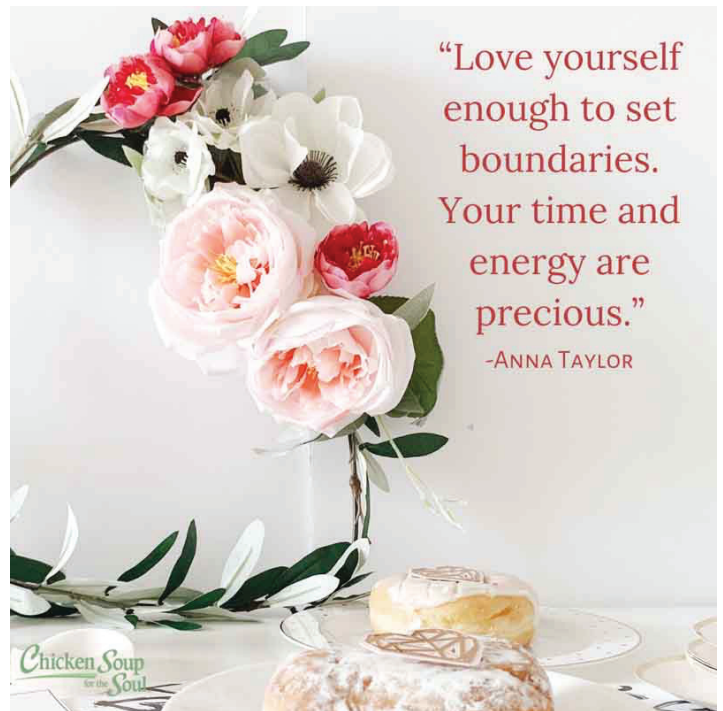


Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 1 of 83

- [1- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [2- Bates and Groton Township Notices](#)
- [2- Kindergarten Roundup](#)
- [3- City Council Meeting Agenda](#)
- [4- Park Rx Encourages South Dakotans to Exercise Outdoors](#)
- [5- St. Elizabeth holds Hunger Banquet](#)
- [7- Groton Area Staff Spotlight: Beth Gustafson](#)
- [8- Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique bring variety to Downtown Groton](#)
- [10- Dance teams perform](#)
- [11- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [14- Yesterday's COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [21- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [22- Weather Pages](#)
- [26- Daily Devotional](#)
- [27- Physicans Life Insurance Ad](#)
- [28- 2021 Community Events](#)
- [29- News from the Associated Press](#)



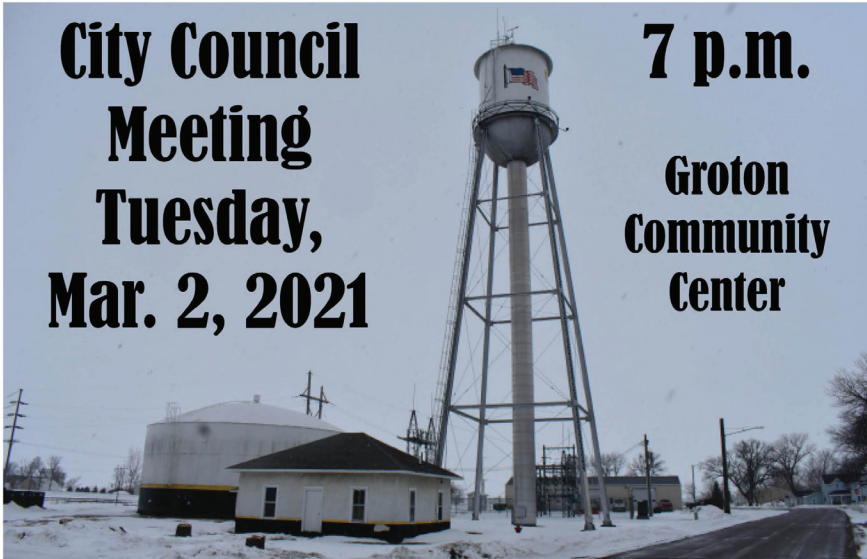
“Love yourself enough to set boundaries. Your time and energy are precious.”

-ANNA TAYLOR

City Council Meeting
Tuesday,
Mar. 2, 2021

7 p.m.

Groton Community Center



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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



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.



Bates Township Annual Meeting Notice

Bates Township
BATES TOWNSHIP ANNUAL MEETING
NOTICE

Bates Township will hold its annual meeting and election on Tuesday, March 2nd, 2021 at the home of the Clerk, 14523 409th Ave, Conde.

Election of officers and business meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m.

We will be receiving bids for road maintenance and gravel. Please mail bids to

Betty Geist, Bates Township Clerk, 14523 409th Ave., Conde, SD 57434 prior to meeting date.

Betty Geist, Township Clerk (0217.0224)

Groton Township Notice of Annual Meeting

Groton Township Notice of Annual Meeting
NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION IN GROTON TOWNSHIP Notice is hereby given that the annual Groton Township Annual and Election of Officers will be held Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at the Groton Community Center. Meeting at 1 p.m. followed by election of officers. Sealed bids will be accepted for gravel, loaded and delivered, to designated places in Groton Township. The township board reserves the right to inspect the gravel before awarding the bid. Bids must be addressed to Jeff Howard, Township Clerk, 40829 131st Street, Groton, SD 57445, sealed and plainly marked "Bid for Gravel." Separate bids will be accepted for mowing weeds along road ditches, removal of snow and blading. Bidders are to furnish township with name and address of insurance agent. Bids will be opened by the Board of Supervisors, Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at 1 p.m. The board reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids. Jeff Howard, Township Clerk

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 3 of 83

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda
March 2, 2021 – 7:00pm
Groton Community Center

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
2. Minutes
3. Bills
4. Department reports
5. Spring Garbage Routes Effective 3/9/21
6. Revisit the Award for the 2021 Gravel Bid
7. Water Tower Logo
8. Baseball/Softball Foundation Annual Dueling Duo Fundraiser – April 10th at the American Legion – Request the City to donate 4 adult baseball season tickets
9. Mayor’s declaration for City offices to be closed April 2nd and 5th for Easter
10. Second Reading of the Summer Salary Ordinance #741
11. Second Reading of the 2021 Supplemental Appropriation Ordinance #742
12. Select an Equalization Meeting Date March 16th
13. First Reading of the Ordinance Amending Liquor Revenues #744
14. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
15. Adjournment

Park Rx Encourages South Dakotans to Exercise Outdoors

Brookings, S.D. - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adults get 150 minutes of aerobic activity and children at least an hour of physical activity each week, but Americans often fall short of these guidelines. To get more South Dakotans moving, the South Dakota Department of Health (DOH), SDSU Extension and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks are once again working together to empower healthcare providers to write their patients a prescription for physical activity in any South Dakota state park.

Launched in 2015, the Park Prescription project aims to connect healthcare professionals with physical activity assessments and prescriptions to open the conversation about physical activity. Healthcare providers can prescribe a free one-day pass to any South Dakota state park to engage in physical activity, making the park the patient's outdoor gym. The one-day pass can also be turned in for a half-off discounted annual pass to encourage further continued physical activity engagement in South Dakota state parks.

"Parks and open spaces are essential resources for physical health and mental wellness. With over 60 state park areas located across the state, they are an accessible option for most South Dakotans," says Emilie Miller, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Visitor Services Coordinator. "We're proud to partner with DOH and SDSU Extension for the Park Rx program to provide discounted park entrance to those who could benefit most from the health aspects of outdoor recreation."

For the month of March, any healthcare provider that signs up as a prescribing provider will receive a free swag bag from South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. Healthcare providers can sign up at the ParkRx website to receive a Park Rx kit.

SDSU Extension Health and Physical Activity Field Specialist Nikki Prosch says there are ample benefits to getting regular physical activity. State parks offer several options: kayaking, canoeing, paddle boarding, hiking, biking and snowshoeing. According to Prosch, physical activity can improve muscular fitness, help prevent falls, assist with weight management, and improve older adults' cognitive function. Research has also shown physical activity to be an effective behavior to both prevent certain chronic diseases, and in some cases, help treat or monitor others.

"Engaging in physical activity outdoors in parks or green spaces can further enhance the mental and health benefits associated with exercise, including reduced feelings of stress and improved attention," Prosch says. "Additionally, recent studies are documenting that extra time spent outdoors may help mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The organizations also invite South Dakotans to join them in celebrating National Park Rx Day on April 25. National Park Rx Day helps spread the word of the Park Rx Project and encourages the prescription of exercise in outdoor environments. The celebration is also an opportunity for communities to come together and focus on the positive health effects of outdoor physical activity.

Communities and providers can choose to celebrate in a variety of ways. A few ideas include planning and hosting a community celebration, organizing a group walk or 5K, arranging a free screening at a local park, hosting a community picnic, planning an outdoor group fitness class, hosting a short lunch-and-learn session at a nearby park, etc. For more ideas on how to celebrate, visit ParkRx.org.

If you are interested in learning more, or if you are a healthcare provider who has questions about the program, please contact Nikki Prosch at nikki.prosch@sdstate.edu.



St. Elizabeth holds Hunger Banquet

The Hunger Banquet was held last Wednesday at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Groton. There were three groups of people and each person coming in had to draw their designated area. The largest group were those from developing countries. Those individuals had to sit on the floor and eat their rice with their fingers. The next largest group had a bowl of stew and they sat on chairs and got to use utensils. They were in the back of the room. The smallest group had a steak supper and were waited on and could have all they wanted. They are pictured on the left side of the room on tables with table clothes.

Father Tom Hartman said that the Hunger Banquet was started by a Presentation Sister, Sister Pegge Boehm PBVM, and it was started in Milbank. When she no longer did it, Father Tom took over the project. He did it in Milbank for a couple of years, then did it at seminary and now for two years in the time he has been in Groton. The Hunger Banquet is part of the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl Program. According to Father Tom, there were about 80 people in attendance. "This event is to broaden our vision of mission and expand our understanding of "Who is my neighbor?" The take away is how will we respond? May these programs help us to see Church as so much bigger than our parish family."

Oxfam is the organization that spearheads the Hunger Banquet. OXFAM (Oxford Committee for Famine Relief) is a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty, founded in 1942 and led by Oxfam International. It is a major nonprofit group with an extensive collection of operations.

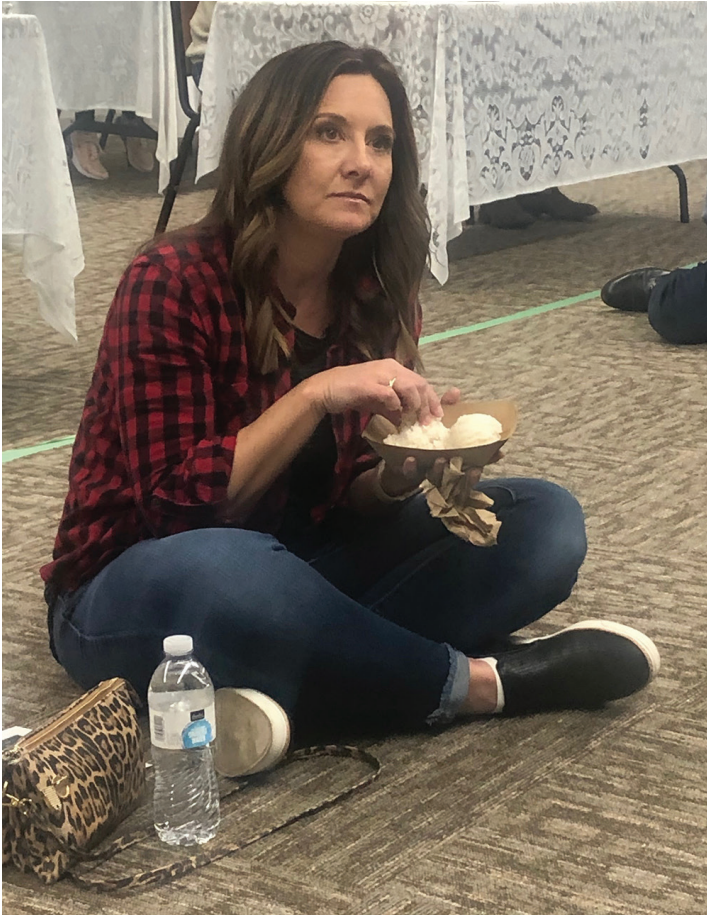
Father Tom Hartman holds up one of the rice bowls that people could take home and fill up with coins for the project. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 6 of 83



Jamie Simon got rice for supper, which had to be eaten by your fingers. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Blakely Stiegelmeier got a bowl of stew for supper. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Bowls of rice were ready for those to pick up and eat. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



David Hunter was one of those that got the luck draw and had a steak supper. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Groton Area Staff Spotlight!

Name: Beth Gustafson

Occupation: Elementary and High School Nurse

Length of Employment: 2003-Present



With the current state of affairs during the COVID-19 epidemic, proper sanitation and health precautions are necessary to prevent the spread of the virulent virus. It is no easy task to ensure that those attending school in person stay healthy, but Beth Gustafson has continued to do her best to make sure the students of Groton remain healthy.

Mrs. Gustafson graduated with a degree in Medical Secretary in 1984. She later obtained her second degree in Nursing ten years later, in 1994. She has worked at Groton Area as a school nurse for seventeen years. She was the first medical staff member to be hired by the district and has continued her tenure for almost two decades. Before she began working at the Groton School District, Mrs. Gustafson worked at McKennan Labor and Delivery in Sioux Falls for a total of eleven years. As the resident medical professional for the school

district, Beth's responsibilities include treating minor injuries such as scrapes and bruises, contacting parents to give and receive medical information when necessary, and assisting in treating occasional head lice.

Alongside her duties at the elementary and high schools, Mrs. Gustafson administers COVID-19 testing at the high school! To be tested for COVID-19, patients must be symptomatic. After getting tested at their appointed time, patients can expect to have their results within a span of 15 minutes. While she was initially skeptical, Beth Gustafson can personally testify to the accuracy of the COVID tests she administers, as the test identifies proteins associated with the COVID-19 virus. Mrs. Gustafson has said that positive results have decreased recently.

However, the people of Groton should still follow health precautions and follow sanitation protocols to prevent possible transmission. To avoid spreading or becoming infected, we should keep a distance of six feet from each other at most time, wash our hands with soap and water often, and clean surfaces we touch with disinfectant.

Outside of her duties at work, Beth enjoys summer camping with her husband and three daughters, two of which have graduated from Groton. Her third daughter will be graduating high school next year.

Editor's Note: This is a continuing series compiled by Benjamin Higgins. Higgins who is working for the Groton Independent through the Project Skills program.

Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique bring variety to Downtown Groton by Dorene Nelson

The Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique, planning to open on Groton's Main Street around the first part of March with a Grand Opening in the middle of March, is the perfect combination for favorite coffee drinks, gifts, Groton Tiger gear, along with many great choices of ladies' tops, dresses, pants, and more!

Carla Tracy and Kassie Dunbar are the co-owners and creative minds behind this new store.

"I ran a daycare out of this building for seven years," Tracy explained, "and now I want to use it for something new and exciting! We wanted to contribute to the community and have some fun along the way."

"Kassie mentioned to me that she would like to start an on-line clothing boutique, and I had considered starting a boutique a couple years back" she said. "What better way to use this space then to combine a coffee shop, home decor, and Groton Gear along with some great selections of women's clothes!"

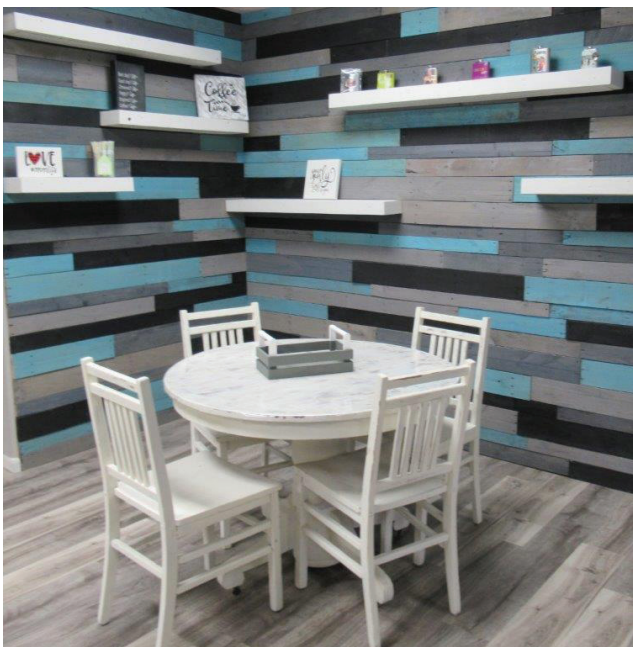
"Due to my other job, I'll be working here on evenings and weekends," Dunbar explained. She currently runs a daycare.

"We have partnered up with the local vendor, Front Porch 605, for some home décor and gift items. The clothes that we will be selling include tops, dresses, jeans, athletic wear, shoes, and jewelry from many new vendors. We also will be supplying the latest styles on graphic tees and Groton apparel from another local vendor, AMA Design. We are excited to bring so many great local items into our store and work with some very talented local ladies," commented Tracy and Dunbar.

"We've been busy remodeling the building to suit our business," Tracy continued. "Our husbands have been working very hard and have done all of the work themselves."



Kassie Dunbar and Carla Tracy are opening up Beauty Brew Coffee & Boutique in downtown Groton. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)



There will be some unique settings in the store. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)



There will be some untraditional display of clothing and items. (Photo by Dorene Nelson)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 9 of 83

"There is all new flooring, two dressing rooms, a kitchen, and various shelving and unique displays throughout the store," Tracy smiled. "Our hard working, clever husbands have helped make our dream into a reality!"

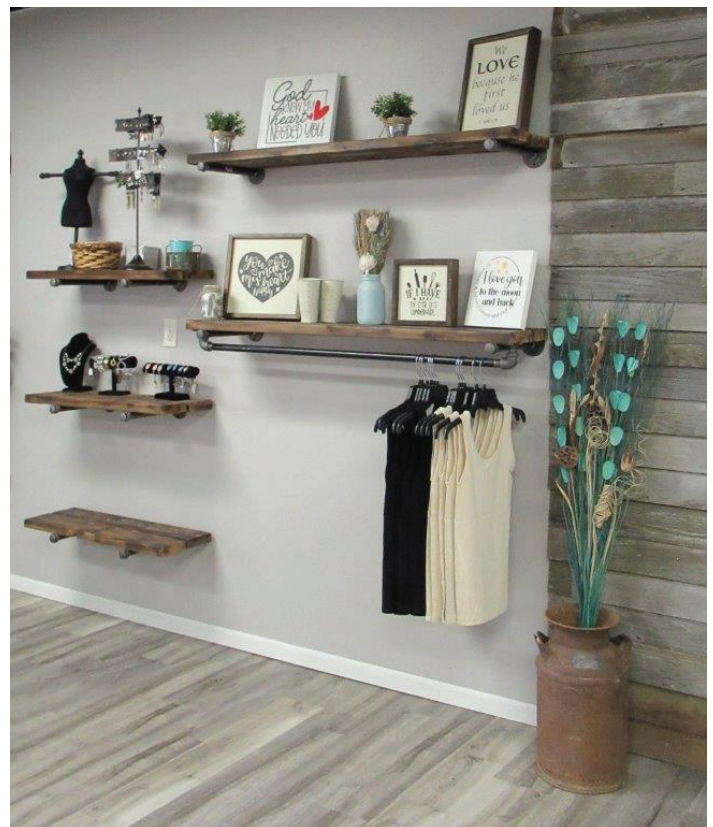
"We've decided to use refurbished or repurposed material and supplies," Dunbar stated. "The counter, for example, is made from stained pallets with a custom-designed counter top. The walls have old barn wood, tin, doors, and windows. We are excited to show it all off to the community. "

"The coffee shop is located in the rear of the building where the existing kitchen for my daycare had been," Tracy explained. "The coffee nook has a table with four chairs and two additional smaller tables, made from wooden wire spools, that can seat two on each table for a total of 8-10 customers at once, along with a full couch."

"The kitchen has been remodeled with large stainless-steel sinks and counters to meet the health inspector's requirements," Dunbar said. "We eventually plan to offer some homemade snacks in addition to the coffee."

"In order for us to open the coffee shop and serve any food and drinks, we both had to take and pass the ServSafe Certification course," she added.

"We are very eagerly looking forward to our grand opening and welcoming our customers," Dunbar added. Their grand opening is slated for March 19-20. "Be sure to check us out; there will be plenty of give-a-ways and fun!"



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 10 of 83



Dance teams perform

A dance showcase was presented Monday night in the Groton Area Arena, which was also livestreamed on GDILIVE.COM. The Sugar Babes, Sweet Sensations and Spice Girlz put on a 45-minute presentation, doing their stretches and performances as the parents watched.

(Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 11 of 83

#372 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

No news here really. We've leveled off—no longer really showing declines. This is a concern because this plateau is higher than previous plateaus. There were 56,600 new cases reported today. That brings us to 28,676,900 total cases, 0.2% more than yesterday. Hospitalizations continue to decline, now at 47,352. And we're now at 514,361 deaths, which is 0.3% more than yesterday's total. There were 1532 deaths reported today.

Something important here is that, after the spring wave, which peaked on April 10 with a seven-day new-case average of 31,709, our low point was a seven-day new-case average of 20,764 on May 28. Then after the summer wave which peaked on July 25 at a seven-day new-case average of 66,784, our low point was a seven-day new-case average of 34,596 on September 12. The peak this time around came on January 8 at a seven-day new-case average of 259,571. Our current seven-day new-case average is 67,868, close to double the last low point and slightly increased from our lowest point of 66,393 on February 21. You see the pattern here, right? Higher starting points have been creating higher peaks in each successive wave, and the seven-day new-case average has actually been ticking upward for over a week now. Worse yet, testing has fallen 30 percent over the past few weeks, leaving us blind to just how many cases might actually be out there. It's tough to track variants without specimens to test; but if decreases in testing reflect lower numbers of people concerned about contacts and symptoms, it could be a good thing. Overall, I find it worrisome. I would like to see these new-case numbers push further downward before the middle of the month when the B.1.1.7 variant is expected to take over the country, and I'd be happier with more testing. I guess we'll see what the coming days bring.

On March 1, 2020, one year ago today, the US had its second and third confirmed deaths from Covid-19, both in King County, Washington. I was not doing all of the tracking then that I do now—still didn't know this was going to be an ongoing thing; in fact, I did not post at all on March 1—so this next is my best attempt to reconstruct: The US had approximately 159 cases, including 44 from aboard the Diamond Princess and three repatriated from China. States reporting cases were Washington, Oregon, California, Utah, Arizona, Nebraska (to the best of my knowledge, all repatriated cases shipped in to a specialized infectious diseases unit for treatment), Texas, Wisconsin, Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Florida. There were community transmissions, as well as returning travelers included in these numbers. Thirty-three new cases turned up in California. The first case was identified in New York in a recently-returned traveler. The Department of Health and Human Services was busy trying to figure out what was wrong with the test kits the CDC had sent out, which was just the start of the testing woes that would plague us for months. Washington health officials began investigating a possible outbreak at a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington, which eventually yielded dozens of cases and many deaths; this was the first day we knew there was going to be a problem there, and the ensuing lockdown was the first in a nursing home in the US. Over 3000 deaths had occurred worldwide, only just over 100 of those outside China. The airlines began to waive change fees for travelers postponing trips. Cancellations included the MotoGP (world motorcycle racing competition), American Physical Society meeting, and Delta Airlines flights to Milan (but not Rome). Olympic officials, according to CNN, were "urging people not to worry about novel coronavirus—there will be a complete Games with tens of thousands of athletes competing." Who knew?

We have some data on new variants in the US population. We should note up front that our genomic surveillance of specimens is still woefully deficient, so whatever we see here is far below the total number of cases circulating across the country. Nonetheless, it may give us a picture of which variants are most prevalent at this time. Right now, we see 2400 cases of B.1.1.7 (UK), 53 cases of B.1.351 (South Africa), and 10 cases of B.1.1.28.1 (Brazil).

It appears we will soon have firmer guidance for vaccinated individuals. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the President's chief medical adviser for Covid-19, spoke at a briefing today and indicated the CDC is promulgating new guidance. He also said that at-home small-group gatherings of people, all of whom are fully-vaccinated, are a low-risk activity. Please note that

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 12 of 83

this applies only to situations where everyone present is fully-vaccinated. He wasn't ready to commit at this point on other kinds of activities, but this does provide those who are being vaccinated with some sense of what may or may not be safe once they're two weeks past their second dose. I'll report out this new information as it becomes available.

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has been receiving approval in several countries, most recently in Canada, even while there have been questions about their clinical trials and its overall efficacy. I should note that phase 3 trials are still underway in the US, so data from those are not yet forthcoming, and it is these on which the FDA will base its emergency use authorization (EUA) decision. This is another adenovirus-vectored DNA vaccine like the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine recently approved here, but it is a two-dose vaccine. It has the advantage over other vaccines in current use of being stable at standard refrigeration temperatures, which is significant in easing distribution chains and may play a large role in getting vaccine to countries across the globe. Many of the recent concerns have occurred because there were not very many older participants in the clinical trials on which these approvals were based. This has led to concerns about efficacy in those age groups. An advantage of the early adoption of the vaccine in the UK and their success in vaccinating large swaths of their population is that we now have much more data about vaccines' effectiveness in real-life use; and some of those data were provided today on a pre-print server, which means they are not yet peer-reviewed. The news is pretty good.

Only the first-dose effect of the vaccine was assessed because second doses have not been rolled out in England; likewise because of a late rollout, effect on mortality at this point was not assessed. Based on a sample of all adults in England 70 and over who reported symptoms between December 8 and February 19, this vaccine showed 60 percent effectiveness from 28 to 34 days after administration, which rose to 73 percent at day 35. The vaccine was 80 percent effective at preventing hospitalizations after a single dose. I have seen some indication its effectiveness at preventing infection rises to 89 percent longer after a second dose, but I do not believe those data were from over-70 individuals, but rather from a larger trial sample which would be more comparable to the other vaccines currently on the market. I don't have information about the effect of a second dose on hospitalizations or mortality, which are the really important numbers. There is also some evidence the second dose may be most effective if delayed to as long as six weeks after the first. There's a lot here to sort out. I will be most interested in the US trial data when it becomes available. I'm going to guess we'll have something by the middle of the month or so.

The Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine, with its shiny new EUA, started shipping today. Doses should start getting into people tomorrow. There were 3.9 million doses shipped, but production will be spotty for a while. We should see another 16 million doses going out by the end of the month, and that will help. Projections are that, by June, 100 million doses will have been delivered: This is enough to fully immunize close to one-third of our population. There have been recommendations to direct this vaccine toward hard-to-reach populations and those who are less likely to keep a second appointment for another dose—homeless, rural, college students, and those with mobility issues, for example. It is not clear whether people will be able to choose which vaccine they will receive except by making appointments at sites where a given vaccine is being administered. Generally, you do not know this when you make your appointment, so we'll see how that plays out. I'm going to reiterate that the best vaccine for you is the one someone's willing to give you today. If you refuse your dose because you've decided you don't want a particular vaccine, be prepared to wait around until a chance for the "right" one appears. Personally, I wouldn't risk this.

Now that the EUA has been issued, the company intends to begin pediatric studies. They hope to begin work with adolescents next week. Toward the end of the month, they will begin studies in pregnant people. After mid-year, studies in immunocompromised people will get underway. More information is always better.

We talked a few days ago about mammograms showing suspicious lymph nodes in folks who'd recently been vaccinated; it has been recommended mammograms be delayed until at least six weeks after receiving a vaccination. This is because the vaccine can cause swelling which looks suspicious on these scans without actually indicating any risk for cancer. We are now receiving further notice that anyone undergoing surveillance after treatment for cancers of various kinds should be aware of the possibility

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 13 of 83

that swollen lymph nodes may create confusion in these tests. As much as possible, it would be good to delay any imaging for six weeks after the second dose of vaccine; but if that is not possible, a standard message should be developed for patients receiving scans. Patients who have or have had cancer and develop enlarged lymph nodes after vaccination may need to undergo additional testing, even biopsies of those nodes, in order to determine just what is causing that.

We've mentioned vaccine hesitancy among military personnel and that a fair proportion of military personnel are refusing vaccine at this point. Military spokesperson, John Kirby, said today that the various branches of the military have administered 1.1 million doses of vaccine so far; considering they've received only about 1.3 million doses, they're keeping up. While the services can require members to be vaccinated, they are unable to require vaccines which are not licensed, but only have EUA. No decision has been made yet about whether to make the vaccination mandatory once full licensure is granted.

Across the country, 77 million doses of vaccine have been administered; that's around four-fifths of what's been delivered to states. Nearly 51 million people have now received at least one dose, about half of them fully vaccinated. This means over 15 percent of the population has received one dose and almost eight percent both doses, which is pretty good for this point in the rollout. The seven-day average is over 1.8 million doses per day. This number needs to continue to grow.

We've seen many stories out of the South from that terrible winter storm of a couple of weeks ago. I have one last for you. You will recall that, on Valentine's Day weekend, large swaths of the region, especially in Texas where the power grid is isolated from the rest of the country for reasons on which I'm not entirely clear. Leander, part of the greater Austin area, is one city in Texas that felt the effects.

On Tuesday, February 16, customers at Leander's H-E-B supermarket first experienced the blackout as they were shopping. Most of them hurried through and made their way to the checkout lines only to discover the cashiers were unable to scan and charge for their purchases. Cash registers these days, after all, run on electricity. So do the credit-card/debit-card terminals. A couple of hundred shoppers built up in the checkout lanes, wondering whether they were going to be able to make their purchases or not. Cashiers handled the situation, waving people through without charging them at all.

One shopper told the Washington Post, "And it hit us—like, wow, they're just letting us walk out the door." Just like that. The newspapers noticed, the Houston Chronicle headline reading, "Why H-E-B comes through in a crisis when Texas government doesn't." The whole episode went viral on Tim Hennessy's Facebook timeline where he said, "Then all of a sudden we started moving faster. We both thought: Wow, they are checking out people quickly. Must be all hands on deck." And that was before he actually reached the checkout. When they arrived there, the cashier asked, "Do you have any alcohol?" I said: 'No, but if you are giving out drinks, I could use one about now.' She then said: 'Please go ahead, but we can't bag anything up for you'" He asked, "How or who do we pay for our groceries?" The answer: "Just go ahead and be safe driving home."

His takeaway: "This is the America that I know. Despite all the negative we hear/see being reported daily in the news. American and most Americans are still kind, thoughtful, generous, and caring." They proceeded to demonstrate this caring by helping one another in the parking lot. Those with carts bogged down in the slush received help from fellow shoppers to get to their cars. People who struggled to get started in the slipper conditions received a push to get going. People still help people when it counts, and that makes me feel good.

Stay healthy. I'll be back tomorrow.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 14 of 83

County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	453	432	861	15	Minimal	4.2%
Beadle	2733	2603	5797	39	Substantial	24.4%
Bennett	382	370	1175	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1504	1477	2050	25	Minimal	9.3%
Brookings	3588	3495	11807	37	Moderate	1.8%
Brown	5132	4980	12585	88	Moderate	10.3%
Brule	691	676	1861	9	Minimal	9.7%
Buffalo	420	406	895	13	None	0.0%
Butte	978	943	3201	20	Moderate	6.5%
Campbell	129	125	257	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1294	1213	3883	21	Substantial	8.2%
Clark	371	357	940	5	Moderate	23.1%
Clay	1793	1757	5172	15	Moderate	8.2%
Codington	3989	3815	9576	77	Substantial	21.5%
Corson	468	453	995	12	Minimal	9.7%
Custer	751	728	2683	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2955	2867	6464	61	Moderate	7.0%
Day	663	616	1751	28	Substantial	5.9%
Deuel	473	459	1123	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1412	1373	3798	26	Substantial	7.6%
Douglas	434	412	899	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	482	459	1031	12	Minimal	4.0%
Fall River	527	501	2585	15	Moderate	9.2%
Faulk	360	340	689	13	Moderate	0.0%
Grant	974	904	2208	38	Substantial	13.4%
Gregory	540	496	1255	29	Moderate	8.3%
Haakon	251	236	530	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	713	649	1760	37	Substantial	26.4%
Hand	338	321	801	6	Moderate	11.1%
Hanson	363	347	704	4	Moderate	28.0%
Harding	91	90	181	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2302	2225	6509	36	Substantial	6.0%
Hutchinson	788	748	2345	24	Moderate	7.5%

Broton Daily Independent

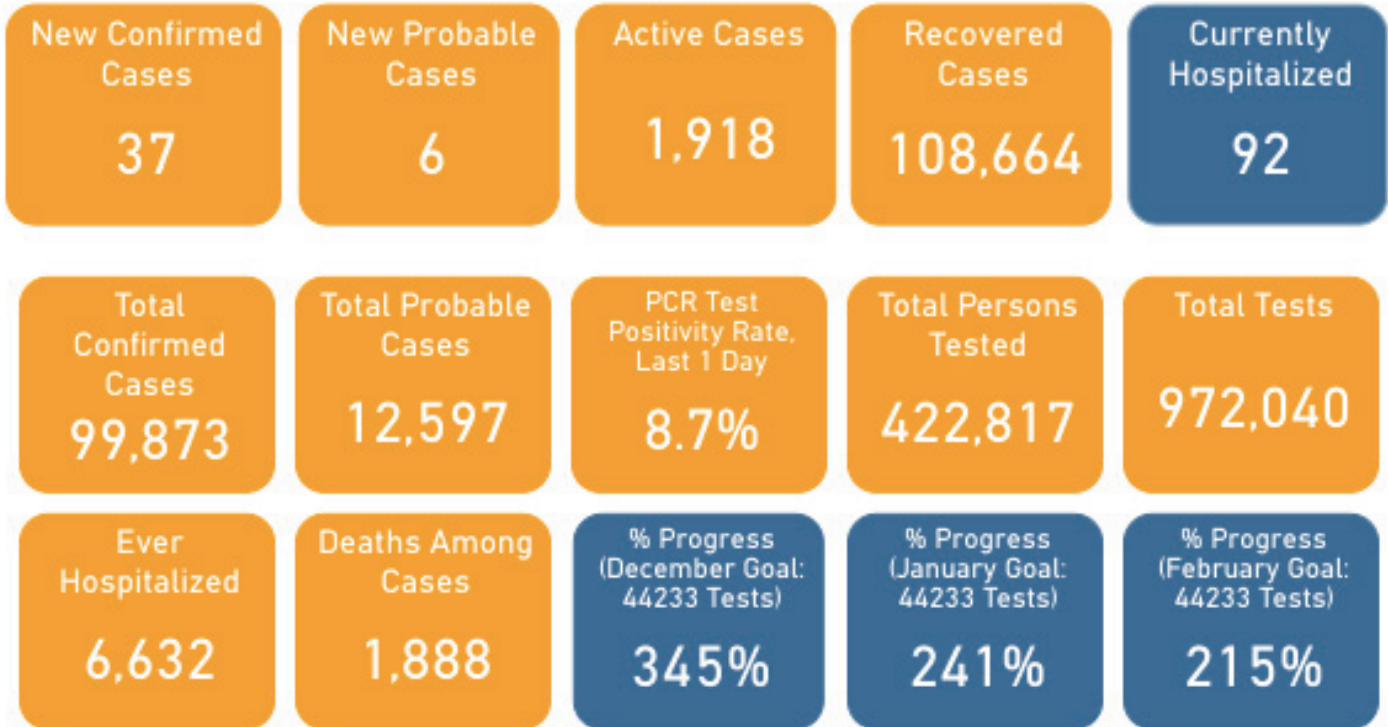
Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 15 of 83

Hyde	138	135	402	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	279	263	907	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	272	249	547	16	Minimal	10.0%
Jones	85	83	219	0	Minimal	12.5%
Kingsbury	639	609	1651	14	Moderate	3.9%
Lake	1192	1145	3261	17	Substantial	7.6%
Lawrence	2825	2746	8461	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	7754	7535	20012	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	598	585	1862	10	Minimal	2.8%
Marshall	319	295	1174	5	Substantial	15.4%
McCook	741	709	1605	24	Moderate	4.0%
McPherson	239	231	547	4	Minimal	12.5%
Meade	2592	2511	7597	31	Substantial	11.4%
Mellette	248	242	723	2	Minimal	33.3%
Miner	271	253	568	9	Minimal	7.1%
Minnehaha	28018	27255	77279	332	Substantial	7.6%
Moody	618	591	1739	16	Moderate	5.9%
Oglala Lakota	2060	1990	6609	49	Moderate	7.2%
Pennington	12908	12498	38907	189	Substantial	10.9%
Perkins	347	329	801	14	Minimal	8.0%
Potter	371	358	823	4	Moderate	14.3%
Roberts	1189	1112	4096	36	Substantial	15.7%
Sanborn	330	321	680	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	798	766	2101	25	Minimal	3.0%
Stanley	331	323	917	2	Moderate	0.0%
Sully	137	132	307	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1219	1189	4089	28	Minimal	8.0%
Tripp	699	663	1467	16	Substantial	21.2%
Turner	1067	1001	2697	53	Moderate	7.1%
Union	1981	1909	6191	39	Substantial	6.7%
Walworth	725	694	1813	15	Moderate	7.0%
Yankton	2802	2742	9254	28	Moderate	6.1%
Ziebach	336	327	859	9	Minimal	7.1%
Unassigned	0	0	1811	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 16 of 83

South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4515	0
10-19 years	12651	0
20-29 years	19990	7
30-39 years	18497	18
40-49 years	16055	35
50-59 years	15865	113
60-69 years	12882	249
70-79 years	6893	431
80+ years	5122	1035

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	58620	888
Male	53850	1000

Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 17 of 83

Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

3

New Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

64

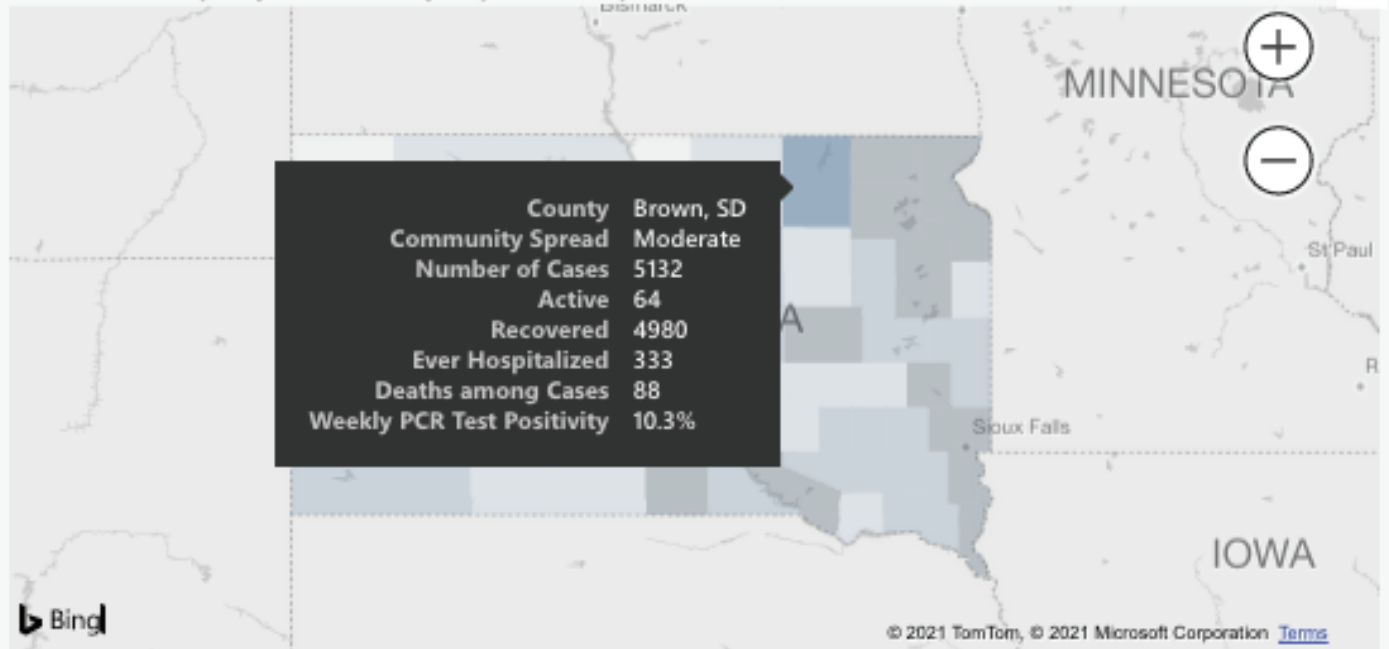
Recovered Cases

4,980

Currently Hospitalized

92

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: None, Minimal, Moderate, Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases

4,590

Total Probable Cases

542

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

12.1%

Total Persons Tested

17,717

Total Tests

47,594

Ever Hospitalized

333

Deaths Among Cases

88

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

345%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

241%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 18 of 83

Day County

New Confirmed Cases

0

New Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

19

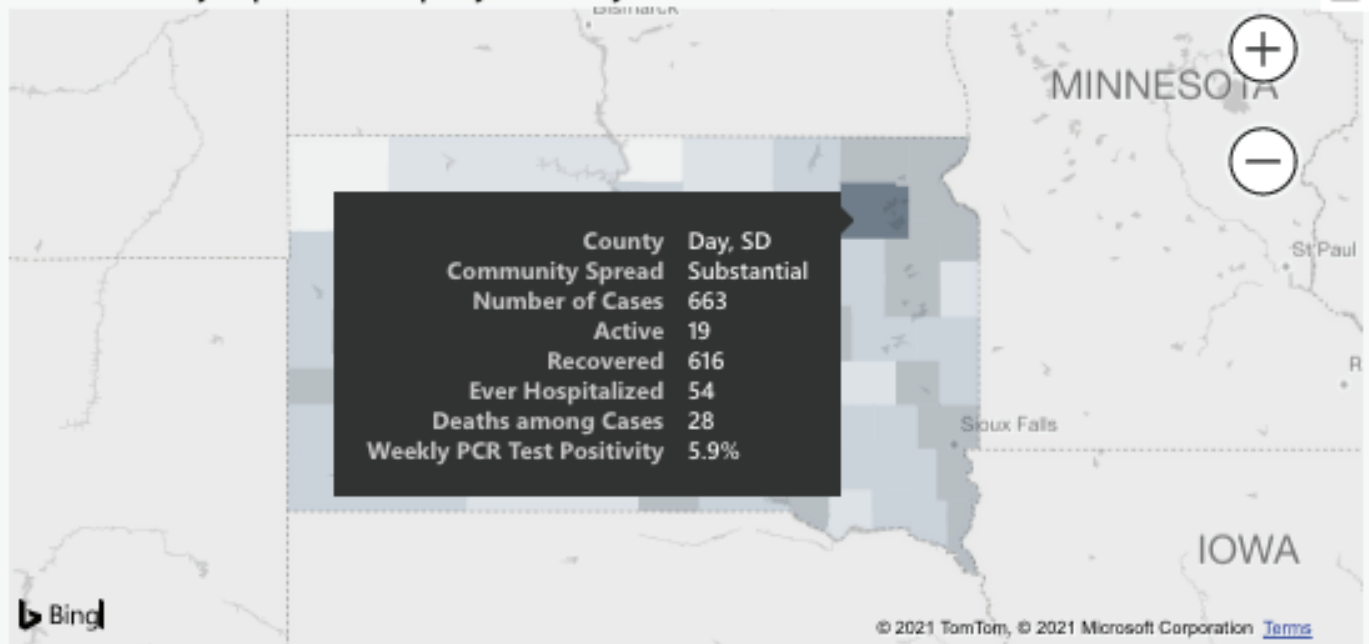
Recovered Cases

616

Currently Hospitalized

92

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

Total Confirmed Cases

514

Total Probable Cases

149

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

0.0%

Total Persons Tested

2,414

Total Tests

8,038

Ever Hospitalized

54

Deaths Among Cases

28

% Progress (December Goal: 44233 Tests)

345%

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

241%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

215%

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 19 of 83

Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

223,798

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

146,264

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

26%

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	113,541
Pfizer	110,257

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	36,621
Moderna - Series Complete	38,460
Pfizer - 1 dose	32,109
Pfizer - Series Complete	39,074

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	25.63%
Series Complete	13.33%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	581	201	190	391
Beadle	4493	1,681	1,406	3,087
Bennett*	381	103	139	242
Bon Homme*	2442	1,128	657	1,785
Brookings	6529	2,849	1,840	4,689
Brown	9749	2,799	3,475	6,274
Brule*	1368	414	477	891
Buffalo*	112	72	20	92
Butte	1473	659	407	1,066
Campbell	793	283	255	538
Charles Mix*	2074	932	571	1,503
Clark	823	329	247	576
Clay	3497	1,019	1,239	2,258
Codington*	7064	2,402	2,331	4,733
Corson*	192	72	60	132
Custer*	1956	758	599	1,357
Davison	5546	1,492	2,027	3,519
Day*	1789	623	583	1,206
Deuel	1027	345	341	686
Dewey*	323	73	125	198
Douglas*	815	247	284	531
Edmunds	886	318	284	602
Fall River*	1940	678	631	1,309
Faulk	715	263	226	489
Grant*	1620	668	476	1,144
Gregory*	1167	461	353	814
Haakon*	415	147	134	281

Broton Daily Independent

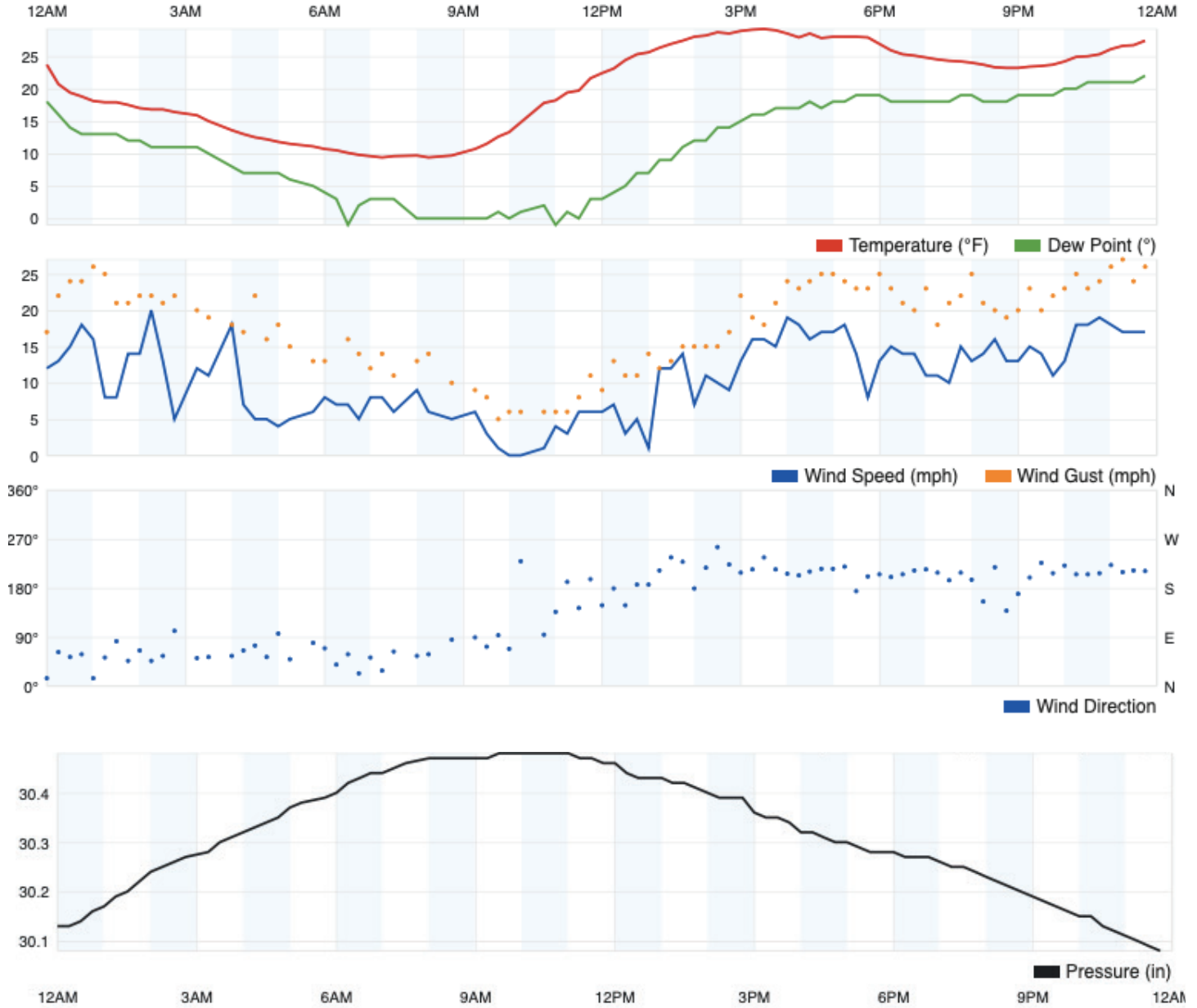
Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 20 of 83

Hamlin	1231	483	374	857
Hand	917	347	285	632
Hanson	341	123	109	232
Harding	54	38	8	46
Hughes*	5506	1,920	1,793	3,713
Hutchinson*	2397	831	783	1,614
Hyde*	373	149	112	261
Jackson*	301	107	97	204
Jerauld	545	277	134	411
Jones*	472	146	163	309
Kingsbury	1518	674	422	1,096
Lake	2694	982	856	1,838
Lawrence	5637	2,177	1,730	3,907
Lincoln	19228	4,538	7,345	11,883
Lyman*	547	177	185	362
Marshall*	1083	437	323	760
McCook	1646	520	563	1,083
McPherson	161	65	48	113
Meade*	4290	1,722	1,284	3,006
Mellette*	35	17	9	26
Miner	643	193	225	418
Minnehaha*	58938	15,258	21,840	37,098
Moody*	1118	474	322	796
Oglala Lakota*	130	52	39	91
Pennington*	26537	7,539	9,499	17,038
Perkins*	385	143	121	264
Potter	560	272	144	416
Roberts*	3198	1,316	941	2,257
Sanborn	729	229	250	479
Spink	2054	720	667	1,387
Stanley*	833	317	258	575
Sully	244	100	72	172
Todd*	128	40	44	84
Tripp*	1550	560	495	1,055
Turner	2590	676	957	1,633
Union	1895	843	526	1,369
Walworth*	1507	473	517	990
Yankton	7369	1,737	2,816	4,553
Ziebach*	46	12	17	29
Other	4598	1,030	1,784	2,814

Groton Daily Independent






Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 21 of 83

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs








Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 22 of 83

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
Sunny	Mostly Clear then Patchy Fog	Areas Fog then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 58 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 58 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 56 °F

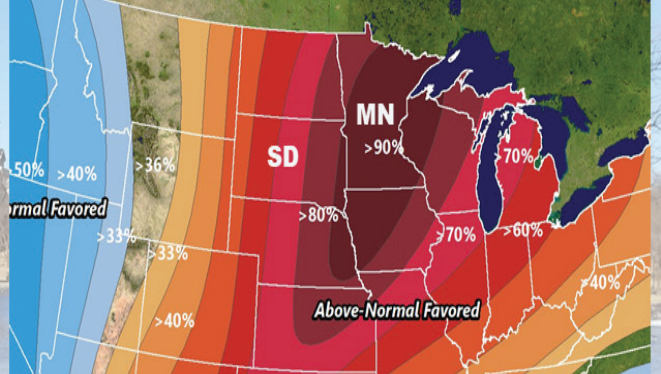
Very Mild Into Next Week

No precipitation through the weekend as well

48° to 60°	45° to 60°+	48° to 60°+	50° to 60°+	55° to 65°+
				
Today Mar 2 nd	Wed Mar 3 rd	Thu Mar 4 th	Fri Mar 5 th	Sat Mar 6 th

6-10 Day Temperature Outlook

Mar 07 - Mar 11, 2021



6-10 Day Precipitation Outlook

Mar 07 - Mar 11, 2021



March is certainly coming in like a lamb, with above normal temperatures likely through the first third of the month (average highs range from about 32 to 42 in early March across the area). Those with snow cover will continue to see it melt in the days ahead, with partly cloudy skies and little to no precipitation.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 23 of 83

Volunteers Needed



**Community Collaborative
Rain Snow & Hail Network**

WANTED:
Volunteers Of All Ages
Measure and Report
Rain Snow and Hail
In Your Own Backyard

Precipitation Analyzed By Meteorologists & Hydrologists To Assess Severe Weather, Droughts and Flooding Threats...We Need Your Data!

Learn More at: <https://www.cocorahs.org/>

CoCoRaHS March Madness 2021
March 1-31, 2021
How many new volunteers can you recruit in your state?



While the NWS can make fairly good assertions about how the weather is impacting the public, observers are invaluable and we just don't have enough of them! Be that person who fills in the gap and helps protect your community. More at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5-sXXg9M30>



Scheduled Radar Outage For Upgrade

What

Scheduled refurbishment and replacement of the **WSR-88D's** pedestal assembly. This is an important piece of the radar that rotates and positions the antenna.

Where

The WSR-88D at the National Weather Service Office in **Aberdeen, SD (KABR)**.

When

The weather radar will be down for approximately two weeks **beginning Monday, March 8**.

Why

This is the third of four major upgrades, known as **service life extension projects**, planned in the next five years to replace and refurbish major components of the 20 year old WSR-88Ds.

Alternate Radar Sites:

Sioux Falls (KFSD) Bismarck (KBIS) Grand Forks (KMOVX)
Rapid City (KUDX) Minneapolis (KMPX) North Platte (KLNK)

Beginning March 8, the KABR radar will be down for about 2 weeks for scheduled maintenance. Technicians will replace the pedestal, an important piece of the radar that rotates and positions the antenna.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 24 of 83

Today in Weather History

March 2, 1966: The blizzard began late on March 2nd in the west and moved very slowly across the state, reaching the extreme east on the 4th, continuing into the 5th. Snow depths ranged from 2 to 4 inches in southeast South Dakota to nearly 3 feet in north-central South Dakota. Winds of 40 to 55 mph with gusts to 70 mph caused widespread blowing snow and near-zero visibilities during the storm. Drifts up to 30 feet were reported in sheltered areas with open fields nearly bare. The storm caused massive livestock losses. Estimated losses were 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1800 hogs. The most substantial losses were in the central and north-central parts of the state. The heavy snow also collapsed many structures. The storm directly caused three deaths due to exposure, and the storm indirectly caused three deaths; 2 due to heart attacks and one by asphyxiation. The blizzard was rated as one of the most severe that has been experienced in South Dakota. Many roads were blocked for days, along with many schools and businesses closed.

March 2, 2007: An area of low pressure moved slowly northeast across the central and northern plains, bringing widespread snowfall along with intense winds. The combination of the falling snow and the existing snow cover resulted in blizzard conditions with visibilities to zero at times. This blizzard event was part of the same upper-level low-pressure trough that brought the heavy snowfall to the area on February 28th. Additional snowfall occurred on March 1st and 2nd across the region as a large area of snow wrapped in from the east. Widespread blizzard conditions developed by noon on March 2nd and continued into the early morning hours of the 3rd. Snowfall amounts, including the snow on February 28th, ranged from 2 inches to as much as 22 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. The heaviest snowfall amounts were across northeastern South Dakota, where total snow depths were in the 25 to 30-inch range. Northwest winds of 30 to 45 mph with gusts near 60 mph brought zero visibilities at times across the area, along with creating large snowdrifts. Schools, businesses, airports, roads, and interstates were closed for up to two days. Travel was not advised across the area. Also, many cars were ditched, along with several accidents. Many travelers were stranded, and several shelters were opened. The Emergency Operations Center was activated in Pierre, and the Governor declared the blizzard area a disaster. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts over the three days included 11 inches at Andover, Hosmer, and Redfield, 12 inches at Webster, 13 inches at Miller, 14 inches at Victor, Groton, and Clark, 15 inches at Castlewood and Summit, 16 inches at Watertown and Roy Lake, 19 inches at Sisseton, 20 inches at Milbank, 21 inches at Bryant, and 22 inches at Clear Lake.

1927: Raleigh, North Carolina, was buried under 17.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location until 2000. On January 25, 2000, Raleigh saw 17.9 inches of snow in 24 hours.

1988: Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south-central U.S. A tornado in Baton Rouge, Louisiana injured two persons, and another tornado caused five million dollars damage at the airport in Lafayette, Louisiana.

1990: Twenty-two ships were trapped by ice in the worst ice jam in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 10 years. The ice was 23 feet thick.

Groton Daily Independent

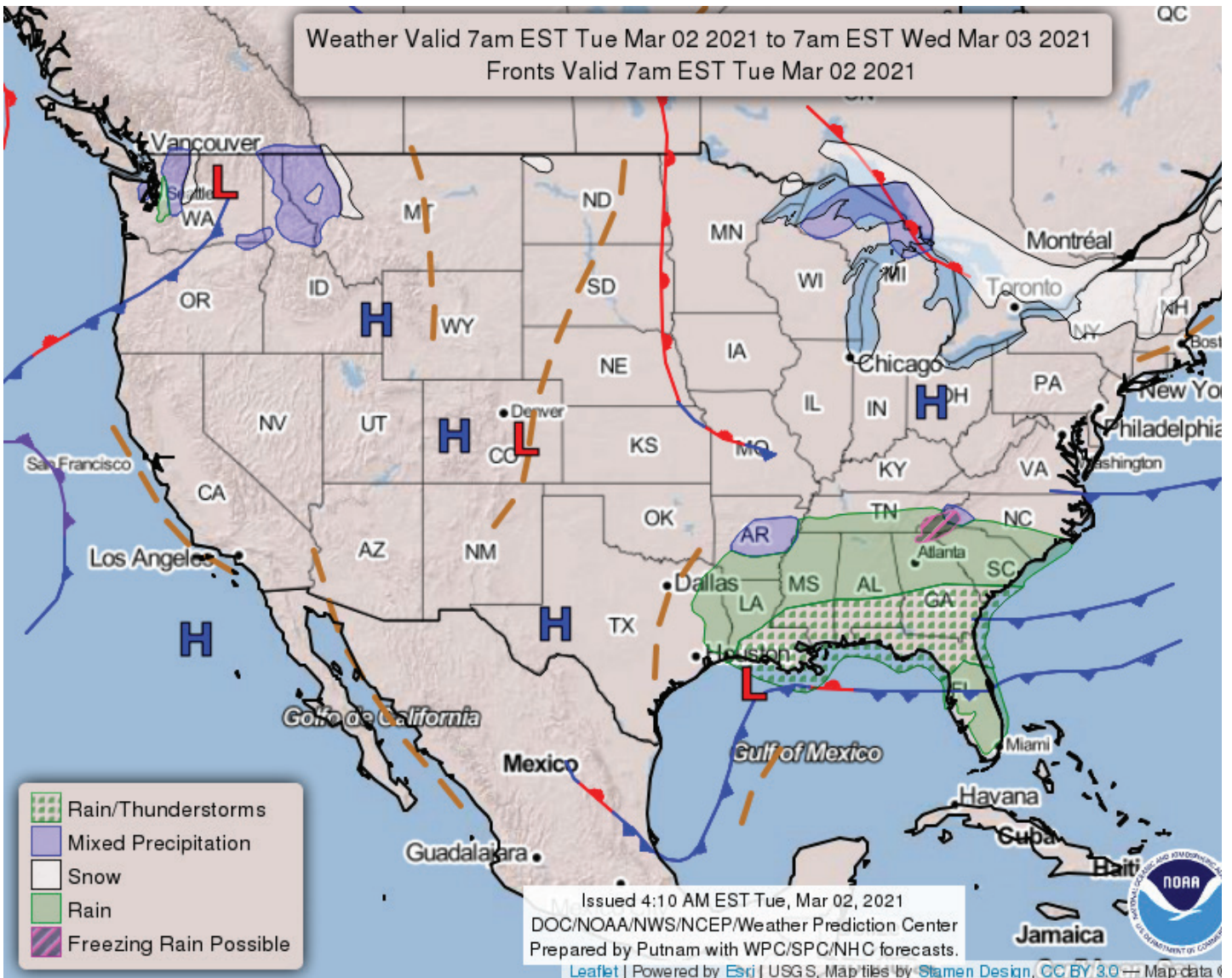
Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 25 of 83

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 29 °F at 3:48 PM
Low Temp: 9 °F at 7:18 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 11:07 PM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1905, 1974
Record Low: -21° in 1913
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 14°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.03
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.05
Precip Year to Date: 0.18
Sunset Tonight: 6:23 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 26 of 83



FACING THE UNKNOWN

Imagine, if you can, leaving your loved ones behind as you depart for a war zone. Think, if it is possible, how you would feel if you were told you had stage-four cancer and there was no treatment to help prolong your life. Consider, if you will, what you would do if you discovered that your loved one had abandoned you.

While we hear of these tragedies impacting others, few of us would welcome or want them to invade our lives or the lives of our loved ones. But what happens if they do? The Psalmist gives us comfort if or when we must embrace the unwelcome tragedies of life.

"In times of trouble may the Lord answer your cry," he writes. Not hear your cry, nor think about your cry, nor put your cry on His waiting list. But may He answer your cry.

Life is filled with unexpected tragedies. One moment everything is the way we had planned it to be and the next moment things are upside down. Often we are faced with unforeseen temptations that present choices we never thought we would have to face. But, fortunately, we do not face life alone. We have the protection of God, the power of the risen Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to rescue us from defeat.

We cannot avoid the trials or tragedies of life. Nor do we need to face them alone. God is there to protect and defend us. Victory is ours when our lives are in God's hands.

Prayer: Thank You, Father that Your ear is open to our cry and Your strength available when we need help. May we look to You, and not ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In times of trouble, may the Lord answer your cry. May the name of the God of Jacob keep you safe from all harm. Psalm 20:1

FINAL EXPENSES

Check this off your to-do list!



Guaranteed, modified whole life coverage from Physicians Life Insurance Company that's affordable and easy to get.

- Guaranteed acceptance for ages 45 to 85*
- No medical exam! No health questions!
- Lock in your rate for life

Call for a FREE, no-obligation Information Kit.

1-855-621-0363

>> www.life55plus.info/gdi

*Ages may vary by state. Guaranteed for one of these life insurance policies. Benefits reduced first two years.

Insurance Policy L770 (ID: L770ID; OK: L770OK; TN: L770TN).

6238

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 28 of 83

2021 Community Events

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 29 of 83

News from the Associated Press

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

First Round=

Class B=

Region 1=

Great Plains Lutheran 51, Britton-Hecla 48

Leola/Frederick 64, Wilmot 40

Region 3=

Arlington 63, Iroquois 29

Estelline/Hendricks 72, James Valley Christian 52

Hitchcock-Tulare 62, Lake Preston 57

Region 4=

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 58, Colman-Egan 41

Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 55, Mitchell Christian 50

Region 5=

Centerville 65, Menno 54

Gayville-Volin 58, Freeman 39

Irene-Wakonda 50, Scotland 32

Region 6=

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 57, Bon Homme 50

Kimball/White Lake 57, Colome 56

Marty Indian 71, Avon 51

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

Former South Dakota AG Jackley says he'll seek old job

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Former South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley announced Monday he will run again for his old job in 2022, as the current attorney general faces calls for his resignation and impeachment over a fatal car crash.

The announcement by Jackley, a Republican, positions him to replace Attorney General Jason Ravensborg — also a Republican — who is dealing with a political crisis from striking and killing a man with his car last year. Jackley served as the state's attorney general from 2009 to 2019, winning reelection twice. He ran for governor in 2018, losing in the GOP primary to Kristi Noem, who went on to win the general election.

Jackley said over the last few months people from across the state have urged him to seek the post of the state's top law enforcement official again.

"I love and believe in what the attorney general stands for and that's protecting South Dakotans and defending our constitutional rights," he said, adding that he would use "the trust that I've earned" from years of holding the position.

Jackley said that he had spoken with Ravensborg and told him he intended to seek the office next year, but added he would "leave the rest of what's going to happen to the attorney general's decision and the legislative process."

If Ravensborg resigns or if the Legislature removes him from office, Noem would get to name his replacement. Noem has called for his resignation, along with law enforcement groups. A House committee is expected Wednesday to discuss how to move forward with Ravensborg's impeachment.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 30 of 83

Ravnsborg is also facing three misdemeanor traffic charges, as well as questions from lawmakers about his conduct following the crash. He was returning from a Republican fundraiser late on Sept. 12 when he struck and killed 55-year-old Joseph Boever, who was walking on the shoulder of a rural highway. He said he thought he had hit a deer until he returned to the accident scene the next day and found the body.

Jackley announced his candidacy with the endorsement of Mark Barnett, a three-term attorney general and recently retired circuit judge, as well as Butte County Sheriff Fred Lamphere and Clay County State's Attorney Alexis Tracy.

Jackley argued before the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of the state in 2018, defending the state's ability to charge sales tax for online purchases. He has been working as an attorney in Pierre with the Gunderson Palmer law firm.

Study shows that Minnesota deer were exposed to insecticides

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A preliminary study shows that deer throughout Minnesota have been exposed to a certain class of insecticides, the state Department of Natural Resources said Monday.

The DNR said further analysis is required to determine if the presence of neonicotinoid pesticides is high enough to adversely affect deer health. Additional study results should be completed this spring.

Neonicotinoids, often referred to as "neonics," are the most widely used class of insecticides worldwide and are found in more than 500 commercial and domestic products in the United States. They are present in products used for insect control in homes, gardens, yards, and crops, as well as on pets.

The DNR launched the project in fall 2019 following a study conducted on captive deer in South Dakota that raised concerns about potential adverse effects of neonicotinoid exposure, including reduced fawn survival.

The study asked Minnesota hunters to submit spleens from their harvest wild deer. Nearly 2,000 people requested sampling kits that resulted in the collection of 800 spleens from all areas of the state. Early results show that 61% of those samples indicated exposure to neonicotinoids.

The Minnesota Department of Health believes there is likely "little-to-no" human health risk from eating venison from deer that may have been exposed to the substances.

Midwest Economy: February state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for February:

Arkansas: The overall index increased to 79.8 from January's 76.9. Components from the February survey of supply managers were: new orders at 81.4, production or sales at 79.2, delivery lead time at 83.0, inventories at 81.1, and employment at 81.1. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have expanded at a healthy pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in Arkansas have expanded by 4.6% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Iowa: Iowa's overall index dipped to 71.1 from 71.5 in January. Components were: new orders at 80.2, production, or sales, at 68.9, delivery lead time at 78.4, employment at 68.8, and inventories at 68.4. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in Iowa have expanded at a healthy pace. However, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in the state have been flat since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Kansas: The state's overall index slipped to 61.6 from 62.0 in January. Components were: new orders at

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 31 of 83

68.7, production or sales at 74.2, delivery lead time at 67.0, employment at 60.8, and inventories at 37.4. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have expanded at a slow pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in the state have expanded by weak 0.6% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Minnesota: The overall index climbed to 68.8 from 66.9 in January. Components were: new orders at 78.7, production or sales at 76.1, delivery lead time at 72.9, inventories at 51.5, and employment at 64.9. "Since July of last year, nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have expanded at a healthy pace while durable goods producers have advanced at a slow pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in the state have expanded by 2.6% since the onset of COVID-19," said Goss.

Missouri: The overall index rose to 64.2 from 62.5 in January. Components were: new orders at 77.3, production or sales at 76.4, delivery lead time at 67.5, inventories at 38.8, and employment at 61.1. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have expanded at an anemic pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in Missouri have expanded by a strong 6.1% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Nebraska: The overall index rose to 70.8 from 69.2 in January. Components were: new orders at 80.2, production or sales at 76.5, delivery lead time at 74.3, inventories at 57.2, and employment at 65.9. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have expanded at a slow pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in Nebraska have expanded by 1.7% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index increased to 76.0 from 75.6 in January. Components were: new orders at 80.5, production or sales at 78.2, delivery lead time at 79.7, employment at 69.7, and inventories at 71.9. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have experienced only slight growth. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in North Dakota have expanded by 2.9% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Oklahoma: The state's overall index expanded to 67.1 from 65.4 in January. Components were: new orders at 78.1, production or sales at 75.3, delivery lead time at 70.5, inventories at 48.7, and employment at 63.2. "Since July of last year, nondurable goods manufacturers in the state have advanced at a slow pace while durable goods producers experienced only slight growth. However according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in the state have expanded by a very strong 12.9% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

South Dakota: The overall index climbed to 64.0 from 62.2 in January. Components were: new orders at 77.2, production or sales at 74.3, delivery lead time at 67.2, inventories at 38.0, and employment at 63.4. "Since July of last year, both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers in South Dakota have expanded at a slow pace. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, manufacturing wages for production workers in the state have expanded by 0.1% since the onset of COVID-19," Goss said.

Survey: Economy grows, but inflation, shipping worries loom

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy in nine Midwest and Plains states continues to improve to levels seen before the start of the coronavirus pandemic last year, according to a new monthly survey of business leaders, but concerns about rising inflation and bottlenecks in the supply chain are tempering economic optimism.

February's overall index of the Creighton University Mid-America Business Conditions suggests improved growth, coming in at a strong 69.6 from January's 67.3.

Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession. But more than eight of 10 supply managers reported supply bottlenecks and delays of deliveries in receiving raw materials and supplies from vendors, said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey. One supply manager noted in the January survey that his company's order fulfillment times that had been at 8 to 10 weeks have extended to 20 to 22 weeks.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 32 of 83

The survey also is tracking higher inflationary pressure at the wholesale level, Goss said.

"Metal products and lumber, for example, are experiencing significant upward pressures in prices," Goss said.

The survey's confidence index, which looks ahead six months, dropped to 50.0 from January's 53.6, and Goss placed the blame squarely with business leaders' concerns over inflation and supply disruptions.

The employment index rose to 65.6 in February from January's 57.2, with Goss noting that the region has regained almost half the manufacturing jobs lost to the pandemic.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

Thousands of doses of new vaccine headed for South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota is expected to receive 7,000 doses this week of the recently approved Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine.

It brings the state's allotment to just over 25,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine per week.

South Dakota Department of Health Secretary Kim Malsam-Rysdon says the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a great option for people that have trouble being able to schedule a second dose.

"Folks that maybe they are in another state for the winter and they're coming home and just the logistics of the two-dose vaccine make it hard for some people and so we do expect there to be some excitement among people to get the one dose and just be done with it," Malsam-Rysdon said.

The Food and Drug Administration on Saturday cleared the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. One dose is 85% protective against the most severe COVID-19 illness, in a massive study that spanned three continents.

This vaccine does not require extremely cold storage facilities. Dr. David Basel of Avera Medical says the storage differences will make a big impact, KSFY-TV reported.

"It's a lot more shelf-stable so refrigerator stable so it doesn't have to require near the special handling that some of the vaccines that we've had out before need so there's a lot of advantages coming out with this vaccine," said Dr. Basel.

Alarm grows in Serbia over virus surge; lockdown urged

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbian health experts urged the government on Tuesday to introduce a state of emergency and a strict lockdown to halt a surge in coronavirus infections that they say threaten the Balkan nation's health care system.

The numbers of daily new infections have been rising sharply in the nation of 7 million despite a mass inoculation campaign that so far has seen nearly 1 million people receive a first vaccine shot. That rate of vaccinations has made Serbia, a non-European Union nation, one of the best in Europe when it comes to delivering vaccines to its citizens.

Still, the demand for a state of emergency is unlikely to win support from the conservative government, which is hoping that its program of trying to get vaccines from the West, China and Russia will pull Serbia out of the pandemic's devastating economic and social undertow.

Chief epidemiologist Predrag Kon of the government-appointed coronavirus crisis team told the state RTS television network on Tuesday that there is "no alternative" to ordering a lockdown.

"We must ban contacts or we will break. And then we will realize what it means when the health system collapses," he said.

"The exhaustion is beyond all limits," Kon said of the country's medical workers. "It can no longer be tolerated."

Health authorities say 4,000 COVID-19 patients remain hospitalized in Serbia and reported new infections have reached 3,500 a day, up from under 2,000 a day only a few weeks ago. Serbia has recorded nearly 4,500 virus-related deaths.

Experts have blamed the recent surge of infections on private parties and nightclubs flouting anti-virus

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 33 of 83

rules as well as on ski resorts that stayed open throughout the winter.

Yet the nation's top officials are against imposing a lockdown, warning that would hurt Serbia's economy. President Aleksandar Vucic said in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo that "I don't believe we are close to (introducing) a state of emergency."

Vucic said Serbia expects to receive additional vaccines in the coming weeks and expressed hope that further inoculations will help bring down the surge.

"We must show more discipline, we have all behaved irresponsibly," Vucic said. "But people are fed up. They must work, our economies must work."

Serbia introduced a curfew and a strict lockdown at the start of the outbreak last year, but has relaxed anti-virus rules in the past few months. Still, cafes and restaurants must close at 8 p.m., gatherings are limited and masks are mandatory in closed spaces.

Analysts say Serbia's relative success on the mass inoculation front might have prompted people to lower their guard regarding virus protection.

Serbia has vaccinated most people with China's Sinopharm jabs, followed by Pfizer, Russia's Sputnik V and recently the AstraZeneca shot.

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

Analysis: Biden retreats from vow to make pariah of Saudis

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

As a presidential candidate, Joe Biden promised to make a pariah out of Saudi Arabia over the 2018 killing of dissident Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi. But when it came time to actually punish Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Biden's perception of America's strategic interests prevailed.

The Biden administration made clear Friday it would forgo sanctions or any other major penalty against Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Khashoggi killing, even after a U.S. intelligence report concluded the prince ordered the it.

The decision highlights how the real-time decisions of diplomacy often collide with the righteousness of the moral high ground. And nowhere is this conundrum more stark than in the United States' complicated relationship with Saudi Arabia — the world's oil giant, a U.S. arms customer and a counterbalance to Iran in the Middle East.

"It is undeniable that Saudi Arabia is a hugely influential country in the Arab world," State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday when asked about Biden's retreat from his promise to isolate the Saudis over the killing.

Ultimately, Biden administration officials said, U.S. interests in maintaining relations with Saudi Arabia forbid making a pariah of a young prince who may go on to rule the kingdom for decades. That stands in stark contrast to Biden's campaign promise to make the kingdom "pay the price" for human rights abuses and "make them in fact the pariah that they are."

"We've talked about this in terms of a recalibration. It's not a rupture," Price said of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

But what the Biden administration is calling a "recalibration" of former President Donald Trump's warm relationship with Saudi royals looks a lot like the normal U.S. stand before Trump: chiding on human rights abuses in the kingdom, but not allowing those concerns to interfere with relations with Saudi Arabia.

In recent days, Biden officials have responded to intense criticism of its failure to sanction the prince by pointing to U.S. measures targeting his lower-ranking associates.

Those include steps against the prince's "Tiger squad" that allegedly has sought out dissidents abroad and sanctions and visa restrictions upon Saudi officials who directly participated in Khashoggi's slaying and dismemberment.

The language itself has softened, with Biden officials referring to Saudi Arabia as a strategic partner

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 34 of 83

rather than pariah.

Watching it all, Trump suggested over the weekend that Biden's stand on Saudi Arabia's prince wasn't so different from his after all. Khashoggi's killing by Mohammed bin Salman's security and intelligence officials was bad, Trump told Fox News, "but we have to look at it as an overall" situation. Biden seems to be "viewing it maybe in a similar fashion, very interesting, actually."

Mohammed bin Salman, 35, has consolidated power in Saudi Arabia since his father Salman, now 85 and ailing, became king in 2015. The prince soon after launched a Saudi-led war in neighboring Yemen that has deepened hunger and poverty in that country; opened a recently ended economic blockade of Qatar; and invited the leader of another Arab country, Lebanon, for a visit and without warning detained him.

The prince has silenced civil society at home, imprisoning writers, clerics, businesspeople and women's rights advocates, detaining and allegedly torturing fellow royals, and allegedly forming a squad charged with luring or abducting exiles back to the kingdom to face further punishment.

Khashoggi had fled Saudi Arabia and was deepening his criticism of the prince in columns written for The Washington Post. When Khashoggi scheduled an Oct. 2, 2018, appointment at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to pick up paperwork needed for his wedding, Saudi security and intelligence officials were waiting for him there. So was Saudi security's forensics chief, known for his techniques for rapid dissections. Khashoggi's remains have never been found.

Senate Intelligence Chairman Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, told The Associated Press on Monday that he was open to more sanctions. But Warner, too, stressed that the United States needs to maintain the relationship with Saudi Arabia.

"This is a dangerous neighborhood. And the Saudis are critical in terms of keeping pressure on Iran," Warner said.

Rights groups and the few Saudi dissidents in exile who still dare to speak say the United States is making a mistake. They say Prince Mohammed's actions in his first five years in power show he's not bound by international norms or diplomatic persuasion. Waiving penalties on Mohammed bin Salman now also sends a signal to Saudis on the succession, when Salman dies, they say.

Forgoing punishment in such a brutal killing, of an internationally known journalist, sends a message of impunity for future slayings, not just for the prince but for all authoritarian governments, said Sarah Leah Whitson, leader of Democracy for the Arab World Now, a rights group Khashoggi founded not long before his death.

The Biden administration "basically sent the message that if you're at the top you're safe, and business will continue as usual, as long as we agree on some low-level officials to throw under the bus," Whitson said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Ellen Knickmeyer, who reported in Saudi Arabia from 2011-14, covers foreign policy and national security for The Associated Press. She reported from Oklahoma City.

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

Analysis: Biden retreats from vow to make pariah of Saudis

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

As a presidential candidate, Joe Biden promised to make a pariah out of Saudi Arabia over the 2018 killing of dissident Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi. But when it came time to actually punish Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Biden's perception of America's strategic interests prevailed.

The Biden administration made clear Friday it would forgo sanctions or any other major penalty against Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Khashoggi killing, even after a U.S. intelligence report concluded the prince ordered the it.

The decision highlights how the real-time decisions of diplomacy often collide with the righteousness of the moral high ground. And nowhere is this conundrum more stark than in the United States' complicated relationship with Saudi Arabia — the world's oil giant, a U.S. arms customer and a counterbalance to Iran

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 35 of 83

in the Middle East.

"It is undeniable that Saudi Arabia is a hugely influential country in the Arab world," State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday when asked about Biden's retreat from his promise to isolate the Saudis over the killing.

Ultimately, Biden administration officials said, U.S. interests in maintaining relations with Saudi Arabia forbid making a pariah of a young prince who may go on to rule the kingdom for decades. That stands in stark contrast to Biden's campaign promise to make the kingdom "pay the price" for human rights abuses and "make them in fact the pariah that they are."

"We've talked about this in terms of a recalibration. It's not a rupture," Price said of the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

But what the Biden administration is calling a "recalibration" of former President Donald Trump's warm relationship with Saudi royals looks a lot like the normal U.S. stand before Trump: chiding on human rights abuses in the kingdom, but not allowing those concerns to interfere with relations with Saudi Arabia.

In recent days, Biden officials have responded to intense criticism of its failure to sanction the prince by pointing to U.S. measures targeting his lower-ranking associates.

Those include steps against the prince's "Tiger squad" that allegedly has sought out dissidents abroad and sanctions and visa restrictions upon Saudi officials who directly participated in Khashoggi's slaying and dismemberment.

The language itself has softened, with Biden officials referring to Saudi Arabia as a strategic partner rather than pariah.

Watching it all, Trump suggested over the weekend that Biden's stand on Saudi Arabia's prince wasn't so different from his after all. Khashoggi's killing by Mohammed bin Salman's security and intelligence officials was bad, Trump told Fox News, "but we have to look at it as an overall" situation. Biden seems to be "viewing it maybe in a similar fashion, very interesting, actually."

Mohammed bin Salman, 35, has consolidated power in Saudi Arabia since his father Salman, now 85 and ailing, became king in 2015. The prince soon after launched a Saudi-led war in neighboring Yemen that has deepened hunger and poverty in that country; opened a recently ended economic blockade of Qatar; and invited the leader of another Arab country, Lebanon, for a visit and without warning detained him.

The prince has silenced civil society at home, imprisoning writers, clerics, businesspeople and women's rights advocates, detaining and allegedly torturing fellow royals, and allegedly forming a squad charged with luring or abducting exiles back to the kingdom to face further punishment.

Khashoggi had fled Saudi Arabia and was deepening his criticism of the prince in columns written for The Washington Post. When Khashoggi scheduled an Oct. 2, 2018, appointment at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to pick up paperwork needed for his wedding, Saudi security and intelligence officials were waiting for him there. So was Saudi security's forensics chief, known for his techniques for rapid dissections. Khashoggi's remains have never been found.

Senate Intelligence Chairman Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, told The Associated Press on Monday that he was open to more sanctions. But Warner, too, stressed that the United States needs to maintain the relationship with Saudi Arabia.

"This is a dangerous neighborhood. And the Saudis are critical in terms of keeping pressure on Iran," Warner said.

Rights groups and the few Saudi dissidents in exile who still dare to speak say the United States is making a mistake. They say Prince Mohammed's actions in his first five years in power show he's not bound by international norms or diplomatic persuasion. Waiving penalties on Mohammed bin Salman now also sends a signal to Saudis on the succession, when Salman dies, they say.

Forgoing punishment in such a brutal killing, of an internationally known journalist, sends a message of impunity for future slayings, not just for the prince but for all authoritarian governments, said Sarah Leah Whitson, leader of Democracy for the Arab World Now, a rights group Khashoggi founded not long before his death.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 36 of 83

The Biden administration “basically sent the message that if you’re at the top you’re safe, and business will continue as usual, as long as we agree on some low-level officials to throw under the bus,” Whitson said.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Ellen Knickmeyer, who reported in Saudi Arabia from 2011-14, covers foreign policy and national security for The Associated Press. She reported from Oklahoma City.

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington contributed to this report.

Myanmar police fire tear gas, rubber bullets at protesters

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Police in Myanmar repeatedly used tear gas and rubber bullets Tuesday against crowds protesting last month’s coup, but the demonstrators regrouped after each volley and tried to defend themselves with barricades as standoffs between protesters and security forces intensified.

Myanmar authorities have escalated their crackdown on the protests in recent days, making mass arrests and firing into the crowds. The United Nations said it believed at least 18 people were killed on Sunday by security forces. Foreign ministers from Southeast Asian countries were meeting Tuesday to discuss the increasingly volatile crisis.

Despite the crackdown, demonstrators have continued to flood the streets — and are beginning to more rigorously resist attempts to disperse them. Hundreds, many wearing construction helmets and carrying makeshift shields, gathered in Myanmar’s largest city of Yangon, where a day earlier police had fired repeated rounds of tear gas. They dragged bamboo poles and debris to form barricades, chanted slogans and sang songs at the police lines. They even threw banana skins onto the road in front of them in a bid to slow any police rush.

The mainly young demonstrators fled in panic each time tear gas canisters were fired but soon returned to their barricades. Videos posted on social media showed similar chaotic scenes in the Insein neighborhood of northern Yangon.

Protesters also took up their flags and banners to march through the streets of Dawei, a small city in southeastern Myanmar that has seen almost daily large demonstrations against the coup. One group of demonstrators was targeted by the security forces as it entered a narrow street on its way to pay respects at the house of a man killed in Sunday’s crackdown. Another was attacked on the main street in the city’s center.

Police also dispersed protests in Mandalay, the country’s second-largest city, on Tuesday.

Yangon, Dawei and Mandalay were among the cities where security forces reportedly fired live ammunition into crowds Sunday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office. There were reports that they also fired live rounds Tuesday, but they could not immediately be confirmed.

Some fear the junta’s escalating use of force is meant to provoke a violent backlash by the demonstrators — who have largely remained nonviolent — in order to discredit them and justify an even harsher crackdown. Videos from recent days show a greater number of protesters trying to stand their ground and throw objects at the police.

“I beg the people in Myanmar not to fall in this trap, so to stay peaceful,” U.N. Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener said in interview with CNN, acknowledging that it was easier for her, safely away from the violence, to urge peaceful protesting. She also accused the authorities of spreading rumors about the conditions of people in detention to stir up even more anger on the streets.

The Feb. 1 coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar after five decades of military rule. It came the day a newly elected Parliament was supposed to take office. Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy party would have been installed for a second five-year term, but instead she was detained along with President Win Myint and other senior officials.

The military government has charged Suu Kyi, 75, with several offenses that critics say are trumped up merely to keep her jailed and potentially prevent her from participating in the election promised in a year’s time by the military. Her party says it does not know where Suu Kyi — who has a long history of

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 37 of 83

campaigning for democracy in Myanmar — is being held.

The weekend crackdown drew international condemnation. In addition to the use of force, authorities also detained more than 1,000 people over the weekend, according to the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Those detained included at least eight journalists, among them Thein Zaw of The Associated Press.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the use of force and arbitrary arrests “unacceptable,” according to his spokesperson. The U.S., British and other governments issued similar statements of concern.

But the military has showed no sign of backing down.

The protesters and their supporters have appealed for help from abroad, but there are few prospects for major intervention. The results of Tuesday’s special meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, held by video conference because of the coronavirus pandemic, were expected to be announced in the evening. But the 10-nation regional group’s policy of seeking a consensus among its members makes it unlikely to take strong action.

The U.N.’s independent expert on human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has proposed that countries could institute a global embargo on the sale of arms to Myanmar and “tough, targeted and coordinated sanctions” against those responsible for the coup, the crackdown and other rights abuses.

But any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations would be difficult since two permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it. Some countries have imposed or are considering imposing their own sanctions.

Associated Press writers Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Eileen Ng in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, contributed to this report.

6 Dr. Seuss books won’t be published for racist images

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Six Dr. Seuss books — including “And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street” and “If I Ran the Zoo” — will stop being published because of racist and insensitive imagery, the business that preserves and protects the author’s legacy said Tuesday.

“These books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong,” Dr. Seuss Enterprises told The Associated Press in a statement that coincided with the late author and illustrator’s birthday.

“Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss Enterprises’ catalog represents and supports all communities and families,” it said.

The other books affected are “McElligot’s Pool,” “On Beyond Zebra!,” “Scrambled Eggs Super!,” and “The Cat’s Quizzer.”

The decision to cease publication and sales of the books was made last year after months of discussion, the company told AP.

“Dr. Seuss Enterprises listened and took feedback from our audiences including teachers, academics and specialists in the field as part of our review process. We then worked with a panel of experts, including educators, to review our catalog of titles,” it said.

Books by Dr. Seuss — who was born Theodor Seuss Geisel in Springfield, Massachusetts, on March 2, 1904 — have been translated into dozens of languages as well as in braille and are sold in more than 100 countries. He died in 1991.

He remains popular, earning an estimated \$33 million before taxes in 2020, up from just \$9.5 million five years ago, the company said. Forbes listed him No. 2 on its highest-paid dead celebrities of 2020, behind only the late pop star Michael Jackson.

As adored as Dr. Seuss is by millions around the world for the positive values in many of his works, including environmentalism and tolerance, there has been increasing criticism in recent years over the way Blacks, Asians and others are drawn in some of his most beloved children’s books, as well as in his earlier

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 38 of 83

advertising and propaganda illustrations.

The National Education Association, which founded Read Across America Day in 1998 and deliberately aligned it with Geisel's birthday, has for several years deemphasized Seuss and encouraged a more diverse reading list for children.

School districts across the country have also moved away from Dr. Seuss, prompting Loudoun County, Virginia, schools just outside Washington, D.C., to douse rumors last month that they were banning the books entirely.

"Research in recent years has revealed strong racial undertones in many books written/illustrated by Dr. Seuss," the school district said in a statement.

In 2017, a school librarian in Cambridge, Massachusetts, criticized a gift of 10 Seuss books from first lady Melania Trump, saying many of his works were "steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes."

In 2018, a Dr. Seuss museum in his hometown of Springfield removed a mural that included an Asian stereotype.

"The Cat in the Hat," one of Seuss' most popular books, has received criticism, too, but will continue to be published for now.

Dr. Seuss Enterprises, however, said it is "committed to listening and learning and will continue to review our entire portfolio."

Numerous other popular children's series have been criticized in recent years for alleged racism.

In the 2007 book, "Should We Burn Babar?," the author and educator Herbert R. Kohl contended that the "Babar the Elephant" books were celebrations of colonialism because of how the title character leaves the jungle and later returns to "civilize" his fellow animals.

One of the books, "Babar's Travels," was removed from the shelves of a British library in 2012 because of its alleged stereotypes of Africans. Critics also have faulted the "Curious George" books for their premise of a white man bringing home a monkey from Africa.

And Laura Ingalls Wilder's portrayals of Native Americans in her "Little House On the Prairie" novels have been faulted so often that the American Library Association removed her name in 2018 from a lifetime achievement award it gives out each year.

AP National Writer Hillel Italie contributed from New York.

Israeli attorney general slams Netanyahu's vaccine diplomacy

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's attorney general has warned Benjamin Netanyahu that he cannot single-handedly share the country's surplus vaccines with far-flung allies in Africa, Europe and Latin America, and that such an important decision cannot be made by the prime minister alone.

In an official letter, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit argues that Netanyahu should have consulted the Cabinet for such a plan. The justice ministry released the letter, addressed to the national security adviser, Meir Ben Shabbat, on Monday.

Netanyahu's announcement last week of his decision to share some of Israel's vaccine stockpile had caused an uproar and was later frozen, due to legal questions in Israel, but not before thousands of vaccine doses were shipped to Honduras and reportedly the Czech Republic as well.

Netanyahu has not identified the countries he intended to receive Israeli vaccines, but an Israeli TV station said they included a number of nations supportive of Israel's claims to the contested city of Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel has immunized over half of its population against the coronavirus in one of the world's most successful vaccination drives since late December. Netanyahu is casting the country's vaccination success as a personal accomplishment as part of his campaigning ahead of the upcoming March 23 elections.

The prime minister secured deals with drug makers Pfizer and Moderna to ensure enough supplies for

Israel's 9.3 million people.

But his controversial plan has raised questions at home about Netanyahu's decision-making as well as his choice to help nations in Africa and Latin America at a time of global shortages, and when the neighboring Palestinian territories are struggling to secure their own vaccine supplies.

Critics say Netanyahu's plan illustrates how the prime minister treats the vaccine as an asset that can be used for diplomatic gain.

On Sunday, Israel announced plans to vaccinate tens of thousands of Palestinians who work inside Israel and its West Bank settlements. Earlier, Israel had shared 2,000 vaccines with the Palestinian Authority to protect front-line medical workers in the West Bank.

In his letter, Mandelblit recommends that for "proper and complete government procedure," any decisions concerning the transfer of Israel's vaccines to foreign countries must be made by the relevant authorities.

In light of the importance and diplomatic implications of such a decision, Mandelblit said it was "appropriate that the subject be brought for discussion in the government, Cabinet or in another forum that includes all the relevant ministers in the matter."

FBI chief to face questions about extremism, Capitol riot

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Director Chris Wray is set to testify for the first time since the deadly Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, with lawmakers likely to press him on whether the bureau adequately communicated with other law enforcement agencies about the potential for violence that day.

Questions about the FBI's preparations for the riot, and investigations into it, are expected to dominate Wray's appearance Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary Committee. He's also likely to be pressed on how the FBI is confronting the national security threat from white nationalists and domestic violent extremists and whether the bureau has adequate resources to address the problem.

The violence at the Capitol made clear that a law enforcement agency that revolutionized itself after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to deal with international terrorism is now scrambling to address homegrown violence from white Americans. President Joe Biden's administration has tasked his national intelligence director to work with the FBI and Department of Homeland Security to assess the threat.

Wray has kept a notably low profile since a violent mob of insurrectionists stormed the Capitol two months ago. Though he has briefed lawmakers privately and shared information with local law enforcement hearings, Tuesday's oversight hearing will mark Wray's first public appearance before Congress since before November's presidential election.

The FBI is facing questions over how it handled intelligence in the days ahead of the riot and whether warnings it had of potential violence reached the correct officials.

Last week, for instance, the acting chief of the Capitol Police said a Jan. 5 report from the FBI made its way to investigators within the police force and to the department's intelligence unit but was never sent up the chain of command. The report warned about concerning online posts foreshadowing a "war" in Washington the following day. The FBI has said the report, which it says was based on uncorroborated information, was shared through its joint terrorism task force.

Wray may also face questions about the FBI's investigation into the massive Russian hack of corporations and U.S. government agencies, which happened when elite hackers injected malicious code into a software update.

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

EXPLAINER: Japan to try US men accused of helping Ghosn flee

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Two Americans suspected of helping former Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn skip bail and

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 40 of 83

escape to Lebanon in December 2019 have been extradited to Japan.

Michael Taylor and his son Peter had been held in a suburban Boston jail since May. They were handed over to Japanese custody on Monday and arrived in Tokyo on Tuesday.

Ghosn, who led Nissan Motor Co. for more than two decades, was arrested in 2018, and charged with under-reporting his future compensation and breach of trust in diverting Nissan money for personal gain. He says he is innocent.

WHAT ARE THE FATHER AND SON ACCUSED OF DOING?

Michael Taylor, with the help of another man, George-Antoine Zayek, hid Ghosn in a large black box supposedly containing audio equipment, according to the authorities. The box passed through airport security in Osaka, central Japan, and was loaded onto a private jet that flew Ghosn to Turkey. Peter Taylor is accused of meeting with Ghosn and helping his father carry out the escape. Authorities say the Taylors were paid at least \$1.3 million.

WHERE WILL THEY BE TAKEN AND WHAT HAPPENS THERE?

The Taylors, like other suspects, can be held up to 23 days without any formal charges at the Tokyo Detention Center on the outskirts of the capital and questioned for hours almost daily by prosecutors, without a lawyer present. Their lawyer can visit and they can receive snacks and books. The detention can be extended with "rearrests," if more charges are tagged on. Ghosn spent more than 100 days at the center before gaining his release on bail. The solitary cells are simple, with Japanese-style futon mattresses. The center, which is different from prisons for people who have been convicted, also has an exercise area and clinic.

IS THIS THE ROUTINE TREATMENT OF SUSPECTS IN JAPAN?

The Japanese treatment of suspects has been widely criticized as "hostage justice," designed to coerce suspects to confess and often resulting in false confessions. The Taylors' lawyers in the U.S. say they worry they may be treated unfairly in Japan and subjected to "mental and physical torture." They also argue that jumping bail is not a crime under Japanese law. That is technically accurate, but most people who escape are easily caught in Japan. Japanese prosecutors say they have enough evidence to convict the Taylors.

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED IF THEY GO ON TRIAL?

Even after formal charges are filed, closed-door pre-trial sessions by the prosecutors and defendants before a judge generally go on for months. The media have no access to such sessions. Jury trials exist in Japan, but only for murders and other heinous crimes. A panel of three judges will hear the Taylors' case in a trial that could last months or even years. English translation will be provided during the trial. Media coverage is allowed, but no filming or recording. If convicted, the Taylors face up to three years in prison and a fine of up to 300,000 yen (\$2,900). They could get a suspended sentence and not serve time. In principle, just as in the U.S., people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. But 99% of criminal trials end in convictions.

WHERE IS CARLOS GHOSN AND CAN HE BE TRIED?

Japan has put Ghosn on Interpol's wanted list, but Lebanon has no extradition treaty with Japan. Extradition from the U.S. isn't common, so the extradition of the Taylors for an alleged nonviolent crime reflects the determination of Japanese prosecutors to pursue the case against Ghosn. Ghosn is almost certain to be extradited if he sets foot in the U.S. Former Nissan senior executive Greg Kelly is on trial in Tokyo on charges he helped under-report Ghosn's compensation. Kelly, an American, says he is innocent.

Yuri Kageyama is on Twitter <https://twitter.com/yurikageyama>

Nigerian governor says 279 kidnapped schoolgirls are freed

By LEKAN OYEKANMI Associated Press

GUSAU, Nigeria (AP) — Hundreds of Nigerian schoolgirls abducted last week from a boarding school in the northwestern Zamfara state have been released, the state's governor said Tuesday.

Zamfara state governor Bello Matawalle announced that 279 girls have been freed. The government last

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 41 of 83

week said 317 had been kidnapped.

Gunmen abducted the girls from the Government Girls Junior Secondary School in Jangebe town on Friday, in the latest in a series of mass kidnappings of students in the West African nation.

An Associated Press reporter saw hundreds of girls dressed in light blue hijabs and barefoot sitting at the state Government House office in Gusau.

After the meeting, the girls were escorted outside by officials and lined up to be taken away in vans. They appeared calm and ranged in ages from 10 and up.

Matawalle said they would be taken for medical examinations before being reunited with their families.

"Alhamdulillah! (God be praised!) It gladdens my heart to announce the release of the abducted students of GGSS Jangebe from captivity. This follows the scaling of several hurdles laid against our efforts. I enjoin all well-meaning Nigerians to rejoice with us as our daughters are now safe," Matawalle said in a post on Twitter early Tuesday.

At the time of the attack, one resident told AP that the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from responding to the mass abduction at the school.

One of the girls recounted the night of their abduction to the AP.

"We were sleeping at night when suddenly we started hearing gunshots. They were shooting endlessly. We got out of our beds and people said we should run, that they are thieves," she said. "Everybody fled and there were just two of us left in the room."

The attackers held guns to the girls' heads, she said.

"I was really afraid of being shot," she said, adding that they asked for directions to the staff quarters and the principal. "We said we don't know who she is. They said the principal is our father and they will teach us a lesson."

Police and the military had since been carrying out joint operations to rescue the girls, whose abduction caused international outrage.

President Muhammadu Buhari expressed "overwhelming joy" over the release of the girls.

"I join the families and people of Zamfara State in welcoming and celebrating the release of these traumatized female students," he said in a statement. "Being held in captivity is an agonizing experience not only for the victims, but also their families and all of us."

The president called for greater vigilance to prevent bandits from carrying out such attacks.

He urged police and military to pursue the kidnappers, and warned that policies of making payments to bandits will backfire.

"Ransom payments will continue to prosper kidnapping," he said.

The terms of the female students' release were not made immediately clear.

Nigeria has seen several such attacks and kidnappings in recent years. On Saturday, 24 students, six staff and eight relatives were released after being abducted on February 17 from the Government Science College Kagara in Niger state. In December, more than 300 schoolboys from a secondary school in Kankara, in northwestern Nigeria, were taken and later released. The government has said no ransom was paid for the students' release.

The most notorious kidnapping was in April 2014, when 276 girls were abducted by the jihadist rebels of Boko Haram from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than 100 of those girls are still missing. Boko Haram is opposed to western education and its fighters often target schools.

Other organized armed groups, locally called bandits, often abduct students for money. The government says large groups of armed men in Zamfara state are known to kidnap for money and to press for the release of their members held in jail.

Experts say if the kidnappings continue to go unpunished, they may continue.

AP writers Sam Olukoya in Lagos, Nigeria and Carley Petesch in Dakar, Senegal contributed.

Dutch PM's popularity high but eroding as election looms

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 42 of 83

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — After more than a decade in power and a year spent battling the virus, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's popularity — boosted by his handling of the pandemic — remains high two weeks before a general election.

But amid a tough COVID-19 lockdown, that support is showing signs of eroding as the Dutch grow weary of pandemic restrictions.

The election is being held over three days, starting with a limited number of polling booths opening on March 15 and 16 for people who are extra vulnerable to the coronavirus before the main voting day on March 17. Some 2.4 million people aged over 70 are entitled to vote by mail.

It's shaping up as a referendum on the government's handling of the unprecedented health crisis and political parties' differing plans for the country's economic and social recovery when it finally ends.

Rutte's conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD, is currently projected to win about twice as many seats as its nearest rival in the 150-seat lower house of parliament.

Political science professor Tom van der Meer of Amsterdam University says the VVD's huge lead in the polls is partly a result of the pandemic.

"The popularity of Mark Rutte ... got a big boost last year due to the COVID-19 crisis," Van der Meer said.

Rutte's regular TV appearances — to explain new lockdown measures, relax some restrictions or announce multibillion state support packages for ailing businesses — have cast him as a strong, dependable leader working tirelessly to protect his nation from the worst of the pandemic.

But with the election approaching, support for the virus lockdown is fading and many Dutch businesses are growing increasingly angry at being shuttered for months. The Netherlands has seen over 15,700 deaths in the pandemic and officials fear the impact of the highly transmissible and more deadly U.K. virus variant.

"We see that this rally-around-the-flag effect has diminished," Van der Meer said. "But at the same time, voters for the VVD haven't really yet had this clear reason to move away."

If the VVD emerges as the largest party in parliament, the 54-year-old Rutte will be first in line to form the country's next governing coalition and begin a fourth term in office. That would make him the longest-serving Dutch prime minister, overtaking the 12-year tenure of Ruud Lubbers.

Opposition parties, however, are keen to stress their differences with Rutte, even though they have largely supported his government's efforts to rein in the pandemic. Parties on the left accuse him of running the country's health service down with years of market-driven reforms.

Rutte's ongoing popularity is all the more striking because his government resigned in January over a scandal involving tax office attempts to root out fraud among parents claiming child benefit payments, leaving Rutte as a caretaker leader. A parliamentary inquiry concluded last year that tax office policies that included racial profiling violated "fundamental principles of the rule of law."

In the campaign's first major televised debate on Sunday, Rutte was confronted by one of the parents, Kristie Rongen, who told him: "You have failed me."

"Why do you think that you can stay on as the person who is ultimately responsible in the benefit scandal?" she asked.

"I asked myself the same question," Rutte replied. "This is such a stain, such a debacle, but I weighed up that so many things have gone well in the last 10 years and that I'm proud of and I decided in the end to keep going."

The largest Dutch opposition party is the Party for Freedom led by populist, anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders, who has harshly criticized the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis, from the slow start of its vaccination program to its imposing a curfew.

But most mainstream parties reject the idea of working in a coalition with Wilders because of his strident anti-Islam rhetoric, effectively putting his party out of the running to join a new government.

The right-wing populist Forum For Democracy, which performed strongly two years ago during a provincial election, has imploded over the last year amid reports of anti-Semitism in its ranks. Some key members have left and set up a rival party that is fielding candidates in the March election.

That new party is among a record 37 groups registered to take part in the election, a further fragmenta-

tion of the Dutch political landscape that could make forming a new ruling coalition tricky. After the last election in March 2017, it took a post-World War II record 225 days to form Rutte's third Cabinet.

Labor Party leader Lilianne Ploumen has appealed to left-leaning parties to work together, saying "if we don't, the only one laughing will be the VVD."

Follow all AP developments on the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>.

Victims of anti-Asian attacks reflect a year into pandemic

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Nearly a year after they were almost stabbed to death inside a Midland, Texas, Sam's Club, Bawi Cung and his two sons all have visible scars.

It's the unseen ones though that are harder to get over. Cung can't walk through any store without constantly looking in all directions. His 6-year-old son, who now can't move one eyebrow, is afraid to sleep alone.

On a Saturday evening in March, when COVID-19 panic shopping gripped the nation, Cung was in search of rice at a cheaper price. The family was in the Sam's Club meat section when Cung suddenly felt a punch to the back of his head. A man he didn't know then slashed his face with a knife. The assailant left but soon returned to stab the boys. He wounded the 3-year-old in the back and slashed the 6-year-old from his right eye to a couple of inches past his right ear.

The grisly encounter brought home the dangerous climate Asian Americans have faced since the coronavirus entered the U.S., with racially motivated harassment and assaults occurring from coast to coast.

Now, just over a year and thousands of incidents later, some of the early victims find moving forward has been difficult or, at best, bittersweet. A recent wave of attacks on elderly Asian Americans — including the death of an 84-year-old San Francisco man — has fueled worries that hostilities have only worsened.

In Cung's case, the man responsible for the attack believed the Myanmar man and his children were Chinese and spreading the virus, according to the FBI.

Cung said he's not sure what would have happened had a Sam's Club employee, Zach Owen, not intervened.

"Maybe I might kill him. Maybe he might kill all of my family. I don't know," Cung said. "God protected my family, God sent Zach to protect my family right there at the right time."

Owen, who was stabbed in the leg and deeply cut in his right palm, and an off-duty Border Patrol agent detained the suspect, Jose Gomez, 19.

Verbal attacks have also made a lasting mark.

In April, a confrontation in a Richmond, California, park left an irrevocable impact not just on Kelly Yang, 36, but her children. She was forced to discuss anti-Asian racism with her son, 10, and daughter, 7 — a talk she didn't think would happen for a few more years. An elderly white couple, upset over her unleashed dog, called Yang, who is Chinese American, an "Oriental" and said the words many Asian Americans dread: "Go back where you came from."

Her children thought the couple meant for them to go home. Torn, Yang eventually explained they meant "for us to go back to Asia."

"It means that we're not welcome here."

Her son burst into tears.

Yang believes the couple felt emboldened by then-President Donald Trump's use of racially charged terms like "Chinese virus." She applauded President Joe Biden's recent executive order condemning anti-Asian xenophobia as a good start. But Yang is afraid a lot of non-Asians have already shrugged off the issue as though it ceased when Trump's presidency did.

"I don't know what can be done," said Yang, who writes young adult novels and plans to weave her experience into her next book. "But I do know talking about it, acknowledging it, remembering — that's

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 44 of 83

what we do with wars — we have to remember what happened.”

Douglas Kim, 42, chef and owner of Jeju Noodle Bar in New York City, is certain COVID-19-fueled racism was behind the April vandalizing of his Michelin-starred, Korean restaurant. Someone used a Sharpie to scrawl on the winter vestibule “Stop eating dogs,” referring to a stereotype about Asian cuisines. Ultimately, Kim decided not to report it.

“At the time it pissed me off, but I have more important things to worry about,” Kim said. “Maintaining a business is more important.”

He shared a picture of the graffiti on Instagram to call attention to hate crimes. There was a groundswell of support, but he feels like much of it has faded.

Yet, Kim is hopeful fewer people are stereotyping Asian Americans as foreigners who don’t belong in the U.S.

“I think it’s all about education,” Kim said. “If you raise your children that way, they’re gonna learn that way. I think things are changing but it’s not 100% yet. That’s why somebody obviously wrote that on our door.”

More than 3,000 incidents have been reported to Stop AAPI Hate, a California-based reporting center for Asian American Pacific Islanders, and its partner advocacy groups, since mid-March 2020. What’s frustrating is that the encounters don’t often rise to the legal definition of a hate crime. Still, police in several major cities saw a sharp uptick in Asian-targeted hate crimes between 2019 and 2020, according to data collected by the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino. New York City went from three incidents to 27, Los Angeles from seven to 15, and Denver had three incidents in 2020 — the first reported there in six years.

A rash of crimes victimizing elderly Asian Americans in the past two months has renewed outcry for more attention from politicians and the media. On Wednesday, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed off on legislation allocating \$1.4 million to Stop AAPI Hate and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. The funding will go toward community resources and further tracking of anti-Asian hate incidents.

Local officials and citizens have also taken notice. Initiatives like increased police presence, volunteer patrols and special crime hotlines are coming to fruition. Big-name brands like the Golden State Warriors and Apple, based in the Bay Area, have promised to donate to the cause.

Cynthia Choi, of Stop AAPI Hate, wishes news cycles would focus not just on the latest crimes but the solutions being discussed. Policing and prosecution aren’t necessarily the answers, she said. COVID-19 vitriol is rooted in more than a century of anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant attitudes. She and other advocates think more investment in education and community resources could help get at those root causes. Anti-Asian xenophobia should be part of the ongoing conversations on racial reckoning, Choi added.

“Our work to address anti-Asian racism is inextricably tied to fighting anti-Black racism,” Choi said. “That’s gonna take all of us, it’s gonna take public education efforts, it’s gonna take racial solidarity efforts that really bring our communities together.”

Before immigrating to the U.S. six years ago, Cung, the Texas hate crime survivor, had never encountered racism. Now, it’s difficult for him to hear stories about anti-Asian American violence. Initially after the attack, Cung wrestled with how Gomez tried to kill him simply because of how he looked. Now, he prays for his attacker.

As for what should happen to Gomez, who remains jailed on three counts of attempted capital murder, Cung said that’s up to the courts.

“I can forgive him, but we cannot accept racism or that kind of terrorist attack,” said Cung, who received more than \$20,000 in online donations.

One thing he is looking ahead to — life as a newly naturalized U.S. citizen in a country where “they respect people.” Cung remains unbothered that he may not fit some people’s idea of what America looks like.

“Maybe personally they have racism,” Cung said. “I don’t care. I’m proud of being Asian and Asian American.”

Tang reported from Phoenix and is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ttangAP>

Critics: Cuomo apology 'tone-deaf,' ignores power imbalance

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — When she first arrived in Albany to work as a legislative aide in 2013, New York Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou had lawmakers grab her buttocks, suggest she and her boss were “a hot duo” who should have sex, and peer into her office to check her out for a “hot or not” list.

Niou, then a chief of staff in her late 20s, never reported it. She feared it would unfairly drag down her boss. But the experiences stayed with her.

She bristled Monday at the response from Gov. Andrew Cuomo to allegations he sexually harassed two young women in state government, remarks some on social media called a “faux-pology” that blames victims for misinterpreting his “good-natured” jokes.

“When is it a joke to say ‘Do you have sex with older men?’” said Niou, now 38, who became a lawmaker herself in 2017, and now represents lower Manhattan. “I felt like it was very much gaslighting instead of an apology, and I think a lot of women read it that way.”

Cuomo, a fellow Democrat, has not been seen in public since new details of the sexual harassment complaints became public last week.

One former administration employee, Lindsey Boylan, said Cuomo kissed her on the lips, commented on her appearance and summoned her to an unnecessary private meeting in his office after a holiday party.

Another former employee, 25-year-old Charlotte Bennett, said Cuomo questioned her about her sex life, talked about being lonely and asked if she would be open to a sexual relationship with an older man.

And late Monday, a third woman, Anna Ruch, said in New York Times story that Cuomo touched her back and face without consent and asked to kiss her in the middle of a 2019 wedding reception, moments after they met.

Bennett criticized Cuomo’s statement in one of her own Monday, saying the 63-year-old governor has “refused to acknowledge or take responsibility for his predatory behavior.”

Cuomo’s office did not respond to a request for comment Monday. He denied Boylan’s allegations in his statement and said that in Bennett’s case, he had intended to act like a mentor.

“I have teased people about their personal lives, their relationships, about getting married or not getting married. I mean no offense and only attempt to add some levity and banter to what is a very serious business,” the three-term governor said in the statement issued Sunday.

“I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation,” he continued. “To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry.”

Northwestern University law professor Deborah Tuerkheimer, who teaches law and gender issues, said Cuomo in his statement ignored the crucial power imbalance at play.

“The notion that his behavior was simply unwanted ‘flirtation’ that may have caused ‘offense’ entirely ignores a workplace hierarchy in which he — the governor of the state — was positioned at the very top,” Tuerkheimer said.

“It’s about the environment. The allegations described an environment that made both of these women feel degraded ... as objects, rather than the competent workers they were,” she said.

The allegations against Cuomo emerged almost exactly a year after the high-profile sexual assault trial in New York of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein ended in a conviction, and more than three years after the #MeToo movement took hold.

Bennett complained to her bosses and to Cuomo’s legal counsel last spring about what she deemed the governor’s sexual advances and was transferred to a new position before leaving public employment in November.

By Monday, she had retained employment discrimination lawyer Debra Katz, who represented Christine Blasey Ford in her sexual assault accusation against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Katz called Cuomo "tone-deaf" and questioned whether a governor who asks "invasive, inappropriate questions about a subordinate employee, almost 40 years his junior," is fit for office.

"If he says 'Yeah, this is how I talk to people,' then other women were subjected to this," she said.

Niou believes that sexual harassment in state government remains pervasive, but said it's at least being discussed more openly as more women take office. She took part in a statehouse hearing on the issue in 2017 that led to reforms, but she said the new laws are not yet comprehensive enough.

"That's why these stories were so striking and could be so relatable, because how many times have women had to have complete career changes, had their entire lives altered," she said, pausing for a heavy sigh, "when a man has exercised power in that way?"

"It happens to so many women."

Follow Maryclaire Dale on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/Maryclairedale>

Nashville music club owners recall night the music died

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — When frantic messages started trickling in that a tornado had hit a beloved music venue in Nashville, Mike Grimes told himself it couldn't possibly be that bad.

Could Basement East really be destroyed? Just hours before, the club Grimes co-owns had hosted a benefit concert for Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.

Affectionately known as "The Beast," the club was only 5 years old, but already had established a reputation as one of Nashville's trendiest music spots, across the river from the city's tourist-laden honky-tonks on lower Broadway.

The venue, with a capacity limit of 475, quickly became known as a premier site for hosting big-name acts in an intimate setting. Margo Price, Cage the Elephant, John Prine, Maggie Rogers, Maren Morris, Sturgill Simpson and many others played there.

Maybe, Grimes thought desperately as he drove over to the club, the people texting him about the destruction were exaggerating.

But when he pulled up to The Beast, his stomach dropped. The tornado had ripped the roof cleanly off a little after 1 a.m., crumbling the majority of the walls and leaving a tangled mess of destruction behind.

"You just don't want to believe it," Grimes said. "It was immediate shock."

The March 3 storm killed more than 20 people, some in their beds, as it struck after midnight. More than 140 buildings were destroyed across a roughly 60-mile (97-kilometer) swath of Middle Tennessee, burying people in rubble and basements.

The six Basement East staffers who were cleaning up after the Sanders event escaped harm by running to the actual basement of the building just minutes before the powerful EF-3 tornado roared down the street. It took two staffers to shut the door against the winds, just as the twister passed over.

Right on the heels of the tornadoes, the virus outbreak slammed into the state with brute force last spring, and by Thanksgiving, Tennessee ranked among the worst hit in the country, with a record number of hospitalizations and cases. To date, more than 11,000 residents have died from COVID-19.

The pandemic hit Nashville's renowned music scene particularly hard. Small, intimate clubs weren't designed to factor in virus-control measures such as social distancing.

"It's so strange to have a scenario where the building is gone and then we have something ... like COVID-19," a confluence of devastating occurrences "that has never happened like this in our lifetime," Grimes said.

As the virus raged on, the dream of once again packing Basement East full of music lovers seemed shakier than ever.

"There were times that thought crossed my mind: 'It's not going to happen,'" Brown said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 47 of 83

The club first opened its doors in 2015, but it took nearly five years for the venue to turn a profit. It wasn't until 2020 that Brown and Grimes felt they could breathe, that what they were doing was working. The partners — who describe themselves as grown teenagers with a love for rock 'n' roll — had wanted to celebrate their five-year anniversary in April 2020, but the tornado and pandemic had other plans.

Now, as the anniversary of the two catastrophic events approaches, the partners are hoping to finally reopen. Amid signs that virus cases are dropping and with more people getting vaccinated, they've set their sights on this spring. But they still plan to require patrons to wear masks and will spread tables out throughout the club's 5,000-square-foot (465-square-meter) space.

When the tornado struck Basement East last March, it left one thing standing: A portion of a wall mural with the slogan, "I believe in Nashville."

Like that wall, the city itself is steadfast and resilient, Brown and Grimes note. Both believe Nashville's central role in the world of American entertainment and culture will ensure that it perseveres.

"The magic of music," Brown said. "That's what makes this place so strong."

COVID-19 pandemic fuels attacks on health workers globally

By HELEN WIEFFERING and JOSHUA HOUSING Associated Press

Two Nigerian nurses were attacked by the family of a deceased COVID-19 patient. One nurse had her hair ripped out and suffered a fracture. The second was beaten into a coma.

Following the assaults, nurses at Federal Medical Centre in the Southwestern city of Owo stopped treating patients, demanding the hospital improve security. Almost two weeks passed before they returned to work with armed guards posted around the clock.

"We don't give life. It is God that gives life. We only care or we manage," said Francis Ajibola, a local leader with the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives.

The attack in Nigeria early last month was just one of many on health workers globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. A new report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 threats or acts of violence against health care workers and facilities last year.

Researchers found that about 400 of those attacks were related to COVID-19, many motivated by fear or frustration, underscoring the dangers surrounding health care workers at a time when they are needed most. Insecurity Insight defines a health care attack as any physical violence against or intimidation of health care workers or settings, and uses online news agencies, humanitarian groups and social media posts to track incidents around the world.

"Our jobs in the emergency department and in hospitals have gotten exponentially more stressful and harder, and that's at baseline even when people are super supportive," said Rohini Haar, an emergency physician in Oakland, California, and Human Rights Center research fellow. "To do that work and to do it with commitment while being attacked or with the fear of being attacked is heartbreaking to me."

Medical professionals from surgeons to paramedics have long confronted injury or intimidation on the job, especially in conflict zones. Experts say many attacks are rooted in fear or mistrust, as family members react to a relative's death or a community responds to uncertainty around a disease. The coronavirus has amplified those tensions.

Ligia Kantún has worked as a nurse for 40 years in Mexico and never felt threatened until last spring. As she was leaving a hospital in Merida in April, she heard someone shout the word "Infected!" She was drenched in hot coffee before she could turn around.

"When I got home 10 minutes later my daughter was waiting for me and I hugged her crying, all scared, thinking, 'How is it possible that they have done this to me?'" she told The Associated Press.

Kantún said many people in Mexico at the time thought health workers wore the same uniforms in public that they wore when treating coronavirus patients. "That ignorance was what made them act that way," she said.

Researchers saw the most attacks last spring and summer as the coronavirus swept across the globe.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 48 of 83

Yet recent events from Nigeria to the Netherlands, where in January rioters set fire to a coronavirus testing center, prove the threat remains.

Haar said she expected health care workers to be widely celebrated for their lifesaving work during the pandemic, just as Italians sang tributes to doctors during the lockdown.

"But actually that didn't happen in many, many places," she said. "There's actually more fear, more distrust, and attacks grew rather than decreased."

Many attacks may have gone undetected because they are never reported to police or in the media. Insecurity Insight scrambled to expand its monitoring as a flood of attacks were detected in countries that have traditionally been safe for health workers, said director Christina Wille.

In the United States, for example, researchers counted about a dozen threats to health care workers last year. Several incidents involved the injury or arrest of street medics during Black Lives Matter protests.

"I think in the U.S. the culture has been more of trusting health workers," Haar, the emergency physician, said. "There hasn't been a longstanding conflict where there's been a dissonance between health workers and the community."

Yet health workers in the U.S. are still subject to great risk. Hospital employees in the U.S. are nearly six times as likely as the average worker to be the victim of an intentional injury, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and last month a Minnesota medical assistant was killed during a shooting at a clinic by a former patient unhappy with his treatment.

Misinformation has spurred violence in some cases. Wille said her team looked closely at social media postings in April after three Ebola treatment centers were ransacked in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We could actually see that there was a build-up over several days of misinformation about what they call the 'Ebola business,' that this was all related to people inventing the disease," she said.

Experts say that even though health workers are in many cases the target of attacks, entire communities suffer when they lose access to medical care after a clinic or medical facility is forced to close due to threats.

"You're robbing the community of the service they would have provided," said Nyka Alexander, who leads the World Health Organization's communications on health emergencies.

With or without a pandemic, the most dangerous places for health workers are often areas of conflict and political upheaval. Last year, hundreds of threats and acts of violence were tracked in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Naser Almhawish, surveillance coordinator for Syria's Early Warning Alert and Response Network, said he faced threats several times while working as a doctor in the city of Raqqa. He recalled the day in 2012 at Ar-Raqqa National Hospital when armed men confronted him in the middle of an operation, saying they'd kill him if the patient died.

"You just freeze and you know that you are working and you are trying to save this guy," he said. "This is our duty. I didn't ask if this guy was a military, civilian or anything. He's a human being who needed an operation."

Almhawish said such attacks on health care settings in Syria had waned in the last year. Researchers said declining violence in the country was the reason they didn't see a greater surge in total health care attacks in 2020.

Kantún, the nurse in Mexico, said she went almost eight months after the attack last April without wearing her nursing scrubs in public. Now, one year into the pandemic, she feels health workers are more respected. But she still worries.

"I've had that fear of going out and finding my car scratched, or my car window broken," she said. "I do have that fear, since I lived it."

Helen Wieffering is a Roy W. Howard Fellow. Joshua Housing is an investigative fellow on the global investigative team.

Contributing to this report are AP video journalist Federica Narancio and Anne Daugherty and Devon Lum at the University of California, Berkeley Human Rights Center Investigations Lab.

Chinese vaccines sweep much of the world, despite concerns

By HUIZHONG WU and KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The plane laden with vaccines had just rolled to a stop at Santiago's airport in late January, and Chile's president, Sebastián Piñera, was beaming. "Today," he said, "is a day of joy, emotion and hope."

The source of that hope: China — a country that Chile and dozens of other nations are depending on to help rescue them from the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's vaccine diplomacy campaign has been a surprising success: It has pledged roughly half a billion doses of its vaccines to more than 45 countries, according to a country-by-country tally by The Associated Press. With just four of China's many vaccine makers claiming they are able to produce at least 2.6 billion doses this year, a large part of the world's population will end up inoculated not with the fancy Western vaccines boasting headline-grabbing efficacy rates, but with China's humble, traditionally made shots.

Amid a dearth of public data on China's vaccines, hesitations over their efficacy and safety are still pervasive in the countries depending on them, along with concerns about what China might want in return for deliveries. Nonetheless, inoculations with Chinese vaccines already have begun in more than 25 countries, and the Chinese shots have been delivered to another 11, according to the AP tally, based on independent reporting in those countries along with government and company announcements.

It's a potential face-saving coup for China, which has been determined to transform itself from an object of mistrust over its initial mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak to a savior. Like India and Russia, China is trying to build goodwill, and has pledged roughly 10 times more vaccines abroad than it has distributed at home.

"We're seeing certainly real-time vaccine diplomacy start to play out, with China in the lead in terms of being able to manufacture vaccines within China and make them available to others," said Krishna Udayakumar, founding director of the Duke Global Health Innovation Center at Duke University. "Some of them donated, some of them sold, and some of them sold with debt financing associated with it."

China has said it is supplying "vaccine aid" to 53 countries and exports to 27, but it rejected a request by the AP for the list. Beijing has also denied vaccine diplomacy, and a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said China considered the vaccine a "global public good." Chinese experts reject any connection between the export of its vaccines and the revamping of its image.

"I don't see any linkage there," said Wang Huiyao, president of the Centre for China and Globalization, a Beijing think tank. "China should do more to help other countries, because it's doing well."

China has targeted the low- and middle-income countries largely left behind as rich nations scooped up most of the pricey vaccines produced by the likes of Pfizer and Moderna. And despite a few delays of its own in Brazil and Turkey, China has largely capitalized on slower-than-hoped-for deliveries by U.S. and European vaccine makers.

Like many other countries, Chile received far fewer doses of the Pfizer vaccine than first promised. In the month after its vaccination program began in late December, only around 150,000 of the 10 million Pfizer doses the South American country ordered arrived.

It wasn't until Chinese company Sinovac Biotech Ltd. swooped in with 4 million doses in late January that Chile began inoculating its population of 19 million with impressive speed. The country now has the fifth highest vaccination rate per capita in the world, according to Oxford University.

Chilean Vilma Ortiz got her Sinovac shot at a school in Santiago's Nunoa neighborhood, along with about 60 other people. Although she considers herself "kind of a skeptical person," she said she researched the Chinese vaccines on the Internet and was satisfied.

"I have a lot of faith and confidence in the vaccine," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 50 of 83

In Jakarta, the sports stadium was abuzz as masked healthcare workers filed in to receive their Sinovac shot. Wandering the rows of vaccination stations was Indonesian President Joko Widodo, the first person in the Southeast Asian country to get the Chinese shot, 140 million doses of which he has ordered for his people.

Among those at the stadium was Susi Monica, an intern doctor receiving her second dose. Despite questions over its efficacy, getting the shot was worth it to her, particularly because she didn't have any adverse reactions to the first dose.

Besides, she said, "Do I have another choice right now?"

The choices are limited for Indonesia and many other low- and middle-income countries clobbered by COVID. Vaccine deployment globally has been dominated by wealthier countries, which have snapped up 5.8 billion of the 8.2 billion doses purchased worldwide, according to Duke University.

China's vaccines, which can be stored in standard refrigerators, are attractive to countries like Indonesia, a sweltering nation that straddles the equator and could struggle to accommodate the ultracold storage needs of vaccines like Pfizer's.

The bulk of Chinese shots are from Sinovac and Sinopharm, which both rely on a traditional technology called an inactivated virus vaccine, based on cultivating batches of the virus and then killing it. Some countries view it as safer than the newer, less-proven technology used by some Western competitors that targets the coronavirus' spike protein, despite publicly available safety data for the Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines and none for China's.

"The choice was made for this vaccine because it is developed on a traditional and safe inactivated platform," said Teymur Musayev, an official with the Ministry of Health in Azerbaijan, which has ordered 4 million Sinovac doses.

In Europe, China is providing the vaccine to countries such as Serbia and Hungary -- a significant geopolitical victory in Central Europe and the Balkans, where the West, China and Russia are competing for political and economic influence. This stretch of Europe has offered fertile ground for China to strengthen bilateral ties with Serbia and Hungary's populist leaders, who often criticize the EU.

Serbia became the first country in Europe to start inoculating its population with China's vaccines in January. The country has so far purchased 1.5 million doses of Sinopharm's vaccine, which makes up the majority of the country's supply, and smaller amounts of Russia's Sputnik V and Pfizer's vaccines.

Donning heavy coats against the winter chill, masked-up Serbians have been waiting in long lines for their turn to get the vaccine.

"They have been vaccinating their own people for (a) long period, I assume they have more experience," Natasa Stermenski, a Belgrade resident, said of her choice to get the Chinese shot at a vaccination center in February.

Neighboring Hungary, impatient over delays in the European Union, soon became the first country in the EU to approve the same Chinese vaccine. On Sunday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban got the Sinopharm shot, after recently saying he trusted the Chinese vaccine the most.

Many leaders have publicly supported the Chinese shots to allay concerns. Early on, "people had all these microchip theories in their heads, genetic modification, sterilization, running around on social media platforms," said Sanjeev Pugazhendi, a medical officer in the Indian Ocean island nation of the Seychelles, whose president recently received a Sinopharm shot on camera. "But the moment we started giving out the vaccines to leaders, religious leaders and health workers, that started to subside."

Beijing's vaccine diplomacy efforts are good for both China and the developing world, experts say.

"Because of the competition for influence, the poor countries can get earlier access for vaccines," said Yun Jiang, managing editor of the China Story Blog at the Australian National University. "Of course, that's assuming that all the vaccines are safe and delivered in the right way."

China's vaccine diplomacy will only be as good as the vaccines it is offering, and it still faces hurdles.

Ahmed Hamdan Zayed, a nurse in Egypt, was reluctant to receive a vaccine, especially a Chinese one. The frontline health worker would be among the first in the country to get Sinopharm's shot as part of a

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 51 of 83

mass vaccination campaign. Over 9 million Sinopharm shots have been given outside China.

"We had concerns about vaccines in general," the 27-year-old father of two said in a phone interview from the Abu Khalifa hospital in the northeastern part of the country. "The Chinese vaccine, in particular, there was insufficient data available compared to other vaccines."

But Zayed ultimately decided to get the shot after conducting more research. A doctor at his hospital called colleagues in the United Arab Emirates, which had approved the same shot, and they met with Egyptian health officials.

Sinopharm, which said its vaccine was 79% effective based on interim data from clinical trials, did not respond to requests for an interview. Sinopharm's chairman has said they have not had a single severe adverse event in response to their vaccine.

Chinese vaccine companies have been "slow and spotty" in releasing their trial data, compared to companies like Pfizer and Moderna, said Yanzhong Huang, a global health expert at the U.S. think tank Council for Foreign Relations. None of China's three vaccine candidates used globally have publicly released their late-stage clinical trial data. CanSino, another Chinese company with a one-shot vaccine that it says is 65% effective, declined to be interviewed.

China's pharmaceutical business practices also have raised concerns. In 2018, it emerged that one of China's biggest vaccine companies falsified data to sell its rabies vaccines. That same year, news broke that a Sinopharm subsidiary, which is behind one of the COVID-19 vaccines now, had made substandard diphtheria vaccines used in mandatory immunizations.

With Chinese vaccines, "for a lot of people, the first thing you think about is 'Made in China,' and that doesn't give you much assurance," said Joy Zhang, a professor at the University of Kent in the UK who studies the ethics of emerging science.

Russia and India have faced similar skepticism, partly because people have less trust in products made outside the Western world, said Sayedur Rahman, head of the pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University in Bangladesh.

"China, India, Russia, Cuba, whenever they develop a vaccine or conduct research, their data is questioned, and people say their process is not transparent," he said.

A December YouGov poll of 19,000 people in 17 countries and regions on how they felt about different vaccines found that China's received the second-lowest score, tied with India's. In the Philippines, which has ordered 25 million Sinovac doses, less than 20% of those surveyed by a research group expressed confidence in China's vaccines.

Those concerns have been exacerbated by confusion around the efficacy of Sinovac's shot. In Turkey, where Sinovac conducted part of its efficacy trials, officials have said the vaccine was 91% effective. However, in Brazil, officials revised the efficacy rate in late-stage clinical trials from 78% to just over 50% after including mild infections.

A senior Chinese official said Brazil's numbers were lower because its volunteers were healthcare workers who faced a higher risk of infection. But other medical experts have said exposure would not affect a vaccine's effectiveness.

Sinovac's trials were conducted separately in Turkey and Brazil, and the differences in efficacy rates arise from differences in the populations, a spokesman for the company said in a previous interview with the AP. The company declined to be interviewed for this article. An expert panel in Hong Kong assessed the efficacy of the vaccine at about 51%, and the city approved its use in mid-February.

Globally, public health officials have said any vaccine that is at least 50% effective is useful. International scientists are anxious to see results from final-stage testing published in a peer-reviewed science journal for all three Chinese companies.

It's also unclear how the Chinese shots work against new strains of the virus that are emerging, especially a variant first identified in South Africa. For example, Sinopharm has pledged 800,000 shots to South Africa's neighbor, Zimbabwe.

There are concerns among receiving countries that China's vaccine diplomacy may come at a cost, which

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 52 of 83

China has denied. In the Philippines, where Beijing is donating 600,000 vaccines, a senior diplomat said China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, gave a subtle message to tone down public criticism of growing Chinese assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea.

The senior diplomat said Wang did not ask for anything in exchange for vaccines, but it was clear he wanted "friendly exchanges in public, like control your megaphone diplomacy a little." The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue publicly.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte publicly said in a news conference on Sunday that China did not ask for anything, as the donations were flown in.

Meanwhile, opposition legislators in Turkey are accusing Ankara's leaders of secretly selling out Uyghurs to China in exchange for vaccines after a recent shipment delay. The legislators and the Uyghur diaspora community fear Beijing is trying to win passage of an extradition treaty that could see more Uyghurs deported to China.

Despite all the worries, the pandemic's urgency has largely superseded hesitations over China's vaccines. "Vaccines, particularly those made in the West, are reserved for rich countries," said one Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. "We had to guarantee a vaccine. Any vaccine."

Gelineau reported from Sydney.

Associated Press researcher Chen Si in Shanghai, and AP reporters Patricia Luna in Santiago, Chile; Sam Magdy in Cairo; Jim Gomez in Manila, Philippines; Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia; Aida Sultanova in London; Justin Spike in Budapest, Hungary; Dusan Stojanovic in Belgrade, Serbia; Cara Anna in Nairobi, Kenya; Allen G. Breed in Raleigh, North Carolina; and Diane Jeantet in Rio de Janeiro contributed to this report.

Cuomo allegations leave Democrats grappling with response

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats across the country celebrated New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo as the face of governing competence as President Donald Trump fumbled his administration's response to the exploding pandemic last year.

Now, the Democratic governor is struggling through a sexual harassment scandal that's testing the limits of his party's support as Democrats grapple with one of the first political headaches of the post-Trump era.

So far, few Democrats have come to Cuomo's rescue. But they haven't explicitly condemned him, either.

Both of New York's Democratic U.S. senators have publicly embraced the state attorney general's nascent investigation into Cuomo's behavior. New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy on Monday described the allegations as "deeply troubling and deeply concerning."

And on Monday, President Joe Biden, a longtime Cuomo ally, declined to stand behind the embattled governor.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the president supports the state attorney general's probe. She noted that Biden requires people to be treated with civility and respect in his administration.

"The president's view has been consistent and clear," Psaki said when asked about Cuomo. "Every woman coming forward should be treated with dignity and respect."

The scrutiny of Cuomo comes at a delicate moment as Democrats work to project unity and competence in contrast to four years of near-constant scandal and norm-shattering behavior under Trump. Cuomo's scandal also threatens the moral high ground Democrats have sought on issues related to gender and sexual harassment — which are top of mind to many women who abandoned Republicans in droves last fall to help fuel Biden's victory.

While Democrats across the country are not rallying behind Cuomo, few are calling for him to step down. For now, Rep. Kathleen Rice is the only Democrat from New York's congressional delegation to explicitly call for Cuomo's resignation.

That's in contrast to the treatment of former Minnesota Sen. Al Franken, who ultimately bowed to pressure from within his own party to step down in 2018 after facing accusations of sexual impropriety from

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 53 of 83

several women.

At that time, New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand was the first Democrat to call on Franken to resign. On Sunday, Gillibrand called the allegations against Cuomo "serious and deeply concerning" and called on State Attorney General Letitia James to conduct "a transparent, independent and thorough investigation with subpoena power."

Republicans highlighted the relatively cautious response from some Democrats, although the GOP's criticism of Cuomo directly was somewhat muted given the long list of sexual harassment allegations against Trump.

A Trump spokesman declined to weigh in when asked Monday. Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel offered a written statement seizing on Biden's unwillingness to condemn Cuomo more forcefully.

"Biden claims he is this unifying leader, but if Cuomo is not worthy of his criticism, then who is?" McDaniel said, noting that Biden last year described Cuomo as the "gold standard" for his leadership through the pandemic.

Cuomo was already facing criticism for his administration's undercounting of pandemic-related nursing home fatalities last week when a former aide, Lindsey Boylan, elaborated on harassment allegations she first made in December. Boylan said Cuomo subjected her to an unwanted kiss and comments about her appearance.

Calls for an investigation mounted when a second former aide went public Saturday with harassment claims.

Charlotte Bennett, a low-level aide in Cuomo's administration until November, told The New York Times Cuomo asked questions about her sex life, including whether she ever had sex with older men, and made other comments she interpreted as gauging her interest in an affair.

Cuomo acknowledged for the first time Sunday that some of his behavior with women "may have been insensitive or too personal," and said he would cooperate with a sexual harassment investigation led by the state's attorney general.

In a written statement, he said he had teased people about their personal lives in an attempt to be "playful."

Cuomo, the 63-year-old son of former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, is in the midst of his third four-year term as the top elected official in the nation's fourth most populous state. He has been expected to seek another term next year; New York has no term limits for governors.

Cuomo's daily coronavirus briefings brought him into the living rooms of millions of voters across the country last year, but he has long been viewed more as a regional player in Democratic politics. Still, he briefly considered a presidential bid before the last election and currently serves as the chairman of the National Governors Association.

A spokesman for the National Governors Association did not respond to a request for comment on Monday.

"The notion that this has some larger ranging political impact beyond those who read the insider tip sheets I think is misguided," said Cuomo pollster Jeffrey Pollock.

And at least for now, Cuomo's team doesn't see any risk to his 2022 reelection.

"Anytime you have to deal with chaos, it always has the potential to impact a race," Pollock said. "But right now, there is no race. There is nobody running against him. And in the past when there's been much excitement about challengers, each one of them has been vanquished by a large margin."

Cuomo's challenge underscores a stark political reality well-known across New York: the Democratic Party's far-left wing has never liked him very much.

At least two Democratic lawmakers have called on Cuomo to resign, but the most aggressive early criticism has been confined to progressives who have tried and failed for years to defeat him.

His last primary challenge from the left came from actress Cynthia Nixon, whom Cuomo defeated by more than 30 points. On Monday, Nixon encouraged Cuomo's critics on social media and called out Gillibrand for not delivering a stronger rebuke.

"Cat got your tongue @SenGillibrand???" Nixon tweeted.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 54 of 83

Gillibrand's office had no immediate response.

Meanwhile, James, the state attorney general, said she's moving forward with an investigation into the allegations against Cuomo after receiving a letter from his office Monday authorizing her to take charge of the probe. The referral letter allows James to deputize an outside law firm to conduct the inquiry with full subpoena power.

When the investigation is finished, the findings will be disclosed in a public report.

"Cuomo has been untouchable for a really long time," said New York-based progressive strategist Sophie Ellman-Golan, of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, which has called for Cuomo's resignation. "Our state deserves so much better."

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

Minimum wage hike all but dead in big COVID relief bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' hopes of including a minimum wage increase in their \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill seemed all but dead as the Senate prepared to debate its own version of the House-passed aid package.

Four days after the chamber's parliamentarian said Senate rules forbid inclusion of a straight-out minimum wage increase in the relief measure, Democrats on Monday seemed to have exhausted their most realistic options for quickly salvaging the pay hike. In one decision, they abandoned a potential amendment threatening tax increases on big companies that don't boost workers' pay to certain levels.

"At this moment, we may not have a path but I hope we can find one" for pushing the federal pay floor to \$15 an hour, said No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois.

Senate Democrats hope to unveil their version of the broad relief package and begin debate as early as Wednesday. Congressional leaders want to send President Joe Biden the legislation combating the pandemic and bolstering the economy by March 14, the date emergency jobless benefits that lawmakers approved in December expire.

The overall relief bill is Biden's biggest early legislative priority. It looms as an initial test of his ability to unite Democrats in the Senate — where the party has no votes to spare — and risks lasting damage to his influence should he fail. Republicans are strongly against the legislation and could well oppose it unanimously, as House GOP lawmakers did when that chamber approved the bill early Saturday.

The measure would provide \$1,400 payments to individuals plus hundreds of billions of dollars for schools and colleges, COVID-19 vaccines and testing, mass transit systems, renters and small businesses. It also has money for child care, tax breaks for families with children and assistance for states willing to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income residents.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said he wanted Democrats to ignore the parliamentarian's ruling blocking the minimum wage increase. He also wants them to vote to eliminate filibusters — procedural delays that would take an unachievable 60 votes for Democrats to prevail.

Neither idea seemed to have the support among Democrats or the White House needed to succeed. But Sanders, the Senate's lead sponsor of the hike to \$15, said he'd force a vote on an amendment restoring the minimum wage increase anyway.

"This is the soul of the Democratic Party," he said of the proposal. In an acknowledgement that his effort might fall short, he said, "If we fail in this legislation, I will be back" and offer it in the near future.

The Senate is divided 50-50 between the parties with Vice President Kamala Harris able to cast only tie-breaking votes. Democrats are employing a seldom-used procedure for the COVID-19 relief bill that will shield the measure from filibusters.

Biden discussed the relief bill Monday in a virtual meeting with nine Senate Democrats, including Joe Manchin of West Virginia, an opponent of the \$15 hourly target. A White House statement said the group was "united in the goal of quickly passing a significant package that reflects the scope of the challenges

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 55 of 83

our country is facing.”

Democrats, who will need unanimity to pass the legislation, are pushing for several changes in the House measure.

Manchin told reporters he wants the bill's emergency unemployment benefits, set at \$400 weekly by the House, to revert to the current \$300 figure enacted in December. That is certain to be divisive and draw strong opposition from progressives.

He and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., also said they want spending to be better “targeted,” which Manchin said meant “helping the people that need help the most.” Republicans have said the legislation is too costly and spends money needlessly.

Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, said he wants the bill's \$350 billion for state and local governments to specify minimum amounts for municipal governments and wants perhaps \$50 billion to improve broadband coverage.

The parliamentarian ruled Monday that some House-approved provisions, which would provide billions to help some struggling pension plans and to help people who've lost jobs afford health insurance, could stay in the bill, according to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

The House-approved minimum wage language would gradually raise the federal floor to \$15 an hour by 2025, more than double the \$7.25 in place since 2009.

After the parliamentarian said that provision would have to be deleted, Sanders and Wyden said they were working on plans to increase taxes on large corporations that don't meet certain levels for workers' pay.

But that plan was dropped, Democrats said Monday, with Sanders saying the proposal would have been too easy for employers to evade. It was always questionable whether pressuring companies with tax increases would have won enough Democratic support to survive, and the idea would have affected only a fraction of workers paid the minimum wage.

Raising the minimum wage has broad support among Democrats. But while it's embraced passionately by the party's progressives, at least two Senate moderates — Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona — have voiced opposition to including it in the broader relief measure, wounding its prospects and fostering tensions within the party.

Democrats must now decide “how we do minimum wage as part of another piece of legislation or on its own,” said Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut.

While eliminating filibusters or overruling the parliamentarian has strong support among progressives, the ideas lack appeal to moderates. They are wary of erasing procedures that the party has used in the past, and could use again, to protect its priorities when it is in the minority.

Among those who've long supported retaining the filibuster is Biden, who served nearly four decades in the Senate.

“The president's view on the filibuster is well known. He has not changed that point of view,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said pointedly Monday.

Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

Asian stocks mixed after Wall St. rises

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets were mixed Tuesday after Wall Street rose as a wave of investor concern about possible higher interest rates receded.

Market benchmarks in Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong declined. Seoul and Sydney advanced.

Overnight, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index climbed 2.4%, recovering most of its losses from the past week.

That came after a selloff in U.S. Treasury bonds eased. That helped to ease investor concerns the cost of borrowing might rise, putting downward pressure on the U.S. economic recovery.

“Bond markets rowed back into calmer waters,” said Stephen Innes of Axi in a report. “Stocks should con-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 56 of 83

tinue to move higher to the beat of the U.S. consumer's capacity to spend their way out of this recession."

Also Tuesday, Japan reported employment rose despite a state of emergency to cope with renewed coronavirus outbreaks and South Korea reported higher factory output.

The Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.3% to 3,539.91 and the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo sank 0.4% to 29,554.75. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 0.2% to 29,405.45.

The Kospi in Seoul advanced 1.6% to 3,060.39 after the government reported factory production increased by a better-than-forecast 7.5% in January over a year earlier, up from December's 2.5%.

The S&P-ASX 200 in Sydney was up less than 0.1% at 6,792.50. New Zealand, Singapore and Jakarta also rose.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose to 3,901.82 in its biggest single-day gain since June 5. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 2% to 31,535.51. The Nasdaq composite climbed 3% to 13,588.83.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury, or the difference between its market price and the payout if an investor holds it to maturity, fell to 1.43% after reaching its highest level in more than a year last week.

Stocks turned lower in late February after a rapid rise in bond yields, caused by a fall in their market price, fueled concerns about higher inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note climbed as high as 1.5%. It was at 1.41% on Tuesday.

Bond yields influence rates on mortgages and other borrowing.

They have climbed as investors bet coronavirus vaccination efforts would get economic growth back on track. That fueled concerns about inflation and prompted investors to move money out of bonds and into stocks and other assets that do better when consumer prices rise.

Investors are looking for more information about the U.S. economic outlook when Federal Reserve officials deliver speeches this week. Lael Brainard, an advocate for looser monetary policies, will give a monetary policy speech on Tuesday and Fed Chair Jerome Powell speaks Thursday.

Investors are watching Washington after the House of Representatives approved President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion economic aid package early Saturday and sent it to the Senate. It includes one-time payments to the public and aid to struggling businesses and local governments.

Johnson & Johnson rose 0.5% after the Food and Drug Administration gave approval for the company's coronavirus vaccine, one that does not require extensive refrigeration like the ones made by Moderna and Pfizer.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude fell 93 cents to \$59.71 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract sank 86 cents to \$60.64 on Monday. Brent crude, used to price international oils, retreated 92 cents to \$62.77 per barrel in London. It declined 73 cents the previous session to \$63.69 per barrel.

The dollar declined to 106.77 yen from Monday's 106.81 yen. The euro fell to \$1.2022 from \$1.2047.

Calls for Cuomo's resignation mount as 3rd accuser emerges

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Calls for New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's resignation intensified late Monday after a third woman accused him of offensive behavior, saying he'd touched her face and back and asked to kiss her moments after they met at a wedding reception.

Anna Ruch told The New York Times late Monday that she removed the Democratic governor's hand from her back, but he said she seemed "aggressive," promptly put his hands on her face and asked if he could kiss her.

"I was so confused and shocked and embarrassed," Ruch, now 33, told the Times, which published a photo of the encounter showing the governor's hands on her face. "I turned my head away and didn't have words in that moment."

An email seeking comment was sent to Ruch's photography business. Her social media accounts were private. An email was also sent to Cuomo's administration for comment.

The account from Ruch, who worked as a photographer at the White House during President Barack

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 57 of 83

Obama's second term, made her the second woman to accuse Cuomo of touching her without permission, and fueled broader calls for Cuomo to step down, including from some in his own party.

"The pattern of sexual harassment and predatory behavior by Governor Cuomo is unacceptable, and I believe the women coming forward," New York City Councilman Antonio Reynoso tweeted in comments echoed elsewhere. "Governor Cuomo must resign."

The latest accusation follows sexual harassment allegations against the governor from two women who had worked for his administration, accounts that led New York's independently elected attorney general to say she was moving ahead with an investigation of his conduct.

Attorney General Letitia James received a letter Monday from Cuomo's office authorizing her to take charge of the probe after a weekend of wrangling over who should investigate.

The letter enables James, also a Democrat, to deputize an outside law firm to conduct an inquiry with full subpoena power. The findings will be disclosed in a public report, the letter said.

Cuomo has maintained he had never inappropriately touched or propositioned anyone.

The former aide, Charlotte Bennett, rejected Cuomo's attempted apology in which he excused his behavior as "playful," saying Monday that the governor has "refused to acknowledge or take responsibility for his predatory behavior."

Bennett, who alleges Cuomo quizzed her about her sex life and asked whether she would be open to a relationship with an older man, tweeted that "abusers — particularly those with tremendous amounts of power — are often repeat offenders who engage in manipulative tactics to diminish allegations, blame victims, deny wrongdoing and escape consequences."

After news of Ruch's account broke, Bennett tweeted to her: "His inappropriate and aggressive behavior cannot be justified or normalized. Thank you for your courage and strength."

Cuomo's support has plummeted amid dual crises. The harassment allegations come on the heels of accusations he covered up the true death toll of coronavirus on nursing home residents.

It's quite a tumble for Cuomo, who had been widely celebrated for his leadership during the pandemic, particularly the daily news conferences where he sought to inform and reassure the public with charts, graphs and a machismo he dubbed "New York tough."

Mayor Bill de Blasio and other elected officials have said that while Cuomo is under investigation, he should cede emergency powers he's held since the pandemic began, nearly a year ago. The Legislature hasn't taken any steps to revoke Cuomo's emergency powers — set to expire April 30 — despite a push from Republicans and some Democrats.

On Monday, Cuomo retained Manhattan litigator Elkan Abramowitz to represent him and his office in probes related to nursing homes.

Abramowitz, who previously represented Cuomo's office in a federal investigation into his 2014 decision to shutdown a state anti-corruption commission, said he is not representing Cuomo in the sexual harassment matter.

Bennett, 25, came forward with her allegations in a story published Saturday in the Times. She said Cuomo told her he was lonely and looking for a girlfriend.

Cuomo did not respond to Bennett's statement Monday.

Former aide Lindsey Boylan said Cuomo made inappropriate comments about her appearance, kissed her without her consent at the end of a meeting and once suggested they play strip poker while aboard his state-owned jet. Boylan, who is running for Manhattan borough president, first accused Cuomo in a tweet last December and elaborated on the allegations in a Medium post last week.

She tweeted Monday about Ruch's experience with the governor, saying, "This doesn't make me feel validated. It makes me feel sick."

Cuomo has denied Boylan's allegations. In a statement Sunday, he acknowledged that he had teased people about their personal lives in an attempt to be "playful" and funny. He said he had wanted to act like a mentor to Bennett.

"I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 58 of 83

my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that," he said.

Cuomo's statement drew immediate backlash from critics who said he was throwing responsibility onto the women by saying they perceived his statements wrongly.

The letter authorizing James' investigation said that all state employees have been directed to cooperate fully with the review. Cuomo senior adviser Beth Garvey said she would facilitate interviews with witness and requests for documents from Cuomo's office.

Ross Garber, a lawyer who has represented former governors Mark Sanford of South Carolina and John Rowland of Connecticut, said Cuomo is "essentially handing his reputation to an outsider and saying, 'Have at it. Go find whatever you want and publish a report to the public about whatever it is you've concluded that I've done or not done.'"

Bennett's lawyer, Debra Katz, said her client will cooperate fully with the attorney general's investigation. "He was not acting as a mentor and his remarks were not misunderstood by Ms. Bennett," Katz said. "He was abusing his power over her for sex. This is textbook sexual harassment."

Initially, Cuomo appeared wanting to retain a level of control over the investigation. His office said it was asking a former federal judge, Barbara Jones, to conduct the probe. Then, his office suggested that the attorney general and the state's top judge work together to appoint outside counsel.

Finally, on Sunday, Cuomo acquiesced to James' demands that she take control.

Villeneuve reported from Albany, New York. Associated Press reporter Karen Matthews in New York contributed to this report.

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak and Marina Villeneuve at twitter.com/ReporterMarina

Deal reached to get California children back in classrooms

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

ELK GROVE, Calif. (AP) — The majority of California's 6.1 million public school students could be back in the classroom by April under new legislation announced Monday by Gov. Gavin Newsom and legislative leaders. Critics panned the plan as inadequate.

Most students in the nation's most populous state have been learning from home for the past year during the pandemic. But with new coronavirus cases falling rapidly throughout the state, Newsom and lawmakers have been under increasing pressure to come up with a statewide plan aimed at returning students to schools in-person.

If approved by the Legislature, the plan announced Monday would not order districts to return students to the classroom and no parents would be compelled to send their kids back to school in-person. Instead, the state would set aside \$2 billion to pay districts that get select groups of students into classrooms by the end of the month.

Crucially, the legislation does not require districts to have an agreement with teachers' unions on a plan for in-person instruction. That's a barrier that many districts, including the nation's second-largest district in Los Angeles, have not been able to overcome.

It also does not require all teachers be vaccinated, as teacher unions had urged and that could take months given the nation's limited supply of vaccine. The legislation would make it state law that 10% of the state's vaccine supply be set aside specifically for teachers and school staff.

"You can't reopen your economy unless you get your schools reopened for in-person instruction," said Newsom, who announced the deal with state Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon at an elementary school in the Elk Grove Unified School District just south of Sacramento. The district, one of the first in the country to halt in-person learning last year because of the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 59 of 83

coronavirus, plans to return to in-person instruction later this month.

The state's two largest teachers unions mostly praised the agreement, with California Federation of Teachers President Jeff Freitas calling the prioritization of vaccines for teachers "a huge victory." Kevin Gordon, a lobbyist representing many of the state's school districts, called the plan "a grand slam home run," saying it "dismantled every impediment to reopening that we've had so far."

The announcement comes at a critical time for Newsom, who could face a recall election later this year fueled by anger over his response to the pandemic. Kevin Faulconer, the former Republican mayor of San Diego who already has announced his candidacy, said the plan Newsom announced "isn't even close to good enough for our kids and teachers."

"For months, Newsom has ignored science and left public schools across our state shuttered while private schools are open," Faulconer said. "For him to tout this as an accomplishment after months of inexcusable failures shows how out of touch he is, and why he should be recalled."

In addition to the \$2 billion, the legislation would give all school districts access to \$4.6 billion to help students who have struggled with learning from home. Districts could use this money to add another month to the school year or they could spend it on counseling and tutoring for students who need the most help.

To get their slice of the \$2 billion, districts in counties under the state's most restrictive set of coronavirus rules — known as the purple tier — must offer in-person learning for transitional kindergarten through second grade, plus certain vulnerable students in all grades. This includes students who are disabled, homeless, in foster care, learning English, don't have access to technology or are at risk of abuse and neglect.

Counties in the next group, known as the red tier, must offer in-person instruction for all elementary school grades, plus at least one grade each in middle and high schools. With new coronavirus cases falling, Newsom said he expects most counties to be in the red tier by the end of the month.

Districts that meet the March 31 deadline get full compensation based on a complicated formula, while those that meet the standards after April 1 get less money. Districts that fail to have children back in classrooms before May 15 won't get any money.

The bill does not say how long students must be in the classroom each week. That concerns Jonathan Zachreson, founder of the parent group Reopen California Schools, who says districts could offer classroom instruction for a few hours one day per week and still get the money. He predicted many parents will get excited reading headlines from Monday's announcement, only to end up frustrated.

"It does not compel any school district to open other than just bribing them with extra money," he said. "We need to have higher standards for what in-person learning means."

Newsom dismissed those concerns, saying he is "confident people won't be gaming the system that way."

Cecily Myart-Cruz, head of United Teachers Los Angeles, said she worries the state plan would benefit schools in wealthier neighborhoods where the coronavirus is less prevalent.

"This would send extra dollars to affluent areas that are able to reopen because of low infection rates, leaving students from low-income communities of color behind," she said.

Megan Bacigalupi, a parent advocate with Open Schools California, said she worried there was no urgency to get middle and high school students back to classrooms, noting the agreement does not require all of those students to return for in-person learning.

"Framing this as a reopening deal is blind to the fact that there will be kids that will not be back in school this year," she said.

California Teachers Association President E. Toby Boyd praised the legislation for recognizing the union's safety concerns, which were broadcast to state residents in television ads that started running last month. But he criticized the plan for only requiring coronavirus testing in schools located in counties where the coronavirus is the most widespread.

This story has been corrected to say the state has set aside \$2 billion, not \$6.6 billion, that districts can tap if they return to in-person learning. The remaining \$4.6 billion is not contingent on a return to classrooms.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 60 of 83

Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento and Amy Taxin in Orange County contributed reporting.

Georgia House passes GOP bill rolling back voting access

By BEN NADLER and ANILA YOGANATHAN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Republican lawmakers in Georgia muscled legislation through the state House on Monday that would roll back voting access, over the objection of Democrats and civil rights groups gathered at the Capitol to protest.

The bill comes after record turnout led to Democratic wins in Georgia's presidential election and two U.S. Senate runoffs.

House Bill 531 passed the lower legislative chamber by a vote of 97-72. It now goes to the state Senate for more debate.

The far-reaching bill would require a photo ID for absentee voting, limit the amount of time voters have to request an absentee ballot, restrict where ballot drop boxes could be located and when they could be accessed, and limit early voting hours on weekends, among many other changes.

It is one of a flood of election bills being pushed by GOP lawmakers across the country this year that would add new barriers to voting.

Republicans say the measure is needed to restore the public's confidence in elections, after former President Donald Trump and his allies relentlessly pushed false claims about fraud.

"House Bill 531 is designed to begin to bring back the confidence of our voters back into our election system," said Republican Rep. Barry Fleming, the measure's chief sponsor.

Democrats say the legislation furthers Trump's lies and would disproportionately affect voters of color.

"It's pathetically obvious to anyone paying attention that when Trump lost the November election and Georgia flipped control of the U.S. Senate to Democrats shortly after, Republicans got the message that they were in a political death spiral," Democratic Rep. Renitta Shannon said. "And now they are doing anything they can to silence the voices of Black and brown voters specifically, because they largely powered these wins."

Dozens of protesters gathered just outside the Capitol on Monday in opposition to the bill, chanting "say no to voter suppression" and "protect the vote."

"Today, before the eyes of this country, Georgia is poised to pass some of the most egregious, dangerous and most expensive voter suppression acts in this entire nation, rolling back years of hardball progress and renewing our own reputation for discrimination," the Rev. James Woodall, president of the Georgia NAACP, said at the rally.

Alaina Reaves, the president of the Clayton County Young Democrats, was among the protesters.

"We take one step forward and then you know these legislators are trying to bring us up to two steps back," Reaves said.

Later Monday, the state Senate Ethics Committee approved a Republican-backed bill that would limit who can vote absentee in Georgia to those 65 and older, people with a disability and people who will be away from their precinct on Election Day.

That bill would do away with no-excuse absentee voting adopted by a Republican-controlled legislature in 2005. It could soon move to the full Senate for a vote.

Senate confirms Cardona as Biden's education secretary

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

The Senate voted Monday to confirm Miguel Cardona as education secretary, clearing his way to lead President Joe Biden's effort to reopen the nation's schools amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Cardona, 45, a former public school teacher who went on to become Connecticut's education chief, was approved on a 64-33 vote.

He takes charge of the Education Department amid mounting tension between Americans who believe

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 61 of 83

students can safely return to the classroom now, and others who say the risks are still too great.

Although his position carries limited authority to force schools to reopen, Cardona will be asked to play a central role in achieving Biden's goal to have a majority of elementary schools open five days a week within his first 100 days. He will be tasked with guiding schools through the reopening process, and sharing best practices on how to teach during a pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last month released a road map for getting students back into classrooms safely. The agency said masks, social distancing and other strategies should be used, but vaccination of teachers was not a prerequisite for reopening.

Cardona, who gained attention for his efforts to reopen schools in Connecticut, has vowed to make it his top priority to reopen schools. At his Senate confirmation hearing last month, he said there are "great examples throughout our country of schools that have been able to reopen safely."

The debate has become a political firestorm for Biden, who is caught between competing interests as he aims to get students into the classroom without provoking the powerful teachers unions that helped put him in the White House. He says his goal of returning students to the classroom is possible if Congress approves his relief plan, which includes \$130 billion for the nation's schools.

Republicans have rebuked Biden for failing to reopen schools faster, while teachers unions opposed the administration's decision to continue with federally required standardized tests during the pandemic.

The tricky terrain is nothing new for Cardona, however, who faced similar tension navigating the pandemic in Connecticut, and who has won early praise even from Biden's critics.

Republicans in Congress have applauded Cardona's efforts to reopen schools in Connecticut, and some see him as a potential ally in their support for charter schools. Teachers, meanwhile, see him as a partner who brings years of experience in education and knows the demands of the teaching.

The nomination continues a meteoric rise for Cardona, who was appointed to lead Connecticut's education department in 2019 after spending 20 years working in Meriden, Connecticut, public schools — the same district he attended as a child.

He began his career as a fourth grade teacher before becoming the state's youngest principal at age 28. In 2012, he was named Connecticut's principal of the year, and in 2015 he became an assistant superintendent of the district. When he was appointed state education commissioner, he became the first Latino to hold the post.

Cardona grew up in a public housing project in Meriden, raised by parents who came to Connecticut from Puerto Rico as children. Through his career, he has focused on closing education gaps and supporting bilingual education. It's a personal issue for Cardona, who says he spoke only Spanish when he entered kindergarten and struggled to learn English.

Cardona was the first in his family to graduate from college, and his three degrees include a doctorate in education from the University of Connecticut. He and his wife, Marissa, have two children in high school.

His deep roots in public schooling fit the criteria Biden was looking for in an education secretary. During his campaign, Biden vowed to pick a secretary with experience in public education. It was meant to draw a contrast with then-secretary Betsy DeVos, a Michigan billionaire who spent decades advocating for school choice policies.

In an increasingly fractionalized world of education, Cardona has vowed to be a unifier. At his confirmation hearing, he promised to engage with "the vast, diverse community of people who have a stake in education." He added that, "we gain strength from joining together."

As he works to help schools reopen, he will also be tasked with helping them address the damage the pandemic has done on student learning. He has echoed Biden's call for further education funding, saying schools will need to expand summer academic programs and hire more counselors to help students with mental health issues.

He's also likely to face an early test as he weighs how much flexibility to grant states as they administer standardized tests. Last week, the Education Department ordered states to continue with annual testing but said assessments could be offered online or delayed until fall. The agency also held out the possibility

that states could be granted "additional assessment flexibility" in certain cases.

Some states are already pushing for that extra flexibility, including Michigan, which is asking to replace state tests with local "benchmark" assessments that were administered this year. It will be up to Cardona to decide how much leniency to provide.

Republicans have also set the stage for a fight over transgender athletes. At last month's hearing, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., raised objections with policies that allow transgender girls to participate in girls' athletics. It's the subject of a legal battle in Connecticut, where some cisgender athletes are challenging a state policy that lets transgender students participate as their identified gender.

Pressed by Paul to take a stance on the issue, Cardona said he would support the right of "all students, including students who are transgender."

United Methodist conservatives detail plans for a breakaway

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Conservative leaders within the United Methodist Church unveiled plans Monday to form a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church, with a doctrine that does not recognize same-sex marriage.

The move could hasten the long-expected breakup of the UMC over differing approaches to LGBTQ inclusion. For now, the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant church in the U.S. and second only to the Southern Baptist Convention, an evangelical denomination, among all U.S. Protestant churches.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the UMC's General Conference — at which the schism would be debated — has been postponed for two consecutive years, and is now scheduled to take place in Minneapolis starting in late August of 2022.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, a Methodist elder from Virginia who chairs the Global Methodist initiative, said he and his allies do not want to wait that long to formally leave the UMC. They have asked that the topic of schism be added to the tightly limited agenda of a special one-day General Conference to be conducted online May 8.

"The church is basically stalemated right now," Boyette said. "We don't believe an additional year is going to be helpful for anybody."

However, Louisiana-based Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, who heads the UMC's Council of Bishops, said debate over a schism would involve "delicate deliberations" and attempting to conduct them online in May "does not seem wise or ethical."

If the issue is not addressed on May 8, Boyette said he and his allies would be willing to delay until the 2022 General Conference, but only if UMC centrists and progressives remain committed to previous agreements about a breakup. Any lessening of those commitments might prompt the conservatives to bring the new church into existence, Boyette said.

Differences over same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy have simmered for years in the UMC, and came to a head in 2019 at a conference in St. Louis where delegates voted 438-384 to strengthen bans on LGBTQ-inclusive practices. Most U.S.-based delegates opposed that plan and favored LGBTQ-friendly options; they were outvoted by U.S. conservatives teamed with most of the delegates from Methodist strongholds in Africa and the Philippines.

In the aftermath of that meeting, many moderate and liberal clergy made clear they would not abide by the bans, and various groups worked on proposals to let the UMC split along theological lines.

The most prominent plan, the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation, has some high-level support, including from the Council of Bishops and from the Global Methodist group. Under the protocol, conservative congregations and regional bodies would be allowed to separate from the UMC and form a new denomination. They would receive \$25 million in UMC funds and be able to keep their properties.

On a new website launched Monday, the Global Methodist organizers said the new denomination would allow women to serve at all levels and seek a membership that is "ethnically and racially diverse."

Regarding LGBTQ issues, organizers said the denomination would adhere to "the traditional understanding of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman and as God's intended setting for

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 63 of 83

human sexual expression.”

Bishop Karen Oliveto of the UMC’s Mountain Sky region — who in 2016 became the UMC’s first openly lesbian bishop — said in an email that “it is heartbreaking when the Body of Christ fragments itself.”

“I pray that those who are called into the Global Methodist Church will find themselves free to be the people whom God calls them to be,” she added.

Formed in a merger in 1968, the United Methodist Church claims about 12.6 million members worldwide, including nearly 7 million in the United States.

The UMC’s demography is illustrated by the apportionment of voting delegates for the 2022 General Conference: About 56% come from the United States, 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines and most of the rest from Europe.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

VIRUS TODAY: States ease restrictions despite warnings

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— With the U.S. vaccination drive picking up speed and a third vaccine on the way, states eager to reopen for business are easing coronavirus restrictions despite warnings from health experts that the outbreak is far from over and that moving too quickly could prolong the misery.

— Senate Democrats are considering reshaping parts of the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill passed by the House. As they do so, party leaders who are hoping to salvage a minimum wage increase have abandoned one proposal aimed at pressuring big companies to boost workers’ pay.

— California Gov. Gavin Newsom and state legislative leaders have reached an agreement aimed at getting most public school children back in classrooms by the end of March. Under the deal announced Monday, school districts could receive up to \$6.6 billion if they reopen classrooms by March 31.

THE NUMBERS: According to data from Johns Hopkins University, the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. declined over the past two weeks, going from 90,946.7 on Feb. 14 to 67,364.9 on Sunday. In the U.S., 15.3% of the population had received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, while 7.7% have completed their vaccination.

QUOTABLE: “This is exactly what we fought for. This is the moment that we knew would be possible and important in the lives of our young people. ... That’s why this giving parents an option to come back in-person for their students was so important.” - Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, as thousands of Chicago Public Schools students returned to school Monday morning. It’s the largest wave of students to go back to the classroom there after almost a year of remote learning.

ICYMI: Massive fraud in the nation’s unemployment system is raising alarms even as President Joe Biden and Congress prepare to pour hundreds of billions of dollars into expanded benefits. A government watchdog agency says that as of December, nearly two dozen states had not started using a key system to block fraud.

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

Texas top utility regulator quits in fallout over blackouts

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas’ top utilities regulator resigned Monday in the widening fallout from blackouts triggered by an unusually heavy and widespread winter storm that left millions in the state without power and water for days.

DeAnn Walker, the chairwoman of the Public Utility Commission, is the highest-ranking official to step

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 64 of 83

down in the aftermath of one of the largest power failures in U.S. history.

Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Walker to the commission in 2017, and she is one of two commissioners who used to work in his office. In a letter to Abbott, Walker said she accepted her role in the outages but that others should acknowledge their responsibility, including gas companies and lawmakers.

"I believe others should come forward in dignity and courage and acknowledge how their actions or inactions contributed to the situation," Walker wrote.

She resigned the same day Texas' largest and oldest power cooperative announced it was filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, and as the state's attorney general launched an investigation into one electricity provider, Griddy, whose customers incurred massive bills during February's winter storm.

Abbott, a Republican, blamed the power failures on the state's grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, commonly known as ERCOT. But the three-member commission appointed by Abbott has oversight authority over ERCOT.

Abbott's spokesman Renae Eze said in a short statement that the governor thanks Walker "for her years of service to the State of Texas." The statement did not reflect on Walker's performance ahead of the outages.

Walker struggled in two lengthy appearances before legislative panels investigating the state's electric grid breakdowns, the commission's response and the lack of communication with the public over the approaching storm.

She initially said her agency has little control over ERCOT, but later said it has total control. Lawmakers questioned her knowledge of her agency's authority and the decision to reduce or reassign enforcement staff charged with policing the utility companies.

"Despite the treatment I received from some legislators, I am proud that I spoke the truth," Walker wrote.

She was also criticized for a lack of communication about the approaching catastrophic storm. Walker testified that she spoke with Abbott's office, as well as staff for Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and others several days before the storm hit to warn them about the weather and its potential impact on power distribution in the state.

Texas was hit with historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures in an icy blast that cut across the Deep South for days starting Feb. 14. More than 40 deaths in Texas — and double that toll regionwide — have been blamed on the storm and the resulting blackouts.

ERCOT officials have said the entire grid — which is uniquely isolated from the rest of the U.S. — was on the brink of collapse in the early hours of Feb. 15 as power plants froze in the cold and record demand for electricity to heat homes overwhelmed the system.

At least six ERCOT board members have resigned in the wake of the power failures.

Also Monday, Brazos Electric Power announced it was filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, citing the punishing storm. The state's largest and oldest power cooperative said it received excessively high invoices from ERCOT for collateral and purported cost of electric service during the storm, and that it was not prepared to pass those costs along to its members or customers.

Associated Press reported Paul Weber contributed to this report.

Lady Gaga's dog walker speaks out after Hollywood shooting

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lady Gaga's dog walker, who was shot last week during a robbery in Hollywood when two of the singer's French bulldogs were stolen, described the violence and his recovery "from a very close call with death" in social media posts Monday.

Ryan Fischer's posts included pictures taken from his hospital bed, where he says "(a) lot of healing still needs to happen" but he looks forward to reuniting with the dogs.

Fischer was shot once as he walked three of Lady Gaga's dogs on Wednesday night on a street just off the famed Sunset Boulevard. Video captured by the doorbell camera of a nearby home captured Fischer's

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 65 of 83

screams of "Oh my God! I've been shot!" and "Help me!" and "I'm bleeding out from my chest!"

Police are seeking two men in the attack and said Monday they are still investigating.

The two dogs, named Koji and Gustav, were returned unharmed Friday evening when a woman showed up at a Los Angeles police station with them. Detectives do not believe she was involved in the robbery or shooting and did not know if she would receive the \$500,000 reward Lady Gaga had offered for the dogs' return. The singer is currently in Rome to film a movie.

Fischer thanked Lady Gaga for her support during the ordeal, writing "your babies are back and the family is whole ... we did it!" in Instagram posts. A third dog, named Asia, escaped the assailants and lies down next to Fischer "while a car sped away and blood poured from my gun shot (sic) wound," he wrote.

The doorbell video shows 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.

Prince Harry: Split from royal life 'unbelievably tough'

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Prince Harry says the process of separating from royal life has been very difficult for him and his wife, Meghan.

In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Harry invoked the memory of his late mother, Princess Diana, who had to find her way alone after she and Prince Charles divorced.

"I'm just really relieved and happy to be sitting here talking to you with my wife by my side, because I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like for her going through this process by herself all those years ago," Harry said, adding, "because it's been unbelievably tough for the two of us."

"But at least we have each other," Harry said, in a clip from the interview special, which is scheduled to air March 7 on CBS and the following day in Britain. Diana was shown in a photo holding toddler Harry as he made the comments. His mother died in 1997 of injuries suffered in a car crash.

Harry and Meghan sat opposite Winfrey and side-by-side, holding hands during the interview that was conducted in a lush garden setting. The couple lives in Montecito, California, where they are neighbors of Winfrey. Meghan, who recently announced she is pregnant with the couple's second child, wore an empire-style black dress with embroidery. Harry wore a light gray suit and white dress shirt, minus a tie.

As Meghan Markle, the actor starred in the TV legal drama "Suits." She married Queen Elizabeth II's grandson at Windsor Castle in May 2018, and their son, Archie, was born a year later.

The brief promotional clip was one of two of that aired Sunday during CBS' news magazine "60 Minutes." Winfrey's questions and comment were predominant in the other clip, including her statement that, "You said some pretty shocking things here," without an indication of what she was referring to. Meghan was not heard from in the clips.

Harry and Meghan stepped away from full-time royal life in March 2020, unhappy at media scrutiny and the strictures of their roles. They cited what they described as the intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media toward the duchess, who is African American.

It was agreed the situation would be reviewed after a year. On Feb. 19, Buckingham Palace confirmed that the couple will not be returning to royal duties and Harry will give up his honorary military titles — a decision that makes formal, and final, the couple's split from the royal family.

The pair, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, verified "they will not be returning as working members of the Royal Family. "

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

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

This story corrects the date Buckingham Palace confirmed the couple would not return to royal duties. It was Friday, Feb. 19, not Friday.

States easing virus restrictions despite experts' warnings

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — With the U.S. vaccination drive picking up speed and a third formula on the way, states eager to reopen for business are easing coronavirus restrictions despite warnings from health experts that the outbreak is far from over and that moving too quickly could prolong the misery.

Massachusetts on Monday made it much easier to grab dinner and a show. In Missouri, where individual communities get to make the rules, the two biggest metropolitan areas — St. Louis and Kansas City — are relaxing some measures. Iowa's governor recently lifted mask requirements and limits on the number of people allowed in bars and restaurants, while the town of Lawrence, home to the University of Kansas, now lets establishments stay open until midnight.

Mike Lee, who owns Trezo Mare Restaurant & Lounge in Kansas City, said he hopes increased vaccine access, combined with warmer weather, will improve business.

"I think that people are excited to put this past them and be able to start to get back to their ways of doing things," Lee said.

The push to reopen comes as COVID-19 vaccine shipments to the states are ramping up. Nearly 20% of the nation's adults — or over 50 million people — have received at least one dose of vaccine, and 10% have been fully inoculated 2 1/2 months into the campaign to snuff out the virus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Johnson & Johnson shipped out nearly 4 million doses of its newly authorized, one-shot COVID-19 vaccine Sunday night to be delivered to states for use starting on Tuesday. The company will deliver about 16 million more doses by the end of March and a total of 100 million by the end of June.

That adds to the supply being distributed by Pfizer and Moderna and should help the nation amass enough doses by midsummer to vaccinate all adults. The White House is encouraging Americans to take the first dose available to them, regardless of manufacturer.

In New York City, where limited indoor dining has resumed, officials said the J&J vaccine will help the city to inoculate millions more people by summer, including through door-to-door vaccinations of homebound senior citizens.

But the efforts come with strong warnings from health officials against reopening too quickly, as worrisome coronavirus variants spread.

On Monday, the head of the CDC, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, urgently warned state officials and ordinary Americans not to let down their guard, saying she is "really worried about reports that more states are rolling back the exact public health measures that we have recommended."

"I remain deeply concerned about a potential shift in the trajectory of the pandemic," she said. "We stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground that we have gained."

Cases and hospitalizations have plunged since the end of January, and deaths have also dropped sharply, but they are still running at dangerously high levels and have even risen slightly over the past several days.

"We cannot be resigned to 70,000 cases a day and 2,000 daily deaths," Walensky said.

Overall, the outbreak has killed more than a half-million Americans.

The vaccine already is contributing to a decrease in severe cases and deaths among older people, and is "quickly becoming a bigger contributor" nationally, Justin Lessler, an expert in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University, said in an email.

"I suspect we will see it overtake natural infection as the biggest driver of immunity late spring earliest, more likely midsummer," Lessler said.

Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious disease specialist at Johns Hopkins University, said he believes states and cities have leeway to ease some restrictions because hospitals no longer are at capacity in most communities. But "I do think that masks are likely going to need to be kept in place for some time until we get more of our vulnerable populations vaccinated," he said.

"It is important for restaurants who are increasing their capacity to remember that we are still in a pandemic and to continue to follow some of those rules," Adalja said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 67 of 83

The Biden administration wants to see all three vaccines distributed evenly, while also acknowledging that the easy-to-handle J&J vaccine will be used in pop-up mobile sites and locations without freezer storage capacity.

States are hoping that the surging vaccine supply will help tamp down new infections.

In Massachusetts, Gov. Charlie Baker lifted restaurant capacity limits entirely. Theaters can open at 50% capacity, with a maximum of 500 people. And capacity limits across all businesses have been raised to 50%.

Las Vegas on Monday became the latest of the nation's largest school districts to return children to classrooms. Pre-K children to third graders will go back two days a week, with other grades to be phased in by early April.

And in California, Gov. Gavin Newsom and legislative leaders reached an agreement aimed at getting most children back in classrooms by the end of March. Under the deal announced Monday, school districts could receive up to \$6.6 billion if they reopen by March 31.

The U.S. ranks fourth in the world, behind Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Britain, in the number of doses administered relative to the population, according to data compiled by the University of Oxford.

President Joe Biden fell well short of his goal of setting up 100 new federally operated mass-vaccination sites by the end of February, with just seven up and running.

White House vaccination coordinator Jeff Zients also acknowledged that scheduling of vaccination appointments "remains too difficult in too many places." But he said the White House is working with states to improve scheduling systems and is exploring federal support for call centers to make it easier for people to get appointments.

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan. Associated Press writers Adam Beam in Sacramento, California; Bryan Anderson in Raleigh, North Carolina; Carla K. Johnson in Seattle; Mark Pratt in Boston; Karen Matthews in New York City; and Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Tensions over vaccine equity pit rural against urban America

By TRAVIS LOLLER, JONATHAN MATTISE and GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Rita Fentress was worried she might get lost as she traveled down the unfamiliar forested, one-lane road in rural Tennessee in search of a coronavirus vaccine. Then the trees cleared and the Hickman County Agricultural Pavilion appeared.

The 74-year-old woman wasn't eligible to be vaccinated in Nashville, where she lives, because there were so many health care workers to vaccinate there. But a neighbor told her the state's rural counties had already moved to younger age groups and she found an appointment 60 miles away.

"I felt kind of guilty about it," she said. "I thought maybe I was taking it from someone else." But late that February day, she said there were still five openings for the next morning.

The U.S. vaccine campaign has heightened tensions between rural and urban America, where from Oregon to Tennessee to upstate New York complaints are surfacing of a real — or perceived — inequity in vaccine allocation.

In some cases, recriminations over how scarce vaccines are distributed have taken on partisan tones, with rural Republican lawmakers in Democrat-led states complaining of "picking winners and losers," and urbanites traveling hours to rural GOP-leaning communities to score COVID-19 shots when there are none in their city.

In Oregon, state GOP lawmakers walked out of a Legislative session last week over the Democratic governor's vaccine plans, citing rural vaccine distribution among their concerns. In upstate New York, public health officials in rural counties have complained of disparities in vaccine allocation and in North Carolina, rural lawmakers say too many doses were going to mass vaccine centers in big cities.

In Tennessee, Missouri and Alabama, a dearth of shots in urban areas with the greatest number of health care workers has led senior citizens to snap up appointments hours from their homes. The result

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 68 of 83

is a hodgepodge of approaches that can look like the exact opposite of equity, where those most likely to be vaccinated are people with the savvy and means to search out a shot and travel to wherever it is.

"It's really, really flawed," said Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, who noted there are even vaccine hunters who will find a dose for money. "Ideally, allocations would meet the population's needs."

With little more than general guidance from the federal government, states have taken it upon themselves to decide what it means to distribute the vaccine fairly and reach vulnerable populations.

Tennessee, like many states, has divvied up doses based primarily on county population, not on how many residents belong to eligible groups — such as health care workers. The Tennessee health commissioner has defended the allocation as the "most equitable," but the approach has also exposed yet another layer of haves and have-nots as the vaccine rollout accelerates.

In Oregon, the issue led state officials to pause dose deliveries in some rural areas that had finished inoculating their health care workers while clinics elsewhere, including the Portland metro area, caught up. The dust-up last month prompted an angry response, with some state GOP lawmakers accusing the Democratic governor of playing favorites with the urban dwellers who elected her.

Public health leaders in Morrow County, a farming region in northeastern Oregon with one of the highest COVID-19 infection rates, said they had to delay two vaccine clinics because of the state's decision. Other rural counties delayed vaccines for seniors.

States face plenty of challenges. Rural counties are less likely to have the deep-freeze equipment necessary to store Pfizer vaccines. Health care workers are often concentrated in big cities. And rural counties were particularly hard hit by COVID-19 in many states, but their residents are among the most likely to say they're "definitely not" going to get vaccinated, according to recent Kaiser Family Foundation polling.

Adalja said most of these complications were foreseeable and could have been avoided with proper planning and funding.

"There are people who know how to do this," he said. "They're just not in charge of it."

In Missouri, where Facebook groups have emerged with postings about appointment availabilities in rural areas, state Senate Minority Leader John Rizzo, a Democrat from the Kansas City suburb of Independence, cited a need to direct more vaccine to urban areas.

The criticism drew an angry rebuke from Republican Gov. Mike Parson, who said vaccine distribution has been proportional to the population and critics are using "cherry-picked" data.

"There is no division between rural and urban Missouri," Parson said during his weekly COVID-19 update last week.

In Republican-led Tennessee, Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey notes that the Trump administration deemed the state's plan among the nation's most equitable. Extra doses go to 35 counties with a high social vulnerability index score — many small and rural, but also Shelby County, which includes Memphis, with a large Black population.

Last week, state officials revealed some 2,400 doses had been wasted in Shelby County over the past month due to miscommunication and insufficient record-keeping. The county also built up nearly 30,000 excessive doses in its inventory. The situation caused the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate and the county health director to resign.

In Nashville, Democratic Mayor John Cooper says the fact that city residents can get shots elsewhere is a positive, even if the road trips are "a little bit of a pain."

"I'm grateful that other counties have not said, 'Oh my gosh, you have to be a resident of this county always to get the vaccine,'" Cooper said.

Nashville educators Jennifer Simon and Jessica Morris took sick days last week to make the four-hour round-trip to tiny Van Buren County, population less than 6,000.

They got their first shots there in January, when Republican Gov. Bill Lee was pushing Nashville and Memphis area schools to return to in-person classes. Republican lawmakers even threatened to pull funding from districts that remained online.

In-person classes started a couple weeks ago, but the city only began vaccinating teachers last week.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 69 of 83

"It was scary, frustrating, and feeling really betrayed," Simon said.

Flaccus reported from Portland, Oregon. Jim Salter in O'Fallon, Missouri; Bryan Anderson in Raleigh, N.C., and Carla Johnson in Washington state contributed.

AI panel urges US to boost tech skills amid China's rise

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

An artificial intelligence commission led by former Google CEO Eric Schmidt is urging the U.S. to boost its AI skills to counter China, including by pursuing "AI-enabled" weapons – something that Google itself has shied away from on ethical grounds.

Schmidt and current executives from Google, Microsoft, Oracle and Amazon are among the 15 members of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, which released its final report to Congress on Monday.

"To win in AI we need more money, more talent, stronger leadership," Schmidt said Monday.

The report says that machines that can "perceive, decide, and act more quickly" than humans and with more accuracy are going to be deployed for military purposes — with or without the involvement of the U.S. and other democracies. It warns against unchecked use of autonomous weapons but expresses opposition to a global ban.

It also calls for "wise restraints" on the use of AI tools such as facial recognition that can be used for mass surveillance.

"We have to develop technology that preserves our Western values, but we have to be prepared for a world in which not everyone is doing that," said Andrew Moore, a commissioner and the head of Google Cloud AI.

The group has the ear of top lawmakers from both parties, but has attracted criticism for including many members who work for tech companies with big government contracts, and who thus have a lot at stake in federal rules on emerging technology.

The report calls for a "White House-led strategy" to defend against AI-related threats, to set standards on how intelligent machines can be used responsibly and to boost U.S. research and development to maintain the nation's technological advantage over China.

"We believe we are one or two years ahead of China, not five or 10," Schmidt told the Senate Armed Services Committee last week. He clarified Monday that that he was expressing his personal opinions and not necessarily those of the commission.

It's not yet clear whether President Joe Biden's administration is on board with the commission's approach. It's still awaiting confirmation of a new director for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, which Biden has elevated to a Cabinet-level position.

"AI policy tends to be very bipartisan," said Michael Kratsios, who was U.S. chief technology officer under President Donald Trump and led a push to pump more resources into AI development across federal agencies. The greatest imperative, he said, is that "the next great AI technologies are developed in the West."

One big difference between the two administrations is likely to be the approach to building AI talent. The commission recommends a more open immigration policy than what Trump favored.

Congress formed the AI panel in 2018 and appointed 12 of its 15 commissioners, with the others picked by Trump's Defense and Commerce secretaries. A judge later compelled the commission to make its meetings and records more accessible to the public after a civil liberties group, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, challenged its secrecy.

It's been led by Schmidt, who was Google's CEO and later the executive chairman of its parent company Alphabet. He previously helped lead the Defense Innovation Board, which advises the Pentagon on new technology.

That brought some conflict in 2018 when Google backed out of Project Maven, a U.S. military initiative using AI-based computer vision technology to analyze drone footage in conflict zones. The company, respond-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 70 of 83

ing to internal activism from employees, also pledged not to use AI in any weapons-related applications.

"I did not agree with the Google decisions on Maven," Schmidt told senators last week, calling it an "aberration" compared to the tech industry as a whole, where he says there are plenty of companies that want to work with the military. He said AI and machine vision systems are particularly good at "watching for things," which is something the military spends a lot of time doing.

The commission also includes executives like Safra Catz, the CEO of software giant Oracle, and Amazon's incoming CEO, Andy Jassy, who currently runs its cloud computing division, as well as top AI experts at Microsoft and Google. All four companies have competed against each other for federal cloud computing contracts. The representatives from Microsoft and Google joined other members in approving the final report Monday, but abstained from the section relating to government partnerships with the private sector.

Excluding human rights groups and rank-and-file tech experts from the commission has led the group to more easily frame this policy issue as a "democracy versus authoritarianism" competition against China while skirting more difficult topics, like the use of AI technologies on the U.S.-Mexico border, said Jack Poulson, a former Google researcher who now directs industry watchdog Tech Inquiry.

"The nominal reason to have these tech CEOs on these committees is they're experts in the technology. But they're also, subject to shareholder requirements, acting in the interests of their companies," Poulson said. "They don't want significant regulation or antitrust enforcement."

The government-industry partnership may be important for the U.S. and its allies to help set standards for the responsible use of AI, said Megan Lamberth, a research associate at the Center for a New American Security.

"AI has the potential to really transform not only how militaries fight wars, but how economies operate and how societies and people interact with each other," Lamberth said. "If there's a gap in leadership, another country is going to fill that void."

The American Civil Liberties Union said in a statement Monday that the commission made useful recommendations but it should have gone further by establishing civil rights protections now, before AI systems are widely deployed by intelligence agencies and the military.

The commission asked Congress to make new laws requiring federal agencies to conduct human rights assessments of new AI systems used on Americans. But it didn't recommend the binding surveillance limits sought by activists.

WHO: 'Premature,' 'unrealistic' COVID-19 will end soon

By MARIA CHENG and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A senior World Health Organization official said Monday it was "premature" and "unrealistic" to think the pandemic might be stopped by the end of the year, but that the recent arrival of effective vaccines could at least help dramatically reduce hospitalizations and death.

The world's singular focus right now should be to keep transmission of COVID-19 as low as possible, said Dr. Michael Ryan, director of WHO's emergencies program.

"If we're smart, we can finish with the hospitalizations and the deaths and the tragedy associated with this pandemic" by the end of the year, he said at media briefing.

Ryan said WHO was reassured by emerging data that many of the licensed vaccines appear to be helping curb the virus' explosive spread.

"If the vaccines begin to impact not only on death and not only on hospitalization, but have a significant impact on transmission dynamics and transmission risk, then I believe we will accelerate toward controlling this pandemic."

But Ryan warned against complacency, saying that nothing was guaranteed in an evolving epidemic.

"Right now the virus is very much in control," he said.

WHO's director-general, meanwhile, said it was "regrettable" that younger and healthier adults in some rich countries are being vaccinated against the coronavirus before at-risk health workers in developing countries.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 71 of 83

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said immunizations provided by the U.N.-backed effort COVAX began this week in Ghana and the Ivory Coast, but lamented that this was happening only three months after countries such as Britain, the U.S. and Canada began vaccinating their own populations.

"Countries are not in a race with each other," he said. "This is a common race against the virus. We are not asking countries to put their own people at risk. We are asking all countries to be part of a global effort to suppress the virus everywhere."

But WHO stopped short of criticizing countries who are moving to vaccinate younger and healthier populations instead of donating their doses to countries that haven't yet been able to protect their most vulnerable people.

"We can't tell individual countries what to do," said Dr. Bruce Aylward, a senior WHO adviser.

Tedros also noted that for the first time in seven weeks, the number of COVID-19 cases increased last week, after six consecutive weeks of declining numbers. He described the increase as "disappointing," but said it wasn't surprising.

Tedros said WHO was working to better understand why cases increased, but that part of that spike appeared to be due to the "relaxing of public health measures."

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng reported from London.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Armenia's political tensions rise amid rival rallies

By AVET DEMOURIAN Associated Press

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — Political tensions in Armenia heightened Monday, with supporters of the embattled prime minister and the opposition each holding massive rallies at separate sites in the capital.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has faced opposition demands to resign since he signed a peace deal in November that ended six weeks of intense fighting with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The Russia-brokered agreement saw Azerbaijan reclaim control over large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas that had been held by Armenian forces for more than a quarter-century.

Opposition protests seeking Pashinyan's ouster abated during the winter but intensified last week amid a rift between him and the country's military leaders.

The spat was sparked by Pashinyan firing a deputy chief of the military's General Staff who had laughed off the prime minister's claim that only 10% of Russia-supplied Iskander missiles that Armenia used in the conflict exploded on impact.

The General Staff then demanded Pashinyan's resignation, and he responded by dismissing the General Staff chief, Col. Gen. Onik Gasparyan. The dismissal has yet to be approved by Armenia's largely ceremonial president, Armen Sarkissian, who sent it back to Pashinyan, saying the move was unconstitutional.

Pashinyan quickly resubmitted the demand for the general's ouster, and the prime minister's allies warned that the president could be impeached if he fails to endorse the move.

Sarkissian's office responded with a strongly worded statement condemning "inadmissible speculation" about his move and emphasizing that his decision was "unbiased and driven exclusively by national interests."

Addressing a rally of thousands of his supporters, Pashinyan voiced hope the president would endorse the dismissal of the General Staff's chief for meddling in politics.

He blamed the country's former leader who lost power in the 2018 "velvet revolution" for influencing the military brass and trying to "set the army against the legitimately elected authorities and the people."

The prime minister also suggested calling a constitutional referendum in October to ask voters about

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 72 of 83

expanding presidential powers to avoid future crises, although he didn't spell out specific changes.

After an hour-long speech, Pashinyan led his supporters on a march across Yerevan under the heavy escort of police and security officers.

Thousands of opposition supporters rallied at a separate location, demanding that the prime minister resign, and some later marched to the president's residence to support him in the rift with Pashinyan.

The two marches proceeded along separate routes amid tight police cordons. At one point, scuffles broke out between some from the rival camps, but police quickly pulled them apart.

Amid the escalating tensions earlier in the day, a group of protesters broke into a government building in central Yerevan to press for Pashinyan's resignation, but they left shortly afterward without violence.

Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a leading member of the opposition Dashnaktsutyun party, promised that the protests will continue Tuesday. He also called for another rally Wednesday, when Pashinyan is expected to appear in parliament. Saghatelyan urged opposition supporters to gather in front of parliament that day "to clearly convey our voice."

Pashinyan, a 45-year-old former journalist who came to power after leading large street protests in 2018 that ousted his predecessor, still enjoys broad support despite the country's humiliating defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh and the opposition calls for his resignation.

The prime minister has defended the peace deal as a painful but necessary move to prevent Azerbaijan from overrunning the entire Nagorno-Karabakh region, which lies within Azerbaijan but was under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since a separatist war there ended in 1994. The fighting with Azerbaijan that erupted in late September and lasted 44 days has left more than 6,000 people dead. Russia has deployed about 2,000 peacekeepers to monitor the Nov. 10 peace deal.

Armenia has relied on Moscow's financial and military support and hosts a Russian military base — ties that will keep the two nations closely allied regardless of the outcome of the political infighting.

Last week, the Russian Defense Ministry rebuked the Armenian leader for criticism of the Iskander missile, a state-of-the-art weapon touted by the military for its accuracy. The Russian military said it was "bewildered" to hear Pashinyan's claim because Armenia hadn't used an Iskander missile in the conflict.

In a bid to repair the damage to Armenia's ties with Moscow, Pashinyan rescinded his claim Monday, acknowledging that he made the statement after being misled.

—
Associated Press writer Vladimir Isachenkov in Moscow contributed.

George Floyd kin joins protest anthem album project

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Before a late night rehearsal in December, Terrence Floyd couldn't remember the last time he squatted on a drum throne, sticks in hand and ready to perform.

Surely, he said, it had not happened since his brother, George Floyd, died at the hands of police in Minneapolis last May, sparking a global reckoning over systemic racism and police brutality.

Now, Terrence is lending a talent he honed as a youngster in a church band to help produce and promote a forthcoming album of protest anthems inspired by the Black Lives Matter demonstrations prompted in part by his brother's death.

"I want to pay my respects to my brother any way I can, whether it's a march, whether it's just talking to somebody about him, or whether it's doing what I do and playing the drums," Terrence told The Associated Press.

"His heartbeat is not beating no more," he said, "but I can beat for him."

The untitled project, set for release one year after George Floyd's death, follows a long history of racial justice messages and protest slogans crossing over into American popular music and culture. In particular, music has been a vehicle for building awareness of grassroots movements, often carrying desperate pleas or enraged battle cries across the airwaves.

Terrence was recruited for the project by the Rev. Kevin McCall, a civil rights activist who said he believes

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 73 of 83

an album of street-inspired protest anthems does not yet exist.

"These protest chants that were created have been monumental," said McCall. "It created a movement and not a moment."

Some songs make bold declarations, like the protest anthem album's lead single, "No Justice No Peace." The well-known protest refrain, popularized in the U.S. in the 1980s, is something that millennials grew up hearing before they joined the front lines of their generation's civil rights movement, McCall said.

McCall is featured on the track, along with his fiancée, singer Malikka Miller, and choir members from Brooklyn's Grace Tabernacle Christian Center. The song is currently available for purchase and streaming on iTunes, Amazon Music and YouTube.

Godfather Records, a label run and owned by David Wright, pastor of Grace Tabernacle Christian Center, plans to put out the seven-song album. His late father, Timothy Wright, is considered the "Godfather of gospel music."

"We're mixing gospel music with social justice, to reach the masses," Wright said. "We have always been strengthened through songs, like 'We Shall Overcome' and 'Wade in the Water.' I want to put a new twist on it."

There is a history of interplay between music and Black protest. The 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles Police Department officers — as well as the contemporary "war on drugs" — amplified NWA's 1988 anthem, "F(asterisk)(asterisk)(asterisk) tha Police," and Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," released in 1989. More recently, Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," Beyoncé's "Freedom" featuring Lamar, and YG's "FDT" provided a soundtrack for many BLM protests.

Legendary musician and activist Stevie Wonder released his hit 1980 song, "Happy Birthday," as part of a campaign to recognize the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr's birthday as a federal holiday. King's Day, which faced years of opposition at the national level, was officially recognized in 1986, three years after it won the backing of federal lawmakers.

Some historians cite Billie Holiday's musical rendition of the Abel Meeropol poem, "Strange Fruit," in 1939 as one of the sparks of the civil rights movement. The song paints in devastating detail the period of lynching carried out against Black Americans for decades after the abolition of slavery, often as a way to terrorize and oppress those who sought racial equality.

The new film "United States vs. Billie Holiday" depicts the jazz luminary's real-life struggle to perform the song in spite of opposition from government officials. Singer and actress Andra Day, who portrays Holiday in the film, recently told the AP the song's significance influenced her decision to take on the role.

"It was her singing this song in defiance of the government that reinvigorated the movement," Day said. "And so that was really incentivizing for me."

Todd Boyd, the Katherine and Frank Price Endowed Chair for the Study of Race and Popular Culture at the University of Southern California, said many of the most well-known protest chants came out of the civil rights and Black power movements, and then inspired songs.

"That's how culture works," Boyd said. "Something that starts out in one space can very easily grow into something bigger and broader, if the movement itself is influential."

Terrence Floyd said the protest anthem project feels like a fitting way to honor his brother's memory. Many years before his death, George Floyd dabbled in music — he was occasionally invited to rap on mixtapes produced by DJ Screw, a fixture of the local hip-hop scene in Houston.

"If his music couldn't make it out of Houston, I'm using my Floyd musical ability to reach people in his name," Terrence said.

AP entertainment reporter Jamia Pugh in Philadelphia contributed.

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

UN experts urge independent probe into Navalny's poisoning

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 74 of 83

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Two top U.N. human rights experts urged an international probe into the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and called Monday for his immediate release from prison.

Agnès Callamard, the Special U.N. Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and Irene Khan, the Special U.N. Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, said Navalny's poisoning was intended to "send a clear, sinister warning that this would be the fate of anyone who would criticize and oppose the government."

"Given the inadequate response of the domestic authorities, the use of prohibited chemical weapons, and the apparent pattern of attempted targeted killings, we believe that an international investigation should be carried out as a matter of urgency in order to establish the facts and clarify all the circumstances concerning Mr. Navalny's poisoning," they said in a statement.

Navalny, the most prominent critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, fell sick on Aug. 20 during a domestic flight in Russia and was flown while still in a coma to Berlin for treatment two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent. Russian authorities have denied any involvement in the poisoning.

In December, Navalny released the recording of a phone call he said he made to a man he described as an alleged member of a group of officers of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, who purportedly poisoned him in August and then tried to cover it up. The FSB dismissed the recording as a fake.

Callamard and Khan, independent human rights experts working with the U.N., on Monday published their official letter sent to the Russian authorities in December and noted that "the availability of Novichok and the expertise required in handling it and in developing a novel form such as that found in Mr. Navalny's samples could only be found within and amongst state actors."

The experts emphasized in the letter that Navalny "was under intensive government surveillance at the time of the attempted killing, making it unlikely that any third party could have administered such a banned chemical without the knowledge of the Russian authorities."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova responded by charging that an international inquiry should look into Germany's refusal to share biological samples and other materials proving Navalny's poisoning with Moscow. Russia claims its medical experts found no evidence of poisoning.

Navalny was arrested on Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from the nerve agent poisoning. The arrest triggered massive protests, to which the Russian authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown.

Last month, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation while convalescing in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as fabricated — and which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful.

Last week, Navalny was sent to serve his sentence to a prison outside Moscow despite the ECHR's demand for his release, which cited concerns for his safety.

Officials haven't said what prison he was sent to, but Russian media reported it's in the city of Pokrov, 85 kilometers (53 miles) east of Moscow, which stands out among Russian penitentiaries for having particularly stringent rules. Former inmates said that Navalny would face hourly check-ups, including all night, and would be banned from speaking to others.

Russian officials have dismissed demands from the United States and the European Union to free Navalny and stop the crackdown on his supporters.

Mikhail Galperin, Russia's deputy justice minister, charged Monday that Moscow has contested the ECHR's ruling demanding Navalny's release in a letter sent to the Strasbourg-based court.

Meanwhile, the UN rights experts noted that an international probe into Navalny's poisoning was "especially critical" now when he is in prison. They called for his immediate release and reminded Russia that it's "responsible for the care and protection of Mr. Navalny in prison and that it shall be held responsible for any harm that may befall him."

Jamey Keaten in Geneva contributed to this report.

New WTO chief pushes for vaccine access, fisheries deal

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The new head of the World Trade Organization called Monday for a “technology transfer” when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines and urged member nations to reach a deal to reduce overfishing after years of fruitless talks as she laid out her top priorities after taking office.

Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian economist and former government minister, donned a mask and doled out welcoming elbow bumps as she took up her job at WTO headquarters on the banks of Lake Geneva. Still, she immediately set about trying to change the organization’s culture.

“It cannot be business as usual. We have to change our approach from debate and rounds of questions to delivering results,” she told ambassadors and other top government envoys that make up the 164-member body’s General Council.

“The world is leaving the WTO behind. Leaders and decision-makers are impatient for change,” she said, noting several trade ministers had told her that “if things don’t change,” they would not attend the WTO’s biggest event — a ministerial meeting — “because it is a waste of their time.”

Okonjo-Iweala, 66, is both the first woman and the first African to serve as the WTO’s director-general. Her brisk comments were a departure from the more cautious approach of her predecessor, Roberto Azevedo, who resigned on Aug. 31 — a year before the end of his term.

She did not take sides on an effort led by South Africa and India to wrest a temporary waiver of WTO rules on intellectual property protections, which could help expand production of COVID-19 vaccines and expedite their rollout around the world. But she gave an early shout-out to the developing world.

While “intensifying” dialogue continues on the vaccine waiver proposal, Okonjo-Iweala said: “I propose that we ‘walk and chew gum’ by also focusing on the immediate needs of dozens of poor countries that have yet to vaccinate a single person. People are dying in poor countries.”

She alluded to “difficult” targets to produce 10 billion doses, “so we must focus on working with companies to open up and license more viable manufacturing sites now in emerging markets and developing countries. We must get them to work with us on know-how and technology transfer now.”

As for fisheries, WTO negotiators have been tasked with striking a deal that could help eliminate subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and prohibit fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and an overcapacity of fishing boats.

Member states of the WTO, which works to craft accords that can ensure smooth international trade, have struggled to reach an agreement on fisheries even after two decades of work. Okonjo-Iweala called for finalizing the negotiations “as soon as possible,” and credited Colombian ambassador Santiago Wills, who chairs those talks, for his “really hard” work.

“My presence is to try and support him proactively to try and unblock the situation so he can complete the fantastic work he has been doing,” she said alongside Wills as they met with advocacy groups outside the WTO gates. “It has been 20 years — and 20 years is enough.”

Wills said it was “music to my ears to see on the first day the (director general) comes here and makes a statement on the fisheries negotiations.”

Okonjo-Iweala’s first day also consisted of meeting staffers and attending her first meeting of the General Council. The closed-door council meeting was largely held by videoconference because of measures aimed to fight the pandemic.

Okonjo-Iweala’s victory in the race last fall was delayed largely because the U.S. administration under Donald Trump supported another candidate. Her appointment came through last month when the Biden administration cleared the way for her selection at the trade body, whose rules require consensus.

The WTO is facing headwinds such as rising protectionism. Its dispute settlement system has been blocked because the U.S. has almost singlehandedly prevented appointments to its Appellate Body — a rough equivalent to an appeals court.

Okonjo-Iweala said last month that “wide-ranging reforms” are needed, vowing that a first priority would

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 76 of 83

be to address the economic and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic — such as by working to lift export restrictions on supplies and vaccines to get them distributed to countries in need.

2 Americans wanted in Ghosn's escape in Japanese custody

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — An American father and son wanted by Japan for aiding former Nissan Motor Co. Chairman Carlos Ghosn escape from the country in a box were handed over to Japanese custody Monday, ending their months-long battle to stay in the U.S.

Michael Taylor and his son, Peter Taylor, failed to convince U.S. officials and courts to block their extradition to Japan, where they will be tried on charges that they smuggled Ghosn out of the country in 2019 while the former auto titan was awaiting trial on financial misconduct charges.

The Massachusetts men, who have been locked up at a suburban Boston jail since their arrest in May, were handed over to Japanese officials early Monday, said one of their attorneys, Paul Kelly.

The Taylors' lawyers had argued the accusations don't fit under the law Japan wants to try them under and that they would be treated unfairly in Japan and subjected to "mental and physical torture." They have accused Japan of pursuing the pair in an attempt to save face after the embarrassment of Ghosn's escape.

Michael Taylor, a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran and private security specialist who in the past was hired by parents to rescue abducted children, has never denied the allegations.

He gave an interview to Vanity Fair magazine for a story last year in which he described the mission in detail. When asked why he did it, he responded with the motto of the Special Forces: "De oppresso liber" or "to liberate the oppressed," the magazine reported.

Michael Taylor refused to discuss the details of the case in an interview last month with The Associated Press because of the possibility that he will be tried in Japan. But he insisted that his son wasn't involved and was not even in Japan when Ghosn left.

Ghosn, who became one of the auto industry's most powerful executives by engineering a turnaround at the Japanese manufacturer, had been out on bail after his November 2018 arrest on charges that he underreported his future income and committed a breach of trust by diverting Nissan money for his personal gain.

Ghosn has denied the allegations and has said he fled to avoid "political persecution."

Prosecutors have described it as one of the most "brazen and well-orchestrated escape acts in recent history." Authorities say the Taylors were paid at least \$1.3 million for their help.

On the day of the escape, Michael Taylor flew into Osaka on a chartered jet with another man, George-Antoine Zayek, carrying two large black boxes and pretending to be musicians with audio equipment, authorities said. Meanwhile, Ghosn, free on bail, headed to the Grand Hyatt in Tokyo and met up with Peter Taylor, who was already in Japan, authorities say.

The elder Taylor and Zayek met up with the two others at the Grand Hyatt and shortly after, they split up. Peter Taylor hopped on a flight to China while the others got on a bullet train and went back to another hotel near the airport, where Taylor and Zayek had booked a room. They all went in; only Ghosn's rescuers were seen walking out.

Authorities say Ghosn was inside one of the big black boxes. At the airport, the boxes passed through a security checkpoint without being checked and were loaded onto a private jet headed for Turkey, officials said.

The Taylors had hired lawyers connected to former President Donald Trump, including ex-White House attorney Ty Cobb, in attempt to get Trump to block the extradition before he left office.

In his interview with the AP, Michael Taylor implored President Joe Biden to step in and said he felt betrayed that the U.S. would try to turn him over to Japan after his service to the country. But the Biden administration declined to block the extradition.

Under Trump, the U.S. State Department agreed in October to hand the men over to Japan. But a federal judge in Boston put their extradition on hold shortly after their lawyers filed an emergency petition. The

judge rejected their petition in January and the Boston-based 1st Circuit Court of Appeals later denied their bid to put the extradition on hold while they appeal that ruling.

Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer last month denied a bid for more time for an appeal, clearing the way for the men to be handed over to Japan.

Countries urge drug companies to share vaccine know-how

By MARIA CHENG and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Bangladesh's largest city lies a factory with gleaming new equipment imported from Germany, its immaculate hallways lined with hermetically sealed rooms. It is operating at just a quarter of its capacity.

It is one of three factories that The Associated Press found on three continents whose owners say they could start producing hundreds of millions of COVID-19 vaccines on short notice if only they had the blueprints and technical know-how. But that knowledge belongs to the large pharmaceutical companies who have produced the first three vaccines authorized by countries including Britain, the European Union and the U.S. — Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. The factories are all still awaiting responses.

Across Africa and Southeast Asia, governments and aid groups, as well as the World Health Organization, are calling on pharmaceutical companies to share their patent information more broadly to meet a yawning global shortfall in a pandemic that already has claimed over 2.5 million lives. Pharmaceutical companies that took taxpayer money from the U.S. or Europe to develop inoculations at unprecedented speed say they are negotiating contracts and exclusive licensing deals with producers on a case-by-case basis because they need to protect their intellectual property and ensure safety.

Critics say this piecemeal approach is too slow at a time of urgent need to stop the virus before it mutates into even deadlier forms. WHO called for vaccine manufacturers to share their know-how to "dramatically increase the global supply."

"If that can be done, then immediately overnight every continent will have dozens of companies who would be able to produce these vaccines," said Abdul Muktedir, whose Incepta plant in Bangladesh already makes vaccines against hepatitis, flu, meningitis, rabies, tetanus and measles.

All over the world, the supply of coronavirus vaccines is falling far short of demand, and the limited amount available is going to rich countries. Nearly 80% of the vaccines so far have been administered in just 10 countries, according to WHO. More than 210 countries and territories with 2.5 billion people hadn't received a single shot as of last week.

The deal-by-deal approach also means that some poorer countries end up paying more for the same vaccine than richer countries. South Africa, Mexico, Brazil and Uganda all pay different amounts per dose for the AstraZeneca vaccine — and more than governments in the European Union, according to studies and publicly available documents. AstraZeneca said the price of the vaccine will differ depending on local production costs and how much countries order.

"What we see today is a stampede, a survival of the fittest approach, where those with the deepest pockets, with the sharpest elbows are grabbing what is there and leaving others to die," said Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS.

In South Africa, home to the world's most worrisome COVID-19 variant, the Biovac factory has said for weeks that it's in negotiations with an unnamed manufacturer with no contract to show for it. And in Denmark, the Bavarian Nordic factory has capacity to spare and the ability to make more than 200 million doses but is also waiting for word from the producer of a licensed coronavirus vaccine.

Governments and health experts offer two potential solutions to the vaccine shortage: One, supported by WHO, is a patent pool modeled after a platform set up for HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis treatments for voluntary sharing of technology, intellectual property and data. But no company has offered to share its data.

The other, a proposal to suspend intellectual property rights during the pandemic, has been blocked in the World Trade Organization by the United States and Europe, home to the companies responsible for

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 78 of 83

creating coronavirus vaccines. That drive has the support of at least 119 countries and the African Union but is adamantly opposed by vaccine makers.

Pharmaceutical companies say instead of lifting IP restrictions, rich countries should simply give more vaccines to poorer countries through COVAX, the public-private initiative WHO helped create for more equitable vaccine distribution. The organization and its partners delivered its first doses last week in very limited quantities.

But rich countries are not willing to give up what they have. Ursula Von der Leyen, head of the European Commission, has used the phrase "global common good" to describe the vaccines but the European Union imposed export controls on vaccines, giving countries the power to stop shots from leaving.

On her first day as director-general of the WTO, Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said the time had come to shift attention to the vaccination needs of the world's poor.

"We must focus on working with companies to open up and license more viable manufacturing sites now in emerging markets and developing countries," she told the organization's members. "This should happen soon so we can save lives."

The long-held model in the pharmaceutical industry is that companies pour in huge amounts of money and research in return for the right to reap profits from their drugs and vaccines. Last May, Pfizer's CEO Albert Bourla described the idea of sharing IP rights widely as "nonsense" and even "dangerous."

Thomas Cueni, director general of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers, called the idea of lifting patent protections "a very bad signal to the future. You signal that if you have a pandemic, your patents are not worth anything."

Advocates of sharing vaccine blueprints argue that, unlike with most drugs, taxpayers paid billions to develop vaccines that could help end the world's biggest public health emergency in living memory.

"People are literally dying because we cannot agree on intellectual property rights," said Mustaqeem De Gama, a South African diplomat involved in the WTO discussions.

Paul Fehlner, the chief legal officer for biotech company Axcella and a supporter of the WHO patent pool board, said governments that poured billions of dollars into developing vaccines and treatments should have demanded more from the companies they were financing from the beginning.

"A condition of taking taxpayer money is not treating them as dupes," he said.

Last month, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the leading pandemic expert in the United States, said all options need to be on the table, including improving production capacity in the developing world and working with pharmaceuticals to relax their patents.

"Rich countries, ourselves included, have a moral responsibility when you have a global outbreak like this," Fauci said. "We've got to get the entire world vaccinated, not just our own country."

It's hard to know exactly how much more vaccine could be made worldwide if intellectual property restrictions were lifted. But Suhaib Siddiqi, former director of chemistry at Moderna, said with the blueprint and technical advice, a modern factory should be able to get vaccine production going in at most three to four months.

"In my opinion, the vaccine belongs to the public," said Siddiqi. "Any company which has experience synthesizing molecules should be able to do it."

Back in Bangladesh, the Incepta factory tried to get what it needed to make more vaccines in two ways, by offering its production lines to Moderna and by reaching out to a WHO partner. Moderna did not respond to requests for comment about the Bangladesh plant, but its CEO, Stéphane Bancel, told European lawmakers the company's engineers were fully occupied on expanding production in Europe.

"Doing more tech transfer right now could actually put the production and the increased output for the months to come at great risk," he said. "We are very open to do it in the future once our current sites are running."

Muktadir said he fully appreciates the extraordinary scientific achievement involved in the creation of vaccines this year, wants the rest of the world to be able to share in it, and is willing to pay a fair price.

"Nobody should give their property just for nothing," he said. "A vaccine could be made accessible to people — high quality, effective vaccines."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 79 of 83

Maria Cheng reported from Toronto. Jamey Keaten in Geneva, Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, Al-Emrun Garjon in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Andrew Meldrum in Johannesburg, South Africa, contributed to this report.

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at:

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

<https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-vaccine>

<https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

France's Sarkozy convicted of corruption, sentenced to jail

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A Paris court found French former President Nicolas Sarkozy guilty of corruption and influence peddling on Monday and sentenced him to a year in prison. He can ask to serve that time at home and also plans to appeal.

The 66-year-old, who was president from 2007 to 2012, was convicted of trying to bribe a magistrate in exchange for information about a legal case in which he was implicated.

He will remain free while he appeals, but it was a blow to the retired politician who still plays an influential role in French conservative politics. It's not the end of his legal troubles either: He faces another trial later this month and is also under investigation in a third case.

The ruling marks the first time in France's modern history that a former president has been convicted of corruption — and given a prison term. His predecessor, Jacques Chirac, was found guilty in 2011 of misuse of public money during his time as Paris mayor — not considered a corruption offense — and was given a two-year suspended prison sentence.

The court said Sarkozy is entitled to ask to be detained at home with an electronic bracelet — as is the case for any sentence of two years or less. He also received a two-year suspended sentence — which he will not have to serve if he commits no new offense in the next five years.

Later, Sarkozy's lawyer, Jacqueline Laffont, said he would appeal.

Sarkozy's co-defendants — his lawyer and longtime friend Thierry Herzog, 65, and now-retired magistrate Gilbert Azibert, 74 — were also found guilty and given the same sentence as the politician.

The court found that Sarkozy and his co-defendants sealed a "pact of corruption," based on "consistent and serious evidence".

The court said the case was "particularly serious" given that the acts were committed by a former president for his personal gain. In addition, as a lawyer by training, Sarkozy was "perfectly aware" that what he was doing was illegal, the court said.

Sarkozy did not deny offering to help Azibert get a job in Monaco — but he firmly refuted that he had done anything wrong during the 10-day trial at the end of last year.

Seated on a chair facing the judges and wearing a mask largely hiding his face, Sarkozy showed no reaction when the verdict was read out, and quickly left the courtroom.

"What insane harassment, my love," his wife Carla Bruni said in a post on Instagram. "The fight goes on, truth will see the light."

The trial focused on phone conversations that took place in February 2014.

At the time, investigative judges had launched an inquiry into the financing of Sarkozy's 2007 presidential campaign. During the investigation, they discovered that Sarkozy and Herzog were communicating via secret mobile phones registered to the alias "Paul Bismuth."

Wiretapped conversations on those phones led prosecutors to suspect Sarkozy and Herzog of promising Azibert a job in Monaco in exchange for leaking information about another legal case involving Sarkozy.

In one phone call with Herzog, Sarkozy said of Azibert: "I'll make him move up. ... I'll help him."

In another, Herzog reminded Sarkozy to "say a word" for Azibert during a trip to Monaco.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 80 of 83

Azibert never got the Monaco job, and legal proceedings against Sarkozy have been dropped in the case he was seeking information about.

Prosecutors have concluded, however, that the "clearly stated promise" still constitutes corruption under French law, even if the promise wasn't fulfilled.

Laffont, Sarkozy's lawyer, argued the whole case was based on "idle chatter" between a lawyer and his client.

Sarkozy vigorously denied any malicious intention in his offer to help Azibert. He told the court that his political life was all about "giving (people) a little help. That all it is, a little help," he said during the trial.

He also complained that the confidentiality of communications between a lawyer and his client was violated by the wiretaps.

"You have in front of you a man of whom more than 3,700 private conversations have been wiretapped. ... What did I do to deserve that?" Sarkozy said during the trial.

The court concluded that the use of wiretapped conversations was legal as long as they helped show evidence of corruption-related offenses.

Sarkozy withdrew from active politics after failing to be chosen as his conservative party's presidential candidate in France's 2017 election, won by Emmanuel Macron.

He remains very popular amid conservative voters, however, and plays a major role behind the scenes, including through maintaining a relationship with Macron, whom he is said to advise on some issues. His memoirs published last year, "The Time of Storms," was a bestseller for weeks.

Sarkozy will face the Paris court again later this month over suspicions regarding his 2012 presidential campaign, which ended in victory for Socialist rival Francois Hollande. His conservative party and a company named Bygmalion are accused of using a special invoice system to conceal allegedly spending 42.8 million euros (\$50.7 million) — almost twice the maximum authorized.

In another investigation opened in 2013, Sarkozy is accused of having taken millions from then-Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi to illegally finance his successful 2007 campaign.

In both cases, he has denied wrongdoing.

Prince Philip moved to specialized London heart hospital

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Philip was transferred Monday to a specialized London heart hospital to undergo testing and observation for a pre-existing heart condition as he continues to be treated for an unspecified infection, Buckingham Palace said.

The 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II was moved from King Edward VII's Hospital, where he has been treated since Feb. 17, to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, which specializes in cardiac care.

The palace says Philip "remains comfortable and is responding to treatment but is expected to remain in hospital until at least the end of the week."

Philip was admitted to the private King Edward VII's Hospital in London after feeling ill. Philip's illness is not believed to be related to COVID-19. Both he and the queen, 94, received a first dose of a coronavirus vaccine in early January.

The Bart's Heart Centre is Europe's biggest specialized cardiovascular center, the National Health Service said. The center seeks to perform more heart surgery, MRI and CT scans than any other service in the world.

Philip, who retired from royal duties in 2017, rarely appears in public. During England's current coronavirus lockdown, Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, has been staying at Windsor Castle, west of London, with the queen.

Philip married the then-Princess Elizabeth in 1947 and is the longest-serving royal consort in British history. He and the queen have four children, eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

In 2011, he was rushed to a hospital by helicopter after suffering chest pains and was treated for a blocked coronary artery. In 2017, he spent two nights in the hospital and he was hospitalized for 10 days

in 2018 for a hip replacement.

Philip was last hospitalized in December 2019, spending four nights in the King Edward VII's Hospital for what the palace said was planned treatment of a pre-existing condition.

Hundreds claim decades of abuse by 150 youth center staffers

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Abuse allegations against New Hampshire's state-run youth detention center now span six decades, with 150 staffers during that time accused of physically or sexually harming 230 children at a facility the victims' attorney calls a "magnet for predators."

Rus Rilee sued the state in January 2020 on behalf of three dozen adults who alleged they were abused as children at the Youth Development Center in Manchester between 1982 and 2014. He now represents 230 clients who say they were abused between 1963 and 2018, when they were ages 7 to 18.

As the number of years, accusers and alleged perpetrators has swelled, so, too, has the sickening nature of the allegations. While details beyond the updated number of accusers and time span aren't included in latest court documents, Rilee plans to add his clients' accounts to the complaint and described them to The Associated Press:

Of the 150 accused staffers, more than half are accused of sexual abuse, Rilee said. Children were gang raped by counselors, beaten while being raped and forced to sexually abuse each other, he said. Some ended up with sexually transmitted diseases; one ended up pregnant.

Staff members choked children, beat them unconscious, burned them with cigarettes and broke their bones, Rilee said. Counselors set up "fight clubs" and forced kids to compete for food. Children were locked in solitary confinement for weeks or months, sometimes shackled or strapped naked to their beds. Kept away from classrooms while their injuries healed, some can't read or write today, he said.

"These broken, shattered children were then unleashed into society with no education, no life skills and no ability to meaningfully function," said Rilee.

The Manchester facility, now called the Sununu Youth Services Center after former Gov. John H. Sununu, serves children ordered to a secure institutional setting by the juvenile justice system. The average population last year was just 17 residents overseen by about 90 employees, though it once housed upward of 100 youths and employed a larger staff.

Joe Ribsam, director of the state Division for Children, Youth and Families, said the agency continues to cooperate with a broad criminal investigation into the center launched by the attorney general's office in 2019. He did not comment on the new allegations.

"The facility's policies and systems that protect the youth receiving care include full compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act and security cameras throughout the facility to provide additional sets of eyes on staff and student interactions," Ribsam said in a written statement.

It's unclear how far up the chain of command knowledge of the alleged abuse traveled over the years. But the lawsuit alleges that some supervisors were themselves abusers and that other staffers looked the other way.

"The systemic, governmental child abuse that occurred was allowed to occur because there wasn't sufficient oversight, and the state was institutionally negligent in their hiring, training, supervision and retention policies," Rilee said. "It's pretty clear to me that this facility was a magnet for predators."

Rilee said most of his clients have spoken to state police as part of the criminal investigation, including one man who spent two years at the facility in the late 2000s. The man alleges that he was sexually assaulted by two staffers more than half a dozen times, was beaten by six staff members at once and often locked in his room for a week at a time. Now 28, he said he has been in and out of the criminal justice system most of his life, and has struggled with depression, strained relationships and a warped sense of socially acceptable behavior.

"The kids that don't have it good in there, we don't come out good," he said. "It takes a part of you. The worthlessness you feel afterwards. 'Am I good enough for people? Am I good enough for myself?'"

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 82 of 83

Another man, now 29, spent more than a year at the center starting in 2007. He alleges he was beaten several times and sexually assaulted by three different staff members dozens of times, including a sexual assault that he says was recorded on a perpetrator's cell phone. After years of substance abuse, he has been clean for seven months, but nightmares and other PTSD symptoms continue.

"I relive it a lot. Every night, every other night, it never stops," he said.

Neither of them have any records of their time at the center, though they said they have requested them and gave state police officers who interviewed them permission to do the same.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been victims of sexual assault, unless they go public, like the lawsuit's lead plaintiff, David Meehan.

Meehan, 39, went to police in 2017 with allegations of abuse from the 1990s. In July 2019, two of his former counselors were charged with 82 counts of rape, and the attorney general's office launched a broader criminal investigation into the center's operations and employees from 1990 to 2000. Those charges were dropped last March, when the office announced it was devoting "an unprecedented allocation" of resources to an expanded investigation, including assigning 10 state police troopers to a task force.

Meanwhile, the state has been granted several extensions in responding to the lawsuit, and as recently as January, said in court documents that the parties were "in discussions aimed at narrowing or resolving the matters in issue in this case." But earlier this month, the state filed a motion to dismiss the case, in part because it said the case didn't meet the criteria for a class action suit.

The attorney general's office declined to comment on the new allegations or the lawsuit.

"There are dedicated prosecutors in the Attorney General's Office as well as investigators from New Hampshire State Police who are working daily on this investigation," acting Attorney General Jane Young said in a written statement. "The investigation will follow the evidence wherever it leads."

In a recent interview, Meehan said he has been frustrated by the pace of the legal process but understands it will take time. He said he has grown stronger every day, in part because he has inspired others to come forward, including the two who spoke to the AP.

"It's heartwarming in a way to know that I helped these other people find the strength to be able to speak the truth about their experience," he said. "But at the same time, it hurts in a way that I can't explain, knowing that so many other people were exposed to the same types of things that I was."

Meehan said he has no regrets about speaking out.

"I can't allow the abuse that I endured to be what destroys my life anymore," he said.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 2, the 61st day of 2021. There are 304 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 2, 1932, the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which moved the date of the presidential inauguration from March 4 to January 20, was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

On this date:

In 1867, Howard University, a historically Black school of higher learning in Washington, D.C., was founded. Congress passed, over President Andrew Johnson's veto, the first of four Reconstruction Acts.

In 1877, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was declared the winner of the 1876 presidential election over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, even though Tilden had won the popular vote.

In 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship as President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act.

In 1939, Roman Catholic Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (puh-CHEL'-ee) was elected pope on his 63rd birthday; he took the name Pius XII. The Massachusetts legislature voted to ratify the Bill of Rights, 147 years after the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution had gone into effect. (Georgia and Connecticut soon followed.)

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 02, 2021 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 239 ~ 83 of 83

In 1943, the three-day Battle of the Bismarck Sea began in the southwest Pacific during World War II; U.S. and Australian warplanes were able to inflict heavy damage on an Imperial Japanese convoy.

In 1962, Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors in a game against the New York Knicks, an NBA record that still stands. (Philadelphia won, 169-147.)

In 1965, the movie version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The Sound of Music," starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer, had its world premiere in New York.

In 1977, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a strict code of ethics.

In 1985, the government approved a screening test for AIDS that detected antibodies to the virus, allowing possibly contaminated blood to be excluded from the blood supply.

In 1989, representatives from the 12 European Community nations agreed to ban all production of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons), the synthetic compounds blamed for destroying the Earth's ozone layer, by the end of the 20th century.

In 1990, more than 6,000 drivers went on strike against Greyhound Lines Inc. (The company, later declaring an impasse in negotiations, fired the strikers.)

In 1995, the Internet search engine website Yahoo! was incorporated by founders Jerry Yang and David Filo.

Ten years ago: The Supreme Court ruled, 8-1, that a grieving father's pain over mocking protests at his Marine son's funeral had to yield to First Amendment protections for free speech in a decision favoring the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas. A man armed with a handgun attacked a bus carrying U.S. Air Force troops at Frankfurt airport, killing two airmen before being taken into custody. (Arid Uka, an Islamic extremist, was later sentenced to life in prison.)

Five years ago: The U.N. Security Council unanimously approved the toughest sanctions against North Korea in two decades, reflecting growing anger at Pyongyang's latest nuclear test and rocket launch in defiance of a ban on all nuclear-related activity. After nearly a year aboard the international space station, NASA astronaut Scott Kelly and Russia's Mikhail Kornienko returned to earth aboard a Soyuz capsule.

One year ago: Health officials in Washington state, where a cluster of coronavirus cases had surfaced at a nursing home near Seattle, said four more people had died from the virus. The director-general of the World Health Organization said there was still time to stop the COVID-19 epidemic, saying "containment is feasible." Vice President Mike Pence said the coronavirus risk to Americans remained low, but that "we're ready for anything." The Dow Jones Industrial Average soared nearly 1,300 points as stocks roared back from a seven-day rout on hopes of action from central banks. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar ended her Democratic presidential campaign and endorsed Joe Biden. Longtime MSNBC host Chris Matthews abruptly retired from his "Hardball" show after apologizing for making inappropriate comments about women. The Recording Academy said it had fired Deborah Dugan, its former president who had questioned the integrity of the Grammy Awards nominations process and complained of sexual harassment. James Lipton, longtime host of "Inside the Actors Studio," died at his New York home; he was 93.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Cullum is 91. Former Soviet President and Nobel peace laureate Mikhail S. Gorbachev is 90. Actor Barbara Luna is 82. Author John Irving is 79. Actor Cassie Yates is 70. Actor Laraine Newman is 69. Former Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., is 68. Former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is 66. Singer Jay Osmond is 66. Pop musician John Cowsill (The Cowsills) is 65. Former tennis player Kevin Curren is 63. Country singer Larry Stewart (Restless Heart) is 62. Rock singer Jon Bon Jovi is 59. Blues singer-musician Alvin Youngblood Hart is 58. Actor Daniel Craig is 53. Actor Richard Ruccolo is 49. Rock singer Chris Martin (Coldplay) is 44. Actor Heather McComb is 44. Actor Rebel Wilson is 41. Actor Bryce Dallas Howard is 40. NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is 39. NHL goalie Henrik Lundqvist is 39. Musician Mike "McDuck" Olson (Lake Street Dive) is 38. Actor Robert Iler is 36. Actor Nathalie Emmanuel is 32. Country singer Luke Combs is 31. Singer-rapper-actor Becky G is 24.