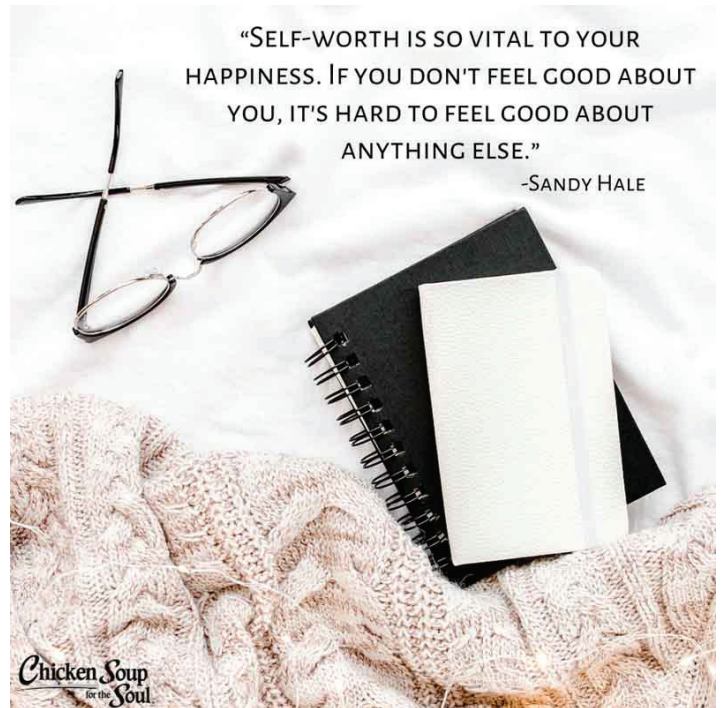


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BOYS

**Region 1A at Groton Area
Milbank Bulldogs
Friday, March 5, 2021, 7 p.m.**



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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2021-2022 PROPOSED SPORTS ALIGNMENTS

CROSS COUNTRY ALIGNMENTS

CLASS AA

Aberdeen Central	Harrisburg	Pierre TF Riggs	SF Lincoln	Sturgis Brown
Brandon Valley	Huron	RC Central	SF Roosevelt	Watertown
Brookings	Mitchell	RC Stevens	SF Washington	Yankton
Douglas	O'Gorman	SF Jefferson	Spearfish	

CLASS A

Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5
Clark/Willow Lake	Baltic	Andes Cent./Dak.Chr.	Chamberlain	Belle Fourche
Dakota Hills	Dell Rapids	Beresford	Cheyenne-Eagle Butte	Bennett County
Deuel	Deubrook Area	Bon Homme	Crow Creek	Custer
Florence/Henry	Elkton-Lake Benton	Canton	McLaughlin	Dupree
Great Plains Luth.	Flandreau	Dakota Valley	Mobridge-Pollock	Hill City
Groton Area	Flandreau Indian	Elk Point-Jefferson	Mt. Vernon/Plankinton	Hot Springs
Hamlin	Garretson	Ethan/Parkston	Sanborn Cent./Woon.	Lakota Tech
Milbank	Madison	Hanson	St. Francis Indian	Lead-Deadwood
Redfield	McCook Cent./Montrose	Lennox	Stanley County	Little Wound
Sisseton	SF Christian	Parker	Todd County	Pine Ridge
Tiospa Zina	Sioux Valley	Tea Area	Winner Area	RC Christian
Tri-State	Tri-Valley	Vermillion		Red Cloud
Webster Area	West Central	Wagner		St. Thomas More

CLASS B

Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5
Aberdeen Christian	Alcester-Hudson	Avon	Faulkton Area	Bison
Aberdeen Roncalli	Arlington	Bridgewater-Emery	Herreid/Selby Area	Crazy Horse
Britton-Hecla	Canistota	Burke	Highmore-Harrold	Faith
Castlewood	Centerville	Corsica-Stickney	Ipswich	Harding County
Estelline/Hendricks	Chester Area	Freeman	Leola	Jones County
Frederick Area	Colman-Egan	Freeman Aca./Marion	Lower Brule	Kadoka Area
Hitchcock-Tulare	De Smet	Gregory	Lyman	Lemmon
Iroquois/Doland	Dell Rapids St. Mary	Kimball/White Lake	McIntosh	New Underwood
James Valley Christian	Gayville-Volin	Marty	Miller	Newell
Langford Area	Howard	Menno	North Central	Oelrichs
Northwestern	Irene-Wakonda	Mitchell Christian	Potter County	Philip
Warner	Lake Preston	Platte-Geddes	Sully Buttes	Takini
Waverly-South Shore	McCrossan	Scotland	Sunshine Bible Academy	Tiospaye Topa
	Oldham-Ramona/Rutland	Tripp-Delmont/Armour	Timber Lake	Wall
	SF Lutheran		Wakpala	White River
	Viborg-Hurley		Wessington Springs	
			Wolsey-Wessington	

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2021-2022 PROPOSED SPORTS ALIGNMENTS

FOOTBALL ALIGNMENTS

CLASS 11AAA

Brandon Valley	RC Central	SF Jefferson	SF Roosevelt
Harrisburg	RC Stevens	SF Lincoln	SF Washington
O'Gorman			

CLASS 11AA

Aberdeen Central	Huron	Spearfish	Watertown
Brookings	*Mitchell	Sturgis Brown	Yankton
Douglas	Pierre T.F. Riggs	Tea Area	

CLASS 11A

Belle Fourche	Dakota Valley	Madison	Tri-Valley
Canton	Dell Rapids	Milbank	Vermillion
Chamberlain	Lakota Tech**	SF Christian	West Central
*Custer	Lennox	Sisseton	

CLASS 11B

*Aberdeen Roncalli	Elk Point-Jefferson	*McCook Central/Montrose	Sioux Valley
Baltic	Flandreau	*Miller/Highmore-Harrod	St. Thomas More
Bennett County	Groton Area	Mobridge-Pollock	*TDA/AC/DC
Beresford	Hill City	*Mt. Vernon/Plankinton	Wagner
*Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan	*Hot Springs	Parker	Webster Area
*Clark/Willow Lake	*Jim River	RC Christian	Winner
*Dakota Hills	Lead-Deadwood	Redfield	*W/WS/SC
Deuel			

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2021-2022 PROPOSED SPORTS ALIGNMENTS

FOOTBALL ALIGNMENTS

CLASS 9AA

Region 1

*Arlington/Lake Preston
Deubrook Area
Elkton-Lake Benton
*Florence/Henry
Hamlin

Region 2

*Canistota/Freeman
Chester Area
Garretson
Hanson
Viborg-Hurley

Region 3

Bon Homme
Lyman
Parkston
Platte-Geddes
Stanley County
White River

Region 4

Dupree
*Ipswich/Edmunds Central
*Lemmon/McIntosh
*Leola/Frederick
Timber Lake

CLASS 9A

Region 1

Britton-Hecla
Castlewood
Great Plains Lutheran
*North Central
Northwestern
Warner

Region 2

Colman-Egan
DeSmet
Howard
*Oldham-Ramona/Rutland
Wolsey-Wessington

Region 3

Burke
Centerville
Gregory
Irene-Wakonda
*Kimball/White Lake.

Region 4

*Herreid/Selby Area
Kadoka Area
Newell
Philip
Wall

CLASS 9B

Region 1

*Estelline/Hendricks
Faulkton Area
Hitchcock-Tulare
Langford Area
Waverly-South Shore

Region 2

Alcester-Hudson
Avon
Corsica-Stickney
Dell Rapids St. Mary
Gayville-Volin
SF Lutheran

Region 3

Colome
Jones County
*Potter County
Sully Buttes
Sunshine Bible Academy

Region 4

Bison
Edgemont
Faith
Harding County
New Underwood

Groton 2021 Football Schedule

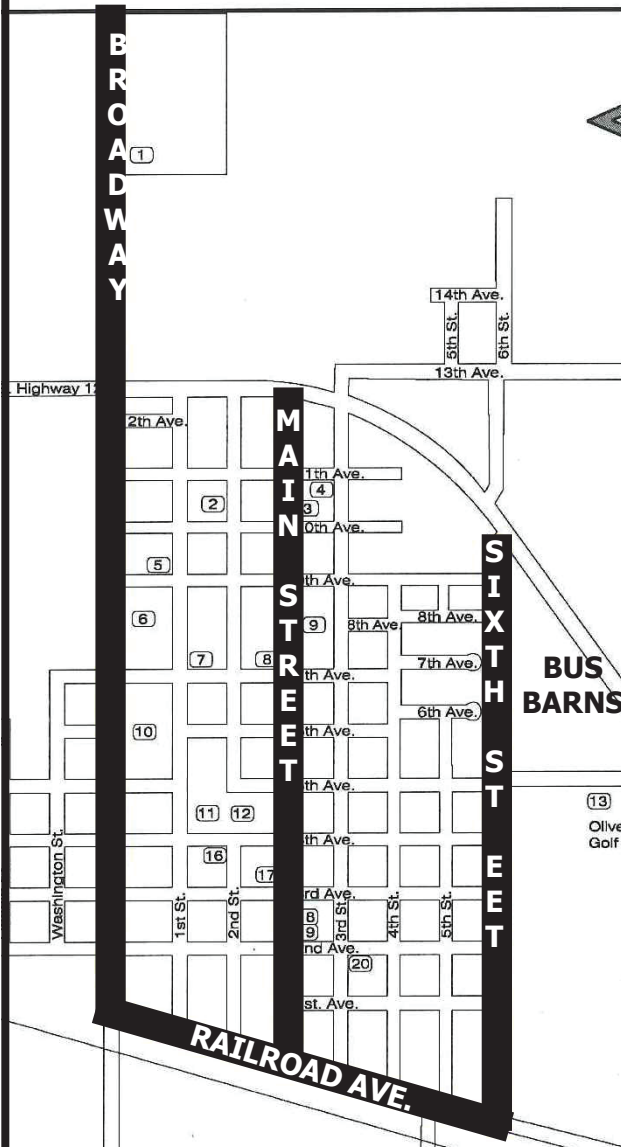
Groton Area

Week One	vs	Clark/Willow Lake
Week Two	vs	Redfield
Week Three	at	Webster
Week Four	at	Deuel
Week Five	vs	Mobridge-Pollock
Week Six	vs	Aberdeen Roncalli
Week Seven	at	Dakota Hills
Week Eight		
Week Nine	at	Sisseton

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Notice of Garbage Pickup Effective March 9th



Groton residents are asked to bring their garbage to the following locations until further notice:

Railroad Avenue, Main Street, Sixth Street & Broadway (Highway 37)

Residents of the Broadway Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to Hwy 37.

Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Developments) need to bring their garbage to the bus barns.

Please bring your garbage bags and cans to these streets for Tuesday pickup.



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.

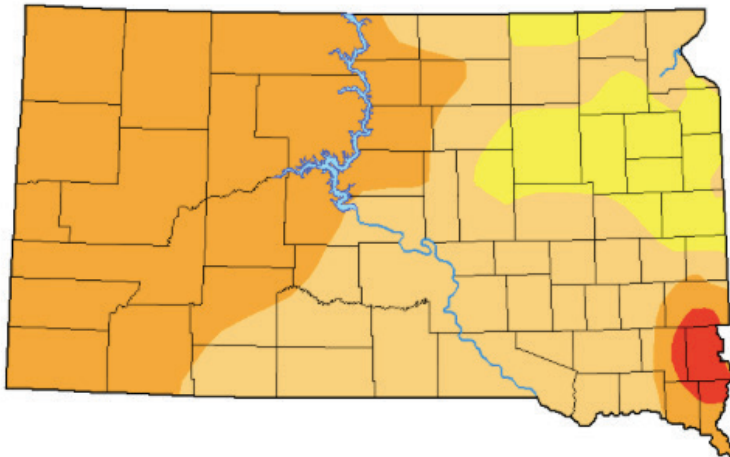
Packets are being sent home this week with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for KG and JK this coming 2021-2022 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet by the end of this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



No change from last week.

Map released: Thurs. March 4, 2021

Data valid: March 2, 2021 at 7 a.m. EST



Intensity:

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

US Drought Monitor Summary

The current U.S. Drought Monitor period was highlighted by a large swath of heavy rain that started in northeast Texas and progressed northeast into the Mid-Atlantic. In this area, widespread reports of 200-400% of normal precipitation took place, with some areas of Kentucky having widespread 6-8 inch amounts. Dry conditions dominated much of the West and especially the Southwest and into the Plains. Some active weather in the Pacific Northwest and northern Rocky Mountains brought with it rain and snow, helping to boost seasonal snow totals. Temperatures during the week were cooler than normal over the West with departures of 6-9 degrees below normal widespread, while temperatures were above normal from the Plains eastward with departures of 9-12 degrees above normal over much of Alabama.

High Plains

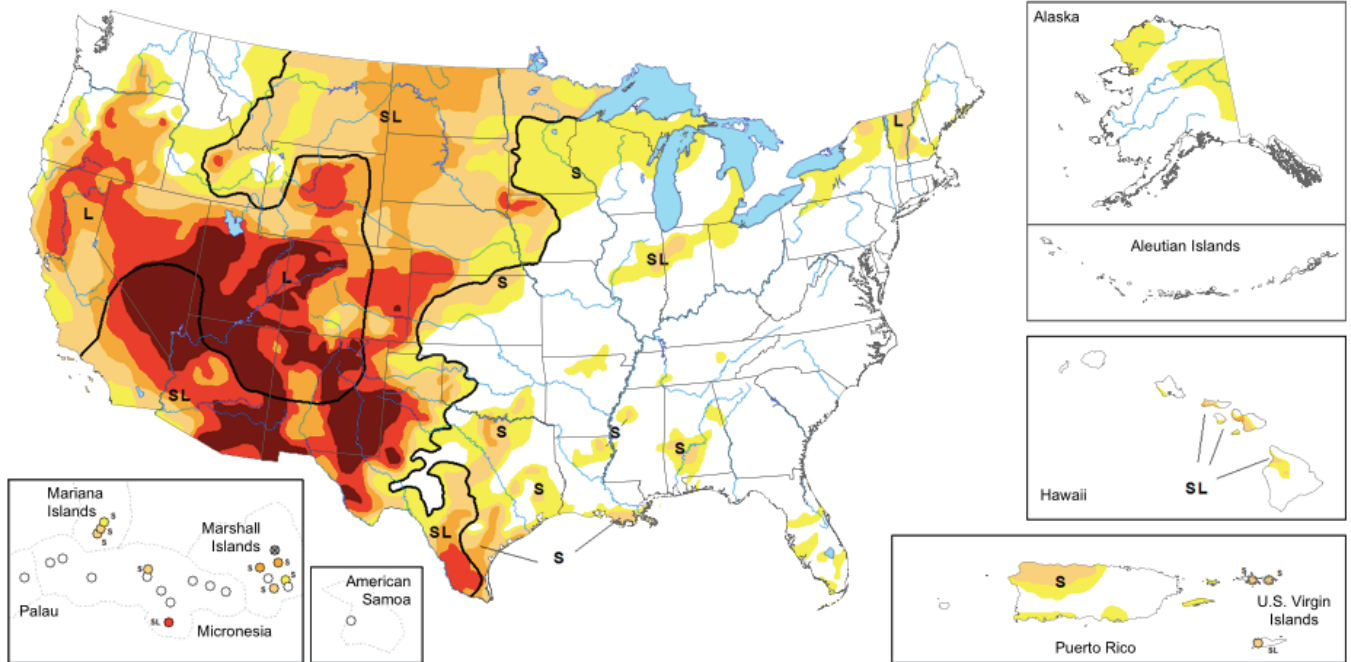
Dry conditions dominated the region, with only portions of central South Dakota, central and eastern North Dakota, portions of the High Plains in eastern Colorado and central Wyoming recording above-normal precipitation. Temperatures were above normal over most of the area, with below-normal temperatures farther west into Wyoming and Colorado. The greatest departures were in eastern South Dakota where temperatures were 6-9 degrees above normal and northwest Wyoming where temperatures were 12-15 degrees below normal for the week. Improvements were made in north central Wyoming, where areas of extreme and severe drought were showing a good snow season to allow for a reduction in drought intensity. Severe drought was expanded in far northeast North Dakota and into far northwest Minnesota.

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Map released: March 4, 2021

Data valid: March 2, 2021



Gustafson is Intern Spotlight

From the SD Republican Party Facebook Page

INTERN SPOTLIGHT: Ashley Gustafson is from Langford, SD, and is a freshman honors student at USD, majoring in Political Science with minors in History and English. She serves as Senate Majority Leader Gary Cammack's intern.

As we approach the end of week eight, Ashley reflected on her time in Pierre. "I'm going to miss it here. Because I work for the majority leader, I've seen a lot of the behind-the-scenes action and have been able to contribute my perspective to the legislative action."

Ashley serves as the USD College Republicans Communications Director. She said she likes to keep busy, and certainly did so during the 2020 election.



Ashley volunteered for local candidates in Vermillion and Sioux Falls, as well as for Rep. Dusty Johnson and Sen. Mike Rounds. When asked if she'd ever consider serving in the legislature, Ashley said, "Someday, sure. I would consider it, but I have a lot of life ahead of me. I really have enjoyed my experience here at the State Capitol."

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#374 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We are not seeing much change from day to day, which, as we've discussed, is not really a great thing because our new-case counts are too high. Today, there were 66,500 new cases reported. That brings us to 28,867,400 total cases so far in the pandemic, which is 0.2% more than yesterday. We're on track to hit 29 million over the weekend or so. I do not want to see 30 million; I wonder whether we can stay away from that—not super-hopeful. Hospitalizations continue to decrease, now at 45,462. And deaths are up to 519,870, which is 0.4% more than yesterday's total. There were 1978 deaths reported today.

On March 4, 2020, one year ago today, the worldwide numbers were 95,000 cases with 3200 deaths—that's fewer deaths than the US had in the last two days. In the grip of the Europe's first big wave with over 2500 cases, Italy closed down its schools and universities. The rumor that this virus was concocted in a lab had already begun to make the rounds. This was the day I read my first report of some jerk violating a self-isolation order; it was not the last, not close. It was also the day domestically-acquired cases in the US topped 100. We had a total of 158 cases, 49 of them in repatriated citizens, the rest domestic. I remember being pretty horrified by that huge number: Little did I know.

Another cruise ship, this one the Grand Princess, was stricken and sitting off the coast of California. With 9400 people being monitored, 36 cases diagnosed, and the state's first reported death, California's governor declared a state of emergency which is, to the best of my knowledge, still in effect today. The state of Washington, with 39 reported and many suspected cases, bought a motel to use for isolation of those suspected cases. That nursing home in King County was up to six deaths on this day. New York had 11 cases and 1000 people in quarantine. The US had reported 11 deaths, 10 in Washington and one in California; the mortality rate was estimated at around 2%.

We were told by government authorities that the risk to the public "remains low." Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (a title I had to look up every time I used it back then, not so much now), told a House Appropriations Committee that we should be proactive in testing for Covid-19, something we were most assuredly not doing. The Department of Homeland Security provided on its website a recommended list of items which should be stockpiled in preparation for a pandemic; that list notably did not include toilet paper. Cancellations: all sporting events in 11 cities in Italy, a lot of flights for US air carriers, a bunch of college basketball games, handshakes (remember those?), all air travel by UAW staff, Starbucks' in-person shareholder meeting (apparently an early Zoom adopter – I still didn't know what that was), change fees at more airlines. On the other hand, the organizing committee for the Tokyo Olympic Games said at a news conference this day that there is "no current threshold" that could postpone the Games.

CNN reported, "A coronavirus vaccine won't be widely available for a long time, several top pharmaceutical executives said Wednesday [March 4]. Early stage clinical trials likely won't start until the end of the year or in 2021, they said." I have never been happier to see someone's predictions blown out of the water as my friends and neighbors have lined up for vaccinations. Johnson & Johnson's chief scientific officer weighed in with a projection that they could be ready to start large-scale clinical trials in 2021. This is also the day the US House of Representatives passed a huge package to fund vaccine development efforts, which just goes to show what bucketsful of cash and dedicated scientists can accomplish in a crunch. I've been overusing the word, but I'm just going to say again that this entire effort was nothing short of remarkable.

There was some concern that the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine would be viewed as an inferior choice by the public, but there is something else entirely happening. People have been showing a preference for a vaccine that they can get in just one dose. The convenience seems to be a big selling point. Public health officials are equally delighted with it because it's easier and cheaper to distribute, both because of its easier storage requirements and the fact that a single dose is needed. It is viewed particularly favorably for use in communities which might have difficulty following up with a second dose. Dr. Matthew Daley, senior investigator at Kaiser Permanente Colorado's Institute for Health Research and

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a member of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, told the New York Times, "There are circumstances in which it is going to be a really good option or maybe the best option." These early small shipments are being treated as tests for various ways to distribute them. This is still being viewed as a best choice for people it would be difficult to get back for second doses, for example, homeless or those about to be released from prison, also migrant agricultural workers who might not be in the same location three or four weeks hence. It has also been popular with people who have difficulty taking time off work because they need to take time off only once and also with people who are not nuts about needles—one stick seems preferable to them. This vaccine also seems to have fewer side effects, so that's another appealing feature. I'm pleased to see uptake is likely to be strong. We need people willing to take all of the vaccines available.

Speaking of vaccines, nine apes at the San Diego Zoo have been given an experimental vaccine—not diverting doses meant for humans here; this is the product of a veterinary pharmaceutical company not approved for use in human. This follows an outbreak in this population and arises from a desire to preserve members of valuable species (which designation, after all, applies to all species really). One of the orangutans who received vaccine is one who became the first orangutan to have open-heart surgery back in 1994. She's what I'd call a pioneer. Most eyes are on gorillas, some of which are very endangered; if the vaccine proves safe and effective, this could be a benefit in preservation efforts. This vaccine is also being tested in mink, something that could prove valuable in preventing spread from these animals to wild populations, a turn of events we really, really need to avoid. In addition to an interest in preserving these wild species, we have a critical interest in preventing the establishment of a viral reservoir in species where it could mutate and pass back to humans in a more virulent form or one which is not controlled by current vaccines. We had a taste of how scary that could be in Denmark last year, and we do not wish to see it happen again.

A small study conducted at four New York area hospitals over last spring and summer involving 152 children with Covid-19, 55 of whom had multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), found that one in 10 of them had acute kidney injury, a condition which can develop rapidly in which the kidneys do not work properly and which can be fatal. Although this resolved in most of the children before they went home, it does seem to predispose to kidney disease in later life. Black children were at nearly three times the risk for this complication. Because the study was small, it is difficult to generalize to the population from it; but it does provide plenty of reason to follow up on these complications in children.

Something that's been kicked around for nearly a year now is the potential usefulness of ivermectin, an anthelmintic—treatment for parasitic worms—already approved by the FDA, as a therapeutic for Covid-19. There is some evidence of effectiveness from in vitro (laboratory) studies when high doses were used to inhibit the virus in cell cultures. There has been concern that the doses required would be unsafe in clinical use, so we have been awaiting the results of randomized controlled clinical trials, the only way to know whether a drug is beneficial in treatment of actual patients. In this study, researchers included 400 people with mild symptoms, assigning them to control or treatment groups; they found there was not a statistically significant difference between the groups; it also did not use severe disease or death as an endpoint so its usefulness is limited. This was a relatively small trial, so the conclusion cannot readily be generalized, but this is not a hopeful result. There are larger trials underway that might give more useful data. There is still not enough evidence to draw any firm conclusions. I still do not see a good reason to use this drug. Not giving up yet, but so far, not much.

Saturday morning, we had a very short salesperson at our door hawking Girl Scout cookies. My husband, an inveterate cookie-lover and soft touch for kids, bought a lot of them. Although I'm not much for eating cookies, I support his support for this worthwhile program where kids put themselves on the line to make sales. Our salesperson lives in a safe and intact home. What I didn't know until today is that there are Girl Scout troops for kids in not-so-great situations, including those with insecure housing. Such a troop formed in Council Bluffs, Iowa, to serve homeless kids back in 2018, and they've served 117 girls since then. They started selling cookies almost immediately; with six current members and despite their 2021 goal of 1000 boxes, just this year (which is only just over two months old, I'll remind you) have sold almost

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20,000 boxes of cookies. Quite amazing when you think about it. That's \$100,000 in sales for just six girls.

A spokesperson for the national organization said, "In a disruptive time like we're living in today, it is more important than ever for girls experiencing challenging situations to stay connected to each other with adult support and supervision to feel less alone and more hopeful as part of the Girl Scout community." Some of these kids can't find transportation to go to meeting sites, so online meetings are the backbone of this community. Parents say this program has helped to bring back their daughters' confidence. There are six such troops in the US which focus on barriers to access.

Beth Shelton chief executive of Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa, told The Lily, "It unites girls and gives them a sense of pride. Most people really love the cookie program, and the girls get to be at the heart of something. They get to be heroes." These kids transcended their circumstances with the love and help of dedicated volunteers. Surely we can all be that for someone.

Take care. We'll talk again.

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County	Total Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased Among Cases	Community Spread	% PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	454	432	864	15	Minimal	4.2%
Beadle	2772	2624	5851	39	Substantial	24.4%
Bennett	382	370	1177	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1506	1477	2058	25	Minimal	9.3%
Brookings	3602	3505	11892	37	Moderate	1.8%
Brown	5157	4994	12646	89	Moderate	10.3%
Brule	694	677	1873	9	Minimal	9.7%
Buffalo	420	406	898	13	None	0.0%
Butte	981	948	3210	20	Moderate	6.5%
Campbell	130	125	257	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1307	1216	3905	21	Substantial	8.2%
Clark	374	357	946	5	Moderate	23.1%
Clay	1803	1761	5228	15	Moderate	8.2%
Codington	4012	3836	9650	77	Substantial	21.5%
Corson	471	453	994	12	Minimal	9.7%
Custer	758	734	2706	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2959	2871	6509	63	Moderate	7.0%
Day	665	621	1768	28	Substantial	5.9%
Deuel	474	461	1132	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1415	1380	3811	26	Substantial	7.6%
Douglas	434	416	907	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	482	462	1038	12	Minimal	4.0%
Fall River	537	504	2616	15	Moderate	9.2%
Faulk	361	341	694	13	Moderate	0.0%
Grant	979	913	2222	38	Substantial	13.4%
Gregory	543	499	1270	29	Moderate	8.3%
Haakon	256	238	530	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	719	655	1769	38	Substantial	26.4%
Hand	341	325	808	6	Moderate	11.1%
Hanson	363	351	713	4	Moderate	28.0%
Harding	91	90	182	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2311	2229	6551	36	Substantial	6.0%
Hutchinson	790	751	2361	25	Moderate	7.5%

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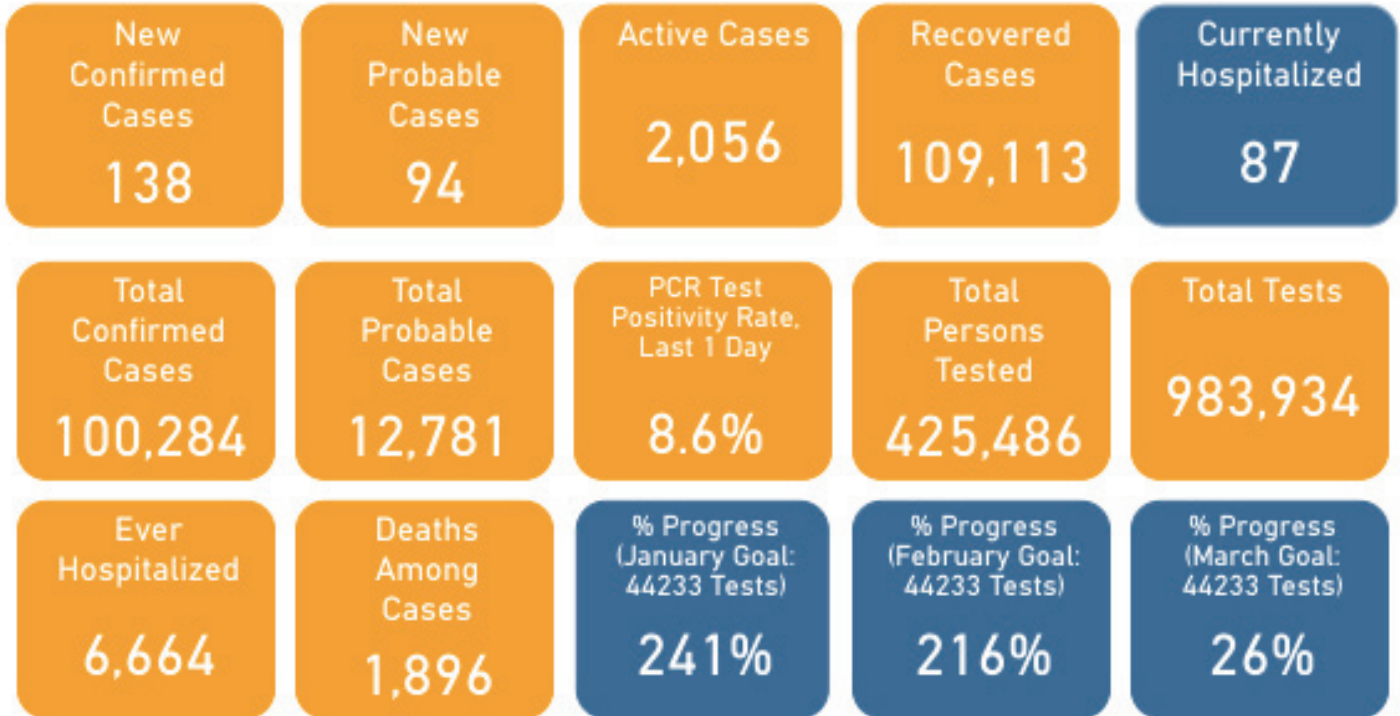
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Hyde	138	135	405	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	279	263	912	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	273	251	550	16	Minimal	10.0%
Jones	85	84	220	0	Minimal	12.5%
Kingsbury	642	615	1665	14	Moderate	3.9%
Lake	1204	1149	3311	17	Substantial	7.6%
Lawrence	2831	2756	8501	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	7807	7567	20143	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	602	586	1867	10	Minimal	2.8%
Marshall	332	299	1183	5	Substantial	15.4%
McCook	745	709	1615	24	Moderate	4.0%
McPherson	240	231	552	4	Minimal	12.5%
Meade	2605	2524	7656	31	Substantial	11.4%
Mellette	253	243	729	2	Minimal	33.3%
Miner	273	253	574	9	Minimal	7.1%
Minnehaha	28175	27365	77821	334	Substantial	7.6%
Moody	620	590	1749	17	Moderate	5.9%
Oglala Lakota	2063	1992	6623	49	Moderate	7.2%
Pennington	12962	12566	39204	189	Substantial	10.9%
Perkins	348	330	808	14	Minimal	8.0%
Potter	373	362	828	4	Moderate	14.3%
Roberts	1208	1127	4118	36	Substantial	15.7%
Sanborn	331	323	686	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	799	766	2117	25	Minimal	3.0%
Stanley	334	323	926	2	Moderate	0.0%
Sully	137	132	311	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1219	1189	4105	28	Minimal	8.0%
Tripp	704	669	1476	16	Substantial	21.2%
Turner	1071	1004	2717	53	Moderate	7.1%
Union	1992	1919	6223	39	Substantial	6.7%
Walworth	730	697	1819	15	Moderate	7.0%
Yankton	2810	2745	9299	28	Moderate	6.1%
Ziebach	337	327	864	9	Minimal	7.1%
Unassigned	0	0	1808	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range with Years	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
0-9 years	4560	0
10-19 years	12752	0
20-29 years	20062	7
30-39 years	18590	18
40-49 years	16148	35
50-59 years	15955	113
60-69 years	12953	250
70-79 years	6915	434
80+ years	5130	1039

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	58885	893
Male	54180	1003

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Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

4

New Probable Cases

6

Active Cases

74

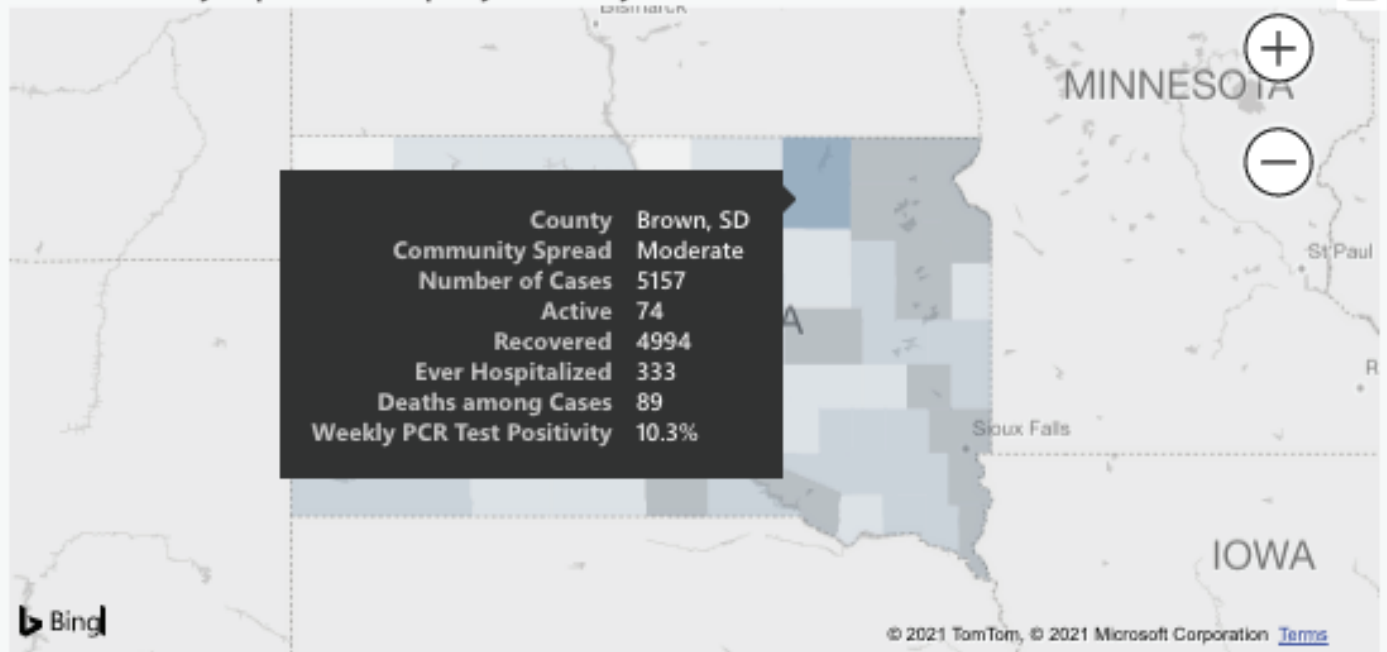
Recovered Cases

4,994

Currently Hospitalized

87

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

4,602

Total Probable Cases

555

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

6.1%

Total Persons Tested

17,803

Total Tests

48,000

Ever Hospitalized

333

Deaths Among Cases

89

% Progress (January Goal: 44233 Tests)

241%

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

216%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

26%

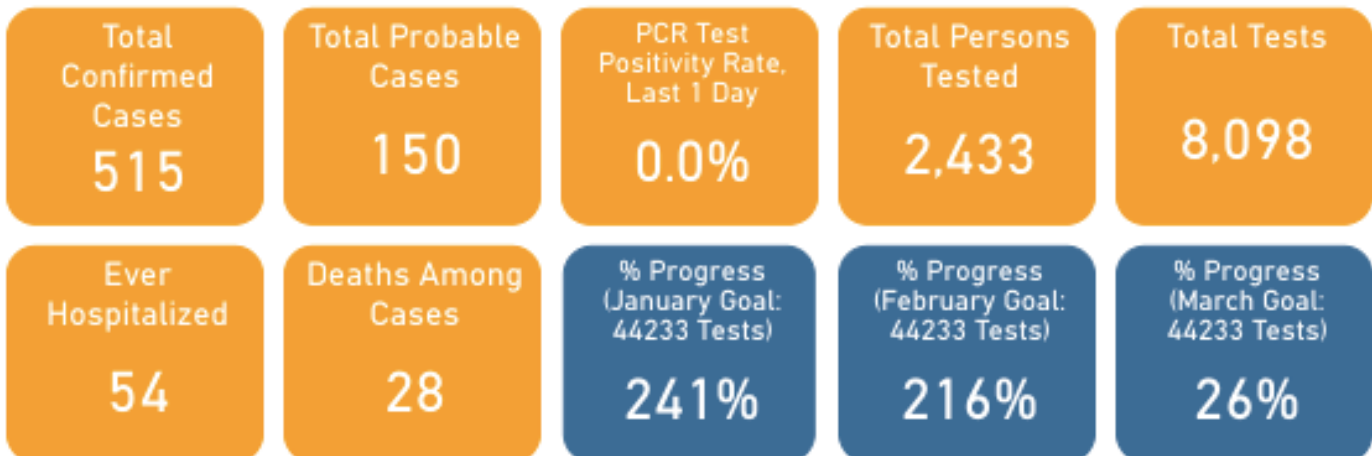
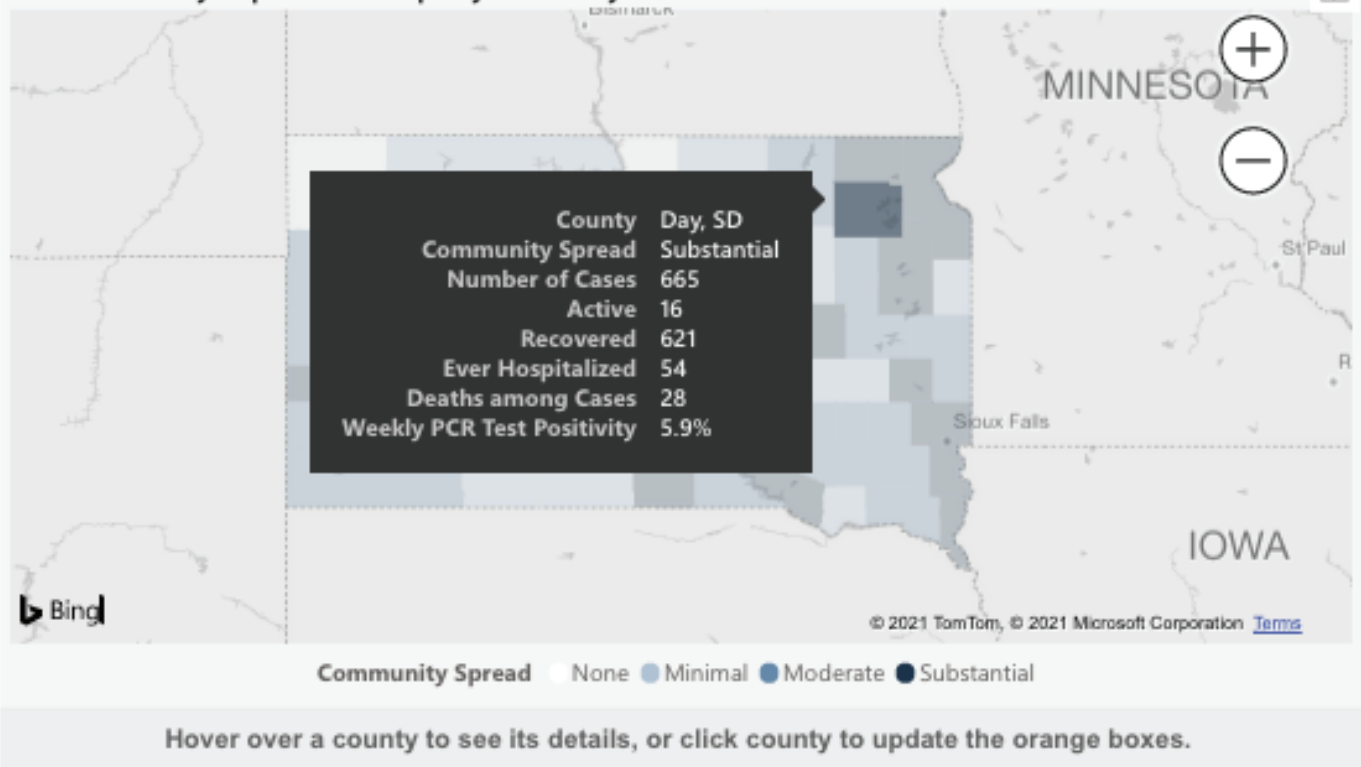
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Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

237,370

State Allocation

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

154,334

State Allocation

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

29%

State & Federal Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Moderna	119,623
Pfizer	117,747

Doses	# of Recipients
Moderna - 1 dose	38,809
Moderna - Series Complete	40,407
Pfizer - 1 dose	32,489
Pfizer - Series Complete	42,629

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	29.48%
Series Complete	19.15%

Based on 2019 Census Estimate for those aged 16+ years. Includes aggregate data on IHS and federal

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	593	197	198	395
Beadle	4803	1,879	1,462	3,341
Bennett*	383	105	139	244
Bon Homme*	2466	1,124	671	1,795
Brookings	6824	2,908	1,958	4,866
Brown	10816	2,634	4,091	6,725
Brule*	1472	456	508	964
Buffalo*	117	77	20	97
Butte	1646	686	480	1,166
Campbell	796	280	258	538
Charles Mix*	2356	968	694	1,662
Clark	884	342	271	613
Clay	3603	1,113	1,245	2,358
Codington*	7341	2,391	2,475	4,866
Corson*	209	85	62	147
Custer*	2109	843	633	1,476
Davison	5702	1,604	2,049	3,653
Day*	1828	628	600	1,228
Deuel	1094	402	346	748
Dewey*	324	74	125	199
Douglas*	857	247	305	552
Edmunds	971	337	317	654
Fall River*	1989	649	670	1,319
Faulk	751	283	234	517
Grant*	1804	656	574	1,230
Gregory*	1267	483	392	875
Haakon*	447	161	143	304

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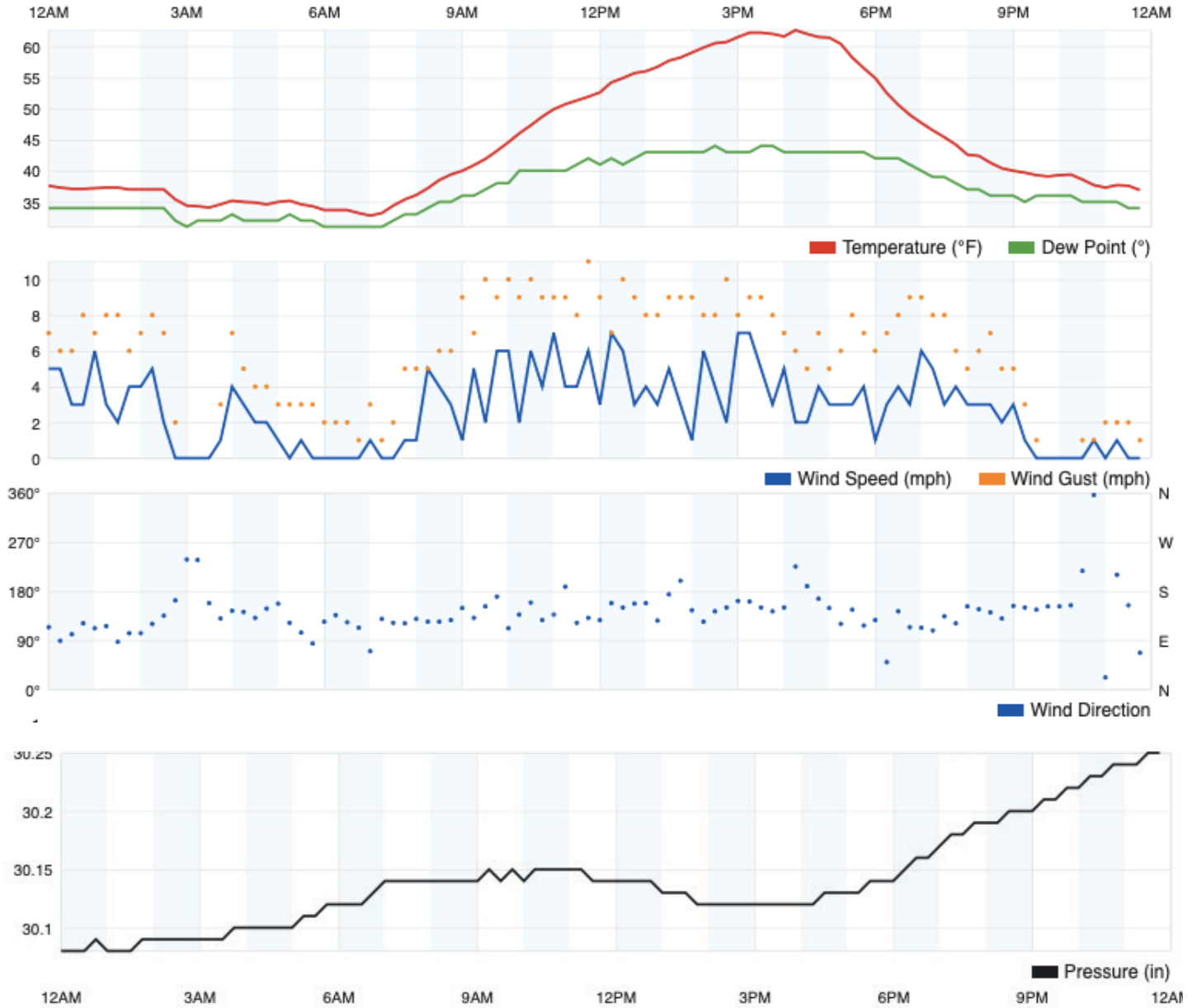
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Hamlin	1306	496	405	901
Hand	1031	391	320	711
Hanson	350	132	109	241
Harding	60	34	13	47
Hughes*	5769	1,719	2,025	3,744
Hutchinson*	2567	893	837	1,730
Hyde*	408	166	121	287
Jackson*	324	110	107	217
Jerauld	598	282	158	440
Jones*	488	142	173	315
Kingsbury	1664	796	434	1,230
Lake	2885	963	961	1,924
Lawrence	6172	2,288	1,942	4,230
Lincoln	20218	4,644	7,787	12,431
Lyman*	582	188	197	385
Marshall*	1102	436	333	769
McCook	1690	532	579	1,111
McPherson	172	66	53	119
Meade*	4651	1,681	1,485	3,166
Mellette*	36	18	9	27
Miner	653	189	232	421
Minnehaha*	62538	16,250	23,144	39,394
Moody*	1298	548	375	923
Oglala Lakota*	142	54	44	98
Pennington*	28316	7,702	10,307	18,009
Perkins*	403	159	122	281
Potter	622	326	148	474
Roberts*	3329	1,285	1,022	2,307
Sanborn	751	247	252	499
Spink	2226	750	738	1,488
Stanley*	879	289	295	584
Sully	257	93	82	175
Todd*	141	47	47	94
Tripp*	1615	621	497	1,118
Turner	2707	755	976	1,731
Union	2076	1,014	531	1,545
Walworth*	1513	471	521	992
Yankton	7503	1,719	2,892	4,611
Ziebach*	48	14	17	31
Other	4828	1,176	1,826	3,002

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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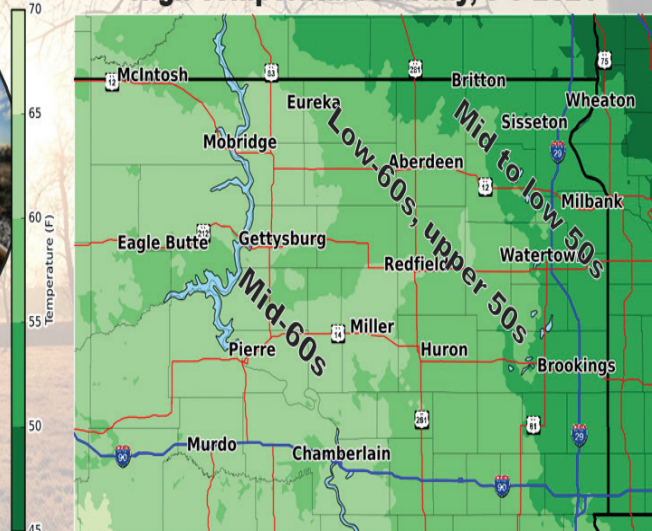
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Patchy Dense Fog then Mostly Sunny	Patchy Fog	Patchy Fog then Sunny	Partly Cloudy and Breezy	Mostly Sunny
High: 58 °F	Low: 28 °F	High: 64 °F	Low: 40 °F	High: 68 °F

Continued Very Mild, Dry Weather

- Foggy this morning and again Saturday morning for some areas
- Breezy conditions Saturday and Sunday, leading to fire weather concerns



High Temperatures Today, 3-5-2021



NWS Aberdeen Updated: 3/5/2021 5:54 AM

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Today in Weather History

March 5, 1966: The historic blizzard of 1966, which started on March 2, comes to an end in the Dakotas. North Dakota saw severe livestock losses with an estimated 18,500 cattle, 7,500 sheep, and 600 hogs killed. On a farm in eastern North Dakota, 7,000 turkeys perished. The total damage to livestock was estimated at near \$4 million. In South Dakota, an estimated 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1,800 hogs were killed. Most of the deaths occurred in the central and northern central part of the state.

1894: The low temperature of 36 degrees at San Diego, California, on this day was their lowest on record for March.

1959: Near blizzard conditions occurred over northern and central Oklahoma. Up to seven inches of snow fell and winds up to 50 mph created snow drifts 4 to 8 feet deep. In Edmond, a bus slid off the road into a ditch and overturned, injuring 16 people.

1966: A plane crashes near Mount Fuji in Japan after encountering severe turbulence. The pilot veered a few miles off course to give the passengers a better view of Mount Fuji when it tremendous wind gusts. All 124 people on board the aircraft were killed.

1972: Palm Springs, California recorded a high of 100 degrees, the earliest the city has ever hit the century mark.

1989: A F2 tornado killed one person and injured six others in Heard County, Georgia. A stronger, F3 tornado injured 23 persons and caused more than 5 million dollars damage around Grantville, Georgia.

2007: The morning temperature dropped to 51 degrees below zero at Key Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada.

1960 - Eastern Massachusetts greatest March snowstorm of record began to abate. The storm produced record 24 hour snowfall totals of 27.2 inches at Blue Hill Observatory, 17.7 inches at Worcester, and 16.6 inches at Boston. Winds gusted to 70 mph. (3rd-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1962 - A tremendous storm raged along the Atlantic coast. The great Atlantic storm caused more than 200 million dollars property damage from Florida to New England. Winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast reached 70 mph raising forty foot waves, and as much as 33 inches of snow blanketed the mountains of Virginia. The Virginia shoreline was rearranged by historic tidal flooding caused by the combination of the long stretch of strong onshore winds and the Spring Tides. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain and high winds in California. Up to six inches of rain soaked the San Francisco Bay area in 24 hours, and winds gusted to 100 mph at the Wheeler Ridge Pumping Plant near the Tehachapi Mountains. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - While snow blanketed eastern Kansas and northern Oklahoma, eight cities in North Dakota reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 61 degrees at Bismarck ND was 27 degrees warmer than that at Chanute KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S. A strong (F-2) tornado killed one person and injured six others in Heard County GA. A strong (F-3) tornado injured 23 persons and caused more than five million dollars damage around Grantville GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms over eastern Colorado, developing ahead of a major storm system, produced up to three inches of small hail around Colorado Springs in the late morning and early afternoon. Strong thunderstorms swept through southeastern sections of the Denver area during the evening hours. These strong thunderstorms also produced up to three inches of small hail, along with wind gusts to 50 mph, and as much as 2.4 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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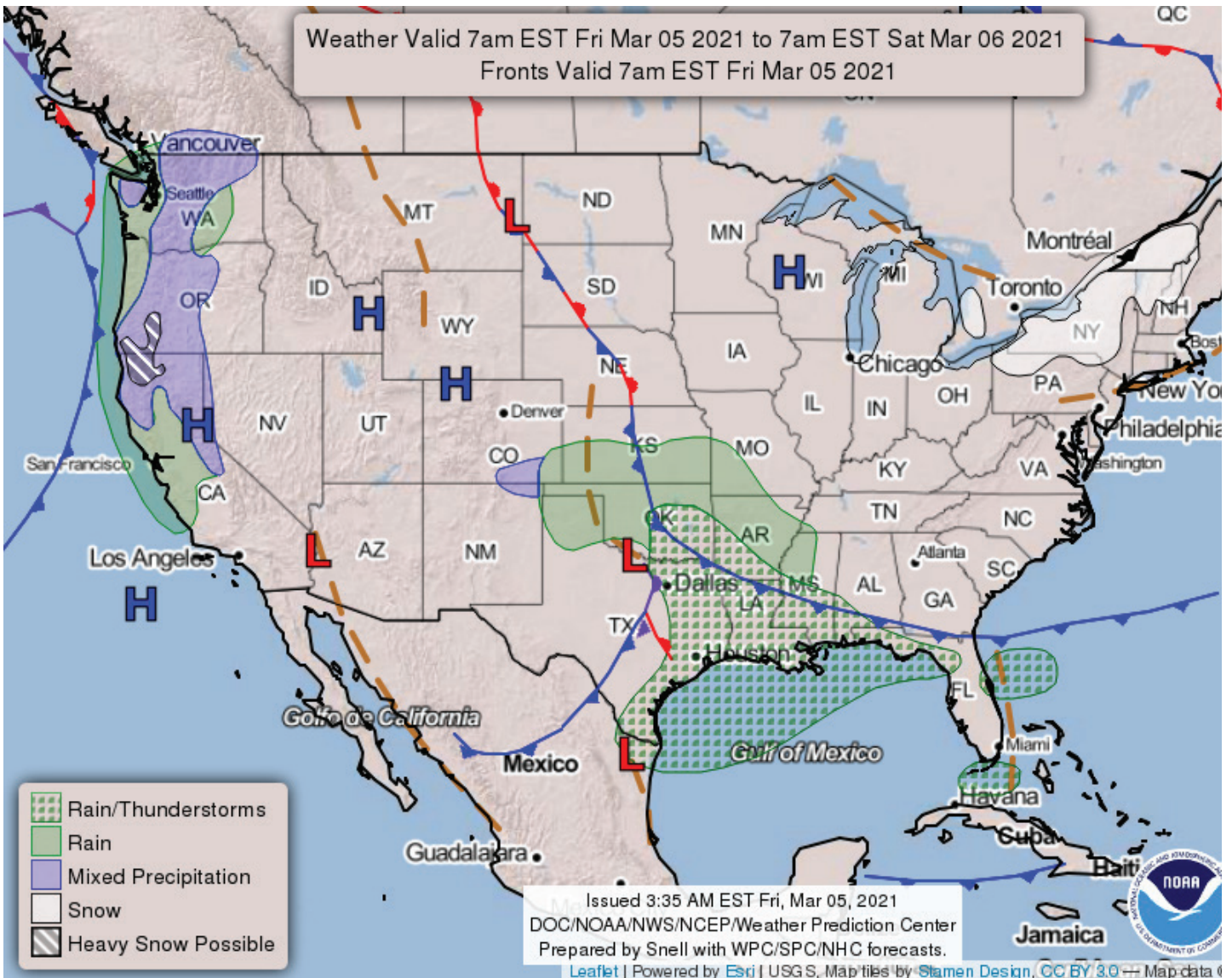
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 63 °F at 4:16 PM
Low Temp: 33 °F at 6:56 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 11:44 AM
Precip:

Today's Info

Record High: 74° in 2000
Record Low: -22° in 1919
Average High: 35°F
Average Low: 15°F
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.11
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.13
Precip Year to Date: 0.18
Sunset Tonight: 6:27 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:02 a.m.



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WHO IS MY SHEPHERD?

Yahweh is my Shepherd are the first words of Psalm 23. These words announce the protection and provisions of a personal God. The emphasis is on the fact that Yahweh – the Creator of the universe – recognizes me as an individual and wants me to speak His name and call on Him for my deepest and most personal needs.

Often when we worship we speak of our God. And He is indeed our God. We come together as believers to worship and praise Him. But David, who once was a lonely shepherd watching his flock, wants us to know that this Shepherd takes a personal interest in the individual needs of each sheep in His flock. Sheep are, perhaps, the most dependent of all animals and cannot survive without the care and constant attention of the shepherd. If any of his sheep have any need at any time, the shepherd is available, night or day, ready and able to meet any and every need of his sheep.

Most of us would not want to depend on anyone for everything the way sheep depend on their shepherd. But Yahweh, our Creator, wants us to depend on Him that way. Why? It keeps us close to Him and dependent on Him and not ourselves.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to look to You and trust in You to meet our every need in life. May we recognize how blest we are to have You as our personal Shepherd. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

FINAL EXPENSES

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*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

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2021 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS BASKETBALL=

State Qualifier=

Class A=

SoDak 16=

Aberdeen Roncalli 50, Redfield 15

Belle Fourche 50, Parkston 46

Dakota Valley 68, Tea Area 59

Hamlin 62, Mobridge-Pollock 22

McCook Central/Montrose 41, Hill City 39

Sioux Falls Christian 52, Flandreau 50, OT

St. Thomas More 61, Miller 27

Winner 50, Tri-Valley 35

Class B=

SoDak 16=

Castlewood 65, DeSmet 37

Corsica/Stickney 49, Timber Lake 33

Ethan 61, Faulkton 45

Hanson 59, Faith 28

Herreid/Selby Area 49, Menno 47

Viborg-Hurley 55, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 46

Waverly-South Shore 46, New Underwood 27

White River 49, Aberdeen Christian 37

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

Weah has career high, North Dakota beats South Dakota 21-10

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Otis Weah ran for 132 of his career-high 163 yards after halftime and had both of his TD runs in the third quarter to help North Dakota beat South Dakota 21-10 on Thursday night.

North Dakota, No. 4 in the FCS Top 25, has its first 3-0 start to a season since 2008, beating FCS-ranked teams in all three games.

The No. 20 Coyotes (1-1) drove to the North Dakota 2 and opened the scoring with a field goal in the first five minutes. About five minutes later, Weah fumbled into the end zone and South Dakota's Jacob Matthew recovered it for a touchback.

But South Dakota struggled to get the ball back past midfield and the Fighting Hawks took a 21-3 lead after Quincy Vaughn threw his first TD pass of his career in the second quarter and Weah scored twice in the third.

Kai Henry ran 15 times for 84 yards and a touchdown for South Dakota.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-football> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Sanford Health to conduct virus testing at NBA All-Star Game

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sanford Health will be conducting coronavirus testing for players, coaches and staff involved in the NBA All-Star Game and associated events, the Sioux Falls-based health care system

announced Thursday.

Sanford Health lab technicians will travel to Atlanta in one of the mobile testing units that it has been using for PGA Tour events. Sanford said earlier this week it would be testing pro golfers, caddies and essential personnel at tournaments through the end of June.

Sanford expects to run as many as 750 tests for the NBA All-Star weekend, which includes the skills competition, 3-point contest, slam dunk contest and game.

"This collaboration is a direct result of our successful partnership with the PGA TOUR," said Rochelle Odenbrett, senior executive director of Sanford Laboratories. "It is rewarding to know professional sports organizations are seeking out our expertise because they have confidence in our incredible team."

Lawmakers push 60% vote threshold on tax ballot measures

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Republicans on Thursday voted to put a constitutional amendment on the next primary election ballot that would make it more difficult to pass ballot initiatives to raise taxes or spend public funds.

The effort to move the proposed amendment from the general election to the primary — when fewer people traditionally vote — drew criticism from Democrats and some Republicans that it was an unfair effort to head off ballot campaigns already in the works.

Nonetheless, a majority of GOP lawmakers passed the resolution to ask primary voters in June 2022 to decide whether ballot initiatives should have a 60% vote requirement to raise taxes or spend more than \$10 million within five years of enactment.

The resolution easily cleared the House after the Senate approved it by a single vote on Wednesday.

Republicans reasoned that, although fewer voters inevitably show up in primary elections, the constitutional amendment would be important enough to draw people who cared about it to weigh in.

"If they don't think that's sacred and they don't go vote, they get what they deserve," said Republican Rep. Tim Goodwin.

In last year's primary election, 28% of registered voters cast a ballot, whereas 74% of voters participated in the November general election.

Democratic Rep. Ryan Cwach pointed out that primaries are partisan in their very nature, and that voters registered as independents often don't participate.

"We know primary turnouts are lower," he said. "We know people aren't going to show up."

Several Senate Republicans had spoken against the resolution because it leapfrogs the issue in front of ballot measures that are already in the works, including an effort to make Medicaid health insurance available to people who live below 133% of the federal poverty level.

But Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, the Senate pro tem, initiated the move to expedite the constitutional amendment vote, saying it was important to get "safeguards in place for the taxpayers."

He acknowledged that his expedited push was motivated by the Medicaid expansion campaign, but argued that the vote threshold should apply to all ballot initiatives that levy taxes or spend significant state funds. The Legislature must pass a high threshold — a two-thirds majority — for similar bills.

But the resolution touches on an issue that already has some voters frustrated: curtailing their ability to pass laws at the ballot, especially when lawmakers refuse to take up an issue.

"It's a systematic assault on the will of the people," said Senate Democratic Leader Troy Heinert.

Noem weighs in on special session process for AG impeachment

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday offered her opinion that the Legislature could easily convene to consider impeaching the state's attorney general for his role in a fatal car crash, putting her at odds with the Republican lawmaker overseeing the proceedings.

As lawmakers consider a process that is unprecedented in the state, the procedural conflict touches on

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rules in the state constitution that are unclear, but will bear on whether Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg will even have to face an impeachment inquiry as he seeks to hold on to his job.

Republican House Speaker Spencer Gosch, who led the move to postpone considering impeachment, has asserted that the Legislature would need support from two-thirds of both chambers to convene outside the regularly scheduled legislative session. That would make it more difficult for the Legislature to even consider impeaching the Republican attorney general.

"We cannot act in an official capacity unless we have a special session," Gosch said, adding that lawyers for the Legislature had reached that conclusion.

But Noem says legislative leaders could simply call lawmakers back to Pierre without the two-thirds requirement.

"I believe they don't need a special session for impeachment," the governor said at a news conference.

The state's top law enforcement officer is facing three misdemeanor charges for striking and killing a man walking on the shoulder of a highway late on Sept. 12. Ravnsborg initially told authorities that he thought he had struck a deer and said he searched the unlit area with a cellphone flashlight. He said he didn't realize he had killed a man until the next day when he returned to the accident scene.

Those seeking to remove Ravnsborg from office suffered a setback Wednesday when a House committee moved to put off considering whether he should be impeached until the conclusion of his criminal case. An initial hearing date in the criminal case has been set for March 12 — meaning that it may not conclude until after the final scheduled day of the legislative session on March 29.

At the news conference, Noem declined to discuss the impeachment proceedings further. But she kept up her calls for the attorney general to resign, saying that was "the best thing that could happen" in the situation.

Last week, she put maximum pressure on him to step down: Publicly calling for his resignation and releasing videos of his interviews with criminal investigators the same day that lawmakers unveiled articles of impeachment. But a judge's order halting Noem — or other government officials — from publishing the videos or other documents in the investigation has given lawmakers reason to halt impeachment proceedings.

Lawmakers have taken the judge's order to mean they are under a gag order from even discussing the attorney general's crash. Gosch has said he pushed the step back from considering impeachment to make sure the process would be "fair and transparent," and that can happen only after the criminal case concludes.

If the Legislature reconvenes, the House would need a simple majority to advance the impeachment charges to the Senate. There, it would require two-thirds of senators to convict and remove the attorney general from office.

But the state constitution does not spell out impeachment proceedings and whether a special session — which requires the support of two-thirds of lawmakers from both chambers — is necessary. Noem could also call a special session, but said Thursday she would not do so.

"This is unprecedented because no one has ever been convicted of impeachment in South Dakota," said Patrick Garry, an expert on the state constitution at the University of South Dakota Law School. "The constitution does not really lay out the procedural aspect."

Garry suggested the state Supreme Court would be the ultimate authority in determining whether calling a special session is necessary. The governor would have to request an opinion from the high court for it to step in.

Noem's office did not immediately respond to an inquiry on whether she was considering that option.

VIRUS TODAY: Alabama governor extends face mask order

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THE NUMBERS:

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VACCINES: Nearly 54.1 million people, or 16.3% of the U.S. population, have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, according to the CDC. Some 27.7 million people have completed their vaccination, or 8.4% of the population.

CASES: The seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. decreased from 77,579 on Feb. 17 to 63,675 on Wednesday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

DEATHS: The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. decreased from 2,044 on Feb. 17 to 1,835 on Wednesday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

POSITIVITY RATE: The seven-day rolling test positivity rate in the U.S. decreased from 5.3 on Feb. 17 to 4.2 on Wednesday, according to data from the COVID Tracking Project. The top three states with the highest coronavirus positivity rates: Idaho (24.4%), South Dakota (22.6%) and Iowa (19.7%).

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey is extending the state's mandatory face mask order by a month despite what Texas and neighboring Mississippi are doing about mask requirements.

— A new study of pro athletes found heart inflammation was uncommon after a mild case of COVID-19. The research was conducted by major professional sports leagues in the U.S.

— Nonprofits, churches and health care outreach workers are helping older people who have difficulty signing up for vaccinations.

QUOTABLE: "You need somebody in charge and you need somebody who can act quickly." — Kansas state Rep. Pam Curtis during a discussion on how far to go in restricting a governor's power in emergencies.

ON THE HORIZON: The California Legislature has OK'd a \$6.6 billion plan aimed at returning students to the classroom. Gov. Gavin Newsom says he plans to sign the bill into law Friday. Most of California's 6.1 million public school students have been learning from home since March 2020. The plan requires 10% of the state's COVID-19 vaccine supply be set aside for teachers.

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

Mother facing charges after children ate THC candy

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A Sioux Falls mother is facing charges after her two young children ate some gummy candy laced with THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, according to police.

The 28-year-old woman brought the children, ages 4 and 7, to the hospital Tuesday night after they found the gummies in her purse while she was driving, according to Sioux Falls police spokesman Sam Clemens.

He said the woman wanted to make sure the children were OK. Clemens says the youngsters were checked and are doing fine.

Police are recommending charges of abuse and neglect, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, possession of a controlled substance and resisting arrest, according to Clemens.

Guilty plea entered in fatal Pine Ridge shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man accused in a fatal shooting near the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation boundaries has pleaded guilty to murder charges.

Phillip Pond, 38, entered the plea Wednesday in federal court in Rapid City to second-degree murder and using a gun during a violent crime, KOTA-TV reported.

Pond is accused of shooting 40-year-old Justin Little Hawk in Pine Ridge on Nov. 22, 2020 after the two argued. Little Hawk died the following month at a hospital in Colorado.

Court documents say Pond shot Little Hawk in the left shoulder after the two got into an argument at the North Ridge Housing complex.

Pond recently turned himself in at a police station in Chadron, Nebraska.

The Latest: Pope meets Iraqi leaders in Baghdad's Green Zone

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BAGHDAD (AP) — The Latest on Pope Francis' historic visit to Iraq to deliver a message of hope to the country's dwindling Christian community following years of unrest and amid a devastating pandemic (all times local):

3:30 p.m.

Pope Francis arrived inside the heavily fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq's government, to meet with President Barham Salih and other officials.

Horsemen carrying both Iraqi and Vatican flags escorted his motorcade inside the Green Zone, which houses key government buildings and foreign embassies.

Salih greeted Francis outside the presidential palace. Both men wore masks as a band played the Vatican and Iraqi national anthems.

Francis, who has been vaccinated along with his entourage, shook hands with several Iraqi officials.

Public health experts have expressed concern about the first-ever papal visit to Iraq, fearing it could accelerate the country's already worsening coronavirus outbreak. The Vatican said strict health measures would be taken, but many in the crowds greeting Francis were not wearing masks or keeping their distance from others.

2:45 p.m.

Pope Francis rolled down the window of his car to wave at some of the hundreds of people who gathered to greet him as his motorcade rolled through Iraq's capital.

Crowds waving Iraqi and Vatican flags gathered along Baghdad's airport road — the scene of regular attacks in the years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion — to greet the pontiff on the first-ever papal visit to the country. Iraqi authorities hope to highlight the improved security situation after declaring victory against the Islamic State group in 2017.

The Pope, who arrived earlier on Friday, was on his way to the presidential palace where he is to meet with President Barham Salih and other officials. Francis hopes to deliver a message of peace and hope to Iraq's Christian community, which has dwindled in recent years of war and unrest.

The Vatican had defended going ahead with the trip despite Iraq's worsening coronavirus outbreak, saying social distancing and other health measures would be enforced. But many in the airport and along the motorcade route were packed together and not wearing masks.

2 p.m.

Pope Francis has arrived in Iraq on a visit to rally the country's dwindling Christian community after decades of war.

The pontiff's landmark visit has been months in the making and is the first papal visit to Iraq, one that eluded his predecessors. He brings a message of peace and coexistence to comfort the country's deep-rooted Christian minority, many of whom fled the country in the successive conflicts that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

His trip will begin in Baghdad, where he is due to deliver speeches and celebrate Mass in the capital's churches, and cover the holy city of Najaf, the plains of Ur in Nassiriyah province, as well as Mosul and Irbil in the north.

The Alitalia flight, with both Vatican and Iraqi flags, carrying the pope and his delegation landed just before 2 p.m. (1100GMT). A red carpet was rolled out on the tarmac in Baghdad's international airport.

Hundreds of people gathered along the airport road with hopes of catching a glimpse of the pope's convoy.

Iraq was estimated to have nearly 1.5 million Christians prior to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Now, church officials estimate only a few hundred thousand, or even fewer, remain with Iraq's borders.

11:30 a.m.

Dozens of Christians are gathering at the Church of the Virgin Mary in Baghdad hours before Pope Francis

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was due to land in Iraq for a first papal visit to the war-weary country.

Men, women and children gathered inside the church early in the morning. Many were not wearing masks and sat close to each other. One man tapped his feet impatiently, as they waited to be shuttled to the airport in buses.

The papal visit has raised alarm among public health experts, who fear large crowds will inevitably gather to see the pope.

Iraq is confronting a worsening coronavirus outbreak driven by a more infectious strain that first appeared in the U.K.

A timeline of disaster and displacement for Iraqi Christians

By The Associated Press undefined

BAGHDAD (AP) — In Iraq, two decades of back-to-back conflicts have left ancient Christian communities that were once a vibrant and integral part of the landscape scattered and in ruins.

Iraq was estimated to have nearly 1.5 million Christians before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. They date back to the first centuries of the religion and include Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian and Armenian churches.

Now, church officials estimate only a few hundred thousand, or even less, remain within Iraq's borders. The rest are scattered across the globe, resettling in far-flung places like Australia, Canada and Sweden, as well as neighboring countries.

Many of those who remain in Iraq feel abandoned, bitter and helpless, some wary of neighbors with whom they once shared feasts and religious celebrations, Muslim and Christian alike.

The Vatican for years has voiced concern about the flight of Christians from the Middle East, driven out by war, poverty, persecution and discrimination. Pope Francis hopes that by visiting Iraq — the first visit by a sitting pontiff — he will be sending a message of hope and solidarity.

Here's a look at disasters Iraq's Christians have endured, from Saddam's ouster to the brutal campaign by Islamic State militants:

U.S. INVASION AND RISE OF MILITANCY

Christians in Iraq enjoyed protection and near-equal rights with Iraq's Muslim majority under Saddam but were among the first groups targeted amid the breakdown in security and sectarian bloodbath that prevailed for years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that overthrew him.

The U.S. occupation and the chaotic years that followed ushered in the rise of religious militancy, with the al-Qaida terror network taking the lead. Killings, kidnappings and bombings became an everyday occurrence, sometimes with multiple bombings on the same day.

A Chaldean Catholic archbishop was found dead in 2008 after being abducted by gunmen. Churches around the country were bombed repeatedly by Sunni militants, terrorizing the community and setting off an exodus that continues to this day.

BAGHDAD CHURCH MASSACRE

On October 31, 2010, Islamic militants seized a Baghdad church during Sunday evening mass, killing dozens of people, including two priests, in a terrifying four-hour siege. It was the deadliest single assault ever recorded against Iraq's Christians.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an offshoot of al-Qaida, claimed responsibility for the attack at the Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church, where Pope Francis is expected to pray this weekend. The carnage deepened the mistrust between the beleaguered community and its Muslim neighbors and fueled the Christian flight from Iraq.

To this day, the memory of the massacre is etched in the minds of Iraq's Christian community.

ISLAMIC STATE JUGGERNAUT

In the summer of 2014, fighters belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant swept over the northern city of Mosul and seized a broad swath of the country, including towns and villages in the Nineveh plains of northern Iraq.

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Thousands of Christians found themselves fleeing once again the militants' advance, taking refuge in Iraq's northern Kurdish region or leaving the country. Over the next few years, the extremists killed thousands of Iraqi civilians from a variety of religions. They also destroyed buildings and ruined historical and culturally significant structures they considered contrary to their interpretation of Islam. Militants from the Islamic State group demolished religious and historic sites, including monasteries, mosques, tombs, shrines and churches in Syria and Iraq.

The IS juggernaut and the long war to drive the militants out left ransacked homes and charred or pulverized buildings across the north. Christians in the Nineveh plains fled the IS onslaught and many of those who returned dream of resettling abroad.

Senate nears relief bill votes after half-day GOP delay

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate steered on Friday toward a voting marathon on Democrats' \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill after enduring an extraordinary half-day holdup forced by a Republican foe of President Joe Biden's top legislative priority.

The chamber planned to begin voting around midday on a mountain of amendments, mostly by GOP opponents and virtually all of which were destined to be rejected. That would set the Senate on course toward approving its reworked version of the massive measure, probably over the weekend, and shipping it back to the House so it could whisk the final package to Biden for his signature.

Moments after the Senate took up the legislation Thursday, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., forced the chamber's clerks to read aloud the entire 628-page measure. The exhausting task took the staffers 10 hours and 44 minutes and ended shortly after 2 a.m. EST, with Johnson alternately sitting at his desk and pacing around the mostly empty chamber.

Democratic leaders made more than a dozen late additions to their package on Thursday. That reflected their need to cement unanimous support from all their senators — plus Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote — to succeed in the precariously divided 50-50 chamber.

The Senate's 51-50 vote to start debating the package, with Harris pushing Democrats over the top, underscored how they were navigating the package through Congress with virtually no margin for error. In the House their majority is a scrawny 10 votes.

The bill, aimed at battling the killer virus and nursing the staggered economy back to health, will provide direct payments of up to \$1,400 to most Americans. There's also money for COVID-19 vaccines and testing, aid to state and local governments, help for schools and the airline industry, tax breaks for lower-earners and families with children, and subsidies for health insurance.

"We are not going to be timid in the face of a great challenge," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The new provisions offered items appealing to all manner of Democrats. Progressives got money boosting feeding programs, federal subsidies for health care for workers who lose jobs, tax-free student loans, and money for public broadcasting and consumer protection investigations.

Moderates won funds for rural health care, language assuring minimum amounts of money for smaller states and a prohibition on states receiving aid using the windfalls to cut taxes. And for everyone, there was money for infrastructure, cultural venues, start-up companies and afterschool programs.

Even with the late revisions, there was a good chance lawmakers will make yet another one and vote to pare back the bill's \$400 weekly emergency unemployment benefits to \$300.

That potential change could also extend those emergency payments another month, through September. It was described by aides and a lobbyist who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal conversations.

Biden and Senate leaders had agreed Wednesday to retain the \$400 weekly jobless payments included in the version of the relief bill the House approved Saturday. The reduction to \$300 — which seemed likely to occur once the Senate begins a "vote-a-rama" on scores of amendments later this week — seemed to

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reflect a need to secure support from moderate Democrats.

It also left House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the task of keeping her chamber's numerous progressives on board. Liberals already suffered a blow when their No. 1 priority — a federal minimum wage increase to \$15 hourly that was included in the House package — was booted from the bill in the Senate for violating the chamber's rules and for lack of moderates' support.

In another bargain that satisfied moderates, Biden and Senate Democrats agreed Wednesday to tighten eligibility for the direct checks to individuals. The new provision completely phases out the \$1,400 payments for individuals earning at least \$80,000 and couples making \$160,000, well lower than the original ceilings.

"My hope is they don't screw around with it too much," Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said of the Senate in an interview. "If they do there could be some problems."

Congress wants to send the bill to Biden before March 14, when a previous round of emergency benefits for people tossed out of work by the pandemic expires.

Johnson told reporters he was forcing the bill's reading to "shine the light on this abusive and obscene amount of money." Schumer said Johnson would "accomplish little more than a few sore throats for the Senate clerks."

Asked about GOP delays, Biden told reporters he's talked to Republican lawmakers and added, "We're keeping everybody informed." Biden met last month with Republican senators who offered a plan one-third the size of Democrats' proposal, and there have been no signs since of serious talks.

Johnson's move pointed to a larger GOP argument: Democrats were ramming an overpriced bill through that disregarded that growing numbers of vaccinations and other signs suggesting the country's pandemic ordeal is beginning to ease.

"Instead of heading into a dark tunnel, we're accelerating out of it," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

The economic recovery began to stall late last year as the virus surged, causing a shortfall in hiring in recent months. Employers added just 49,000 jobs in January and cut 227,000 jobs in December. Economists estimate that the February employment report being released Friday will show gains of 175,000, not nearly enough to swiftly recover the nearly 10 million jobs lost to the pandemic-induced recession.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates economic growth will exceed 4% this year without Biden's rescue package. Republicans cite that as evidence the economy is pointed upward, but Democrats say a strong economic stimulus is still needed to prevent a relapse.

"It's a crisis that is still very much with us, and it is deadly, deadly serious," Schumer said.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak, Alexandra Jaffe and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

Pope arrives in Iraq to rally Christians despite pandemic

By NICOLE WINFIELD and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Pope Francis arrived in Iraq on Friday to urge the country's dwindling number of Christians to stay put and help rebuild the country after years of war and persecution, brushing aside the coronavirus pandemic and security concerns to make his first-ever papal visit.

The pope, who wore a facemask during the flight, kept it on as he descended the stairs to the tarmac and was greeted by two masked children in traditional dress. But health measures appeared lax inside the airport despite the country's worsening coronavirus outbreak.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said Iraqis were eager to welcome Francis' "message of peace and tolerance" and described the visit as a historic meeting between the "minaret and the bells." Among the highlights of the three-day visit is Francis' private meeting Saturday with the country's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a revered figure in Iraq and beyond.

Francis' plane touched down at Baghdad's airport just before 2 p.m. local time (1100 GMT). A red carpet was rolled out on the tarmac in Baghdad's international airport with Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on hand to greet him. Francis was visibly limping in a sign his sciatica, which has flared and forced him to

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cancel events recently, was possibly bothering him.

A largely unmasked choir sang songs as both pope and premier made their way to a welcome area in the airport. People wandered around without masks, and the pope and the prime minister took theirs off as they sat down for their first meeting — seated less than two meters (yards) apart — and later stood next to each other shaking hands and chatting.

The pope later rolled down the window and waved to some of the hundreds of people who gathered along the airport road to watch his motorcade pass. The airport road was the scene of regular attacks in the chaotic years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Iraqis were keen to welcome him and the global attention his visit will bring, with billboards depicting Francis with the slogan "We are all Brothers."

The government is eager to show off the relative security it has achieved after years of wars and militant attacks that nevertheless continue even today. Francis and the Vatican delegation are relying on Iraqi security forces to protect them, including with the expected first use of an armored car for the popemobile-loving pontiff.

Francis is breaking his year-long COVID-19 lockdown to refocus the world's attention on a largely neglected people whose northern Christian communities, which date from the time of Christ, were largely emptied during the violent Islamic State reign from 2014-2017.

For the pope, who has often traveled to places where Christians are a persecuted minority, Iraq's beleaguered Christians are the epitome of the "martyred church" that he has admired ever since he was a young Jesuit seeking to be a missionary in Asia.

In Iraq, Francis is seeking to not only honor its martyrs but deliver a message of reconciliation and fraternity. The few Christians who remain in Iraq harbor a lingering mistrust of their Muslim neighbors and face structural discrimination long predating both IS and the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that plunged the country into chaos.

"The Pope's visit is to support the Christians in Iraq to stay, and to say that they are not forgotten," the Chaldean patriarch, Cardinal Luis Sako, told reporters in Baghdad this week. The aim of Francis' visit, he said, is to encourage them to "hold onto hope."

The visit comes as Iraq is seeing a new spike in coronavirus infections, with most new cases traced to the highly contagious variant first identified in Britain. The 84-year-old pope, the Vatican delegation and travelling media have been vaccinated; most Iraqis have not.

The Vatican and Iraqi authorities have downplayed the threat of the virus and insisted that social distancing, crowd control and other health care measures will be enforced. The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, said this week the important thing is for Iraqis to know that the pope came to Iraq as an "act of love."

"I come among you as a pilgrim of peace, to repeat 'you are all brothers,'" Francis said in a video-message to the Iraqi people on the eve of his visit. "I come as a pilgrim of peace in search of fraternity, animated by the desire to pray together and walk together, also with brothers and sisters of other religious traditions."

Christians once constituted a sizeable minority in Iraq but their numbers began dwindling after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. They fell further when IS militants in 2014 swept through traditionally Christian towns across the Nineveh plains. Their extremist brand of Islam forced residents to flee to the neighboring Kurdish region or further afield.

Few have returned, and those who have found their homes and churches destroyed.

Returnees have had to contend with more struggles. Many cannot find work and blame discriminatory practices in the public sector, Iraq's largest employer. Since 2003, public jobs have been mostly controlled by majority Shiite political elites, leaving Christians feeling marginalized.

While hard numbers are hard to come by, there were an estimated 1.4 million Christians in Iraq in 2003. Today the number is believed to be around 250,000.

During his visit, Francis will pray in the Baghdad church that was the site of one of the worst massacres of Christians, the 2010 attack by Islamic militants that left 58 people dead. He will honor the dead in a Mosul square surrounded by shells of destroyed churches and meet with the small Christian community

that returned to Qaraqosh. He will bless their church, which was used as a firing range by IS.

The Vatican and the pope have frequently insisted on the need to preserve Iraq's ancient Christian communities and create the security, economic and social conditions for those who have left to return. But that hasn't necessarily translated into reality.

"I am the only priest in Mosul. Every Sunday I hold mass at 9 a.m., and only around 70 people attend," said the Rev. Raed Adil Kelo, parish priest of the Church of the Annunciation in the onetime de-facto IS capital.

Before 2003, the Christian population was 50,000, he said. It had dwindled to 2,000 before IS overran northern Iraq.

He doesn't expect more to return, but he said Francis' visit would have immeasurable importance for those who stayed.

"This visit will bring peace to Iraq" he said.

Winfield reported from Vatican City.

Teacher vaccinations go untracked amid school reopening push

By CASEY SMITH Associated Press/Report for America

The national rush to vaccinate teachers in hopes of soon reopening pandemic-shuttered schools is running into one basic problem: Almost no one knows how many are getting the shots, or refusing to get them.

States and many districts have not been keeping track of school employee vaccinations, even as the U.S. prioritizes teachers nationwide. Vaccines are not required for educators to return to school buildings, but the absence of data complicates efforts to address parents' concerns about health risk levels and some teachers unions' calls for widespread vaccinations as a condition of reopening schools.

The number of school staff members receiving vaccinations — and refusal rates — are unclear in several large districts where teachers were prioritized, including Las Vegas, Chicago and Louisville, Kentucky.

Some state agencies and districts have said privacy concerns prevent them from tracking or publishing teacher vaccination data. Others say vaccine administration sites are not tracking recipients' occupations and they are not in position to survey employees themselves.

In Oregon, where teachers began receiving vaccines in January, the state Health Authority can't say for sure how many have been vaccinated because the agency does not track the profession of recipients. Portland Public Schools, the state's largest district where learning remains largely remote, is not keeping track either as it works toward launching a hybrid model for elementary schools by April.

No states are publicly reporting the percentage of teachers and school staff that have been vaccinated, according to a Johns Hopkins University analysis published Thursday.

Education leaders are missing out on an opportunity to address hesitancy about when it's safe to go back, said Megan Collins, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Consortium for School-Based Health Solutions. Increased transparency could influence back-to-school decision making, she said, and would likely make teachers and students more willing to return to classrooms.

"We're seeing a substantial disconnect. There are states not prioritizing teachers for vaccine that are fully open for in-person instruction, and others that are prioritizing teachers for vaccines, but aren't open at all," Collins said. "If states are going to use teacher vaccinations as a part of the process for safely returning to classrooms, it's very important then to be able to communicate that information so people know that teachers are actually getting vaccines."

Over a dozen states had yet to prioritize teachers for vaccines before President Joe Biden directed all state governments this week to administer at least one coronavirus vaccination to every teacher, school employee and child-care worker by the end of March. Biden has promised to have most K-8 schools open for classroom instruction by the end of his first 100 days in office, or the end of April.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did not include vaccinating teachers in its guidelines for schools to consider when to bring students back to classrooms. But vaccines have been a sticking point

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in reopening debates.

A push for statewide vaccine data is under way in at least one state, New York, where Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he would direct districts to report weekly how many staff members have been vaccinated. The more teachers that have been vaccinated, he said, the better others will feel about returning to classrooms.

Los Angeles Unified School District, the second largest in the country after New York City, lets teachers register for vaccine appointments offered by the school system through an app designed with Microsoft. But district spokesperson Shannon Huber said the district is not tracking who has gotten vaccinated. A reopening date for Los Angeles schools is still undetermined and depends in part on all school staff being offered vaccines, a demand of the district's teachers union.

At Jefferson County Public Schools, the Kentucky district including Louisville, all staff wanting to receive COVID-19 vaccines got shots in arms by mid-February, and the district is now gearing up to reopen schools. A district spokesperson said vaccination figures were not available.

Vaccinations are not mandated in Kentucky, but Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear does require vaccinated teachers who were working remotely to return to their school buildings whenever in-person classes resume. Exceptions can be made with an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or if the employee qualifies as a high-risk employee.

Beshear has called for districts statewide to reopen, saying the state "didn't vaccinate our educators for nothing."

Vaccines were a contentious part of the fight to reopen schools in Chicago, which narrowly avoided a teachers strike last month over COVID-19 safety plans. Vaccinations began in mid-February, but it's unknown how many of the nearly 40,000 Chicago Public Schools employees have been vaccinated.

Chicago school system officials say they have some data from appointments that were allocated to school staffers, but medical privacy laws limit their ability to publicize a firm count. A plan that recently cleared the school board will require school employees to disclose their vaccination status and, eventually, require vaccinations.

Even after vaccines are widely available to teachers, that may not be enough to leave behind distance learning.

In Philadelphia, where schools are preparing to launch hybrid learning for students in PreK-2, a dispute with the teachers union over the state of school infrastructure has remained a stumbling block in returning to in-person instruction.

In Detroit, teacher distrust in health care has made the district slow to reopen, Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said. With a community population that is 78% Black, the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 have sowed fear about receiving vaccine, as well as a reluctance from teachers to inform the district that they've been inoculated.

Though \$750 in hazard pay is being offered to teachers as an incentive to return to school buildings, Vitti said Detroit will need different outreach from other school districts to encourage vaccinations and in-person returns.

"What I'm fearful of is what usually happens in this country," Vitti said. "Based on what the majority is doing — the majority in this case being white suburban rural districts coming back — the understanding is, 'Well, everyone's back, why wouldn't we be back?' There needs to be a differentiated, unique intentionality about the communication and effort to bring back our students and other students like ours throughout the country."

AP reporters Jocelyn Gecker in San Francisco and Sophia Tareen in Chicago, and reporters Sara Cline in Salem, Oregon, and Anna Liz Nichols in Lansing, Michigan, contributed to this report.

Casey Smith, Cline and Nichols are corps members for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists

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in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Myanmar cracked down brutally on protests. It may get worse.

By VICTORIA MILKO and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Myanmar's security forces have killed scores of demonstrators protesting a coup. The new junta has jailed journalists — and anyone else capable of exposing the violence. It has done away with even limited legal protections. The outside world has responded so far with tough words, a smattering of sanctions and little else.

The slide from a nascent democracy to yet another coup, as rapid as it has been brutal, opens up a grim possibility: As bad as it looks in Myanmar now, if the country's long history of violent military rule is any guide, things could get worse.

Protesters have continued to fill the streets despite violence that left 38 people dead one day this week — though in smaller numbers than the weeks right after the Feb. 1 coup. They have used smartphones to capture the brutality. Recent videos show security forces shooting a person at point-blank range and chasing down and savagely beating demonstrators.

The military, however, has the clear upper hand, with sophisticated weapons, a large network of spies, the ability to cut telecoms, and decades of fighting experience from civil conflicts in the country's borderlands.

"We are at a crisis point," Bill Richardson, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations with long experience working with Myanmar, told The Associated Press, pointing to the arrests of journalists, including AP's Thein Zaw, and the indiscriminate killing of protesters. "The international community needs to respond much more forcefully, or this situation will degenerate into complete anarchy and violence."

So, will it?

Governments around the world, including the United States, have condemned the coup, which reversed years of slow progress toward democracy. Before that opening up began, Myanmar had languished under a strict military rule for five decades that led to international isolation and crippling sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip in the past decade, the international community lifted most sanctions and poured in investment.

Despite the flurry of recent global criticism, however, there's not much hope that pressure from outside will change the course of events inside the country. For one thing, coordinated action at the U.N. — like a global arms embargo that the world body's independent expert on human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, called for — is unlikely. Russia and China, Myanmar's most powerful supporter, are still selling arms to the military — and they each have a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council and thus could veto any such measure. The Security Council will take up the crisis in Myanmar on Friday.

Myanmar's neighbors, the countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, are generally loathe to "interfere" in one another's affairs — a policy that means they are unlikely to do anything more than call for talks between the junta and the ousted government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

That leaves sanctions from the United States and other Western countries. Washington imposed sanctions on Myanmar's top military leaders after the Feb. 1 coup. More pressure came after a U.N. envoy said security forces killed 38 people on Wednesday. Britain imposed sanctions on three generals and six members of the junta in response to the coup and the crackdown. The European Union is drawing up measures to respond to the coup.

But even tough sanctions from those countries are unlikely to yield anything, though they may weigh heavily on ordinary people. Myanmar has ridden out decades of such measures before, and the military is already talking about plans for "self-reliance."

U.N. special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, told reporters this week that she had warned the military that tough sanctions may be coming — and the response was that the generals knew how to "walk with only a few friends."

"Myanmar's history suggests the military will use ever increasing brutality and violence in an attempt to put down the protest movement," said Ronan Lee, a visiting scholar at the International State Crime

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Initiative at Queen Mary University of London. "In the past, the military has been prepared to murder thousands to quell civil unrest or to meet its goals."

In the face of such determination, some observers question how long the protest movement can last.

"While it may appear at first glance to be a battle of wills, the military has a substantial resource advantage over the average protester and has demonstrated that it's willing to engage in extreme acts of violence and brutality to try to force compliance," said John Lichteferd, vice president of The Asia Group, a consulting firm.

It may get much worse, he said. The military "is an organization with tremendous institutional pride, and it's possible that hardliners within the military who have been pushing for a more aggressive response are beginning to gain influence."

The military has also gotten away with past abuse. In 2017 the army slaughtered thousands of minority Rohingya Muslims in massacres that U.N. officials have said bear the "hallmarks of genocide" with few consequences so far.

In a sign of how limited the options are to influence the junta, when asked what more Britain and other countries could do, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab responded: "We will continue to look at how we hold individual members of the regime to account."

Myanmar's military is banking on the world going no further than "harsh words, some economic sanctions and travel bans," Lee, the scholar at Queen Mary University, said. In order to ensure that, it may exercise some restraint in its crackdown — to try to keep violence below a threshold that would compel action — or at least keep it hidden.

This is why, he said, authorities are targeting journalists. It suggests they "understand the value of international exposure to the protesters and are aggressively working to limit it."

Milko reported from Jakarta, Indonesia. Associated Press writers Jill Lawless in London, Jamey Keaton in Geneva, Frances D'Emilio in Rome and Raf Casert in Brussels contributed to this report.

YouTube cancels Myanmar military-run channels, pulls videos

BANGKOK (AP) — YouTube has removed five channels run by Myanmar's military for violating its community guidelines and terms of service.

The company said Friday that it terminated channels of broadcasters Myawaddy Media, MRTV, WD Online Broadcasting, MWD Variety and MWD Myanmar. The decision follows a Feb. 1 military coup that ousted the country's elected government, provoking massive public protests.

"We have terminated a number of channels and removed several videos from YouTube in accordance with our community guidelines and applicable laws," YouTube said in an emailed statement.

The company said it was monitoring the situation for any content that might violate its rules.

YouTube said it had terminated around 20 channels and removed over 160 videos in the past couple months for violating its policies regarding hate speech and harassment, spam and deceptive practices, violent or graphic content policy and violations of its terms of service.

In December, it pulled 34 channels as part of an investigation into content uploaded in a coordinated influence campaign. That campaign uploaded content about elections in Myanmar, regional conflicts and news related to the U.S., China and Malaysia, the company said.

The decision by YouTube followed Facebook's earlier announcement that it had removed all Myanmar military-linked pages from its site and from Instagram, which it also owns.

China sets growth target 'over 6%,' tightening HK control

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's No. 2 leader set a healthy economic growth target Friday and vowed to make the nation self-reliant in technology amid tension with the U.S. and Europe over trade and human rights.

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Another official announced plans to tighten control over Hong Kong by reducing the public's role in government.

The ruling Communist Party aims for growth of "over 6%" as the world's second-largest economy rebounds from the coronavirus, Premier Li Keqiang said in a speech to China's ceremonial legislature. About 3,000 delegates gathered for its annual meeting, the year's highest-profile political event, under intense security and anti-virus controls. It has been shortened from two weeks to one because of the pandemic.

The party is shifting back to its longer-term goal of becoming a global competitor in telecoms, electric cars and other profitable technology. That is inflaming trade tension with Washington and Europe, which complain Beijing's tactics violate its market-opening commitments and hurt foreign competitors.

Li promised progress in reining in climate-changing carbon emissions, a step toward keeping President Xi Jinping's pledge last year to become carbon-neutral by 2060. But he avoided aggressive targets that might weigh on economic growth.

The NPC meeting focuses on domestic issues but is overshadowed by geopolitics as Xi's government pursues more assertive trade and strategic policies and faces criticism over its treatment of Hong Kong and ethnic minorities. The ruling party has doubled down on crushing dissent as Xi tries to cement his image as a history-making leader reclaiming China's rightful place as a global power.

An NPC deputy chairman, Wang Chen, said a Hong Kong Election Committee dominated by businesspeople and other pro-Beijing figures will be given a bigger role in choosing the territory's legislature. Wang said the Election Committee would choose a "relatively large" share of the now 70-member Legislative Council.

That came after a spokesman for the legislature on Thursday said Beijing wants "patriots ruling Hong Kong," fueling fears opposition voices will be shut out of the political process.

Li, the premier, said Beijing wants to "safeguard national security" in Hong Kong.

Also Friday, the government announced a 6.8% rise in military spending to 1.4 trillion yuan (\$217 billion) amid territorial disputes with India and other neighbors and ambitions to match the United States and Russia in missile, stealth fighter and other weapons technology.

That is less than the double-digit increases of earlier years but a marked rise in real terms when inflation is close to zero. Foreign analysts say total military spending is up to 40% more than the reported figure, the world's second-highest after the United States.

China became the only major economy to grow last year, eking out a multi-decade-low 2.3% expansion after shutting down industries to fight the virus. Growth accelerated to 6.5% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2020 while the United States, Europe and Japan struggled with renewed virus outbreaks.

The 6% target is higher than expectations for the United States and other major economies but less than the 7%-8% forecasters expected Li to announce.

That suggests Beijing is "shifting focus from quantity to quality of economic growth," said Chaoping Zhu of J.P. Morgan Asset Management in a report.

Beijing might allocate resources to environmental protection and other initiatives "to boost China's long-term growth potential," Zhu said.

Li vowed to "work faster" to develop tech capabilities seen by Communist leaders as a path to prosperity, strategic autonomy and global influence. Those plans are threatened by conflicts with Washington over technology and security that prompted then-U.S. President Donald Trump to slap sanctions on companies including telecom equipment giant Huawei, China's first global tech brand.

The ruling party's latest five-year development blueprint says efforts to make China a self-reliant "technology power" are this year's top economic priority.

The party sees "technological self-reliance as a strategic support for national development," Li said.

Li promised to pursue "green development" following Xi's pledge last year to ensure China's carbon emissions peak by 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. That will require sharp increases in clean energy in an economy that gets 60% of its power from coal and is the world's biggest source of climate-changing industrial pollution.

He promised to reduce carbon emissions per unit of economic output by 18% over the next five years. That is in line with the previous five-year period's goal, but environmentalists say Beijing needs to do more.

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"It defers some of the most important questions to the future," said Li Shuo of Greenpeace.

Li repeated official promises to promote "peaceful growth of relations" with Taiwan but announced no initiatives toward the self-ruled island that split with the mainland in 1949 after a civil war.

Beijing claims Taiwan as its territory and has threatened to invade if it tries to make its de facto independence official. Li said the mainland will "resolutely deter" any activity "seeking Taiwan independence."

This year's legislative meeting is being held mostly by video links to keep Chinese leaders, delegates and reporters separate as an anti-virus measure.

The ruling party earlier announced it achieved its goal of doubling economic output from 2010 levels by last year, which required annual growth of 7%. Xi has talked about doubling output again by 2035, which would imply annual growth of about 5%, still among the highest for any major economy.

As Xi has sought to cement his image, China has doubled down on repression of dissent in ways that could stifle innovation.

The ruling party's desire for the prosperity produced by free-market competition also clashes with its insistence on playing a dominant role in the economy and strategic goals of reducing dependence on other countries.

Beijing will promote "domestic circulation," Li said, a reference to official pressure on industries to use more Chinese-supplied components and technology and rely less on foreign inputs, even if that increases costs.

That emphasis on self-reliance and the conflict with Washington has fueled fears the world might split into separate U.S., Chinese and other industrial spheres with incompatible technologies, less competition and higher costs.

The goal of "decoupling them from foreign technology" is "more likely to harm productivity than help it," Mark Williams of Capital Economics said in a report this week.

AP writers Huizhong Wu in Taipei, Taiwan, and Zen Soo in Hong Kong contributed to this report.

This story corrects the current size of the Hong Kong legislature to 70 members, not 35.

'WandaVision,' a sitcom sendup, was a pandemic parable, too

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

Imagine being trapped in the confines of your own neighborhood, losing a sense of the outside world — and of yourself — with each passing day.

Things are seeming kind of flat lately, and sometimes downright colorless. Everything looks reasonably placid, but something's not quite right with reality. The days feel ... episodic. Does the world taper off at the end of the block? Does life loop back on itself? Are your neighbors with you, or against you?

This has been the premise of "WandaVision," Marvel's latest foray into the intricate, immersive universe first cobbled together in the comics by Stan Lee six decades ago. Not incidentally, it's also an apt description of life in many corners of America during this pandemic micromoment.

In an era when meticulously crafted fictional universes are entertainment's billion-dollar baby, "WandaVision," whose inaugural and probably only season concludes Friday, took it all a step further, turning the seven-decade tradition of the American sitcom into a decade-hopping suburban prison.

Episode by TV-homage episode, it pinballed through unsettling sendups of "The Dick Van Dyke Show," "Bewitched," "The Brady Bunch," "Family Ties," "Malcolm in the Middle" and "Modern Family," swallowing an entire New Jersey town and its people and, along the way, serving up a darker version of Marvel's already dysfunctional funhouse mirror.

The pitch-perfect result: a distorted reflection not merely of America, but of the way it has seen itself through its broadly drawn television comedy across three generations.

How did this show manage (inadvertently, of course, since it was conceived before the virus arrived) to match the tenor of its comfort-craving moment? Because it reached so lovingly into the mannered,

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structured lore of sitcoms, which were comfort food for the American TV watcher's brain long before the word "streaming" ever tumbled into the lexicon.

The television scholar Robert Thompson once described the contentment that people find in old sitcoms as "the aesthetic of the anesthetic" — a style of narrative that reset itself every week, making sure society's norms were reinforced by presenting nonthreatening communities populated with nonthreatening characters doing nonthreatening things.

"WandaVision" coopted that vision and upended it. It used, as foils, those landscapes of assuagement and the way they morphed over the decades to match the times. Their surface tranquility and amiable conflict were backdrops for a slowly unfolding Marvel plot that, in its wink-nudge bubblegum darkness, was pure 21st century.

There's irony, too, in the fact that Marvel has been owned for the past 12 years by Disney, a conglomerate built by self-described "imagineers" who were instrumental in stamping the sensibility of immersive fantasy onto more than a half century's worth of American children — and onto the landscape itself.

Wanda Maximoff, the world-building witch at the show's nucleus, is a stand-in for Walt Disney himself, who built his gauzy childhood memories of early 20th-century Midwestern life into theme parks and an entertainment empire. Like the world of "WandaVision," Disney's creations reflected not quite reality but its saccharine stepsibling, recognizable and appealing but hardly real life.

By the time "WandaVision" got to its take on 1980s television, the gentle opening credits of that "very special episode" sang this to us, revealing the theme of the show (and of pandemic life too): "We're making it up as we go along."

Yet like those 1980s horror movies in which the dreamer of the nightmare awakens, only to find out that he or she is still asleep, in "WandaVision" the "real" world is still the fantastic one of the Marvel Universe. The "Inception" model is at play: You're still in the layered matrix, still separated from actual reality by several strata of Marvel and a robust layer of Disney.

In one of its later episodes, "WandaVision" offers its take on the "Malcolm in the Middle" opening credits of the early 2000s. This theme song, more aggressive and insolent than its predecessors, offers up the following lyrics: "What if it's all illusion? Sit back. Enjoy the show."

As the first storyline of its astonishingly extensive streaming lineup of shows concludes, that could be Marvel's overall tagline. Because — first in comic books, then in theaters, now on all our assorted screens — Marvel IS the universe. It is comics and movies and video games, TV and toys and collectibles, cosplayers and party favors and an entire pantheon of secular gods.

You could even argue that its seamlessly cross-marketed cosmos is the new American suburb — a completely immersive neighborhood, interconnected and self-perpetuating, privileged and complex and, sometimes, brimming with the emptiness of the industrially manufactured Technicolor narrative. It is us, but amplified.

"Thousands of people under your thumb, all interacting with each other, according to complex storylines?" one character, who will remain nameless for spoiler-avoidance purposes, says to Wanda as her magic-powered dream microverse begins to fray. "Well, that's something special, baby."

Does life imitate Marvel, then? Maybe just a little. One day, after the blip that was the pandemic finally ends, we'll all be back — well, most of us. We'll re-emerge into the real world, blink hard, look around, reconnect with our neighbors and take stock of what we all missed.

We'll say to each other: What a weird and all-encompassing dream this was. And then we'll dream again. Roll credits. Rinse. Repeat.

Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

Guatemala woman, 23, is among 13 killed in California crash

EL CENTRO, Calif. (AP) — One of the 13 people killed when the SUV smuggling them into California hit

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a tractor-trailer was a 23-year-old woman who was fleeing violence in Guatemala for the hope of a better life, family members said.

Yesenia Magali Melendrez Cardona had told her father she wanted to follow in his footsteps and go to the United States, where he had started a new life 15 years earlier, the Los Angeles Times reported Thursday.

"She couldn't reach the American dream," her father, Maynor Melendrez of New York, told the paper in Spanish. He arrived in California on Wednesday.

"There are no words," he said. "I couldn't see her again, I couldn't hug her."

Yesenia and her mother, 46-year-old Verlyn Cardona, were among 25 people packed into a 1997 Ford Expedition that drove through a hole cut in a border fence on Tuesday. The vehicle, with a smuggler at the wheel, was driving through California's agricultural Imperial Valley when it was broadsided at an intersection by a tractor-trailer hauling two empty trailers, authorities said.

Seventeen occupants were Mexican — 10 who died, including the driver, and seven who were injured. Nine migrants had major injuries, including two Guatemalans, authorities said.

The youngest injured was a 15-year-old girl whose name and nationality were undetermined, according to California Highway Patrol. She had major injuries.

The oldest was Verlyn Cardona. The Guatemala City woman lost consciousness. When she came to in the back of the broken SUV, her daughter was sprawled dead across her legs, family members told the Times.

She was treated for a head injury that caused a cerebral hemorrhage and has been released from the hospital.

"She always tried to give her daughter a better life," said Yesenia's uncle, Rudy Dominguez. "Never imagining that the price she would pay would be this."

He and other family members described Yesenia as a loving woman who loved to play soccer and was like a big sister to Dominguez's teenage daughter.

Although Yesenia had a job and was studying to be a lawyer at a university, her hometown of Chiquimulilla was ravaged by unemployment as the coronavirus pandemic closed businesses, and some people took to crime, making the streets unsafe.

She was being harassed and threatened, said her uncle.

"It was an emergency decision," Dominguez said. "There they threaten you and they kill you."

Dominguez had left Guatemala 16 years ago, despite the risks of being kidnapped or left for dead in the desert by smugglers.

"These are decisions you make, where you ask yourself, 'Do I die over there? Or do I die fighting for a dream?'" he said.

Yesenia and her mother left on Feb. 2 and traveled to Baja California, Mexico. They stayed about a week before beginning their final journey across the border.

The Border Patrol said surveillance video showed the Expedition and a Chevrolet Suburban drive through an opening in the border wall about 30 miles (48 kilometers) east of the crash. The Suburban carried 19 people, and it caught fire for unknown reasons on a nearby interstate after entering the U.S. All escaped the vehicle and were taken into custody by the Border Patrol, which said it was not pursuing either SUV.

The Expedition soon struck the tractor-trailer, whose driver, a 68-year-old man from El Centro, suffered major injuries.

Tekandi Paniagua, Guatemala's consul general in Los Angeles, told the Times that smugglers are encouraging the belief in Guatemala that the administration of new President Joe Biden is loosening immigration restrictions when in reality, "the politics haven't changed a lot."

Migrants still face an uncertain and dangerous crossing, he said.

"They don't know if they're going to go into a tractor-trailer, if they're going to hide in the false bottom of a bus, if they're going to hide in a truck with 25 people like what happened here," Paniagua said. "We're seeing the lives lost."

Reports: NY officials altered count of nursing home deaths

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NEW YORK (AP) — Top aides to Gov. Andrew Cuomo altered a state Health Department report to obscure the true number of people killed by COVID-19 in the state's nursing homes, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times reported late Thursday.

The aides, including the secretary to the governor, Melissa DeRosa, pushed state health officials to edit the July report so only residents who died inside long-term care facilities, and not those who became ill there and later died at a hospital, were counted, the newspapers reported, citing documents and people with knowledge of the administration's internal discussions.

The report was designed and released to rebut criticism of Cuomo over a March 25 directive that barred nursing homes from rejecting recovering coronavirus patients being discharged from hospitals. Some nursing homes complained at the time that the policy could help spread the virus.

The report concluded the policy played no role in spreading infection.

The state's analysis was based partly on what officials acknowledged at the time was an imprecise statistic. The report said 6,432 people had died in the state's nursing homes.

State officials acknowledged that the true number of deaths was higher because of the exclusion of patients who died in hospitals, but they declined at the time to give any estimate of that larger number of deaths, saying the numbers still needed to be verified.

The Times and Journal reported that, in fact, the original drafts of the report had included that number, then more than 9,200 deaths, until Cuomo's aides said it should be taken out.

State officials insisted Thursday that the edits were made because of concerns about accuracy, not to protect Cuomo's reputation.

"While early versions of the report included out of facility deaths, the COVID task force was not satisfied that the data had been verified against hospital data and so the final report used only data for in facility deaths, which was disclosed in the report," said Department of Health Spokesperson Gary Holmes.

Scientists, health care professionals and elected officials assailed the report at the time for flawed methodology and selective stats that sidestepped the actual impact of the directive.

Cuomo had refused for months to release complete data on how the early stages of the pandemic hit nursing home residents. A court order and state attorney general report in January forced the state to acknowledge the nursing home resident death toll was higher than the count previously made public.

DeRosa told lawmakers earlier this month that the administration didn't turn over the data to legislators in August because of worries the information would be used against them by the Trump administration, which had recently launched a Justice Department investigation of nursing home deaths.

"Basically, we froze, because then we were in a position where we weren't sure if what we were going to give to the Department of Justice or what we give to you guys, what we start saying was going to be used against us while we weren't sure if there was going to be an investigation," DeRosa said.

Cuomo and his health commissioner recently defended the March directive, saying it was the best option at the time to help free up desperately needed beds at the state's hospitals.

"We made the right public health decision at the time. And faced with the same facts, we would make the same decision again," Health Commissioner Howard Zucker said Feb. 19.

The state now acknowledges that at least 15,000 long-term care residents died, compared to a figure of 8,700 it had publicized as of late January that didn't include residents who died after being transferred to hospitals.

Officers maced, trampled: Docs expose depth of Jan. 6 chaos

By MARTHA MENDOZA and JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

Two firefighters loaned to Washington for the day were the only medics on the Capitol steps Jan. 6, trying to triage injured officers as they watched the angry mob swell and attack police working to protect Congress.

Law enforcement agents were "being pulled into the crowd and trampled, assaulted with scaffolding materials, and/or bear maced by protesters," wrote Arlington County firefighter Taylor Blunt in an after-

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action memo. Some couldn't walk, and had to be dragged to safety.

Even the attackers sought medical help, and Blunt and his colleague Nathan Waterfall treated those who were passing out or had been hit. But some "feigned illness to remain behind police lines," Blunt wrote.

The memo is one of hundreds of emails, texts, photos and documents obtained by The Associated Press. Taken together, the materials shed new light on the sprawling patchwork of law enforcement agencies that tried to stop the siege and the lack of coordination and inadequate planning that stymied their efforts.

The AP obtained the materials through 35 Freedom of Information Act requests to law enforcement agencies that responded to the Capitol insurrection.

"We were among the first mutual aid teams to arrive and were critical to begin the process of driving protestors off the Capitol," wrote Blunt.

Five people died in the attack, including a police officer. Two other officers killed themselves after. There were hundreds of injuries and more than 300 people, including members of extremist groups Proud Boys and Oathkeepers, have been charged with federal crimes. Federal agents are still investigating and hundreds more suspects are at large. Justice Department officials have said they may charge some with sedition.

The Arlington firefighters ended up at the Capitol because, two days earlier, Washington Metro Police Chief Robert J. Contee had formally asked the Arlington County Police Department, along with police departments from Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland, and Arlington County in Virginia, to lend them some officers trained for protests and riots, according to the documents.

Arlington's acting police chief Andy Penn said they'd send help for the "planned and unplanned first amendment activities," according to emails.

At the time, the Capitol Police department had issued a security assessment warning that militia members, white supremacists and other extremists were heading to Washington to target Congress in what they saw as a "last stand" to support President Donald Trump.

Federal agencies not responding were also preparing for potential violence. On Jan. 4, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said staff should try to telework for the week.

Two days later, it was 3:39 p.m. when Penn emailed county officials that he had "just been notified" that Arlington officers were responding to the Capitol attack and had been absorbed into the overall response led by Capitol Police.

That was almost 90 minutes after the mob first busted into the Capitol and more than an hour after the medics began treating injured police on the steps.

Members of Congress, who were locked down or rushed to safety that day as the attackers approached the House and Senate chambers, are holding hearings this week to get to the bottom of what went wrong with the law enforcement response that allowed the crowd to enter and ransack the Capitol building.

One question they are looking to answer is why the Capitol Police didn't have more help on hand early in the day, before the rally near the White House devolved into insurrection at the Capitol.

The emails obtained by AP — hastily written and including misspellings and incomplete sentences — show that nearby police agencies were alerted two days earlier that there might be trouble and were prepared to help.

The night before the breach, after hours of rallies and speeches across the city, Federal Protective Service officers, who protect federal property, had noticed protesters trying to camp out on federal property and were "being vigilant for any suspicious activity," according to an email from the agency.

They were expecting large crowds, and by the next morning they were monitoring them closely.

At 9:45 a.m. a protective service liaison to the Capitol Police wrote, "Good morning Sir, what I have is the Ellipse is permitted for 30k but they expecting for there to be much more. Freedom Plaza original permit was 5k and it was raised to 30k, the permit outside Sylvan Theater is permitted for 15K."

The agents were particularly interested in the right wing extremist group, Proud Boys. They noted how many were in Washington, that they were staying at a downtown hotel, and what they planned.

In a briefing at noon on that day, just as Trump was encouraging supporters to "fight like hell," a Federal Protective Service email said about 300 Proud Boys were at the U.S. Capitol.

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"No incidents at this time," the email said. But then it warned, "The Proud Boys are threatening to shut down the water system in the downtown area, which includes government facilities."

The email noted there was a man in a tree with what appeared to be a rifle near the Ellipse, and about 25,000 people were around the White House, including some who were hiding bags in bushes outside the building.

"Together we stand!" the officer signed off.

About 20 minutes later, a protective service officer whose name was redacted sent an email that read, "POTUS is encouraging the protesters to march to capitol grounds and continue protesting there." POTUS stands for president of the United States.

In a series of emails that followed, protective service officers messages offered a blow-by-blow account of the march to the Capitol from the rally where Trump spoke.

"Protesters moving towards the capitol down Pennsylvania, Constitution and Madison in numbers estimated 10-15,000," read an email sent at 12:28 p.m.

The officers tracked them across the city and at 12:57 p.m. a message read, "Large group just breached the USCP barricade on the West Front," referring to the Capitol Police barriers on west side of the Capitol Building.

About a half hour later, they reported several police officers were injured, and then at 2:14 a message screamed "CAPITOL HAS BEEN BREACHED. PROTESTERS ARE NOW INSIDE THE CAPITOL." Two minutes later they reported the House and Senate chambers were being locked down.

"Shots fired 2nd floor house side inside the capitol," read a message at 2:45, probably the moment when a Capitol Police officer fatally shot Ashli Babbitt, a Trump supporter who tried to hurl herself through a broken interior window into the Speaker's Lobby just outside the House chamber where lawmakers were taking cover.

Intelligence agents used Facebook to monitor dozens of protests planned for Jan. 6 and beyond, according to emails. These rallies had names such as the "Yugest Trump Parade of All (45 Exclamation Points)!", "Fight for President Trump and Your Rights," and "Wild Protest for Donald Trump (The Republican Mandate)." Some events were permitted, others were not.

Officers in the Virginia suburb of Vienna were already on edge two days before the Capitol breach after a video of a small, half-hour protest at the home of Republican Sen. Josh Hawley — a Trump supporter — attracted more than 100,000 pageviews.

"They claim they are coming back tonight," Vienna Deputy Chief Daniel Janickey said in Jan. 5 emails to Fairfax County officials.

"WE will have some officers out there tonight monitoring in case (the) group shows up," Janickey wrote. "Hawley and his staff have hired armed private security for (the) next 48 hours."

Those protesters didn't return. But within 24 hours, Fairfax County, Virginia, officials realized their Washington counterparts had much more trouble on their hands.

At 3:10 p.m. on Jan. 6, Fairfax County's deputy county executive, Dave Rohrer, emailed more than 25 county officials: "Subject: Awareness - Police Mutual Aid Request U.S. Capitol Police."

That was about two hours after the first windows had been broken.

The U.S. Capitol had been breached, he said.

"It is obvious to me based on my experience and knowledge that an emergency exists," said Rohrer. He said he had authorized the Fairfax County Police Department to send Civil Disturbance Unit officers and commanders "to assist gaining control for safety reasons."

He added that they were monitoring the deployment closely. The redacted email refers to an early June episode when police from several jurisdictions used tear gas to violently break up a peaceful and legal protest in Lafayette Square, across the street from the White House.

On Jan. 6, Rohrer said he reminded commanders on the scene "that they are to cease operations if at any point they determine they are being used in an inappropriate, unethical, illegal manner, or are not under a competent authority... Maintaining life safety, regaining and establishing a safe perimeter, etc.,

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should be the initial focus.”

Just 12 minutes later, Rohrer had an update: They were suspending any fire, rescue or emergency service transportation to hospitals in the District of Columbia and “upgrading response and command structure.”

For hours, Fairfax County’s police monitored Metro stations and acted as back up to Washington police, according to the emails. They were also checking with hotels where some in the mob were staying. Rohrer noted that many had been staying in Alexandria and Arlington..

The hotels “reported some problems with crowds and disorderly conduct the past few nights,” he said. That evening, at 8:31 p.m., a Federal Protective Service memo alerted “there is a report of an armed militia group headed to dc from west Virginia. Query ongoing.”

As midnight approached, Rohrer emailed again. Although the Capitol was quiet, “Intel will be monitored throughout the night and, unfortunately, PD and US Capitol Police are investigating several threats targeting residences of Capitol VIPs or family members received late tonight.”

By Jan. 7, Fairfax County Police Department Major Shawn Bennett was bristling at Capitol Police Chief Terry Gainer’s critique of the police response.

“Gainer throws a lot of shame but he doesn’t offer any answers to what ‘specifically’ he would have done differently to keep the initial group from breaking down the barriers,” emailed Bennett.

Also on Jan. 7, Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill was thanking his staff.

“Our Police Department’s Civil Disturbance Unit answered the call yesterday, and as much as I hated to activate you, it was an activation to preserve our republic,” he wrote. “I am hopeful we will never again see what we witnessed yesterday, but I am most hopeful that yesterday’s events will galvanize our county and our nation as we do our best to vaccinate, maintain calm and create a sense of unity.”

Associated Press writers Colleen Long in Washington and Garance Burke in San Francisco contributed to this story.

Contact AP’s Global Investigations team at investigative@ap.org

US job growth likely rose in February in rebound from slump

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America’s employers likely stepped up their hiring in February as confirmed viral cases declined, consumers spent big chunks of their government aid checks and the economy appeared to be sustaining a tentative recovery.

Economists have forecast that job growth reached 175,000 last month, according to data provider FactSet. That would mark a sharp improvement over an average of just 29,000 jobs a month from November through January.

Yet with the nation still 10 million jobs short of its pre-pandemic level, monthly hiring would need to significantly accelerate to bring relief to the many people who remain laid off, especially at restaurants, hotels, entertainment venues and other areas of the hospitality industry that are far from recovered. The unemployment rate is predicted to have ticked up from 6.3% to 6.4% on the assumption that more Americans started looking for work in February and began to be counted as unemployed.

One year into the pandemic, most analysts are growing more optimistic that hiring will accelerate in the coming months, with the economy strengthening and gauges of consumer spending and manufacturing rising. Americans as a whole have accumulated a huge pile of savings after having slashed spending on travel, movie tickets and visits to bars and restaurants. Much of that money is expected to be spent once most people feel comfortable about going out.

And nearly all of President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion economic rescue package looks likely to win approval in Congress in the coming weeks. It would provide, among other things, \$1,400 relief checks to most adults, an additional \$400 in weekly unemployment aid and another round of aid to small businesses.

With so much money being pumped into the economy, Oxford Economics now forecasts that growth will

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reach 7% for all of 2021, which would be the fastest calendar-year expansion since 1984. The Congressional Budget Office projects that the nation will add a substantial 6.2 million jobs this year, though that wouldn't be nearly enough to restore employment to pre-pandemic levels.

Still, the size of the Biden relief package, coming as the economy is already showing improvement, has stoked fears that growth could overheat and spur higher inflation, send borrowing costs up and lead the Federal Reserve to jack up interest rates. Those fears have roiled financial markets for the past two weeks.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell sought to assuage those concerns on Thursday — without success, based on sharp selloffs in the stock and bond markets — when he suggested that any meaningful rise in inflation would likely prove temporary and that the Fed would be in no hurry to raise its benchmark short-term rate.

Nor did Powell offer any hint that the Fed would act to push back against a surge in the yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which has jumped from about 0.9% last year to 1.5% late Thursday. Still, Powell sounded some optimistic notes. Citing in part the increasing distribution and administering of coronavirus vaccines, he said, "There's good reason to expect job creation to pick up in the coming months."

Other recent economic reports have also suggested better times ahead. Americans sharply increased their spending at retail stores and restaurants in January, when the \$600 relief checks were mostly distributed. Retail sales jumped 5.3%, after three months of declines.

Factory output also picked up that month, and demand for long-lasting goods, such as autos and aircraft, rose 3.4%, the government said last week.

Home sales have been on a tear for most of the past year, driven by low mortgage rates and the desire of many Americans for more space during the pandemic. A huge jump in the proportion of people working from home has also driven up sales, which were nearly 24% higher in January than a year earlier.

Little damage from huge Pacific quake; tsunami threat passes

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — One of the strongest earthquakes to hit the South Pacific in modern history triggered tsunami warnings across the ocean and forced thousands of people in New Zealand to evacuate coastal areas Friday. Small tsunami waves were seen, but little damage was apparent hours later.

The magnitude 8.1 quake in the Kermadec Islands region about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from New Zealand's two main islands was the largest in a series of temblors over several hours, including two earlier quakes that registered magnitude 7.4 and magnitude 7.3.

The tsunami threat caused traffic jams and some chaos in New Zealand as people scrambled to get to higher ground.

Residents recorded videos of small wave surges in some places, including at Tokomaru Bay near Gisborne. In the afternoon, the National Emergency Management Agency said the threat had passed and people could return to their homes, although they should continue avoiding beaches.

One of the earlier quakes hit much closer to New Zealand and awoke many people as they felt a long, rumbling shaking. "Hope everyone is ok out there," New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wrote on Facebook during the night.

After the largest quake, civil defense authorities in New Zealand told people in some coastal areas to immediately get to higher ground. They said a damaging tsunami was possible, and waves could reach up to 3 meters (10 feet).

Emergency Management Minister Kiri Allan told reporters that people had followed the advisory.

"They felt the long or strong earthquakes and they knew to grab their bag and head into the highlands," she said. "I can only thank and acknowledge the tireless efforts of the men and women from up and down the coast who knew how to act, when to act, and what to do."

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center cautioned the quake could cause tsunami waves of up to 3 meters (10 feet) in Vanuatu and up to 1 meter (3 feet) in Tonga, other South Pacific islands and Latin America's Pacific coast.

Chilean authorities ordered people off beaches due to the potential for a tsunami along the nation's

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long coastline. Guatemala issued a tsunami alert, and authorities in El Salvador ordered people to take precautions in recreational activities. Mexico said there was no threat.

Waves of 30 centimeters (1 foot) above tide levels were measured by ocean gauges off the Pacific nation of Vanuatu, off Gisborne, New Zealand, and off an Australian island. Smaller waves were measured elsewhere in the South Pacific.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the strongest quake was centered near the Kermadec Islands at a depth of 19 kilometers (12 miles).

Although the islands are uninhabited, New Zealand has built research and accommodation facilities there and often had scientists cycling through until the coronavirus hit last year and it halted the program. But a large group of more than 100 people including scientists and students was due to stay on the islands this week, until they were forced to cancel because of a virus lockdown in Auckland, said a spokesperson from the Department of Conservation.

The USGS said in a report that the quake occurred at the intersection of the Pacific and Australia tectonic plates and eclipsed the largest quake previously recorded along the fault line, a magnitude 8.0 in 1976.

It said the interaction between the plates creates one of the most seismically active regions in the world, and it has recorded 215 quakes there above magnitude 6.0 over the past century.

Jennifer Eccles, an earthquake expert at the University of Auckland, said the quake was at the top end of the scale for those involving only the Earth's ocean crust.

"This is about as big as it gets," she said.

She said most quakes larger than magnitude 8.0 tend to occur when a section of more robust continental crust is involved.

The USGS said the magnitude 7.4 quake was likely a "foreshock" that contributed to the larger quake but that the first quake that hit closer to New Zealand was too far away in time and distance to have directly contributed.

The first quake was centered at a depth of 21 kilometers (13 miles) under the ocean about 174 kilometers (108 miles) northeast of the city of Gisborne.

It was widely felt in New Zealand, and residents in the major cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch reported being shaken awake.

In 2011, a magnitude 6.3 quake hit the city of Christchurch, killing 185 people and destroying much of its downtown.

By slimmest of margins, Senate takes up \$1.9T relief bill

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted by the slimmest of margins Thursday to begin debating a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, after Democrats made eleventh-hour changes aimed at ensuring they could pull President Joe Biden's top legislative priority through the precariously divided chamber.

Democrats were hoping for Senate approval of the package before next week, in time for the House to sign off and get the measure to Biden quickly. They were encountering opposition from Republicans arguing that the measure's massive price tag ignored promising signs that the pandemic and wounded economy were turning around.

Democratic leaders made over a dozen late additions to their package, reflecting their need to cement unanimous support from all their senators — plus Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote — to succeed in the 50-50 chamber. It's widely expected the Senate will approve the bill and the House will whisk it to Biden for his signature by mid-March, handing him a crucial early legislative victory.

The Senate's 51-50 vote to start debating the package, with Harris pushing Democrats over the top, underscored how they were navigating the package through Congress with virtually no margin for error. In the House their majority is a scrawny 10 votes.

The bill, aimed at battling the killer virus and nursing the staggered economy back to health, will provide direct payments of up to \$1,400 to most Americans. There's also money for COVID-19 vaccines and testing,

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aid to state and local governments, help for schools and the airline industry, tax breaks for lower-earners and families with children, and subsidies for health insurance.

"We are not going to be timid in the face of a great challenge," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

The new provisions offered items appealing to all manner of Democrats. Progressives got money boosting feeding programs, federal subsidies for health care for workers who lose jobs, tax-free student loans, and money for public broadcasting and consumer protection investigations.

Moderates won funds for rural health care, language assuring minimum amounts of money for smaller states and a prohibition on states receiving aid using the windfalls to cut taxes. And for everyone, there was money for infrastructure, cultural venues, start-up companies and afterschool programs.

Even with the late revisions, there was a good chance lawmakers will make yet another one and vote to pare back the bill's \$400 weekly emergency unemployment benefits to \$300.

That potential change could also extend those emergency payments another month, through September. It was described by aides and a lobbyist who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal conversations.

Biden and Senate leaders had agreed Wednesday to retain the \$400 weekly jobless payments included in the version of the relief bill the House approved Saturday. The reduction to \$300 — which seemed likely to occur once the Senate begins a "vote-a-rama" on scores of amendments later this week — seemed to reflect a need to secure support from moderate Democrats.

It also left House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the task of keeping her chamber's numerous progressives on board. Liberals already suffered a blow when their No. 1 priority — a federal minimum wage increase to \$15 hourly that was included in the House package — was booted from the bill in the Senate for violating the chamber's rules and for lack of moderates' support.

In another bargain that satisfied moderates, Biden and Senate Democrats agreed Wednesday to tighten eligibility for the direct checks to individuals. The new provision completely phases out the \$1,400 payments for individuals earning at least \$80,000 and couples making \$160,000, well lower than the original ceilings.

"My hope is they don't screw around with it too much," Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said of the Senate in an interview. "If they do there could be some problems."

Congress wants to send the bill to Biden before March 14, when a previous round of emergency benefits for people tossed out of work by the pandemic expires.

As soon as the Senate began considering the bill, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., forced the chamber's clerks to begin reading the entire 628-page measure aloud. He was the only senator at his desk for most of the night, appearing to follow along silently, one sheet at a time. As the night dragged on, he stood every so often and paced the perimeter of the chamber, reading as he walked. He said earlier that he was doing it to "shine the light on this abusive and obscene amount of money."

Schumer said Johnson would "accomplish little more than a few sore throats for the Senate clerks."

Asked about GOP delays, Biden told reporters he's talked to Republican lawmakers and added, "We're keeping everybody informed." Biden met last month with Republican senators who offered a plan one-third the size of Democrats' proposal, and there have been no signs since of serious talks.

Johnson's move, which would take many hours to complete, pointed to a larger GOP argument: Democrats were ramming an overpriced bill through that disregarded that growing numbers of vaccinations and other signs suggesting the country's pandemic ordeal is beginning to ease.

"Instead of heading into a dark tunnel, we're accelerating out of it," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

The economic recovery began to stall late last year as the virus surged, causing a shortfall in hiring in recent months. Employers added just 49,000 jobs in January and cut 227,000 jobs in December. Economists estimate that the February employment report being released Friday will show gains of 175,000, not nearly enough to swiftly recover the nearly 10 million jobs lost to the pandemic-induced recession.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates economic growth will exceed 4% this year without Biden's rescue package. Republicans cite that as evidence the economy is pointed upward, but Democrats

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say a strong economic stimulus is still needed to prevent a relapse.

"It's a crisis that is still very much with us, and it is deadly, deadly serious," Schumer said.

Associated Press writers Josh Boak, Alexandra Jaffe and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

US demands Myanmar release detained journalists, protesters

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration stepped up its condemnation of the coup in Myanmar on Thursday, demanding that military authorities stop their brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protesters and release demonstrators and journalists who have been detained.

The White House called the situation, including the arrest of an Associated Press journalist, "troubling" and of "great concern." The State Department said it's working with other countries to send a unified message to the military that its actions are unacceptable and will be met with consequences.

The U.S. has already imposed sanctions on Myanmar's top military leaders since the Feb. 1 coup, but stepped up pressure after security forces killed as many as 38 people on Wednesday. The administration says it's in close touch with partners and allies, as well as with countries like China, to try to convince Myanmar officials to ease their heavy-handed response to the protests.

"The detainment of journalists, the targeting of journalists and dissidents is certainly something that is of great concern to the president, to the secretary of state and to every member of our administration," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

At the State Department, spokesman Ned Price said the administration was "deeply saddened" by reports of deaths in the crackdown on protests. "This latest escalation in violence demonstrates the fact of the junta's complete disregard for their own people, for the people of Burma," he said. "It is unacceptable."

"We are deeply concerned about the increasing attacks on and arrest of journalists," he said. "We call on the military to immediately release these individuals and to cease their intimidation and harassment of the media and others who are unjustly detained for doing nothing more than their job, for doing nothing more than exercising their universal rights."

Associated Press journalist Thein Zaw and several other members of the media were arrested last week while covering security forces charging at anti-coup protesters. They have been charged with violating a public order law that could see them imprisoned for up to three years. The AP and press freedom groups have called for Zaw's immediate release, but there has been no response from the authorities.

In a statement Thursday, National Press Club President Lisa Nicole Matthews, the AP's assignment manager for U.S. video, and National Press Club Journalism Institute President Angela Greiling Keane expressed concern for Zaw's safety.

"We believe he was simply doing his job as a journalist and look forward to his swift release," the statement said.

The U.S. and other countries have roundly condemned the coup and the ensuing crackdown on dissent to little effect thus far. Price said the United States was looking toward China, Myanmar's most powerful neighbor and friend, to exert its influence on the military.

"We have urged the Chinese to play a constructive role to use their influence with the Burmese military to bring this coup to an end," he said. "There have been a number of conversations with Chinese officials at different levels, and our message in all of those conversations has been consistent: The world, every responsible constructive member of the international community, needs to use its voice, needs to work to bring this coup to an end and to restore the democratically elected government of Burma."

Earlier Thursday, footage of the brutal crackdown on protests against the coup unleashed outrage and calls for a stronger international response. Videos showed security forces shooting a person at point-blank range and chasing down and savagely beating demonstrators.

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip in recent years, the international community lifted most sanctions and poured in investment.

Capitol Police chief appeals for National Guard to stay

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, LISA MASCARO and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Worried about continuing threats, the acting chief of the U.S. Capitol Police appealed to congressional leaders Thursday to use their influence to keep National Guard troops at the Capitol, two months after the law enforcement breakdowns of the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection.

Yogananda Pittman told the leaders in a letter obtained by The Associated Press that the board that oversees her department has so far declined to extend an emergency declaration required by the Pentagon to keep Guardsmen who have assisted Capitol officers since the riot.

Pittman said she needed the leaders' assistance with the three-member Capitol Police Board, which reports to them. She said the board has sent her a list of actions it wants her to implement, though she said it was unclear whether the points were orders or just recommendations.

The letter underscored the confusion over how best to secure the Capitol after a dismal lack of protection in January and biting criticism for law enforcement's handling of the invasion.

And it came as authorities spent the day on high alert, primed for a "possible plot" by a militia group to storm the building again, two months after Trump supporters smashed through windows and doors in an insurrection meant to halt the certification of Joe Biden's presidential victory.

The list in the letter to lawmakers included a partial removal of the imposing fence encircling the Capitol grounds starting Monday and a drawdown of the Guard to 900 troops from the current 5,200 remaining in Washington.

Police want to keep the fence indefinitely. In her letter, Pittman said she would ask for a drawdown of the deployment "based on the threat environment and physical and operational security capabilities."

Earlier Thursday, The Associated Press reported the Pentagon was reviewing a Capitol Police request to keep up to 2,200 Guardsmen at the Capitol another 60 days. A statement from the police said Pittman had formally made the recommendation to the Pentagon.

A similar dispute had erupted between the Capitol Police and its board before Jan. 6 and even as rioters were storming the building. The Capitol Police Board, comprised of the House and Senate sergeants at arms and the architect of the Capitol, is charged with oversight of the police force.

Steven Sund, the now-former Capitol Police chief, has testified to Congress that he wanted to request the Guard two days before the invasion following reports that white supremacist and far-right groups would target the building to disrupt the certification of Biden's election victory over outgoing President Donald Trump. Paul Irving, who served on the Capitol Police Board as House sergeant-at-arms, denied that Sund asked him to call the Guard.

Sund has testified that he asked repeatedly for the Guard to be called as rioters stormed the building, breaking police lines and running over officers unequipped to hold them off. He ultimately called the commanding general of the D.C. National Guard just before 2 p.m., who in turn testified that the request for help was delayed by the Defense Department. The request was not approved until after 5 p.m., as hundreds of rioters marauded through the building and left without being arrested.

Five people died in the riot, including a Capitol Police officer and a Trump supporter shot by police.

On Thursday, despite the warnings of new trouble, there were no signs of disturbance at the heavily secured building. Nor was there evidence of any large group heading to Washington.

The most recent threat appeared to be connected to a far-right conspiracy theory, mainly promoted by supporters of QAnon, that former Trump would rise again to power on March 4 and that thousands would come to Washington to try to remove Democrats from office. March 4 was the original presidential inauguration day until 1933, when it was moved to Jan. 20.

But Trump was miles away in Florida. In Washington, on one of the warmest days in weeks, the National Mall was almost deserted, save for joggers, journalists, and a handful of tourists trying to take photos of the Capitol dome through the fencing.

Online chatter identified by authorities included discussions among members of the Three Percenters,

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an anti-government militia group, concerning possible plots against the Capitol on Thursday, according to two law enforcement officials who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Members of the Three Percenters were among the extremists who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6.

But federal agents found no significant increases in the number of hotel rooms being rented in Washington, or in flights to the area, car rental reservations or buses being chartered. Online chatter about the day on extremist sites was declining.

U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, was briefed by law enforcement about the possible threat and said lawmakers were braced for whatever might come.

"We have the razor wire, we have the National Guard. We didn't have that January 6. So I feel very confident in the security," he said.

But those measures aren't permanent. Some states have threatened to pull their Guardsmen amid reports that some troops had been made to take rest breaks in parking garages or served spoiled food. Other Guardsmen have said they have been given good meals with accommodations for those on vegan or halal diets.

In Michigan, which sent 1,000 troops, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said she did "not have any intention of agreeing to an extension of this deployment."

Meanwhile, Trump continues to promote lies that the election was stolen from him through mass voter fraud, even though such claims have been rejected by judges and Trump's former attorney general. He repeatedly told those lies on social media and in a charged speech on Jan. 6 in which he implored thousands of supporters to "fight like hell." Many of those supporters eventually walked to the Capitol grounds and overran officers to breach the building.

Trump was impeached by the House on a charge of incitement of insurrection but was acquitted by the Senate. So far, about 300 people have been charged with federal crimes for their roles in the riot.

Trump's election rhetoric continues to be echoed by many national and local Republicans posting online messages about voter fraud and questioning the legitimacy of Biden's victory.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki cited "a years-long trend of false narratives fueling violence."

"On the specifics of today's threats, the FBI and DHS have warned that the threat of domestic violent extremism, particularly racially motivated and anti-government extremists, did not begin or end on January 6 and we have been vigilant day in and day out," she said Thursday.

Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo, Alan Fram, Mary Clare Jalonick, Colleen Long, and Lisa Mascaro in Washington, and Amanda Seitz in Chicago contributed to this report.

Prosecutors: Officer was on Floyd's neck for about 9 minutes

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — As the trial approaches for a white Minneapolis police officer charged with murder in the death of George Floyd, prosecutors are putting the time Derek Chauvin's knee was on the Black man's neck at about nine minutes.

The time has fluctuated before. It was recorded as 8 minutes, 46 seconds in an initial criminal complaint — a figure that became symbolic to many in the weeks after Floyd's death — before a math error was corrected to make it 7:46. But filings since then, citing time-stamped police body-camera video, now make it at least nine minutes.

The fact that the figure has evolved probably won't matter at Chauvin's trial, which begins Monday with jury selection. One former prosecutor says it's common for such details to be fine-tuned as prosecutors build a case. A support group for victims of police violence says the discrepancies won't have any impact.

"He was obviously on there enough time to think about what he was doing. He heard the man pleading that he couldn't breathe," said Toshira Garraway, founder of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence. "If it was two minutes or if it was five minutes or if it was 10 minutes, he was fully aware ... Once he said, 'I cannot breathe' ... he was supposed to remove his knee."

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Floyd died May 25. He had been handcuffed and was pleading that he couldn't breathe, but Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd's neck even after he stopped moving and speaking.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter. Three other officers — Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao — are charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and manslaughter and are scheduled for trial in August.

The narrative in the initial complaint filed May 29 by the Hennepin County Attorney's Office says Chauvin held his knee to Floyd's neck for 8 minutes, 46 seconds. But the time stamps cited in that charging document indicate it was actually 7 minutes, 46 seconds.

The Associated Press began asking about the error the day after the initial charges were filed, but prosecutors repeatedly declined to address it. The 8:46 detail was repeated in an amended complaint filed days later by the Attorney General's Office.

In the weeks that followed Floyd's death, some demonstrators staged "die-ins" that lasted 8 minutes, 46 seconds, some lawmakers knelt for that amount of time in the U.S. Senate, and mourners at a memorial service for Floyd stood in silence for 8:46 to reflect on the final moments of his life.

In mid-June, prosecutors acknowledged the one-minute error, but said it would have no impact on the case.

Documents filed by prosecutors in September and October changed the timing yet again. These documents contain the most detailed picture of what happened, citing time stamps from Lane, Keung and Thao's body camera videos.

The documents don't list an exact time for when Chauvin began kneeling on Floyd, but instead provide a narrative for when Floyd was first pressed to the ground. Time stamps on video from Lane's body camera — recorded in 24-hour-clock format — show that began at some point from 20:19:14 to 20:19:45, meaning from 14 to 45 seconds after 8:19 p.m.

But the documents cite a clear moment when Chauvin removed his knee, when a stretcher was ready to take Floyd away. Lane's body camera time-stamp read 20:28:45.

This means Chauvin had his knee on Floyd's neck for at least nine minutes flat, but possibly for as long as 9 minutes, 31 seconds. Documents filed by prosecutors characterize the timing as "approximately nine minutes," though in at least one document it is characterized as "more than nine minutes and twenty seconds."

John Stiles, the spokesman for the Attorney General's Office, said the length of time of Chauvin's restraint will be evidence presented at trial. He declined further comment.

Tom Heffelfinger, a former U.S. attorney for Minnesota who is not connected to this case, said it's normal for prosecutors to fine-tune details as they build a case and that the length of Chauvin's restraint won't become essential until a prosecutor presents it to the jury.

But at trial, he said, the timing will become extremely relevant as both sides argue about Floyd's cause of death. Heffelfinger also said it points to Chauvin's state of mind and can be used by prosecutors to show willfulness, and that Chauvin had Floyd under his control and held his position for too long.

"You can see from the bystander video, Chauvin had Floyd under control for that entire period," Heffelfinger said. "He didn't need to have his knee to the neck in order to maintain that ... control."

Follow Amy Forliti on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/amyforliti>

Find AP's full coverage of the death of George Floyd at: <https://apnews.com/hub/death-of-george-floyd>

EXPLAINER: Why rising rates are unsettling Wall Street

By STAN CHOE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Interest rates keep marching higher, and Wall Street keeps shaking because of it.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed back above 1.50% Thursday, prodded higher by comments by the Federal Reserve's chair, and it helped send stocks on Wall Street on another slide. The speed at

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which the yield has climbed has forced investors to re-examine how they value stocks, bonds and every other investment. And the immediate verdict has been to sell them at lower prices, particularly the most popular investments of the last year.

Yields have been climbing with optimism for an economic revival following a year of coronavirus-induced misery, along with expectations for the higher inflation that could accompany it. That's key because those yields form the bedrock that the financial world uses to try to figure out the value for anything from Apple's stock to a junk bond.

For years, yields have been ultralow for Treasuries, meaning investors earned very little in interest for owning them. That in turn made stocks and other investments more attractive, driving up their prices. But when Treasury yields rise, so does the downward pressure on prices for other investments. Here's a look at why the recent moves have been so rocky:

WHY ARE TREASURY YIELDS RISING?

Part of it is rising expectations for inflation, perhaps the worst enemy of a bond investor. Inflation means future payments from bonds won't buy as much – because the price of a banana or a bouquet of flowers will be higher than it is today. So when inflation expectations rise, bonds are less desirable, and their prices fall. That pushes up their yield.

Treasury yields also often track with expectations for the economy's strength, which are on the rise. When the economy is healthy, investors feel less need to own Treasuries, considered to be the safest possible investment.

WHY DO FALLING BOND PRICES MEAN RISING YIELDS?

Say I bought a bond for \$100 that pays 1% in interest, but I'm worried about rising inflation and don't want to be stuck with it. I sell it to you for \$90. You're getting more than a 1% return on your investment, because the regular payouts coming from the bond will still be the same amount as when I owned it.

WHY ARE INFLATION AND GROWTH EXPECTATIONS RISING?

Coronavirus vaccines will hopefully get economies humming this year, as people feel comfortable returning to shops, businesses reopen and workers get jobs again. The International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to grow 5.5% this year following last year's 3.5% plunge.

A stronger economy often coincides with higher inflation, though it's been generally trending downward for decades. Congress is also close to pumping another \$1.9 trillion into the U.S. economy, which could further boost growth and inflation.

WHY DO RATES AFFECT STOCK PRICES?

When trying to figure out what a stock's price should be, investors often look at two things: how much cash the company will make and how much to pay for each \$1 of that cash. When interest rates are low and bonds are paying little, investors are willing to pay more for that second part. They're not losing out on much income if they had put that money in a Treasury instead.

AND NOW THAT RATES ARE RISING?

The recent rise in yields is forcing investors to pare back how much they're willing to spend on each \$1 of future company earnings. That's prompting hard questions, particularly when critics had already been arguing stocks were approaching dangerous levels after their prices raced higher much, much faster than profits.

Stocks with the highest prices relative to earnings are getting hit hard, as are stocks that have been bid up for their expected profits far in the future. Big Tech stocks are in both those camps. Dividend-paying stocks also get hurt because investors looking for income can now turn instead to bonds, which are safer investments.

The ultimate worry is that inflation will take off at some point, sending rates much higher.

AREN'T INTEREST RATES STILL REALLY LOW?

Yes, even at 1.54%, the 10-year Treasury yield is still below the 2.60% level it was at two years ago or the 5% level of two decades ago.

"The concern isn't that the 10-year is at 1.50%," said Yung-Yu Ma, chief investment strategist at BMO

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Wealth Management. "It's that it went from 1% to 1.50% in a handful of weeks, and what does that mean for the rest of 2021."

Ma thinks it could keep rising above 2% by the end of the year, but he doesn't see it going back to the old normal of 4% or 5%, which would force an even bigger reassessment for markets. Until that becomes more clear, though, he says he's looking for the stock market to stay volatile.

AREN'T STOCKS STILL REALLY HIGH?

Yes. Despite the recent pullback in the market, the major U.S. stock indexes all remain near all-time highs set within the last month. The S&P 500 is still within 4.2% of its record set on Feb. 12.

HASN'T THE FED SAID IT WILL KEEP INTEREST RATES LOW?

Yes. The Federal Reserve has direct control over short-term interest rates, and Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly said it's in no hurry to raise them. It's also not planning to trim its \$120 billion in monthly bond purchases used to put downward pressure on longer-term rates.

Powell said the Fed won't raise its benchmark interest rate, now at its record low of zero to 0.25%, until inflation runs slightly above its 2% target level. Powell has also repeatedly said that while price increases might accelerate in coming months, those increases are expected to be temporary and not a sign of long-run inflation threats.

He echoed those statements again on Thursday, but analysts said longer-term yields rose on disappointment that Powell didn't offer something more forceful to tamp down the recent increases.

"We think our current policy stance is appropriate," Powell said.

IS WALL STREET STILL OPTIMISTIC?

Yes, much of Wall Street still expects stocks to keep rising. One reason is that many investors agree with Powell and expect inflation pressures to be only temporary. That should hopefully keep rates from spiking to dangerous levels.

Also, after a dismal 2020 for most companies, investors are banking that growth in corporate profits will explode higher as more people get COVID-19 vaccines through the year and the economy gradually approaches something close to normal. If earnings rise enough, stocks can stay stable or maybe even go higher, despite a rise in rates..

DO SOME COMPANIES DO WELL WHEN RATES ARE RISING?

Financial companies, particularly banks, have gained recently because rising rates can mean bigger profits made on a variety of consumer loans, including mortgages. And if rates are rising on inflation worries, energy companies could benefit if prices are also rising for oil and other commodities.

Overall, though, rising interest rates are a drag on companies because they make borrowing more expensive. This is especially painful for companies like real estate investment trusts, or REITs, which require a lot of money, and often debt, to operate.

People who rely heavily on credit may also cut back, which could have a ripple effect on all kinds of companies that rely on consumer spending.

VIRUS TODAY: Alabama governor extends face mask order

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THE NUMBERS:

VACCINES: Nearly 54.1 million people, or 16.3% of the U.S. population, have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, according to the CDC. Some 27.7 million people have completed their vaccination, or 8.4% of the population.

CASES: The seven-day rolling average for daily new cases in the U.S. decreased from 77,579 on Feb. 17 to 63,675 on Wednesday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

DEATHS: The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths in the U.S. decreased from 2,044 on Feb. 17 to 1,835 on Wednesday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

POSITIVITY RATE: The seven-day rolling test positivity rate in the U.S. decreased from 5.3 on Feb. 17

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to 4.2 on Wednesday, according to data from the COVID Tracking Project. The top three states with the highest coronavirus positivity rates: Idaho (24.4%), South Dakota (22.6%) and Iowa (19.7%).

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY:

— Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey is extending the state's mandatory face mask order by a month despite what Texas and neighboring Mississippi are doing about mask requirements.

— A new study of pro athletes found heart inflammation was uncommon after a mild case of COVID-19. The research was conducted by major professional sports leagues in the U.S.

— Nonprofits, churches and health care outreach workers are helping older people who have difficulty signing up for vaccinations.

QUOTABLE: "You need somebody in charge and you need somebody who can act quickly." — Kansas state Rep. Pam Curtis during a discussion on how far to go in restricting a governor's power in emergencies.

ON THE HORIZON: The California Legislature has OK'd a \$6.6 billion plan aimed at returning students to the classroom. Gov. Gavin Newsom says he plans to sign the bill into law Friday. Most of California's 6.1 million public school students have been learning from home since March 2020. The plan requires 10% of the state's COVID-19 vaccine supply be set aside for teachers.

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

Powell: Higher inflation temporary, no rate hikes in sight

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell suggested Thursday that inflation will pick up in the coming months but that it would likely prove temporary and not enough for the Fed to alter its record-low interest rate policies.

His message of wait-and-see patience caused bond yields to jump and stocks to fall further, signaling that investors foresee stronger growth and higher inflation on the horizon. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note had jumped from below 1% at the end of last year to roughly 1.4% Wednesday — and then surged above 1.5% during Powell's remarks.

Stock investors, too, dumped shares in the midst of Powell's remarks, in which he suggested that the Fed would need to see both a near-full recovery in the job market and a sustained rise in inflation above its target level before considering a rate hike.

The S&P 500 index ended Thursday with a loss of 1.3% and was showing just a sliver of a gain for the year. The tech-heavy Nasdaq pulled back 2.1%. Higher yields on government bonds can entice some investors to sell stocks and buy Treasuries instead, thereby forcing stock prices down.

Powell also said the outlook for the economy has improved after three months of weak job growth. But he cautioned that the economy and the job market are still far from fully recovered and that full employment would not be achieved this year.

The chairman also offered no signal that the Fed might respond soon to rising rates on Treasury securities by altering its bond-buying policies. The central bank is purchasing about \$80 billion a month in government bonds. Some analysts argue that the Fed could focus more of those purchases on the 10-year Treasury to keep it from rising much further.

"The market was really looking for more of a definitive stand perhaps against what's happened with yields," said Lisa Erickson, head of traditional investments at U.S. Bank Wealth Management. "It was looking for more assurance, for example, that the Fed might take action."

The surge in Treasury bond yields has also forced up mortgage rates. Last week, the average rate on the benchmark 30-year mortgage breached the 3% mark for the first time since July, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac.

Powell suggested, though, that the Fed would sit tight for the foreseeable future.

"We think our current policy stance is appropriate," Powell said.

Earlier this week, San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly and Chicago Fed President Charles Evans said

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they weren't bothered by the move higher in interest rates. They characterized it as a positive signal that markets expected growth to pick up.

Powell said Thursday that the last week's jump in yields "was notable and caught my attention." But he said the Fed wouldn't be concerned unless the Treasury market became "disorderly" or rates rose persistently enough to threaten the economy's growth.

As the economy reopens in the coming months with vaccines more widely distributed, many economists expect a spending boom that will stretch available supplies of goods and services. That additional spending could send prices up in some sectors of the economy.

For example, gas prices have been rising as Americans are venturing out more. Yet oil production hasn't yet caught up, making gas more expensive. And when Americans do return to pre-pandemic habits, such as going to movies or eating out, they will have find many of their former favorite haunts closed.

Once price declines that occurred about a year ago when the pandemic began are removed from the year-over-year calculations, inflation will temporarily rise. But the Fed won't see either of those trends as worrisome increases that would force them to change their policies, Powell said.

"If we do see what we believe is likely a transitory increase in inflation, where longer-term inflation expectations are broadly stable, I expect that we will be patient" about making any changes, he said.

Higher inflation is unlikely to persist, Powell said, because most consumers and businesses expect mild prices gains, and therefore will keep their prices and wage demands in check. Global competition and online shopping also force many companies to keep prices low — factors that didn't exist during the high-inflation 1970s.

When the pandemic intensified nearly a year ago, the Fed pegged its short-term interest rate to near zero and began purchasing \$120 billion in Treasury and mortgage bonds a month. The Fed has previously signaled that it intends to keep its rate near zero through at least 2023. And many analysts say they think the bond purchases won't be tapered until next year.

Powell declined to comment on whether the brighter-than-expected economic outlook has altered any of the Fed's timelines. But he did say he shared some of that optimism.

"There's good reason to expect job creation to pick up in the coming months," he said.

Associated Press writer Alex Veiga in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Myanmar crackdown on protests, widely filmed, sparks outrage

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Footage of a brutal crackdown on protests against a coup in Myanmar unleashed outrage and calls for a stronger international response Thursday, a day after 38 people were killed. Videos showed security forces shooting a person at point-blank range and chasing down and savagely beating demonstrators.

Despite the shocking violence the day before, protesters returned to the streets Thursday to denounce the military's Feb. 1 takeover — and were met again with tear gas.

The international response to the coup has so far been fitful, but a flood of videos shared online showing security forces brutally targeting protesters and other civilians led to calls for more action.

The United States called the images appalling, the U.N. human rights chief said it was time to "end the military's stranglehold over democracy in Myanmar," and the world body's independent expert on human rights in the country urged the Security Council to watch the videos before meeting Friday to discuss the crisis.

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip in recent years, the international community lifted most sanctions and poured in investment.

U.N. special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, described Wednesday as "the bloodiest day" since the takeover, when the military ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 50 civilians, mostly peaceful protesters, are confirmed to have been killed by police and soldiers

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since then, including the 38 she said died Wednesday.

"I saw today very disturbing video clips," said Schraner Burgener, speaking to reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York via video link from Switzerland. "One was police beating a volunteer medical crew. They were not armed. Another video clip showed a protester was taken away by police and they shot him from very near, maybe only one meter. He didn't resist to his arrest, and it seems that he died on the street."

She appeared to be referring to a video shared on social media that begins with a group of security forces following a civilian, who they seem to have pulled out of a building. A shot rings out, and the person falls. After the person briefly raises their head, two of the troops drag the person down the street by the arms.

In other footage, about two dozen security forces, some with their firearms drawn, chase two people wearing the construction helmets donned by many protesters down a street. When they catch up to the people, they repeatedly beat them with rods and kick them. One of the officers is seen filming the scene on his cell phone.

In yet another video, several police officers repeatedly kick and hit a person with rods, while the person cowers on the ground, hands over their head. Officers move in and out of the frame, getting a few kicks in and then casually walk away.

As part of the crackdown, security forces have also arrested around 1,200 people, including journalists, according to U.N. envoy Schraner Burgener. More than 500 children are estimated to be among those arbitrarily detained, UNICEF said Thursday.

The journalists include Thein Zaw of The Associated Press; he and five other members of the media have been charged with violating a public safety law that could see them imprisoned for up to three years. A video of Thein Zaw's arrest Saturday showed him briefly held in a chokehold before he was led away.

On Thursday, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric condemned the targeting of journalists by security forces, including the video of Thein Zaw's arrest, and called for their release.

"The video is extremely disturbing," Dujarric said. "We have seen in Myanmar in recent days harassment, arrests and physical attacks on journalists. Those must cease and those journalists who have been detained along with the other people who have been arrested should also be freed."

UNICEF, meanwhile, condemned the reported killings of at least five children since Wednesday, as well as the wounding of four others.

"In addition to those killed or seriously wounded, many children are being exposed to harm from tear gas and stun grenades, and are witnessing horrific scenes of violence, in some cases directed against parents or family members," UNICEF said in a statement Thursday.

While some countries have imposed or threatened to impose sanctions following the coup, others, including those neighboring Myanmar, have been more hesitant in their response.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Thursday urged all of those with "information and influence" to hold military leaders to account.

"This is the moment to turn the tables towards justice and end the military's stranglehold over democracy in Myanmar," she said.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. was "appalled" at the "horrific violence," and the U.N.'s independent expert on human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said the "systematic brutality of the military junta is once again on horrific display."

"I urge members of the UN Security Council to view the photos/videos of the shocking violence being unleashed on peaceful protesters before meeting," Andrews said on Twitter.

The Security Council has scheduled closed-door consultations for Friday on calls to reverse the coup — including from U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres — and stop the escalating crackdown.

But Justine Chambers, the associate director of the Myanmar Research Center at the Australian National University, said that while the graphic images would no doubt lead to strong condemnations — action on Myanmar would be harder.

"Unfortunately I don't think the brutality caught on camera is going to change much," she said. "I think domestic audiences around the world don't have much of an appetite for stronger action, i.e. intervention,

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given the current state of the pandemic and associated economic issues.”

Any kind of coordinated action at the U.N. will be difficult since two permanent members of the Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it.

Even if the council did take action, U.N. envoy Schraner Burgener cautioned it might not make much of a difference. She said she warned Myanmar’s army that the world’s nations and the Security Council “might take huge strong measures.”

“And the answer was, ‘We are used to sanctions and we survived those sanctions in the past,’” she said. When she also warned that Myanmar would become isolated, Schraner Burgener said, “the answer was, ‘We have to learn to walk with only a few friends.’”

Wednesday’s highest death toll was in Yangon, the country’s biggest city, where an estimated 18 people died. Video at a hospital in the city showed grieving relatives collecting the blood-soaked bodies of family members. Some relatives sobbed uncontrollably, while others looked in shock at the scene around them.

Protesters gathered again Thursday in Yangon. Police again used tear gas to try to disperse the crowds, while demonstrators again set up barriers across major roads.

Protests also continued in Mandalay, where three people were reported killed Wednesday. A formation of five fighter planes flew over the city on Thursday morning in what appeared to be a show of force.

Protesters in the city flashed the three-fingered salute that is a symbol of defiance as they rode their motorbikes to follow a funeral procession for Kyal Sin, also known by her Chinese name Deng Jia Xi, a university student who was shot dead as she attended a demonstration the day before.

Associated Press Writer Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

‘Falling through cracks’: Vaccine bypasses some older adults

By GILLIAN FLACCUS, HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Jean Andrade, an 88-year-old who lives alone, has been waiting for her COVID-19 vaccine since she became eligible under state guidelines nearly a month ago. She assumed her caseworker would contact her about getting one, especially after she spent nearly two days stuck in an electric recliner during a recent power outage.

It was only after she saw a TV news report about competition for the limited supply of shots in Portland, Oregon, that she realized no one was scheduling her dose. A grocery delivery service for homebound older people eventually provided a flyer with vaccine information, and Andrade asked a helper who comes by for four hours a week to try to snag her an appointment.

“I thought it would be a priority when you’re 88 years old and that someone would inform me,” said Andrade, who has lived in the same house for 40 years and has no family members able to assist her. “You ask anybody else who’s 88, 89, and don’t have anybody to help them, ask them what to do. Well, I’ve still got my brain, thank God. But I am very angry.”

Older adults have top priority in COVID-19 immunization drives the world over right now, and hundreds of thousands of them are spending hours online, enlisting their children’s help and traveling hours to far-flung pharmacies in a desperate bid to secure a COVID-19 vaccine. But an untold number like Andrade are getting left behind, unseen, because they are too overwhelmed, too frail or too poor to fend for themselves.

The urgency of reaching this vulnerable population before the nation’s focus turns elsewhere is growing as more Americans in other age and priority groups become eligible for vaccines. With the clock ticking and many states extending shots to people as young as 55, nonprofits, churches and advocacy groups are scrambling to find isolated elders and get them inoculated before they have to compete with an even bigger pool — and are potentially forgotten about as vaccination campaigns move on.

An extreme imbalance between vaccine supply and demand in almost every part of the United States makes securing a shot a gamble. In Oregon, Andrade is vying with as many as 750,000 residents age 65 and older, and demand is so high that appointments for the weekly allotment of doses in Portland are snapped up in less than an hour. On Monday, the city’s inundated vaccine information call line shut down

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by 9 a.m., and online booking sites have crashed.

Amid such frenzy, the vaccine rollout here and elsewhere has strongly favored healthier seniors with resources "who are able to jump in their car at a moment's notice and drive two hours" while more vulnerable older adults are overlooked, said James Stowe, the director of aging and adult services for an association of city and county governments in the bistate Kansas City area.

"Why weren't they the thrust of our efforts, the very core of what we wanted to do? Why didn't it include this group from the very outset?" he said of the most vulnerable seniors.

Some of the older adults who have not received vaccines yet are so disconnected they don't even know they are eligible. Others realize they qualify, but without internet service and often email accounts, they don't know how to make an appointment and can't get to one anyway — so they haven't tried.

Still others have debilitating health issues that make leaving home an insurmountable task, or they are so terrified of exposure to COVID-19 that they'd rather go unvaccinated than risk venturing out in public to get a shot.

In Kansas City, Missouri, 75-year-old Pat Brown knows she needs the vaccine because her asthma and diabetes put her at higher risk of serious COVID-19 complications. But Brown hasn't attempted to schedule an appointment and didn't even know if they were being offered in her area yet; she says she is too overwhelmed.

"I don't have no car, and it's hard for me to get around places. I just don't like to go to clinics and have to wait because you have to wait so long," Brown said, adding that she is in constant pain because of spinal arthritis. "I couldn't do it. My back would give out...and I don't have the money to take a cab."

The pandemic has also closed senior centers, libraries and churches — all places where older Americans might remain visible in their communities and get information about the vaccine. And some public health departments at first relied on mass emails and text messages to alert residents they were eligible, thereby missing huge chunks of the senior population.

"Do you think everyone has internet access? Do you really think everyone has email?" Denise LaBuda, spokeswoman for the Council on Aging of Central Oregon, said. "We just don't know where they all are. They have to raise their hand — and how do they raise their hand?"

To counter access disparities, the Biden administration said Wednesday that it will partner with health insurance companies to help vulnerable older people get vaccinated for COVID-19. The goal is to get 2 million of the most at-risk seniors vaccinated soon, White House coronavirus special adviser Andy Slavitt said.

Slavitt says insurers will use their networks to contact Medicare recipients with information about COVID-19 vaccines, answer questions, find and schedule appointments for first and second doses and coordinate transportation. The focus will be on reaching people in medically underserved areas.

Non-profits, churches and advocates for older people have already spent weeks figuring out how to reach disadvantaged Americans over age 65 through a patchwork and grassroots effort that varies widely by location.

Some are partnering with charities like Meals on Wheels to distribute vaccine information or grocery-delivery programs like the one which alerted Andrade. Others are mining library card rosters, senior center membership lists and voter registration databases to find disconnected older people.

Reaching out through organizations and faith groups that marginalized older Americans already trust is key, said Margaret Scharle, who developed a vaccine outreach toolkit for her Roman Catholic parish in Oregon. The "low-tech" approach, which other charities started using, relies on door-knocking, paper brochures and scripted phone calls to communicate with residents over 65.

"Once you've been blocked so many times in trying to make an appointment, you might give up. So we are working as hard as we can to penetrate the most marginalized communities, to activate networks that are already existing," said Scharle, who after the initial contact offers assistance with scheduling appointments and transportation.

In Georgetown, South Carolina, a rural community where many of the 10,000 residents are the descendants of slaves, the local NAACP chapter is using its rolls from a November get-out-the-vote drive to get

the oldest citizens out for the vaccine. Chapter president Marvin Neal said they are trying to reach 2,700 people to let them know they are eligible for a shot and to offer help booking appointments.

Many of those individuals don't have internet service or transportation, or suffer from medical issues like dementia, he said.

"Some are not even aware that the vaccine is even in their community, that's the challenge," Neal said. "It's like they're just throwing up their hands in the air and hoping somebody steps in. Because all the ones I have talked to want the vaccine. I haven't had one yet that didn't say, 'Sign me up.'"

Outreach workers are also identifying holes in the system that prevent the most vulnerable seniors from accessing shots. For example, a dial-a-ride service in a rural part of Oregon doesn't take passengers beyond their town limits, meaning they can't get to their county's mass vaccination site. In the same region, only the largest city has a public bus system.

Such obstacles underscore what outreach workers say is a huge demand for mobile vaccine clinics. Some local governments and non-profit organizations are partnering with paramedics and volunteer groups that specialize in disaster response to inoculate the hardest-to-reach seniors.

In South Carolina, pharmacist Raymond Paschal purchased a van and a \$3,000 refrigerator to start a mobile clinic for underserved areas, but his independent pharmacy in Georgetown can't get ahold of any vaccine.

"There's a lot of people falling through the cracks," Paschal said. "These older people who have still not received their vaccine, they're going to have all this younger generation they have to compete with. So we've got to get to these older people first."

Hollingsworth reported from Kansas City, Missouri. Bynum reported from Savannah, Georgia. Associated Press reporter Sara Cline in Portland, Oregon contributed to this report.

Boston Marathon plan to hand out 70,000 medals roils runners

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Distance running, traditionally one of the world's most genteel sports, has been roiled by an ugly mid-pandemic squabble over who should get a shot at a coveted Boston Marathon medal.

Rival camps in the running world began snapping at each other's heels this week. It began after the Boston Athletic Association, which still hopes to hold a truncated in-person edition of the planet's most prestigious footrace in October, said it will award medals to up to 70,000 athletes if they go the distance wherever they are.

Practically within minutes of the BAA's announcement greatly expanding its virtual version of the race, a boisterous social media maelstrom ensued.

On one side: Runners who've spent years training to qualify to run the real thing, including some who complain that mailing medals to people who run the 26.2 miles (42.2 kilometers) in Dallas or Denver will cheapen the iconic Boston experience.

"A dagger through the heart to someone who has worked hard to finally earn the qualifying standard," one runner, Mark Howard of Salisbury, North Carolina, groused on Twitter.

On the other: Pretty much everyone else, including the plodding masses and runners who raise millions for charities, who counter that anything that helps the 125-year-old marathon survive the COVID-19 crisis is worthwhile.

"A virtual Boston race that invites everyone is a reason to celebrate," said Maria Arana, a marathoner and coach in Phoenix. "It in no way takes away from my personal Boston Marathon experience or anyone else's."

The bickering seems to have caught many off-guard, if only because road racing has long had a reputation as a kind and egalitarian sport.

It's one of the few disciplines where ordinary amateurs compete in real time on the same course as elite professionals, and where trash-talking is rare. As four-time Boston champion Bill Rodgers famously said:

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"Running is a sport where everyone gets along."

A notable exception to that gentility was the 1967 race, when race director Jock Semple ran after Kathrine Switzer — the first woman to run with an official bib number — and tried unsuccessfully to pull her off the course.

It also comes as the Boston Marathon and other big-city races are struggling to stay afloat during the pandemic and looking for creative ways to keep runners engaged online.

The BAA put on a virtual version of the marathon last year, after the coronavirus pandemic forced it to first postpone its usual April running to September, and then cancel in-person racing altogether.

But that was limited to athletes who had already qualified to race or had registered as charity runners. This time, the first 70,000 people aged 18 or older who sign up and pay a fee will be able to earn a finisher's medal simply by covering the classic distance wherever they happen to be. They don't even need to run — they can walk.

"For the first time in our history, most everyone will have the opportunity to earn a Unicorn finisher's medal," BAA president and CEO Tom Griik said in a statement.

Griik said the in-person race, if it comes off as scheduled on Oct. 11, will have a reduced field to help keep athletes and spectators safe. Typically the Boston field is capped at around 30,000; the BAA hasn't said how much smaller it will be this autumn.

Josh Sitzer, a San Francisco runner who's qualified for the Boston Marathon three times, initially was among those who trashed the idea of giving out 70,000 medals as "a blatant money grab."

"Respect yourself and the game. Don't do Boston unless you earn it," he tweeted. Then he had a change of heart, tweeting: "I was wrong. It's not the same as the actual Boston Marathon, and it doesn't devalue" the experience of those who meet strict qualifying standards for a chance to line up in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.

It's been a bad look, acknowledges Erin Strout, who covers the sport for WomensRunning.com.

"If there ever was a time to put our elitism and cynicism aside, it's now," she wrote in an opinion piece. "Let's welcome each other in, cheer each other on, and seize the opportunity to bring back running bigger, better, and more inclusive than it was before."

This story has been corrected to delete a reference to a \$70 entry fee for the virtual marathon; organizers say they haven't yet decided on entry fees.

Follow AP New England editor Bill Kole on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/billkole>.

Israel, Denmark and Austria join forces against COVID-19

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel, Denmark and Austria agreed on Thursday to join forces in the fight against COVID-19 with an investment in research and roll-out of vaccines to protect people against new surges and mutations of the coronavirus.

The leaders of the three countries said their alliance will set up a foundation and vaccine distribution plants in Europe and Israel, based on Israel's world-leading inoculation drive.

The effort is aimed at getting ahead of another expected surge of COVID-19 and the uncertainty of how long inoculations will remain effective. Details, such as costs and the time frame for opening the projects, were still being worked out, the leaders said.

"We think that by joining the resources of three small but very able and gifted countries, we can better meet these challenges," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. He added that other countries have also expressed interest in the effort.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz added that "this pandemic can only be overcome through global cooperation."

That has been a delicate question as virus-fighting campaigns faced challenges in places like Europe and raised concerns that the pandemic would last longer in poorer countries that cannot afford vaccina-

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tion campaigns.

Israel has inoculated more than half of its population in one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns, though it has faced some criticism for not sending significant amounts of vaccines to the Palestinians.

That's expected to change next week with Israel providing vaccines to some 100,000 Palestinian laborers who work in Israel or its West Bank settlements. Still, the vast majority of the estimated 5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will remain unvaccinated.

For Netanyahu, the alliance served as a way to flex his political muscle on the international stage ahead of the March 23 elections. "Vaccination nation," as he calls Israel, would become "vaccination nations," to include Denmark and Austria, he said, adding the group would welcome more international partners.

While Israel does not produce vaccines, the prime minister has moved aggressively to secure enough vaccines for Israel's 9.3 million people in deals with Pfizer and Moderna. Netanyahu has even offered some surplus vaccines to allied nations.

The European leaders said they wanted to learn from Israel's success. Austria is among a number of European Union members that have expressed frustration over the vaccine's slow rollout among the 27-nation bloc. Kurz said he was happy with some of the EU's handling of the crisis, "but we also need to cooperate worldwide."

Earlier in the day, Kurz and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen joined Netanyahu at a gym in Israel to observe how vaccine certifications, known as the "green pass," or passport, work. Only people with the badge indicating they have been vaccinated, obtained through an app, can use gyms and go to concerts.

"Vaccine production involves many steps, so we will divide the task between us, and each is to focus on specific ones," said Kurz, who said his country will need about 30 million doses for the pandemic's next expected stage. Austria has vaccinated just over 6% of its population.

Frederiksen said that she would also like to see the countries cooperate on clinical trials. Denmark has inoculated a little over 7% of its population as of March 1.

"We all have promising research that could pave the way for next generation platforms," she said.

Associated Press writers Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

Follow Kellman on Twitter at <http://www.Twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>

GOP state lawmakers seek to nullify federal gun limits

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — With Democrats controlling the presidency and Congress, Republican state lawmakers concerned about the possibility of new federal gun control laws aren't waiting to react.

Legislation in at least a dozen states seeks to nullify any new restrictions, such as ammunition limits or a ban on certain types of weapons. Some bills would make it a crime for local police officers to enforce federal gun laws.

That can create confusion for officers who often work with federal law enforcement, said Daniel Isom, a former chief of the St. Louis Police Department who is now a senior advisor for Everytown for Gun Safety. Federal law plays a big role in some areas, such as keeping guns away from domestic violence offenders.

Putting local officers in a position to decide which laws to enforce is the last thing police need at a time when cities such as St. Louis are experiencing a rise in violent crime, Isom said.

"This has been an extremely challenging year for both communities and law enforcement, and to ask any more mental strain on officers at this point in time seems to be quite displaced," he said. Gun sales also have set monthly records nationwide since the coronavirus pandemic took hold.

Isom is concerned about a Missouri measure passed by the state House that would allow police departments with officers who enforce federal gun laws to be sued and face a \$50,000 fine. It's not the first

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time Missouri has considered such a bill, but supporters pointed to President Joe Biden taking office as a reason to pass it now.

In Utah, Republican Rep. Cory Maloy also referenced the incoming administration after the state House passed his bill with a similar provision forbidding the enforcement of federal gun laws. Many Republican state lawmakers see attempts to pass federal firearms restrictions as a threat to the Second Amendment.

"We really feel the need to protect those rights," he said.

Several states passed similar laws under then-president Barack Obama, although judges have ruled against them in court. Most of the latest crop of federal nullification proposals focus on police officers inside their states who primarily enforce state rather than federal laws.

While Biden has called for a ban on assault weapons, any new gun legislation will likely face an uphill climb given the political polarization that has tripped up past administrations. Democratic lawmakers from conservative-leaning states also could join Republicans in opposing new gun restrictions. Any measures likely to pass would have broad support, like background checks on all gun sales, said Everytown President John Feinblatt.

Those dynamics haven't stopped state lawmakers who want to make the first move to protect gun rights in their states. Federal nullification bills have been introduced in more than a dozen other states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Wyoming, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia and Iowa. In Texas, the governor has called for the state to become a Second Amendment sanctuary.

In Arizona, a Senate proposal that passed the chamber on Wednesday would allow officers to be sued for enforcing federal gun restrictions that the state considers violations of the Second Amendment. They potentially could face criminal charges. A bill in the House doesn't include those punishments, but its sponsor, Republican Rep. Leo Biaggi, said it would be a clear rejection of federal restrictions on assault-style weapons, high-capacity magazines or other firearms.

"They can do that at a federal level, but in Arizona it's not going to fly," he said.

His proposal passed the state House last week over the objections of Democrats such as Rep. Daniel Hernandez of Tucson, who was present at the 2011 shooting that severely injured former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords. If signed into law, the measure would be unconstitutional and lead to an expensive court fight, he said.

Biaggi compares his plan to Arizona voters' move to legalize recreational marijuana even though it remains against federal law. Gun-control groups see it differently.

"Guns kill people and are used to create a public safety issue, whereas marijuana is really not," said Alison Anderman, senior counsel with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. "What is likely to happen if gun laws are not followed is people get killed as a result."

Similar measures passed by the Republican Legislature in Montana were vetoed in previous years by the former Democratic governor. Now working with a Republican governor, the state House passed a bill last week to bar state officials from enforcing federal bans on certain firearms, ammunition or magazines.

Under Obama's presidency, the Legislature passed a law in 2009 that made guns and ammunition manufactured in Montana exempt from federal law. It eventually was struck down in court, but several states still followed with their own nullification measures. In 2013, two Kansas men tried to use that state's nullification law to overturn their federal convictions for possessing unregistered firearms, but the challenge was rejected.

"The main issue there is the Supremacy Clause," the part of the Constitution that says federal law supersedes state law, said Jacob Charles, executive director of the Center for Firearms Law at Duke Law School. Even so, the bills focused on what local police can and can't do could pass legal muster.

"States have no obligation to enforce federal law," he said.

Associated Press writer Bob Christie in Phoenix contributed to this report.

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Still divisive, Dr. Luke resurges at Grammys — as Tyson Trax

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — With dark clouds looming behind him, controversial music producer and hitmaker Dr. Luke rose to the top of the Billboard charts last year with Doja Cat's ubiquitous funk-pop jam "Say So," along with Saweetie's anthemic bop "Tap In" and Juice WRLD's Top 5 pop smash "Wishing Well."

It marked a creative resurgence for the pop prince, who remains embroiled in a lawsuit with Kesha. His chart domination was followed by his first Grammy nomination in seven years — cementing his comeback.

That has the music world is split — some believe the art and the person should be separated, while others have blasted the Recording Academy for rewarding the hitmaker with a nomination for one of its top prizes.

But not all of the academy members may have been aware they were voting for Dr. Luke when they completed their ballots this year. That's because he used a moniker — Tyson Trax — for Doja Cat's "Say So," which he produced and co-wrote. The hit tune is competing for record of the year, where Dr. Luke is in contention as the song's producer.

"It's difficult to say whether or not Grammy voters are aware that 'Tyson Trax' is used as a pseudonym," Harvey Mason Jr., the academy's interim president and CEO, said in a statement to The Associated Press. "While it's true that the 'Tyson Trax' producer credit would be visible on the ballot entry, I would imagine that a lot of voters were making their selection with Doja Cat in mind, thinking primarily about the artistic merits of her performance."

Doja Cat, who released her debut EP on Dr. Luke's Kemosabe label in 2014 before Kesha's lawsuit, is also nominated for best new artist and best pop solo performance at the March 14 Grammys. Dr. Luke produced multiple songs on her sophomore album "Hot Pink." Those include the double-platinum success "Juicy" and the Gucci Mane-assisted hit "Like That," which reached No. 3 on the R&B charts last year. For those songs, he's credited as Tyson Trax.

"I didn't know that Tyson Trax was Dr. Luke. I could have looked it up, but I didn't, and I didn't care. It's a name and I'm voting on the artistic merit of the record, so it didn't matter," said Susan Rogers, a professor at Berklee College of Music and Prince's former staff engineer who is a Grammy voter.

"Your judgment should be based upon who did the best, most creative, most artistic work during the year; what work is going to advance the state of the industry. That's the only thing that we're voting on," she said. "Anytime we bring anything else into that mix — how we feel about someone personally, whether we like them or dislike them, know them or don't know them — we're being unfair to all the others."

Dr. Luke, 47, has also used the Tyson Trax pseudonym for his contribution to Toronto rapper-singer Benny Mayne's "Hokey Pokey." He's been referred to as MADE IN CHINA for his work with pop singer Kim Petras. His producer credit on Lil Wayne's "Shimmy" from his 2020 album "Funeral"? Loctor Duke.

Evan Minsker, news editor for the music publication Pitchfork, admitted that some of his colleagues didn't recognize Dr. Luke was Tyson Trax: "It's their job to be plugged in (and) they didn't know Dr. Luke was Tyson Trax."

"I think there probably are a lot of cases of (Dr. Luke) sneaking under the radar, people not connecting what his other pseudonyms are with who he is," Minsker said.

"Regardless of who he is and what his various names are, clearly there is some kind of proven result in what Dr. Luke and Doja Cat did together," he continued. "I think while maybe some people didn't know, I wouldn't be surprised if some people did and just don't really have a hard time falling asleep at night after putting his name through."

Dr. Luke was last in Grammy contention in 2014 when he competed for non-classical producer and record of the year for his work on Katy Perry's "Roar." He emerged as the protege of pop music maestro Max Martin, who produced 23 No. 1 hits throughout his career, working with everyone from pop idols such as Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears and N'Sync to contemporary stars like Adele, Taylor Swift and The Weeknd.

Together, Martin and Dr. Luke crafted hits for Kelly Clarkson, Katy Perry, Pink and Kesha, who he signed in 2005. Eventually Dr. Luke stepped into the forefront, helming successes for Miley Cyrus, Pitbull, Nicki

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Minaj and Flo Rida, logging 17 No. 1 hits.

Dr. Luke has gotten a taste of his former life on top of the charts, with every major label — including Sony Music, Warner Music Group and Universal Music Group — launching a hit with him last year. In addition to his work with Doja Cat, Juice WRLD, Saweetie and Lil Wayne, he also produced “Blind” for rapper DaBaby and co-wrote “Broken Glass” for hit DJ-producer Kygo. This year he produced another hit for Saweetie with “Best Friend,” which is currently No. 10 on the rap charts.

“I think (the Grammys) set themselves up a little bit to fail because instead of having this big celebratory moment, there were a lot of questions all of a sudden. ‘How come you got Dr. Luke in (one of) the big four (categories)?’ That’s pretty surprising,” Pitchfork’s Minsker said. “I can see why this is the moment for (‘Say So’) and I also was surprised to see that it would be nominated in such a way that (Dr. Luke) would get an award at this stage in his life.”

Kesha, 34, has accused Dr. Luke of sexual assault during their yearslong partnership, allegations he vigorously denies. The court case continues, despite a New York judge dismissing Kesha’s sexual abuse-related claims in 2016 on procedural grounds; no ruling was made on whether the allegations were true. Kesha lost another round when a judge said she made a defamatory statement about Dr. Luke in a 2016 text message telling Lady Gaga the producer had also raped Perry.

Kesha’s lawyers are appealing the ruling, which didn’t resolve other aspects of his defamation and breach-of-contract suit, including the crucial question of whether Kesha’s rape allegation is true. The judge said that’s for a jury to decide at trial.

Fiona Apple, who is nominated for three Grammys, slammed the academy for Dr. Luke’s inclusion this year. She questioned the organization because three years ago, they invited Kesha to perform “Praying” — the deeply emotional and touching piano tune arguably about her experience with Dr. Luke — at the show. Kesha was joined onstage by Cyndi Lauper, Andra Day, Bebe Rexha, Camila Cabello, Julia Michaels and the Resistance Revival Chorus for the widely praised performance.

The song appeared on the album “Rainbow,” which was released on Dr. Luke’s label but was the first time she created music commercially without him. The music even earned Kesha her first pair of Grammy nominations.

Berklee’s Rogers explained that “as a member of the female sex ... we have to be sensitive and tolerant of women who make accusations of sexual impropriety or coercion or any number of things that they might be victim of. We have to listen to them. We have to be credulous. We have to believe them.

“We also have to recognize it’s a two-sided conversation,” she continued. “Both sides have the right to express themselves. I don’t dismiss Kesha’s (claims) ... I don’t dismiss the fact that she had a rough time with Dr. Luke — what I’m saying is that I recognize that it has absolutely nothing to do with my vote as a member of the Recording Academy.”

Eager to act, Biden and Democrats leave Republicans behind

By LISA MASCARO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress are jamming their agenda forward with a sense of urgency, an unapologetically partisan approach based on the calculation that it’s better to advance the giant COVID-19 rescue package and other priorities than waste time courting Republicans who may never compromise.

The pandemic is driving the crush of legislative action, but so are the still-raw emotions from the U.S. Capitol siege as well as the hard lessons of the last time Democrats had the sweep of party control of Washington. Republicans are mounting blockades of Biden’s agenda just as they did during the devastating 2009 financial crisis with Barack Obama.

Democrats, in turn, are showing little patience for the GOP objections and entertaining few overtures toward compromise, claiming the majority of the country supports their agenda. With fragile majorities in the House and Senate, and a liberal base of voters demanding action, Democrats are operating as if they are on borrowed time.

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For many lawmakers, it's personal.

Rep. Karen Bass, D-Calif., led the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act to House passage Wednesday on the 30th anniversary of the Rodney King beating by police in Los Angeles that she thought at the time would spur policing reforms. Instead, more Black Americans and others have died in police violence, even after Floyd's death at the hands of law enforcement last summer.

"It's examples like that that lead to the urgency," Bass said Wednesday.

The start of the first congressional session of the Biden administration was supposed to be a new era of bipartisan deal-making. The Senate evenly split, 50-50, and the House resting on a slim majority for Democrats set prime conditions for Biden to swoop in and forge across-the-aisle compromises.

But the rush through Biden's first 100 days is shaping up as an urgent era of hardball politics, with Democrats prepared to go it alone, even if that means that changes to the Senate filibuster rules are needed to work around Republican roadblocks to legislation that many Americans support.

"We said we're going to do X, Y and Z, but we didn't say we were going to be magicians," said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md. "We can't magically make the Republicans be for what the people are for."

Days before Biden entered office, White House chief of staff Ron Klain highlighted the urgency with which the incoming administration would seek to act. "We face four overlapping and compounding crises: the COVID-19 crisis, the resulting economic crisis, the climate crisis, and a racial equity crisis," he wrote in a memo. "All of these crises demand urgent action."

From his first hours in office, Biden sought to take deliberate steps to deliver relief, but also to raise awareness about those and other priorities on the theory that moving urgently would increase public support and raise pressure on Republican lawmakers who might stand in the way.

And within the White House there's another kind of urgency: Biden has staffed his administration with veterans of government service who are not looking to stick around that long. Some aides are open about their commitments to help Biden for just a year before returning to private-sector jobs.

Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan is coursing ahead on party-line votes under budget rules that will allow Senate passage by a simple 51-vote threshold, denying Republicans the ability to block the bill with a filibuster that would take 60 votes to overcome.

House leaders have reworked this month's schedule for legislation to include voting rights, gun background checks and immigration in the queue — many of them do-overs of bills blocked last session by President Donald Trump and Senate Republicans. They still face a long haul to becoming law without GOP support in the Senate. But lawmakers and advocates are racing to capitalize on House rules that allow any bill to bypass lengthy committee hearings if brought forward by April 1.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer often hark back to the lessons of 2009, when Obama took office during the financial crisis and Democrats cut back the recovery package to win a few Republican votes only to face an onslaught of attacks against the bill.

Many of the same Democrats in leadership today are unwilling to risk a repeat, especially as Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and other economists now say that paring back the 2009 rescue package stunted the recovery.

"One of the biggest lessons that Republicans learned in the '09 and '10 era is they could basically obstruct everything and not suffer at the ballot box," said Tre Easton, a senior adviser at the liberal Battle Born Collective.

The strategy is on display again. House Republicans used procedural objections to stall the COVID-19 package until well past midnight late last week after a marathon rules session spilled voting into early Saturday. Senate Republicans are now threatening similar delays.

"We'll be fighting this in every way that we can," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said about the COVID-19 package.

McConnell wants Senate Republicans to vote in lockstep against the virus aid, calling it a bloated liberal wish list, following the lead of House Republicans who gave it zero support.

That leaves Democrats negotiating with themselves on the COVID-19 package, with Biden warning

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they won't like every aspect as he courts centrists. Progressives are being forced to abandon, for now, a provision to lift the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. On Wednesday, Democrats decided to more narrowly target \$1,400 direct payments to households.

Yet Democrats are holding together, so far, because there's also the urgency that was not readily apparent until Biden was sworn into office.

Perhaps nothing has stiffened the Democratic resolve like the deadly Jan. 6 siege of the Capitol, which carved new fault lines between those who confirmed the presidential election results and those willing to side with the mob seeking to overturn Trump's defeat to Biden.

Democratic lawmakers who arrive at the fenced-in Capitol under the watchful protection of armed National Guard troops appear to have "zero" patience, as one aide put it, for engaging with Republicans — some of whom still question the election results. A new threat of violence sent lawmakers to wrap up work for the week late Wednesday.

Republicans are protesting the partisan start, even though they relied on a similar budget mechanism to try to pass Trump-era priorities. They set out to repeal "Obamacare," an effort that shockingly failed when Sen. John McCain gave it a thumbs-down vote. Later they passed \$2 trillion in tax cuts on a party-line vote.

The third-ranking Republican, Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, said Biden should go back to his campaign and inauguration themes of bipartisanship "and try to live up to it."

Bass and others are still hopeful working to find bipartisan Senate support for the policing bill.

But a generation of House leaders who have served decades with Biden and are nearing retirement are increasingly pushing for Senate filibuster rules changes to counter broader Republican opposition.

Rep. James E. Clyburn, D-S.C., the majority whip, said of Republican obstruction: "If that's what they're going to do, then they're going to have to live with it, because we're going to serve it up."

House passes sweeping voting rights bill over GOP opposition

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats passed sweeping voting and ethics legislation over unanimous Republican opposition, advancing to the Senate what would be the largest overhaul of the U.S. election law in at least a generation.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, was approved Wednesday night on a near party-line 220-210 vote. It would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

The bill is a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election. Yet it faces an uncertain fate in the Democratic-controlled Senate, where it has little chance of passing without changes to procedural rules that currently allow Republicans to block it.

The stakes in the outcome are monumental, cutting to the foundational idea that one person equals one vote, and carrying with it the potential to shape election outcomes for years to come. It also offers a test of how hard President Joe Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters.

This bill "will put a stop at the voter suppression that we're seeing debated right now," said Rep. Nikema Williams, a new congresswoman who represents the Georgia district that deceased voting rights champion John Lewis held for years. "This bill is the 'Good Trouble' he fought for his entire life."

In a statement, Biden said he looked forward to refining the measure and hoped to sign it into law, calling it "landmark legislation" that is much needed "to repair and strengthen our democracy."

To Republicans, however, it would give license to unwanted federal interference in states' authority to conduct their own elections — ultimately benefiting Democrats through higher turnout, most notably among minorities.

"Democrats want to use their razor-thin majority not to pass bills to earn voters' trust, but to ensure

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they don't lose more seats in the next election," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said from the House floor Tuesday.

The measure has been a priority for Democrats since they won their House majority in 2018. But it has taken on added urgency in the wake of Trump's false claims, which incited the deadly storming of the U.S. Capitol in January.

Courts and even Trump's last attorney general, William Barr, found his claims about the election to be without merit. But, spurred on by those lies, state lawmakers across the U.S. have filed more than 200 bills in 43 states that would limit ballot access, according to a tally kept by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

In Iowa, the legislature voted to cut absentee and in-person early voting, while preventing local elections officials from setting up additional locations to make early voting easier. In Georgia, the House on Monday voted for legislation requiring identification to vote by mail that would also allow counties to cancel early in-person voting on Sundays, when many Black voters cast ballots after church.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court appeared ready to uphold voting restrictions in Arizona, which could make it harder to challenge state election laws in the future.

When asked why proponents sought to uphold the Arizona laws, which limit who can turn in absentee ballots and enable ballots to be thrown out if they are cast in the wrong precinct, a lawyer for the state's Republican Party was stunningly clear.

"Because it puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats," said attorney Michael Carvin. "Politics is a zero-sum game."

Battle lines are quickly being drawn by outside groups who plan to spend millions of dollars on advertising and outreach campaigns.

Republicans "are not even being coy about it. They are saying the 'quiet parts' out loud," said Tiffany Muller, the president of End Citizens United, a left-leaning group that aims to curtail the influence of corporate money in politics. Her organization has launched a \$10 million effort supporting the bill. "For them, this isn't about protecting our democracy or protecting our elections. This is about pure partisan political gain."

Conservatives, meanwhile, are mobilizing a \$5 million pressure campaign, urging moderate Senate Democrats to oppose rule changes needed to pass the measure.

"H.R. 1 is not about making elections better," said Ken Cuccinelli, a former Trump administration Homeland Security official who is leading the effort. "It's about the opposite. It's intended to dirty up elections."

So what's actually in the bill?

H.R. 1 would require states to automatically register eligible voters, as well as offer same-day registration. It would limit states' ability to purge registered voters from their rolls and restore former felons' voting rights. Among dozens of other provisions, it would also require states to offer 15 days of early voting and allow no-excuse absentee balloting.

On the cusp of a once-in-a-decade redrawing of congressional district boundaries, typically a fiercely partisan affair, the bill would mandate that nonpartisan commissions handle the process instead of state legislatures.

Many Republican opponents in Congress have focused on narrower aspects, like the creation of a public financing system for congressional campaigns that would be funded through fines and settlement proceeds raised from corporate bad actors.

They've also attacked an effort to revamp the federal government's toothless elections cop. That agency, the Federal Election Commission, has been gripped by partisan deadlock for years, allowing campaign finance law violators to go mostly unchecked.

Another section that's been a focus of Republican ire would force the disclosure of donors to "dark money" political groups, which are a magnet for wealthy interests looking to influence the political process while remaining anonymous.

Still, the biggest obstacles lie ahead in the Senate, which is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats.

On some legislation, it takes only 51 votes to pass, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker.

On a deeply divisive bill like this one, they would need 60 votes under the Senate's rules to overcome a Republican filibuster — a tally they are unlikely to reach.

Some Democrats have discussed options like lowering the threshold to break a filibuster, or creating a workaround that would allow priority legislation, including a separate John Lewis Voting Rights bill, to be exempt. Biden has been cool to filibuster reforms and Democratic congressional aides say the conversations are fluid but underway.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has not committed to a time frame but vowed "to figure out the best way to get big, bold action on a whole lot of fronts."

He said: "We're not going to be the legislative graveyard. ... People are going to be forced to vote on them, yes or no, on a whole lot of very important and serious issues."

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

17% of food production globally wasted, UN report estimates

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Instead of finishing your leftovers, you let them go bad and buy takeout.

It's a familiar routine for many — and indicative of habits that contribute to a global food waste problem that a new United Nations report says needs to be better measured so that it can be effectively addressed.

The U.N. report estimates 17% of the food produced globally each year is wasted. That amounts to 931 million metric tons (1.03 billion tons) of food.

The waste is far more than previous reports had indicated, though direct comparisons are difficult because of differing methodologies and the lack of strong data from many countries.

"Improved measurement can lead to improved management," said Brian Roe, a food waste researcher at Ohio State University who was not involved in the report.

Most of the waste — or 61% — happens in households, while food service accounts for 26% and retailers account for 13%, the U.N. found. The U.N. is pushing to reduce food waste globally, and researchers are also working on an assessment of waste that includes the food lost before reaching consumers.

The authors note the report seeks to offer a clearer snapshot of the scale of a problem that has been difficult to assess, in hopes of spurring governments to invest in better tracking.

"Many countries haven't yet quantified their food waste, so they don't understand the scale of the problem," said Clementine O'Connor, of the U.N. Environment Program and co-author of the report.

Food waste has become a growing concern because of the environmental toll of production, including the land required to raise crops and animals and the greenhouse gas emissions produced along the way. Experts say improved waste tracking is key to finding ways to ease the problem, such as programs to divert inedible scraps to use as animal feed or fertilizer.

The report found food waste in homes isn't limited to higher income countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Roe of Ohio State noted that food sometimes is wasted in poor countries without reliable home refrigeration. In richer countries, people might eat out more, meaning food waste is simply shifted from the home to restaurants.

Roe said cultural norms and policies also could contribute to waste at home — such as massive packaging, "buy one, get one free" deals, or lack of composting programs.

That's why broader system changes are key to helping reduce waste in households, said Chris Barrett, an agricultural economist at Cornell University.

For example, Barrett said, people might throw away food because of a date on the product — even though such dates don't always say when a food is unsafe to eat. "Food waste is a consequence of sensible decisions by people acting on the best information available," he said.

To clarify the meaning of labeling dates, U.S. regulators have urged food makers to be more consistent in using them. They note that labels like "Sell By," "Best By" and "Enjoy By" could cause people to throw out food prematurely, even though some labels are intended only to indicate when quality might decline.

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that a family of four wastes about \$1,500 in food each year. But accurately measuring food waste is difficult for a variety of reasons including data availability, said USDA food researcher Jean Buzby, adding that improved measurements are part of a government plan to reduce waste.

Richard Swannell, a co-author of the U.N. report, said food was generally more valued even in richer countries just a few generations ago, since people often couldn't afford to waste it. Now, he said, awareness about the scale of food waste globally could help shift attitudes back to that era.

"Food is too important to waste," he said.

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Will Paramount+ be a mountain or a molehill in streaming?

By MAE ANDERSON AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Paramount+ debuts Thursday as the latest — and last — streaming option from a major media company, this time from ViacomCBS. It's betting that consumers are willing to add yet another paid streaming service in an increasingly crowded field.

Its backers hope a smorgasbord of offerings — live sports and news, reboots of properties like "Frasier" and "Rugrats," original shows like "Star Trek: Discovery" and the ViacomCBS library — will entice viewers. But its relatively late entrance to a competitive landscape and a \$4 price increase compared to its predecessor, CBS All Access, could make it a challenging sell.

"Paramount+ has a mountain of challenges ahead of it," said Tim Hanlon, CEO of Vertere Group, playing off the Paramount+ tagline, "A mountain of entertainment." (The venerable Paramount logo features — you guessed it — a mountain, and the streamer's recent ad campaign featured a number of characters from its shows climbing a snowy peak.)

Over the last year and a half more and more streaming services have debuted to challenge the reigning triumvirate of Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime. Disney+ kicked things off in late 2019, followed by WarnerMedia's HBO Max, NBCUniversal's Peacock and Discovery+.

In a way, ViacomCBS is a pioneer; CBS, then a separate company, debuted CBS All Access in 2014. The new service effectively rebrands All Access and adds other Viacom Properties channels including Comedy Central, BET, MTV and Nickelodeon.

But Paramount+ could have a brand awareness problem, Hanlon said. Most people associate the name Paramount with the mountainous title card that appears before movies. "Most consumers have very little understanding that Viacom, Paramount and CBS have the same parent, so the marketing team has a big job in front of it," he said.

Second, the pricing may leave some scratching their heads. The ad-free tier launching Thursday is \$10 a month. That's the same price as CBS All Access' ad-free version, and \$4 more than ad-supported CBS All Access, although the new service will offer a lot more material, including live news and sports. A \$5 monthly ad-supported version will launch in June, but it won't include the live local CBS stations that CBS All Access offered. Showtime and BET+, both owned by ViacomCBS, will remain separate subscription services.

Still, the service also has some potential advantages over others. CBS All Access, Showtime and BET+ now have nearly 30 million subscribers, some of who will shift to Paramount+. ViacomCBS projects that those services will reach 65 million subscribers by 2024, with most of the growth coming from Paramount+.

ViacomCBS plans to increase its investment in streaming, from \$1 billion a year to at least \$5 billion annually by 2024. It will introduce 36 original shows in 2021, including a spinoff of "60 Minutes" called "60 Minutes+," a documentary series about the making of "The Godfather," a reboot of MTV's "The Real World" that reunites the original New York City cast from 30 years ago, and series based on movies including "Fatal Attraction" and "Flashdance."

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"Viacom really has all assets they need to have a thriving business," said Brian Wieser, GroupM global president of business intelligence. "A meaningful investment in original programming attracts people to the platform. And a deep library causes people to stay. Put those two together and you could have a viable successful service."

But they may not be taking bold enough steps to stand out, said Colin Gillis, director of research at Chatham Road Partners. ViacomCBS said some of the studio's films, including "Mission: Impossible 7" and "A Quiet Place Part II," will go to its fledgling streaming service, Paramount+, after 45 days in theaters. But that's not as bold a step as HBO Max has done, releasing 17 of their films on HBO Max the same day they're released in theaters.

"That type of strategy, plus being late to the market, looks a lot like a 'me too' move," Gillis said. "If they want to act like a second tier streaming service, they're doing a fantastic job."

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 5, the 64th day of 2021. There are 301 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 5, 1953, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin died after three decades in power.

On this date:

In 1770, the Boston Massacre took place as British soldiers who'd been taunted by a crowd of colonists opened fire, killing five people.

In 1868, the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson began in the U.S. Senate, with Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase presiding. Johnson, the first U.S. president to be impeached, was accused of "high crimes and misdemeanors" stemming from his attempt to fire Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton; the trial ended on May 26 with Johnson's acquittal.

In 1927, "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place," the last Sherlock Holmes story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was published in the U.S. in Liberty Magazine.

In 1933, in German parliamentary elections, the Nazi Party won 44 percent of the vote; the Nazis joined with a conservative nationalist party to gain a slender majority in the Reichstag.

In 1946, Winston Churchill delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in which he said: "From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an 'iron curtain' has descended across the continent, allowing police governments to rule Eastern Europe."

In 1960, Elvis Presley was discharged from the U.S. Army.

In 1963, country music performers Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins died in the crash of their plane, a Piper Comanche, near Camden, Tennessee, along with pilot Randy Hughes (Cline's manager).

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter took questions from 42 telephone callers in 26 states on a network radio call-in program moderated by Walter Cronkite.

In 1982, comedian John Belushi was found dead of a drug overdose in a rented bungalow in Hollywood; he was 33.

In 1998, NASA scientists said enough water was frozen in the loose soil of the moon to support a lunar base and perhaps, one day, a human colony.

In 2003, in a blunt warning to the United States and Britain, the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Russia said they would block any attempt to get U.N. approval for war against Iraq.

In 2006, AT&T announced it was buying BellSouth Corp., a big step toward resurrecting the old Ma Bell telephone system.

Ten years ago: Egyptians turned their anger toward ousted President Hosni Mubarak's internal security apparatus, storming the agency's main headquarters and other offices. Alberto Granado, 88, who'd accompanied Ernesto "Che" Guevara on a journey of discovery across Latin America described in "The Motorcycle Diaries," died in Havana.

Five years ago: Bernie Sanders won Democratic caucuses in Kansas and Nebraska, while Hillary Clinton

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prevailed in Louisiana. Republican Ted Cruz won in Maine and Kansas while Donald Trump was victorious in Louisiana and Kentucky. Ray Tomlinson, 74, inventor of person-to-person email, died in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

One year ago: Palestinian officials closed the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem over fears of the coronavirus. Officials ordered a cruise ship with 3,500 people aboard to stay back from the California coast until passengers and crew could be tested; a traveler from its previous voyage died of the coronavirus. Two weeks of wild swings in the stock market continued, with the Dow industrials falling 970 points, or 3.6 percent. The Senate passed and sent to the White House an \$8.3 billion measure to help tackle the virus outbreak. (The only senator to vote against it, Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky, would later become the first senator to test positive for the virus.) Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren ended her Democratic presidential campaign after failing to finish higher than third place in any of the 18 states that had voted so far.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Paul Sand is 89. Actor James B. Sikking is 87. Actor Dean Stockwell is 85. Actor Fred Williamson is 83. Actor Samantha Eggar is 82. Actor Michael Warren is 75. Actor Eddie Hodges is 74. Singer Eddy Grant is 73. Rock musician Alan Clark (Dire Straits) is 69. Actor-comedian Marsha Warfield is 67. Magician Penn Jillette is 66. Actor Adriana Barraza is 65. Actor Talia Balsam is 62. Rock singers Charlie and Craig Reid (The Proclaimers) are 59. Pro Football Hall of Famer Michael Irvin is 55. Actor Paul Blackthorne is 52. Rock musician John Frusciante (froo-SHAN'-tee) is 51. Singer Rome is 51. Actor Kevin Connolly is 47. Actor Eva Mendes is 47. Actor Jill Ritchie is 47. Actor Jolene Blalock is 46. Model Niki Taylor is 46. Actor Kimberly McCullough is 43. Actor Karolina Wydra is 40. Singer-songwriter Amanda Shires is 39. Actor Dominique McElligott is 35. Actor Sterling Knight is 32. Actor Jake Lloyd is 32. Actor Micah Fowler is 23.