.S. hosted neighbors who had no heat or water during the vicious February storm and deep freeze, Kate Rugroden provided a refuge for shell-shocked bats.

Starving and disoriented, the winged mammals tumbled to the snow-coated ground as temperatures plunged to levels rarely seen in the region.

"They burned through their energy reserves as they tried to wake up and get away from the cold and ice," said Rugroden, of Arlington, Texas, one of numerous rehabilitation specialists nursing stranded bats plucked up by sympathetic people. "And there aren't any insects out there for them to eat yet."

Bats are among numerous wildlife believed to have taken a beating in the South, a region unaccustomed to such a severe and prolonged cold snap. Many species migrate there for winter precisely because of its normally mild weather.

It might take weeks or months to determine the extent of the harm, but anecdotal evidence is already turning up — including dead robins on yards and sidewalks.

Alligators in Oklahoma's Red Slough Wildlife Management Area were photographed with snouts protruding from frozen waterways — a survival maneuver enabling them to breathe while their bodies go dormant to conserve energy.

Fish kills were feared in Arkansas and Louisiana. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department said it expected casualties among exotic deer and antelope. Across the Gulf of Mexico coast as far east as Florida, naturalists worried about monarch butterflies and the milkweed plants essential to their survival as they

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prepare to migrate northward.

"Animals can respond to events like this by moving elsewhere, but if it's beyond your flight range or your walking range you have to hunker down," said Perry Barboza, a wildlife biologist at Texas A&M University. "Some animals like small birds can do it just a night or two. The duration becomes the killer."

Sea turtles stunned by frigid Gulf coastal waters were still being cared for at facilities this week. More than 10,600 had been found and officials were tabulating how many died, said Donna Shaver, Texas coordinator for the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network.

Sea Turtle Inc. took in so many that it used the South Padre Island Convention Center to accommodate the overflow, executive director Wendy Knight said.

"Our hospital is now completely filled to the gills," Knight said.

Fish kills along the Texas coast were expected for recreational favorites such as spotted sea trout and red drum. In Louisiana, officials said it could take a week for dead fish to wash ashore.

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission warned anglers to expect die-offs of threadfin shad, a primary food source for lake species such as bass, walleye and crappie.

While extreme weather is particularly dangerous for imperiled species, the whooping crane — listed by the federal government as endangered — appears to have weathered the storm, said Joe Saenz, manager of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

About 500 of the majestic birds spend winters at the refuge before returning to Canadian nesting grounds. During the cold spell, some were spotted feasting on dead fish floating on the Gulf waters.

Biologists are concerned about monarch butterflies, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in December designated as a candidate for endangered or threatened status because of a sharp decline in recent decades.

The biggest monarch population winters in Mexican mountains and begins its northward trek in March. Had the cold spell happened a few weeks later, the orange-and-black butterflies could have been devastated, said Ray Moranz, an Oklahoma-based scientist.

They still might not escape unscathed. Some typically spend winters along the Gulf coast, where their odds during the deep freeze were poor, said Moranz, of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

Another potential danger is to milkweed, which provides spots for female monarchs to lay eggs and food for their larvae. If the plants' growth across the South is stunted, more young would not survive.

That situation underscores a hazard for wildlife across the region: Even those that made it through the freeze might see damaged habitat and less food.

In South Texas, bur clover, a winter weed crucial for deer in spring, was showing freeze burn.

Long-term, the biggest concerns are for birds and bats, both of which had absorbed heavy blows even before the storm.

Breeding bird populations in the U.S. and Canada have plummeted nearly 30 percent in the past 50 years — primarily because of habitat loss. Spring population counts will offer the first indication of how many succumbed to the cold, said Barboza of Texas A&M.

Migratory birds don't bother fattening up for winter because food in the South is plentiful, he said. During the storm, many probably burned through their meager energy reserves and died of exhaustion. About 20 dead brown pelicans were found on Texas' Chester Island.

"You worry about food sources covered in snow — seeds and berries — and a decrease in insect life," said Ben Jones, executive director of the Texas Conservation Alliance, who found five dead birds in his yard last weekend. Robins, bluebirds, hermit thrushes and gray catbirds were among hard-hit types, he said.

Frozen songbirds also were spotted on streets in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where temperatures plunged to minus-13 degrees last week.

Bats have their own challenges, including a fungal disease called white-nose syndrome that has killed millions. To those struggling to save them, every bat is precious. They eat huge numbers of insects that consume farm crops and carry diseases.

"We're seeing a large population hit," including migratory bats just arriving from Mexico, said Rugroden, the rehabilitation specialist. A well-known colony living in a Houston bridge appears to have taken big losses.

Flesher reported from Traverse City, Michigan.

FDA says single-dose shot from J&J prevents severe COVID

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Johnson & Johnson's single-dose vaccine offers strong protection against severe COVID-19, according to an analysis released Wednesday by U.S. regulators that sets the stage for a final decision on a new and easier-to-use shot to help tame the pandemic.

The long-anticipated shot could offer the nation a third vaccine option and help speed vaccinations by requiring just one dose instead of two. Food and Drug Administration scientists confirmed that overall the vaccine is about 66% effective at preventing moderate to severe COVID-19, and about 85% effective against the most serious illness. The agency also said J&J's shot is safe.

The analysis is just one step in the FDA's evaluation. On Friday, the agency's independent advisers will debate if the evidence is strong enough to recommend the shot. With that advice, the FDA is expected to make a final decision within days.

The COVID-19 death toll in the U.S. topped 500,000 this week, and the vaccination drive has been slower than hoped, hampered by logistical and weather delays. So far, about 44.5 million Americans have received at least one dose of vaccine made by Pfizer or Moderna, and nearly 20 million of them have received the second dose required for full protection.

Tests showed the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were 95% effective at protection against symptomatic COVID-19.

Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, is part of the FDA advisory panel that will scrutinize the J&J data on Friday and cautions that none of the vaccines have been directly compared. Still, he was encouraged that one dose of the J&J vaccine appears as good at preventing serious illness as its two-dose competitors.

"This is a vaccine to prevent you from going to the hospital and dying at a level that's certainly comparable" to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, he said.

J&J tested its single-dose option in 44,000 adults in the U.S., Latin America and South Africa. Different mutated versions of the virus are circulating in different countries, and the FDA analysis cautioned that it's not clear how well the vaccine works against each variant. But J&J previously announced that the vaccine worked better in the U.S. — 72% effective against moderate to severe COVID-19, compared with 66% in Latin America and 57% in South Africa.

South Africa recently began giving the J&J vaccine to front-line health workers on a test basis after deciding that a vaccine from rival AstraZeneca had not shown strong enough study results against the particularly concerning variant spreading there.

"I was reassured" that despite different variants, the J&J shot still protected against serious illness, said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former FDA vaccine chief. "That's pretty robust data."

In case the vaccines eventually need to be updated, manufacturers are working on adjustments to their recipes. Moderna announced Wednesday that it is ready to begin testing experimental doses that better match the South African version of the virus.

Across all countries, the analysis of the J&J vaccine showed protection began to emerge about 14 days after vaccination. But by 28 days after vaccination, there were no hospitalizations or deaths in the vaccinated group compared with 16 hospitalizations and seven deaths in study recipients who received a dummy shot.

The FDA said effectiveness and safety were consistent across racial groups, including Black and Latino participants.

All of the world's COVID-19 vaccines have been tested differently, making comparisons nearly impossible. It would not be surprising if one dose turned out to be a little weaker than two doses, and policymakers will decide if that's an acceptable trade-off to get more people vaccinated faster.

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J&J has another large study underway to see if a second dose of its vaccine works better, raising the prospect that countries could eventually add a booster if one turned out to be warranted.

Like other COVID-19 vaccines, the main side effects of the J&J shot are pain at the injection site and flu-like fever, fatigue and headache. No study participant experienced the severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis, that is a rare risk of some other COVID-19 shots, although one experienced a less serious reaction.

The FDA said there were no serious side effects linked to the vaccine so far, although it recommended further monitoring for blood clots. In the study, those were reported in about 15 vaccine recipients and 10 placebo recipients, not enough of a difference to tell if the vaccine played any role.

J&J was on track to become the world's first one-dose option until earlier this month. Mexico announced it would use a one-dose version from China's CanSino, which is made with similar technology as J&J's shot but initially was developed as a two-dose option until beginning a one-dose test in the fall.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines now being used in the U.S. and numerous other countries must be kept frozen, while the J&J shot can last three months in a refrigerator, making it easier to handle. Astra-Zeneca's vaccine — widely used in Europe and Britain — is made similarly and also requires refrigeration but takes two doses.

If the FDA clears the J&J shot for U.S. use, it will not boost vaccine supplies significantly right away. Only a few million doses are expected to be ready for shipping in the first week. But J&J told Congress this week that it expected to provide 20 million doses by the end of March and 100 million by summer.

European regulators and the World Health Organization also are considering J&J's vaccine. Worldwide, the company aims to produce around a billion doses by the end of the year.

Associated Press video producer Kathy Young contributed to this report.

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

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine works well in big 'real world' test

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer

A real-world test of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in more than half a million people confirms that it's very effective at preventing serious illness or death, even after one dose.

Wednesday's published results, from a mass vaccination campaign in Israel, give strong reassurance that the benefits seen in smaller, limited testing persisted when the vaccine was used much more widely in a general population with various ages and health conditions.

The vaccine was 92% effective at preventing severe disease after two shots and 62% after one. Its estimated effectiveness for preventing death was 72% two to three weeks after the first shot, a rate that may improve as immunity builds over time.

It seemed as effective in folks over 70 as in younger people.

"This is immensely reassuring ... better than I would have guessed," said the Mayo Clinic's Dr. Gregory Poland.

Vanderbilt University's Dr. Buddy Creech agreed: "Even after one dose we can see very high effectiveness in prevention of death," he said.

Neither doctor had a role in the Israel study but both are involved in other coronavirus vaccine work.

Both doctors also said the new results may boost consideration of delaying the second shot, as the United Kingdom is trying, or giving one dose instead of two to people who have already had COVID-19, as France is doing, to stretch limited supplies.

"I would rather see 100 million people have one dose than to see 50 million people have two doses," Creech said. "I see a lot of encouragement on one dose" in the results from Israel, which were published by the New England Journal of Medicine.

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The vaccine, made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, is given as two shots, three weeks apart, in most countries.

The study was led by researchers from the Clalit Research Institute and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, with Harvard University in the U.S. It did not report on safety of the vaccine, just effectiveness, but no unexpected problems arose in previous testing.

Researchers compared nearly 600,000 people 16 and older in Israel's largest health care organization who were given shots in December or January to an equal number of people of similar age, sex and health who did not receive vaccine. None of the participants had previously tested positive for the virus.

The vaccine was estimated to be 57% effective at preventing any symptoms of COVID-19 two to three weeks after the first dose, and 94% a week or more after the second dose.

Effectiveness was 74% after one shot and 87% after two for preventing hospitalization, and 46% and 92% for preventing confirmed infection. Reducing infections gives hope that the vaccine may curb spread of the virus, but this type of study can't determine if that's the case.

There were 41 COVID-19-related deaths, 32 of them in people who did not get vaccine.

Overall, the numbers compare well to the 95% effectiveness after two doses that was seen in the limited testing that led U.S. regulators to authorize the vaccine's emergency use, Poland said. How much benefit there would be from one dose has been a big question, "and now there's some data" to help inform the debate, he added.

"Maybe the right thing to do here to protect the most number of people ... is to give everybody one dose as soon as you can. I think that's a very acceptable strategy to consider," Poland said.

Israel now has vaccinated nearly half of its population. A newer variant of the virus that was first identified in the United Kingdom became the dominant strain in Israel during the study, so the results also give some insight into how well the vaccine performs against it.

Earlier this week, two U.K. studies suggested benefits even after one dose of the Pfizer vaccine or a different one from AstraZeneca. The U.K. is delaying the second shot for up to 12 weeks after the first one to try to give more people some level of protection.

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

Things to Know: States push their own relief packages

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— States not willing to wait for pandemic financial relief from the federal government have taken matters into their own hands. Maryland and California recently approved help for small businesses, the poor, the jobless and those needing child care. New Mexico and Pennsylvania are also funneling grants directly to cash-starved businesses. The spending shows that many states have proved unexpectedly resilient during the pandemic. And it has provided fuel for critics who say they don't need another massive infusion of cash from Congress. The Biden administration's \$1.9 trillion relief plan would send hundreds of billions of dollars to state and local governments.

— An analysis by U.S. regulators says Johnson & Johnson's single-dose vaccine provides strong protection against severe COVID-19. The report Wednesday confirmed that overall the vaccine is about 66% effective at preventing moderate to severe COVID-19. On Friday, a panel of experts to the Food and Drug Administration will debate if the evidence is strong enough to recommend the long-anticipated shot. The FDA is expected to make a final decision within days. If the FDA clears the J&J shot for U.S. use, it won't boost vaccine supplies significantly right away. Only a few million doses are expected to be ready for shipping in the first week.

— The predominantly Latino cities of Central Falls, Rhode Island, and Chelsea, Massachusetts, have been among their states' hardest-hit communities in the pandemic. Rhode Island has opened up vaccinations

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to all Central Fall residents 18 or older, and city officials say they're on pace to inoculate most residents by the summer. Massachusetts, meanwhile, hasn't done the same for Chelsea or other hard-hit communities of color. Public health experts, civil rights groups and immigrant activists have complained for months that the state isn't doing nearly enough to ensure that Black and Latino residents are inoculated.

THE NUMBERS: According to data through Tuesday from Johns Hopkins University, the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. fell over the past two weeks, from roughly 108,073 on Feb. 9 to 65,763 on Tuesday. Over the same period, the seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths also fell, from nearly 2,677 on Feb. 9 to about 2,019 on Tuesday.

QUOTABLE: "We know we need to focus on Black and brown communities," said Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, the director of the health department in Washington, D.C. "Let's not give up on communities of color being interested in the vaccine. Let's continue to answer their questions. Let's continue to be very thoughtful in how we answer their questions."

ICYMI: Tennessee's top health officials say that more than 2,400 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in the state's most populous county have gone to waste over the past month. According to state findings announced Tuesday, local officials sat on tens of thousands of shots that were thought to have already gone into arms. The finding comes after the Department of Health launched an investigation into a recent report that severe winter storms caused 1,000 doses to be tossed in Shelby County, which encompasses Memphis. But Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey revealed that the problems were far more widespread. She said there were numerous issues dating back to Feb. 3.

ON THE HORIZON: Republican lawmakers pushing to spend public money to pay for private or home schooling say they are responding to parental frustration over lack of in-person schooling. Opponents of such vouchers say they will sap resources as schools try to help kids harmed by online school and other disruptions. There are fresh voucher proposals in states with already abundant subsidies for private and home schools and in states where there are none. Schools have been more likely to stay all-virtual in states controlled by Democrats. Yet the proposals appear more likely to pass in states controlled by Republicans.

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

After mental health break, a turnaround at Detroit Mercy

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Detroit Mercy's men's basketball team began the season with three games in five days. A week later, a matchup with Kentucky was canceled. Then on the last weekend of December, there was some uncertainty about whether a couple games against rival Oakland would be played.

They were, but Detroit Mercy coach Mike Davis wasn't happy about it.

"I said enough is enough," Davis recalled. "We're taking some time off."

After the two games against Oakland, the Detroit Mercy program paused activities, citing not positive COVID-19 tests or contact tracing issues but the mental health of its athletes. The Titans didn't play another game until Jan. 15. Since then, they've found their stride, winning 10 of their final 12 regular-season games going into Thursday night's game against Robert Morris in the Horizon League Tournament.

In this season unlike any other, players throughout the country have had to adjust to coronavirus protocols, scheduling uncertainty and just general anxiety about what's to come. Many have been largely isolated on campuses that are far emptier than normal.

Even for those who avoid catching the virus, the mental strain can be a real issue.

"We don't have the normal balance of our lives that we usually do, while being concerned about not getting COVID and trying to be as healthy as you can be and control what you can control," Iowa star Luka Garza said. "It's definitely been a different year than any other for all of us."

An NCAA study conducted in the fall on the well-being of athletes shed some light on the challenges they face during the pandemic.

"Student-athletes reported fewer sleep difficulties and lower levels of loneliness, loss, anger and sadness

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in fall 2020 than at the outset of the pandemic," the study said. "However, similar to spring, elevated rates of mental exhaustion, anxiety, hopelessness and feelings of being depressed were reported."

Davis said he thought playing some games would be good, but that can create stress of its own — something as simple as staying at a hotel takes a different toll than it did a year ago.

Then there were the two games against Oakland at the end of December. Davis was concerned because of a game the Golden Grizzlies had played shortly before that.

"We found out that the referee that was in that game had the virus, and then we had to play Oakland six days later," Davis said. "Our guys did not want to play, I didn't want to coach, and you could just see it in them."

Oakland coach Greg Kampe said at the time that he didn't want to play the games either, but they were held. Detroit Mercy lost both, falling to 1-7 on the season. Then the Titans took their break.

It wasn't a completely unusual move. Earlier in December, Duke canceled its remaining nonconference games to help players spend time with family over the holidays.

At Detroit Mercy, Davis felt the virus was wearing on his team in a variety of ways.

"You have the threat of someone getting it every day, anybody. Most people who get it don't know where they got it from," he said. "I think that our fans have been really patient with us, and our administration, our AD is just unbelievable."

The pause was initially supposed to be a week and wasn't due to any positive tests in the program. Davis said there was eventually a positive test, and the Titans didn't play Milwaukee the weekend of Jan. 9 as planned. They returned the following week against Green Bay.

Since coming back, the Titans have had only conference games, and they were all on Fridays and Saturdays. Those back-to-backs weren't necessarily easy, but they allowed the team to establish a sense of routine.

Davis said the Titans would play their games, then take Sunday off. Then they'd practice Monday and Tuesday before another day off Wednesday.

Marquell Fraser, a guard for Detroit Mercy, said the lengthy break did have some drawbacks — any time away from the court can make it tough to build team chemistry. But he said it has been helpful to have a consistent schedule from week to week — something that wasn't the case during the nonconference season.

"Going into every week, we all know what to expect," Fraser said. "We all know that we're going to be playing Friday, Saturday, Sunday off, and after that, Monday we're back to work. I think it is good just knowing your set schedule for the rest of the week."

Of course, now Detroit Mercy begins the conference tournament with its first Thursday game of the entire season. But the Titans have a lot of reasons to feel optimistic. They not only made it through the regular season, they now look like a threat in the Horizon.

And Davis has learned a few things from this experience that might be useful even in a non-pandemic year.

"You realize that you can give guys off days. Sometimes, coaches, we're so nervous about not being in the gym and not practicing," he said. "But two days on and one day off, we're playing better than we ever played."

Follow Noah Trister at <https://twitter.com/noahtrister>

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

EXPLAINER: UN vaccine plan is underway, but problems remain

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

As the coronavirus pandemic exploded worldwide last April, global organizations banded together to help ensure that the world's most vulnerable people would get vaccines amid the rush for shots. The initiative

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known as COVAX was formed by the World Health Organization, the vaccines alliance GAVI and a coalition for epidemic innovations called CEPI.

COVAX is supposed to make deals to buy vaccines in bulk from drug companies and can also receive donated shots from rich countries. Poorer nations can receive free doses from the initiative — and wealthier ones can also buy from it, as a way of diversifying their supply.

But it has been dogged by shortages of cash and supplies as well as logistical hurdles — all while a handful of rich countries raced ahead with their vaccination campaigns.

Only on Wednesday did the first vaccines bought by COVAX arrive in Ghana. A look at the project so far: **WHY IS COVAX NECESSARY?**

Not all countries can afford their own COVID-19 vaccines, and in past pandemics, including the 2009 swine flu pandemic, vaccines were hoarded by rich countries until the outbreak ended. During the HIV crisis, life-saving treatments were made available in Africa only years after they were introduced in the West.

Beyond the moral duty of sharing vaccines broadly, scientists have warned that allowing the coronavirus to spread freely in any population is a global risk because that could lead to dangerous new variants that could then spread — even in people who had already had the virus or who had been vaccinated against it.

WHAT DID COVAX SET OUT TO DO?

COVAX's initial goal was to get vaccines to poor countries at roughly the same time shots were being rolled out in rich countries. Although it's missed that target, it is still hoping to deliver about 2 billion doses to more than 90 countries by the end of the year.

COVAX is only planning to provide enough vaccine to immunize about 20% to 30% of people in poorer countries — a figure that will still leave those nations vulnerable to coronavirus outbreaks. Experts estimate that at least 70% of a population needs to be protected against COVID-19 to prevent future epidemics.

Kate Elder of Doctors Without Borders called COVAX's first vaccine delivery to Ghana "a very small, late start" to global immunization. The charity suggested postponing vaccine shipments to rich countries "while the world works to catch up on protecting the most at-risk people living in developing countries."

WHY HASN'T COVAX MOVED FASTER?

There aren't enough vaccines. The world's supply of COVID-19 vaccines is extremely limited — companies are struggling to make more — and experts predict there won't be enough shots to cover the global population until 2023 or 2024. While middle- and high-income countries have reserved more than 5 billion doses, COVAX has signed deals to obtain more than 1 billion vaccines — but not all of those deals are legally binding.

The initiative has received billions of dollars in funding, but WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed out this week that money is almost meaningless if there are no vaccines to buy. He pleaded with rich countries not to strike further deals to secure additional vaccines since that might jeopardize the deals COVAX already has.

COVAX was also unable to start shipping out any vaccines until they were granted an emergency use approval by WHO. Only two vaccines have received that green light so far, the shots made by Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca. The AstraZeneca doses make up the bulk of the shots COVAX has deals for and was only authorized last week.

Unlike in past outbreaks, when poorer countries have waited for vaccines to be sent by aid agencies, these delays have led numerous developing countries to strike their own private deals outside of COVAX.

WHAT ARE RICH COUNTRIES DOING TO HELP?

Although the Group of Seven, a club of major economic powers, promised to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and pledged \$7.5 billion for COVAX, there have been few details from countries including Britain, Germany and France about when they would be willing to donate any of their excess shots.

While French President Emmanuel Macron promised to donate 5% of vaccines to COVAX, British Foreign

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Minister James Cleverly said it was "difficult to say with any kind of certainty" when or how much Britain could donate.

Several wealthier countries have come under fire for buying up huge quantities of vaccines — the U.K., for instance, has deals for enough to cover its population more than five times over. The countries have defended themselves by noting that they had to make the agreements before they knew which shots would work — and, often, by promising to donate excess vaccines. But the lack of detail now is worrying, and some experts say countries will be unlikely to donate any shots until they know how long immunity lasts, and against which variants.

Other rich countries, such as Canada, New Zealand and Singapore, have applied to receive vaccines through COVAX even though they have their own supplies. WHO has said those requests will be fulfilled since part of COVAX's goal was to allow rich countries to buy a wider range of vaccines.

States pass their own virus aid, not waiting on Washington

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Not waiting for more federal help, states have been approving their own coronavirus aid packages, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to help residents and business owners devastated by the the pandemic's economic fallout.

Maryland and California recently moved forward with help for the poor, the jobless, small businesses and those needing child care. New Mexico and Pennsylvania are funneling grants directly to cash-starved businesses. North Carolina's governor wants additional state aid for such things as bonus pay for teachers and boosting rural internet speeds.

The spending also provides fuel for critics who say states don't need another massive infusion of cash from Congress. The Biden administration's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan calls for sending \$350 billion to state and local governments. Directing federal money to state governments has been so contentious that the idea was stripped from the previous congressional aid package passed in December.

Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida has frequently criticized proposals to send more money to state governments, calling it a bailout for Democratic-run states he accuses of overspending.

"It's great news that states are doing well, many seeing revenues higher than projected, and are able to help their citizens during this pandemic," he said in a statement to The Associated Press. "House and Senate Democrats should follow the facts and ditch their radical efforts to award wasteful bailouts for failed politicians in states like New York and California."

Many governors say continued uncertainty about the ongoing effects of the pandemic on their economies justifies the need for more federal spending. They say their state aid initiatives are targeted at people who remain desperate for help nearly a year after the pandemic began shuttering businesses.

In Maryland, where direct stimulus checks were being distributed as part of more than \$1 billion in relief, Catrina Garrett said the boost from the state was crucial. Garrett, a 35-year-old single mother with a part-time job, said it will help her pay rent and catch up on bills.

"A lot of people will need this, and it will help families that have not been able to provide for their children," said Garrett, who lives in Baltimore with her three kids.

Other states are considering significant spending to provide more relief to residents. Governors and lawmakers have said they are concerned the economy and job prospects will deteriorate even further before Congress acts on the Biden plan. A slow start to the nationwide vaccination program also has tempered expectations that inoculations will be widespread soon enough to rescue businesses that have struggled with shutdown orders.

Under a bill awaiting the governor's signature, New Mexico would provide \$200 million in direct grants to businesses, which could use them to pay rent and mortgages. It's part of a proposed state pandemic relief package that also would provide a \$600 tax rebate to low-wage workers, a four-month tax holiday for restaurants as they recover from indoor-dining restrictions and a waiver on liquor store license fees.

Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said aggressive action is needed to ward off business closures

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and evictions as Congress deliberates.

"The cascading effect, it's actually a problem that most states are grappling with ... waiting for the relief money out of the feds," she said. "We need to be able to hold up, to shore up businesses moving forward, and we want them to have security to hold their current employees and potentially hire more."

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom this week signed a \$7.6 billion relief package that includes \$600 in one-time payments for about 5.7 million residents, including immigrants who were left out of previous relief initiatives. Another \$2 billion is going to struggling businesses.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, signed legislation last week with bipartisan support in the Democratic-controlled legislature for one-time stimulus payments of \$300 for certain individuals and \$500 for families. It also provides up to \$9,000 in sales tax relief for small businesses.

"Absent of a federal response, the states are having to step up," said Robin McKinney, co-founder and CEO of the CASH Campaign of Maryland, a nonprofit organization that helps low-income residents file taxes.

The spending also shows that many states have proved unexpectedly resilient during the pandemic, with better-than-projected tax revenue and healthy budgets. In California, revenue for the current fiscal year through January was running more than \$10 billion ahead of the governor's initial projections.

Critics say the stronger-than-expected state finances undermine the Biden administration's plan to direct billions more to state and local governments. Some governors are facing pushback from their own legislatures.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, unveiled a \$695 million emergency budget proposal that would use state money on bonuses for educators and school staff, hazard pay for state law enforcement officers, rural broadband and small businesses.

While Republicans in charge of the Legislature haven't dismissed his ideas, they are unlikely to pass such a sweeping package. They approved a COVID-19 relief package earlier this month that distributed more than \$2.2 billion in federal money for vaccine preparations, to schools and to prevent evictions. They also are still figuring out how to spend another \$1.8 billion in federal money that Congress approved in December.

"We are addressing the needs," said Republican state Sen. Brent Jackson.

In Pennsylvania, Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat, earlier this month signed legislation using \$145 million in reserves from a worker's compensation fund for grants of up to \$50,000 to owners of hard-hit bars, restaurants and hotels. The money is expected to be available next month.

Industry representatives said the aid is helpful but won't reach many who work in Pennsylvania's 30,000 such businesses. And for some of those who do receive it, the extra state money represents just a fraction of the financial hit they have taken during the pandemic.

Susan Williams, who with her sister owns a bar in Pittsburgh and another just outside the city, plans to apply for the grants.

Her businesses remain under restrictions that include serving at 25% capacity, no seating at the bar and 11 p.m. last calls. The bars are closed part of the week to keep from losing money, and there's nothing left over to pay tax bills that arrived this week.

"They know damn well we haven't been open," Williams said. "They basically choked our income, but they're still sending our tax bills. It's insane."

Associated Press writers Adam Beam in Sacramento, California; Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Gary D. Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina, contributed to this report.

Bust of Black hero of Lewis & Clark trip goes up in Portland

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

Last year, protesters against racial injustice toppled numerous statues around the country. Now, one of the first works of art to emerge in their place depicts an unsung hero of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

A huge bust of York, a Black man who was enslaved by William Clark and who was the first African-Amer-

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ican to cross the continent and reach the Pacific Ocean, is sitting atop a pedestal amid a lushly forested park in Portland, Oregon. It was placed there in the dead of night last weekend by persons unknown.

People have flocked to the bust, which seems to be at least four feet tall, in Mount Tabor Park. The artist's depiction of York shows him seemingly deep in thought or even sad, his eyes cast downward. York hadn't been painted contemporaneously so how his face really looked is unknown.

Officials in the city, which has been an epicenter of Black Lives Matter protests since the killing of George Floyd, love what the head of the parks department called "guerrilla art."

"This past summer, there's been concern about some of the public art that many states have displayed, and so folks really see this installation as a bit of a reckoning," Portland Parks and Recreation Director Adena Long said in an interview. "The story of York is really compelling and very sad."

Passersby stare up at the bust or touch the tall stone pedestal. The anonymous artist affixed a plaque describing how York was an integral part of the 1804-1806 expedition to find an all-water route to the Pacific, but then was denied his freedom by Clark after it was over.

Since the killing of Floyd in Minneapolis last May, hundreds of symbols of racism and other dark chapters of U.S. history have been removed. Among them were at least 167 Confederate symbols, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Pedestals that used to support statues that were torn down by Black Lives Matter protesters or removed by officials now are empty. One, in Virginia, held a monument to Jefferson Davis; others held memorials to Confederate soldiers in Florida, North Carolina, and Alabama; another bore a statue of Robert E. Lee, in Alabama.

Simply renaming places has been easier. At least 14 schools — mostly in the south — were renamed last year. For example, Robert E. Lee High School, in Springfield, Virginia, became John R. Lewis High School, named for the late civil rights leader and congressman from Georgia.

"John R. Lewis, by his lifetime of service, strength, conviction and dedication to improving the lives of others, is memorialized as an enduring symbol through his namesake high school," the school district says.

Deciding what to replace downed statues with, commissioning the artists and having the work done takes time.

Whoever made the gigantic head of York circumvented all that by producing the bust — officials believe it might have been done with a 3D printer — getting it into the park without being detected and then placing it on top of the pedestal, which itself is around 10 feet (3 meters) high).

It's likely the artist had collaborators to install it. On Friday night, as is customary, park rangers shut gates on the roads and locked them at 10 p.m. closing time. On Saturday morning, a maintenance worker saw the York bust, perched on a pedestal where a statue of a conservative figure who opposed women's right to vote had stood until someone knocked it over last year.

"None of those gates had been damaged. None of those locks had been damaged. And so we do feel that this was brought in on foot," said Tim Collier, community relations manager for the city parks department.

They had to transport the bust, which seems to be composed of plastic or composite of synthetic material, at least 1,000 feet (300 meters) uphill from the nearest road access.

The mysterious appearance of the bust has prompted many to look up York's story.

In the epic expedition, York had gone on scouting missions, had hunted buffalo and deer to feed the group and helped tend to the sick.

Historian Stephen Ambrose, in his book "Undaunted Courage" about the expedition, described York as "strong, agile, a natural athlete." Native Americans were fascinated by the first Black person they had ever seen.

"They did not look upon him as a slave or as a mere man, but as an extraordinary person more interesting and elevated than any of his companions," the National Park Service says in a brief biography.

After the expedition was over, everyone but York was rewarded with money and land. York, whose wife was also a slave and lived in another town, demanded freedom as a reward for his services on the expedition, Ambrose wrote. But Clark refused and even gave him "a Severe trouncing" for being insolent.

Clark later claimed to a friend that he'd freed York. Historians haven't been able to verify that.

Collier said that in the legends of the expedition, York's role has been overlooked, and that the bust "is really furthering that conversation here in our very, very white city."

Long hopes the artist comes forward to possibly have a conversation about making York a permanent art installation.

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

Bust of Black hero of Lewis & Clark trip goes up in Portland

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

Last year, protesters against racial injustice toppled numerous statues around the country. Now, one of the first works of art to emerge in their place depicts an unsung hero of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

A huge bust of York, a Black man who was enslaved by William Clark and who was the first African-American to cross the continent and reach the Pacific Ocean, is sitting atop a pedestal amid a lushly forested park in Portland, Oregon. It was placed there in the dead of night last weekend by persons unknown.

People have flocked to the bust, which seems to be at least four feet tall, in Mount Tabor Park. The artist's depiction of York shows him seemingly deep in thought or even sad, his eyes cast downward. York hadn't been painted contemporaneously so how his face really looked is unknown.

Officials in the city, which has been an epicenter of Black Lives Matter protests since the killing of George Floyd, love what the head of the parks department called "guerrilla art."

"This past summer, there's been concern about some of the public art that many states have displayed, and so folks really see this installation as a bit of a reckoning," Portland Parks and Recreation Director Adena Long said in an interview. "The story of York is really compelling and very sad."

Passersby stare up at the bust or touch the tall stone pedestal. The anonymous artist affixed a plaque describing how York was an integral part of the 1804-1806 expedition to find an all-water route to the Pacific, but then was denied his freedom by Clark after it was over.

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Biden aims to distribute masks to millions in 'equity' push

By ZEKE MILLER and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden plans to distribute millions of face masks to Americans in communities hard-hit by the coronavirus beginning next month as part of his efforts to ensure "equity" in the government's response to the pandemic.

Biden, who like Donald Trump's administration considered sending masks to all Americans, is instead adopting a more conservative approach, aiming to reach underserved communities and those bearing the brunt of the outbreak. Trump's administration shelved the plans entirely.

Biden's plan will distribute masks not through the mail, but instead through Federally Qualified Community Health Centers and the nation's food bank and food pantry systems, the White House announced Wednesday.

The Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Agriculture will be involved in the distribution of more than 25 million American-made cloth masks in both adult and kid sizes. The White House estimates they will reach 12 million to 15 million people.

"Not all Americans are wearing masks regularly, not all have access, and not all masks are equal," said White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients.

The White House is not distributing safer N95 masks, of which the U.S. now has abundant supply after shortages early in the pandemic.

The cloth masks adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and "certainly they meet those requirements set by our federal standard," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Biden hinted at the move Tuesday during a virtual roundtable discussion Tuesday with four essential workers who are Black, saying he expected his administration to send millions of masks to people around the country "very shortly."

Biden has asked all Americans to wear face masks for the first 100 days of his term, pointing to models showing it could help save 50,000 lives. He also required mask-wearing in federal buildings and on public transportation in an effort to slow the spread of the virus.

In late January, a Quinnipiac poll showed that 75% of Americans said they wear a mask all the time when they go out in public and are around others, and an additional 12% said they wear a mask most of the time.

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Biden has made a virtue of his public displays of mask-wearing, drawing direct contrast with Trump, who only rarely was seen covering his face while president. Biden has also required the use of masks around the White House, unlike Trump, whose White House was the scene of at least three outbreaks of the virus.

Psaki suggested earlier this month that logistical concerns underpinned the decision to scale back the plans to send masks to all Americans.

"I think there are some underlying questions about how you target them — the masks — where they go to first; obviously, it couldn't happen immediately," she said.

—
Associated Press writer Hannah Fingurhut contributed to this report.

Ghana 1st nation to receive coronavirus vaccines from COVAX

By FRANCIS KOKUTSE and CARLEY PETESCH Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — Ghana received the world's first delivery of coronavirus vaccines from the United Nations-backed COVAX initiative on Wednesday — the long-awaited start for a program that has thus far fallen short of hopes that it would ensure shots were given quickly to the world's most vulnerable people.

The arrival of 600,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the West African country marks the beginning of the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history, according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF. It is a linchpin of efforts to bring the pandemic to an end and has been hailed as the first time the world has delivered a highly sought-after vaccine to poor countries during an ongoing outbreak.

"Today marks the historic moment for which we have been planning and working so hard. With the first shipment of doses, we can make good on the promise of the COVAX facility to ensure people from less wealthy countries are not left behind in the race for life-saving vaccines," said Henrietta Fore, executive director of UNICEF, which delivered the vaccines.

But the initiative, formed to ensure fair access to vaccines by low- and middle-income countries, has been hampered by the severely limited global supply of doses and logistical problems. Although it aims to deliver 2 billion shots this year, it currently has legally binding agreements only for several hundred million shots.

It already missed its own goal of beginning vaccinations in poor countries at the same time immunizations were rolled out in rich ones. The overall campaign thus far has been extremely uneven: 80% of the 210 million doses administered worldwide thus far were given in just 10 countries, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this week.

That delay led numerous poorer countries to rush to sign their own deals, potentially undermining COVAX's efforts to get shots to the neediest people.

And some countries can't afford to go it alone.

Ghana is among 92 countries that will receive vaccines for free through the initiative, which is led by the WHO; Gavi, a vaccine group; and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. Another 90 countries and eight territories have agreed to pay.

Ghana, a nation of 30 million people that has recorded 81,245 cases and 584 deaths since the beginning of the pandemic, plans to begin vaccinations on March 2. Neighboring Ivory Coast will be the next to receive vaccines, and also will roll them out starting next week.

Even as it celebrated receiving the first doses, Ghana noted the long road ahead.

"The government of Ghana remains resolute at ensuring the welfare of all Ghanaians and is making frantic efforts to acquire adequate vaccines to cover the entire population through bilateral and multilateral agencies," Ghana's acting minister of information, Kojo Opong Nkrumah, said in a statement.

That freneticism has been echoed across the continent of 1.3 billion people, as deliveries have fallen behind schedule and African nations have scrambled to secure vaccines from various sources. Only about seven of 54 have begun vaccination campaigns.

"If you look at which countries have managed to secure vaccines for their citizens, they are all in the developed industrialized world. And we are happy for their citizens. But we also want everyone who needs

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to be protected against the pandemic to get the vaccine," UNICEF's regional director for West and Central Africa, Marie-Pierre Poirier, told The Associated Press, calling the deliveries to Ghana a historic moment. "This is critical to put an end to the pandemic, because until everybody is safe, no one is safe."

The target for 2021 is 1.3 billion doses in the 92 countries, and up to 2 billion taking into consideration the other countries, she said.

While 20% of the most vulnerable population being vaccinated is the current goal, she said the hope is that this is significantly increased.

"I think that more actors, once they feel a little bit reassured about their own population, would for sure come and help so we can catch up," she said.

Some activists have also expressed serious concern about the COVAX initiative's goal of only giving enough shots to cover about 20% to 30% of the population in countries that receive donated doses. They have warned that even if the program is successful in distributing those vaccines, those countries will remain vulnerable to continued coronavirus outbreaks since most experts guess that at least 70% of people will need protection from the virus to reach herd immunity.

And experts have noted that even if richer countries reach some level of herd immunity, everyone will remain vulnerable as long as there are pockets of COVID-19 anywhere in the world.

"We will not end the pandemic anywhere unless we end it everywhere," said Tedros, the WHO leader. "Today is a major first step towards realizing our shared vision of vaccine equity, but it's just the beginning. We still have a lot of work to do with governments and manufacturers to ensure that vaccination of health workers and older people is underway in all countries within the first 100 days of this year."

The vaccines delivered Wednesday are the first of some about 7 million doses being produced by the Serum Institute in India for some 20 countries, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Over the coming weeks, COVAX must deliver vaccines to all participating economies to ensure that those most at risk are protected, wherever they live," said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi. "We need governments and businesses now to recommit their support for COVAX and help us defeat this virus as quickly as possible."

Petesich reported from Dakar, Senegal. Associated Press writers Maria Cheng in Toronto and Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed.

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

Despite GOP outcry, Cassidy 'at peace' with impeachment vote

By MELINDA DESLATTI Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Trashed on social media and censured by Louisiana Republicans, U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy described himself Wednesday as "at peace" with his vote to convict former President Donald Trump at his impeachment trial and dismissed the scorching GOP backlash he's received.

Louisiana's senior Republican senator said he does not believe the criticism represents the feelings of many of his party's voters. He said the censure he received from the leadership of the state Republican Party represented "a small group of people," not the "broader Republican Party."

"I am such at peace with that vote. I say that knowing that I'm getting criticized, but I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution," Cassidy said in a conference call with reporters on a variety of topics.

Cassidy joined six other Senate Republicans in voting with Democrats on Feb. 13 to convict Trump of inciting the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol in an impeachment trial that saw the former president acquitted. Louisiana's other U.S. senator, Republican John Kennedy, voted against conviction.

"I've received comments from folks who are Republican who object to the vote," Cassidy said. "I've received a heck of a lot of folks who agree with me or, if they don't agree with me, respect the kind of thought process that went into it."

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He added: "There's a diversity of opinion among Louisiana Republicans, even if there is not among a very small group of people."

Though the 57-43 Senate vote was short of the two-thirds majority needed to find Trump guilty, the seven GOP votes against Trump represented the largest number of lawmakers to ever vote to find a president of their own party guilty at impeachment proceedings.

Some Republicans who voted to acquit Trump said they did not believe the Democrats proved their case that the former president was directly responsible for inciting hundreds of people to storm the Capitol building in a riot that left five people dead. Other Republicans said they simply did not believe Congress had jurisdiction over a president no longer in office.

Cassidy has tried to change the conversation since the impeachment trial ended, sending out daily statements about a variety of subjects and talking about other issues, such as the confirmation hearings of President Joe Biden's cabinet appointments and recovery from the icy weather.

But Trump supporters don't want to move on, and they've been slamming Cassidy on conservative talk radio and websites. They've called for Republicans to ban Cassidy from their events, and several local Republican groups have joined the executive committee of the state GOP in condemning Cassidy's vote to convict Trump.

Cassidy, a doctor, overwhelmingly won reelection in November to a second term, with Trump's backing. Asked whether his vote to convict Trump could damage his chances of reelection in 2026, Cassidy replied: "It is six years off, but that's immaterial. I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution."

Follow Melinda Deslatte on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/melindadeslatte>.

Dear Sir or Madam: Paul McCartney memoir due out in November

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul McCartney is finally ready to write his memoirs, and will use music — and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet — to help guide him.

"The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present" will be released Nov. 2, according to a joint announcement Wednesday from the British publisher Allen Lane and from Liveright in the United States.

McCartney, 78, will trace his life through 154 songs, from his teens and early partnership with fellow Beatle John Lennon to his solo work over the past half century. Irish poet Paul Muldoon is editing and will contribute an introduction.

"More often than I can count, I've been asked if I would write an autobiography, but the time has never been right," McCartney said in a statement.

"The one thing I've always managed to do, whether at home or on the road, is to write new songs. I know that some people, when they get to a certain age, like to go to a diary to recall day-to-day events from the past, but I have no such notebooks. What I do have are my songs, hundreds of them, which I've learned serve much the same purpose. And these songs span my entire life."

Financial terms for "The Lyrics," which has a list price of \$100, were not disclosed. Publishers have long sought a McCartney memoir, even though he has spoken often about the past and has participated in such projects as Barry Miles' biography "Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now," and the 1990s documentary and book "The Beatles Anthology." The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards has been equally open about himself, but his 2010 memoir "Life" still sold millions of copies.

No Beatle has written a standard, full-fledged account of his life. Lennon published two works of stories, poems and drawings and was considered the most gifted with words, but he was murdered in 1980, at age 40. Ringo Starr's "Another Day In the Life" is centered on photographs and quotes, because, the drummer has said, a traditional memoir would require multiple volumes. George Harrison, who died of cancer in 2001, issued the scrapbook/retrospective "I, Me, Mine" in 1980.

According to McCartney's publishers, his songs will be arranged alphabetically, and will include McCartney's comments on when and where they were written and what inspired them. The U.S. edition of the

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book will be broken into two volumes, contained within a single box.

"Presented with this is a treasure trove of material from McCartney's personal archive — drafts, letters, photographs — never seen before, which make this also a unique visual record of one of the greatest songwriters of all time," according to Wednesday's announcement.

McCartney has often received more acclaim for his melodies than for his lyrics, but he has written some of the most quoted songs in recent history, including "Let It Be," "Hey Jude" and "Eleanor Rigby." Muldoon said in a statement that their conversations in recent years "confirm a notion at which we had but guessed — that Paul McCartney is a major literary figure who draws upon, and extends, the long tradition of poetry in English."

Muldoon is known for such poetry collections as "Moy Sand and Gravel" and "Horse Latitudes," and also has a background in music. He has given spoken-word performances backed by the musical collective Rogue Oliphant; published a book of rock lyrics, "The Word on the Street"; and collaborated on the title track of Warren Zevon's "My Ride's Here." He even mentioned McCartney in a poem, "Sideman":

"I'll be McCartney to your Lennon/ Lenin to your Marx/ Jerry to your Ben &/ Lewis to your Clark"

A shot in the arm: EU vaccine program struggles to speed up

By LORNE COOK and RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Two months after its first vaccine shots, the European Union is still struggling to get its COVID-19 inoculation drive up to speed. EU leaders are meeting Thursday to jump-start the process, fearing that new virus variants might spread faster than Europe's response.

At a video conference, the leaders will look at ways to improve the bloc's vaccine rollout, as the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, presses pharmaceutical companies to respect the terms of their contracts. Officials also want to try to fast-track vaccine authorizations.

More than 21 million coronavirus cases have been recorded and some 515,000 people have died from it in the EU's 27 countries, according to the European Centre for Disease Protection and Control.

Italy, France, Germany and Spain have the most coronavirus deaths in the EU, although all trail non-EU member Britain, which has Europe's highest virus death toll at over 121,000.

Given the spread of the disease — the Czech prime minister is worried about "a total catastrophe" at overburdened hospitals, Germany fears the impact of new variants, the Netherlands is seeing a rise in cases — there should be little appetite to ease up on travel and other restrictions too soon.

"The epidemiological situation remains serious, and the new variants pose additional challenges. We must therefore uphold tight restrictions while stepping up efforts to accelerate the provision of vaccines," the leaders will say, according to a draft summit statement seen by The Associated Press.

But public pressure to relax measures is building. The Netherlands has eased some lockdown measures in what Prime Minister Mark Rutte called a calculated risk to make the year-long crisis "bearable." Denmark just allowed high school students to partially return to classes.

In Belgium, Jean-Marc Nollet, head of the francophone Greens party that is part of the ruling coalition, openly said he no longer followed his own government's limits on social contacts because "I am a human being and human contact is something vital."

The leaders will say, however, that the crisis is far from over, especially as vaccine production lags.

"We need to urgently accelerate the authorization, production and distribution of vaccines, as well as vaccination. We also need to enhance our surveillance and detection capacity in order to identify variants as early as possible so as to control their spread," the draft statement said.

The commission has sealed deals with several companies for well over 2 billion vaccine shots — far more than the EU population of around 450 million — but only three have been authorized: jabs from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca, which all involve two shots over several weeks. In March, the bloc could also authorize the Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccine.

But the EU was heavily criticized for taking almost a month longer than Britain to approve the first vac-

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cines and for lagging so far behind in vaccinating its people. The EU leaders' debate will focus as much on speeding up authorizations as boosting vaccine production rates through new facilities and cutting delivery bottlenecks.

Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic said one way might be to "agree upon legislation to allow for the emergency authorization of vaccines at the EU level. To date, this is only possible at national level."

And as curfew-weary, mask-wearing European citizens hope for relief — and the prospect of a real summer vacation this year — this summit will also focus on when to ease restrictions and the possibility of a future vaccination certificate so people can travel more conveniently.

Such a certificate has been demanded by southern EU nations that depend heavily on tourism, and they consider it a way to stave off a second disastrous summer season.

An official from an EU nation, who asked not to be identified because the preparations were still ongoing, said talks would also center on ways to dovetail any EU vaccine certificate with similar efforts at the World Health Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Air Transport Association.

Still, European travel restrictions don't look like they will be easing anytime soon. Belgium, home to the EU's institutions, has a ban on all nonessential travel that could remain through March. The country has been criticized by some neighbors for what they see as a disproportionate use of border controls.

"For the time being, nonessential travel needs to be restricted," the leaders say in their draft statement, which still could be modified. But they add "the unhindered flow of goods and services within the single market must be ensured."

With leaders conscious that the pandemic will not end unless it's defeated everywhere, summit talks will also touch on getting vaccines to other countries in need, notably in Africa, through the U.N.-backed COVAX program.

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>

2 hard-hit cities, 2 diverging fates in vaccine rollout

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

CENTRAL FALLS, R.I. (AP) — Mario Valdez, his wife and their 18-year-old son were fully vaccinated for COVID-19 this month as part of a special effort to inoculate every resident of Central Falls, the Rhode Island community hit hardest by the pandemic.

"I feel happy," the 62-year-old school bus driver said shortly after receiving his second and final dose. "Too many people here have COVID. It's better to be safe."

Roughly 50 miles (80 kilometers) across the state line is Chelsea, a Massachusetts city that was an early epicenter of the virus. Like Central Falls, it's a tiny former industrial city that is overwhelmingly Latino. Residents of both cities live in dense rows of triple-decker homes and apartment complexes, providing the workforce for their respective state capitals of Providence and Boston.

But the two cities' fortunes could not be more different during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Chelsea high school sophomore Mannix Resto fears that Massachusetts' slow pace of vaccinations will continue to prevent students from attending classes in person. The 15-year-old says no one in his family has been vaccinated yet as the state focuses on front-line workers and residents who are older or have serious health conditions.

"I just want to know how much longer it's going to last," Resto said earlier this month while walking with a friend on Broadway, Chelsea's busy main street. "It's been a year already. We can't keep living like this."

Rhode Island began offering vaccinations to elderly Central Falls residents in late December and gradually expanded it so that anyone 18 or older who lives or works in the city is now eligible.

Nearly a third of adults in the city have received at least one dose of vaccine and about 16% are fully vaccinated, according to state data. Health officials say the city of about 20,000 has seen a marked drop

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in COVID-19 cases as a result.

In Massachusetts, meanwhile, public health experts, civil rights groups and immigrant activists have been complaining for months that the state isn't doing nearly enough to make sure Black and Latino residents are inoculated.

Under mounting pressure, Gov. Charlie Baker recently announced outreach and public awareness efforts targeted to hard-hit, minority communities, but critics say bolder action is needed to make up for lost ground.

White residents have so far received 66% of all doses in the state while Black residents have received about 5% and Latino residents 4%, according to state data. Meanwhile, Black and Latino residents are dying from the virus at three times the rate of whites in the state by some measures, and Chelsea remains one of the state's hardest hit communities, with a COVID-19 positivity rate higher than the state's.

"It's frustrating," said Gladys Vega, executive director of La Colaborativa, a community nonprofit in Chelsea that's part of a new statewide coalition calling for greater vaccine equity. "Chelsea has demonstrated over and over again that we support the economy. But we've been neglected for decades."

Some states and counties have taken different approaches to ensuring vaccines are fairly distributed to communities of color, but too many government leaders are reluctant to fully embrace the strategies as a necessity, says Dr. Bernadette Boden-Albala, dean of the public health program at the University of California, Irvine.

Until hard-hit communities are properly addressed, their residents will continue to spread the infection, ensuring the virus persists, she and other experts say.

"If the pandemic is a fire, the vaccination is the water," Boden-Albala said. "You need to bring it to where the fire is burning the most, or you'll never put it out."

To be sure, Rhode Island and Massachusetts leaders have both faced withering criticism about the slow pace of vaccinations overall in their states. And the vaccine rollout hasn't been all smooth sailing in Central Falls.

Mayor Maria Rivera, who took office in January, says the state hasn't provided additional resources or manpower for the rollout in Central Falls, which went bankrupt during the 2008 recession and emerged from state receivership in 2013.

The city's main vaccination site, held every Saturday at the high school gymnasium, is an almost entirely volunteer operation.

Rivera says city volunteers have been going door-to-door registering residents unwilling or unable to sign up for appointments online or by phone. They've also had to reassure residents living in the country illegally that they won't be targeted by immigrant enforcement officials for seeking a shot, she says.

"We just want them to show up," Rivera says. "We're not going to turn anyone away."

According to data provided by Rivera's office this week, nearly 40% of doses have gone to Latinos and 27% to whites at three of the city's main vaccination sites. Another 23% of vaccine recipients didn't provide their race or ethnicity, and demographic data wasn't available for other vaccine locations, the office said.

Across the state line in Chelsea, Vega's organization has partnered with a community health center to launch a public vaccination site at its office on Broadway.

Vega says bringing the site to the city was a hard-fought achievement by local advocates. The only mass vaccination site the state has so far opened in a Boston-area community of color is about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Chelsea, in Boston's historically Black Roxbury neighborhood, she and other advocates say.

And unlike vaccination sites in Central Falls, Chelsea's sites are limited by Massachusetts' eligibility rules, which only last week expanded to persons 65 or older, as well as people with two or more serious medical conditions.

The clinic has vaccinated more than 900 since opening Feb. 4, but the numbers are expected to rise this week as more people in the state now qualify, according to the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, which operates the site.

Earlier this month, David Evans was surprised to find he had the clinic mostly to himself as he received his first dose. "That went pretty smoothly," the 82-year-old Chelsea resident said. "I was preparing for this to

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be an ordeal after hearing about places where people couldn't get appointments or they didn't have shots."

Out on Broadway that same day, the opening of the clinic was largely met with shrugs and indifference, suggesting officials have a long road ahead to win over skeptical residents.

"If the government told me I must take the vaccine, then I'd take it. But at the moment, I don't want it," said Cesar Osorio, a 30-year-old construction worker washing his clothes at a self-service laundry down the block. "Spanish people, we have our own medicines. We don't want vaccines."

Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera is already dreaming of the return of beloved community events, like the city's summertime salsa nights.

She says the city is on pace to inoculate most residents by the summer. "I'm looking forward to the day we don't have to wear face masks," Rivera said while volunteering recently at the high school site.

Resident Mario Valdez has equally modest hopes. Now that he and his family are fully inoculated, they're making plans to fly to his native Guatemala in July, a trip they make nearly every year to visit relatives.

"It's going to be great," he said. "We love it down there."

Column: Tiger Woods survives but his career might not

By TIM DAHLBERG AP Sports Columnist

The sheared-off front of the wrecked SUV told part of the story, and the officers on the scene filled in the rest. Tiger Woods was lucky to be alive, they said, thanks to modern safety technology and a big dose of good luck.

Alive and well, no. But alive nonetheless.

The good news — no, make that the BEST news — is that Woods survived after being pried Tuesday from the SUV he wrecked in Los Angeles. That's despite injuries that are so severe — including multiple open fractures of his leg — that he will be convalescing a long, long time.

The other piece of good news was that there was no immediate sign that Woods was impaired at the time of the crash — a significant bit of information, of course, because of his past.

The bad news is that the career of the world's greatest golfer — at least on the game's biggest stages — is probably over.

Coming back from his recent back surgery to play again at the age of 45 was always going to be a problem. Woods himself said previously that Father Time remains undefeated and that his return to top level play wasn't guaranteed.

Combine that with the gruesome injuries from his crash and now it borders on impossible.

This isn't Ben Hogan, coming back from a near fatal car accident in 1949 to win the U.S. Open next year. Hogan was nine years younger, hadn't been through multiple back and knee surgeries, and didn't have to try to swing his driver hard enough to hit it 350 yards to keep up with the other players.

Woods was fragile enough to begin with and there were already questions about whether he could return to play at a high level. He might share Hogan's determination to overcome everything in front of him, but in the end there's only so much he can do to mend his broken body.

That means Woods will never break the record of 18 major championship wins held by Jack Nicklaus. It means his fans will never be able to will him on to another win like they did at the 2019 Masters.

And it means golf will be a lot quieter for a long time to come.

The wreck on a downhill stretch of road in tony Rancho Palos Verdes was stunning, though it shouldn't have come as a shock. It marked the third time in a dozen years that Woods has been taken from vehicles in various stages of distress, a disturbing pattern that began with his infamous Thanksgiving weekend 2009 encounter with his now ex-wife outside his Florida mansion.

Four years ago he was found passed out in his car on a Florida highway with the engine running and charged with a DUI that was later plea bargained down.

And now the questions are just beginning about how he managed to crash a brand-new Genesis SUV on a clear morning on the California coast — a wreck that sheriff deputies say he was lucky to escape alive.

Suddenly, the 2019 Masters seems like it was an awful long time ago.

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Woods has done things over the years we couldn't imagine on the golf course. I've been along for many of them, covering Woods from his first PGA Tour win in Las Vegas in 1996 as well as the Masters comeback win two years ago that was one of the great sports stories of our times.

He transitioned from young phenom to all-time great as the years and the wins piled up, only to be humbled by a scandal that cost him his marriage as well as a lot of fans. Then he came back to win his fifth green jacket in a storybook tale that might have made him more popular than ever.

Woods celebrated behind the 18th green that day by hugging his children, much as he celebrated becoming the youngest Masters champion ever in 1997 by hugging his father. Woods not only seemed to regain his game in the last few years but his ability to connect with others as he began smiling and signing autographs like it wasn't the chore he made it out to be most of his career.

On Sunday he was at the Genesis Invitational at nearby Riviera Country Club as the tournament host. He couldn't play because of his most recent back surgery just before Christmas but came on CBS to answer questions about whether he would be back in time for the Masters.

"God, I hope so," Woods said. "I gotta get there first."

He won't be there this year. The odds are he will never tee it up at Augusta National as a competitive player again.

The one sure thing is that golf won't be the same without him. The game will survive, of course, but it's hard to imagine it without the one player who transcended the sport.

The only thing that really matters now, though, is that Woods survived, too.

Tim Dahlberg is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at tdahlberg@ap.org or <http://twitter.com/timdahlberg>

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2021. There are 309 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 25, 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency.

On this date:

In 1793, President George Washington held the first Cabinet meeting on record at his Mount Vernon home; attending were Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of War Henry Knox and Attorney General Edmund Randolph.

In 1901, United States Steel Corp. was incorporated by J.P. Morgan.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1919, Oregon became the first state to tax gasoline, at one cent per gallon.

In 1950, "Your Show of Shows," starring Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner and Howard Morris, debuted on NBC-TV.

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt's prime minister after the country's president, Mohammed Naguib, was effectively ousted in a coup.

In 1964, Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

In 1983, playwright Tennessee Williams was found dead in his New York hotel suite; he was 71.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 Americans were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

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In 2010, in Vancouver, the Canadian women beat the United States 2-0 for their third straight Olympic hockey title.

In 2018, China's official news agency said the country's ruling Communist Party had proposed scrapping term limits for China's president, appearing to lay the groundwork for Xi Jinping to rule as president beyond 2023. (China's rubber-stamp lawmakers approved that change on March 11.)

Ten years ago: The Obama White House broke decades of tradition, naming Jeremy Bernard the first man to ever serve as social secretary in the female-dominated East Wing. Suze Rotolo, artist and girlfriend of singer Bob Dylan, who was his lyrical muse when he came to prominence in the early 1960s, died in New York at age 67.

Five years ago: Brawling from the get-go, a fiery Marco Rubio went after Donald Trump during their Republican debate in Houston, lacerating the front-runner's position on immigration, his privileged background, his speaking style and more; Ted Cruz piled on, too, questioning Trump's conservative credentials. A gunman stormed into a Hesston, Kansas, factory and shot 17 people, killing three, before being shot dead by police.

One year ago: U.S. health officials warned that the coronavirus was certain to spread more widely in the United States; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to be prepared. President Donald Trump, speaking in India, said the virus was "very well under control" in the U.S. Civil protection officials in Italy said the number of virus cases there had increased by 45% in a 24-hour period; Italy had confirmed a total of 11 deaths. Six European nations announced cases of COVID-19 in people who had recently traveled from northern Italy. U.S. stock indexes added a second consecutive day of losses, falling more than 3 percent. Former Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, who was a force for stability in the Middle East for nearly 30 years before being forced from power in an Arab Spring uprising, died at a Cairo hospital; he was 91.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ann McCrea is 90. Actor Tom Courtenay is 84. Former CBS newsman Bob Schieffer is 84. Actor Diane Baker is 83. Actor Karen Grassle is 79. Former talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael is 79. Former professional wrestler Ric Flair is 72. Humorist Jack Handey is 72. Movie director Neil Jordan is 71. Rock singer-musician/actor John Doe (X) is 68. Rock musician Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) is 64. Rock singer-musician Mike Peters (The Alarm; Big Country) is 62. Comedian Carrot Top is 56. Model and actor Veronica Webb is 56. Actor Alexis Denisof is 55. Actor Tea (TAY'-ah) Leoni is 55. Actor Lesley Boone is 53. Actor Sean Astin is 50. Singer Daniel Powter is 50. Latin singer Julio Iglesias Jr. is 48. R&B singer Justin Jeffre is 48. Actor Anson Mount is 48. Comedian-actor Chelsea Handler is 46. Actor Rashida Jones is 45. Country singer Shawna Thompson (Thompson Square) is 43. Actor Justin Berfield is 35. Actors James and Oliver Phelps ("Harry Potter" movies) are 35. Actor Jameela Jamil is 35. Rock musician Erik Haager (Carolina Liar) is 34.