

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 1 of 72

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Final Northeast Conference Standings](#)
- [3- Kindergarten Roundup](#)
- [4- Knights hand Tigers first home loss of the season](#)
- [4- Tigers share NEC title, retain #1 seed in region](#)
- [5- Region 1A Bracket](#)
- [6- Monson advances to state title match](#)
- [7- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [11- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [18- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [24- News from the Associated Press](#)



## Upcoming Schedule

**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.

## Final Northeast Conference Standings

### Boys NEC Standings

Groton .....	8-2
Clark/Willow Lake ....	8-2
Sisseton .....	7-3
Hamlin.....	7-3
Tiospa Zina .....	6-4
Roncalli .....	6-4
Milbank .....	5-5
Redfield .....	5-5
Deuel .....	2-8
Webster.....	1-9
Britton-Hecla.....	0-10

### Girls NEC Standings

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



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.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 4 of 72

## Knights hand Tigers first home loss of the season

Aberdeen Christian outshot the Tigers, 39 percent to 29 percent, and handed Groton Area its first home loss of the season in the regular season finale, 44-32.

Aberdeen Christian jumped out to a 6-0 lead and the Tigers never tied or led in the game. Aberdeen Christian took an 11-5 lead after the first period, a 22-18 lead at half time and a 37-26 lead after three quarters.

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

Jacob Zak led the Tigers with 10 points, five rebounds, one assist and two steals. Tate Larson had six points, seven rebounds, two steals and one assist. Jayden Zak had six points and one assist. Wyatt Hearnen had three points, one rebound and one steal. Isaac Smith had three points, one rebound and two assists. Cole Simon had three points. Tristan Traphagen had three rebounds and one steal and Lucas Simon had one assist.

Groton Area made 10 of 29 two-pointers for 34 percent, three of 15 in three-pointers for 20 percent, was three of seven from the line for 43 percent off of the Knight's 12 team fouls, had 19 rebounds, nine turnovers, 10 assists and 12 team fouls. The Knights had nine turnovers with eight of them being steals.

Aberdeen Christian made 17 of 44 field goals for 39 percent and was six of 12 from the line for 50 percent.

Jett Becker led the Knights with 14 points followed by Brent Ekanger with 10, Jackson Isakson seven, Ethan Russell six, Malek Wieker five and Kaden Clark two.

Making three-pointers were Hearnen-1, Smith-1, Jacob Zak-1, Isakson-2 and Becker -2.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 47-19. The Tigers led at the quarter stops at 9-2, 28-4 and 39-9.

Wyatt Hearnen led Groton Area with 16 points which included 13 alone in the second quarter. After that it was Colby Dunker with eight, Favian Sanchez and Tyson Parrow each had six, Jackson Cogley five, Cole Simon four and Dillon Abeln two.

Joey Johnson led Aberdeen Christian with nine points.

The junior varsity game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Gordon and Dorene Nelson of Groton and Skip and Diane Larson of Woonsocket, grandparents of Cade and Tate Larson.

## Tigers share NEC title, retain #1 seed in region

Groton Area and Clark/Willow Lake will share the Northeast Conference title this year. Two conference games were played last night with Sisseton beating Tiospa Zina, 62-42, and Roncalli beating Milbank, 58-53. Sisseton outscored Tiospa Zina, 21-6, in the third quarter to pull away from a 26-tie at half time.

Since both Groton Area and Tiospa Zina both lost, Groton Area was able to maintain the number one seed in the region.

As it stands now, on Tuesday, #5 seed Milbank will travel to #4 seed Redfield, #6 seed Roncalli will travel to #3 seed Sisseton and #7 seed Webster Area will travel to #2 seed Tiospa Zina.

Then on Friday, Groton Area will host the winner of the Milbank-Redfield game while the winners of the other two games will travel to the higher seed place.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 5 of 72

## Region 1A Boys Basketball Tournament

### #1 Groton Area

Score:

Date:

Time:

Site:

Score:

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

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### #4 Redfield

Score:

Date:

Time:

Site:

Score:

### #5 Milbank

### #2 Tiospa Zina

Score:

Date:

Time:

Site:

Score:

### #7 Webster Area

### #3 Sisseton

Score:

Date:

Time:

Site:

Score:

### #6 Aberdeen Roncalli

Score:

Date:

Time:

Site:

Score:

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

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School	Seed Pts.
Groton Area	42.100
Tiospa Zina	41.667
Sisseton	40.700
Redfield	40.400
Milbank	40.000
Aberdeen Roncalli	39.300
Webster Area	36.450

## Monson advances to state title match

Groton Area's Senior Dragr Monson will put his undefeated record on the line in his final high school match in the championship round of the State B Wrestling Tournament. Monson scored a major decision and a decision win on Friday.

Christian Ehresmann and Lane Krueger each scored a win with a pin, but was unable to advance as they were beaten in the next round. Cole Bisbee lost both of his matches via a pin.

### **B-113: Dragr Monson (39-0)**

Champ. Round 1 - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 39-0 won by fall over Brady Unser (Ipswich/Leola/Bowdle) 21-14 (Fall 2:41)

Quarterfinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 39-0 won by major decision over Iden Myers (Kimball/White Lake/Platte-Geddes) 22-12 (MD 12-2)

Semifinal - Dragr Monson (Groton Area) 39-0 won by decision over Teague Granum (Canton) 34-6 (Dec 7-3)

### **B-126: Christian Ehresmann (34-8) scored 3.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Porter Neugebauer (Parkston) 31-11 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 34-8 (Dec 9-2)

Cons. Round 1 - Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 34-8 won by fall over Jude Sargent (Winner Area) 18-20 (Fall 0:21)

Cons. Round 2 - Brady Bierema (Bon Homme/Scotland/Avon) 20-9 won by decision over Christian Ehresmann (Groton Area) 34-8 (Dec 8-6)

### **B-160: Cole Bisbee (19-21)**

Champ. Round 1 - Dylan Whitley (Redfield Area) 32-4 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 19-21 (Fall 0:37)

Cons. Round 1 - Gunnar Stephens (Burke/Gregory) 27-20 won by fall over Cole Bisbee (Groton Area) 19-21 (Fall 0:58)

### **B-195: Lane Krueger (24-9) scored 3.0 team points.**

Champ. Round 1 - Charlie Patten (Parker) 42-6 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 24-9 (Fall 1:43)

Cons. Round 1 - Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 24-9 won by fall over Cole Wellner (Mobridge-Pollock) 19-10 (Fall 1:44)

Cons. Round 2 - Josh Merkle (Canton) 37-7 won by fall over Lane Krueger (Groton Area) 24-9 (Fall 3:27)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 7 of 72

**#369 in a series**

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

It was in the wee hours of Wednesday, February 26, 2020, so actually very late Tuesday night, that I sat down at the computer and began a post with this: "I'm going to put on my old, faded microbiologist hat here for a few minutes because it seems a lot of people have questions about this virus thing that's in all the news. I am not an expert on coronaviruses (and if I ever was, I'd be pretty rusty by now); but I've been doing a lot of reading, and so I thought I'd provide sort of a primer for folks who were never microbiologists at all." Then I proceeded to discuss just what a coronavirus is and explore what we knew to that point; I also talked a bit about what we might have to do. And see whether you think this sounds familiar: "What I can tell you is, if the public health people tell you to do certain things and not to do other things, you should listen to them. Even if you're healthy as a horse, the person you give the virus to might not be. Being stupid could cost someone their life."

I read the whole thing this morning, and I am pleased to report that I didn't get anything wildly wrong that first day. Pretty sure my luck on that didn't hold forever: There have been missteps along the way—no sure exactly when it was, but I distinctly remember, at some point, quoting the CDC or some such that the threat level was "low." Oops. I did redeem myself somewhat by also mentioning in the same post that experts were saying a pandemic looked likely. Looks like I didn't start tracking case numbers or deaths until a few days later; of course, you will want to bear in mind that there were, at this point, no reported US deaths yet. (Turns out there had actually been two Covid-19 deaths in California, one on February 6 and another on February 17, but those were not discovered to be Covid-19-related until months later when specimens from those patients were tested retrospectively.) At this point, there was no known community spread (although as it turns out there was quite a lot of unknown community spread), and we were focused pretty much on our first hot spot, King County, Washington, where an outbreak was just getting underway in a nursing home, one that eventually took more than a few lives.

On this date last year, there were 60 reported cases in the US: 42 cruise ship passengers (Diamond Princess), 3 repatriated from Wuhan, China, and 15 cases detected in the US, all travelers or family members of travelers. There were 80,000 cases worldwide, including every continent except Antarctica. South America reported its first case in a traveler returned from Italy, and Africa reported its first two cases on this day. Australia had 22. Most of the cases were in China with large numbers in other Asian countries as well: almost 1300 in South Korea, including one US service member, our first active duty case, 139 in Iran, 89 in Hong Kong, 40 in Thailand, 32 in Taiwan, 2 in Pakistan. Italy was just ramping up with 400 reported cases. Greece had 1. The International Olympic Committee announced preparations were continuing on schedule for the 2020 games in Tokyo. 2700 had died worldwide, the vast majority of them in China.

I know that personally I didn't really "get" it yet. After making this first post, I judged a science fair that morning. My last major social event was yet to come on February 29, and I attended a theater production that following week. Booked a flight I never took and booked one for my husband he never took either. We were pretty serious about staying home by mid to late March, but we didn't start with the masking until early summer or so. We—neither of us—had any clue what was coming. None. Couldn't have imagined it. Would've called you a liar if you'd suggested there would be a time when having 50,000 new cases in a single day made that a pretty good day or that one day there would be half a million lives lost to this. No clue at all.

Over the coming weeks, however many of them we're still getting together each day, I'll take some other looks back so we can get some sense of the distance we've all traveled together. It remains to be seen whether we're beating back the final surge or this virus has one last hurrah coming. If there is another surge, it seems likely that will do it. Even if we don't convince enough folks to get vaccinated to produce solid herd immunity, I suspect we are getting closer to wrestling this thing into a form we can live with, at least most of us—there will continue to be casualties. I am thinking, whenever it becomes evident we're through the worst of this, I may cut back to a quick daily run of the numbers and then a longer post gathering up recent news maybe once or twice a week. Although I've lived on a farm pretty much my whole life, we've never had dairy cows; so I've never before had a job where there were no days off, ever. This wears on a person.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 8 of 72

So we'll see where we are, going forward. I'm not abandoning ship; as long as we're in a bad way, I'll keep coming back and providing as much clarity as possible so we all can proceed on the basis of sound information. I've found in a long lifetime that good information makes for better decisions; so I'll do what I can to provide that. In the meanwhile, if you're interested in where this all started, here's a link to that first post: <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3386973427985706>.

And now, back to our regular programming.

Not much change today. New cases are up a bit at 82,200, bringing us to 28,506,000 total cases in the US, 0.3% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations are still declining: fifty days straight without a hiccup. We now have 52,669 people hospitalized. And there were 2394 deaths reported today. We've lost 510,205 to this virus, which is 0.5% more than yesterday.

Experts think there's another surge coming. Dr. Michael Osterholm, epidemiologist and director at the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and member of the White House Covid-19 Advisory Board, told CNN that he thinks there will be one more surge in cases as the B.1.1.7 (UK) variant spreads across the country. He says the variant is doubling about every 10 days, and that's going to be very bad news by about the third week in March. He is strongly encouraging those 65 and older to receive at least a first dose of vaccine before then.

According to the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, we are seeing a steeper-than-expected decline in cases and deaths. They report the seven-day new-case average as declining from 96,800 to 65,300 in just a week. It's had to even express how dramatic this is. They have also projected a smaller number of deaths than previously projected, much like the CDC's ensemble forecast reported here just a few days ago. There is currently no sign the B.1.1.7 (UK) variant is fueling a new surge; it could yet come, but for now, we're still good. Their projections show nearly 166 million Americans vaccinated by June 1; that's nearly half our population. Things look better and better; I hope we don't mess this up. We're looking at almost 20 percent of the population infected by now. And just to keep our feet on the ground, they're still projecting 574,000 deaths by June 1, and that is simply horrible.

I have more news from Pfizer's vaccine briefing yesterday. I didn't listen to the whole thing, and so I missed the news on pediatric trials. They've finished enrolling 12 to 15-year-olds in their adolescent trial, with the hope that data will be available by the end of April and that their five to 11-year-old trial is about to get underway with results by the end of the year, as Albert Bourla, Chairman and CEO, told NBC News yesterday.

The FDA did approve Pfizer's application for a modification in their emergency use authorization (EUA), permitting storage of their vaccine at higher temperatures than the original EUA allowed. They will be allowed to transport and store for up to two weeks at the "conventional temperatures" we see in standard freezers. Big help.

Meanwhile, Moderna has completed enrollment of 3000 for a phase 2/3 trial in adolescents, aged 12 to 17; the phase 2 trial in younger children begins soon. The company is also beginning study on a vaccine that is refrigerator-stable, so that it does not require the freezing temperatures needed for the currently-authorized model. This would be the third-dose booster or primary series for people who have not been vaccinated.

Here's an interesting study from India that compares risk of infection in glasses-wearers and those who do not wear them. It has a small sample, only 304 patients with Covid-19 whose glasses-wearing behavior was assessed and compared with the glasses-wearing behavior of the general population. It found that wearing glasses continuously during the day is associated with a two to three times smaller risk of infection. Speculation is that wearing glasses reduces the risk of conducting virus from the conjunctiva (membranes of the eye) to the nasopharynx. We talked a long time ago about the anatomical connection between the eyes and the nasopharynx: Your tear ducts drain in that direction, which is why your nose runs when you cry. Anything that starts out in your eyes has a good chance of ending up in your nasopharynx where this virus begins its attack. Could be simply a matter that glasses make it less likely you'll touch your eyes with possibly contaminated fingers, or it could be the glasses more directly block droplets from getting to your eyes. I don't want you to get too sure of yourself if you wear glasses; they were by no means foolproof. A reduction in cases, not complete protection was seen in the study. Nonetheless, wearing glasses with



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 9 of 72

your mask does appear to provide additional protection. I will note that this means you probably should be washing your glasses with soap and water when you return home, just as you wash your hands.

I've been hearing about side effects from these vaccines, not the fairly common sore arm/achy muscles/fever side effects, but other more severe ones. A group of folks on social media today were kicking around the possibility that Covid-19 vaccine causes shingles. Shingles (or zoster) is a generally painful and sometimes excruciating inflammation of a peripheral nerve caused by the reactivation of latent varicella (chicken pox) virus. You see, when you have chicken pox, something that happened to just about everyone when I was a kid in the days before a vaccine, the virus never completely goes away; it just gets beaten into submission where it lies latent in collections of sensory nerve cell bodies near your spinal cord and brain called ganglia. Your immune system keeps it confined there where it can't do any harm. In some people, more often as they age and their immune responses become less robust, the virus can stage a breakout, making its way down the sensory neuron to the skin where it causes a rash, blistering, itching, and pain. It's not typically life-threatening, but I've been given to understand it is miserable and, in some percentage of patients, leaves lingering issues with neuralgia, or nerve pain. One in three Americans develops shingles in their lifetime; in any given year, about one percent of over-60 adults develop it. Shingles is more likely to occur when you are under stress, experiencing depression, or immunocompromised. There are treatments available, and now there are vaccines—one for varicella which prevents the initial chicken pox infection in children and reduces the likelihood of shingles later in life and another one for shingles given to older people.

So one person in the social media group had developed shingles a few days after receiving a Covid-19 vaccination. Then one or two others recounted stories of people they'd heard of who also got shingles after being vaccinated, and then a whole thing started. People were speculating and worrying and stirring one another up. They started wondering whether they should put off their Covid-19 vaccines until they got the shingles vaccine. Short answer: No. No, you should not. You should absolutely have the shingles vaccine if you qualify (there's an age minimum), but you should not put off the Covid-19 vaccine in order to do that.

Here's another thing. Sometimes people die after receiving a Covid-19 vaccine. That doesn't mean the vaccine killed them. Two things that happen close in time do not necessarily have a causal relationship. Sometimes someone gets vaccinated and then they die, and the two events are entirely unrelated; in fact, so far, all the time the two events are entirely unrelated. We've vaccinated close to 50 million people, most of them elderly, in the US over the past couple of months. In any group of 50 million elderly people, you can expect a certain number of deaths in a two-month period, even if there was no pandemic and no new vaccine. People die; old ones die more than young ones. Every day. More than 8000 of them per day in the US this time of year—and that's in nonpandemic times.

So if you take a population who's likely to develop things like shingles, who has a lot of chronic diseases, who has a higher chance of dying, there's a pretty good chance some of them are going to develop shingles or die in any given week. If you are also vaccinating those people as fast as you can, some proportion of the ones who turn up with a disease like shingles or who die are going to be people who were recently vaccinated. That's not proof of anything.

Turns out humans have some trouble properly attributing causation. We get the idea that all kinds of things cause certain effects without having any particular reason to think so. And that's because one of the things our brains do really well is spot patterns; we evolved to do that because it confers a survival advantage. If one of our long-ago ancestors observed that every time one of his compatriots consumed the berries of a particular tree, the person became sick and died within days, the ability to spot that pattern would be important because the possibility exists that those berries are making people sick enough to die. What our Cro-Magnon ancestors didn't have was any way to test that theory, so better safe than sorry. They just learned to avoid those berries. But the fact is, the berry-eating might not have been the problem. People might have been dying because of something they consumed along with the berries, because of some microorganism hanging in the air or on the branch where the berries were found, or due to the strain of climbing so high into a tree to pick the berries. Or there might just have been a run of bad luck—sheer coincidence. Maybe there was a virus going around. After all, there was a time tomatoes

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 10 of 72

were believed to be poisonous; I'm not sure where that belief came from. Nowadays, of course, we'd sample the berries, extract and identify their constituents, and determine whether any of those was toxic by testing them against human cells in a lab or in animal models.

So how can we tell whether these vaccines are making people sick or killing them? By tracking. By reporting and recording so-called adverse events and analyzing them when they occur to see if we can figure out some mechanism by which the vaccine could have caused the observed outcome. By collating bunches of data from all over the world. By looking for patterns. And by looking for a disturbance in patterns.

For example, the shingles thing has come up before today's discussion. It's been evaluated two ways: (a) to see whether there is some way this vaccine could suppress your immune responses sufficiently to permit that varicella-zoster virus to reactivate and (b) to see whether there is a spike in diagnosed cases of shingles—that would be the disrupted pattern we're looking for. What we've seen is not much.

Dr. Aaron Glatt, chief of infectious diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau in Oceanside, New York, and spokesperson for the Infectious Diseases Society of America, said, "There is no scientific evidence of this [association between the vaccine and shingles]." There is also no increased incidence of shingles "that exceeds the normal background rate," according to Dr. William Schaffner, professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and also a spokesman for the Infectious Diseases Society of America.

Every illness or death in a person who was recently vaccinated has been investigated, looking for a link. The CDC, FDA, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and Department of Defense are all on that project. Autopsies are conducted, patterns are sought. To date, it's looking like a lot of people are having the kinds of side effects we've discussed before—fever, fatigue, aches, sore arm. Around two or three in a million who receive the Moderna vaccine and about 11 in a million who receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine have severe allergic reactions. And zero deaths have been attributed to these vaccines. If problems develop, someone's watching. You can relax.

This is getting long, so I'll simply let you know the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee met today and did, indeed, recommend authorization of the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine candidate. I'm guessing we'll have the FDA director's decision tomorrow. And I'm guessing vaccine will ship next week because I do not see any reason the emergency use authorization (EUA) doesn't get issued. We'll talk details tomorrow when we have more time.

It's a thing for professional athletes, especially the high-profile ones in major sports, to engage in some sort of public or community service, often fund-raising for worthy causes. One such is JJ Watt, defensive end, late of the Houston Texans where he wore #99. He has a foundation that supports middle school athletic programs so that children "may learn the character traits of accountability, teamwork, leadership, work ethic, and perseverance, while in a safe and supervised environment with their peers." They've done all right: According to the website, they've handed out \$6.3 million to over 700 schools in 38 states and the District of Columbia. That should help a lot of kids.

Watt is a free agent now, but during his 10 years in Houston, he did a whole lot for that community too. After Hurricane Harvey in 2017, he launched a fund-raising campaign to help Houstonians recover from the storm's destruction. He kicked this off by asking for \$200,000. That went OK too: The final total was over \$41 million. According to his website, the money was used to clean up, repair, and rebuild almost 1200 homes, to recover and rebuild over 970 child care centers serving almost 109,000 children, to distribute over 230 million meals, to provide physical and mental health services to almost 9000 people, and to distribute well over 300,000 prescriptions to low-income and uninsured patients. I don't know how the fans are reacting, but I'm going to guess the city will be sorry to see this guy leave.

He was released a couple of weeks ago, so he's definitely going to leave. But something sort of cool happened when the news broke. As he recounted on his Twitter feed, "Waking up this morning to a flood of \$99 donations to Watt Foundation from Houston and cities all over the country. . . . Kids all over the country will benefit from your generosity. I'm truly thankful." Seems like the sort of guy we should wish great success wherever he fetches up.

Be well. We'll talk tomorrow.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 11 of 72

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	453	432	857	15	Minimal	0.0%
Beadle	2720	2594	5774	39	Substantial	18.3%
Bennett	382	370	1173	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1504	1476	2040	25	Minimal	0.0%
Brookings	3579	3486	11756	37	Substantial	2.6%
Brown	5117	4968	12542	88	Moderate	3.8%
Brule	690	676	1860	9	Moderate	9.1%
Buffalo	420	406	893	13	Minimal	0.0%
Butte	975	941	3195	20	Moderate	7.7%
Campbell	129	125	256	4	Minimal	0.0%
Charles Mix	1283	1213	3876	21	Substantial	9.4%
Clark	370	354	937	5	Moderate	12.5%
Clay	1787	1753	5158	15	Moderate	2.1%
Codington	3974	3793	9533	77	Substantial	13.5%
Corson	468	451	994	12	Minimal	21.1%
Custer	748	727	2675	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2945	2861	6435	61	Moderate	9.8%
Day	662	611	1748	28	Substantial	17.6%
Deuel	472	458	1121	8	Moderate	10.3%
Dewey	1410	1372	3793	24	Moderate	13.5%
Douglas	433	410	894	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	482	458	1028	12	Moderate	8.3%
Fall River	526	501	2571	15	Moderate	6.0%
Faulk	360	337	688	13	Moderate	4.5%
Grant	969	901	2199	38	Substantial	9.5%
Gregory	538	492	1249	28	Moderate	12.5%
Haakon	250	236	529	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	710	645	1753	38	Substantial	23.3%
Hand	335	319	799	6	Minimal	4.8%
Hanson	357	344	701	4	Moderate	22.2%
Harding	91	90	181	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2295	2213	6488	35	Substantial	1.9%
Hutchinson	787	744	2328	24	Moderate	19.6%

# Groton Daily Independent

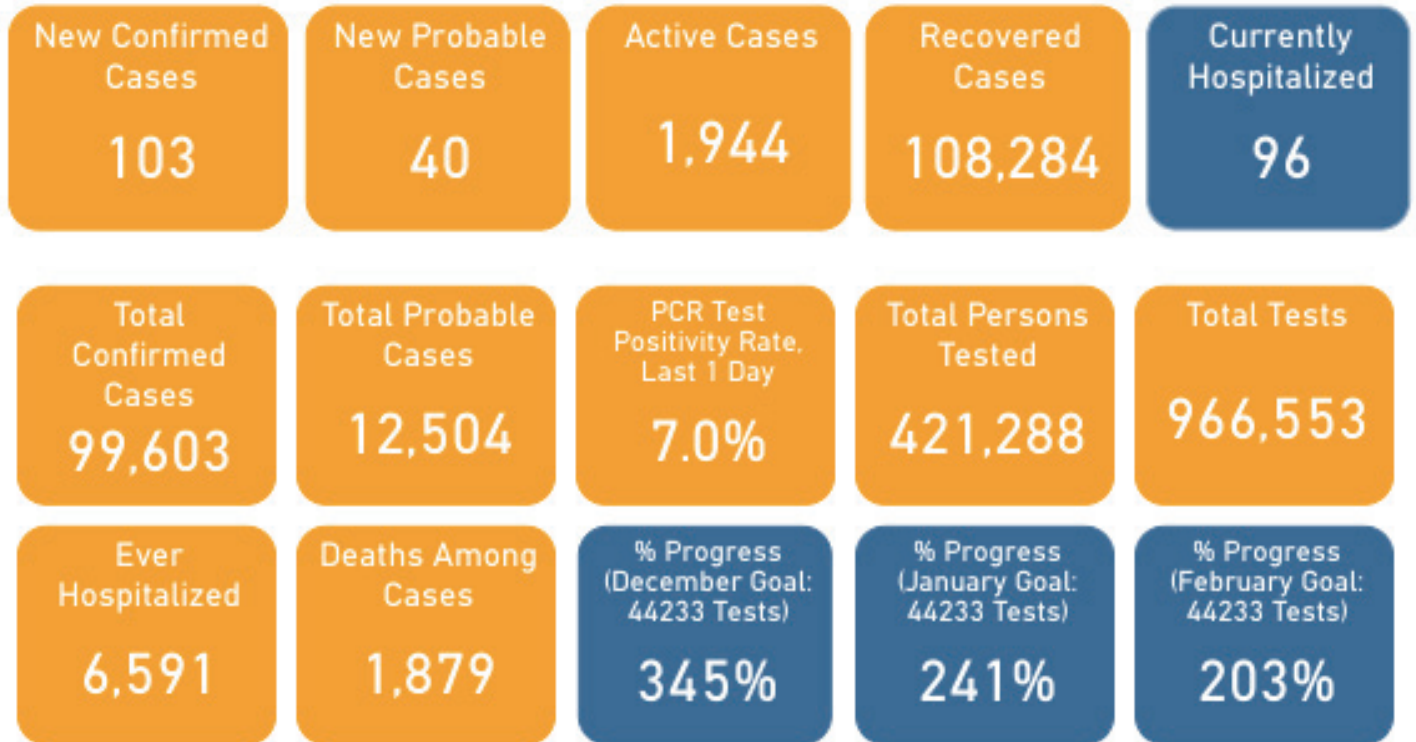
Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 12 of 72

Hyde	137	134	402	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	279	260	904	14	Minimal	9.1%
Jerauld	271	249	548	16	None	0.0%
Jones	84	83	217	0	Minimal	0.0%
Kingsbury	638	604	1645	14	Substantial	11.9%
Lake	1185	1137	3242	17	Moderate	4.2%
Lawrence	2819	2740	8401	45	Moderate	5.2%
Lincoln	7723	7515	19960	77	Substantial	9.4%
Lyman	598	583	1856	10	Minimal	0.0%
Marshall	314	292	1167	5	Moderate	2.8%
McCook	739	707	1611	24	Moderate	12.5%
McPherson	238	231	544	4	None	0.0%
Meade	2583	2495	7565	31	Substantial	12.0%
Mellette	247	241	721	2	Minimal	16.7%
Miner	271	252	565	9	Minimal	16.7%
Minnehaha	27925	27147	76982	331	Substantial	6.9%
Moody	616	590	1735	16	Moderate	9.5%
Oglala Lakota	2057	1986	6593	49	Moderate	6.3%
Pennington	12871	12444	38736	185	Substantial	9.6%
Perkins	346	327	799	13	Minimal	11.8%
Potter	369	358	823	4	Moderate	0.0%
Roberts	1174	1101	4084	36	Substantial	12.7%
Sanborn	328	321	676	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	798	765	2095	25	Moderate	11.1%
Stanley	330	321	914	2	Minimal	0.0%
Sully	137	132	305	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1218	1188	4087	28	Minimal	1.5%
Tripp	696	661	1464	16	Substantial	21.3%
Turner	1065	999	2684	53	Moderate	3.4%
Union	1974	1907	6151	39	Substantial	9.6%
Walworth	722	694	1806	15	Moderate	3.6%
Yankton	2798	2736	9199	28	Moderate	6.6%
Ziebach	336	327	859	9	Minimal	8.3%
Unassigned	0	0	1817	0		

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 13 of 72

## South Dakota



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

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4486	0
10-19 years	12593	0
20-29 years	19947	5
30-39 years	18435	17
40-49 years	16010	35
50-59 years	15814	110
60-69 years	12845	248
70-79 years	6866	429
80+ years	5111	1035

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	58422	885
Male	53685	994

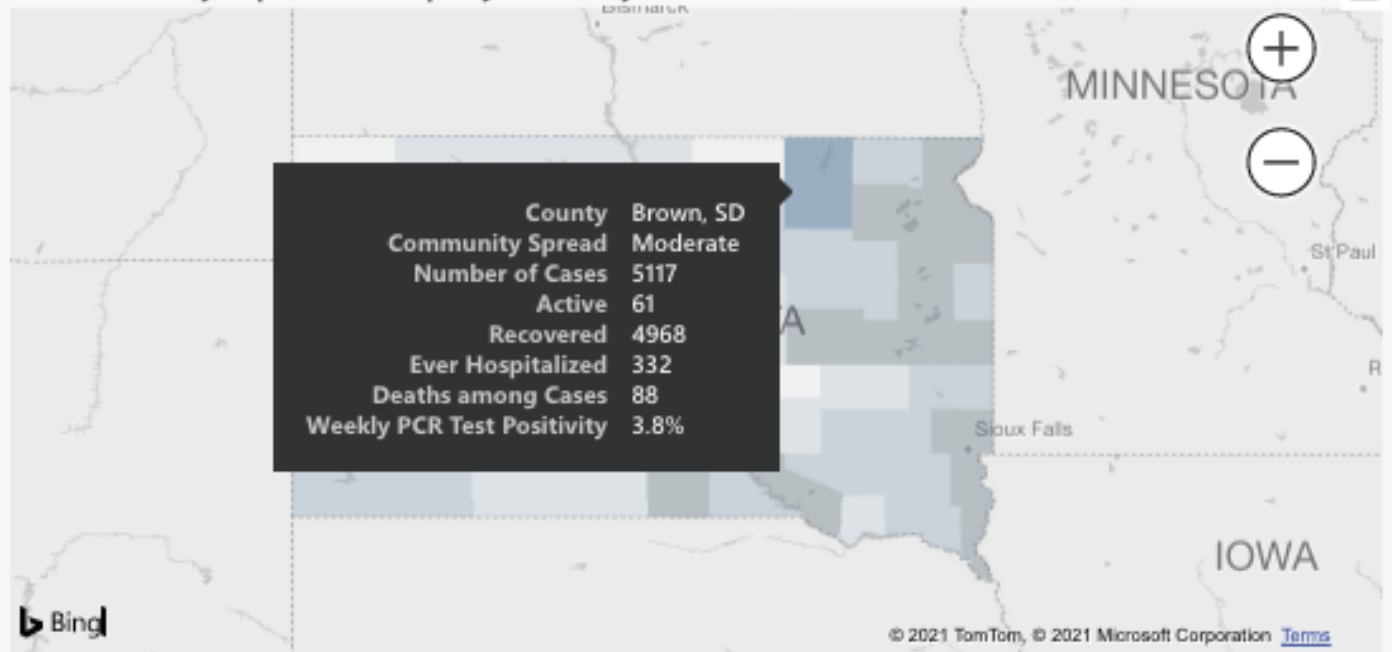
# Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 14 of 72

## Brown County

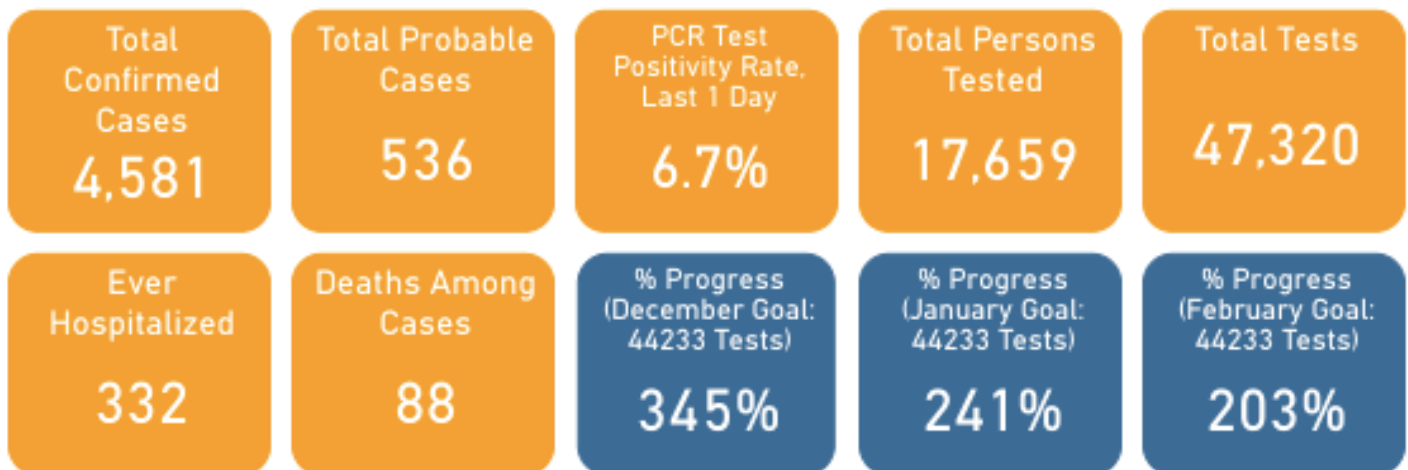


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● None ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



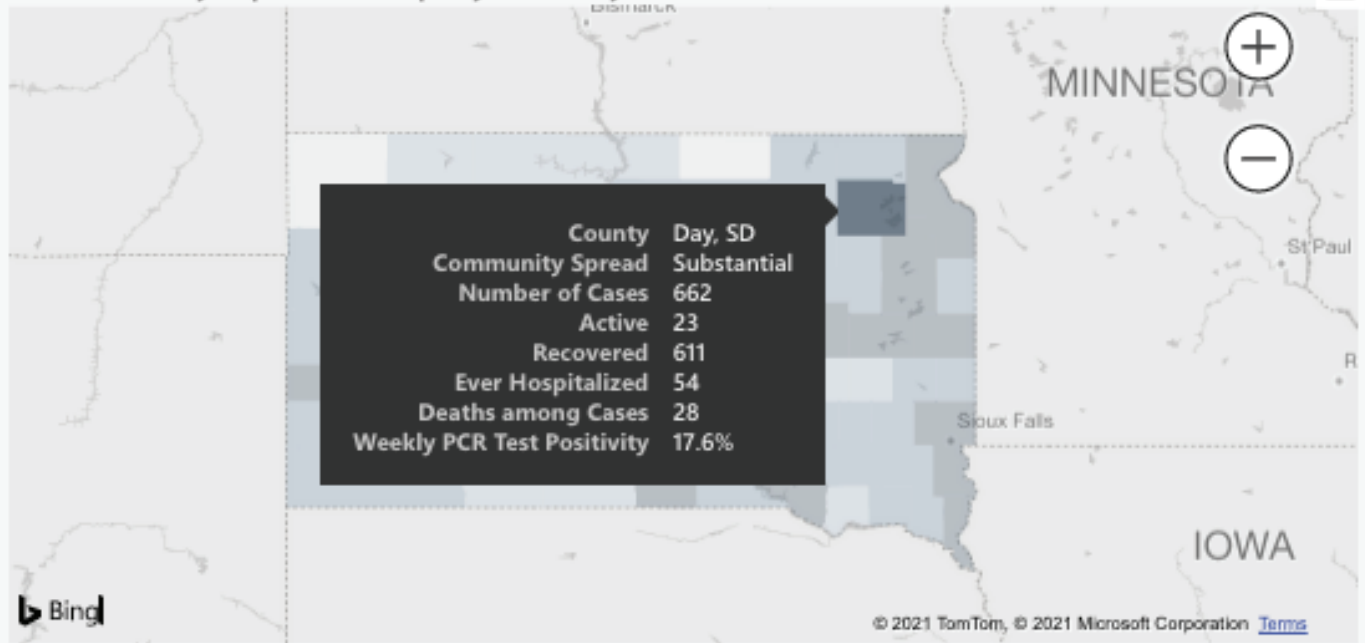
# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 15 of 72

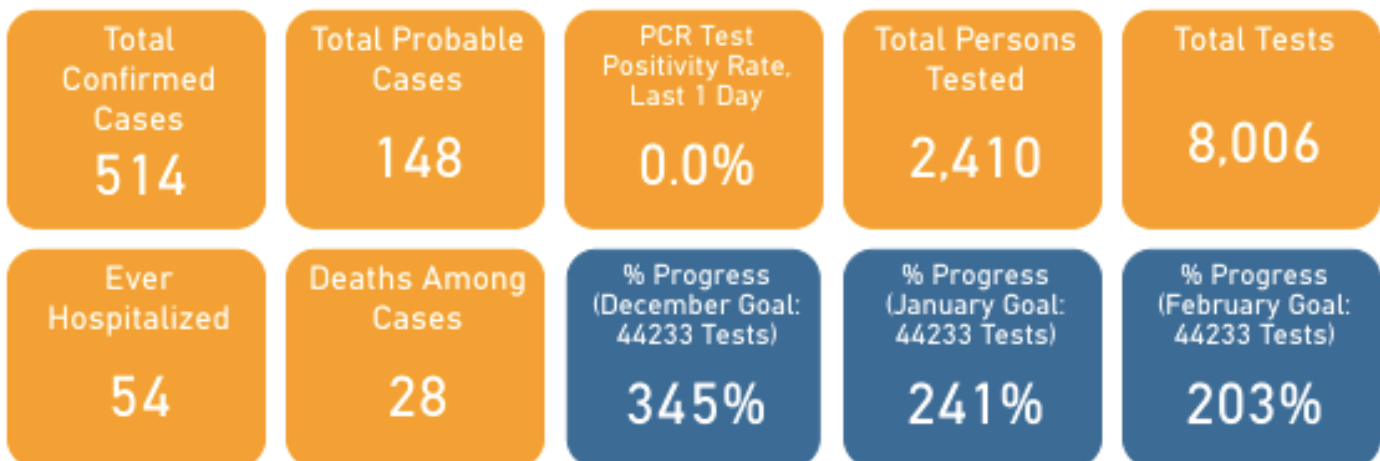
## Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 16 of 72

## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

207,943

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

136,143

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

24%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	107,128
Pfizer	100,815

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	34,882
Moderna - Series Complete	36,123
Pfizer - 1 dose	29,461
Pfizer - Series Complete	35,677

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	24.03%
Series Complete	12.45%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	478	244	117	361
Beadle	4194	1,700	1,247	2,947
Bennett*	356	86	135	221
Bon Homme*	2236	1,042	597	1,639
Brookings	5437	2,027	1,705	3,732
Brown	9527	2,803	3,362	6,165
Brule*	1319	393	463	856
Buffalo*	109	69	20	89
Butte	1295	549	373	922
Campbell	769	309	230	539
Charles Mix*	1993	891	551	1,442
Clark	799	331	234	565
Clay	3142	988	1,077	2,065
Codington*	6495	2,279	2,108	4,387
Corson*	182	72	55	127
Custer*	1819	761	529	1,290
Davison	4738	1,656	1,541	3,197
Day*	1632	646	493	1,139
Deuel	997	357	320	677
Dewey*	316	74	121	195
Douglas*	793	257	268	525
Edmunds	861	333	264	597
Fall River*	1861	731	565	1,296
Faulk	704	266	219	485
Grant*	1543	595	474	1,069
Gregory*	1121	455	333	788
Haakon*	395	143	126	269



# Groton Daily Independent

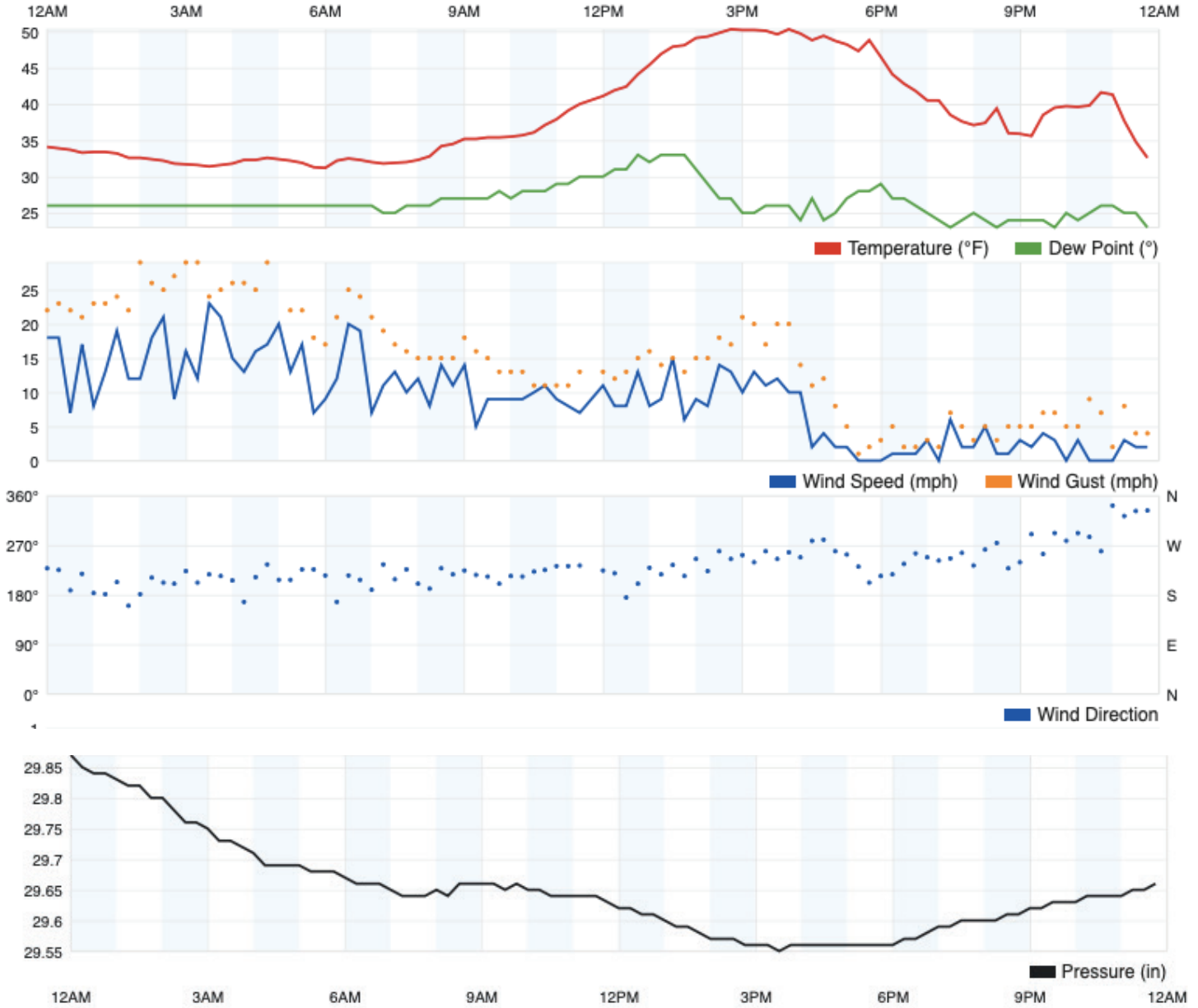
Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 17 of 72

Hamlin	1158	470	344	814
Hand	901	347	277	624
Hanson	278	130	74	204
Harding	51	37	7	44
Hughes*	5237	1,735	1,751	3,486
Hutchinson*	2250	820	715	1,535
Hyde*	367	145	111	256
Jackson*	283	95	94	189
Jerauld	529	283	123	406
Jones*	441	125	158	283
Kingsbury	1421	633	394	1,027
Lake	2529	939	795	1,734
Lawrence	5128	2,024	1,552	3,576
Lincoln	18086	4,384	6,851	11,235
Lyman*	530	172	179	351
Marshall*	987	419	284	703
McCook	1553	487	533	1,020
McPherson	156	62	47	109
Meade*	3912	1,570	1,171	2,741
Mellette*	31	13	9	22
Miner	621	199	211	410
Minnehaha*	54595	14,375	20,110	34,485
Moody*	1002	376	313	689
Oglala Lakota*	118	46	36	82
Pennington*	24955	7,109	8,923	16,032
Perkins*	347	163	92	255
Potter	543	273	135	408
Roberts*	2896	1,208	844	2,052
Sanborn	646	252	197	449
Spink	2022	728	647	1,375
Stanley*	784	290	247	537
Sully	232	96	68	164
Todd*	115	35	40	75
Tripp*	1475	493	491	984
Turner	2434	578	928	1,506
Union	1809	829	490	1,319
Walworth*	1483	495	494	989
Yankton	6650	1,048	2,801	3,849
Ziebach*	44	14	15	29
Other	4233	789	1,722	2,511

# Groton Daily Independent






Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 18 of 72

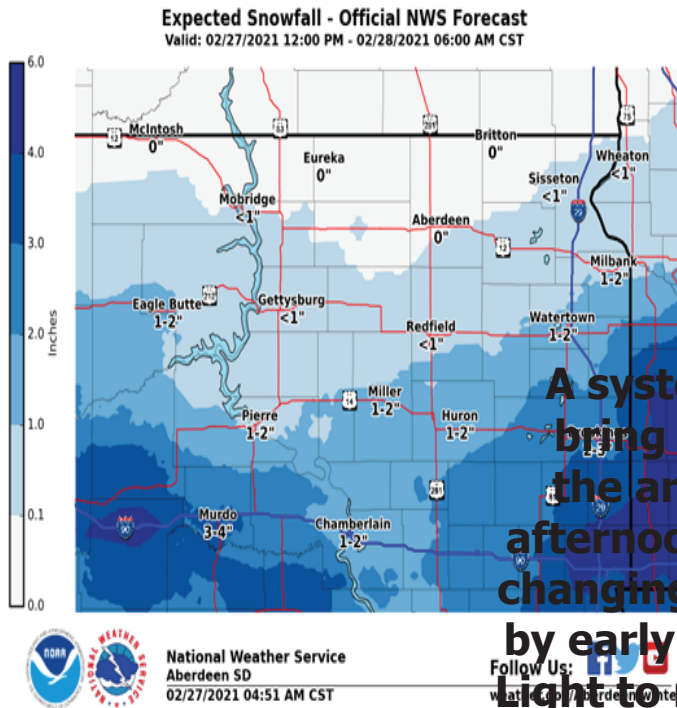
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

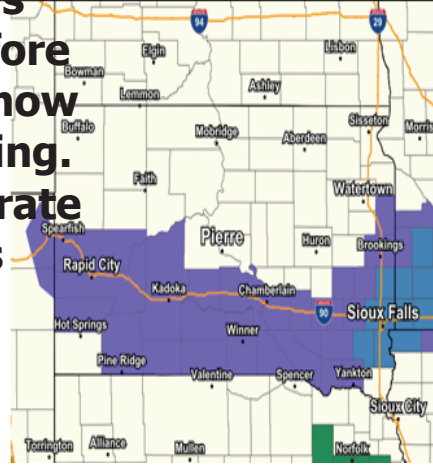
Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 19 of 72

Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
Areas Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Gradual Clearing	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny
High: 37 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 39 °F	Low: 13 °F	High: 36 °F



**Light to Moderate Snow Tonight**

A system will bring rain to the area this afternoon before changing to snow by early evening. Light to moderate snowfall is



**Winter Weather Advisory across most of southern South Dakota** →

A system will bring rain to the area this afternoon before changing to snow by early evening. Light to moderate snowfall is possible and thus a Winter Weather Advisory is in effect for portions of the area from 6 pm CST tonight to 6 am CST Sunday.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 20 of 72

## Today in Weather History

February 27, 1969: Snowfall of up to 15 inches blocked many roads in South Dakota. Freezing rain formed a glaze on many utility lines resulting in extensive damage. The most considerable damage occurred in the north-central part of the state.

February 27, 1996: Across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota, a strong area of low pressure brought 4 to 11 inches of snow from the late afternoon of the 26th to the late evening of the 27th. Along with the snow came strong cold north winds of 20 to 40 mph, creating near-blizzard conditions at times. Wind chills were from 20 below to 60 below. Some schools were closed or started late the 27th, along with some activities canceled. Snowfall amounts included, 4 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Aberdeen, Redfield, near Reliance, Wheaton, Browns Valley, Britton, and Gettysburg. Other snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Lebanon, Hoven, Miller, Webster, Eden, Frederick, and Seneca, 7 inches near Chelsea and Mellette, 8 inches at Roscoe and east of Hosmer, Tulare and near Milbank, 9 inches south of Ree Heights, 8 to 10 inches in the Ortonville area, and 11 inches at Wilmot.

1986: It was 99 degrees in Palm Springs, California. This is the highest temperature on record for February. This also occurred on Fe2/26/1986.

2010: A magnitude 8.8 earthquake occurred off the coast of central Chili at 3:34 local time. The quake triggered a tsunami that devastated several coastal towns in south-central Chile. Tsunami warnings were issued in 53 countries. Waves caused minor damage in the San Diego area and the Tohoku region of Japan.

1717 - What was perhaps the greatest snow in New England history commenced on this date. During a ten day period a series of four snowstorms dumped three feet of snow upon Boston, and the city was snowbound for two weeks. Up to six feet of snow was reported farther to the north, and drifts covered many one story homes. (David Ludlum)

1969 - A record snowstorm in Maine came to an end. Two to four feet of snow buried southern and central Maine, with a state record of 57 inches reported at West Forks. Drifts covered many single story homes, and the weight of the snow collapsed many roofs. Two to four feet of snow also buried northeastern Vermont and northeastern Massachusetts. In New Hampshire, Mount Washington NH reported 97.8 inches of snow, a record storm total for New England. (24th-28th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm spread heavy snow into the Central High Plains Region, and produced severe thunderstorms in the Southern Plains. Snowfall totals in western Nebraska ranged up to 19 inches at Sydney. Severe thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced baseball size hail at Stringtown and Atoka. A storm in the eastern U.S. produced heavy rain over the Carolinas and heavy snow in the southern Appalachians and piedmont region. Five inches of rain left four feet of water in the streets of Greenville SC. Snowfall totals in southwestern Virginia ranged up to 20 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms along a cold front produced heavy rain in southern California, with up to 2.52 inches reported in Ventura County. Strong winds accompanying the rain gusted to 55 mph in the Tehachapi Mountains. Rapid City SD established a February record with an afternoon high of 75 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Rain and snow prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Up to eight inches of snow blanketed north central Tennessee, and snowfall totals in western North Carolina ranged up to 14 inches at Mount Mitchell. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in southeastern Colorado, with 12 inches reported at Lamar. The same storm produced severe thunderstorms over the Southern High Plains, with wind gusts to 93 mph reported at the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. Low pressure brought high winds to the Prince William Sound area of Alaska. Big River Lakes reported wind gusts to 92 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 - A weak EF0 tornado causes no damage as it moved across California's southern San Joaquin Valley. However it is the only tornado reported in the United States during the month. According to the Storm Prediction Center only five months since 1950 have lacked a tornado report. The Weather Doctor



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 22 of 72



## CLEAN - IT MEANS WHAT IT MEANS

"Son," said Fred's mother, "dinner is ready, and you haven't washed your hands. They are dirty!"

"They're not dirty," he protested, "just a little soiled. What difference does it make?"

According to Psalm 24, there is no difference between dirty and soiled. Only those who have clean hands and a pure heart are invited to worship God. So, what does the Psalmist mean when he talks about "clean hands?"

"Clean hands" translated literally means "clean habits." Habits are formed over time and are rarely noticed until they draw attention to themselves in one way or another. A habit may be good or bad, depending on its outcome. If it leads to a self-nourishing behavior or something that leads to wellness or well-being, it is a good habit. But if it is a toxic behavior and leads to self-destruction or death, it is certainly a bad habit.

"Clean habits" would, of course, begin with a "clean heart." The Bible is unapologetic when it reminds us that "what comes out of us has a home within us." In other words, if God is in us - God comes out of us. If God is not dwelling within us, His "ways" and His "will" certainly cannot come out of us.

We also need "clean hopes" or beliefs so we do not worship the "idols" of this world. If God is not in first place, He may as well be considered as being in last place. Why? Whatever is in first place is what we worship and build our lives around.

And we also need a "clean history" - not making any promises we do not intend to keep. If we say it, we must do it. Keeping our word is a statement about our honesty.

Prayer: Lord, we're so careful not to touch unclean, dirty or disgusting things. We try to avoid them at all costs. May we have that attitude toward sin. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The one who has clean hands and a pure heart. Psalm 24:4a

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 23 of 72

## 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

## News from the Associated Press

### **Pandemic challenges also give some teams chances to bond**

By ANDREW SELIGMAN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Southern Illinois guard Trent Brown figures this is a season he will remember more than any other.

It's not just because of the obstacles and oddities teams are facing as they try to play during a pandemic. Brown has seen some positives in a difficult situation, like the way his team has bonded.

"We always say we're all we have, but that's all we need, too," he said. "It's been a great time."

A strange time, too. A challenging time. And a time when, maybe, teams have forged stronger bonds.

It has forced conferences and schools to get creative in wading through a flood of challenges. Postponements and outright cancellations happen every day. One wrinkle seen much of the season in some leagues: back-to-back games.

The Missouri Valley Conference — which Southern Illinois plays in — and the Summit League ditched the traditional home-and-home scheduling format. Instead, teams are mostly playing two-game series on consecutive days on the same court in an effort to cut back on travel. In the Valley, each team also plays its designated travel partner at home and on the road.

For the players, keeping up with schoolwork can be a little more challenging with teams spending extra time in a different town. Meals are socially distanced. Contact with people outside their bubble is basically nil, home and away, something that's raised concerns about athletes' mental health.

Familiarity can breed contempt — with opponents and each other. But players also have more time to grow together when they're spending more time in one place rather than heading right back to campus.

"Just always being around each other and everybody getting to know each other, those longer road trips and just the extra hours that you're around one-another, you just grow to appreciate every person on your team as a person and not just as a player or teammate," Brown said. "You get to know really what makes them tick."

Loyola Chicago star Cameron Krutwig said players in the past might have gone out. Now?

"It's just you and the team," he said. "You can't really go out and do much just because of the protocols that are in place. It's, honestly, just a great time to be with the team, be with the guys."

The back-to-back format also presents some competitive challenges.

"You're going in with the mindset of you've got to go in there, get one win and get out," Brown, a sophomore from Scottsdale, Arizona, said as the Salukis traveled to Chicago to face No. 21 Loyola on Friday and Saturday. "Whether you win or lose that first one, you've got to be able to turn around and pretty much get back into game mode within minutes after that game ends. If you lose the first one, you really just can't hang your head that low, or else you're sure gonna lose the next one."

Brown and his teammates will put his plan to the test: The Salukis lost the opener Friday night as Loyola extended its home win streak to 21 games.

Home teams in the Missouri Valley were a combined 45-35 against conference opponents compared to 64-26 last year. While the gap has narrowed considerably, the numbers still favor the hosts in back-to-back sets.

Home teams had an 18-16 record in the first game of the league's series and were 21-13 in the second entering Friday. Teams that dropped the first game were a combined 13-21 in the second.

Hosts in the Valley have seen jumps in field-goal percentages in 20 of 34 games on the back end and increases in scoring by an average of 2.9 points in second games. For visitors, shooting percentages went up just eight times, and their scoring has dropped by 3.6 points on average.

In the Summit League, there have been 16 sweeps and 13 splits in the 29 two-game series. Take Denver and Omaha, with one league win each, out of the mix and series involving the top seven teams have resulted in six sweeps and 10 splits.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 25 of 72

"Games are going to be more competitive just because you're seeing the same team back-to-back, so it's easier to scout the next day, or you know you have to come play harder the next day," said South Dakota State's Douglas Wilson, the 2019-20 Summit League Player of the Year.

The senior forward from Des Moines, Iowa, also said the back-to-backs are just plain "weird."

"In a way, honestly, it brings us back to our AAU days," he said. "Then again, we were also a lot younger and probably weren't putting as much work in as we are now."

A visitor that loses the first game can't look forward to a rematch on its own court as in years past. Then again, teams that drop an opener can get quick payback.

"If you lose the first night, I think it gives you a better chance because it's fresh, those hard feelings are fresh in your mind of what just happened, so maybe you're a little more ready to go," South Dakota State coach Eric Henderson said. "More times than not, I think that's why you don't see that sweep very often."

Just another wrinkle in a strange, unforgettable season.

"You'll remember more of it, you'll remember more about the teammates you had during this season than you probably will on others just because of how many odd situations that you've had to push through and be around," Brown said.

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AP Sports Writer Eric Olson contributed to this report.

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More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/College-basketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Forecasters say much of the Dakotas could be in for drought

By KIM FUNDINGSLAND Minot Daily News

MINOT, N.D. (AP) — Snowfall in the region earlier this week was a welcome sight, falling on parched ground throughout the area. However, much more moisture is needed to alleviate drought conditions that prevail from border to border in North Dakota.

The quarter-inch or less of moisture contained in the heaviest snowfall band along the U.S. Highway 52 corridor fell prior to the input of data for the latest U.S. Drought Monitor, issued Thursday. However, given the very dry conditions, impact from the snowfall on the ongoing drought gripping the state is expected to be insignificant and have little or no influence in altering future drought designations.

In their weekly issuance of the Drought Monitor, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concludes that nearly 68% of North Dakota is rated to be in "severe" drought, up from 58% a week earlier. The remainder of the state, primarily the southeast, remains entrenched in "moderate" drought or "abnormally" dry.

"Even though precipitation is normally low during the fall and winter seasons, it has been extremely dry during the past 3-4 months (less than 25% of normal), leading to a lack of any snow cover in eastern Montana, western North Dakota, and north-central South Dakota," concludes the Drought Monitor. It added that drought conditions expanded this past week "southward across south-central North Dakota and central South Dakota."

The weekly assessment was compiled while snow was falling in North Dakota, so this week's snowfall was not part of the data included in the Drought Monitor. Impact from the snowfall, if any, will be included in the next Drought Monitor.

One of the impacts of a severe drought designation, according to the Drought Monitor, is that "river flow is decreased; stocks dams are low." Low river and stream levels are normal for North Dakota at this time of year. Nevertheless, indicators remain troublesome.

The Souris River that enters North Dakota from Canada near Sherwood, loops down through Minot, and then returns to Canada near Westhope, has seen little or no flow for several months. The release gates at Lake Darling, of which the Souris is the primary source of water and is located northwest of Minot, have been closed since last August.

Lake Darling stood at 1,595.42 feet Thursday, more than a half-foot below its winter operating level as

prescribed by the International Agreement between the U.S. and Canada.

"We are in water conservation mode," said Tom Pabian, Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge manager. Lake Darling is located at Upper Souris NWR. Furthermore, given current dry conditions in North Dakota and the Saskatchewan drainage area of the Souris River, chances for improvement in water flows remains very minimal.

"Indications are that we will not achieve 1,597," said Pabian, referring to Lake Darling's preferred summer operating level.

Dry weather can be expected to continue into the early part of March. The region's 8-14 day precipitation outlook calls for a well below normal chance of moisture through March 10. The 3-month precipitation outlook for March-April-May favors normal precipitation for North Dakota throughout the outlook period.

## Officials in 10 counties mull over regional jail in Aberdeen

By ELISA SAND Aberdeen American News

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Officials are measuring the need for a regional jail in northeastern South Dakota. Representative from 10 counties in the area, including sheriffs and county commissioners, were invited to attend a meeting in Aberdeen recently to consider an idea that Brown County Commissioner Duane Sutton first mentioned in November after he was re-elected to the commission. Since, he said, a couple firms have reached out and provided information.

"Our jail numbers keep going off the charts," Sutton said. "We want to know who would be interested in doing this."

Chief Deputy Dave Lunzman of the Brown County Sheriff's Office said the county has simply run out of space. While the county was able to find housing for inmates in recent weeks, he said, space is also limited at those facilities.

"And, every time we send someone out, we need to bring them back," he said. "We're trying to find a solution. In my mind it is a regional jail."

Lunzman said with its population, two hospitals and judges, Brown County is a logical site.

"Moving people around and not having places to go is inefficient," he said.

Brown County State's Attorney Ernest Thompson said the county jails are intended to provide the spaces necessary to hold people accountable, and state law is written in such a way that certain felony offenses come with the presumption of a probationary sentence. That means a suspended sentence and 30 days in jail.

Now, he said, the average jail sentence is 30 days, but when space is tight at the jail, it makes it hard to get a 60-, 90- or 120-day jail sentence needed in some cases, the Aberdeen American News reported.

Thompson said there was a lull in criminal cases in mid-2020 as the region grappled with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. But, case numbers have since picked up and he expects that to continue this year.

Each county has its own needs, however.

In Marshall County, Sheriff Damian Bahr said they have maybe two or three inmates at any give time. They're housed at other jails because the local need just isn't high enough to support a jail. Marshall relies on nearby county jails in Brown, Roberts and Day counties, he said.

"A regional thing would be good for all the smaller counties," he said.

McPherson County Sheriff Dave Ackerman said the county hasn't had a jail since the 1970s.

"Moving inmates is something we're accustomed to," he said, noting that area jails are seeing increases in their populations.

"Finding a place to call home is something that's important to us," he said.

Day County Sheriff Ryan Rucktaeschel said he agrees on the need for space. While he usually has room for the local inmates, he said, Day's challenge is the age of its facility, which is about 50 to 60 years old.

His biggest challenge, he said, is finding space for women and juveniles because they need to be sound and sight separated from the other inmates. If he takes one woman, he said, he loses the use of his entire west wing.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 27 of 72

In Walworth County, where the jail closed in October, Sheriff Josh Bohl said the typical housing need is anywhere from 10 to more than 30. Without a jail of its own, he said, Walworth is finding space elsewhere.

There are sections of state law that allow counties to enter into a joint agreement for the establishment of a regional jail. Staci Ackerman, executive director for the South Dakota Sheriff's Association, said there are four sections of state law that specifically deal with the concept. Three have been in place since 1986, she said.

"Legislators back then foresaw the need for a regional jail," she said.

But she also noted the provisions lack detail and clarity.

While there isn't any legislation pending in the state Legislature specifically addressing a regional jail, District 3 Rep. Drew Dennert, R- Aberdeen, spoke briefly on a bill that could just provide a new source of revenue for counties. That's House Bill 1230, which proposes to redirect a percentage of the sales and use tax that is paid to the state and place that revenue in a capital improvement fund for county use.

According to that legislation initially 0.05% would be diverted, which would net about \$578,803 for all counties to share. But the bill also includes a provision that the percentage increase by 0.05% each year until it reaches 0.25%, which would be in fiscal year 2026. By then, the projected revenue, shared among the counties, would be \$3.5 million.

Dennert said counties in the area could tap that revenue and put it toward the construction of a regional jail.

As it's written right now, he said, counties would have to make a payment request through the state. But he talked about amending the bill so the money would go directly to the counties for immediate use or to save for a specific use.

When one county commissioner noted a concern about ongoing expenses with the operation of jails, Dennert said the bill could also be amended to include operational costs of a jail.

The bill has several steps before approval. While it passed unanimously by the House Taxation Committee, it now goes before House appropriations for consideration.

Those in attendance were told the next step is to select a firm as an owner's representative that can walk the counties through the process and conduct a needs assessment in all the counties. That representative would also provide cost estimates for the project.

District 3 Sen. Al Novstrup, R-Aberdeen, said if a funding request is to come before the Legislature, lots of work needs to be done in advance before the next session. It starts with knowing not only construction costs but the cost to operate the facility. With 12 legislators representing northeastern South Dakota and a total of 105 covering the entire state, Novstrup said, making contact with each of those legislators and having personal discussions to get support is important.

"If you don't win the battle before it starts, you lose," he said.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

11-15-37-62-64, Mega Ball: 5, Megaplier: 2

(eleven, fifteen, thirty-seven, sixty-two, sixty-four; Mega Ball: five; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$30 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$106 million

## No. 22 South Dakota State women clinch Summit League title

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Paiton Burckhard and Tylee Irwin each scored 19 points and No. 22 South Dakota State beat UMKC 73-53 on Friday night to clinch the Summit League regular-season title.

Burckhard was 9 of 18 from the field, including South Dakota State's opening four baskets. Irwin made

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 28 of 72

all 12 of her free throws, eight coming in the fourth quarter, as the Jackrabbits were 25 of 36 at the line. South Dakota State shot 18 free throws in the fourth compared to UMKC's 12 attempts for the game.

Mesa Byom added nine points for South Dakota State (20-2, 13-0), which has won 17 straight games. The Jackrabbits were without starting forward Tori Nelson and conference scoring leader Myah Selland due to injuries.

The Jackrabbits close their regular season against UMKC on Saturday, attempting to finish the regular season undefeated at home for the first time since the 2013-14 season.

RaVon Nero and Mandy Willems each scored 11 points for UMKC (10-10, 7-7). The Roos were held to 37% shooting and 20 second-half points.

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

## Tribes in legal limbo over federal virus relief funding

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Nearly a year after Congress passed a coronavirus relief bill, some Native American tribes remain in legal limbo over what's been distributed.

The issue didn't become any clearer for three tribes that argued during a federal court hearing this week that they were shortchanged under the formula used to dole out a portion of the \$8 billion set aside for tribes.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta set deadlines to move the case forward after attorneys for both sides said Thursday they couldn't reach an agreement on interim payments while the U.S. Treasury Department comes up with a new method to distribute the remaining \$533 million.

The department sent out \$4.8 billion in payments to tribal governments using federal population data that some tribes said was badly skewed.

The Shawnee Tribe in Oklahoma and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians in Florida were among those given the minimum \$100,000 because U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development data showed they had a population of zero. The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Kansas has argued it should have received \$7.65 million more than it got, based on its own enrollment data.

The tribes filed separate lawsuits that have been consolidated into one case, with the Shawnee Tribe as the lead plaintiff. Mehta initially ruled the Treasury Department had discretion in how it distributes the funding and, therefore, the methodology wasn't subject to court review.

A federal appeals court revived the claims and sent them back to Mehta for a decision on the merits.

U.S. Justice Department attorney Kuntal Cholera, who is representing the Treasury Department, asked Mehta to give the agency until the end of April to come up with a new methodology that would factor in potential outcomes in a pending U.S. Supreme Court case also centered on virus relief funding for tribes.

Lower courts in that case were split over whether Alaska Native corporations, which own most Native land in the state under a 1971 settlement, should be in the mix. More than a dozen Native American tribes sued the Treasury Department last year to try to keep the money out of the hands of the corporations.

In the Shawnee case, the tribe's attorney, Pilar Thomas, urged Mehta to prevent further delays. "We are still in a pandemic, and we are still without our money," Thomas said.

What's unclear is whether the three tribes would see any financial relief in the case. Cholera said a decision in favor of the tribes simply would send Treasury back to the drawing board on how to distribute the remaining funds. A new methodology would make the tribes' claims moot, and federal laws wouldn't provide for any financial damages, he said.

Thomas disagreed and asked Mehta for an opportunity to argue otherwise, as did attorneys for the Prairie Band and Miccosukee tribes.

In the meantime, Mehta urged Justice Department attorneys to ask treasury officials again if they would consider an interim payment to the tribes and report back to him by March 5. He said it wouldn't be a

terribly large amount.

"What's the worst that happens?" he said. "They get a little more than they're supposed to, and they use it to combat coronavirus."

This story has been corrected to show the U.S. Treasury Department sent out \$4.8 billion in payments to tribal governments using federal population data.

## South Dakota police groups call on Ravensborg to resign

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Three South Dakota law enforcement groups on Friday joined the call for Attorney General Jason Ravensborg to resign, saying his involvement in a September crash that left one man dead has resulted in a lack of confidence.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem this week urged Ravensborg to step down and the state's Secretary of Public Safety Craig Price spoke out in favor of an effort to impeach Ravensborg, the state's top law enforcement officer.

On Friday, the South Dakota Fraternal Order of Police, the South Dakota Chiefs' of Police Association and the South Dakota Sheriffs' Association released a joint statement saying Ravensborg's involvement in the death of Joseph Boever has "resulted in a lack of confidence in his ability to effectively carry out his duties as the chief law enforcement officer in South Dakota."

The statement echoed Price's comment Thursday that in law enforcement "maintaining public trust is critical."

A spokesman for Ravensborg, 44, said he has no intention of stepping down. Ravensborg has been charged with three misdemeanors in the crash that killed the 55-year-old man.

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

After an investigation that stretched over five months, prosecutors charged him with careless driving, driving out of his lane and operating a motor vehicle while on his phone.

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety released videos in which investigators said Boever's glasses were found inside Ravensborg's car and that, "His face was in your windshield, Jason."

The South Dakota Fraternal Order of Police is a union representing all levels of law enforcement and local, county and state agencies. The sheriffs' association includes all 66 county sheriffs offices and is a network for sheriffs across the state. The police chiefs' association consists of the majority of police chiefs and their command staffs statewide.

## Members who broke with polygamous sect buy former compound

CUSTER, S.D. (AP) — A compound in South Dakota's Black Hills that was owned by a secretive polygamous sect has been sold at auction to three former members who broke with the sect years ago.

Blue Mountain Ranch LLC, representing Patrick Pipkin, Seth Cooke and Andrew Chatwin, paid \$750,000 for the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints' 140-acre (57-hectare) compound at a Custer County sheriff's auction Thursday.

The county had valued the nine-parcel property at more than \$9 million. The compound, surrounded by trees and barbed-wire fencing, includes numerous buildings and a watchtower.

Pipkin said he left FLDS about 15 years ago and no longer believes in its teachings, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"I do want people to know that the corruption of this church is coming to an end," he said. "We are part of that side that's helping correct and make a difference here and other places where there's other locations they supposedly own."

The sect still owes nearly \$1.7 million to Pipkin, Cooke and Chatwin as part of a 2017 legal settlement

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 30 of 72

in federal court. The men were allegedly detained and unlawfully jailed in Arizona after being accused of trespassing on property the sect had leased to them.

Their lawsuit alleged that the local marshal's office and other elected leaders were "handpicked" by the FLDS church, which conspired to illegally arrest and prosecute non-members.

A judge ordered the sale of the compound to help pay the judgments.

Custer County Sheriff Marty Mechaley earlier said about 20 adult FLDS members who were still living on the property would leave once it was sold.

Pipkin said some of the people that remain are relatives.

"It's kind of a family dispute situation working through it," he said, adding that the group has no immediate plans for the property.

Mechaley said the \$750,000 will be applied to the judgment against the property.

The FLDS is an offshoot of mainstream Mormonism whose members believe polygamy brings exaltation in heaven. Polygamy is a legacy of the early teachings of the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the religion abandoned the practice in 1890 and prohibits it today.

Seth Jeffs, who authorities say once led the FLDS compound in South Dakota, is the brother of Warren Jeffs, whom the group considers a prophet who speaks for God. Warren Jeffs is serving a life prison sentence in Texas for sexually assaulting underage girls he considered to be his brides.

## Plunging demand for COVID-19 tests may leave US exposed

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just five weeks ago, Los Angeles County was conducting more than 350,000 weekly coronavirus tests, including at a massive drive-thru site at Dodger Stadium, as health workers raced to contain the worst COVID-19 hotspot in the U.S.

Now, county officials say testing has nearly collapsed. More than 180 government-supported sites are operating at only a third of their capacity.

"It's shocking how quickly we've gone from moving at 100 miles an hour to about 25," said Dr. Clemens Hong, who leads the county's testing operation.

After a year of struggling to boost testing, communities across the country are seeing plummeting demand, shuttering testing sites or even trying to return supplies.

The drop in screening comes at a significant moment in the outbreak: Experts are cautiously optimistic that COVID-19 is receding after killing more than 500,000 people in the U.S. but concerned that emerging variants could prolong the epidemic.

"Everyone is hopeful for rapid, widespread vaccinations, but I don't think we're at a point where we can drop our guard just yet," said Hong. "We just don't have enough people who are immune to rule out another surge."

U.S. testing hit a peak on Jan. 15, when the country was averaging more than 2 million tests per day. Since then, the average number of daily tests has fallen more than 28%. The drop mirrors declines across all major virus measures since January, including new cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Officials say those encouraging trends, together with harsh winter weather, the end of the holiday travel season, pandemic fatigue and a growing focus on vaccinations are sapping interest in testing.

"When you combine all those together you see this decrease," said Dr. Richard Pescatore of the health department in Delaware, where daily testing has fallen more than 40% since the January peak. "People just aren't going to go out to testing sites."

But testing remains important for tracking and containing the outbreak.

L.A. County is opening more testing options near public transportation, schools and offices to make it more convenient. And officials in Santa Clara County are urging residents to "continue getting tested regularly," highlighting new mobile testing buses and pop-up sites.

President Joe Biden has promised to revamp the nation's testing system by investing billions more in supplies and government coordination. But with demand falling fast, the country may soon have a glut

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 31 of 72

of unused supplies. The U.S. will be able to conduct nearly 1 billion monthly tests by June, according to projections from researchers at Arizona State University. That's more than 25 times the country's current rate of about 40 million tests reported per month.

With more than 150 million new vaccine doses due for delivery by late March, testing is likely to fall further as local governments shift staff and resources to giving shots.

"You have to pick your battles here," said Dr. Jeffrey Engel of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. "Everyone would agree that if you have one public health nurse, you're going to use that person for vaccination, not testing."

Some experts say the country must double down on testing to avoid flare-ups from coronavirus variants that have taken hold in the U.K., South Africa and other places.

"We need to use testing to continue the downward trend," said Dr. Jonathan Quick of the Rockefeller Foundation, which has been advising Biden officials. "We need to have it there to catch surges from the variants."

Last week, Minnesota began urging families to get tested every two weeks through the end of the school year as more students return to the classroom.

"To protect this progress, we need to use all the tools at our disposal," said Dan Huff, an assistant state health commissioner.

But some of the most vocal testing proponents are less worried about the declines in screening. From a public health viewpoint, testing is effective if it helps to quickly find the infected, trace their contacts and isolate them to stop the spread. In most parts of the U.S., that never happened.

Over the holiday season, many Americans still had to wait days to receive test results, rendering them largely useless. That's led to testing fatigue and dwindling interest, said Dr. Michael Mina of Harvard University.

"It doesn't exactly give you a lot of gratifying, immediate feedback," Mina said. "So people's willingness or interest in getting tested starts to go down."

Still, U.S. test manufacturers continue ramping up production, with another 110 million rapid and home-based tests expected to hit the market next month.

Government officials long assumed this growing arsenal of cheap, 15-minute tests would be used to regularly screen millions of students and teachers as in-person classes resume. But recent guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention don't emphasize testing, describing it as an "additional layer" of protection, behind basic measures like masking and social distancing.

Even without strong federal backing, educational leaders say testing programs will be important for marshaling public confidence needed to fully reopen schools, including in the fall when cases are expected to rise again.

"Schools have asked themselves, justifiably, 'Is the juice worth the squeeze to set up a big testing effort?'" said Mike Magee, CEO of Chiefs for Change, a nonprofit that advises districts in more than 25 states. "Our message to the school systems we work with is: 'Yes, you need to stand up comprehensive testing because you're going to need it.'"

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Associated Press writer Brian Melley in Los Angeles and AP data journalist Nicky Forster in New York contributed to this report.

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Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP\_FDWriter

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## 'Blame Trump' defense in Capitol riot looks like a long shot

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 32 of 72

The “Trump-made-me-do-it” defense is already looking like a longshot.

Facing damning evidence in the deadly Capitol siege last month — including social media posts flaunting their actions — rioters are arguing in court they were following then-President Donald Trump’s instructions on Jan. 6. But the legal strategy has already been shot down by at least one judge and experts believe the argument is not likely to get anyone off the hook for the insurrection where five people died, including a police officer.

“This purported defense, if recognized, would undermine the rule of law because then, just like a king or a dictator, the president could dictate what’s illegal and what isn’t in this country,” U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell said recently in ordering pretrial detention of William Chrestman, a suspected member of the Kansas City-area chapter of the Proud Boys. “And that is not how we operate here.”

Chrestman’s attorneys argued in court papers that Trump gave the mob “explicit permission and encouragement” to do what they did, providing those who obeyed him with “a viable defense against criminal liability.”

“It is an astounding thing to imagine storming the United States Capitol with sticks and flags and bear spray, arrayed against armed and highly trained law enforcement. Only someone who thought they had an official endorsement would even attempt such a thing. And a Proud Boy who had been paying attention would very much believe he did,” Chrestman’s lawyers wrote.

Trump was acquitted of inciting the insurrection during his second impeachment trial, where Democrats made some of the same arguments defense attorneys are making in criminal court. Some Republican lawmakers have said the better place for the accusations against Trump is in court, too.

Meanwhile, prosecutors have brought charges against more than 250 people so far in the attack, including conspiracy, assault, civil disorder and obstruction of an official proceeding. Authorities have suggested that rare sedition charges could be coming against some. Hundreds of Trump supporters were photographed and videotaped storming the Capitol and scores posted selfies inside the building on social media, so they can’t exactly argue in court they weren’t there. Blaming Trump may be the best defense they have.

“What’s the better argument when you’re on videotape prancing around the Capitol with a coat rack in your hand?” said Sam Shamansky, who’s representing Dustin Thompson, an Ohio man accused of stealing a coat rack during the riot.

Shamansky said his client would never have been at the Capitol on Jan. 6 if Trump hadn’t “summoned him there.” Trump, he added, engaged in a “devious yet effective plot to brainwash” supporters into believing the election was stolen, putting them in the position where they “felt the the need to defend their country at the request of the commander in chief.”

“I think it fits perfectly,” he said of the defense. “The more nuanced question is: Who is going to buy it? What kind of jury panel do you need to understand that?”

While experts say blaming Trump may not get their clients off the hook, it may help at sentencing when they ask the judge for leniency.

“It could likely be considered a mitigating factor that this person genuinely believed they were simply following the instructions of the leader of the United States,” said Barbara McQuade, a former U.S. attorney in Michigan who’s now a professor at the University of Michigan Law School.

It could also bolster any potential cases against the former president, experts say.

“That defense is dead on arrival,” said Bradley Simon, a New York City white-collar criminal defense attorney and former federal prosecutor. “But I do think that these statements by defendants saying that they were led on by Trump causes a problem for him if the Justice Department or the attorney general in D.C. were to start looking at charges against him for incitement of the insurrection.”

While the legal bar is high for prosecuting Trump in the Capitol siege, the former president is already facing a lawsuit from Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson that accuses him of conspiring with extremist groups to prevent Congress from certifying the election results. And more lawsuits could come.

Trump spread baseless claims about the election for weeks and addressed thousands of supporters at a rally near the White House before the Capitol riot, telling them that they had gathered in Washington



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 33 of 72

"to save our democracy." Later, Trump said, "I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."

A lawyer for Jacob Chansley, the shirtless man who wore face paint and a hat with horns inside the Capitol, attached a highlighted transcript of the Trump's speech before the riot to a court filing seeking Chansley's release from custody. The defense lawyer, Albert Watkins, said the federal government is sending a "disturbingly chilling message" that Americans will be prosecuted "if they do that which the President asks them to do."

Defense lawyers have employed other strategies without better success. In one case, the judge called a defense attorney's portrayal of the riots as mere trespassing or civil disobedience both "unpersuasive and detached from reality." In another, a judge rejected a man's claim that he was "duped" into joining the anti-government Oath Keepers group and participating in the attack on the Capitol.

Other defendants linked to militant groups also have tried to shift blame to Trump in seeking their pretrial release from jail. An attorney for Jessica Watkins said the Oath Keepers member believed local militias would be called into action if Trump invoked the Insurrection Act to stay in office. Watkins disavowed the Oath Keepers during a court hearing on Friday, saying she has been "appalled" by fellow members of the far-right militia.

"However misguided, her intentions were not in any way related to an intention to overthrow the government, but to support what she believed to be the lawful government," her lawyer wrote.

Meanwhile, a lawyer for Dominic Pezzola, another suspected Proud Boy, said he "acted out of the delusional belief that he was a 'patriot' protecting his country." Defense attorney Jonathan Zucker described Pezzola as "one of millions of Americans who were misled by the President's deception."

"Many of those who heeded his call will be spending substantial portions if not the remainder of their lives in prison as a consequence," he wrote. "Meanwhile Donald Trump resumes his life of luxury and privilege."

## Trump the dominant force at conservative conference

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A conference dedicated to the future of the conservative movement turned into an ode to Donald Trump as speakers declared their fealty to the former president and attendees posed for selfies with a golden statue of his likeness.

As the Republican Party grapples with deep divisions over the extent to which it should embrace Trump after losing the White House and both chambers of Congress, those gathered at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday made clear they are not ready to move on from the former president — or from his baseless charges that the November election was rigged against him.

"Donald J. Trump ain't going anywhere," said Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, one of several potential 2024 presidential contenders who spoke at the event, being held this year in Orlando to bypass COVID-19 restrictions.

Trump on Sunday will be making his first post-presidential appearance at the conference, and aides say he will use the speech to reassert his power.

The program underscored the split raging within the GOP, as many establishment voices argue the party must move on from Trump to win back the suburban voters who abandoned them in November, putting President Joe Biden in the White House. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and others worry Trump will undermine the party's political future if he and his conspiracy theories continue to dominate Republican politics.

But at the conference, speakers continued to fan disinformation and conspiracy theories about the 2020 election, with panels dedicated to amplifying false claims of mass voter fraud that have been dismissed by the courts, state election officials and Trump's own administration.

Indeed, Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., another potential 2024 hopeful, drew among the loudest applause and a standing ovation when he bragged about challenging the election certification on Jan. 6 despite the storming of the Capitol building by Trump supporters trying to halt the process.

"I thought it was an important stand to take," he said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 34 of 72

Others argued the party would lose if it turned its back on Trump and alienated the working-class voters drawn to his populist message.

"We cannot — we will not — go back to the days of the failed Republican establishment of yesteryear," said Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who outlined a new Trumpian GOP agenda focused on restrictive immigration policies, opposition to China and limiting military engagement.

"We will not win the future by trying to go back to where the Republican Party used to be," echoed Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who chairs the fundraising committee tasked with electing Republicans to the Senate. "If we do, we will lose the working base that President Trump so animated. We're going to lose elections across the country, and ultimately we're going to lose our nation."

Scott is dismissing pressure on him to "mediate between warring factions on the right" or "mediate the war of words between the party leaders." He has refused to take sides in the bitter ongoing fight between Trump and McConnell, who blamed Trump for inciting the deadly Capitol riot but ultimately voted to acquit him at his impeachment trial earlier this month.

"I'm not going to mediate anything," he said, criticizing those who "prefer to fan the flames of a civil war on our side" as "foolish" and "ridiculous."

But in speeches throughout the day, the GOP turmoil was front and center. Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., lit into Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House Republican, who has faced tremendous backlash for her vote to impeach Trump for inciting the Capitol riot.

And as the program was wrapping up, Trump issued a statement endorsing Max Miller, a former staffer who has now launched a campaign challenging Ohio Rep. Anthony Gonzalez, another Republican who voted in favor of impeachment.

Kimberly Guilfoyle, a former Fox News Channel host and Trump Jr.'s girlfriend, offered a pointed message to those who stand in opposition to the former president, who will not arrive at the conference until Sunday but was present in spirit in the form of a large golden statue erected in a merchandise show booth, where attendees could pose for pictures with it.

"We bid a farewell to the weak-kneed, the spineless and the cowards that are posing in D.C. pretending that they're working for the people," she said. "Let's send them a pink slip straight from CPAC."

Trump Jr., who labeled the conference "TPAC" in honor of his father, hyped the return of his father and the "Make America Great Again" platform to the spotlight.

"I imagine it will not be what we call a 'low-energy' speech," he said. "And I assure you that it will solidify Donald Trump and all of your feelings about the MAGA movement as the future of the Republican Party."

## **Pakistan expert: Religiosity aiding spike in militancy**

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Militant attacks are on the rise in Pakistan amid a growing religiosity that has brought greater intolerance, prompting one expert to voice concern the country could be overwhelmed by religious extremism.

Pakistani authorities are embracing strengthening religious belief among the population to bring the country closer together. But it's doing just the opposite, creating intolerance and opening up space for a creeping resurgence in militancy, said Mohammad Amir Rana, executive director of the independent Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies.

"Unfortunately, instead of helping to inculcate better ethics and integrity, this phenomenon is encouraging a tunnel vision" that encourages violence, intolerance and hate, he wrote recently in a local newspaper. "Religiosity has begun to define the Pakistani citizenry."

Militant violence in Pakistan has spiked: In the past week alone, four vocational school instructors who advocated for women's rights were traveling together when they were gunned down in a Pakistan border region. A Twitter death threat against Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai attracted an avalanche of trolls. They heaped abuse on the young champion of girls education, who survived a Pakistani Taliban bullet to the head. A couple of men on a motorcycle opened fire on a police check-post not far from the Afghan

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 35 of 72

border killing a young police constable.

In recent weeks, at least a dozen military and paramilitary men have been killed in ambushes, attacks and operations against militant hideouts, mostly in the western border regions.

A military spokesman this week said the rising violence is a response to an aggressive military assault on militant hideouts in regions bordering Afghanistan and the reunification of splintered and deeply violent anti-Pakistan terrorist groups, led by the Tehreek-e-Taliban. The group is driven by a radical religious ideology that espouses violence to enforce its extreme views.

Gen. Babar Iftikar said the reunified Pakistani Taliban have found a headquarters in eastern Afghanistan. He also accused hostile neighbor India of financing and outfitting a reunified Taliban, providing them with equipment like night vision goggles, improvised explosive devices and small weapons.

India and Pakistan routinely trade allegations that the other is using militants to undermine stability and security at home.

Security analyst and fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Asfandyar Mir, said the reunification of a splintered militancy is dangerous news for Pakistan.

"The reunification of various splinters into the (Tehreek-e-Taliban) central organization is a major development, which makes the group very dangerous," said Mir.

The TTP claimed responsibility for the 2012 shooting of Yousafzai. Its former spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, who mysteriously escaped Pakistan military custody to flee to the country, tweeted a promise that the Taliban would kill her if she returned home.

Iftikar, in a briefing of foreign journalists this week, said Pakistani military personnel aided Ehsan's escape, without elaborating. He said the soldiers involved had been punished and efforts were being made to return Ehsan to custody.

The government reached out to Twitter to shut down Ehsan's account after he threatened Yousafzai, although the military and government at first suggested it was a fake account.

But Rana, the commentator, said the official silence that greeted the threatening tweet encouraged religious intolerance to echo in Pakistani society unchecked.

"The problem is religiosity has very negative expression in Pakistan," he said in an interview late Friday. "It hasn't been utilized to promote the positive, inclusive tolerant religion."

Instead, successive Pakistani governments as well as its security establishments have exploited extreme religious ideologies to garner votes, appease political religious groups, or target enemies, he said.

The 2018 general elections that brought cricket star-turned-politician Imran Khan to power was mired in allegations of support from the powerful military for hard-line religious groups.

Those groups include the Tehreek-e-Labbaik party, whose single-point agenda is maintaining and propagating the country's deeply controversial blasphemy law. That law calls for the death penalty for anyone insulting Islam and is most often used to settle disputes. It often targets minorities, mostly Shiite Muslims, who make up about 15% of mostly Sunni Pakistan's 220 million people.

Mir, the analyst, said the rise in militancy has benefited from state policies that have been either supportive or ambivalent toward militancy as well as from sustained exposure of the region to violence. Most notable are the protracted war in neighboring Afghanistan and the simmering tensions between hostile neighbors India and Pakistan, two countries that possess a nuclear weapons' arsenal.

"More than extreme religious thought, the sustained exposure of the region to political violence, the power of militant organizations in the region, state policy which is either supportive or ambivalent towards various forms of militancy ... and the influence of the politics of Afghanistan incubate militancy in the region," he said.

Mir and Rana both pointed to the Pakistani government's failure to draw radical thinkers away from militant organizations, as groups that seemed at least briefly to eschew a violent path have returned to violence and rejoined the TTP.

Iftikar said the military has stepped up assaults on the reunited Pakistani Taliban, pushing the militants to respond, but only targets they can manage, which are soft targets.

But Mir said the reunited militants pose a greater threat.

"With the addition of these powerful units, the TTP has major strength for operations across the former tribal areas, Swat, Baluchistan, and some in Punjab," he said. "Taken together, they improve TTP's ability to mount insurgent and mass-casualty attacks."

## Myanmar police deploy early to crank up pressure on protests

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Police in Myanmar escalated their crackdown on demonstrators against this month's military takeover, deploying early and in force on Saturday as protesters sought to assemble in the country's two biggest cities and elsewhere.

Security forces in some areas appeared to become more aggressive in using force and making arrests, utilizing more plainclothes officers than had previously revealed themselves. Photos posted on social media showed that residents of at least two cities, Yangon and Monywa, resisted by erecting makeshift street barricades to try to hinder the advance of the police.

Myanmar's crisis took a dramatic turn on the international stage at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Friday when the country's U.N. ambassador declared his loyalty to the ousted civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi and called on the world to pressure the military to cede power.

There were arrests Saturday in Myanmar's two biggest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, where demonstrators have been hitting the streets daily to peacefully demand the restoration of the government of Suu Kyi, whose National League for Democracy party won a landslide election victory in November. Police have increasingly been enforcing an order by the junta banning gatherings of five or more people.

Many other cities and towns have also hosted large protests against the Feb. 1 coup.

Police in Dawei, in the southeast, and Monywa, 135 kilometers (85 miles) northwest of Mandalay, used force against protesters. Both cities, with populations of less than 200,000 each, have been seeing large demonstrations.

Social media carried unconfirmed reports of a protester shot dead in Monywa. The reports could not immediately be independently confirmed but appeared credible, with both photos and identification of the victim. The reports from Monywa also said dozens or more people were arrested.

The military takeover reversed years of slow progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule. Suu Kyi's party would have been installed for a second five-year term in office, but the army blocked Parliament from convening and detained her and President Win Myint, as well as other top members of her government.

At the General Assembly in New York, Myanmar's U.N. ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, declared in an emotional speech to fellow delegates that he represented Suu Kyi's "civilian government elected by the people" and supported the fight against military rule.

He urged all countries to issue public statements strongly condemning the coup, and to refuse to recognize the military regime. He also called for stronger international measures to stop violence by security forces against peaceful demonstrators.

He drew loud applause from many diplomats in the 193-nation global body, as well as effusive praise from other Burmese on social media, who described him as a hero. The ambassador flashed a three-finger salute that has been adopted by the civil disobedience movement at the end of his speech in which he addressed people back home in Burmese.

In Yangon on Saturday morning, police began arrests early at the Hledan Center intersection, which has become the gathering point for protesters who then fan out to other parts of the city. Police took similar action in residential neighborhoods.

Security forces also tried to thwart protests in Mandalay, where roadblocks were set up at several key intersections and the regular venues for rallies were flooded with police.

Buddhist monks were prominent in Saturday's march in Mandalay, as they have been regularly, lending moral authority to the civil disobedience movement that is challenging the military rulers.

Mandalay has been the scene of several violent confrontations, and at least four of eight confirmed

deaths linked to the protests, according to the independent Assistance Association of Political Prisoners. On Friday, at least three people there were injured, including two who were shot in the chest by rubber bullets and another who suffered what appeared to be a bullet wound to his leg.

According to the association, as of Friday, 771 people had been arrested, charged or sentenced at one point in relation to the coup, and 689 were being detained or sought for arrest.

The junta said it took power because last year's polls were marred by massive irregularities. The election commission before the military seized power had refuted the allegation of widespread fraud. The junta dismissed the old commission's members and appointed new ones, who on Friday annulled the election results.

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Associated Press writer Edith Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

## **Asia Today: S. Korea allows workers to squeeze extra doses**

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency has allowed health workers to squeeze extra doses from vials of coronavirus vaccines developed by AstraZeneca and Pfizer.

The decision on Saturday came after some health workers who were administering the AstraZeneca shots reported to authorities that they still saw additional doses left in the bottles that had each been used for 10 injections.

KDCA official Jeong Gyeong-shil said skilled workers may be able to squeeze one or two extra doses from each vial if they use low dead-volume syringes designed to reduce wasted medications and vaccines.

However, she said the KDCA isn't allowing health workers from combining vaccines left in different bottles to create more doses.

The KDCA had previously authorized 10 injections for each AstraZeneca vial and six for each Pfizer vial.

South Korea, which launched its public vaccination campaign on Friday, is administering the AstraZeneca shots to residents and workers at long-term care facilities and the Pfizer ones to front-line medical workers.

South Korea on Saturday reported another 405 coronavirus cases.

In other developments around the Asia-Pacific region:

— Over 500,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in Hong Kong on Saturday following a two-day delay due to export procedures, offering a second inoculation option for the city. The Pfizer-BioNTech shots will be offered to about 2.4 million eligible residents from priority groups such as those aged 60 and above and health care workers. About 70,000 residents who have registered for the vaccination program, which kicked off on Friday, will receive the shots developed by Chinese biopharmaceutical firm Sinovac. The Sinovac vaccines were the first to arrive last week. Registration details for those wishing to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech shots haven't been announced yet. Hong Kong has struck deals for a total of 22.5 million doses, with 7.5 million each from Sinovac, AstraZeneca and Fosun Pharma, which is delivering the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. The government has so far approved the Sinovac and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines.

— New Zealand's largest city of Auckland is going back into a seven-day lockdown after a new unexplained coronavirus case was found. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made the announcement Saturday evening after an urgent meeting with top lawmakers in the Cabinet. She said the lockdown would take effect from Sunday morning. Auckland earlier this month was placed into a three-day lockdown after new cases of the more contagious variant first found in Britain were found. New Zealand has pursued a zero-tolerance elimination strategy with the virus, and had successfully stamped out community spread before the latest cases were found this month. Ardern said the latest patient had experienced symptoms since earlier in the week and could have infected others. The rest of New Zealand will also have increased restrictions.

— Sri Lanka's Health Ministry has decided to vaccinate everyone aged 30 and above in the high-risk areas of the capital Colombo and suburbs where COVID-19 cases are rising. There were 466 new cases in the last 24 hours. Sri Lanka began its inoculation drive in January starting with health workers. So far, more than 406,000 people have received their shots.

## Analysis: Biden ambitions run into reality of Senate's rules

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — The early ambitions of Joe Biden's presidency are quickly running into the guardrails of archaic Senate rules, testing his willingness to remake an institution he reveres to fulfill many of the promises he has made to Americans.

It's a wonky, Washington dilemma with real-world implications for millions of people, determining everything from the future of a minimum wage hike to voting access. It will also shape Biden's ability to keep two restive wings of the Democratic Party united: swing state moderates wary of the appearance of effectively giving up on bipartisanship and more progressive Democrats who argue that Republicans aren't coming along anyway.

Biden — who spent four decades as a senator and speaks of the institution with veneration, as well as some revisionist history about the good old days of cross-party cooperation — is so far trying to find the middle ground.

Liberal Democrats applauded his willingness to go it alone on a sprawling, \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief plan, embracing an option known as budget reconciliation that allows certain legislation to pass with a simple majority — in other words, without any Republican votes. But that pathway comes with limitations, including strict rules on what can and can't be included in a bill.

On Thursday, the Senate's parliamentarian decreed that a \$15 minimum wage provision was out of bounds, prompting some Democrats to call on Biden to push the boundaries again and overrule her decision. The White House said that won't happen, citing the president's respect for "the Senate's process."

Ultimately, the COVID-19 relief bill was approved by the House by 219-212 early Saturday and will almost certainly pass Congress, even if some Democrats gripe about losing the minimum wage increase. But the road ahead for Biden only gets more treacherous given Democrats' slim majorities in the House and the Senate and little sign of Republican interest in tackling climate change legislation, an immigration overhaul or election reforms. Those measures mostly fall outside the reconciliation rules, meaning Biden either needs to find a way to bring centrist GOP senators along or blow up what's known as the filibuster, which would clear the way for all legislation to pass with 51 votes.

To some Democrats, taking that step amounts to accepting the reality of what Republicans are, and are not, willing to give Biden.

"Democrats made a lot of promises in winning the House, the Senate and the White House," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a progressive who has advocated for blasting through some long-standing congressional rules. "So we're going to have to make a choice here. Are we going to stick to these rules, or are we actually going to use the levers of government to work for the people? To me, that's not radical — that's governing."

Biden, who pitched himself to voters as a candidate who could overcome Washington's hyperpartisanship, has so far suggested he's inclined to play by the rules and court moderate Republicans who may be willing to work with him.

But the math gets tricky fast. With the Senate split 50-50, Biden would need 10 Republicans to join him to pass major legislation. Yet every move he might make to the center to win a GOP vote could put at risk the support of liberal senators.

Matt Bennett, the executive director of Third Way, a center-left think tank, said he sees some value in Biden gauging Republicans' willingness to work with him during the early weeks of his administration. But without a significant crack in the GOP firewall, Bennett said keeping the filibuster in place will leave Biden with almost no chance of passing his legislative agenda before the 2022 midterm elections.

"If the filibuster remains, then he's going to have to do what (former President Barack) Obama did for six years, which is use executive power to the extent he's able and hope he's able to get a better outcome in the midterms and a few more votes," Bennett said.

Indeed, it's the lessons of the Obama years that have shifted many Democrats' views of the filibuster, including the former president himself. Obama started his tenure with an enviable 60-seat majority in the

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 39 of 72

Senate, allowing him to pass a recession rescue package and health care overhaul without any Republicans or rule changes. But his majority dwindled after his first two years in office, as did his ability to pass major legislation.

Last year, Obama called the filibuster a "Jim Crow relic" and said that if it's used to block voting rights legislation, it should be eliminated.

But there's no clear consensus within the Democratic Party on the way forward. A pair of powerful moderate senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, are on record opposing filibuster reform. Others have yet to fully articulate a position.

Both parties have been chipping away at the filibuster for several years. In 2013, then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, ended the filibuster for confirmation votes for executive branch and some judicial nominees. In 2017, with Republican Mitch McConnell in charge of the Senate, the GOP did away with the 60-vote requirement for Supreme Court nominees.

Many Democrats believe Biden will have to quickly confront the issue. Democrats will soon start pushing forward a sweeping election and ethics bill that is seen by many in the party as a counterweight to voting restrictions being pursued by Republicans at a state level. GOP lawmakers have panned the measure as a federal takeover of elections, and conservative groups have vowed to spend millions to fight it.

That could leave blowing up the filibuster as the only clear path for passage. Progressives argue that's a far more palatable choice than explaining to voters, including many people of color who are fearful of new ballot access restrictions, that protecting a Senate procedure was more important than protecting their right to vote.

"This is going to require presidential leadership," said Tre Easton, senior adviser at Battle Born Collective, a progressive group pushing to end the filibuster. "President Biden has a choice to make pretty early, probably earlier than he wanted, about how much he wants to push."

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Editor's Note: Julie Pace has covered the White House and politics for the AP since 2007. Follow her at <http://twitter.com/jpaceDC>

## House passes \$1.9T pandemic bill on near party-line vote

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House approved a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief bill in a win for President Joe Biden, even as top Democrats tried assuring agitated progressives that they'd revive their derailed drive to boost the minimum wage.

The new president's vision for flushing cash to individuals, businesses, states and cities battered by COVID-19 passed on a near party-line 219-212 vote early Saturday. That ships the massive measure to the Senate, where Democrats seem bent on resuscitating their minimum wage push and fights could erupt over state aid and other issues.

Democrats said the still-faltering economy and the half-million American lives lost demanded quick, decisive action. GOP lawmakers, they said, were out of step with a public that polling shows largely views the bill favorably.

"I am a happy camper tonight," Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., said Friday. "This is what America needs. Republicans, you ought to be a part of this. But if you're not, we're going without you."

Republicans said the bill was too expensive and said too few education dollars would be spent quickly to immediately reopen schools. They said it was laden with gifts to Democratic constituencies like labor unions and funneled money to Democratic-run states they suggested didn't need it because their budgets had bounced back.

"To my colleagues who say this bill is bold, I say it's bloated," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "To those who say it's urgent, I say it's unfocused. To those who say it's popular, I say it is entirely partisan."

Moderate Democratic Reps. Jared Golden of Maine and Kurt Schrader of Oregon were the only two law-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 40 of 72

makers to cross party lines. That sharp partisan divide is making the fight a showdown over who voters will reward for heaping more federal spending to combat the coronavirus and revive the economy atop the \$4 trillion approved last year.

The battle is also emerging as an early test of Biden's ability to hold together his party's fragile congressional majorities — just 10 votes in the House and an evenly divided 50-50 Senate.

At the same time, Democrats were trying to figure out how to assuage progressives who lost their top priority in a jarring Senate setback Thursday.

That chamber's nonpartisan parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, said Senate rules require that a federal minimum wage increase would have to be dropped from the COVID-19 bill, leaving the proposal on life support. The measure would gradually lift that minimum to \$15 hourly by 2025, doubling the current \$7.25 floor in effect since 2009.

Hoping to revive the effort in some form, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., is considering adding a provision to the Senate version of the COVID-19 relief bill that would penalize large companies that don't pay workers at least \$15 an hour, said a senior Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations.

That was in line with ideas floated Thursday night by Sens. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a chief sponsor of the \$15 plan, and Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden, D-Ore., to boost taxes on corporations that don't hit certain minimum wage targets.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., offered encouragement, too, calling a minimum wage increase "a financial necessity for our families, a great stimulus for our economy and a moral imperative for our country." She said the House would "absolutely" approve a final version of the relief bill because of its widespread benefits, even if it lacked progressives' treasured goal.

While Democratic leaders were eager to signal to rank-and-file progressives and liberal voters that they would not yield on the minimum wage fight, their pathway was unclear because of GOP opposition and questions over whether they had enough Democratic support.

House Ways and Means Committee Chair Richard Neal, D-Mass., sidestepped a question on taxing companies that don't boost pay, saying of Senate Democrats, "I hesitate to say anything until they decide on a strategy."

Progressives were demanding that the Senate press ahead anyway on the minimum wage increase, even if it meant changing that chamber's rules and eliminating the filibuster, a tactic that requires 60 votes for a bill to move forward.

"We're going to have to reform the filibuster because we have to be able to deliver," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a progressive leader.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., another high-profile progressive, also said Senate rules must be changed, telling reporters that when Democrats meet with their constituents, "We can't tell them that this didn't get done because of an unelected parliamentarian."

Traditionalists of both parties — including Biden, who served as a senator for 36 years — have opposed eliminating filibusters because they protect parties' interests when they are in the Senate minority. Biden said weeks ago that he didn't expect the minimum wage increase to survive the Senate's rules.

Pelosi, too, seemed to shy away from dismantling Senate procedures, saying, "We will seek a solution consistent with Senate rules, and we will do so soon."

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It also provides billions for schools and colleges, state and local governments, COVID-19 vaccines and testing, renters, food producers and struggling industries like airlines, restaurants, bars and concert venues.

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It also lets the bill move faster, a top priority for Democrats who want the bill on Biden's desk before



the most recent emergency jobless benefits end on March 14.

But those same Senate rules prohibit provisions with only an "incidental" impact on the federal budget because they are chiefly driven by other policy purposes. MacDonough decided that the minimum wage provision failed that test.

Republicans oppose the \$15 minimum wage target as an expense that would hurt businesses and cost jobs.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick and Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

## Experts notice pandemic's mental health toll on German youth

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Pollina Dinner returned to school in Berlin for the first time this week after two months of lockdown. The 9-year-old third-grader was thrilled to see her classmates and teachers again but frets about the coronavirus pandemic's effect on her life.

"I'm not afraid of the coronavirus, I'm afraid that everything will continue like this — that my school will close again, I won't be able to see my friends, and that I can't go to the movies with my family," the girl said, fingering her blue medical mask and sighing deeply. "And wearing this mask is even worse than all the shops being closed."

Psychiatrists, psychologists and pediatricians in Germany have voiced growing alarm that school closings, social restrictions and other precautions are magnifying the fear, disruption and stress of the pandemic among Germany's 13.7 million children and teenagers, raising the prospect of a future mental health crisis.

"We don't have any long-term studies yet, but there's lots of anecdotal evidence of a crisis-driven rise in hospitalizations and overflowing psychologists' practices," Julia Asbrand, a professor of child and youth psychology at Berlin's Humboldt University, told The Associated Press.

A recent survey by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found that about one child in three is suffering from pandemic-related anxiety or depression or is exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. Children from poorer and immigrant families are disproportionately affected, according to the survey.

Pollina, who immigrated from Russia with her family in 2019, worries about forgetting much of her German since she only speaks Russian at home. She's one of 150 youngsters from underprivileged families who, before the pandemic, regularly spent time after school at a youth support program on the eastern outskirts of the German capital.

Arche — Ark in English — is based in Berlin's Hellersdorf district, a neighborhood of drab concrete buildings constructed during the former Communist regime of East Germany. Some children are still allowed to come in person, but only once every two weeks. The rest of the time, the social workers and educators try to stay in touch through video chats while helping their young clients with remote learning.

"Many have completely withdrawn and don't want to get out of their rooms anymore. They've gained a lot of weight, are playing online games nonstop and don't have any more structure in their everyday lives," Arche founder Bernd Siggelkow said.

The second major lockdown in Germany started before Christmas. Students in grades 1-3 were allowed to return to classrooms this week with reduced class sizes and limited lessons. The government hopes to ease further restrictions in coming weeks and has said that the re-opening of all schools is a top priority.

However, there's concern the country is slipping into a third wave of infections due to more contagious variants of the virus. Virologists have repeatedly said it is still unclear to what extent the virus spreads from children attending school into homes and communities. More than 2 million people have contracted the virus in Germany and almost 70,000 have died of COVID-19, although only 10 under the age of 20, according to the country's disease control center.

Even though children are not at as much risk of severe COVID-19 complications as older adults, they may be more vulnerable to the collateral mental health effects of the pandemic, according to experts.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 42 of 72

An analysis by German health insurer DAK regarding youth psychological issues confirms the first-person observations of the staff at Arche.

The evaluation, which was obtained by German news agency dpa, showed that the number of children and teenagers hospitalized for psychiatric treatment in Berlin almost doubled during the first half of 2020, when schools were closed for over two months during the country's first lockdown, compared with first six months of 2019.

The statistic underscores the psychological strain the pandemic is putting on young people but does not illustrate the scope of the problem, Christoph Correll, the director of child and youth psychiatry at Berlin's Charite hospital, told dpa.

"Hospitalizations are the tip of the iceberg," he said.

Teenagers, especially girls, are more prone to eating disorders and self-harming, and many children's psychological problems are going undetected while parents are overwhelmed and teachers, social workers and pediatricians don't have regular contact with students, clients and patients, experts warn.

Psychology professor Asbrand worries that the mental health of children and teenagers has not gotten enough attention during the pandemic. Together with other professionals in the field, she wrote an open letter to the government this month to push for youth needs to get better addressed in the ongoing health crisis and prioritized when society reopens.

An immediate action government authorities could take to help mitigate possible problems would be to allow groups to gather for school and youth sports, in line with hygiene and distancing precautions.

"We all don't know yet how this is going to develop long-term, but we must focus on youth mental health now," she said.

While attending Arche this week for help with homework assigned online, 16-year-old Robin Reyer said not being able to hang out with friends has been one of the hardest parts of the pandemic restrictions.

"I want to celebrate birthdays again, go out and play soccer with my friends in the park or meet them at Burger King," he said while taking a break outside in the spring sun.

"Now, I'm only allowed to meet one friend at most," he said. "That really sucks."

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# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 43 of 72

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# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 44 of 72

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Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick and Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

## LeBron James rejects Zlatan's criticism of activist athletes

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — LeBron James responded to Zlatan Ibrahimovic's criticism of his political activism with a promise that he will never just shut up and dribble.

The Los Angeles Lakers superstar also pointed out that Ibrahimovic clearly didn't feel the same way about spotlighting social injustices when the soccer great called out racism in his native Sweden just three years ago.

The AC Milan striker and former LA Galaxy star criticized James and other socially conscious athletes Thursday in an interview with Discovery Plus. Ibrahimovic called it "a mistake" for James and other athletes to get involved in political causes, saying they should "just do what you do best, because it doesn't look good."

James responded forcefully to Ibrahimovic's stance after the Lakers' 102-93 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Friday night.

"I would never shut up about things that are wrong," said James, who had 28 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists.

"I preach about my people and I preach about equality, social injustice, racism, systematic voter suppression, things that go on in our community," James added. "I know what's going on still, because I have a group of 300-plus kids at my school that's going through the same thing, and they need a voice, and I'm their voice. I'll use my platform to continue to shed light on everything that's going on around this country and around the world. There's no way I would ever just stick to sports, because I understand how powerful this platform and my voice is."

James funds the I Promise School in his native Akron, Ohio. The third-leading scorer in NBA history also backs numerous initiatives pursuing social justice, voting rights and other progressive causes.

James also made it clear he was aware of comments made in 2018 by Ibrahimovic, the Swedish-born son of a Bosnian father and a Croatian mother.

"He's the guy who said in Sweden, he was talking about the same things, because his last name wasn't a (traditional Swedish) last name, he felt like there was some racism going on when he was out on the pitch," James said. "I speak from a very educated mind. I'm kind of the wrong guy to actually go at, because I do my homework."

Indeed, Ibrahimovic told Canal Plus that "undercover racism" caused the Swedish media and public to treat him with less respect and reverence: "This exists, I am 100% sure, because I am not Andersson or Svensson. If I would be that, trust me, they would defend me even if I would rob a bank."

James and Ibrahimovic overlapped in Los Angeles for about 16 months from the summer of 2018 until November 2019, when Ibrahimovic went back to Europe. While Zlatan was unable to carry the Galaxy to an MLS Cup title despite playing exceptionally during two largely frustrating seasons, LeBron already won the Lakers' 17th NBA title in his second season with the club.

They also share remarkable similarities as two astonishing athletes who have remained among the world's best players deep into their 30s. The 36-year-old James is still one of the best all-around players in modern basketball, while the 39-year-old Ibrahimovic remains among Serie A's scoring leaders with 14

goals in just 13 league games for Milan.

Dennis Schröder, the Lakers' German point guard, gave his support to James and confirmed the obvious truth that Ibrahimovic's attitude is decidedly not shared by many European athletes.

"Every athlete can use our platform and try to make change in this world," Schröder said. "Zlatan, he's a little different. Unique player, unique character."

More AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/NBA> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Highlights of the COVID-19 relief bill advancing in Congress

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package early Saturday, 219-212, that includes \$1,400 checks for most Americans and billions of dollars for schools, state and local governments and businesses.

Republicans are overwhelmingly against the bill, raising concerns that the spending is vastly more than necessary and designed to advance policy priorities that go beyond helping Americans get through the pandemic. Democrats and President Joe Biden counter that a robust aid package is necessary to prevent a long and painful recovery from the pandemic.

The Democrats' goal is to have COVID-19 relief approved by mid-March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. The Senate, which Democrats control with a tie-breaking vote from the vice president, will consider the bill next.

A look at some highlights of the legislation:

### MORE CHECKS

The legislation provides a rebate that amounts to \$1,400 for a single taxpayer, or \$2,800 for a married couple that files jointly, plus \$1,400 per dependent. Individuals earning up to \$75,000 would get the full amount as would married couples with incomes up to \$150,000.

The size of the check would shrink for those making slightly more with a hard cut-off at \$100,000 for individuals and \$200,000 for married couples.

Some Republicans want to cut the size of the rebate as well as the pool of Americans eligible for it, but Biden has insisted on \$1,400 checks, saying "that's what the American people were promised." The new round of checks will cost the government an estimated \$422 billion.

### BIGGER TAX BREAK FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH KIDS

Under current law, most taxpayers can reduce their federal income tax bill by up to \$2,000 per child. The package moving through the House would increase the tax break to \$3,000 for every child age 6 to 17 and \$3,600 for every child under the age of 6.

The legislation also calls for the payments to be delivered monthly instead of in one lump sum. If the secretary of the Treasury determines that isn't feasible, then the payments are to be made as frequently as possible.

Also, families would get the full credit regardless of how little they make in a year, even just a few hundred dollars, leading to criticism that the changes would serve as a disincentive to work. Add in the \$1,400 per individual checks and other items in the proposal, and the legislation would reduce the number of children living in poverty by more than half, according to an analysis from the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University.

### AID TO STATES AND CITIES

The legislation would send \$350 billion to state and local governments and tribal governments. While Republicans in Congress have largely objected to this initiative, Biden's push has some GOP support among governors and mayors.

Many communities have taken hits to their tax base as millions of people have lost their jobs and as people stay home and avoid restaurants and stores to prevent getting COVID-19. Many areas have also seen expenses rise as they work to treat the sick and ramp up vaccinations.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 46 of 72

But the impact varies from state to state and from town to town. Critics say the funding is not appropriately targeted and is far more than necessary with billions of dollars allocated last spring to states and communities still unspent.

## AID TO SCHOOLS

The bill calls for \$130 billion in additional help to schools for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The money would be used to reduce class sizes and modify classrooms to enhance social distancing, install ventilation systems and purchase personal protective equipment. The money could also be used to increase the hiring of nurses, counselors and to provide summer school.

Spending for colleges and universities would be boosted by \$40 billion, with the money used to defray an institution's pandemic-related expenses and to provide emergency aid to students to cover expenses such as food and housing and computer equipment.

## AID TO BUSINESSES

The bill provides another round of relief for airlines and eligible contractors, \$15 billion, so long as they refrain from furloughing workers or cutting pay through September. It's the third round of support for airlines.

A new program for restaurants and bars hurt by the pandemic would receive \$25 billion. The grants provide up to \$10 million per entity with a limit of \$5 million per physical location. The grants can be used to cover payroll, rent, utilities and other operational expenses.

The bill also provides another \$7.25 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program, a tiny fraction of what was allocated in previous legislation. The loans are designed to help borrowers meet their payroll and operating costs and can potentially be forgiven.

## AID TO THE UNEMPLOYED

Expanded unemployment benefits from the federal government would be extended, with an increase from \$300 a week to \$400 a week. That's on top of what beneficiaries are getting through their state unemployment insurance program.

## HEALTH CARE

The bill provides money for key elements of the Biden administration's COVID-19 response, while also trying to advance longstanding Democratic priorities like increasing coverage under the Obama-era Affordable Care Act.

On "Obamacare," it dangles a fiscal carrot in front of a dozen states, mainly in the South, that have not yet taken up the law's Medicaid expansion to cover more low-income adults. Whether such a sweetener would be enough to start wearing down longstanding Republican opposition to Medicaid expansion is uncertain.

The bill provides \$46 billion to expand federal, state and local testing for COVID-19 and to enhance contact tracing capabilities with new investments to expand laboratory capacity and set up mobile testing units. It also contains about \$14 billion to speed up the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines across the country.

## RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

The bill would gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour by June 2025 and then adjust it to increase at the same rate as median hourly wages. However, that provision is not expected to survive in the final bill. The Senate parliamentarian ruled that it cannot be included in the COVID-19 economic relief package under the process Democrats chose to undertake to get a bill passed with a simple majority.

Biden had predicted such a result. Still, the ruling was a stinging setback for most Democratic lawmakers who had said the higher minimum wage would increase the pay for millions of Americans. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office had projected the new federal minimum wage would lift some 900,000 people out of poverty once it was fully in place. But Republicans said the mandatory wage hikes would make it harder for small businesses to survive and they pointed to the CBO's projection that about 1.4 million jobs would be lost as employers looked for ways to offset their higher personnel costs.

**Lady Gaga's dogs recovered safely after theft, shooting**

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 47 of 72

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lady Gaga's two French bulldogs, which were stolen by thieves who shot and wounded the dog walker, were recovered unharmed Friday, Los Angeles police said.

A woman brought the dogs to the LAPD's Olympic Community Police Station, just northwest of downtown, around 6 p.m., said Capt. Jonathan Tippet, commanding officer of the department's elite Robbery-Homicide Division.

Lady Gaga's representative and detectives went to the station and confirmed that they were the dogs, Tippet said.

The singer is currently in Rome to film a movie.

The woman who dropped off the dogs appears to be "uninvolved and unassociated" with Wednesday night's attack, Tippet said.

In a tweet Friday night, the LAPD said the woman had found the dogs "and reached out to Lady Gaga's staff to return them."

Her identity and the location where the dogs were found won't be disclosed for her safety and because of the ongoing investigation, the LAPD said.

The dog walker, Ryan Fischer, was shot once as he walked three of the singer's dogs in Hollywood. Video showed a white sedan pulling up and two men jumping out. They struggled with the dog walker before one pulled a gun and fired a single shot before fleeing with two of the dogs. The third escaped and has since been reunited with Lady Gaga's representatives.

The dog walker can be heard on the video saying he had been shot in the chest. He is expected to survive his injuries, Tippet said.

Lady Gaga on Friday repeated her offer of a \$500,000 reward for the return of her dogs — whose names are Koji and Gustav — with no questions asked. Tippet said since police were not involved in the reward, he did not know if the woman would receive it.

"I continue to love you Ryan Fischer, you risked your life to fight for our family. You're forever a hero," Lady Gaga said in an Instagram post.

## White House climate czar to AP: Texas storm 'a wake-up call'

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The deadly winter storm that caused widespread power outages in Texas and other states is a "wake-up call" for the United States to build energy systems and other infrastructure that are more reliable and resilient in the face of extreme-weather events linked to climate change, President Joe Biden's national climate adviser says.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Gina McCarthy said Friday that the storm that devastated Texas and other states "is not going to be as unusual as people had hoped. It is going to happen, and we need to be as resilient and working together as much as possible. We need systems of energy that are reliable and resilient as well."

McCarthy said the scientific evidence is clear that more frequent and more dangerous storms are likely, "and if we really care about keeping our people working and keeping our kids healthy and giving them a future we're proud of, then we're not going to ignore these wake-up calls. We're going to take action."

McCarthy's comments came as Biden and his wife Jill were in Texas to survey damage caused by the storm, which caused millions of homes and business to lose heat and running water. At least 40 people in the state died.

"We need to envision a future and an optimistic way of giving people hope again — that we are building back better," she said, using Biden's slogan for a plan costing at least \$2 trillion to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and create clean-energy jobs.

"It is a catchy phrase, but it also is a kind of optimistic rallying cry and I think we ought to heed it," McCarthy said.

McCarthy said she expects an "after-action" report on the Texas crisis and ways it can be avoided in the future. Many people were caught in frigid homes that lacked heat for days in subfreezing temperatures.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 48 of 72

Texas is not connected to the rest of the nation's power grid, and McCarthy said the storm may be reason to rethink that.

"You know, now's not the time for me to be pointing fingers, but clearly the United States has always done best when it's worked together and relied on one another," she said. "And I think Texas might ... have a real opportunity and probably ought to think about making sure they join with their neighbors in an interstate grid system that allows them flexibility, and that helps them help their neighbors when the time comes."

While Oklahoma, Louisiana and other neighboring states also were hit hard by the storm, they were able to rely on each other, she said.

McCarthy said Biden is committed to an all-of-government response to climate change, which she said was "part and parcel of a strategy to strengthen our economy and grow jobs" amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden has set a goal of eliminating pollution from fossil fuel in the power sector by 2035 and from the U.S. economy overall by 2050, speeding what is already a market-driven growth of solar and wind energy and lessening the country's dependence on oil and gas. The aggressive plan is aimed at slowing human-caused global warming that is magnifying extreme weather events such as the Texas storm and deadly wildfires in the West.

Biden also wants to ensure that efforts to address climate change include "workers that have been left behind" by closed coal mines or power plants, as well as communities located near polluting refineries and other hazards, McCarthy said.

"We're going to push the clean energy, we're going to push for better cars, but it's also going to be about capturing the will of the public to actually face the challenges we're facing today and meet them in a way that's going to be beneficial to them," she said.

For example, Biden's plans to provide 500,000 charging stations for electric cars and invest in battery technology are intended to make it easier for the public to participate in a clean-energy economy. "If we can lower that cost, and everybody knows they can get where they need to go when they need to get there" in an electric car, "we'll get the kind of demand on the auto-sector side that we need," she said.

Similarly, if utilities are given the right incentives, they can meet Biden's goal to have net-zero carbon emissions by 2035, McCarthy said. The head of a lobbying group for electric utilities said earlier this month that the 2035 date would be "an incredibly difficult situation to handle" for most U.S. providers.

While she respects the group and individual utilities, 2035 is Biden's goal "and I think we will get there," McCarthy said.

On coal, McCarthy convened a working group Friday to discuss ways to help communities affected by coal-mine closures and shuttering of coal-fired power plants.

The working group is intended to "bring a high level of representation from every single agency ... to come around the table and start thinking about ways in which we can really address communities that may be having difficult transitions," she said.

One idea, endorsed by West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, the chairman of the Senate Energy Committee, is to ramp up a program to seal and clean abandoned coal mines in his state and across the country. Former coal miners and power plant workers "have a terrific skill set that could be used in the same areas to start closing some of the mines," she said. "We can provide significant resources to keep people working in those areas ... and it's going to reduce methane emissions" that are now spewing virtually uncontrolled.

Similar challenges exist in the oil and natural gas industry, McCarthy said.

"From a climate perspective, we can address a dangerous problem," she said, while also "investing in ways that continue to build up opportunities for workers to work."

## Judge approves \$650M Facebook privacy lawsuit settlement

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge on Friday approved a \$650 million settlement of a privacy lawsuit against Facebook for allegedly using photo face-tagging and other biometric data without the permission of its users.

U.S. District Judge James Donato approved the deal in a class-action lawsuit that was filed in Illinois in



2015. Nearly 1.6 million Facebook users in Illinois who submitted claims will be affected.

Donato called it one of the largest settlements ever for a privacy violation.

"It will put at least \$345 into the hands of every class member interested in being compensated," he wrote, calling it "a major win for consumers in the hotly contested area of digital privacy."

Jay Edelson, a Chicago attorney who filed the lawsuit, told the Chicago Tribune that the checks could be in the mail within two months unless the ruling is appealed.

"We are pleased to have reached a settlement so we can move past this matter, which is in the best interest of our community and our shareholders," Facebook, which is headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area, said in a statement.

The lawsuit accused the social media giant of violating an Illinois privacy law by failing to get consent before using facial-recognition technology to scan photos uploaded by users to create and store faces digitally.

The state's Biometric Information Privacy Act allowed consumers to sue companies that didn't get permission before harvesting data such as faces and fingerprints.

The case eventually wound up as a class-action lawsuit in California.

Facebook has since changed its photo-tagging system.

## **Biden surveys Texas weather damage, encourages virus shots**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — President Joe Biden heard firsthand from Texans clobbered by this month's brutal winter weather on Friday and pledged to stick with them "for the long haul" as he made his first trip to a major disaster area since he took office.

Biden was briefed by emergency officials and thanked workers for doing "God's work." He promised the federal government will be there for Texans as they try to recover, not just from the historic storm but also the public health and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"When a crisis hits our states, like the one that hit Texas, it's not a Republican or Democrat that's hurting," Biden said. "It's our fellow Americans that are hurting and it's our job to help everyone in need."

With tens of thousands of Houston area residents without safe water, local officials told Biden that many are still struggling. While he was briefed, first lady Jill Biden joined an assembly line of volunteers packing boxes of quick oats, juice, and other food at the Houston Food Bank, where he arrived later.

The president's first stop was the Harris County Emergency Operations Center for a briefing from acting FEMA Administrator Bob Fenton and state and local emergency management officials.

Texas was hit particularly hard by the Valentine's weekend storm that battered multiple states. Unusually frigid conditions led to widespread power outages and frozen pipes that burst and flooded homes. Millions of residents lost heat and running water.

At least 40 people in Texas died as a result of the storm and, although the weather has returned to more normal temperatures, more than 1 million residents are still under orders to boil water before drinking it.

"The president has made very clear to us that in crises like this, it is our duty to organize prompt and competent federal support to American citizens, and we have to ensure that bureaucracy and politics do not stand in the way," said Homeland Security Adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall, who accompanied Biden to Houston.

Biden was joined for much of his visit by Gov. Greg Abbott and Sen. John Cornyn, both Republicans, four Democratic Houston-area members of Congress and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo.

The president also stopped by a mass coronavirus vaccination center at NRG Stadium that is run by the federal government. Biden on Thursday commemorated the 50 millionth COVID-19 vaccination since he took office, halfway toward his goal of 100 million shots by his 100th day in office. That celebration followed a moment of silence to mark the passage earlier this week of 500,000 U.S. deaths blamed on the disease.

Democrat Biden suggested that he and Republicans Abbott and Cornyn could find common cause in

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 50 of 72

getting Americans vaccinated as quickly as possible.

"We disagree on plenty of things," Biden said. "There's nothing wrong with that, but there are plenty of things we can work on together. And one of them is represented right here today, the effort to speed up vaccinations."

Texas' other U.S. senator, Ted Cruz, an ally of former President Donald Trump and one of a handful of GOP lawmakers who had objected to Congress certifying Biden's victory, was in Florida Friday addressing the Conservative Political Action Conference.

Cruz, who has been criticized for taking his family to Cancun, Mexico, while millions of Texans shivered in unheated homes, later said the trip was a mistake, but he made light of the controversy on Friday. "Orlando is awesome," he said to laughs and hoots. "It's not as nice as Cancun. But's nice."

At the peak of the storm, more than 1.4 million residents were without power and 3.5 million were under boil-water notices in Houston's Harris County, the nation's third largest county.

Post-storm debate in Texas has centered on the state maintaining its own electrical grid and its lack of better storm preparation, including weatherization of key infrastructure. Some state officials initially blamed the blackouts on renewable energy even though Texas relies heavily on oil and gas.

In Washington, Biden's climate adviser said the deadly winter storm was a "wake-up call" for the United States to build energy systems that can withstand extreme weather linked to climate change.

"We need systems of energy that are reliable and resilient," Gina McCarthy said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The White House said Biden's purpose in visiting was to support, not scold.

Biden was bent on asking Texans "what do you need, how can I help you more," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said. "And what can we get more for you from the federal government."

Biden has declared a major disaster in Texas and asked federal agencies to identify additional resources to aid the recovery. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has sent emergency generators, bottled water, ready-to-eat meals and blankets.

Galveston County Judge Mark Henry said in an interview that he didn't know what more the federal government could do to help because the failures were at the state level. But Henry, a Republican who is the highest county official in the suburban Houston county, said that if Biden "thinks it's important to visit, then come on down."

Biden wanted to make the trip last week, but said at the time that he held back because he didn't want his presence and entourage to detract from the recovery effort.

Houston also was the destination for Trump's first presidential visit to a disaster area in 2017 after Hurricane Harvey caused catastrophic flooding that August.

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Associated Press writers Juan Lozano in Houston, Aamer Madhani in Chicago, and Jill Colvin and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed reporting.

## **Airline CEOs, Biden officials consider green-fuel breaks**

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Chief executives of the nation's largest passenger and cargo airlines met with key Biden administration officials Friday to talk about reducing emissions from airplanes and push incentives for lower-carbon aviation fuels.

The White House said the meeting with climate adviser Gina McCarthy and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg also touched on economic policy and curbing the spread of COVID-19 — travel has been a vector for the virus. But industry officials said emissions dominated the discussion.

United Airlines said CEO Scott Kirby asked administration officials to support incentives for sustainable aviation fuel and technology to remove carbon from the atmosphere. In December, United said it invested an undisclosed amount in a carbon-capture company partly owned by Occidental Petroleum.

A United Nations aviation group has concluded that biofuels will remain a tiny source of aviation fuel for

several years. Some environmentalists would prefer the Biden administration to impose tougher emissions standards on aircraft rather than create breaks for biofuels.

"Biofuels are false solutions that don't decarbonize air travel," said Clare Lakewood, a climate-law official with the Center for Biological Diversity. "Real action on aircraft emissions requires phasing out dirty, aging aircraft, maximizing operational efficiencies and funding the rapid development of electrification."

Airplanes account for a small portion of emissions that cause climate change — about 2% to 3% — but their share has been growing rapidly and is expected to roughly triple by mid-century with the global growth in travel.

The airline trade group says U.S. carriers have more than doubled the fuel efficiency of their fleets since 1978 and plan further reductions in carbon emissions. But the independent International Council on Clean Transportation says passenger traffic is growing nearly four times faster than fuel efficiency, leading to a 33% increase in emissions between 2013 and 2019.

The U.S. accounts for about 23% of aircraft carbon-dioxide emissions, followed by Europe at 19% and China at 13%, the transportation group's researchers estimated.

The White House said McCarthy, Buttigieg and economic adviser Brian Deese were "grateful and optimistic" to hear the airline CEOs talk about current and future efforts to combat climate change.

Nicholas Calio, president of the trade group Airlines for America, said the exchange was positive.

"Airlines are ready, willing and able partners, and we want to be part of the solution" to climate change, Calio said in a statement. "We stand ready to work in partnership with the Biden administration."

## US implicates Saudi crown prince in Khashoggi's killing

By ERIC TUCKER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Saudi Arabia's crown prince likely approved the killing of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, according to a newly declassified U.S. intelligence report released Friday that instantly ratcheted up pressure on the Biden administration to hold the kingdom accountable for a murder that drew worldwide outrage.

The intelligence findings were long known to many U.S. officials and, even as they remained classified, had been reported with varying degrees of precision. But the public rebuke of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is still a touchstone in U.S.-Saudi relations. It leaves no doubt that as the prince continues in his powerful role and likely ascends to the throne, Americans will forever associate him with the brutal killing of a journalist who promoted democracy and human rights.

Yet even as the Biden administration released the findings, it appeared determined to preserve the Saudi relationship by avoiding direct punishment of the prince himself despite demands from some congressional Democrats and Khashoggi allies for significant and targeted sanctions.

Questioned by reporters, Secretary of State Antony Blinken defended the approach.

"What we've done by the actions we've taken is not to rupture the relationship but to recalibrate it to be more in line with our interests and our values," he said. "I think that we have to understand as well that this is bigger than any one person."

The conclusion that the prince approved an operation to kill or capture Khashoggi was based on his decision-making role inside the kingdom, the involvement of a key adviser and members of his protective detail and his past support for violently silencing dissidents abroad, according to the report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Though intelligence officials stopped short of saying the prince ordered the October 2018 murder, the four-page document described him as having "absolute control" over the kingdom's intelligence organizations and said it would have been highly unlikely for an operation like the killing to have been carried out without his approval.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry responded by saying the kingdom "categorically rejects the offensive and incorrect assessment in the report pertaining to the kingdom's leadership."

Shortly after the findings were released, the State Department announced a new policy, called the

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 52 of 72

"Khashoggi Ban," that will allow the U.S. to deny visas to people who harm, threaten or spy on journalists on behalf of a foreign government. It also said it would impose visa restrictions on 76 Saudi individuals who have engaged or threatened dissidents overseas.

The State Department declined to comment on who would be affected, citing the confidentiality of visa records. But a person familiar with the matter said the prince was not targeted. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The Treasury Department also announced sanctions against a former Saudi intelligence official, Ahmad Hassan Mohammed al Asiri, who U.S. officials say was the operation's ringleader.

Democrats in Congress praised the administration for releasing the report — the Trump administration had refused to do so — but urged it to take more aggressive actions, including against the prince.

Rep. Adam Schiff, chair of the House Intelligence Committee, urged the Biden administration to consider punishing the prince, who he says has the blood of an American journalist on his hands.

"The President should not meet with the Crown Prince, or talk with him, and the Administration should consider sanctions on assets in the Saudi Public Investment Fund he controls that have any link to the crime," Schiff said in a statement.

Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, called for consequences for the prince — such as sanctions — as well as for the Saudi kingdom as a whole.

Rights activists said the lack of any punitive measures would signal impunity for the prince and other autocrats.

Without sanctions, "it's a joke," said Tawwakol Karman, a Nobel Peace Prize winner from neighboring Yemen and friend of Khashoggi's.

While Biden had pledged as a candidate to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" over the killing, he appeared to take a milder tone during a call Thursday with Saudi King Salman.

A White House summary of the conversation made no mention of the killing and said instead that the men had discussed the countries' long-standing partnership. The kingdom's state-run Saudi Press Agency similarly did not mention Khashoggi's killing in its report about the call, focusing on regional issues like Iran and the war in Yemen.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki has told reporters that the administration intends to "recalibrate" the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia. Biden previously ordered an end to U.S. support for the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen and said he would stop the sale of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia but has given few details of his plans.

Though the Biden administration's relationship with Riyadh is likely to be more adversarial than that of Donald Trump's, the reality is that Riyadh's oil reserves and status as a counterbalance to Iran in the Middle East have long made it a strategic — if difficult — ally.

The broad outlines of the killing have long been known. The document released Friday says a 15-member Saudi team, including seven members of the prince's elite personal protective team, arrived in Istanbul, though it says it's unclear how far in advance Saudi officials had decided to harm him.

Khashoggi had gone to the Saudi consulate to pick up documents needed for his wedding. Once inside, he died at the hands of more than a dozen Saudi security and intelligence officials and others who had assembled ahead of his arrival. Surveillance cameras had tracked his route and those of his alleged killers in Istanbul in the hours before his killing.

A Turkish bug planted at the consulate reportedly captured the sound of a forensic saw, operated by a Saudi colonel who was also a forensics expert, dismembering Khashoggi's body within an hour of his entering the building. The whereabouts of his remains remain unknown.

The prince, an ambitious 35-year-old who has rapidly consolidated power since his father became king in 2015, said in 2019 that he took "full responsibility" for the killing since it happened on his watch, but denied ordering it. Saudi officials have said Khashoggi's killing was the work of rogue Saudi security and intelligence officials. Saudi Arabian courts last year announced they had sentenced eight Saudi nationals to prison in Khashoggi's killing. They were not identified.

Madhani reported from Chicago. Associated Press writers Matthew Lee and Ben Fox in Washington and Ellen Knickmeyer in Oklahoma City contributed to this report.

## **Biden: Strikes in Syria sent warning to Iran to 'be careful'**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, ROBERT BURNS and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Friday that Iran should view his decision to authorize U.S. airstrikes in Syria as a warning that it can expect consequences for its support of militia groups that threaten U.S. interests or personnel.

"You can't act with impunity. Be careful," Biden said when a reporter asked what message he had intended to send with the airstrikes, which the Pentagon said destroyed several buildings in eastern Syria but were not intended to eradicate the militia groups that used them to facilitate attacks inside Iraq.

Administration officials defended the Thursday night airstrikes as legal and appropriate, saying they took out facilities that housed valuable "capabilities" used by Iranian-backed militia groups to attack American and allied forces in Iraq.

John Kirby, the Pentagon's chief spokesperson, said members of Congress were notified before the strikes as two Air Force F-15E aircraft launched seven missiles, destroying nine facilities and heavily damaging two others, rendering both "functionally destroyed." He said the facilities, at "entry control points" on the border, had been used by militia groups the U.S. deems responsible for recent attacks against U.S. interests in Iraq.

In a political twist for the new Democratic administration, several leading Congress members in Biden's own party denounced the strikes, which were the first military actions he authorized. Democrats said the airstrikes were done without authorization from lawmakers, while Republicans were more supportive.

"Offensive military action without congressional approval is not constitutional absent extraordinary circumstances," said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va. And Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said lawmakers must hold the current administration to the same standards as any other. "Retaliatory strikes not necessary to prevent an imminent threat," he said, must get congressional authorization.

But Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, backed the decision as "the correct, proportionate response to protect American lives."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Friday that Biden used his constitutional authority to defend U.S. personnel.

"The targets were chosen to correspond to the recent attacks on facilities and to deter the risk of additional attacks over the coming weeks," she said.

Among the recent attacks cited was a Feb. 15 rocket attack in northern Iraq that killed one civilian contractor and wounded a U.S. service member and other coalition troops.

At the Pentagon, Kirby said the operation was "a defensive strike" on a waystation used by militants to move weapons and materials for attacks into Iraq. But he noted that while it sent a message of deterrence and eroded their ability to strike from that compound, the militias have other sites and capabilities. He said the strikes resulted in "casualties" but declined to provide further details on how many were killed or injured and what was inside the buildings pending the completion of a broader assessment of damage inflicted.

An Iraqi militia official said Friday that the strikes killed one fighter and wounded several others.

Kirby said the facilities hit in the attack were near Boukamal, on the Syrian side of the Iraq border, along the Euphrates River.

"This location is known to facilitate Iranian-aligned militia group activity," he said. He described the site as a "compound" that previously had been used by the Islamic State group when it held sway in the area.

The Iraqi militia official told The Associated Press that the strikes against the Kataeb Hezbollah, or Hezbollah Brigades, hit an area along the border between the Syrian site of Boukamal facing Qaim on the Iraqi side. The official was not authorized to speak publicly of the attack and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Speaking to reporters Thursday evening shortly after the airstrikes were carried out, Defense Secretary

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 54 of 72

Lloyd Austin said, "I'm confident in the target that we went after. We know what we hit."

Biden's decision to attack in Syria did not appear to signal an intention to widen U.S. military involvement in the region but rather to demonstrate a will to defend U.S. troops in Iraq and send a message to Iran. The Biden administration in its first weeks has emphasized its intent to put more focus on the challenges posed by China, even as Mideast threats persist.

The U.S. has previously targeted facilities in Syria belonging to Kataeb Hezbollah, which it has blamed for numerous attacks targeting U.S. personnel and interests in Iraq. The Iraqi Kataeb is separate from the Lebanese Hezbollah movement.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group that monitors the war in Syria, said the strikes targeted a shipment of weapons that were being taken by trucks entering Syrian territories from Iraq. The group said 22 fighters from the Popular Mobilization Forces, an Iraqi umbrella group of mostly Shiite paramilitaries that includes Kataeb Hezbollah, were killed. The report could not be independently verified.

In a statement, the group confirmed one of its fighters was killed and said it reserved the right to retaliate, without elaborating. Kataeb Hezbollah, like other Iranian-backed factions, maintains fighters in Syria to both fight against the Islamic State group and assist Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces in that country's civil war.

Austin said he was confident the U.S. had hit back at "the same Shia militants" that carried out the Feb. 15 rocket attack in northern Iraq.

Kirby credited Iraqis with providing valuable intelligence that allowed the U.S. to identify the groups responsible for attacks earlier this year. The U.S., he said, then determined the appropriate target for the retaliatory strike. He said the U.S. also notified Russia shortly before the strike as part of the ongoing deconfliction process of military activities in Syria.

"The operation sends an unambiguous message: President Biden will act to protect American and coalition personnel," Kirby said.

Syria condemned the U.S. strike, calling it "a cowardly and systematic American aggression," warning that the attack will lead to consequences.

U.S. forces have been significantly reduced in Iraq to 2,500 personnel and no longer partake in combat missions with Iraqi forces in ongoing operations against the Islamic State group.

## US advisers endorse single-shot COVID-19 vaccine from J&J

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health advisers endorsed a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson on Friday, putting the nation on the cusp of adding an easier-to-use option to fight the pandemic.

The acting head of the Food and Drug Administration said in a statement that the agency will move quickly to follow the recommendation, which would make J&J's shot the third vaccine authorized for emergency use in the U.S. Vaccinations are picking up speed, but new supplies are urgently needed to stay ahead of a mutating virus that has killed more than 500,000 Americans.

After daylong discussions, the FDA panelists voted unanimously that the benefits of the vaccine outweighed the risks for adults. Once FDA issues a final decision, shipments of a few million doses could begin as early as Monday.

"There's an urgency to get this done," said Dr. Jay Portnoy of Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. "We're in a race between the virus mutating — and new variants coming out that can cause further disease — and stopping it."

More than 47 million people in the U.S., or 14% of the population, have received at least one shot of the two-dose vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, which FDA authorized in December. But the pace of vaccinations has been strained by limited supplies and delays due to winter storms.

While early J&J supplies will be small, the company has said it can deliver 20 million doses by the end of March and a total of 100 million by the end of June.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 55 of 72

J&J's vaccine protects against the worst effects of COVID-19 after one shot, and it can be stored up to three months at refrigerator temperatures, making it easier to handle than the previous vaccines, which must be frozen.

One challenge in rolling out the new vaccine will be explaining how protective the J&J shot is after the astounding success of the first U.S. vaccines.

"It's important that people do not think that one vaccine is better than another," said panelist Dr. Cody Meissner of Tufts University.

The two-dose Pfizer and Moderna shots were found to be about 95% effective against symptomatic COVID-19. The numbers from J&J's study are not that high, but it's not an apples-to-apples comparison. One dose of the J&J vaccine was 85% protective against the most severe COVID-19. After adding in moderate cases, the total effectiveness dropped to about 66%.

Some experts fear that lower number could feed public perceptions that J&J's shot is a "second-tier vaccine." But the difference in protection reflects when and where J&J conducted its studies.

J&J's vaccine was tested in the U.S., Latin America and South Africa at a time when more contagious mutated versions of the virus were spreading. That wasn't the case last fall, when Pfizer and Moderna were wrapping up testing, and it's not clear if their numbers would hold against the most worrisome of those variants.

Importantly, the FDA reported this week that, just like its predecessors, the J&J shot offers strong protection against the worst outcomes, hospitalization and death.

While J&J is seeking FDA authorization for its single-dose version, the company is also studying whether a second dose boosts protection.

Panel member Dr. Paul Offit warned that launching a two-dose version of the vaccine down the road might cause problems.

"You can see where that would be confusing to people thinking, 'Maybe I didn't get what I needed,'" said Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "It's a messaging challenge."

J&J representatives said they chose to begin with the single shot because the World Health Organization and other experts agreed it would be a faster, more effective tool in an emergency.

Cases and hospitalizations have fallen dramatically since their January peak that followed the winter holidays. But public health officials warned that those gains may be stalling as more variants take root in the U.S.

"We may be done with the virus, but clearly the virus is not done with us," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, said during a White House briefing Friday. She noted that new COVID-19 cases have increased over the past few days.

While it's too early to tell if the trend will last, Walensky said adding a third vaccine "will help protect more people faster." More vaccines are in the pipeline.

On Sunday, a CDC panel is expected to meet to recommend how to best prioritize use of the J&J vaccine.

Other parts of the world already are facing which-is-best challenges. Italy's main teachers' union recently protested when the government decided to reserve Pfizer and Moderna shots for the elderly and designate AstraZeneca's vaccine for younger, at-risk workers. AstraZeneca's vaccine was deemed to be about 70% effective in testing. Canada became the latest country Friday to allow use of AstraZeneca's vaccine.

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AP reporters Carla K. Johnson and Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar contributed to this report.

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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.

## Hundreds of Nigerian schoolgirls taken in mass abduction

By SAM OLUKOYA Associated Press

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen abducted 317 girls from a boarding school in northern Nigeria on Friday,

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 56 of 72

police said, the latest in a series of mass kidnappings of students in the West African nation.

Police and the military have begun joint operations to rescue the girls after the attack at the Government Girls Junior Secondary School in Jangebe town, according to a police spokesman in Zamfara state, Mohammed Shehu, who confirmed the number abducted.

One parent, Nasiru Abdullahi, told The Associated Press that his daughters, aged 10 and 13, are among the missing.

"It is disappointing that even though the military have a strong presence near the school they were unable to protect the girls," he said. "At this stage, we are only hoping on divine intervention."

Resident Musa Mustapha said the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from interfering while the gunmen spent several hours at the school. It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties.

Several large groups of armed men operate in Zamfara state, described by the government as bandits, and are known to kidnap for money and to push for the release of their members from jail.

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said Friday the government's primary objective is to get all the school hostages returned safe, alive and unharmed.

"We will not succumb to blackmail by bandits and criminals who target innocent school students in the expectation of huge ransom payments," he said. "Let bandits, kidnappers and terrorists not entertain any illusions that they are more powerful than the government. They shouldn't mistake our restraint for the humanitarian goals of protecting innocent lives as a weakness, or a sign of fear or irresolution."

He called on state governments to review their policy of making payments, in money or vehicles, to bandits.

"Such a policy has the potential to backfire with disastrous consequences," Buhari said. He also said state and local governments must play their part by being proactive in improving security in and around schools.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the abductions and called for the girls' "immediate and unconditional release" and safe return to their families, calling attacks on schools a grave violation of human rights and the rights of children, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The U.N. chief reaffirmed U.N. support to Nigeria's government and people "in their fight against terrorism, violent extremism and organized crime," Dujarric said, and urged Nigerian authorities "to spare no effort in bringing those responsible for this crime to justice."

"We are angered and saddened by yet another brutal attack on schoolchildren in Nigeria," said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF representative in the country. "This is a gross violation of children's rights and a horrific experience for children to go through." He called for their immediate release.

Nigeria has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by jihadist group Boko Haram of 276 girls from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing.

Friday's attack came less than two weeks after gunmen abducted 42 people, including 27 students, from the Government Science College Kagara in Niger State. The students, teachers and family members are still being held.

In December, 344 students were abducted from the Government Science Secondary School Kankara in Katsina State. They were eventually released.

Anietie Ewang, Nigeria researcher at Human Rights Watch, noted the recent abductions and tweeted that "Strong action is required from the authorities to turn the tide & keep schools safe."

Amnesty International also condemned the "appalling attack," warning in a statement that "the girls abducted are in serious risk of being harmed."

Teachers have been forced to flee to other states for protection, and many children have had to abandon their education amid frequent violent attacks in communities, Amnesty said.

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AP writer Carley Petesch in Dakar, Senegal contributed to this report.

**Could pandemic further erode the New England town meeting?**



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 57 of 72

By WILSON RING Associated Press

MIDDLESEX, Vt. (AP) — The town meeting, for centuries, was a staple of New England life — but the coronavirus pandemic could accelerate the departure from the tradition where people gather to debate everything from the purchase of local road equipment to multimillion-dollar budgets to pressing social issues.

The basis of the town meeting is to bring everyone together in the same room — sometimes a literal town hall, sometimes a school gymnasium — where voters will hash out local issues until a decision is made.

The restrictions on in-person gatherings imposed by the pandemic make that impossible.

Some communities are delaying meetings this year until the virus will, hopefully, be more under control. Others are using pre-printed ballots to decide issues, forgoing the daylong debate altogether.

Some worry the temporary workaround could remain even after life returns to normal.

“I’d be very disappointed if people think that this is a new model because that would move us away completely from the essence of town meeting, which is the opportunity to assemble with our fellow voters, to hear from our elected officials directly, to question, to challenge them, to debate a budget and public questions in an assembled meeting,” said former Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas, who served for 33 years as moderator in his hometown of Middlebury.

But others counter that the challenges of getting people together during town meeting, virus or no, restrict the number of people who can participate.

In Vermont, where the traditional Town Meeting Day — the first Tuesday in March — is a holiday, the state authorized towns this year only to decide local issues with pre-printed ballots. Most towns that chose the option held remote informational meetings to help voters make informed decisions.

In Middlesex, Vermont, voters will cast ballots Tuesday on a measure that, if approved, would have the town continue with the pre-printed ballots to decide everything — from appropriations for the local library to payments for social programs — but the town budget.

Longtime Middlesex resident Vic Dwire, who supports the measure, said it would allow more people to vote.

“The point of this is a lot of people feel they can’t ask any questions at town meetings,” said Dwire, who is running this year for a seat on the Middlesex select board. “It gives people a chance to participate in democracy and vote from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.”

But others feel it would take something away from the process.

“We need face-to-face, empowered deliberations,” said Middlesex town meeting moderator Susan Clark.

Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos said he doesn’t take a position on the choices towns make about their meetings, but he understands why some are pushing for change.

A lot of people can’t attend traditional town meetings, which can last all day.

“They may live in one town and work in another town and it’s hard to get time off,” Condos said. “They may have kids, school, whatever it is that interferes with their lives. It’s not like it was 100 years ago.”

In Maine, the pandemic eliminated town meetings last year for more than 400 of the state’s 486 municipalities that hold meetings during the spring. Thanks to an emergency order from the governor, many Maine towns are again this year using the pre-printed secret ballot votes to make decisions.

Eric Conrad of the Maine Municipal Association said that more people cast secret ballots than took part in previous traditional town meetings.

“That democratic give-and-take is lost. But participation is better,” he said.

Town meetings evolved from the era when the first European settlers in what would eventually become the six New England states would gather in a meeting house, usually the church, and decide all local issues. They are still used in some form in all six New England states: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Over the centuries, the power was transferred to groups of local “select men” who were chosen to make the communities’ decisions and the system has continued to evolve, said Douglas, the former Vermont governor.

Now some communities use representative town meetings where locals are elected to represent their neighbors. Others communities use a combination of floor debates, votes and pre-printed ballots for dif-

ferent issues. In larger communities, voters already decide issues with pre-printed ballots.

In Massachusetts, where some of the first New England town meetings were established in the 1630s, 300 of 351 municipalities continue to hold town meetings in some form, according to Secretary of State William Galvin's office.

Last year, Massachusetts lawmakers allowed towns to postpone their annual town meetings to the summer, enabling many to hold them outdoors after the initial virus surge subsided.

In New Hampshire, traditional town meetings are held the second Tuesday in March. Last year in Henniker, the March town meeting was postponed to June and then July, when voters spread out in a school.

This year, Henniker officials decided to proceed with a March 13 meeting, with voters spaced out as much as possible in a gymnasium.

"I hope it will endure. If we keep having things like this, then I think we'll have to re-examine the situation, but I hope this is a once in a lifetime thing and we can get back to normal," said Henniker town moderator Cordell Johnston. "At that point, it's question of whether town meeting is a viable way of running town and I think for most towns, it is."

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Associated Press reporters David Sharp in Portland, Maine, Phil Marcelo in Stoneham, Massachusetts, and Holly Ramer, in Concord, New Hampshire, contributed to this report.

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This story corrects the spelling of the Henniker town moderator's name to Cordell Johnston, not Cordell Johnstone.

## US Army crowdsources ideas to combat sexual assault crisis

By SARAH BLAKE MORGAN Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Sgt. Taylor Knueven always knew sexual assault and harassment plagued the U.S. Army. But the combat medic's own assault early last year opened her eyes to the broken system surrounding one of the military's most infamous problems.

Earlier this week, Knueven and six other soldiers went before a panel in the 18th Airborne Corps headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to present ideas on how the Army can revamp the way it deals with sexual assault and harassment.

The Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program, also known as SHARP, has been the subject of much scrutiny, especially following the slaying of Spc. Vanessa Guillen by a fellow soldier inside a Fort Hood, Texas, armory last April.

The proposal Knueven presented to the panel Monday would address gender and military bias by reworking the composition of offender separation boards. She said her attacker went before a board consisting of three men and no women.

Knueven described in detail events on the night she says she was assaulted by a fellow soldier at a concert. And she recounted how she felt about reporting the incident and what went through her mind when she said she learned he would remain in the Army and ultimately face little punishment.

"I thought it was a total slap in the face to myself," Knueven said.

Last week, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at his first Pentagon news conference that reducing sexual assault is one of his top priorities and that he would introduce stronger efforts to fight it.

"We have been working at this for a long time in earnest, but we haven't gotten it right," he said.

Staff Sgt. Shameka Dudley wants to see stale SHARP training PowerPoints replaced with virtual reality scenarios that would offer soldiers a glimpse at assault and harassment scenarios through the eyes of survivors, aggressors and bystanders.

"We have this same training and it's really not changing much," Dudley said. "The numbers are still going up."

The 28-year-old mother of five handed out virtual reality glasses to the panel as she recounted the success she's seen the method play in the treatment of veterans struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 59 of 72

For her, it's about understanding and empathy.

"The majority of people learn from doing, from seeing, from being able to be there," Dudley said.

Dudley says soldiers who have experienced sexual trauma can opt out of the training as it may serve as a trigger.

The presentations were made as a part of the 18th Airborne Corp's "Dragon's Lair" series, a "Shark Tank" like competition that sources innovative ideas from within the Army's ranks.

"This is an amazing effort to connect our best and brightest directly to senior leaders who are ready to take action. It just feels different this time," Lt. Col. Scott Stephens, who presented to the panel, tweeted Monday.

The Corps says parts of all seven presentations will be implemented across the Army. Some ideas, like Knueven's will be easier than others and involve simple policy changes, according to Col. Joe Buccino, Public Affairs Officer for the 18th Airborne Corps.

The Corps has already begun conversations with a film producer to bring Dudley's idea to life, according to Buccino.

"I am confident, very confident, we will implement all ideas," he told The Associated Press.

Knueven hopes that's the case. She sighs when asked if change is coming to the Army. "I don't know, I sure hope so."

## **NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week**

By ALI SWENSON and ARIJETA LAJKA The Associated Press

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

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Biden didn't reinstate funding for a Wuhan virus lab

CLAIM: President Joe Biden restored taxpayer funding for the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

THE FACTS: Social media users are falsely claiming the Biden administration is bankrolling the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a Chinese lab that has faced unproven allegations that the coronavirus leaked from the facility, leading to the global COVID-19 pandemic. "Biden not sending out COVID relief checks... but refunding the Wuhan lab where COVID came from is THE PERFECT EXAMPLE of America last," read a screenshot of a Twitter post shared on Instagram. "Voila — U.S. taxpayer money was returned to the Wuhan Institute of Virology," a Washington Times opinion piece stated. The claims seemed to originate with distortions of an article on the conservative news website The Daily Caller, which claimed the lab was eligible to receive U.S. taxpayer funding until 2024. The article never said the lab was currently grant funded. It's true that the Wuhan Institute of Virology has fulfilled one requirement that animal research facilities outside the U.S. need to receive a NIH grant: foreign assurance approval. This assurance issued by the NIH Office of Laboratory Welfare confirms that the lab complies with certain guidelines on the humane care and use of laboratory animals. The institute's foreign assurance was issued in 2019 and expires in 2024, the NIH told The Associated Press. However, foreign assurance is just one requirement and "does not determine whether an organization can or will receive a grant award or subaward," according to the NIH. In 2014, the NIH granted an award to the EcoHealth Alliance, a New York-based environmental health nonprofit, for a research project on bat coronaviruses. As part of that project, the nonprofit worked with researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. But in April 2020, the NIH terminated that grant. In July, the agency technically reinstated the grant, but suspended all activity related to it, citing "bio-safety concerns" at the lab and asking EcoHealth Alliance to meet a list of conditions. Those conditions included arranging for an outside team to investigate the lab "with specific attention to addressing the question of whether WIV staff had SARS-CoV-2 in their possession prior to December 2019," according to a letter from the NIH to EcoHealth Alliance viewed by The Associated Press. Some social media users have speculated that a recent World Health Organization trip to the Wuhan Institute of Virology could help satisfy the NIH's

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 60 of 72

conditions, since the team of experts on the trip determined it was unlikely the coronavirus leaked from the lab. Peter Embarek, the WHO food safety and animal disease expert who led the mission, said initial findings suggest the most likely pathway the virus followed was from a bat to another animal and then to humans. He called the unsubstantiated theory that the virus traveled from the Wuhan lab to humans "extremely unlikely." There's no indication at this point that this finding will change the status of the grant that was previously funding research at the lab. Activities associated with the grant have not been allowed to resume at this point, spokespeople for the NIH and EcoHealth Alliance both confirmed to the AP.

Biden didn't block Texas from increasing power during emergency

CLAIM: An order from the U.S. Department of Energy under President Joe Biden blocked Texas from generating adequate power during the recent statewide emergency because it would exceed pollution limits.

THE FACTS The order did the opposite of what social media users are claiming. It gave the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates Texas' power grid, emergency permission to produce enough energy to restore power to Texas homes, even if it temporarily exceeded pollution limits. On Feb. 14, as a severe winter storm wiped out heat and electricity for millions of Texans, ERCOT asked the Energy Department for emergency permission to generate electricity at maximum capacity to get the power grid up and running. Later the same day, the Energy Department granted ERCOT's request, allowing the agency to dispatch enough additional units to "maintain the reliability of the power grid" through Feb. 19, even if it exceeded "emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, mercury, and carbon monoxide emissions, as well as wastewater release limits." The order gave ERCOT these waivers to avoid blackouts, while asking that the agency exhaust all "reasonably and practically available resources" prior to increasing energy generation in order to decrease environmental impact. A week later, with Texas still reeling from the damage of the storm, social media users were misrepresenting the agency's order, falsely claiming it throttled the state's ability to get power back up and running. "Please read Biden's Department of Energy Order No. 202-21-1," a Twitter user wrote. "Had Biden's Department of Energy not blocked Texas from increasing power, the people of Texas would've had power!" However, both the DOE and ERCOT confirmed to The Associated Press that these claims were false and that DOE's order amounted to an approval of what ERCOT requested. "We worked with the DOE to put the order in place," Sopko said. While some social media posts expressed outrage that the order only allowed ERCOT to exceed emissions limits under certain circumstances, the order granted ERCOT's request and did not block the state from increasing power generation.

Biden didn't tweet about 'minorities not being able to use the internet'

CLAIM: On Feb. 18, President Joe Biden tweeted that comments on "minorities not being able to use the internet" were "taken out of context."

THE FACTS: A fake tweet made to appear it came from Biden's official Twitter account @JoeBiden circulated on social media following remarks he made at a CNN town hall on Feb. 16. "My comment regarding minorities not being able to use the internet was taken out of context," reads the phony tweet, which was shared as an image on social media. "It's not they don't know how to use it it's just that they don't know any better. Those people don't know about computers because they lack the resources, education and their overall commitment in their communities. It's not that they're dumb it's just they don't like to do anything. Hope this clears that up." Multiple Facebook users shared the bogus tweet. "I am going to assume that all those minorities that voted for him are okay with how he thinks about minorities," wrote one Facebook user who shared the false post. The tweet cannot be found on Biden's Twitter account or ProPublica's database Politwoops that tracks tweets deleted by public officials. During a CNN town hall last week with journalist Anderson Cooper, Biden responded to a question about how his administration will tackle racial disparities in the COVID-19 vaccine response. There are fewer Black Americans being vaccinated than whites, AP reporting has found. Experts have cited several factors that could contribute to the emerging disparity, such as a deep-rooted mistrust of the medical establishment among Black Americans due to a history of discriminatory treatment. In his response, Biden talked about access to the vaccine being a physical obstacle for marginalized communities and said some people lack the internet access needed to get key information. "A lot of people don't know how to register," Biden stated. "Not everybody

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 61 of 72

in the community — in the Hispanic and the African American community, particularly in rural areas that are distant and/or inner-city districts — know how to use — know how to get online to determine how to get in line for that COVID vaccination at the Walgreens or at the particular store,” Biden responded. Those comments were widely circulated on social media. Some Facebook users then began sharing an image of the false tweet attributed to Biden.

\_\_\_\_\_ Biden didn't tweet about Coca-Cola 'cultural reappropriation'

CLAIM: President Joe Biden tweeted that he was “proud” to see Coca-Cola educate its staff in “cultural reappropriation,” because white and Black people talk in different ways.

THE FACTS: The tweet was fabricated. It does not appear in any of Biden's Twitter feeds, nor in Politwoops, a database from ProPublica that tracks deleted tweets by politicians. While the fake tweet that amassed more than a thousand shares on Facebook and Instagram appeared to come from the Twitter handle @JoeBiden, the president has not tweeted from that account except to retweet his official accounts, @POTUS and @WhiteHouse, since he was sworn in on Jan. 20. The bogus tweet began spreading after social media users began criticizing Coca-Cola for parts of a presentation about confronting racism on its LinkedIn Learning page. A slide in the presentation said, “Try to be less white.” It was part of a larger course called “Confronting Racism, with Robin DiAngelo.” But DiAngelo, an author and consultant who writes and conducts anti-racism trainings, said in a statement that she had not created the presentation, nor did she agree to its creation. The statement said the slides “do not represent the work she does for her virtual or in-person presentations, trainings and workshops.” The course has since been removed from LinkedIn Learning. Coca-Cola responded on Feb. 20 to false claims that the presentation was part of a mandatory training program for its staff, explaining it was among several resources on diversity, equity and inclusion that employees could view through the social media platform. “The video in question was accessible on the LinkedIn Learning platform but was not part of the company's curriculum,” the company wrote.

\_\_\_\_\_ Whole Foods Market didn't post sign banning gendered language

CLAIM: A sign from the grocery store chain Whole Foods Market asks customers to avoid using gendered language — including terms like brother, ladies and sir — when talking to other customers and employees.

THE FACTS: This sign appeared in a student-run café called Monash Wholefoods at Monash University in Australia. It is not affiliated with the American grocery store chain Whole Foods Market. The photo shows a black sign with pink and blue lettering: “WHOLEFOODS ASKS THAT YOU DON'T USE GENDERED LANGUAGE WHEN TALKING TO CUSTOMERS AND SERVERS,” it states. “‘THANKS BROTHER’ ‘HELLO LADIES’ ‘HELLO SIR’ ARE EXAMPLES OF GENDERED LANGUAGE AND THAT IS HARMFUL TO TRANS AND NON-BINARY FOLK.” Social media users this week shared the image without context, leaving many commenters to assume the sign was posted at the Amazon-owned grocery retailer Whole Foods. “Jeff Bezos owns it now, not surprised if real,” one commenter wrote. “Just don't go to whole foods... problem solved!!!” wrote another. A reverse-image search confirms the sign was not posted at Whole Foods, but rather at the similarly named student-run café in Melbourne, Australia. In a 2016 Facebook post, Monash Wholefoods explained its reasoning for the policy, saying, “It's really important you know someone's pronouns before using them, and if you're unsure of their pronouns you can ask them politely, or use non-gendered language until you know.” On its website, Whole Foods Market outlines core values that include “inclusive people practices.” The site does not mention any restrictions on using gendered language in the store. A Whole Foods spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment on the company's gender inclusion policies.

\_\_\_\_\_ Find all AP Fact Checks here: <https://apnews.com/APFactCheck>

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**Some local GOP leaders fire up base with conspiracies, lies**

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 62 of 72

By GARANCE BURKE, MARTHA MENDOZA, JULIET LINDERMAN and LARRY FENN Associated Press

A faction of local, county and state Republican officials is pushing lies, misinformation and conspiracy theories that echo those that helped inspire the violent U.S. Capitol siege, online messaging that is spreading quickly through GOP ranks fueled by algorithms that boost extreme content.

The Associated Press reviewed public and private social media accounts of nearly 1,000 federal, state, and local elected and appointed Republican officials nationwide, many of whom have voiced support for the Jan. 6 insurrection or demanded that the 2020 presidential election be overturned, sometimes in deleted posts or now-removed online forums.

"Sham-peachment," they say, and warn that "corporate America helped rig the election." They call former president Donald Trump a "savior" who was robbed of a second term — despite no evidence — and President Joe Biden, a "thief." "Patriots want answers," they declare.

The bitter, combative rhetoric is helping the officials grow their constituencies on social media and gain outsized influence in their communities, city councils, county boards and state assemblies. And it exposes the GOP's internal struggle over whether the party can include traditional conservative politicians, conspiracy theorists and militias as it builds its base for 2022.

Earlier this month, the FBI knocked on the door of the Republican Women's Federation of Michigan vice president Londa Gatt to ask where she was on the day of the Capitol attack.

Gatt, a Bikers for Trump coordinator who roars, leather-vested, alongside political rallies on her Harley-Davidson, had helped organize busloads of Trump supporters to join her in Washington on Jan. 6. She says she climbed the scaffolding outside the Capitol building that day "to take a picture of the whole view." And she said she gladly told FBI agents that she did nothing wrong, and left the scene right away as things turned violent.

Since then, Gatt has shared hashtags tied to QAnon conspiracy theories online and posted that she has Trump's personal email. She recently asked her Facebook friends who participated in Capitol intrusions to send messages directly to Trump explaining that he didn't incite them, but instead they acted of their own volition. "The lawyers need our help," she posted.

Gatt is among many conservatives organizing on Twitter, Facebook, Parler, Gab and Telegram, and is working on a digital strategy going forward under different monikers.

"We were cheated out of our legit president and we have no voice because our vote didn't count," she told The Associated Press. "I'm getting ready to start opening up some new pages, focus on getting out people who voted against Trump and replace those with conservative Republicans."

Although Democrats have also used incendiary and aggressive language online, AP focused its research on the GOP because court documents show the overwhelming number of people arrested in association with the Capitol insurrection are longtime supporters of Trump, who has a huge Republican fan base even after leaving office.

Working with Deep Discovery, an artificial intelligence company, AP also helped build a classification algorithm that matched officials to accounts on the right-wing aligned Parler, a social media platform that recently returned after being taken offline for several weeks. AP reporters hand-verified each match using an archived Parler dataset. That archive of 183 million posts and 13 million user profiles, provided in advance of publication by New York University researcher Max Aliapoulios, was captured between August 2018 and Jan. 10, 2021, when Parler was taken offline.

AP also surveyed officials' use of alternate social media sites such as Gab and Telegram, whose active users have soared in recent weeks since Twitter and Facebook barred people from posting extremist content and disinformation.

The AP reached out to GOP officials in many states, and sought comment from those named in this story. Several posted portions of email exchanges with the reporters or discussed the interviews on their social media.

Collectively, state and local Republican officials like Gatt play a major role in shaping the party's future, in part because they recruit and promote candidates to run for office and help control the party's messaging.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 63 of 72

Even after the bloody insurrection at the Capitol showed the deadly consequences of online ire, many Republicans continue their furious push to delegitimize the new administration. Experts say it's more dangerous, and influential, when those messages come from elected and appointed GOP officials rather than anonymous gadflies.

"We still have people in this country talking about civil war. I'm talking about high-ranking officials in state governments and elsewhere, talking about civil war, talking about secession, talking about loading up with ammunition," Brian Michael Jenkins, a terrorism expert and adviser at the RAND Corp. think tank, recently told Congress.

Republican National Committee press secretary Mandi Merritt didn't answer AP's specific questions about the online rhetoric but referred to a Jan. 13 statement from Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel: "Violence has no place in our politics. Period."

Last week, Idaho's Kootenai County Republican Central Committee Chairman Brent Regan posted on Facebook: "People who DON'T own a gun should register and pay a fee. Per the Idaho Constitution Article 14 Section 1, all able bodied males between the ages of 18 and 45 are part of the militia and should arm themselves ... That is the LAW."

That posting followed Regan's online messaging in early December, when he boosted a Parler post on his feed: "SIDNEY POWELL'S 'KRAKEN' IS DOD CYBER WARFARE PROGRAM! WE ARE AT WAR! – THE MARSHALL REPORT." Powell, a lawyer who had supported Trump, referred to her legal strategy as "the kraken," powerful enough to destroy Biden's presidency. However, the Supreme Court on Monday rejected a handful of cases related to the 2020 election filed by Trump and his allies in five states.

Another recent Regan Facebook post: "The thing I object most about democrats is that they incite my base instincts to retaliate in kind."

When AP asked about his posts, Regan said: "My message on social media, print media, and in person is consistent: 'Pray for serenity. Be the eye of the storm. Stay calm. Think clearly. Don't panic. Stay peaceful while demanding integrity and honesty.'"

On Jan. 5, Idaho RNC delegate Doyle Beck, who sits with Regan on the board of a libertarian policy group called the Idaho Freedom Foundation, arrived in Washington where he posted a photo of himself on Facebook with Donald Trump Jr., commenting "TRUMP 2020, Stop the Steal."

Beck told AP he went to a meeting at Trump International Hotel that night with Trump Jr., Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville, Trump adviser Peter Navarro and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, and attended the Trump rally the next day but stayed far from the Capitol building.

AP confirmed that Trump Jr. and Tuberville attended the gathering. Navarro denied attending, and Giuliani said he couldn't remember and would need to check his diary.

On Feb. 2, Beck reposted on Facebook a statement reading: "Why Would You Have To Impeach A President That Lost? Unless Of Course He Didn't. Then You'd Have To Silence Him. Oh, Wait..."

More than a month after the insurrection, Beck told AP he believes the election was stolen, and that he might switch to Parler because he thinks his posts are being censored on Facebook.

"Parler is honest," he said. "They don't try to do this fact check bullcrap."

Some Republican officials are posting theories related to QAnon, which the FBI has called a domestic terrorism threat. And the Department of Homeland Security has warned of the potential for lingering violence from extremists enraged by Biden's election and emboldened by the Capitol attack. On Thursday, Homeland Security designated domestic violent extremism as a top priority for the first time, and pledged at least \$77 million to study extremists' use of social media to recruit and radicalize people, calling the Jan. 6 attack one example of a multi-year pattern of violence by domestic extremists. But even as Twitter, Facebook and others are rapidly removing, freezing and suspending accounts, the clamor continues.

Two days after he joined the Capitol attack, Sacramento, California, Republican Assembly President Jorge Riley, posted on Facebook: "I won't say I stood by. Come take my life. I'm right here." Then he posted his home address, according to court documents, followed by "You all will die."

Riley was subsequently forced to resign and arrested for his involvement in the insurrection. Riley and his attorney did not respond to requests for comment.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 64 of 72

Experts warn that if left unchecked, this type of rhetoric could again incite violence.

"What I care about is the potential loss of life, and preventing what appears to be a pretty massive extremist movement that is growing right now," said Elizabeth Neumann, who was a DHS assistant secretary under Trump. "The only way to stop this, aside from law enforcement, is to get the GOP to acknowledge how they have contributed to its growth and get them to speak out about it. Things cannot continue this way."

Many GOP officials told AP that Democrats and the media are ignoring, demeaning or even mocking millions of Americans' legitimate concerns about the election outcome, rather than seriously engaging with them. And they pointed to angry posts from Democrats they said had led to dangerous and costly consequences.

Some of the GOP officials AP surveyed have tempered their online speech in the past month since social media platforms began banning accounts more aggressively and the FBI ramped up investigations tied to Jan. 6.

Still, a rift is opening in some local Republican circles as those who embrace disinformation about election fraud clash with those who recognize Biden's win.

Following Trump's acquittal in his second impeachment trial, Mitch McConnell, the Senate's top Republican, called the claims that the former president won the election "wild myths" and said the insurrection was "a foreseeable consequence of the growing crescendo of false statements, conspiracy theories and reckless hyperbole" online, laying the blame at Trump's feet.

Couy Griffin, a commissioner in Otero County, New Mexico, founded the group Cowboys for Trump, and shows up at rallies on horseback, waving a large American flag. Griffin entered the Capitol grounds Jan. 6, then kept posting on Parler about his support for continuing the fight for Trump. When he got back to New Mexico, he told his fellow county commissioners that he planned to bring his ".357 Henry big boy rifle" and ".357 single action revolver" to the inauguration Jan. 20, according to court documents.

Griffin was arrested near a security checkpoint in Washington before the inauguration and is charged with entering a Secret Service-restricted area without permission. The Republican Party of New Mexico has distanced itself from Griffin, and a recall effort is underway. Griffin told AP he didn't bring guns to DC but he will protect himself.

"I'm not going to be threatened and harassed and bullied," Griffin told AP in an interview. "There's many of us who will continue to take a stand for our freedom and continue to raise our voices and demand that our voices be heard."

Others have faced political consequences.

Hours before Parler was taken offline on Jan. 10, Virginia state Sen. Amanda Chase posted an image she said was from Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's laptop. "Make no mistake," posted Chase. "The 2020 Presidential Election was stolen by the Democratic Party with the help of our enemies. She's the traitor and leader of the insurrection and coup against the USA."

Chase, who is seeking this year's GOP nomination for Virginia governor and was at the Jan. 6 rally but said she did not go to the Capitol building, has been censured by the Virginia Senate for an alleged "pattern of unacceptable conduct" and is suing.

In a phone call, Chase initially said the post calling Pelosi a traitor didn't sound familiar and could have been the work of an imposter. But after the AP emailed her a link of an archived webpage, Chase confirmed it was indeed her post, and said she "stands by it."

"It's my free speech right. I can say all day long that the election was stolen, that's my right to believe that," Chase said. "And for the press, or for other people to try and cancel the free speech of others who have that opinion is un-American."

About two-thirds of Republicans say — contrary to all evidence — that Biden was not legitimately elected president, according to a recent poll by AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Free speech advocates say the legal definition of inciting violence is extremely narrow, and over-policing online posts, including those spreading misinformation, could undermine democracy.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 65 of 72

"We need to be very careful about not painting with an overly broad brush what incitement to violence is, because it's going to have serious consequences if we allow that exception to get wider," said Nora Pelizzari, spokeswoman for the National Coalition Against Censorship. "We can't allow anger at people in power to become punishable."

AP found plenty of anger. Parler posts containing the word "revolution" increased five times faster than the overall rate of message traffic after the election, the analysis found. Also, about 84% of posts referring to the hashtag "#1776" occurred on or after Election Day, according to AP's analysis. Post-election references to "treason" and the QAnon slogan "trust the plan" both increased by about 10 times the overall rate, the data showed.

Republican Ryan Kelley, a planning commissioner in Allendale Township, Michigan, recently announced he's running for governor and started organizing for his campaign on Telegram, saying "the funny biz in the 2020 election that the left brushed under the rug.. Patriots want answers," and pledging to watch a conspiracy theory video pushing Trump's claims of election fraud.

Kelley had made headlines last spring after he organized a protest in Michigan's Capitol, inviting heavily armed militiamen who crowded into the Lansing statehouse. Over the summer, he posted an article about the Michigan Liberty Militia on Parler saying, "Love seeing our Militia highlighted and shown as the good guys they are. #militia" Two members of that group later were charged in an alleged plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. On Jan. 6, Kelley went to the U.S. Capitol but says he was only outside.

Kelley told AP that militia members are "law abiding, lawful citizens that love this country, and maybe you get a couple of them that are bad apples. Question for you is, are bad apples pretty much in everything that we have as far as groups?"

As for his social media use in general he said, "Somebody might look at my posts and think oppositely, think, 'Oh wow, I'm offended by that,' or, 'Oh, man, I feel intimidated by that.' I might look at somebody else's posts that take oppositely of me and think similar things," he said. "The question is, No. 1, is any of them unlawful?"

He said he's simply looking to open conversations with his posts.

New Hampshire state Republican Rep. Terry Roy also continues to push the theory that Biden is not the legitimate winner of November's election.

"THIS guy won 80 million votes? Not in this universe," he posted on the social media platform Gab earlier this month. "I'm busy trying to keep New Hampshire free during the day and preparing for Red Dawn by night." In the 1984 movie "Red Dawn," American teenagers fought Russian invaders.

Roy joined Gab last month, uploading an introductory post showing himself shooting a high-powered bolt-action rifle and displaying a symbol and slogan, "Molon Labe," favored by gun-rights advocates and some members of the militia group the Oath Keepers. Molon Labe translates to "come and take them."

He said the symbol is meaningful for Second Amendment supporters, and that extremist groups can't "hijack" it. He said he referenced "Red Dawn" in part because the film's premise is that citizens can face a foreign invasion, which echoes his beliefs that Americans should embrace gun rights.

After speaking with AP, Roy asked his Gab followers, "Do ANY of you take anything I have ever said to be a call to initiate violence against the Government or anyone else?" Most who responded said no, though several took the opportunity to share their own views involving right-wing conspiracy theories.

Roy said he's now more introspective about what he says online.

"I think it does give me a little pause to just make sure and double-check that hyperbole doesn't run over into encouragement of something that would be illegal," he said. "I always want to make sure that while trying to fire up my base, I don't unnecessarily fire up the crazies."

In Arizona and Illinois, prominent Republicans who refused to support Trump's bid to overturn the election have been rebuked in recent weeks by the state GOP and a central committee, respectively. Last month, the Texas GOP's Twitter account urged people to follow the party on "free speech" social media app Gab using the slogan "We are The Storm," despite its association with the Qanon conspiracy theory.

After the November election, Manhattan, New York, Republican Party chair Andrea Catsimatidis asked on Parler: "Is Joe Biden planning a coup by trying to create his own parallel government?" Earlier this month,

she retweeted: "Corporate America helped rig the election."

Reached by phone, Catsimatidis said she believes it is the duty of political officials to share their opinions and reach as many people as possible.

"Political leaders have influence, and the fact that I have developed a social media following is exactly what you should be doing as a political leader," she said. "And I want to make sure that I can get information out."

Contributing to this report are Associated Press data journalist Camille Fassett in Santa Cruz, California, and AP writers Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho; Michael Householder in Detroit; Helen Wieffering in Minneapolis; Avery Yang in Phoenix; Haleluya Hadero in Atlanta; Michael Kunzelman in College Park, Maryland; Michelle Smith in Providence, Rhode Island; and Thalia Beaty in New York.

Contact AP's Global Investigations team at [investigative@ap.org](mailto:investigative@ap.org)

## Dutch poet declines assignment to translate Gorman's works

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A writer who was chosen to translate American poet Amanda Gorman's work into Dutch has handed back the assignment following criticism that a white author was selected to translate the words of a Black woman who is the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history.

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, who last year became the youngest writer to win the International Booker Prize with her novel "The Discomfort of Evening," announced the decision in a Twitter post Friday.

A Dutch translation of "The Hill We Climb," the poem Gorman recited to wide acclaim at the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden, was scheduled to be released at the end of March by publisher Meulenhoff.

"I am shocked by the uproar around my involvement in the dissemination of Amanda Gorman's message, and I understand people who feel hurt by the choice of Meulenhoff to ask me," said Rijneveld, who writes poetry as well as novels.

Meulenhoff general director Maaïke le Noble said in a statement that the publisher wants to learn from the experience.

"We are going to look for a team to cooperate with to translate Amanda's words and message of hope and inspiration as well as possible and in her spirit," Le Noble said.

The publisher said earlier this week that Rijneveld was the translator it had dreamed of and said that "Amanda Gorman herself was also immediately enthusiastic about the choice for the young poet."

One of the critics of the choice of Rijneveld was Janice Deul, an activist and journalist who wrote an opinion piece in the Netherlands' national daily newspaper *de Volkskrant* about the topic.

"Not to take anything away from Rijneveld's qualities, but why not chose a writer who is -- just like Gorman -- spoken word artist, young, female and unapologetically Black."

On Friday, Deul tweeted: "Thanks for this decision" and tagged Rijneveld and Meulenhoff.

## EXPLAINER: How US airstrike in Syria sends message to Iran

By ZEINA KARAM and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A U.S. airstrike targeting facilities used by Iran-backed militias in Syria appears to be a message to Tehran delivered by a new American administration still figuring out its approach to the Middle East.

The strike was seemingly a response to stepped-up rocket attacks by such militias that have targeted U.S. interests in Iraq, where the armed groups are based. It comes even as Washington and Tehran consider a return to the 2015 accord meant to rein in Iran's nuclear program.

The U.S. appears to have chosen the target, just across the border in Syria rather than in Iraq, carefully. It's a way for President Joe Biden to signal he will be tough on Iran while avoiding a response that could offset the delicate balance in Iraq itself or trigger a wider confrontation.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 67 of 72

And it's yet another example of how Syria, mired in civil war for the past decade, has often served as a proxy battlefield for world powers.

## WHO ARE THE FORCES TARGETED BY THE US?

The U.S. airstrike — which took place Friday in Syria — targeted one of the most powerful Iran-backed militias in the Middle East known as Kataeb Hezbollah, or the Hezbollah Brigades. The group is part of the Popular Mobilization Forces, which includes an array of Iraqi militias.

The group was founded after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. It is different from Lebanon's Hezbollah, but the two groups are strong allies. In recent years, Kataeb Hezbollah has played a major role in the fight against the Islamic State group as well as helping President Bashar Assad's forces in Syria's conflict.

The group was founded by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a veteran Iraqi militant who was closely allied with Iran and killed in a U.S. drone attack in Baghdad in January 2020 along with Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's elite Quds Force.

The U.S. has hit the group before: In December 2019, an American strike along the Syria-Iraq border killed 25 of its fighters and wounded dozens. Washington called it retaliation for the death of an American contractor in a rocket attack that it blamed on Kataeb Hezbollah.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RELATIONS WITH IRAN?

The attack is likely aimed at sending a message to Tehran that the U.S. will not tolerate attacks against American interests in the region, while leaving the door open for talks.

It comes as the Biden administration faces an uncertain road in its attempts to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — which gave Tehran billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program and that the Trump administration pulled out of.

In the meantime, relations with Iran have been further strained as the country's proxies become more assertive, with Iran-backed militias increasingly targeting U.S. interests and allies. That has rekindled worries that the standoff relations between the U.S. and Iran could end up being fought out in Iraq.

Already there are signs that Iraq is being used to fight a proxy war. Explosive-laden drones that targeted Saudi Arabia's royal palace in the kingdom's capital last month were launched from inside Iraq, a senior Iran-backed militia official in Baghdad and a U.S. official told The Associated Press this week.

## WILL THIS TRIGGER A WIDER ESCALATION?

That is unlikely at this point.

Biden's decision to attack in Syria does not appear to signal an intention to widen U.S. military involvement in the region, but rather to demonstrate a will to defend U.S. troops in Iraq while also avoiding embarrassing the Iraqi government, a U.S. ally, by striking on its territory.

Pentagon Spokesman John Kirby said the operation in Boukamal, Syria, sends an unambiguous message: "President Biden will act to protect American and coalition personnel. At the same time, we have acted in a deliberate manner that aims to deescalate the overall situation in eastern Syria and Iraq."

A Syrian commentator based in Turkey, Abdulkader Dwehe, said the choice of Syria was a wise one.

"Responding in Iraq could open a front that may be hard to close," he tweeted following the attack. "With the Boukamal strike, a valuable point, and a political message rather than a military one, have been made."

## FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OTHER US PRESIDENTS

In its first weeks, the new Biden administration has emphasized its intent to put its focus on the challenges posed by China — even as volatility and threats to U.S. interests persist in the Middle East.

But the operation proved the region is never far from a U.S. president's agenda.

By striking Syria, Biden joins every American president from Ronald Reagan onward who has ordered a bombardment of countries in the Middle East.

## Amnesty report describes Axum massacre in Ethiopia's Tigray

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Soldiers from Eritrea systematically killed “many hundreds” of people, the large majority men, in a massacre late November in the Ethiopian city of Axum in the Tigray region, Amnesty International said Friday. The new report echoed the findings of an Associated Press story last week and cited more than 40 witnesses.

As pressure on Ethiopia increased over what might be the deadliest massacre of the Tigray conflict, the prime minister's office announced that “humanitarian agencies have now been provided unfettered access to aid in the region.” It added that the government “welcomes international technical assistance to undertake the investigations (into alleged abuses) as well as invites the potential to collaborate on joint investigations.”

And yet the government alleged the Amnesty report relied on “scanty information,” and said the human rights group should have visited the Tigray region. Amnesty said it requested permission from the government in December and never received a response.

“As you know, no independent human rights monitors have been allowed in the region since the conflict began,” spokesman Conor Fortune said in an email to the AP.

Crucially, the head of the government-established Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Daniel Bekele, says the Amnesty findings “should be taken very seriously.” The commission's own preliminary findings “indicate the killing of an as yet unknown number of civilians by Eritrean soldiers” in Axum, its statement said.

The Amnesty report describes the soldiers gunning down civilians as they fled, lining up men and shooting them in the back, rounding up “hundreds, if not thousands” of men for beatings and refusing to allow those grieving to bury the dead.

Over a period of about 24 hours, “Eritrean soldiers deliberately shot civilians on the street and carried out systematic house-to-house searches, extrajudicially executing men and boys,” the report released early Friday says. “The massacre was carried out in retaliation for an earlier attack by a small number of local militiamen, joined by local residents armed with sticks and stones.”

The “mass execution” of Axum civilians by Eritrean troops may amount to crimes against humanity, the report says, and it calls for a United Nations-led international investigation and full access to Tigray for human rights groups, journalists and humanitarian workers. The region has been largely cut off since fighting began in early November.

Ethiopia's federal government has denied the presence of soldiers from neighboring Eritrea, long an enemy of the Tigray region's now-fugitive leaders, and Eritrea's government dismissed the AP story on the Axum massacre as “outrageous lies.” Eritrea's information minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, on Friday said his country “is outraged and categorically rejects the preposterous accusations” in the Amnesty report.

But even senior members of the Ethiopia-appointed interim government in Tigray have acknowledged the Eritrean soldiers' presence and allegations of widespread looting and killing.

Ethiopia said the “alleged incident” in Axum “will have to be thoroughly investigated.”

And Ethiopia's ambassador to Belgium, Hirut Zemene, told a webinar on Thursday that the alleged massacre in November was a “very highly unlikely scenario” and “we suspect it's a very, very crazy idea.”

No one knows how many thousands of civilians have been killed in the conflict between Ethiopian and allied forces and those of the Tigray regional government, which had long dominated Ethiopia's government before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018. Humanitarian officials have warned that a growing number of people might be starving to death as access, while improving, remains restricted.

“Hostilities must cease immediately,” the European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement in response to the Amnesty International report, adding that “the level of suffering endured by civilians, including children, is appalling.”

The presence of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray has brought some alarm. The United States has repeatedly urged Eritrea to withdraw its soldiers and cited credible reports of “grave” human rights abuses. On Wednesday it asked, “Does the Eritrean military have sufficient control over its troops to prevent them

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 69 of 72

from committing human rights abuses?"

Witnesses of the massacre in Axum told Amnesty International that Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers jointly took control of the city but the Eritreans carried out the killings and then conducted house-to-house raids for men and teenage boys.

Bodies were left strewn in the streets after the events of Nov. 28 and 29, witnesses said.

"The next day, they did not allow us to pick the dead. The Eritrean soldiers said you cannot bury the dead before our dead soldiers are buried," one woman told Amnesty International. With hospitals looted or health workers having fled, some witnesses said a number of people died from their wounds because of lack of care.

"Gathering the bodies and carrying out the funerals took days. Most of the dead appear to have been buried on 30 November, but witnesses said that people found many additional bodies in the days that followed," the new report says.

After obtaining permission from Ethiopian soldiers to bury the dead, witnesses said they feared the killings would resume any moment, even as they piled bodies onto horse-drawn carts and took them to churches for burial, at times in mass graves.

The AP spoke with a deacon at one church, the Church of St. Mary of Zion, who said he helped count the bodies, gathered victims' identity cards and assisted with burials. He believes some 800 people were killed that weekend around the city.

After being left exposed for a day or more, the bodies had begun to rot, further traumatizing families and those who gathered to help.

The new report says satellite imagery shows newly "disturbed soil" beside churches.

## Man who played Duke Chapel bells for 50 years dies

By JONATHAN DREW Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — When J. Samuel Hammond arrived as a freshman at Duke University in 1964, he knew nothing about the musical instrument that allowed a player to send melodies ringing across campus from the bells in the school's iconic chapel tower. A demonstration from a fellow student introduced him to the 50-bell carillon that would become his life's work as he played music that marked the end of the academic day for countless students.

Hammond, who retired as university carillonneur in 2018 after playing the bells at Duke Chapel for five decades, died Thursday at age 73 in Durham, the university said in a news release.

His music was heard each weekday by students leaving the day's classes and, more recently, by alumni who could watch some of his performances online.

Toward the beginning of each weekday afternoon's 15-minute performance, Hammond would pound out five strikes of the largest bell to mark five o'clock. Then, he typically moved on to hymns and other sometimes whimsical selections such as the movie themes from Star Trek or Star Wars, according to a university news article. He would often play songs to mark special occasions, such as the French anthem "La Marseillaise" on Bastille Day. When the basketball team played its archrival from the University of North Carolina, he played the Duke fight song.

"The carillon marks the rhythm of our days here at Duke, providing a shared experience that — sometimes subtly — connects us with one another, with traditions that stretch across centuries and continents, and even with God," the Rev. Luke A. Powery, dean of Duke Chapel, said in 2018 when Hammond retired. "The person who has carried on that tradition at Duke for decades, faithfully and unassumingly, is Sam."

The bells at the Gothic chapel are played by striking wooden keys by hand and pressing foot pedals, similar to a piano. The keys and pedals control cables that cause hammers to strike the bells, which range in size from 10 pounds (4.5 kg) to more than 5 tons (4.5 metric tons), the university article said.

It was physical work. A demonstration video posted by Duke at the time of his retirement shows Hammond shifting forward on his bench and putting his weight down to operate the largest bell when sounding the five o'clock chimes. As he commences the next tune, he leans in and, with subtle flowing movements,

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 70 of 72

uses the side of his hand to strike the thin wooden keys that control smaller bells. The result is a buoyant melody emanating from the chapel's 210-foot (64-meter) tower.

In addition to weekdays, Hammond also performed for Sunday chapel services and university events. The university said he played music on the bells an average of 300 times a year, estimating his performances exceeded 15,000. When he retired as carillonneur, two other musicians took over his duties.

"The sound of those bells is omnipresent in the life of our community, but also unassuming, a gentle accompaniment to the rhythm of our days," Zebulon Highben, director of Chapel music, said in a statement Thursday. "This was Sam, too: omnipresent on campus, unassuming, deeply kind and thoughtful, humbly uninterested in the adulation he deserved."

Hammond also earned two master's degrees, in library science and theological studies, and worked for four decades as a music librarian at the school.

Hammond, who grew up in Americus, Georgia, enrolled at Duke in 1964 and learned how to play the carillon after a demonstration from a fellow student, Hammond recalled in 2018.

"When I was a freshman at Duke, I met the student carillonneur at the time, John Simpson, when we studied organ together," Hammond said in the article about his retirement. "John invited me to see the carillon (of which I knew nothing), and in response to my intrigued interest in such an unusual instrument and in a potential opportunity of being of service to the university, kindly provided me beginning instruction and, ultimately, opportunity to play."

He began playing regularly, according to the university article, and he was promoted to chapel carillonneur in 1968, the same year he graduated. In 1986, he was named university carillonneur, becoming the second person to hold that position.

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This story, originally published on Feb. 25, 2021, has been updated to clarify that while some of Hammond's performances were posted online, daily streams of the carillon performances became common after he retired.

\_\_\_ Follow Drew at [www.twitter.com/JonathanLDrew](https://www.twitter.com/JonathanLDrew).

## UN: Carbon-cutting pledges by countries nowhere near enough

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The newest pledges by countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions are falling far short of what's needed to limit global warming to what the Paris climate accord seeks, a new United Nations report finds.

So the U.N.'s climate chief is telling nations to go back and try harder.

Most countries — especially top carbon polluters China, United States and India — missed the Dec. 31 deadline for submitting official emission-cutting targets for November's climate negotiations in Scotland. Friday's report provides an incomplete snapshot of the world's efforts: The world's pledges so far are only enough to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions to less than 1% below 2010 levels by 2030.

The world has to cut carbon pollution 45% below 2010 levels to achieve the more stringent official Paris goal of limiting future warming to another half a degree (0.3 degrees Celsius) from now, U.N. officials said.

"We are very, very far from where we need to be," U.N. climate chief Patricia Espinosa said. "What we need to put on the table is much more radical and much more transformative than we have been doing until now."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the report "a red alert for our planet."

U.N. officials applauded the more than 120 nations, including the U.S. and China, that have made longer-term goals of net-zero carbon emissions by mid-century. But those same nations must translate long-term talk into the immediate action "that people and the planet so desperately need," Guterres said.

Instead of limiting the world to only 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial times — the more stringent of two Paris accord goals — the data shows that world "is headed to close to 3 degrees Celsius (5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) and a global catastrophe if this is not curtailed quickly," said Bill Hare, director of Climate Analytics, a private group that tracks countries' emissions targets.

The 2015 Paris climate agreement had nations submit voluntary targets for how much heat-trapping

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 71 of 72

gases they would spew by 2025 and update them every five years.

With the big pandemic-delayed climate negotiations in Glasgow set for later this year, nations are supposed to submit updated and tougher goals for 2030. The U.S., the second biggest carbon polluter behind China, promises its goal will be announced before a special Earth Day summit in April.

Fewer than half of the world's countries, accounting for 30% of the world's carbon emissions, submitted targets by the deadline. Only seven of the top 15 carbon polluting nations had done so.

At least 10 countries that submitted goals last year did not provide tougher goals, Hare said. And because of changes to emissions in its base year calculations, Brazil essentially weakened its target from its 2015 version, said Taryn Fransen, a senior fellow at the think tank World Resources Institute.

Espinosa said even countries that already gave targets need to go back and do better because "we are simply out of time."

Her predecessor and prime engineer of the Paris agreement, Christiana Figueres, said she thinks the U.S., China and Japan can change the picture when they announce their goals: "I have high hopes they will deliver."

China and the United States, with 35% of the world's carbon emissions, can make a huge difference with their targets, Fransen said, noting that the U.S. can pledge to cut emissions in half from 2005 baseline levels by 2030 and can achieve that with concerted action.

The goal the Obama Administration submitted in 2015 was to cut emissions 26% to 28% from 2005 levels by 2025. When he was president, Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the agreement, but President Joe Biden put the country back in.

After dramatic decreases in carbon pollution in early 2020 because of the pandemic lockdown, initial data shows that near end-of-the-year emissions were back up to 2019 levels, pushed by China's industrial production, said Corinne LeQuere, who tracks emissions at the University of East Anglia.

The world adopted the more stringent 1.5 degree Celsius temperature goal in 2015 at the urging of small island nations, which fear being swamped by climate-related sea rise if temperatures pass that mark.

"We are flirting dangerously" with the warming limit, said Ambassador Aubrey Webson of Antigua and Barbuda, chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States. "It is small island developing states like ours that will pay the ultimate price if we do not."

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Read stories on climate issues by The Associated Press here.

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## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Feb. 27, the 58th day of 2021. There are 307 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 27, 1933, Germany's parliament building, the Reichstag (RYKS'-tahg), was gutted by fire; Chancellor Adolf Hitler, blaming the Communists, used the fire to justify suspending civil liberties.

On this date:

In 1922, the Supreme Court, in *Leser v. Garnett*, unanimously upheld the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed the right of women to vote.

In 1939, the Supreme Court, in *National Labor Relations Board v. Fansteel Metallurgical Corp.*, effectively outlawed sit-down strikes.

In 1942, the Battle of the Java Sea began during World War II; Imperial Japanese naval forces scored

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 236 ~ 72 of 72

a decisive victory over the Allies.

In 1951, the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, limiting a president to two terms of office, was ratified.

In 1968, at the conclusion of a CBS News special report on the Vietnam War, Walter Cronkite delivered a commentary in which he said the conflict appeared "mired in stalemate."

In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement occupied the hamlet of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, the site of the 1890 massacre of Sioux men, women and children. (The occupation lasted until the following May.)

In 1982, Wayne Williams was found guilty of murdering two of the 28 young Blacks whose bodies were found in the Atlanta area over a 22-month period. (Williams, who was also blamed for 22 other deaths, has maintained his innocence.)

In 1991, Operation Desert Storm came to a conclusion as President George H.W. Bush declared that "Kuwait is liberated, Iraq's army is defeated," and announced that the allies would suspend combat operations at midnight, Eastern time.

In 1998, with the approval of Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's House of Lords agreed to end 1,000 years of male preference by giving a monarch's first-born daughter the same claim to the throne as any first-born son.

In 2003, children's television host Fred Rogers died in Pittsburgh at age 74.

In 2010, in Chile, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and tsunami killed 524 people, caused \$30 billion in damage and left more than 200,000 homeless.

In 2015, actor Leonard Nimoy, 83, world famous to "Star Trek" fans as the pointy-eared, purely logical science officer Mr. Spock, died in Los Angeles. Boris Nemtsov, a charismatic Russian opposition leader and sharp critic of President Vladimir Putin, was gunned down near the Kremlin.

Ten years ago: "The King's Speech" won four Academy Awards, including best picture; Colin Firth won best actor for his portrayal of Britain's King George VI. Frank Buckles, the last surviving American veteran of World War I who'd also survived being a civilian prisoner of war in the Philippines in World War II, died in Charles Town, West Virginia, at age 110. Duke Snider, 84, the Baseball Hall of Famer who helped the Dodgers bring their only World Series crown to Brooklyn, died in Escondido, California.

Five years ago: Hillary Clinton overwhelmed Bernie Sanders in the South Carolina primary. A cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia went into effect across Syria. A violent altercation between Ku Klux Klan members and counter-protesters in Anaheim, California, left three people stabbed. "Fifty Shades of Grey" nabbed five prizes at the Golden Raspberry Awards: worst screenplay, actor, actress, screen combo, and film of the year in a tie with "Fantastic Four."

One year ago: U.S. stocks posted their worst one-day drop since 2011, as worldwide markets plummeted amid growing anxiety about the coronavirus; the Dow tumbled nearly 1,200 points. President Donald Trump declared that a widespread U.S. outbreak of the virus was not inevitable, even as top health authorities at his side warned that more infections were coming. Vice President Mike Pence convened his first meeting of the president's coronavirus task force, a day after he was designated as the government's point person for the epidemic. Saudi Arabia closed off the holiest sites in Islam to foreign pilgrims due to the coronavirus.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Joanne Woodward is 91. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader is 87. Actor Barbara Babcock is 84. Actor Howard Hesseman is 81. Actor Debra Monk is 72. Rock singer-musician Neal Schon (Journey) is 67. Rock musician Adrian Smith (Iron Maiden) is 64. Actor Timothy Spall is 64. Rock musician Paul Humphreys (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) is 61. Country singer Johnny Van Zant (Van Zant) is 61. Rock musician Leon Mobley (Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals) is 60. Basketball Hall of Famer James Worthy is 60. Actor Adam Baldwin is 59. Actor Grant Show is 59. Actor Noah Emmerich is 56. Actor Donal Logue (DOH'-nuhl LOHG) is 55. R&B singer Chilli (TLC) is 50. Rock musician Jeremy Dean (Nine Days) is 49. Country-rock musician Shonna Tucker is 43. Chelsea Clinton is 41. Actor Brandon Beemer is 41. Rock musician Cyrus Bolooki (New Found Glory) is 41. Rock musician Jake Clemons (Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band) is 41. R&B singer Bobby V is 41. Singer Josh Groban is 40. Banjoist Noam (cq) Pikelnny is 40. Rock musician Jared Champion (Cage the Elephant) is 38. Actor Kate Mara is 38. TV personality JWovw (AKA Jenni Farley) is 35. Actor Lindsey Morgan is 31.