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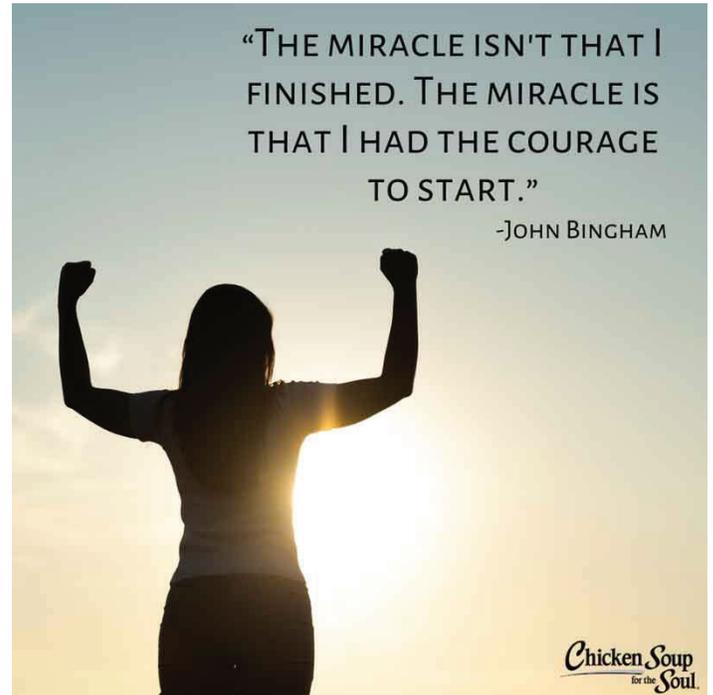
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“THE MIRACLE ISN'T THAT I FINISHED. THE MIRACLE IS THAT I HAD THE COURAGE TO START.”

-JOHN BINGHAM

## Middle School Music Department to host 5th Annual Talent Show

On Thursday March 11th, the Groton MS School Music Department will be hosting our Middle School Talent Show. Theme is “The Stage is Yours.” The event will be held at the Groton High Old Gym at 7:00 pm. The talent show is a fundraiser for the MS Music Students to earn money for their future music trips. The show will consist of talent acts made up of middle school students and popcorn. For people that purchase tickets in advance there will be a drawing for special prizes at the end of the show. The general admission cost is \$5.00. Tickets will not be sold at the door, but a \$5.00 donation will be requested. The 6th Grade Band, JH Band, and JH Choir will also perform. You can get your tickets from any MS Music Student. Come enjoy a fun-filled night of talent and music. Thank you all for your support!



### **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

## Glimpses From Greenfield 2021-Week 8

We are getting down to the final days of session when most of the final touches will be put on the budget. This year, due to funding swaps from state general funds to federal funds because of COVID dollars that supplanted a number of funding priorities, we have millions of one-time dollars available to put toward a number of projects identified by various interested parties. Some of them are below.

SB 156 seeks to secure \$19 million in state funds to go along with \$16 million in locally raised dollars for the SD School of Mines and Technology to build a new Mineral Industry Building. This bill passed the Senate, 34-1.

SB 186 passed with an identical vote total. This bill would allocate \$3 million to the City of Sioux Falls to provide for a new behavioral/mental health stabilization unit. SB 144 would provide \$4.6 million to Pennington county for a similar facility. With an increased focus on mental health concerns, we feel these efforts are necessary. Moreover, in these areas, if there aren't facilities available to deal with crisis situations, they have to seek out available facilities that often result in short-term (up to 5 days) stays in Yankton. It is terribly time consuming and resource-intensive to travel hundreds of miles to stabilize individuals, and then to have to deploy somebody to return to pick up the individual after a handful of days.

SB 99 seeks to provide \$12 million to be coupled with \$8 million in local fundraising efforts to build the Dakota Events Complex (DEX) on the State Fairgrounds to replace the beef barn that burned down and to allow for them to repurpose other facilities for other livestock showcases, most notably the sheep barn. This bill passed, 34-1, as well. I have heard from a number of locals who are very interested in seeing this project through. It will allow for us to really step up our efforts to maintain current offerings, as well as to be more competitive in bringing numerous agricultural showcases, including the Jr. National Finals Rodeo, to SD. Until the fire, there had been an increased focus on utilizing the SD State Fairgrounds for more events throughout the entire year. Should this bill pass, look for us to multiply our efforts many times over.

SB 47 would allocate \$9 million to the Office of School and Public Lands to provide much-needed resources to perform maintenance and repair on dams under their purview. Most notably, the Elm Lake Dam in Northern Brown County is in dire need of immediate attention. It was originally estimated that this project would require \$5 million, but upon further review, it appears the price tag will be upwards of \$7 million. The city of Aberdeen has committed \$1 million to the project, as this dam provides approximately 1/3 of the water to local residents. Of even greater concern is the potential for catastrophic losses of life, livestock, and land if this dam would breach. The bill passed, 35-0.

SB 181 seeks to provide \$1.5 million, to the State Veterans' Cemetery near Sioux Falls. Along with a \$60,000 appropriation in SB 64 for an underground sprinkler system, these improvements would poise our Veterans' Cemetery to be ready to begin laying to rest—in an appropriate setting—those who have served our country and their spouses.

SB 93 would secure \$20 million of state funds to be matched by \$22 million in federal funds and \$42 million in private railroad funds to rehabilitate a very aged rail line from Pierre to Rapid City. Proponents have noted safety concerns along the line, and they have highlighted agricultural and other interests that would be well-served by these improvements.

Other funding concerns that have met with favorable consideration on the Senate side to-date are construction of a regional nursing facility; restoration of air service lost to COVID at airports in Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Aberdeen, Watertown, and Pierre; a bison center on the grounds of the Buffalo Roundup near

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Custer; implementation of a regulatory structure for adult-use and medical marijuana; construction of a National Guard Readiness Center in Sioux Falls; a massive undertaking for providing improved access to broadband services to every SD resident; improving/overhauling a rapidly aging technology infrastructure that is under constant cyber attack to the tune of billions of attacks/year; and several others.

I carried a bill to revise our informed consent law for those women seeking to undergo a chemical abortion. Studies have shown that in cases in which a woman has begun the two-drug protocol, if she decides after taking the first drug that she no longer wishes to continue to process, somewhere between 20-35% of the time, she is able to deliver a 100% healthy child. This bill allows for information to be available on the Department of Health's website concerning next steps if a woman decides to discontinue the process.

HB 1228 seeks to revise the law we passed last year regarding the production of industrial hemp. With the growing season upon us, it is necessary that we ensure our law is up-to-date with USDA guidelines. This bill was brought by agricultural producers to ensure that a commitment made by our SD Department of Agriculture would be pursued this session. As the Senate prime sponsor on this bill, I commend those who worked to educate my fellow legislators and to ensure passage. It flew through the Senate on a 27-6 vote, despite a concerted effort to derail it. Throughout session, we have continued to be in touch with USDA regarding our path forward, and we have received assurance that this bill is consistent with the rules the feds have put in place, and it does not jeopardize the upcoming growing season for SD producers. I reiterate that its aim is to bring us into compliance with the direction provided by the feds.

As I type this, we have look forward to the final four days of the main run. The days will be long, and the debates will be intense, but in the final analysis, we hope to have done our level-best for the people of South Dakota.

God bless you, and thank you for all your feedback throughout session!

Brock

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## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

With the NFL offseason in full swing, it's time to start preparing for free agency. If you read this article last week, you know this offseason will be unlike any other in recent memory. With the salary cap shrinking, teams are having to cut many players just to get under the cap. Many great players who have big contracts will be cut, which means there will be bargains to be found if a team is willing to look hard enough. Let's take a look at the Vikings' roster, specifically the team's pending free agents, to get a better idea of what to expect over the next few months. This week we'll look at the offense, leaving next week for the defense and special teams.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, however, we need to take a moment to recognize Kyle Rudolph, who was recently cut by the Vikings. Rudolph was the longest-tenured Vikings still on the roster, but at 31-years old, the tight end was simply too expensive to keep on the roster. After a decade in purple and gold, the former Notre Dame star will be looking for a new team. Rudolph was a fixture in the Minneapolis area, as the work he and his wife did for the community was second to none. The Vikings saved \$5 million by releasing him.

The Vikings have eight offensive players from last year's roster that are pending free agents. Ameer Abdullah (RB), Chad Beebe (WR), Mike Boone (RB), Dakota Dozier (OL), Rashod Hill (OL), Kyle Hinton (OL), Brett Jones (OL), and Sean Mannion (QB).

While none of the names listed above are key pieces, the Vikings are still over the salary cap and will need to replace those players somehow. There is a good chance some of them will be back, if for no other reason than they are familiar with the Vikings' system and would be cheap backups. However, if the Vikings are looking to improve upon last year's 7-9 record, the team will have to upgrade some of those positions while also spending very little money. Should be easy, right?

With the top two running back spots filled, the Vikings can replace Abdullah and Boone in the draft. The Vikings also have three quarterbacks still on the roster (Cousins, Nate Stanley, Jake Browning), so it's likely the team has an in-house competition for the backup spot. The biggest cause for concern is going to be along the offensive line. Four players are pending free agents, and two of them have been contributors over the past couple of seasons (Hill, Dozier).

While the Vikings would love to be in a position to bring in one of the top offensive linemen, like Brandon Scherff, Joe Thuney, or Trent Williams, the reality is that the team will need to find solid players for cheap. There are a few older players who might still have a year left in them, like Alex Mack, Richie Incognito, or Jason Peters. The team could also try and sift through the bargain bin and try to find a diamond in the rough (players like Cameron Erving, Joe Haeg, and Forrest Lamp come to mind). At the end of the day, it's going to be hard for the Vikings, and many teams across the league, to be competitive this season because of the salary cap. Luckily, the Vikings have one of the best salary cap gurus in the league in Rob Brezinski. Let's just hope they're able to pull off a couple of miracles.

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## Lana's Annals- a report from the House of Representatives

Hello again. I would be first to say that smiles are fading quickly at the Capitol as proposed bills and projects are being torpedoed one by one. One can always tell when the session is winding down as the hours in committees and on the floor increase with our time constraints.

Local Government had a lot of bills on the agenda with nothing too controversial. SB138, which gave 2 more months flexibility to municipalities to budget set, passed unanimously. SB145, an act for filling vacancies of candidates for elected offices was also discussed and passed. If a candidate withdraws or dies after the primary, the state committee chairman can certify a person to be in charge of a meeting to insert a new candidate for the ballot. In multi-counties, a chair will be appointed and each county will have the voting power given to those based by unit representation on each county's number of votes cast for Governor at the last general election.

On the House floor SB178, an act to prevent insurance companies from using genetic information of family members, passed overwhelmingly. Some families are contacted to be a part of genetic study based on hereditary diseases or illnesses. This bill would prevent the information from being used against family members in being possibly denied life or health insurance, long term care, annuities, etc. based upon genetic findings of an earlier generation. I am happy the bill passed resoundingly.

SB134 limited the requirements of green building standards. As I understand it, a project (especially a large one) is rated by points. Those points are attained by the types of windows, air conditioning and hvac, insulation, etc. used for the building. The idea is to create more efficiency; however, some of the items used in approval come with astronomical costs. While we want buildings to be efficient, we are tasked to make sure that tax dollars are not being wasted on project materials not needed or not even helping with efficiency. Testimony pointed out that one project completed was 29 per cent less efficient than a similar building that was not even considered a green project. The bill passed.

On the floor we had a huge discussion on SB177, an act to revise provisions of parental choice regarding public school attendance and ancillary matters. The bill requires the filing of reports with the local school district of intention to home school children. It also warns parents then about truancy should they decide not to fulfill educating their children. The children, if home schooled, must take a minimum requirement of two subjects, math and language arts. These 2 must be taught to mastery. Home school teachers many times teach more classes than the aforementioned, but the instructors do not have to be high school graduates or holders of a GED. The students according to this bill do not have to take state assessment tests. If a student wants to enroll in public school activities such as music, debate, or sports, they need to have their home teacher relay to the school that the student is eligible for those activities and if so, will be allowed in. The pandemic has been a challenge. In some areas students have left the system and are not doing any homework. That said, we do have an obligation to all students, and while many, many of the home schoolers do a fine job, I must consider the 13 year old (as told to me by his grandmother) who is "home schooled." Grandma stated his day is spent playing video games and very little schoolwork. He stays up until 3a.m so is sleeping when his parents both leave for their full time jobs and leave him to set his daily itinerary. This story is not an isolated situation. This bill, if misused, could make it easier for students who struggle with classes but want to play sports to just stay home during the day and show up for practice. We tried to put forth some amendments to get funding of 1/8 FTE to incentivize schools who have home school students who want to participate in extra curriculums. The next amendment said the state would pay for assessment tests of the home schoolers' choosing. The third amendment was that the home school teacher has to have a diploma or equivalent. All of those amendments failed. One proponent mentioned that all pay taxes so this bill was fair. Well, we have students in my district who chose to go to a nearby town to Christian School so they pay both taxes in our district while paying tuition to another entity. They did so because they chose that pathway of education. All in all, it was an interesting discussion. The bill did pass.

We will continue our budget discussions this week. Some of the "wish lists" have already been omitted. It is safe to say the the 50 million dollars in college scholarships, the Elm Lake Dam and Big Sioux

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Projects, the Biofuel research building at Brookings, SDSMT minerology building are alive just to name a few. The DEX building at Huron has found favor, but many have expressed apprehension about its size. A West River Mental Health Stabilization Unit is seeing daylight. Some think we should argue over helping to fund a sewer project for Box Elder. even though they made need help as they create housing plans to get ready for the B-21 Bomber. Then there are the health care workers to remember. One thing for certain: we argue way more when we have money than when we do not!! Go figure.

Until next week, may health and happiness be yours!  
Lana Greenfield



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**#377 in a series**

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

We've been pretty steady for three weeks; I would like to resume a steeper decline. We did spend the week below 70,000 daily new cases every day with four days below 60,000, so that's progress. We are now at 29,033,600 cases in the US, 0.1% more than yesterday. There were just 40,200 new case reports today; we haven't been below 40,000 new cases since October 9, a lifetime ago—could happen maybe this week, or maybe this is just Sunday reporting and we have a ways to go. I have been seeing a less dramatic weekend effect since we came off our last peak, so this could be close to real. Time will tell. Even with the better news we're seeing, we still managed to hit 29 million cases today, as expected. Here's the history, offered in the sincere hope that I never have to report this again.

April 28 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days  
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days  
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days  
December 3 – 14 million – 6 days  
December 7 – 15 million – 4 days  
December 12 – 16 million – 5 days  
December 17 – 17 million – 5 days  
December 21 – 18 million – 4 days  
December 26 – 19 million – 5 days  
December 31 – 20 million – 5 days  
January 5 – 21 million – 5 days  
January 9 – 22 million – 4 days  
January 13 – 23 million – 4 days  
January 18 – 24 million – 5 days  
January 23 – 25 million – 5 days  
January 30 – 26 million – 7 days  
February 7 – 27 million – 8 days  
February 19 – 28 million – 12 days  
March 7 – 29 million – 16 days

Hospitalizations have been declining for over eight weeks and are now below half our peak from January 7. We have 41,401 people hospitalized with this virus today, nearly 7500 fewer than last Sunday.

We're down from 12 to eight states and territories in the red zone—and one of those doesn't really belong there (data anomaly effect), up to 41 in orange (from 36 last week), and have seven in yellow (same as last week): These are larger shifts. One-week increase in total cases was 472,500 last week and is down to 413,300 this week, resuming its downward trend after an uptick last week. Two-week increase was 937,600 last week and is down to 885,800 this week. I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 59,042.9; this is an increase of just 1.4 percent this week.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and the highest two-week rate of increase in any of them is 10.97%. As with last week, this is in Vermont where case numbers are still very

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low. Only four other states and territories are above five percent. Highest per capita rates of increase are in New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Florida; all but one of these were among the leaders a week ago.

There were 672 deaths reported today, a 0.1% increase to 524,639. Average daily deaths haven't been this low since November 29, right before the holiday surge hit. We're at 1687.1 this week. This is the sixteenth consecutive week since spring we've reported over 10,000 deaths; if this drops as much again in the upcoming week, we'll break that streak. States with the most per capita deaths over the past week are Virginia, Arizona, Georgia, Texas, California, and Alabama.

On March 7, 2020, one year ago today, the US had reported 437 cases, 49 from repatriated citizens and another 21 from the Grand Princess cruise ship, still lying off California. We were still talking about screening passengers on cruises; we hadn't come yet to the realization that cruises just weren't going to be able to happen for a good long while. 400 cases of domestically-acquired Covid-19 had occurred in 30 states. Earlier, I'd had difficulty sorting out whether the District of Columbia had a case; on this day, all doubt was removed with a confirmed case announced. That nursing home in King County, Washington, reported that 70 of its 180 employees were having symptoms and 54 of 120 residents had been transferred to hospitals at this point. We were finally ramped up to 72 state and local public health labs running tests, but still the number of tests run was woefully inadequate. Two states, West Virginia and Maine, were not testing at all yet. I think of the testing boondoggle as our single greatest failure in the early days—and for much of the pandemic to date, truth be told.

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) was held on schedule, and someone in attendance was diagnosed with Covid-19 after the fact, creating great consternation about potential exposure of Republican government leaders. Likewise, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) also went ahead and met, and there was a diagnosis arising from that as well, causing another scramble to figure out who'd been exposed. We hadn't really gotten it yet. The federal courts had modified their operations. Amtrak had altered its schedule. The University of Southern California moved classes online for a week; the purpose was to "test our readiness should we need to take stronger action for health & safety"—as it turns out, an excellent choice. Stanford University cancelled in-person classes for the remaining two weeks of the winter quarter.

Worldwide, we'd now seen over 101,000 cases. Countries with the largest case numbers included China with almost 81,000 cases and almost 3500 deaths, South Korea with almost 7000 cases and over 40 deaths, Iran with nearly 5000 cases and over 100 deaths, Italy with almost 6000 cases and over 200 deaths, and Japan with over 1000 cases and 12 deaths—but we should note 706 of those cases were from the Diamond Princess, the cruise ship that fetched up on Japanese shores. Italy was considering a drastic complete lockdown for most of the northern part of the country to tamp down transmissions using police, firefighters, and military to enforce the lockdown. Our neighbor to the north had just 59 cases. This was becoming more real every day.

Vaccinations are continuing apace. States are getting more efficient as their supply has stabilized and some predictability has been achieved, also as they gain experience at distribution and administration in the largest mass vaccination campaign ever undertaken in the United States. Targeting additional supplies directly to pharmacies was smart; after all, pharmacies around the country have been managing large vaccination efforts annually with flu vaccine for years. The FEMA-led and military-staffed mass vaccination sites are moving vaccine out of vials and into arms with unprecedented speed, and the military reports that they are getting smarter and more efficient with every passing day as they learn what works and what doesn't. This degree of coordination and all-out effort is beginning to pay dividends. By the end of the month, we could have at least one dose in a quarter of our population; that's enough to start impacting transmission rates and also enough to give some assurance to the hesitant as they see their friends and neighbors vaccinated without ill consequences. We're not where we need to be, but we're on our way—and now we can see it from here. I'm not kidding myself about the road ahead, but tonight I feel as though some optimism is in order.

With that, if you'll indulge me in a personal note, just in the last couple of weeks, it seems that all around

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me people I care about are reporting their vaccination appointments—or their first (and second) doses. My at-risk family members, my friends, my former colleagues. Every day brings the news that someone else is going to be covered soon. I feel sort of like every day is Christmas, and I also sort of feel like I won't need Christmas gifts any more if I just come out of this mess with the same number of friends and family as I went into it with. And that's now starting to look like a possibility. Don't get me wrong: I remain concerned about the near future, I have worries about the too-high case rate in the population, and I mourn the lost. I also know this isn't over; but I am also starting to imagine a future without this scourge hanging over our every move. Hang in there, everyone: There's a light at the end of the tunnel, and I don't think it's an oncoming train. It remains likely we'll have one more bout of awfulness before we emerge, and it remains critical we keep doing the right things. I just want to temper that warning with the prospect of better days coming.

Some colleges and universities are being proactive and canceling spring breaks—good move because this is a really, really terrible time for spring break. Last thing we need is college kids streaming to Florida, where the B.1.1.7 variant is highest in the country and increasing exponentially, to drink and make unwise life choices, all without masks or social distancing, then return to home states across the map, taking a little surprise gift with them. We can also consider potential crowds of kids in south Texas, a popular spring break spot, where they just eliminated their mask mandate. That's another situation ripe for trouble. Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine told CNN, "It's the perfect storm." We can draw a direct line from a series of superspreader events for this highly-transmissible variant to a spike in deaths a few weeks from now. No one wants that.

And Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC had a message for everyone, not just college kids: "Don't travel. We really, really would advocate for not traveling right now." I've been telling you as much. These next few weeks are so very important, so if you ever considered staying home a while longer, today's the day to make that happen. We don't need to give these variants any opportunity to hitchhike; they're moving fast enough.

In the US, we've been behind the variants all along, sequencing far too few of the specimens we are collecting; but things are improving on that front. We've gone from sequencing a paltry 0.5 percent of cases throughout the entire pandemic to sequencing six percent of new cases in the last two weeks; this is the result of a massive investment in our genomic surveillance program. There appears to be general agreement five percent is the minimum to be able to track the spread of variants, so we've accomplished a lot since late January.

What we're seeing is that B.1.1.7 now accounts for more than 20 percent of new cases, so case numbers with the variant are growing, doubling every 10 days or so. And now we're poised between further reductions in new cases and deaths and a surge in both—could go either way at this point. In a White House briefing Friday, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical adviser for Covid-19, said, "When you have that much of viral activity in a plateau, it almost invariably means that you are at risk for another spike." Yet so far we haven't seen that spike. There's a chance the increasing number of vaccine doses going out and the mitigation efforts, whether mandated and official or individual and unofficial, might be balancing that growth in this variant. An additional factor we have on our side might be the unusually mild winter weather over the past couple of weeks in much of the country—and approaching spring. Better weather means more outdoor activity; and we're all clear by now that outdoors is better than indoors.

Commenting on the plateauing in Florida where B.1.1.7 is most prevalent, Caitlin Rivers, epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University, told the New York Times, "The longer we can hold the line, the more time we have to roll out vaccines, which will protect individuals, particularly those at highest risk of severe illness, and slow transmission over all." We can hope. Please keep doing your bit: We're so close.

One beloved pandemic tradition came to an end last week. When schools in the UK began closing last March, a guy in England, Joe Wicks, who bills himself as The Body Coach, decided to help kids replace one part of their school day at home; and so he started an exercise class for children called "PE With Joe." For a half-hour every weekday, Wicks produced a YouTube fitness class. It was an unexpected hit

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because turns out the parents liked PE With Joe too. He's had more than 100 million views, which averages at close to a million per episode.

I watched a class; on this particular day, Wicks sent Spiderman to run the class because "Joe couldn't make it today." And then he proceeded to run an entertaining, demanding, high-energy 30 minutes of Spidey lunges, Spidey crouches, and other Spidey moves, all in costume. He was jumping and moving and encouraging and telling stories pretty much the entire half-hour. Back when he was just getting started, interviewed on NPR, he said, "The workouts are very simple. You can do them in a very small area. And I've got really funny moves. . . . And all these little things are really making people laugh, and it's really helping people." He wanted kids to have fun and run off some energy, also to have a way to let off stress and anxiety, all while keeping fit. By all accounts, it worked: He was massively popular.

Friday for the 115th and final class, Wicks dressed up as a duck. His wife and younger child made cameos as bunnies, and his older child, a toddler dressed as a baby duck, led the class in "Fluffy Birds," pushups, and "Star Jumps." Apparently somewhere along the way, he started raising money for the National Health Service because he announced they'd raised a grand total of 615,000 pounds in that effort. And he thanked everyone for their support before leading one last crazy, energetic workout class.

But it's over now. London schools go back to in-person classes tomorrow, so he thought it was a good time to wind things up. He told NPR on Friday, "My mission is going to continue, but I'm so tired. I've never worked this hard in my life. I've done so many workouts." I would say he's earned a break.

Be well. 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	874	15	Minimal	4.2%
Beadle	2789	2638	5894	39	Substantial	24.4%
Bennett	382	370	1178	9	Minimal	2.6%
Bon Homme	1508	1478	2077	25	Minimal	9.3%
Brookings	3621	3520	12004	37	Moderate	1.8%
Brown	5175	5008	12725	89	Moderate	10.3%
Brule	695	679	1880	9	Minimal	9.7%
Buffalo	420	406	898	13	None	0.0%
Butte	986	949	3223	20	Moderate	6.5%
Campbell	131	125	258	4	None	0.0%
Charles Mix	1309	1229	3927	21	Substantial	8.2%
Clark	375	360	953	5	Moderate	23.1%
Clay	1810	1768	5349	15	Moderate	8.2%
Codington	4029	3858	9696	77	Substantial	21.5%
Corson	472	454	998	12	Minimal	9.7%
Custer	763	737	2724	12	Moderate	9.5%
Davison	2971	2876	6563	63	Moderate	7.0%
Day	673	628	1778	28	Substantial	5.9%
Deuel	476	461	1138	8	Minimal	0.0%
Dewey	1423	1383	3820	26	Substantial	7.6%
Douglas	434	417	912	9	Moderate	16.7%
Edmunds	486	464	1055	12	Minimal	4.0%
Fall River	546	507	2627	15	Moderate	9.2%
Faulk	362	346	696	13	Moderate	0.0%
Grant	980	920	2238	38	Substantial	13.4%
Gregory	547	501	1285	30	Moderate	8.3%
Haakon	256	240	537	10	Minimal	0.0%
Hamlin	722	662	1778	38	Substantial	26.4%
Hand	343	327	820	6	Moderate	11.1%
Hanson	367	353	719	4	Moderate	28.0%
Harding	92	90	183	1	None	0.0%
Hughes	2321	2240	6597	36	Substantial	6.0%
Hutchinson	790	752	2383	26	Moderate	7.5%

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Hyde	139	137	408	1	Minimal	0.0%
Jackson	280	263	918	14	Minimal	0.0%
Jerauld	275	251	556	16	Minimal	10.0%
Jones	85	85	222	0	Minimal	12.5%
Kingsbury	647	619	1678	14	Moderate	3.9%
Lake	1219	1155	3334	18	Substantial	7.6%
Lawrence	2834	2763	8542	45	Moderate	5.9%
Lincoln	7856	7603	20278	77	Substantial	10.1%
Lyman	603	586	1877	10	Minimal	2.8%
Marshall	337	306	1196	5	Substantial	15.4%
McCook	750	712	1620	24	Moderate	4.0%
McPherson	241	231	555	4	Minimal	12.5%
Meade	2618	2529	7719	31	Substantial	11.4%
Mellette	257	245	733	2	Minimal	33.3%
Miner	274	254	578	9	Minimal	7.1%
Minnehaha	28333	27476	78351	334	Substantial	7.6%
Moody	620	591	1752	17	Moderate	5.9%
Oglala Lakota	2065	1995	6640	49	Moderate	7.2%
Pennington	12994	12606	39459	189	Substantial	10.9%
Perkins	348	330	820	14	Minimal	8.0%
Potter	377	363	837	4	Moderate	14.3%
Roberts	1224	1139	4142	36	Substantial	15.7%
Sanborn	335	324	693	3	Minimal	0.0%
Spink	803	767	2135	25	Minimal	3.0%
Stanley	335	326	936	2	Moderate	0.0%
Sully	137	133	313	3	Minimal	0.0%
Todd	1219	1188	4148	29	Minimal	8.0%
Tripp	713	672	1485	16	Substantial	21.2%
Turner	1074	1006	2725	53	Moderate	7.1%
Union	2006	1926	6274	39	Substantial	6.7%
Walworth	729	698	1825	15	Moderate	7.0%
Yankton	2818	2748	9344	28	Moderate	6.1%
Ziebach	336	326	863	9	Minimal	7.1%
Unassigned	0	0	1797	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	4598	0
10-19 years	12853	0
20-29 years	20127	7
30-39 years	18674	18
40-49 years	16226	36
50-59 years	16027	113
60-69 years	13018	251
70-79 years	6937	434
80+ years	5129	1041

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths Among Cases
Female	59132	896
Male	54457	1004

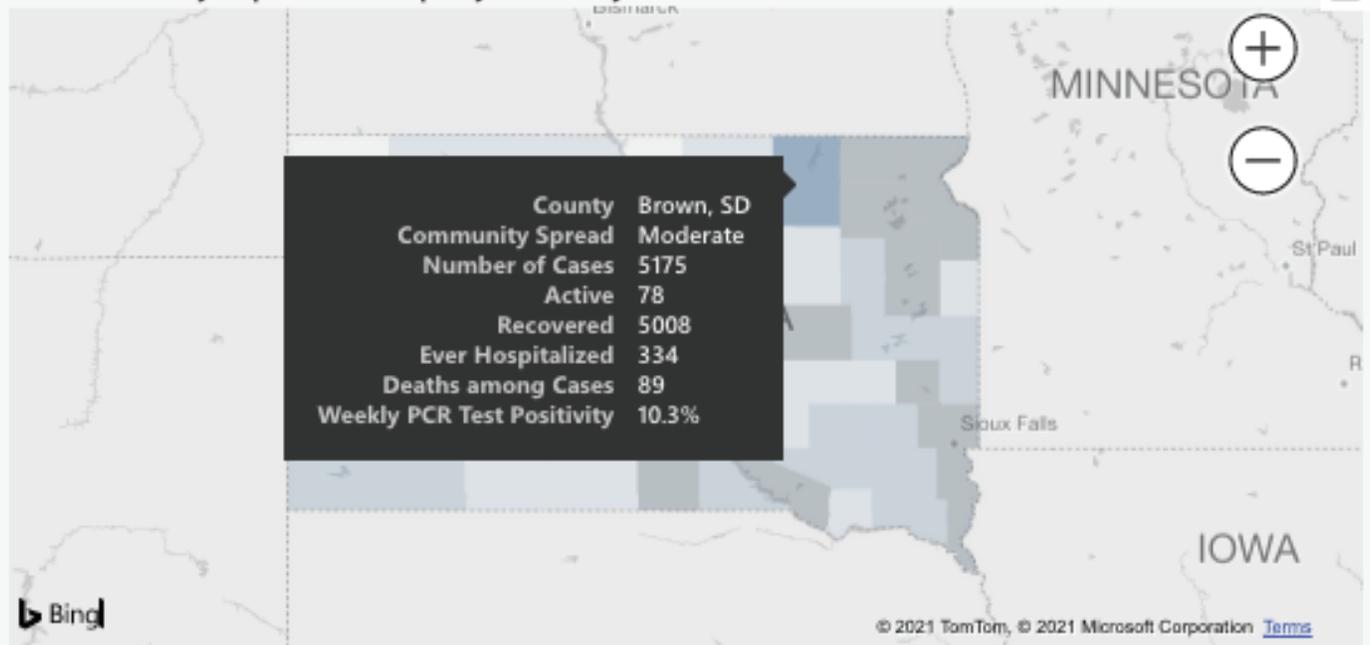
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## Brown County

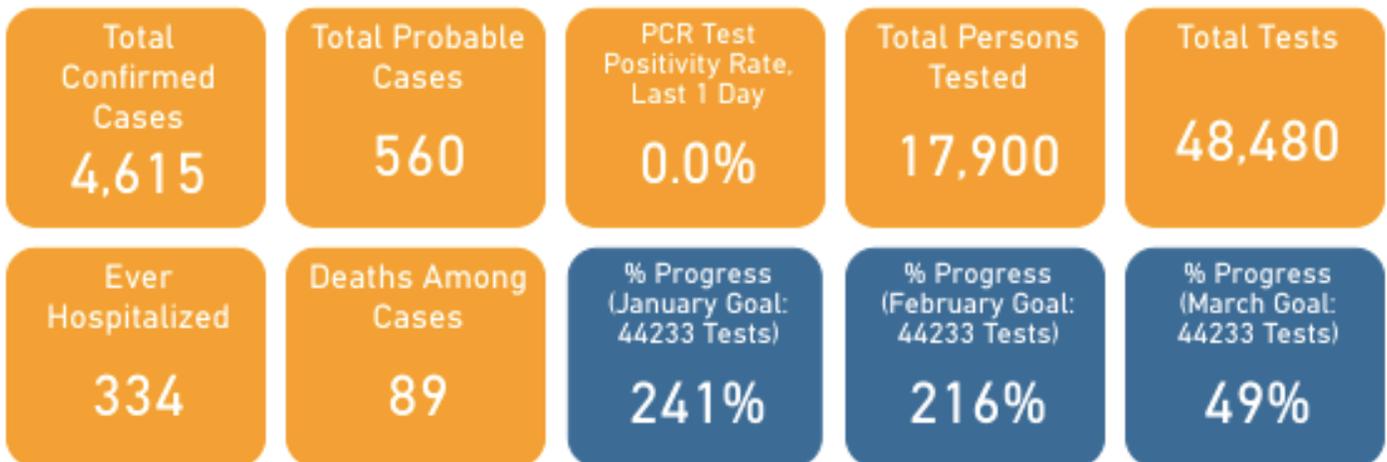


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread: None (white), Minimal (light blue), Moderate (medium blue), Substantial (dark blue)

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



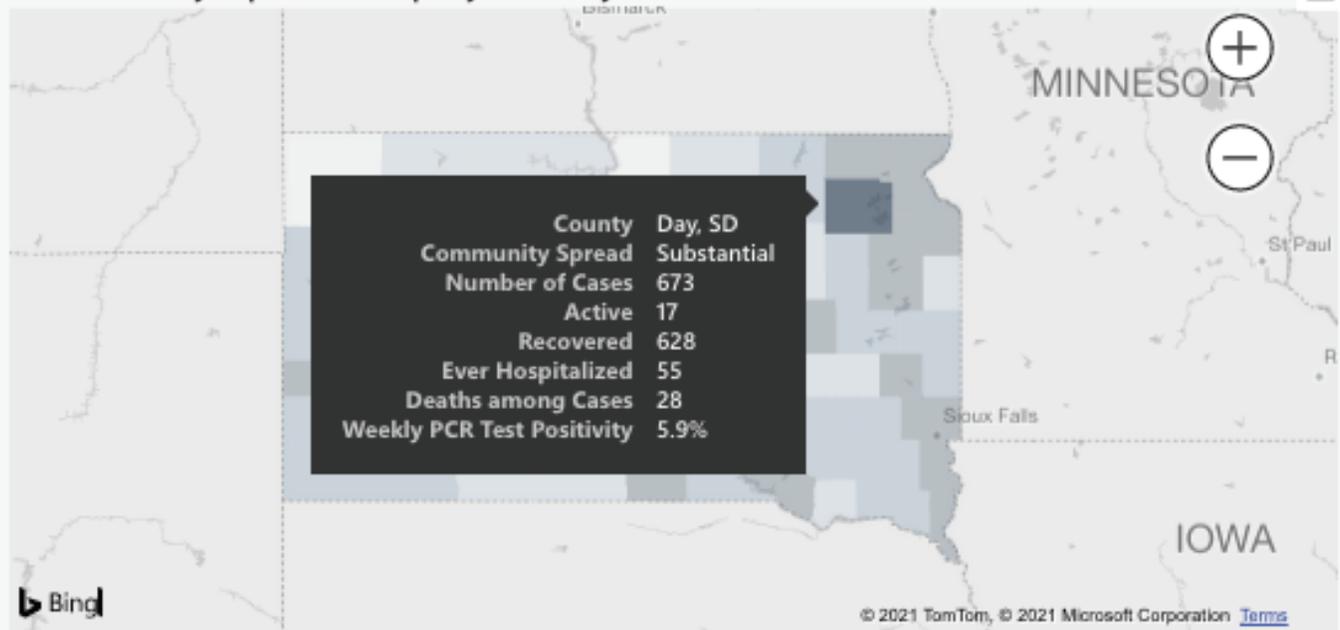
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## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● None ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



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## Vaccinations

Total Doses Administered

260,321

State Allocation

Total Persons Administered a Vaccine

168,737

State Allocation

Percent of State Population with at least 1 Dose

32%

State & Federal Allocation

Manufacturer	# of Doses
Janssen	402
Moderna	129,266
Pfizer	130,653

Doses	# of Recipients
Pfizer - Series Complete	47,673
Moderna - Series Complete	43,910
Moderna - 1 dose	41,446
Pfizer - 1 dose	35,307

Doses	% of Pop.
1 dose	31.93%
Series Complete	20.74%

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

County	# Doses	# Persons (1 dose)	# Persons (2 doses)	Total # Persons
Aurora	694	244	225	469
Beadle	5272	1,832	1,720	3,552
Bennett*	436	122	157	279
Bon Homme*	2738	1,132	803	1,935
Brookings	7492	2,692	2,400	5,092
Brown	12304	2,794	4,755	7,549
Brule*	1564	512	526	1,038
Buffalo*	122	78	22	100
Butte	1794	756	519	1,275
Campbell	874	292	291	583
Charles Mix*	2498	1,070	714	1,784
Clark	984	334	325	659
Clay	4028	1,506	1,261	2,767
Codington*	8128	2,806	2,661	5,467
Corson*	246	98	74	172
Custer*	2319	887	716	1,603
Davison	6357	1,825	2,266	4,091
Day*	2120	770	675	1,445
Deuel	1214	426	394	820
Dewey*	332	72	130	202
Douglas*	973	313	330	643
Edmunds	1086	350	368	718
Fall River*	2205	731	737	1,468
Faulk	814	268	273	541
Grant*	2368	1,178	595	1,773
Gregory*	1436	608	414	1,022
Haakon*	477	159	159	318

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Hamlin	1421	481	470	951
Hand	1056	376	340	716
Hanson	396	150	123	273
Harding	83	39	22	61
Hughes*	6522	1,736	2,393	4,129
Hutchinson*	2693	913	890	1,803
Hyde*	447	147	150	297
Jackson*	343	107	118	225
Jerauld	655	307	174	481
Jones*	553	163	195	358
Kingsbury	1906	842	532	1,374
Lake	3179	1,087	1,046	2,133
Lawrence	6748	2,639	2,054	4,693
Lincoln	21972	4,936	8,518	13,454
Lyman*	647	235	206	441
Marshall*	1352	448	452	900
McCook	1782	550	616	1,166
McPherson	208	64	72	136
Meade*	5132	1,716	1,708	3,424
Mellette*	37	17	10	27
Miner	711	235	238	473
Minnehaha*	67835	17,093	25,371	42,464
Moody*	1403	597	403	1,000
Oglala Lakota*	152	56	48	104
Pennington*	30610	8,546	11,032	19,578
Perkins*	555	275	140	415
Potter	683	309	187	496
Roberts*	3623	1,345	1,139	2,484
Sanborn	834	258	288	546
Spink	2441	869	786	1,655
Stanley*	998	268	365	633
Sully	309	73	118	191
Todd*	144	48	48	96
Tripp*	1726	556	585	1,141
Turner	2946	862	1,042	1,904
Union	2171	1,077	547	1,624
Walworth*	1535	459	538	997
Yankton	8354	1,984	3,185	5,169
Ziebach*	52	16	18	34
Other	5232	1,420	1,906	3,326

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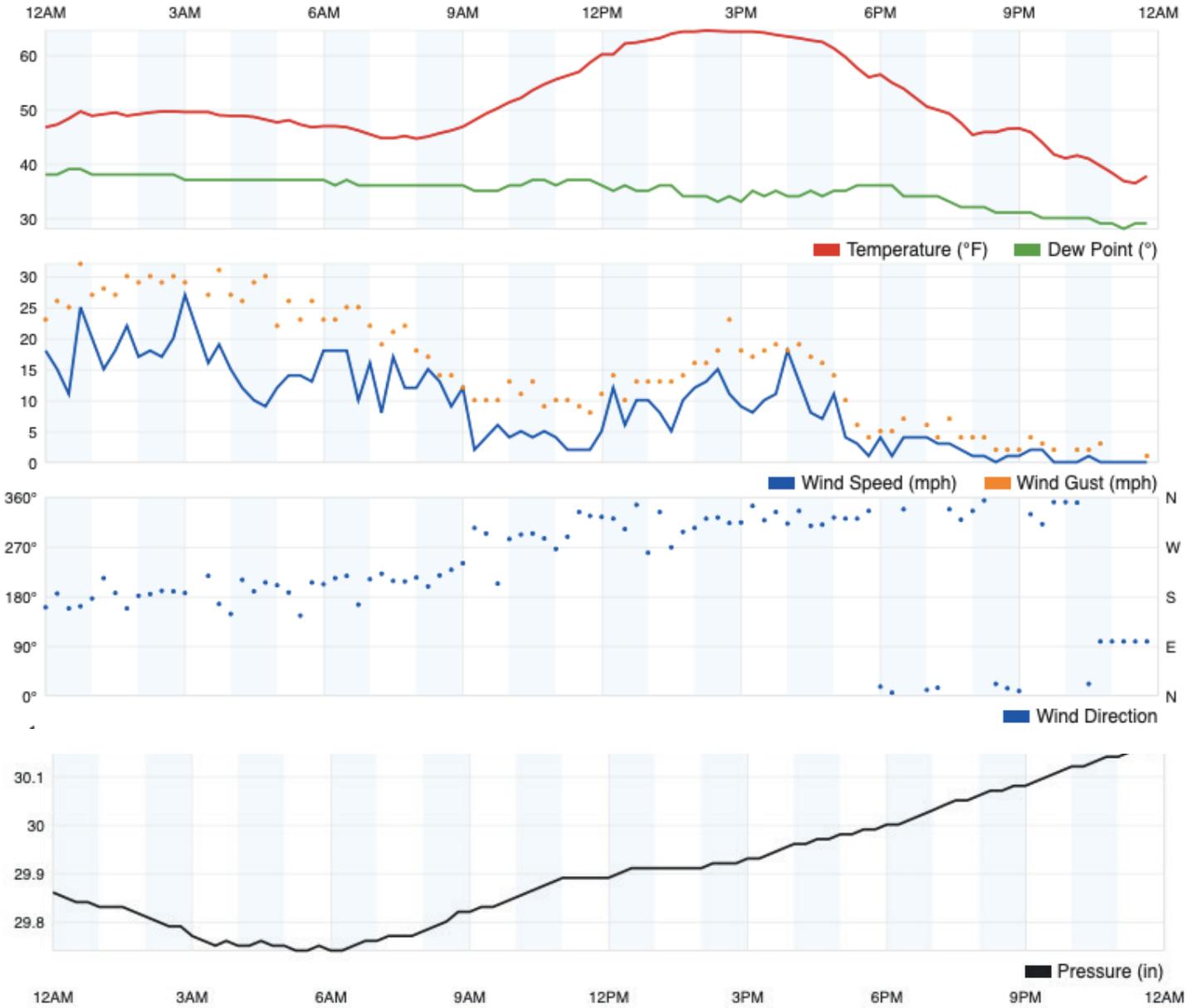


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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday
				
Mostly Sunny	Decreasing Clouds	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow then Rain/Snow Likely
High: 63 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 36 °F

## Elevated Fire Danger Today & Tue

High temps will be 15 to 30+ degrees above normal

Southeast winds today shift on Tuesday to the southwest and then northwest through the day.

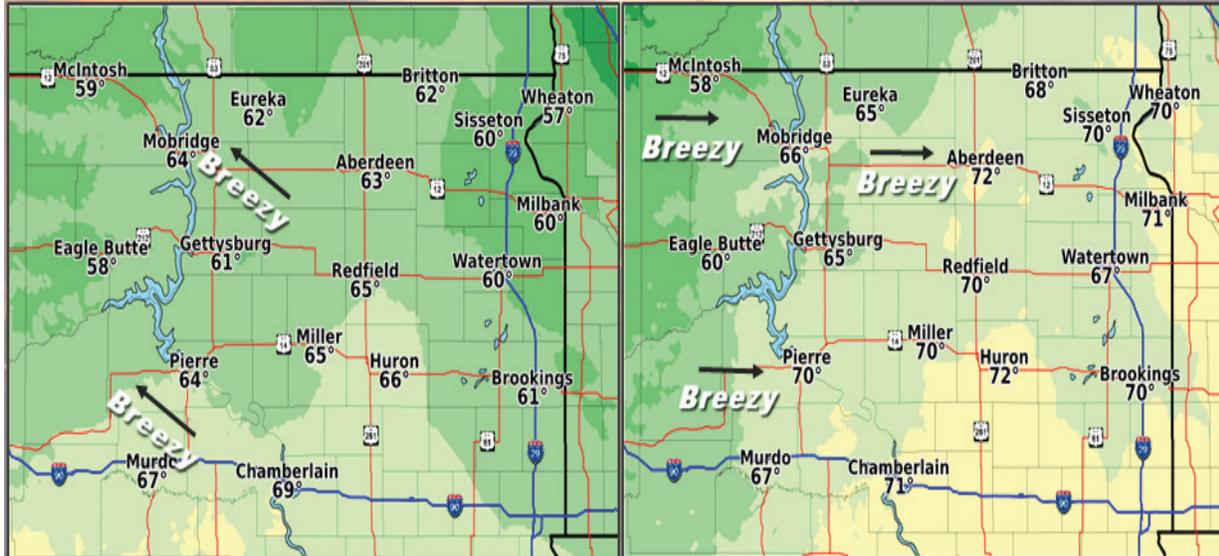
*Dry air & fuels and gusty winds will result in high to very high fire danger across the area. Please exercise caution!*



### Today's High Temperatures



### Tuesday's High Temperatures



NWS Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 3/8/2021 5:36 AM CST

Much above average to record-territory high temperatures are expected today and Tuesday, as well as breezy winds especially across central South Dakota. Be mindful that these conditions are favorable for the development and spreading of fires.

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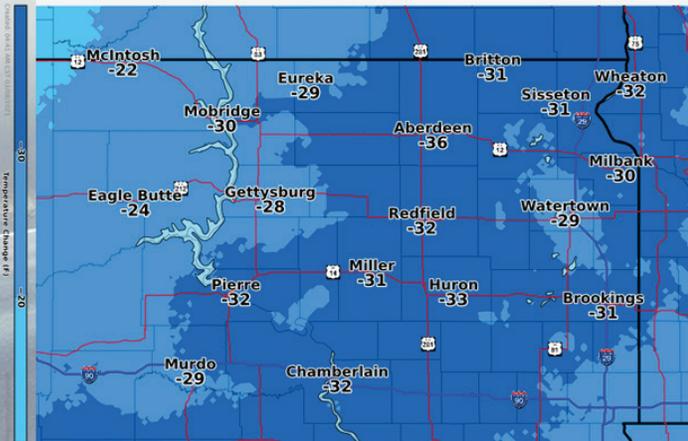
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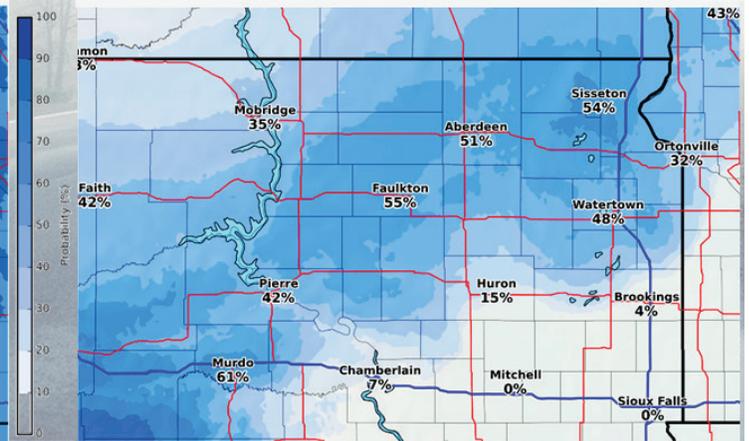
## Changes Coming Wednesday

- Precipitation is becoming increasingly likely Tuesday night through Wednesday.
- Much cooler temps will lead to a mix of rain and snow.
- Snow accumulations of a trace to a slushy inch or so are most likely, but there's potential for more if snow fails to transition to rain during the afternoon. Stay tuned for updates.

### High Temperature Change from Tue to Wed



### Potential for 1"+ of Snow Tue Night - Wed



Visit [www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr) for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 3/8/2021 5:39 AM CT



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Much cooler high temperatures, back to average for this time of year, are expected Wednesday. Precipitation is becoming increasingly likely Tuesday night through Wednesday as well, with potential snow accumulations. Stay tuned for updates.

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## Today in Weather History

March 8, 2000: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, combined with 3 to 7 inches of snow, caused widespread blizzard conditions across north-central South Dakota. Many schools were closed early in the day. Travel was also significantly disrupted. Telephone service went down for several hours between Mobridge and Selby. Some heavy snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte, Selby, and Hoven, and 7 inches southwest of Keldron.

March 8, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought warm moist air overtop low-level cold air, which resulted in the widespread freezing rain across much of northeast South Dakota during the evening and into the early morning hours of the 8th and 9th. For much of the area, the precipitation changed over to all rain before ending as temperatures rose to above freezing. Ice accumulations ranged from a tenth of an inch to a half of an inch. Some ice accumulation reports include; 0.25 inches at Garden City, Hayti, Waubay, Clear Lake, Sisseton, and Summit, and 0.50 inches near Florence and Clark. Travel became hazardous, with no significant accidents reported. Also, no problems with power outages or tree damage were reported.

1717 - On Fishers Island in Long Island Sound, 1200 sheep were discovered to have been buried under a snow drift for four weeks. When finally uncovered, one hundred sheep were still alive. (The Weather Channel)

1909 - The town of Brinkley AR was struck by a tornado which killed 49 persons and caused 600,000 dollars damage. The tornado, which was two-thirds of a mile in width, destroyed 860 buildings. Entire families were killed as houses were completely swept away by the tornado. Tornadoes killed 64 persons and injured 671 others in Dallas and Monroe counties during the Arkansas tornado outbreak. (David Ludlum)

1972: A wind gust of 207 mph was recorded at the Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. Winds were sustained at over 146 mph for three hours during the storm.

1984 - A freak thunder snowstorm produced high winds, vivid lightning, and up to seven inches of snow in the northern suburbs of Washington D.C. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thirty-two cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Madison WI with a reading of 71 degrees. Afternoon highs of 68 degrees at Houghton Lake MI and 72 degrees at Flint MI smashed their previous records for the date by fourteen degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A cold front brought wintry weather to the north central U.S. Snowfall totals in northwestern Minnesota ranged up to eight inches at Roseau and Hallock. Winds in South Dakota gusted to 61 mph at Brookings. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - While arctic cold gripped the northeastern U.S., unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the southwestern states. Albany NY reported a record low of 2 degrees below zero. Tucson AZ reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Late afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather in east central Iowa and west central Illinois. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado south of Augusta IL which traveled 42 miles to Marbleton. Golf ball size hail was reported at Peoria IL and near Vermont IL. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2004 - The California coast warms up. San Francisco broke a 112-year record by reaching 82 degrees. Los Angeles soared to 93 degrees.

2005 - A line of strong to severe thunderstorms affected the eastern portions of North and South Carolina, with wind damage and a few tornadoes reported. Winds gusted over 70 MPH with some of the stronger storms.

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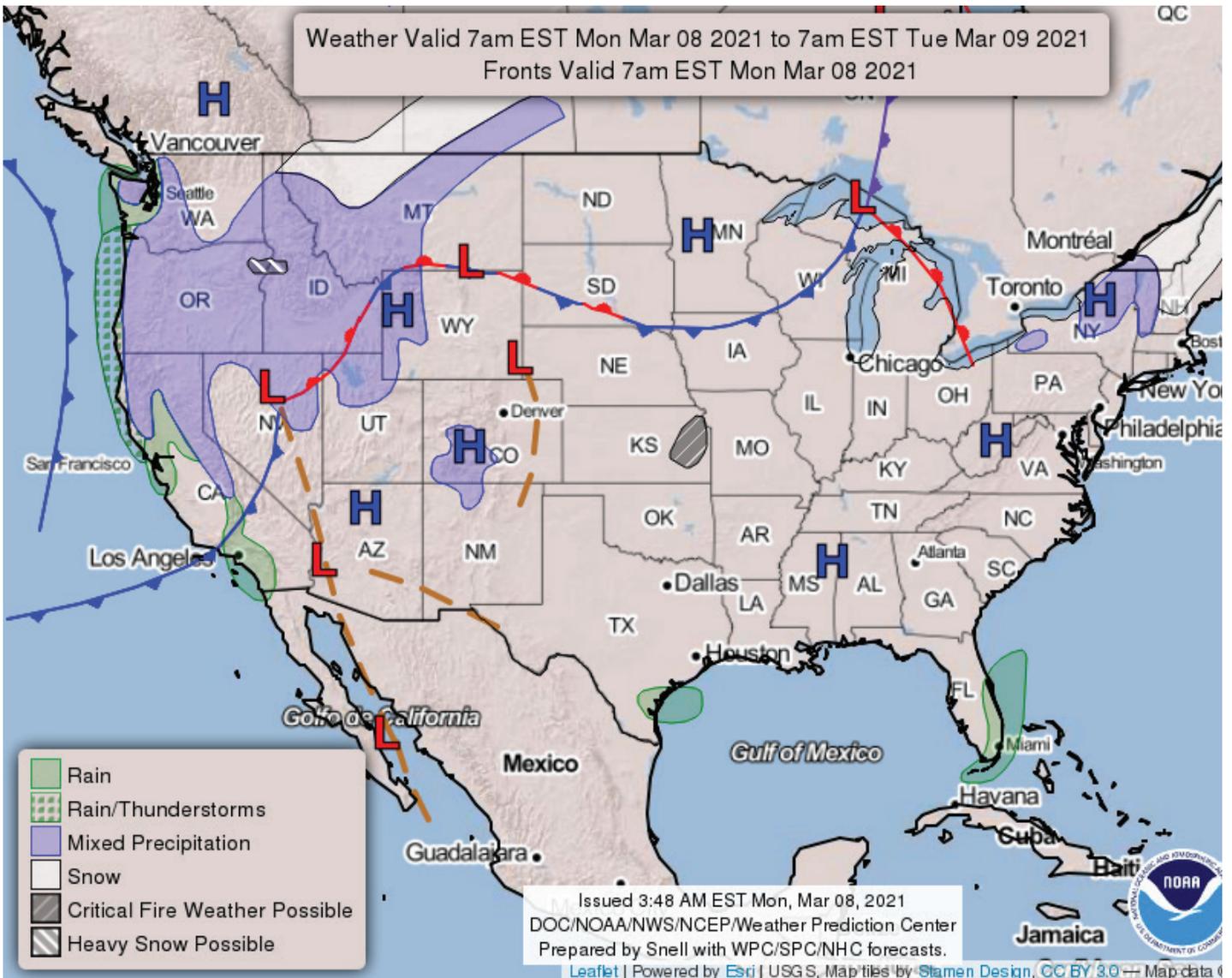
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 65 °F at 2:22 PM**  
**Low Temp: 36 °F at 11:25 PM**  
**Wind: 32 mph at 12:45 AM**  
**Precip:**

## Today's Info

**Record High:** 58° in 1911, 1927  
**Record Low:** -32° in 1995  
**Average High:** 36°F  
**Average Low:** 17°F  
**Average Precip in Mar.:** 0.20  
**Precip to date in Mar.:** 0.00  
**Average Precip to date:** 1.22  
**Precip Year to Date:** 0.18  
**Sunset Tonight:** 6:31 p.m.  
**Sunrise Tomorrow:** 6:57 a.m.



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## FAITH, FEAR AND FACTS

Walking in "paths of righteousness" does not protect us from the "valleys" of life, but we can be sure that the Lord Himself is with us and will protect us while we are in those valleys." Though we may be surrounded by what may seem to be the ultimate darkness brought about by evil, we can rest in confidence and be filled with courage because we know that God's presence and power guarantees His protection.

"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me," wrote David. These two powerful words, rod and staff were not meaningless words – but words that describe the ways that the shepherds guarded and protected their sheep.

The rod was used by shepherds to beat away any external enemy that might harm his sheep. The "crooked" staff was used by shepherds to snatch his sheep from getting in harm's way. So, here we have a picture of how our Shepherd watches over us. He guards us from any external enemy that would attack, defeat, or destroy us. He makes certain that they will not come near us nor harm us because His arm is around us. Nor will he allow internal enemies – thoughts or ideas – that would cause us to doubt His love, mercy, grace, salvation, or hope to destroy the peace His presence brings us.

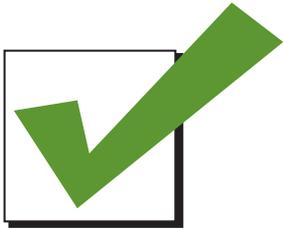
Our Shepherd's rod and staff summarize His role and describe the ways He will care for us if we allow Him. And when we allow Him to become our Shepherd we can say with David, "I will walk through valleys and fear no evil! The threats will not overcome me."

Prayer: Lord, give us faith to believe in the facts of Your Word that in Your strength we need fear no evil or harm that could destroy us. Keep us close! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

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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  
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton  
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course  
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove  
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)  
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)  
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (Halloween)  
10/31/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)  
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

## News from the Associated Press

### Minnesota pipeline protest camp serves as tour headquarters

By NORA G. HERTEL St. Cloud Times

PALISADE, Minn. (AP) — The air smelled like sage. Fat snowflakes fell among maple and birch trees. And pipeline opponents clutched pinches of tobacco to throw with their prayers into the frozen Mississippi River. “We’re all made of water,” said Tania Aubid, a member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. “Don’t take water for granted.”

Aubid is a water protector, a resident opponent to the Enbridge Energy Line 3 oil pipeline currently under construction in northern Minnesota. Since November, Aubid has lived at a camp along the pipeline’s route north of Palisade.

The camp in Aitkin County is called the Water Protector Welcome Center. It’s home to a core group of pipeline opponents and a gathering place for others, including 75 students, faculty and their families who visited the site last month.

They held a prayer ceremony along the Mississippi River and talked about what they believe is at stake with the Line 3 replacement project: Minnesota’s fresh water and land, specifically Anishinaabe treaty territory.

“These are my homelands in the 1855 treaty territory,” Aubid said. The camp rests on 80 acres of land owned by a Native American land trust. It abuts the pipeline route.

Aubid spent nine months on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota to demonstrate against the Dakota Access Pipeline where protestors were sprayed with pepper spray, water cannons and some attacked by dogs.

Demonstrators have taken action to disrupt the construction. Three people recently blocked Enbridge worksites in Savanna State Forest, according to a press release on behalf of the water protector group. Eight were arrested in early January near Hill City. In December activists camped out in trees along the route.

“Our first priority is the safety of all involved — our workers, men and women in law enforcement and the protestors themselves,” wrote Enbridge spokesperson Juli Kellner in an email to the St. Cloud Times. “As a company, we recognize the rights of individuals and groups to express their views legally and peacefully. We don’t tolerate illegal activities of any kind including trespassing, vandalism or other mischief, and Enbridge will seek to prosecute those individuals to the fullest extent of the law.”

Kellner said work to drill and extend the pipeline under the Mississippi will not take place until later in the year, likely in the summer.

Construction began in December and is about 35% complete. The pipeline will carry crude oil from Canada across a small sliver of North Dakota, through Minnesota and into northwestern Wisconsin.

It’s a replacement line on a new route — south and west of existing lines. That’s one of the reasons for the fierce opposition. Opponents don’t want new infrastructure for fossil fuels, because of its impact on climate change. And the indigenous women behind the water protectors’ efforts have highlighted concerns about degradation of the water, which is important for wild rice harvests.

Supporters of the pipeline see it as an improvement to the aging Line 3 pipe, a job creator and an economic boon that is especially welcome with the economy depressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enbridge made a video with Butch De La Hunt, president and CEO of the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber, describing the economic impact of Line 3 construction as a “lifeline” in a tough winter. The hospitality industry, specifically resorts, served people working on the pipeline. And the pipeline generates tax income for the community.

“As of December 2020, Enbridge has spent \$180 million dollars with tribal nations, communities and contractors — and the Line 3 project has just started,” Kellner wrote. More than 4,400 union members are working on Line 3. The contractor provides half the workforce and local unions the other half.

Shanai Matteson, an artist and cultural organizer, moved to the water protector camp in the summer.

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She is familiar with the economic challenges in that part of the state.

"I grew up here in Aitkin County. My family was very poor. We struggled in part, because the economy here isn't sustaining people," Matteson said.

Shanai Matteson poses for a photo at the Water Protector camp north of Palisade, Minnesota, where she lives with other opponents of the Enbridge Energy Line 3 oil pipeline. The pipeline is planned to cross under the Mississippi River near the camp, also called a welcome center.

"I think that the way out of that is not to continue an economy that depends upon extraction but to imagine and create the next economy, which is one that is much more rooted and reciprocal," she said. "Our leaders are lying to us when they tell us that it's not possible for things to be different, when they say we have to have these jobs, because that's what we've done."

Matteson and Aubid were both conducting a hunger strike. Aubid prays through it for fresh water for Anishinaabe people and for all people, she said.

They took students to see the Line 3 route that has been cleared of trees. The students gestured "stop" in the direction of the pipeline. Students and security personnel took photos of each other.

The water protectors have been respectful with law enforcement, said a spokesman for the Northern Lights Task Force, a coalition of many county sheriff's and the Fond Du Lac Reservation that formed as the Line 3 plan took shape. St. Cloud Times requested an interview and received an email response to questions.

Aitkin County Sheriff Dan Guida, a member of the task force, has often visited with pipeline opponents.

"(Guida) has worked diligently to ensure people are treated right and not obstructed from engaging in their First Amendment rights," said the task force spokesman by email. "We support people's First Amendment rights to protest peacefully and have taken steps to provide a safe place for them to do so."

Pipeline opponents want more than protest spaces along the route. They want the project halted. They have asked President Joe Biden to intervene as he did blocking the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Public Utilities Commission granted permits to Enbridge for Line 3. A lawsuit seeks to overturn an Army Corps' permit. In an early February decision, the Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled against opponents and allowed construction of the line to continue.

Matteson reminded students visiting the camp that Twin Cities water runs from northern Minnesota.

"I hope you all will be here again," she said.

## Historic South Dakota town debates Main Street redesign

By JACI CONRAD PEARSON Black Hills Pioneer

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — Deadwood's Main Street is under the microscope and a master plan to address challenges currently occurring on the historic strip is in full motion.

Along with upward of 3 million visitors per year and regular vehicular traffic flow, Historic Main Street in Deadwood regularly accommodates many unique transportation modes, including stagecoaches, trolleys, RVs, and many, many motorcycles.

The Historic Main Street Master Plan was discussed at a joint work session of city staff, historic preservation and planning and zoning commissions. Principals involved in the project ultimately recommended two options for reconfiguring the street, based on public design charettes held in 2020, taking into consideration information recently gleaned during discussions with the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service.

Because Deadwood is a National Historic Landmark, work done to alter the street must involve the two aforementioned entities in master plan discussions, which involve the goal of improved traffic flow, street design, pedestrian access, and bump-outs and parklets for community gathering spaces, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

Nore Winter, president of Winter & Co., the design firm hired to develop the Main Street Master Plan, shared key points from discussions with the state office as well as the Park Service.

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"And that is, recognizing downtown has always been a gathering place and that is a part of its history and evolution and change are also a part of its history," Winter said. "But that doesn't mean that anything is appropriate from a historic preservation standpoint. There are still a lot of things we need to be sensitive to. One is to preserve the few authentic features that do survive. Some of those are obvious things like some of the bulb heads or service entries to underground service areas that are part of the history and even some of the storm water inlets."

Winter said the width of the historic brick paving street itself is a key feature that should be preserved. "Another principle is that it is appropriate to use historic replicas when there's good documentation," he said. "But where there is not a good example of something historic, don't confuse history by putting something historic in it."

Based on the historic preservation and Park Service meetings, Winter presented two design options for consideration, with option one the preferred alternative.

"This is, how do we widen the sidewalks and still maintain the view of the current width of the brick paving and the street itself?" Winter said.

Option one involves equal sidewalks on both sides of the street and a flex lane to accommodate Deadwood's unique transportation modes, including, but not limited to the stagecoach and the trolley.

In option one, the historic curb is delineated with a concrete strip. This option also incorporates travel lanes and a narrower flex lane on the west, what designers refer to as the "hillside" versus the "creekside," and the sidewalk expanded equally on both sides of the street.

"It still does provide a little bit of a flex lane," Winter said. "Enough room that you could have loading and service vehicles stopping and the stagecoach."

Option two calls for a wider sidewalk on one side of the street, the east, or "creekside," and a flex lane on the west, or "hillside."

"The idea is that for many days, the flex lane would actually serve as additional sidewalk," Winter said. "There would be temporary railings with a decorative design that fit the historic theme of downtown that would help to mark the flex lane for pedestrian flow, but there still could be pull-out areas within that for vehicle servicing and parking and other portions could be outdoor seating areas."

Both options recommend that the flex lane be on the "hillside."

"Because that accommodates service vehicles coming in from the north, peeling off onto Lower Main and then coming on fully over for loading and unloading and also for transit vehicles."

Deadwood Historic Preservation Officer Kevin Kuchenbecker said he prefers Option one.

"Just because of the symmetry and you're not favoring one side of the street over the other," Kuchenbecker said. "But it is narrowing the street and we already have a narrow street. You've got tour buses, you've got conveyance buses. We've got deliveries, we've got stagecoach. We have fifth wheels coming through and buses. The other option, and we've talked about doing that, is just leaving everything where it is, but it doesn't address the ADA that we may have to and it doesn't address the fact that our 2 million visitors in peak season, the sidewalks are full."

Commissioner Gary Todd said he has a concern with narrowing the street.

"But the main reason for widening the sidewalk, I did not realize, is to get the slope into ADA compliance," Todd said. "Everything I've ever heard is we need to be more pedestrian friendly. And most communities are that way."

Kuchenbecker said one of the reasons the conversation with SHPO and NPS was held was to involve them in the entire process to avoid investing in a plan that would negatively impact the historic district.

"The other thing is, we wanted to have some discussion with them on the widening of the sidewalks and helping us meet ADA compliance, as we go through this," Kuchenbecker said. "What do we have to do to meet ADA or make it a little more user friendly for ADA reasons without having an adverse effect to the district?"

Deadwood Planning and Zoning Administrator Jeremy Russell said he feels it's important to note that the way Main Street is currently laid out and the difficulties there are with delivery trucks, vehicles, and trolleys.

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"The difficulties with the width of the street now, the inconveniences they pose to our current width of Main Street," he said. "However much we narrow this, what type of impact is that going to have on that driving lane if we do have a trolley stopped and a stagecoach, and a couple delivery trucks on Main Street? Just making sure that we still have passable lanes for oncoming traffic. That's still important, especially for our police department."

Deadwood Mayor David Ruth, Jr. urged the group not to forget when talking about doing any type of narrowing of Main Street, there is motorcycle parking during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, as well.

"We need to be careful what the impact will be for traffic on that, as well," he said.

Other facets of the Main Street Master Plan include:

The development of preliminary cost estimates; an existing conditions/findings report, to include a design framework map, existing conditions map, infrastructure survey work, pedestrian systems, streetscape and wayfinding features, sound, security, and Wi-Fi strategies; design approach including lanes, sidewalk widths, amenities; and a timeline for implementation.

Enhancement of Lee and Gold Street pedestrian ways was also discussed, along with implementation considerations, including the upcoming box culvert project in 2026, which Kuchenbecker pointed out is Deadwood's Sesquicentennial.

"150th anniversary of Deadwood," he said. "Do you do this before? Wait until after?"

Ruth said implementation of the Main Street Master Plan remains to be discussed.

"There are lots of factors to consider," he added.

## **Kreuser leads North Dakota St. past UMKC in Summit tourney**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Rocky Kreuser had 16 points as North Dakota State held off Kansas City 69-65 in the quarterfinals of the Summit League Conference Tourney on Sunday night.

Jarius Cook and Tyree Eady added 15 points each for the Bison and Eady grabbed nine rebounds. Maleeck Harden-Hayes had eight rebounds for North Dakota State (14-11).

Josiah Allick had 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Roos (11-13), Brandon McKissic added 13 points and Marvin Nesbitt Jr. had 11 points and seven rebounds.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and [http://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](http://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

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## **Abmas, Weaver propel Oral Roberts past N. Dakota 76-65**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Max Abmas poured in 22 points, DeShang Weaver added 18 and fourth-seeded Oral Roberts defeated No. 5 seed North Dakota 76-65 in the Summit League tournament quarterfinals on Sunday night.

Abmas and Weaver combined for 16 of 26 shooting for Oral Roberts (14-10), as the Golden Eagles were 26 of 58 from the floor and made 19 of 21 free throws. Kareem Thompson added 16 points and Carlos Jurgens 11.

Oral Roberts broke the game open with a 18-7 run in the later minutes of the first half, pushing a 21-19 lead to 39-26 just before halftime. Weaver scored 12 of his points during the breakaway run. North Dakota (9-17) was 3-12 shooting as Oral Roberts surged ahead, including 0-for-5 from distance.

Sybian Sims, Bentiu Panoam, Caleb Nero and Mitchell Sueker all scored 11 points for the Fighting Hawks.

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

## South Dakota reaches 1,900 deaths due to the coronavirus

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota has reached 1,900 deaths due to complications from the coronavirus, state health officials reported Sunday.

Officials confirmed two new COVID-19-related deaths in the last day, a person in their 40s and a person in their 60s. South Dakota's death count is the eighth highest per capita in the country at 215 deaths per 100,000 people, according to Johns Hopkins University researchers.

The daily state report included 211 new infections, bringing the total to 113,589 positive tests since the start of the pandemic. Active cases rose for a sixth straight day, from 2,109 to 2,158.

There were about 251 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks 25th for new cases per capita, researchers said. One in every 813 people in the state tested positive in the past week.

Hospitalizations fell by two since Saturday, to 72.

## Patrol identifies man struck and killed while changing tire

SISSETON, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have identified a man who was struck and killed while changing a tire on Interstate 29 near Sisseton.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol says 78-year-old Gerald Bartell, of Herman, Minnesota, was pronounced dead at the scene of the Tuesday afternoon crash.

The patrol says Bartell had pulled over to the shoulder and was kneeling near the pickup on the driver's side when a man driving a semi-trailer struck both the vehicle and Bartell.

The semi driver, Wilhelm Hiebert, 55, of Rosenfeld, Manitoba, was not injured. Charges are being reviewed in the case, the patrol says.

## Workers worry about safety, stress as states ease mask rules

By LEAH WILLINGHAM, MICHAEL LIEDTKE and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

JACKSON, Mississippi (AP) — Leo Carney worries that bigger crowds and mask-less diners could endanger workers at the Biloxi, Mississippi, seafood restaurant where he manages the kitchen. Maribel Cornejo, who earns \$9.85 an hour as a McDonald's cook in Houston, can't afford to get sick and frets co-workers will become more lax about wearing masks, even though the fast food company requires them.

As more jurisdictions join Texas, Mississippi and other states in lifting mask mandates and easing restrictions on businesses, many essential workers — including bartenders, restaurant servers and retail workers — are relieved by changes that might help the economy but also concerned they could make them less safe amid a pandemic that health experts warn is far from over.

Many business owners on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were glad Gov. Tate Reeves decided to eliminate mask requirements, limits on seating in restaurants and most other binding restrictions. "But the workers themselves... especially ones that have pre-existing conditions, they're scared right now," Carney said.

"This just puts us back in a situation where we're on the frontlines, under the gun again," said Carney, who sees Black Mississippians facing the greatest risks from the decision that took effect Wednesday. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black and Latino people in the United States, and many Gulf Coast restaurants have a significant number of Black employees.

Public health experts tracking the trajectory of more contagious virus variants have warned that lifting restrictions too soon could lead to another lethal wave of infections. Although vaccination drives are accelerating as drug manufacturers ramp up production, many essential workers are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccines in Mississippi and other states.

Alabama's state health officer on Friday advised residents to keep following standard infection-prevention recommendations even though the governor is letting the state's mask mandate expire next month.

"There is nothing magical about the date of April 9. We don't want the public to think that's the day we all stop taking precautions," State Health Officer Scott Harris said.

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The governors of Iowa, Montana, North Dakota also have ended mask requirements or plan to suspend them soon. The governor of South Carolina on Friday lifted an executive order requiring face coverings in government office buildings and restaurants, leaving it up to state administrators and restaurant operators to develop their own guidelines.

Governors in several other states, including Michigan and Louisiana, eased the operating limits for bars, restaurants and other businesses in recent days.

The National Retail Federation, the largest retail trade association in the U.S., issued a statement Wednesday encouraging shoppers to wear masks. Some retail chains, including Target and supermarket operator Albertson's, plan to continue requiring them for both customers and workers in states that no longer make them mandatory.

Texas Retailers Association President and CEO George Kelemen said he thinks many members will continue to require workers — but not necessarily customers — to wear masks and other protective gear.

"Retailers know their customers best," he said.

McDonald's cook Cornejo, 43, said the end of Texas' mask mandate next week alarms her because several of her co-workers already were lax about keeping their faces covered. She said co-workers she has asked to pull their masks back over their noses politely acquiesced, but not always for long.

"There are just different attitudes," said Cornejo, whose 19-year-old son began working as a cashier at the same restaurant to help pay the family's bills. "Some say it's just too difficult to keep it on for eight hours, especially when it gets hot."

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, encouraged Americans to "do the right thing" by continuing to abide by recommendations for routine mask use and social distancing - even if their states lift restrictions.

Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, said individuals who wear masks still risk infection from unmasked shoppers and diners. He called Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's decision to lift COVID-19 restrictions starting March 10 "entirely too soon and entirely too carefree."

While deaths and new confirmed cases have plummeted from their January peaks nationwide, they're still running at high levels, while outbreak indicators in some states have risen in recent weeks. In Mississippi, for example, the 7-day rolling average of the virus positivity rate rose from 11.47% on Feb. 19 to 12.14% on March 5, and the state's 7-day rolling average of daily deaths increase during the same period from 15 per day to 20.71 per day.

Workers in cities that still have mask mandates or jobs at businesses that maintain their own virus-prevention rules anticipate defiance from customers emboldened by their governors' actions and weary of taking precautions.

Molly Brooks, 25, a barista at a Farmers Branch, Texas, coffee shop, said she has regularly dealt with customers who walked out or bullied her and her colleagues when they were asked to wear a mask. Brooks worries how they're going to enforce the rule, which the coffee shop plans to keep in place, now that Texas' governor lifted the statewide mask mandate.

"We are gearing up for the emotional toll that this is going to take," said the 25-year-old barista, who started working for the coffee shop in November while looking for a job in education. "The people who don't want to wear them are still going to fight...and now they are going to have even more ammunition."

Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi, home of the University of Mississippi, will require masks and allow only eight customers at a time. Although General Manager Lyn Roberts believes the rules will make many customers feel safe, bookstore employee Paul Fyke said he observed a change in Oxford almost as soon as the Board of Aldermen chose to follow the governor's lead and did away with the college town's mask mandate.

"I mean, really, even on the drive home, you can kind of already see there were places where, for a lot of people, it was triumph," he said on Thursday, the day after Oxford's mask requirement ended. "They were happy to be removing them."

Still, some workers are cautiously hopeful that fewer restrictions will bring more customers, tips and job

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security after a year short on all three.

In San Francisco, where the mayor last week announced the return of indoor dining and the reopening of movie theaters and gyms, Dino Keres had no qualms about serving drinks to customers bellying up to the bar inside Sam's Grill.

That's partly because he was about to get his second vaccine dose, but also because nobody on staff was infected when indoor dining was briefly permitted last fall. What's more, masks are required unless people are eating, and indoor seating is limited to 25% of capacity.

"We have already went through this once, and now the timing feels about right to try it again," Keres said Thursday.

Ro Hart, an assistant general manager and hostess at Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco, said the return of indoor dining in the city provoked a mixture of joy and anxiety.

"We are happy to be bringing in more revenue, but we are little nervous, too, because we have to be more stringent about making sure everyone keeps their masks on when they're not eating," Hart said, adding that she would be far more worried if San Francisco didn't require masks.

"We feel for our brothers and sisters at all those restaurants in Texas," she said.

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Associated Press writers Alexandra Olson and Joseph Pisani in New York; David Koenig in Dallas; Dee-Ann Durbin in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

## Hungary closes stores, schools to curb surge due to variants

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungarians on Monday awoke to a new round of strict lockdown measures aimed at slowing a record-breaking wave of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths that are among the worst in the world.

A rapid rise in pandemic indicators since early February prompted Hungary's government to announce the new restrictions, including closing most stores for two weeks and kindergartens and primary schools until April 7. Most services are also required to cease operations, and the government urged businesses to allow employees to work from home. Grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations and tobacconists can stay open.

Hungary's high schools have been remote learning since November and its bars, restaurants and gyms have been closed since then as well.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has warned that the strain on the country's hospitals will soon surpass any other period in Hungary since the pandemic began, and that failing to impose harsher restrictions now would result in a "tragedy."

"The next two weeks will be difficult ... but if we want to open by Easter, we've got to close down," Orban said Friday on a Facebook video.

The number of patients on ventilators in Hungarian hospitals has more than doubled in the last two weeks, with 806 patients on Monday compared to the previous peak of 674 in early December.

Deaths have also risen sharply. With nearly 16,000 confirmed deaths in a country of fewer than 10 million, Hungary has the 8th worst death rate per 1 million inhabitants in the world, according to Johns Hopkins University. The number of COVID-19 patients being treated in hospitals is also likely to break its previous record on Tuesday.

"We can see that the third wave is spreading very forcefully, mainly due to (virus) variants," Hungary's chief medical officer Cecilia Muller said Sunday. "We can't do anything else now but break the chain of infections."

The new restrictions came as many Hungarian businesses were already struggling to make ends meet as shoppers stayed at home amid the surging cases. Zoltan Suto, the founder and owner of Hungarian fashion brand Griff Collection, said revenues were down 70% through the winter thanks to cautious consumers avoiding crowds at shopping malls.

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"I can't pay rent. I can't pay salaries or social contributions, not to mention the taxes," Suto said, adding that a 50% commercial tax break offered by the government meant little in the absence of revenues.

Last year's pandemic-induced economic recession, which saw a 5.1% decrease in Hungary's GDP, led to the shuttering of five of Griff Collection's 10 stores in Hungary, which employ around 80 people. Suto says his business suffered a loss of 200-300 million Hungarian forints (\$645,000-\$968,000) in 2020, and that the crisis will only deepen if the two-week closure that begins Monday is extended further.

Such economic pain has made Hungary's government, which is facing an election next year, reluctant until now to introduce restrictions on businesses, even as COVID-19 cases and deaths have skyrocketed since early February.

Many parents scrambled over the weekend to alter work schedules and arrange for childcare, including Gyongyver and Szilard Brasnyo, a couple in Budapest who have two young daughters.

"We are lucky, my parents are coming over to help us out with the kids," said Gyongyver, adding that her parents live in Serbia, which has one of the highest vaccination rates in Europe, and have already received two vaccine shots.

Szilard, who works from home, said they felt "exhausted" after a year of raising the children during a pandemic. But he was optimistic that Hungary's ambitious vaccination program - which has given more than 1 million Hungarians a vaccine shot, the second-highest vaccination rate in the 27-nation European Union — would soon bring life back to normal.

Hungary has obtained vaccines from Russia and China as well as those approved by the EU.

"We're really looking forward to having a much safer environment for all of us," Szilard said.

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

## After historic whirlwind visit, Pope leaves Iraq for Rome

By NICOLE WINFIELD and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Pope Francis on Monday wrapped up his historic whirlwind tour of Iraq that sought to bring hope to the country's marginalized Christian minority with a message of coexistence, forgiveness and peace.

The pontiff and his traveling delegation were seen off with a farewell ceremony at the Baghdad airport, from where he left for Rome following a four-day papal visit that has covered five provinces across Iraq.

As the pope's plane took off, Iraqi President Barham Salih was at hand on the tarmac, waving goodbye.

At every turn of his trip, Francis urged Iraqis to embrace diversity — from Najaf in the south, where he held a historic face-to-face meeting with powerful Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to Nineveh to the north, where he met with Christian victims of the Islamic State group's terror and heard their testimonies of survival.

The pontiff's visit witnessed scenes unimaginable in war-ravaged Iraq just a few years ago.

In Iraq's south, Francis convened a meeting of Iraqi religious leaders in the deserts near a symbol of the country's ancient past — the 6,000-year-old ziggurat in the Plains of Ur, also thought to be the birthplace of Abraham, the biblical patriarch revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims. The gathering brought religious representatives across the country rarely seen together, from Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and Mandaeans. The joint appearance by figures from across Iraq's sectarian spectrum was almost unheard-of, given their communities' often bitter divisions.

The pope called on them to work together and make peace.

In the city of Najaf, Francis held a private meeting with the notoriously reclusive al-Sistani, among the most influential and revered Shiite clerics, and together they delivered a powerful message of peaceful coexistence and affirmed the rights of Iraqi Christians. It was a powerful message the Vatican hopes can preserve the place of the thinning Christian population in the tapestry.

Al-Sistani is one of the most senior clerics in Shiite Islam, deeply revered among Shiites in Iraq and

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worldwide. His rare but powerful political interventions have helped shape present-day Iraq. Their meeting in al-Sistani's humble home, the first ever between a pope and a grand ayatollah, was months in the making, with every detail painstakingly negotiated beforehand.

In the northern city of Mosul, once at the heart of the IS militants' so-called Islamic "caliphate" and still devastated years after the Islamic State group's onslaught, Francis prayed in a square containing the remnants of four churches — Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean — nearly destroyed in the war to oust IS from the city.

Later, in the Christian town of Qaraqosh, where an entire Christian community was forced out by the brutality of IS militants, Francis urged Christians to forgive their oppressors and rebuild their lives.

People gathered in crowds to catch a glimpse of the pope wherever he went, fueling coronavirus concerns. Few wore facemasks, especially during Francis' stops in northern Iraq on Sunday. That day ended with an open-air mass in a stadium that drew nearly 10,000 people. Security was tight and most events were strictly controlled.

Public health experts had expressed concerns ahead of the trip that large gatherings could serve as superspreader events for the coronavirus in a country suffering from a worsening outbreak where few have been vaccinated. The pope and members of his delegation have been vaccinated but most Iraqis have not.

Iraq is in the midst of another wave of the coronavirus, spurred by a new, more infectious strain that first appeared in the U.K. Authorities in Iraq recorded 4,068 new infections on March 6, according to Health Ministry figures, up significantly from infection rates at the start of the year. In total 13,500 people have died among a total 720,000 infections.

## Deep freeze just latest disaster to befall Houston's needy

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Ernest and Hester Collins already faced their share of hardships before last month's deadly winter storm plunged much of Texas into a deep freeze and knocked out power to millions of homes, including their modest rental in one of Houston's historically Black neighborhoods, Fifth Ward.

The brother and sister were getting by on a fixed income without a car when the storm left them and many neighbors without light or heat for days. The storm caused their pipes to burst, leaving some in the nation's fourth-largest city without running water three weeks on because many couldn't afford repairs. Their dire circumstances left them unable to bathe and forced to use buckets as toilets.

The storm, which experts say may have caused billions of dollars in damage, is just the latest disaster in recent years to disproportionately affect Houston's communities of color and its poorest residents. These include major floods in 2015 and 2016, devastation from Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and, to a lesser degree, Tropical Storm Imelda two years later, a series of plant and refinery fires and explosions, and of course the coronavirus pandemic.

Not surprisingly, many in these communities are beyond frustrated by what they feel is a lack of assistance each time a disaster strikes.

"For some reason, we are not getting (help). They put us on the back burner," Ernest Collins, 56, said.

"Because we poor," a female neighbor added.

Local officials, including Mayor Sylvester Turner, say they've focused recent recovery efforts on helping the underserved, but their work is far from complete. Community advocates worry that residents will continue having trouble accessing help and that this will exacerbate the ills afflicting their communities, including income inequality and a lack of health care.

Last month's storm caused blackouts in much of Texas and left more than 1.4 million Houston-area customers without power. The outages also forced millions of people in Texas and elsewhere, including Mississippi, to have to boil their water because treatment plants lost power. About 25% of all Houston water customers experienced some kind of leak from busted pipes. Of the 25 people killed by the storm in the Houston area, 17 were Black or Latino.

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Robert Bullard, a professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University, said neighborhoods with predominantly Black and Latino populations, such as the Fifth Ward, have faced challenges from the start caused by residential segregation and racially discriminatory practices that denied such individuals mortgages and loans.

"This is life in a lot of those neighborhoods ... struggle, having to live on a modest income, just barely," Bullard said.

As she stood outside her home, Hester Collins, 67, said the helplessness of her situation fueled her depression. The only momentary solace she took was listening to R&B music coming from her neighbor's home.

"So, I just have to deal with what God blessed me to have," she said.

A block away, a group of friends who had informally formed a relief effort stood outside a U-Haul truck, giving away water and other supplies.

"It's just us as Texans taking care of one another," said Jacqueline Westman, who had previously lived in Houston but now resides in Austin and whose group raised thousands of dollars to pay for multiple supply giveaways in Fifth Ward.

About 6 miles (10 kilometers) to the northeast in another historically Black neighborhood, Trinity-Houston Gardens, running water was restored to Marie Johnson's home after she went nearly two weeks without it.

West Street Recovery, a nonprofit created after Hurricane Harvey to help fix flood-damaged homes, was working with plumbers to repair broken pipes for residents like Johnson, who can't afford to do so.

Johnson, 71, whose home was damaged during Harvey, said she was grateful for West Street's help as "the government doesn't do anything." The group was also fixing the plumbing in the adjacent homes of Johnson's two sisters and her niece.

Trinity-Houston Gardens and similar neighborhoods have also had to contend with pollution from industrial facilities and refineries, and a lack of flood mitigation. In 2019, state officials announced that a cancer cluster had been identified in Fifth Ward and a nearby predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood, Kashmere Gardens, and that it may be tied to a rail yard.

"We have to invest in extreme systematic changes that ... protect people from disaster as it comes and retroactively go back and help people care for the disaster that they've already endured," said Becky Selle, a co-founder of West Street Recovery.

Some residents who were still waiting to have their homes fixed after Harvey are now dealing with additional damage from last month's storm, said Keith Downey, president of the Kashmere Gardens Super Neighborhood, a community group that works with the city to set priorities and address local needs.

A city and county relief fund that has raised more than \$11 million will offer repair help. But residents were also encouraged to apply for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA aid is limited, though, as the agency had awarded only \$56 million in storm disaster assistance to the entire state of Texas as of Friday.

An analysis by Texas Housers, a nonprofit that works on housing issues, found that of individuals who had applied for FEMA assistance after Harvey, Black and Latino applicants were denied at higher rates than white applicants. The analysis also found that the poorer an applicant was, the more likely he or she would be denied FEMA assistance, said Zoe Middleton, Texas Housers' Southeast Texas co-director.

A FEMA spokesman, Alberto Pillot, said the agency wants "everyone who was affected by the winter storm to recover as quickly as possible."

And Houston's mayor said the city was doing everything it could to help residents and "stabilize the situation."

But not surprisingly after the repeated disappointments of past recovery efforts, some of Houston's Black and Latino residents remain skeptical.

"In recent memory, there is nothing that tells (residents) the system will work for them," said Huey German-Wilson, president of Trinity-Houston Gardens Super Neighborhood.

German-Wilson said that despite being exhausted and at times disheartened by the efforts to get her neighbors help, she will push forward.

"We continue to work with our communities to say, 'No we're not going to be overwhelmed and we're

not going to give in to this.”

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/juanlozano70>

## UK royals absorb shock of revealing Harry, Meghan interview

By JILL LAWLESS and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain and its royal family absorbed the tremors Monday from a sensational television interview by Prince Harry and Meghan, in which the couple said they encountered racist attitudes and a lack of support that drove the duchess to thoughts of suicide.

In a two-hour soul-baring interview with Oprah Winfrey, the couple painted a deeply unflattering picture of life inside the royal household, depicting a cold, uncaring institution that they had to flee to save their lives.

Meghan told Winfrey that at one point “I just didn’t want to be alive anymore” and had uncontrollable suicidal thoughts. She said she sought help through the palace’s human resources department, but was told there was nothing they could do.

Meghan, 39, admitted that she was naive at the start of her relationship with Harry and unprepared for the strictures of royal life.

The former television star, who identifies as biracial, described that when she was pregnant with son Archie, there were “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he’s born.”

Harry confirmed the conversation, saying: “I was a bit shocked.” He said he would not reveal who made the comment.

The pair, known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, announced they were quitting royal duties last year, citing what they said were the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. That split became official earlier this year, and the interview was widely seen as their first opportunity to explain their decision.

The implications for the interview — which was broadcast Sunday night in the United States and will air in Britain on Monday night — are only beginning to be understood. Emily Nash, royal editor at Hello! Magazine, said the revelations had left her and many other viewers “shell-shocked.”

“I don’t see how the palace can ignore these allegations, they’re incredibly serious,” she said. “You have the racism allegations. Then you also have the claim that Megan was not supported, and she sought help even from the HR team within the household and was told that she couldn’t seek help.”

Anti-monarchy group Republic said the interview gave a clearer picture of what the royal family is like — and it’s not pretty.

“Whether for the sake of Britain or for the sake of the younger royals this rotten institution needs to go,” Graham Smith of the campaign group said. “Some people will say ‘well you would say that,’ but this interview has only served to highlight what a lot of people have known for years: The monarchy is rotten to the core and does not reflect British values.”

Harry, born a royal prince, described how his wife’s experience had helped him realize how he and the rest of the family were stuck in an oppressive institution.

“I was trapped, but I didn’t know I was trapped,” Harry said. “My father and my brother, they are trapped.”

Meghan, he said, “saved me.”

The younger royals — including Harry, Meghan, Harry’s brother, Prince William, and William’s wife, Catherine — have made campaigning for support and awareness around mental health one of their priorities. But Harry described a royal family completely unable to offer that support to its own members.

“For the family, they very much have this mentality of ‘This is just how it is, this is how it’s meant to be, you can’t change it, we’ve all been through it,’” Harry said.

The couple had faced severe criticism in the United Kingdom during the run-up to the interview. Prince Philip, Harry’s 99-year-old grandfather, is in a London hospital after recovering from a heart procedure, and critics saw the decision to go forward as being a burden on the queen — even though, CBS, rather than Harry and Meghan, dictated the timing of the broadcast.

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In the United States, sympathy for the couple poured in after the interview. It will be shown later Monday in Britain, where some see Meghan and Harry as a couple who put personal happiness ahead of public duty.

Tennis star Serena Williams, a friend who attended Harry and Meghan's wedding, said on Twitter that the duchess's words "illustrate the pain and cruelty she's experienced."

"The mental health consequences of systemic oppression and victimization are devastating, isolating and all too often lethal," Williams added.

Meghan — then known as Meghan Markle, who had starred on the American TV legal drama "Suits" — married Harry, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son, Archie, was born the following year.

Holding hands, Harry and Meghan sat opposite Winfrey while she questioned them in a lush garden setting. The couple lives in Montecito, California, where they are Winfrey's neighbors.

Harry said he had lived in fear of a repeat of the fate of his mother, Princess Diana, who was covered constantly by the press and died in a car crash in Paris in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi.

"What I was seeing was history repeating itself, but definitely far more dangerous — because then you add race in, and you add social media in," Harry said.

Both Meghan and Harry praised the support they had received from Queen Elizabeth II, Harry's grandmother.

"The queen has always been wonderful to me," Meghan said.

But Harry revealed he currently has a poor relationship with his brother, William, and said things got so bad with his father that at one point Prince Charles stopped taking his calls.

"There is a lot to work through there," Harry said about his relationship with his father. "I feel really let down. He's been through something similar. He knows what pain feels like. And Archie is his grandson. I will always love him, but there is a lot of hurt that has happened."

In a rare positive moment in the interview, Harry and Meghan revealed their second child, due in the summer, would be a girl.

## Myanmar security forces kill 2 anti-coup protesters

MANDALAY, Myanmar (AP) — Security forces shot dead two people in northern Myanmar on Monday, local media reported, as the military government continued its attempt to stamp out opposition to its Feb. 1 coup.

The Irrawaddy newspaper said the victims were shot in the head during anti-coup protests in Myitkyina in Kachin State. Graphic video on social media showed protesters in the street backing away from tear gas, responding with rocks, then fleeing after a fusillade of what seemed to be automatic gunfire.

Demonstrators hurriedly carried away a number of injured people, including one apparent fatality, a person who had sustained a severe head wound. A second body was seen later on a stretcher, his head covered with a cloth.

To date, the government's violent crackdown has left more than 50 protesters dead. At least 18 people were fatally shot on Sunday last week and 38 on Wednesday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office.

Security forces also clamped down on anti-coup protesters elsewhere Monday, firing tear gas to break up a crowd of about 1,000 people who were demonstrating in the capital, Naypyitaw. The protesters deployed fire extinguishers to create a smoke screen as they fled from authorities.

Thousands of protesters who marched in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, dispersed on their own amid fears that soldiers and police were planning to use force to break up their demonstration.

Meanwhile, an armed force from one of Myanmar's ethnic groups deployed to protect anti-coup marchers in the wake of a brutal junta crackdown.

The unit from the Karen National Police Force (KNPF) arrived shortly after dawn to accompany about 2,000 protestors near Myitta in Tanintharyi Region in south-eastern Myanmar. They carried an assortment of firearms including assault rifles as they marched ahead of the column down dusty rural roads.

The KNPF are under the control of the Karen National Union (KNU), one of many ethnic organizations

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that have been fighting for greater autonomy from the central government for decades. The KNU employs both political and, through its armed wing, military means to achieve its aims.

Large-scale protests have occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar since the country's military seized power, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests.

The coup and its violent aftermath have led foreign governments and international organizations to impose measures against Myanmar's military leaders.

In the latest case, Australia suspended its defense cooperation with Myanmar and is redirecting humanitarian aid in the country because of the military takeover and detention of an Australian citizen.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said Monday that diplomats and relatives had only been able to contact economic policy adviser Sean Turnell twice by phone since he was detained in early February. She described the access as "very limited consular support."

Australia announced late Sunday that it had suspended a defense training program with Myanmar worth about 1.5 million Australian dollars (\$1.2 million) over five years. The program had been restricted to non-combat areas such as English-language training.

Australian humanitarian aid will be directed away from the Myanmar government and government-related entities. Instead it will focus on the immediate humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable and poor in Myanmar, including the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, Payne said.

On Sunday, police occupied hospitals and universities and reportedly arrested hundreds of people involved in protesting the military takeover.

In Myanmar's largest city, Yangon, gun shots from heavy weapons rang out for a second straight night in several neighborhoods after the start of an 8 p.m. curfew. The sounds of what apparently were stun grenades could also be heard on videos posted on social media.

The use of such weapons after protesters had left the streets appeared to be part of a strategy to strike fear in anyone who might think about defying the authorities. In a similar vein, many filmed incidents of police and soldiers show them savagely beating protesters they had taken into custody.

Some of the shooting was heard near hospitals, where reports said neighborhood residents sought to block the entry of police and soldiers.

Security forces have often targeted medical personnel and facilities, including ambulances and their crews. Members of the medical profession launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, which is the nominal coordinator of the protests, frequently hailed on demonstrators' signs by its initials CDM. Taking over hospitals would allow the authorities to easily arrest wounded people presumed to be protesters.

Meanwhile, a Canadian-Israeli lobbyist hired by Myanmar's junta said the ruling generals want to get out of politics and shift the nation away from China.

Ari Ben-Menashe, who previously represented Sudan's military leader and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, spoke to The Associated Press on Sunday from the U.S. after returning from his second trip in the past month to Myanmar.

He said he was confident he can persuade the Biden administration to lift sanctions imposed on military leaders who directed the coup last month that deposed and detained Myanmar's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

He said the U.S. and others in the West have reduced Myanmar's political conflict to a black and white tale of military repression against pro-democracy activists and ignore the exclusion of millions of minority members from voting in last year's election.

## **Biden order could change how colleges handle sex misconduct**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is set to sign an executive order on Monday directing the Department of Education to review policies implemented by Donald Trump's administration, including changes to Title IX regulations that prohibit sex discrimination in federally funded institutions, according

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to administration officials.

Biden focused on gender equity during his campaign and promised to strengthen Title IX if he won the White House. He also will sign a second executive order formally establishing the White House Gender Policy Council, according to two administration officials who briefed reporters on the plan. Biden's transition team announced his plans to create the council before he took office.

The order directing the review of Title IX could pave the way to a major shift in how colleges handle allegations of sexual misconduct moving forward.

Trump's education secretary, Betsy DeVos, in 2018 rescinded an Obama-era administration standard in cases of reported sexual assault from requiring a "preponderance of evidence" — meaning it is more likely than not that sexual harassment or violence occurred — to "clear and convincing evidence."

The DeVos changes reduced the liability of colleges and universities for investigating sexual misconduct claims and bolstered the due process rights of the accused, including the right to cross-examine their accusers through a third-party advocate at campus hearings.

Biden, as vice president, along with then-Education Secretary Arne Duncan in 2011 laid out the legal guidance of what was expected of college campuses in response to allegations of sexual violence on behalf of President Barack Obama's administration.

With the Education Department review, Biden's intent is to set policies that help ensure students have an environment that's free from sexual harassment and without discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, according to one White House official who briefed reporters on the orders.

The order establishing the Gender Policy Council comes after Trump disbanded an office specifically focused on women's issues created during the Obama administration that was called the White House Council on Women and Girls.

While the new council is a resurrection of the Obama-era one, one administration official said that giving it a new name was acknowledgement that inequities can affect people of all genders. Still, the official said the council will primarily focus on issues facing women and girls because of "disproportionate barriers" they face.

The new council is tasked with helping push gender equity on the administration's domestic and foreign policy efforts. Some of the issues the council will focus on include combating sexual harassment, addressing structural barriers to women's participation in the workforce, decreasing gender wage and wealth gaps, addressing caregiving issues that have disproportionately impacted women and responding to gender-based violence.

## Jill Biden helps honor women from 15 countries for courage

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

First lady Jill Biden says nearly two dozen women the State Department is honoring for their courage made an "intentional decision" to persist and demand justice despite their fear.

The 21 women being recognized Monday with the department's International Women of Courage Award include seven from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honors.

The first lady says that the women's stories make it easy to think of them as "mythical heroes or angels among us" but that they're also humans who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

"Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for," Biden says in remarks prepared for the ceremony, which were obtained by The Associated Press.

"Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it," Biden says. "They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune to fear. No one is."

Biden says that in the course of ordinary lives, each of the women made "an extraordinary choice."

"You see, courage isn't really found," Biden says. "It doesn't conjure away our doubts. It's an intentional decision made."

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The ceremony is being held virtually and not at the State Department because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 14 living awardees are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Venezuela.

"These women made an extraordinary choice, to persist, to demand justice, to believe that, despite the obstacles and fear they faced, there is a future worth fighting for," Biden says.

Monday is International Women's Day.

Touching on the past year, the first lady says the pandemic shows "how the things that connect us — our love for family and friends, our hope that we will be together soon — transcend language and distance." She says that diplomacy, "at its best, is a recognition of this connection" and that the United States, under President Joe Biden's leadership, will support women around the world.

"We will make the choice to lead, to be bold and to lift up the women and girls everywhere who light our way," Biden says in her prepared remarks. "For 15 years, we have honored women around the world who have made the extraordinary choice to fight for something bigger than themselves."

"Today, we recommit to being worthy of that courage, to understanding that our lives are tied together in immeasurable and powerful ways and to choosing, every day, to honor that connection," she says. "We will stand with you as we build a brighter future for us all."

## Jill Biden sees teachable moment in the depths of a pandemic

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WATERFORD, Pa. (AP) — Jill Biden sees a teachable moment in the depths of the coronavirus pandemic.

The first lady sat in a socially distanced circle in the library at Fort LeBoeuf Middle School in Pennsylvania, listening and taking notes as parents expressed relief that the school had reopened and their kids were back in the classroom.

One mother talked about the "bumpy patches" of online learning and said reopening "has been so to the T" that she doesn't worry about her son and daughter. Another mom said the district included parent input and she was comfortable her children were in a "safe environment."

A teacher herself, Biden praised the small circle of parents, teachers and administrators for working together to help reopen Fort LeBoeuf. And she repeated a message she had delivered earlier that day while visiting Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Meriden, Connecticut.

"We've been through really tough, hard times, but I think the one good thing about educators that I love — and that includes the cafeteria workers, the bus drivers, the teachers, everyone involved — is we've all learned from this," Biden said of the pandemic and its emotional, social and human toll.

"We're all going to take everything that we've learned and are going to turn it into opportunity to make things better for students as we move forward," she said.

The first lady seems intent on turning every aspect of her new job into an opportunity, for that matter, especially anything related to her triple passions for education, fighting cancer and supporting military families.

A few days after she became first lady, Biden told governors' spouses during a virtual meeting at the White House that her new platform is "one that I would never let go to waste."

She's long been focused on education, having taught at a high school, a psychiatric hospital and community colleges for more than three decades. She's still teaching, virtually from the White House, and pining for the day she can go back to the classroom.

Finding a cure for cancer also motivates her and President Joe Biden.

The couple lost son Beau to brain cancer in 2015 at age 46. Her parents died of cancer, and one of her sisters had a stem cell transplant. Doctors also gave the dreaded breast cancer diagnosis to four of her girlfriends within a one-year period in the 1990s.

The Bidens also advocate for service members and their families, an appreciation that stems from Beau

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Biden's service in the Delaware Army National Guard, including a deployment to Iraq. Jill Biden intends to revive a military family support program that she led with former first lady Michelle Obama when Biden's husband was President Barack Obama's vice president.

Jill Biden quickly set her agenda as first lady by highlighting all three of her longtime causes in her first weeks.

She has been busy with virtual meetings, teaching her community college English class, official travel, running errands in the Washington area and moving the family's dogs into the White House. Even the light blue scrunchie she wore in her hair has gone viral.

Biden, known for springing surprises and practical jokes, also is intent on injecting some levity into things as her husband faces daunting crises: She woke him up to show him giant hearts she had displayed on the White House front lawn for Valentine's Day.

"She's off to a fast start, and I think a very solid one," said Myra Gutin, author of "The President's Partner: The First Lady in the Twentieth Century."

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The first lady is also keeping a robust travel schedule despite the pandemic.

Her first official outing was to a nonprofit community health center in Washington to highlight services for cancer patients. From there, she made a detour to personally deliver chocolate chip cookies to National Guard troops stationed at the U.S. Capitol.

She recently traveled to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond to tour its Massey Cancer Center, where researchers study the socioeconomic and cultural factors that contribute to disparities in cancer outcomes.

In the coming days, Biden plans to visit U.S. military installations in Washington state and California and hear from families about their needs.

Biden also met virtually with the leaders of teachers' unions, the spouses of defense officials and governors, military kids and their teachers, and government cancer researchers, among others. She sent prerecorded remarks to several conferences, and taped a public service commercial with Champ and Major, the family German shepherds, urging people to wear face masks.

Tammy Vigil, author of "Melania & Michelle: First Ladies in a New Era," said Biden's experience as the spouse of a longtime U.S. senator and vice president was an asset that helped her quickly put together a staff. She also didn't need time to figure out the issues she wanted to focus on.

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There apparently are no incognito errand runs for Jill Biden.

Unlike some recent first ladies who tried to hide their identities on unofficial outings in the Washington area, as Michelle Obama once did on a shopping run to Target, Jill Biden goes out as herself.

Stephen Bota said he knew a VIP visit was in the offing when plainclothes U.S. Secret Service agents showed up unannounced at his DuPont Circle newsstand in late January, but they left him to guess about who it would be. Hours later, Jill Biden walked through the door.

"I was kind of, 'Oh my God, it's the first lady,'" Bota, an immigrant from Kenya who owns The Newsroom, recalled in an interview. He and his employees — just his wife and sister-in-law — are featured in a photo with the first lady now on display in the store.

"I told her that we are so grateful that she came to see us," Bota said.

Biden also bought coffee at Brewer's Cafe in Richmond and confections at The Sweet Lobby on Capitol Hill, both of them Black-owned. The president, for his part, stopped his motorcade after church one Sunday for son Hunter Biden to pick up a bagel order.

"She seems more inviting," Vigil said, noting that everyone can relate to running errands.

With the purchases, the Bidens appear to be encouraging support for small businesses, which generate most of the jobs in the U.S. but are struggling to survive the pandemic.

They also seem to be signaling that they will be participants in city life.

Former President Donald Trump went only to his hotel near the White House or his golf club in northern

Virginia. For dinner in a city with a robust restaurant scene, he opted to dine exclusively at the hotel restaurant. His wife, Melania Trump, never made a show of outings in the Washington area in an unofficial capacity.

After Jill Biden released a photo of herself at the counter of The Sweet Lobby, the boutique bakery wasn't the only thing that became an instant hit.

The powder blue scrunchie holding up the first lady's hair went viral.

Biden said she had no idea until daughter Ashley called to tell her.

"I said, 'What scrunchie?' I didn't know what she was talking about," the first lady told talk-show host Kelly Clarkson during an interview at the White House. "I still don't understand it."

## Jury selection is 1st battleground at trial in Floyd's death

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The fate of a former Minneapolis police officer who pressed his knee into George Floyd's neck as the Black man said he couldn't breathe will be decided by 12 Hennepin County residents picked after extensive grilling about their views on police and the justice system.

Jury selection begins Monday in the trial of Derek Chauvin, who is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death. Picking a jury is expected to take at least three weeks, as prosecutors and defense attorneys try to weed out people who may be biased against them.

"You don't want jurors who are completely blank slates, because that would mean they're not in tune at all with the world," Susan Gaertner, a former prosecutor, said. "But what you want is jurors who can set aside opinions that have formed prior to walking into the courtroom and give both sides a fair hearing."

Floyd was declared dead May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for about nine minutes, holding his position even after Floyd went limp as he was handcuffed and lying on his stomach. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond, and led to a nationwide reckoning on race.

Chauvin and three other officers were fired; the others face an August trial on aiding and abetting charges.

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, argued that pretrial publicity of the case and the subsequent violent unrest in Minneapolis would make it impossible to find an impartial jury in Hennepin County. But Judge Peter Cahill said last year that moving the trial probably wouldn't cure the problem of a potentially tainted jury pool because "no corner of the State of Minnesota" has been shielded from pretrial publicity.

The potential jurors — who must be at least 18, U.S. citizens and residents of Hennepin County — were sent questionnaires to determine how much they have heard about the case and whether they've formed any opinions. Besides biographical and demographic information, jurors were asked about prior contacts with police, whether they have protested against police brutality and whether they believe the justice system is fair.

Some of the questions get specific, such as how often a potential juror has watched the bystander video of Floyd's arrest, or whether they carried a sign at a protest and what that sign said.

Mike Brandt, a local defense attorney, said prosecutors will likely seek out jurors who have favorable opinions on the Black Lives Matter movement or might have more outrage over Floyd's death, while Chauvin's attorneys would likely favor jurors who support the police.

Unlike typical jury selection proceedings, this jury pool will be questioned one by one instead of in a group. The judge, defense attorney and prosecutors will all get to ask questions. The defense can object to up to 15 potential jurors without giving a reason; prosecutors can block up to nine with no reason given. The other side can object to these so-called peremptory challenges if they believe the sole reason for disqualifying a juror is race or gender.

Both sides can also argue to dismiss an unlimited number of jurors "for cause," meaning they must provide a reason why they believe that juror shouldn't serve. Those situations can get into some detailed machinations, Brandt said, and it's up to the judge to decide whether a juror stays or goes.

"Sometimes there is some tortured questioning," Brandt said.

He said that even if a juror says they have had a negative interaction with the police, or a negative opinion about Black Lives Matter, the key will be trying to find out whether they can put those past experiences or opinions aside and be fair.

"We all walk into these with biases. The question is, can you put those biases aside and be fair in this case," he said.

Jury selection will end after 14 people are picked – 12 jurors who will deliberate the case and two alternates who won't be part of deliberations unless needed. The jurors will be escorted to the courthouse daily and sequestered during deliberations. Their names will be kept confidential until further order of the court.

The number of seats in the courtroom has been limited to maintain social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and seats for jurors have been spaced out. Like others in the courtroom, jurors will be required to wear masks.

The earliest opening statements will begin is March 29.

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

## Zimbabwe's women battle gender discrimination amid pandemic

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — There are very few female truck drivers in Zimbabwe, but Molly Manatse doesn't like to be singled out for her gender.

"It has always been known as a male job, but don't say I am a female driver. We are just drivers, we do the same job," insists 31-year old Manatse, a Zimbabwean truck driver whose income helps take care of relatives who have lost jobs due to COVID-19.

From driving trucks and fixing cars to encouraging girls living with disabilities to find their places in society, women in Zimbabwe are refusing to be defined by their gender or circumstance, even as the pandemic hits them hardest and imposes extra burdens. As International Women's Day is marked around the world Monday, Zimbabwe's women celebrate the progress they have made in tackling discrimination in the workplace and acknowledge more effort is necessary.

In many instances, Zimbabwean women have become leaders to help this troubled southern African country grapple with the double trauma of COVID-19 and ongoing economic deterioration.

However, many women say it is not easy to achieve equality or professional recognition and they are often reminded of women's traditionally subservient role in Zimbabwe.

"Once you get home they expect you to cook, they expect you to wash clothes ... all the household work, you have to do it. That is a challenge," Manatse told The Associated Press, as she prepared for a 1,700 kilometer (1,056 mile) trip to neighboring South Africa's port city of Durban. She is the only female driver at a trucking company that employs 80 drivers, she said.

Memory Mukabeta, 37, runs a car repair shop, a vocation traditionally viewed as a male domain. Like Manatse, these days she is helping to support members of her extended family whose livelihoods have been hit by the restrictions caused by the virus.

"Some of them are male relatives, they no longer have jobs so I take care of them," said Mukabeta, who said at times she has been forced to close her business by lockdown rules.

After a devastating resurgence that saw an increase in numbers of COVID-19 infections and deaths in December and January, Zimbabwe's government is beginning to relax restrictions and businesses are trying to recover. However, it may be a longer road to recovery for businesses owned by women, especially in male-dominated sectors due to inherent prejudice, said Mukabeta.

From the moment she answers the phone, many clients doubt her abilities, she said.

"They expect a male to answer," she said. "You have to convince them. They will be asking me so many questions, they will doubt me," she said, as she stripped down an accident-damaged truck in need of repair.

On paper, Zimbabwe has progressive laws that guarantee women's rights in the workplace and at home.

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The country is a signatory to international treaties supporting gender equality. But lack of implementation, as well as trained cultural practices that reinforce inequality mean women, who make up 52% of the population of 15 million, still lag behind in education, health and work, according to the United Nations Children's Fund.

UN Women projects that "8 million more women than men will be pushed into extreme poverty" in sub-Saharan Africa in 2021 due to the pandemic.

Although the pandemic has hit women the hardest, "instead of whining women are showing their grit," said Florence Mudzingwa, whose organization, Hope Resurrect Trust, equips girls living with disability with skills, equipment and confidence to make their way in the world, despite their gender and disabilities.

A digital marketer and life coach, Mudzingwa works from her wheelchair during the pandemic saying all she needs is her computer tablet, reliable internet and her brains. She has been using Whatsapp to encourage girls living with disabilities to sell items such as facemasks to put food on the table for their families during the pandemic.

"They can relate to me. They say 'if she is working, we can also work.' This is not a time for self-pity, being a woman and living with disability should not turn us into charity cases," she said.

Manatse, the truck driver, said recognition, respect and equality for women are unlikely to come on a silver platter in a highly patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe's, even though women continue to prove their mettle during the pandemic.

"We have to fight," said Manatse. "As we fight, we surely will come up with something and one day they will recognize us ... that we are not different."

## **Guilt, envy, distrust: Vaccine rollout breeds mixed emotions**

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Before posting a selfie with her COVID-19 vaccination card on Twitter, Aditi Juneja debated whether to include an explanation for why she was eligible for a shot.

"The first draft of the tweet had an explanation," says Juneja, a 30-year-old lawyer in New York City.

After some thought, she decided to leave out that her body mass index is considered obese, putting her at higher risk of serious illness if infected. A friend who disclosed the same reason on social media was greeted with hateful comments, and Juneja wanted to avoid that.

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S. is offering hope that the pandemic that has upended life around the world will finally draw to an end. But as distribution widens in the U.S., varying eligibility rules and unequal access to the coveted doses are also breeding guilt, envy and judgement among those who've had their doses — particularly the seemingly young and healthy — and the millions still anxiously awaiting their turn.

Adding to the second-guessing about who should be getting shots is the scattershot feel of the rollout, and the sense that some might be gaming the system. Faced with a patchwork of confusing scheduling systems, many who aren't as technically savvy or socially connected have been left waiting even as new swaths of people become eligible.

The envy and moral judgements about whether others deserve to be prioritized are understandable and could reflect anxieties about being able to get vaccines for ourselves or our loved ones, says Nancy Berlinger, a bioethicist with the Hastings Center.

"There's the fear of missing out, or fear of missing out on behalf of your parents," she says.

Stereotypes about what illness looks are also feeding into doubts about people's eligibility, even though the reason a person got a shot won't always be obvious. In other cases, Berlinger says judgements could reflect entrenched biases about smoking and obesity, compared with conditions that society might deem more "virtuous," such as cancer.

Yet even though a mass vaccination campaign is bound to have imperfections, Berlinger noted the goal is to prioritize people based on medical evidence on who's most at risk if infected.

Nevertheless, the uneven rollout and varying rules across the country have some questioning decisions

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by local officials.

In New Jersey, 58-year-old software developer Mike Lyncheski was surprised when he learned in January that smokers of any age were eligible, since he knew older people at the time who were still waiting for shots.

"It didn't seem like there was medical rationale for it," says Lyncheski, who isn't yet eligible for the vaccines. He also noted there's no way to confirm that people are smokers, leaving the door open for cheating.

The suspicions are being fueled by reports of line jumpers or those stretching the definitions for eligibility. In New York, a Soul Cycle instructor got vaccinated after teachers became eligible in January, the Daily Beast reported, and later apologized for her "terrible error in judgement." In Florida, two women wore bonnets and glasses to disguise themselves as elderly in hopes of scoring shots. Hospital board members, trustees and donors have also gotten shots early on, raising complaints about unfair access.

It's why some feel obligated to explain why they were able to get the vaccine. In an Instagram post, Jeff Klein held up his vaccination card and noted he was given a shot as a volunteer at a mass vaccination hub.

"I definitely mentioned it on purpose, because I didn't want people to get the wrong idea," says Klein, a 44-year-old musician in Austin, Texas.

As she waited for a shot in Jacksonville, Florida, 33-year-old Amanda Billy said it could be frustrating seeing people her age in other states posting about getting vaccinated. She understood that state rollouts vary, but felt anxious because she has a medical condition that makes COVID-19 "very real and scary."

"I'm just happy for them that they got it. But also, I want it," she said in an interview before getting her first shot.

Others are finding they are opening themselves up to criticism when sharing news that they got a shot. Public figures in particular might become targets of second-guessing by strangers.

In New York, local TV news co-host Jamie Stelter posted a photo of herself after getting the first shot earlier this month. Many replies were positive, but others noted that she didn't look old enough or that she must "have connections."

Afterward, Stelter's co-host Pat Kiernan weighed in and tweeted that the "you don't look that sick to me" commentary she received was "evidence of the hell that COVID has placed us in."

For Juneja, the decision to get a shot after becoming eligible wasn't easy, given the struggles she knew others were having securing appointments because of technology, language or other barriers. But she realized it wouldn't help for her to refrain from getting vaccinated.

"It's not like with other types of things where I could give my spot to someone else who I think is more in need," she says. "We are sort of all in this situation where we can only really decide for ourselves."

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Candice Choi, a reporter on The Associated Press' Health & Science team, has been covering the pandemic and vaccine rollout in the United States.

## Race, title and anguish: Meghan and Harry explain royal rift

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In a wide-ranging interview aired Sunday, Harry and Meghan described painful palace discussions about the color of their son's skin, losing royal protection and the intense pressures that led the Duchess of Sussex to contemplate suicide.

The interview with Oprah Winfrey was the couple's first since they stepped down from royal duties and the two-hour special included numerous revelations likely to reverberate on both sides of the Atlantic.

Harry told Winfrey that he felt trapped by royal life and was surprised that he was cut off financially and lost his security last year. He also said he felt his family did not support Meghan, who acknowledged her naivete about royal life before marrying Harry, as she endured tabloid attacks and false stories.

Meghan, who is biracial, described that when she was first pregnant with son Archie, there were "concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born." The statement led Winfrey to incredulously ask "What?"

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While Winfrey sat in silence, Meghan said she struggled to understand why there were concerns within the royal family about her son's skin color. She said it was hard for her to "compartmentalize" those conversations.

Meghan, the actor formerly known as Meghan Markle who starred in the TV drama "Suits," said she grew concerned about her son not having a royal title because it meant he wouldn't be provided security.

Meghan said processing everything during her pregnancy was "very hard." More than the "prince" title, she felt the most troubled over her son's safety and protection.

"He needs to be safe," a teary-eyed Meghan recalled. "We're not saying don't make him a prince or princess, whatever it's going to be. But if you're saying the title is going to affect their protection, we haven't created this monster machine around us in terms of click bait and tabloid fodder. You've allowed that to happen, which means our son needs to be safe."

The interview was broadcast in the United States a full day before it will air in Britain. The revelations aren't over: Winfrey teased unaired bits of the interview would be shown Monday morning on CBS.

In a rare positive moment in the interview, Harry and Meghan revealed their second would be a girl. The interview opened with Winfrey gushing over Meghan's pregnancy and lamenting that COVID-19 protocols kept them from hugging.

Winfrey at various points in the interview ran through headlines about Meghan and at one point asked about the mental health impact. Meghan responded that she experienced suicidal thoughts and had sought help through the palace's human resources department, but was told there was nothing they could do.

"I was really ashamed to say it at the time and a shame to have to admit it to Harry, especially because I know how much loss he suffered," she said. "But I knew that if I didn't say it that I would do it. And I just didn't, I just didn't want to be alive anymore."

Harry, too, said there are lasting impacts about Meghan's treatment and his relationship with his family.

"There is a lot to work through there," Harry said about his relationship with his father. "I feel really let down. He's been through something similar. He knows what pain feels like. And Archie is his grandson. I will always love him, but there is a lot of hurt that has happened."

Harry said the royal family cut him off financially at the start of 2020 after announcing plans to step back from his roles. But he was able to afford security for his family because of the money his mother, Princess Diana, left behind.

In response to a question from Winfrey, Harry said he wouldn't have left royal life if not for his wife. He said their relationship revealed the strictures of royal life.

"I wouldn't have been able to, because I myself was trapped," Harry said. "I didn't see a way out.

"I was trapped, but I didn't know I was trapped," Harry said, before adding, "My father and my brother, they are trapped."

Harry acknowledged that he does not have a close relationship presently with his brother William, who is heir to the throne after their father, Prince Charles.

Harry disputed rumors that he intentionally blindsided his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, with his decision to split. He suspects the rumors came from the institution.

"I've never blindsided my grandmother," he said. "I have too much respect for her."

Meghan, too, was complimentary toward the queen, despite saying at one point she realized some in the palace were willing to lie to "protect other members of the family."

"The queen has always been wonderful to me," Meghan said.

Sunday's interview special opened with Meghan describing how naïve she was about the ground rules of royal life before she married her husband, Harry, nearly three years ago. "I didn't fully understand what the job was," she said. She also noted that she did not know how to curtsy before meeting Queen Elizabeth II for the first time, and didn't realize it would be necessary.

"I will say I went into it naively because I didn't grow up knowing much about the royal family," Meghan said. "It wasn't something that was part of conversation at home. It wasn't something that we followed."

Meghan said she and Harry were aligned during their courtship because of their "cause-driven" work. But she did not fully comprehend the pressure of being linked to the prestigious royal family.

"There was no way to understand what the day-to-day was going to be like," she said. "And it's so different because I didn't romanticize any element of it."

The couple married at Windsor Castle in May 2018, and their son, Archie, was born a year later. Harry and Meghan's departure from royal duties began in March 2020 over what they described as the intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media toward the duchess.

At the top of the interview, Winfrey said no topic was off limits and that Meghan and Harry were not being paid for the special.

In Britain, the interview is seen as poorly timed. It will air while Harry's 99-year-old grandfather Prince Philip remains hospitalized in London after undergoing a heart procedure.

It is unclear what public reaction, if any, the queen and other royal family members will have to Sunday's interview. The U.K.'s Sunday Times newspaper, citing an anonymous source, reported that the queen would not watch it.

Kelvin Chan in London contributed to this report.

## As US mulls Afghan exit, activist sees long fight for women

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Prominent activist Sima Samar has been fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan for the past 40 years. She believes her struggle is far from over — especially at a time when violence is on the rise, peace talks between rival Afghan groups are stuck and the U.S. mulls a May departure from her country.

Samar, 64, worries about the future, noting that insecurity and instability in Afghanistan have reached frightening levels.

"No one knows what will happen tomorrow," she said in an interview at her home in the Afghan capital, Kabul, protected by blast walls, guards and a German shepherd, who races to his vantage point overlooking the street when a car even slows as it passes.

Yet much is at stake and "a lot of sacrifices have been made in these 20 years," she said, reflecting the anxiety among civil society leaders as the U.S. searches for the best exit from its longest war.

Under a 2020 deal between the Taliban and the Trump administration, all U.S. troops are to leave Afghanistan by May 1. The Biden administration says it's reviewing the deal, suggesting it may not meet the deadline.

Last week, Samar and other civil society representatives participated in a Zoom call with U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad. He assured them that Washington stands with Afghanistan's civil society to protect the gains made in the past 20 years.

The call seemed last-minute to Samar — held just before Khalilzad was leaving Kabul for Qatar to meet with Taliban negotiators, following two days of face-to-face meetings with political leaders and warlords-turned-politicians.

"I feel a little like history is repeating itself," said Samar, questioning the prominence given again to warlords and a political leadership that struggles to win over the trust of Afghans.

When the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001 by the U.S.-led coalition she had pressed for justice — that those who had committed crimes in previous regimes should be punished, that accountability, equality and justice should be given priority.

At that time she warned in vain against having warlords — who had participated in the 1990s civil war and destroyed much of Kabul — in prominent roles in a post-Taliban administration. She received death threats and was targeted in a slander campaign as "Sima Samar, the Salman Rushdie of Afghanistan."

"I am not saying everyone has to go to jail but a crime is a crime," she said. "They should be at least brave enough to say 'I am sorry.' That's a start."

Samar said Afghanistan needs involvement by international community going forward, to make sure that promises made are kept and that cease-fires are monitored independently. Culprits should be punished,

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she said.

The immediate question on the minds of many is who is systematically targeting and killing members of civil society. The Islamic State group has claimed several attacks. The Taliban have denied involvement in most incidents. The government and the Taliban often blame each other.

The number of targeted killings tripled last year, according to Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, which Samar launched and headed from 2002 to 2019.

Commission spokesman Zabihullah Farhang said 65 women were killed and 95 wounded in targeted attacks in 2020. Attackers hit a maternity hospital. Twice they struck educational institutions, killing 50 people, most of them students. Several of the victims were journalists, rights activists, young judges, lawyers.

"It is like taking the rarest pearls from our midst," said Torek Farhadi, an analyst and former Afghan government adviser.

In recognition of International Woman's Day on Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is awarding six Afghan women, who were among those killed last year, with the International Women of Courage award.

"These tragic murders underscore the alarming trend of increased targeting of women in Afghanistan and the United States condemns these acts of violence," Blinken said ahead of the ceremonies.

Blinken also proposed steps to help jumpstart the stalled peace process between the government and the Taliban, according to his letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani published Sunday by Afghanistan's TOLONews.

The letter calls for bringing the two sides together for a U.N.-facilitated conference with foreign ministers and envoys from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the U.S. "to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan."

Samar said much has been gained in the 20 years since the Taliban were ousted. Schools for girls are open. Women entered the workforce, politics, became judges — they are even at the negotiating table where the Taliban and the Afghan government are struggling to find a way to end war.

But the gains are fragile and human rights activists have many enemies in Afghanistan — from militants and warlords to those who want to stifle criticism or challenges to their power.

Afghanistan is second only to Yemen as the worst place in the world to be a woman, according to the 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index, compiled by the Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo. The illiteracy rate among Afghan women is 82% and most of the women in Afghan prisons are jailed for so-called "moral" crimes like seeking a divorce.

The road to justice and equality remains long, said Samar, who became an activist as a 23-year-old medical student with an infant son. At the time, the then-communist government arrested her activist husband, and she never saw him again.

Samar, who says discrimination based on ethnicity and gender is still widespread, is a member of Afghanistan's minority Hazaras, who have faced discrimination for centuries. They are mostly Shiite Muslims in a majority Sunni Muslim Afghanistan and most often the target of Islamic State militants in recent years.

Despite the persistent challenges, Afghanistan of 2021 is different, said Samar, a recipient of numerous awards who during a recent visit wore a T-shirt proclaiming "this is what a FEMINIST looks like."

Human rights, women's rights and the rights of minorities are now at least being discussed. "At least we speak about violence against women now. Before it was not an issue in this country, except for some crazy ones like me," she said.

## Harvard professor ignites uproar over 'comfort women' claims

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — A Harvard University professor has ignited an international uproar and faces mounting scrutiny for alleging that Korean women who were kept as sex slaves in wartime Japan had actually chosen to work as prostitutes.

In a recent academic paper, J. Mark Ramseyer rejected a wide body of research finding that Japan's so-

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called "comfort women" were forced to work at military brothels during World War II. Ramseyer instead argued that the women willingly entered into contracts as sex workers.

His paper has intensified a political dispute between Japan, whose leaders deny that the women were coerced, and South Korea, which has long pressed Japan to provide apologies and compensation to women who have shared accounts of rape and abuse.

Decades of research has explored the abuses inflicted on comfort women from Korea and other nations previously occupied by Japan. In the 1990s, women began sharing accounts detailing how they were taken to comfort stations and forced to provide sexual services for the Japanese military.

Hundreds of scholars have signed letters condemning Ramseyer's article, which united North and South Korea in sparking outrage. Last Tuesday, North Korea's state-run DPRK Today published an article calling Ramseyer a "repulsive money grubber" and a "pseudo scholar."

Ramseyer, a professor of Japanese legal studies at Harvard Law School, declined to comment.

Ramseyer's article, titled "Contracting for sex in the Pacific War," was published online in December and was scheduled to appear in the March issue of the *International Review of Law and Economics*. The issue has been suspended, however, and the journal issued an "expression of concern" saying the piece is under investigation.

Most alarming to historians is what they say is a lack of evidence in the paper: Scholars at Harvard and other institutions have combed through Ramseyer's sources and say there is no historical evidence of the contracts he describes.

In a statement calling for the article to be retracted, Harvard historians Andrew Gordon and Carter Eckert said Ramseyer "has not consulted a single actual contract" dealing with comfort women.

"We do not see how Ramseyer can make credible claims, in extremely emphatic wording, about contracts he has not read," they wrote.

Alexis Dudden, a historian of modern Japan and Korea at the University of Connecticut, called the article a "total fabrication" that disregards decades of research. Although some have invoked academic freedom to defend Ramseyer, Dudden counters that the article "does not meet the requirements of academic integrity."

"These are assertions out of thin air," she said. "It's very clear from his writing and his sources that he has never seen a contract."

More than 1,000 economists have signed a separate letter condemning the article, saying it misuses economic theory "as a cover to legitimize horrific atrocities." A separate group of historians of Japan issued a 30-page article explaining why the article should be retracted "on grounds of academic misconduct."

At Harvard, hundreds of students signed a petition demanding an apology from Ramseyer and a university response to the complaints against him. Harvard Law School declined to comment.

A United Nations report from 1996 concluded that the comfort women were sex slaves taken through "violence and outright coercion." A statement from Japan in 1993 acknowledged that women were taken "against their own will," although the nation's leaders later denied it.

Tensions flared again in January when a South Korean court ruled that the Japanese government must give 100 million won (\$90,000) to each of 12 women who sued in 2013 over their wartime sufferings. Japan insists all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations with South Korea.

In South Korea, activists have denounced Ramseyer and called for his resignation from Harvard. Chung Young-ai, South Korea's minister of gender equality and family, expressed dismay over the article last week.

"There is an attempt to distort (the facts about) the Japanese military's 'comfort women' issue and tarnish the honors and dignity of victims," Chung said, according to comments provided by her ministry.

Lee Yong-soo, a 92-year-old South Korean and survivor, described Ramseyer's assertion as "ludicrous" and demanded he apologize.

An influential activist, Lee is campaigning for South Korea and Japan to settle their decadeslong impasse by seeking judgment from the International Court of Justice.

When asked about Ramseyer last Wednesday, Lee said: "That professor should be dragged to (the ICJ) too."

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The controversy, amplified by its source at an Ivy League university, has yielded new scrutiny of Ramseyer's other work.

In response to new concerns raised by scholars, The European Journal of Law and Economics added an editor's note saying it's investigating a recent piece by Ramseyer — this one studying Koreans living in early 20th century Japan. Cambridge University Press said a forthcoming book chapter by Ramseyer is "being revised by the author after consultation between the author and the editors of the book."

Ramseyer repeated his claims about comfort women in a submission to a Japanese news site in January. In it, he alleged the women entered into contracts similar to those used under a separate, licensed system of prostitution in Japan. He rejected accounts of forced labor as "pure fiction," saying the Japanese army "did not dragoon Korean women to work in its brothels."

"Expressing sympathy to elderly women who have had a rough life is fine," he wrote. "Paying money to an ally in order to rebuild a stable relationship is fine. But the claims about enslaved Korean comfort women are historically untrue."

Opponents counter that many of the women were so young they would have been unable to consent to sex even if there was evidence of contracts.

"We're really talking about 15-year-olds," said Dudden, at the University of Connecticut. "This article further victimizes the very few number of survivors by asserting claims that even the author knows cannot be substantiated."

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Associated Press writers Hyung-jin Kim and Kim Tong-hyung contributed from Seoul.

## Claimed value of sleepy NY estate could come to haunt Trump

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's sleepy by Donald Trump's standards, but the former president's century-old estate in New York's Westchester County could end up being one of his bigger legal nightmares.

Seven Springs, a 213-acre swath of nature surrounding a Georgian-style mansion, is a subject of two state investigations: a criminal probe by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. and a civil inquiry by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Both investigations focus on whether Trump manipulated the property's value to reap greater tax benefits from an environmental conservation arrangement he made at the end of 2015, while running for president.

Purchased by Trump in 1995 for \$7.5 million, Seven Springs drew renewed scrutiny as he prepared to leave office and was on the cusp of losing legal protections he had as president. Vance issued new subpoenas in mid-December, and a judge ordered evidence to be turned over to James' office nine days after Trump departed Washington.

Other Trump legal woes, such as inquiries into his attempts to influence election officials and payments made on his behalf to women alleging affairs, have dominated the headlines. But former Manhattan prosecutor Duncan Levin said white-collar investigators go wherever the paper trail leads.

"While a tax issue related to a conservation arrangement might not be as sexy as a hush-money payment, prosecutors are likely to focus on any violation of law that they find," Levin said. "Remember, the authorities got Al Capone on tax evasion."

Seven Springs is an outlier in a Trump real estate portfolio filled with glossy high-rises and gold-plated amenities. It is listed on his website as a family retreat, although Trump hasn't been there in more than four years.

At the heart of the estate is the mansion built as a summer getaway in 1919 by Eugene Meyer, who went on to become Federal Reserve chairman and owner of The Washington Post. In 2006, while pushing a plan to build luxury homes on the property, Trump floated the idea that he and his family were going to move into the mansion, but that never happened.

Brand new, the 28,322-square-foot dwelling featured more than a dozen bedrooms, an indoor swimming pool, a bowling alley and a tennis court. Meyer's daughter, the late Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham, was married at Seven Springs in 1940.

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In her memoir "Personal History," Graham described ambivalent emotions about going there, writing: "The older I got, the more I disliked the loneliness of the farm, but in my childhood days, it was, as I wrote my father when I was 10, 'a great old Place.'"

At one point, Meyer owned about 700 acres. A philanthropic foundation established by him and his wife, Agnes, gifted 247 acres to the Nature Conservancy and the remaining land and buildings that made up Seven Springs to Yale University in 1973, after Agnes Meyer's death.

The estate changed hands again when the foundation took it back from Yale and operated a conference center there before passing the real estate holdings to Rockefeller University, which eventually sold it to Trump.

Trump paid about \$2.25 million under the list price for Seven Springs, acquiring the land as part of an effort to jumpstart his fortunes after a series of failures in the early 1990s, including casino bankruptcies and the sale of his money-losing Trump Shuttle airline.

Trump envisioned transforming it into his first championship-caliber golf course, with an exclusive clientele and lofty membership fees.

He hired an architecture firm to plot fairways and greens but abandoned the effort when residents voiced concerns that lawn chemicals would contaminate neighboring Byram Lake, a local source of drinking water.

Trump's then tried building houses. He proposed putting up 46 single-family homes, and after that plan also met community opposition, 15 mansion-sized dwellings which he described in 2004 as "super-high-end residential, the likes of which has never been seen on the East Coast." The project was held up by years of litigation and no homes were ever built.

In 2009, Trump made a splash by allowing Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi to pitch his Bedouin-style tent on the Seven Springs property north of New York City because he had no other place to stay for a U.N. visit.

Trump initially suggested he didn't know Gaddafi was involved, but later conceded he "made a lot of money" renting the land to the Libyan leader. Local officials halted work on the tent and Gaddafi never stayed there.

His development plans dashed, Trump opted for a strategy that would allow him to keep the property but reduce his taxes. He granted an easement to a conservation land trust to preserve 158 acres (60 hectares) of meadows and mature forest.

Trump received a \$21 million income tax deduction, equal to the value of the conserved land, according to property and court records. The amount was based on a professional appraisal that valued the full Seven Springs property at \$56.5 million as of Dec. 1, 2015.

That was a much higher amount than the evaluation by local government assessors, who said the entire estate was worth \$20 million.

Michael Colangelo, a lawyer in the New York attorney general's office, outlined the central question involving the Seven Springs easement at a hearing last year regarding a dispute over evidence.

"If the value of the easement was improperly inflated, who obtained the benefit from that improper inflation and in what amounts?" Colangelo said. "It goes without saying that the attorney general needs to see the records that would reflect the value of that deduction, as it flowed up to intermediate entities, and ultimately to Mr. Trump, personally."

A message seeking comment was left with Trump's spokesperson. In the past, the Republican ex-president has decried the investigations as part of a "witch hunt."

Seven Springs caught investigators' attention after Trump's longtime personal lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen told a congressional committee in 2019 that Trump had a habit of manipulating property values — inflating them in some cases and minimizing them in others to gain favorable loan terms and tax benefits.

Cohen testified that Trump had financial statements saying Seven Springs was worth \$291 million as of 2012. He gave copies of three of Trump's financial statements to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform during his testimony.

Cohen said the statements, from 2011, 2012 and 2013, were ones Trump gave to his main lender, Deutsche

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Bank, to inquire about a loan to buy the NFL's Buffalo Bills and to Forbes magazine to substantiate his claim to a place on its list of the world's wealthiest people.

Trump, on his annual financial disclosure forms while president, said the property was worth between \$25 million and \$50 million.

New York's attorney general was first to act. James issued subpoenas to commercial real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield for records relating to its assessment work on Trump's behalf; to law firms that worked on the Seven Springs project; and to Trump's company, the Trump Organization, for records relating to its annual financial statements and the conservation easement.

James also subpoenaed zoning and planning records in 2019 from the three towns Seven Springs spans. Vance followed with his own subpoenas in December. One town clerk said investigators were given "boxes and boxes of documents" in response. They included tax statements, surveying maps, environmental studies and planning board meeting minutes.

James' investigators have interviewed Trump's son, Eric Trump, an executive vice president at the Trump Organization and the president of the limited liability company through which it owns Seven Springs; Trump's chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg; and lawyers Trump hired for the Seven Springs project who specialize in land-use and federal tax controversies.

The investigators have yet to determine whether any law was broken.

Vance, who like James is a Democrat, hasn't disclosed much about his criminal probe, in part because of grand jury secrecy rules. The district attorney's office has said in court papers that it is focusing on public reports of "extensive and protracted criminal conduct at the Trump Organization."

Documents filed in connection with the criminal investigation — buoyed by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last month granting Vance access to Trump's tax records — have listed Seven Springs among possible targets.

Along with the mansion, Seven Springs has a Tudor-style home once owned by ketchup magnate H.J. Heinz, and smaller carriage houses that Trump's adult sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, have said served as "home base" when they visited the estate to hike and ride ATVs.

During his presidency, Trump himself opted for higher-profile properties like his Bedminster, New Jersey golf course and his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, where he's been living since leaving the White House.

The New York Times reported last year that Trump's tax records showed he classified the estate not as a personal residence but an investment property, enabling him to write off more than \$2 million in property taxes since 2014.

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Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at [twitter.com/mikesisak](https://twitter.com/mikesisak)

## **EXPLAINER: What's happened so far at China's annual congress**

BEIJING (AP) — Midway through its annual session, China's ceremonial parliament is focusing on boosting the economy, building self-reliance in technology and further squeezing room for political opposition in Hong Kong. The weeklong meeting of the National People's Congress, which rubber stamps policies approved by the Communist Party leadership, provides a window into government priorities.

### **SETTING AN ACHEIVABLE GROWTH TARGET**

The party set a growth target of "over 6%", as the world's second-largest economy shrugs off the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Last year, it departed from practice and didn't set a target because of pandemic-related uncertainty. The target was lower than the 7% to 8% that forecasters expected and seen by some as signaling a shift from quantity to quality growth, including efforts to expand the green economy.

### **ACCELERATING LEADING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY**

Premier Li Keqiang vowed Friday to "work faster" to develop tech capabilities seen as a path to prosperity, strategic autonomy and international influence. The party is focused on becoming a global competitor in telecoms, electric cars and other profitable areas. Its tactics have inflamed trade tensions with the U.S.

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and and Europe and also raised security concerns. China has poured massive computing and human resources into artificial intelligence, including sometimes controversial technologies such as facial recognition.

## CLOSING DOWN DISSENT IN HONG KONG

The congress has been given draft legislation that would give an Election Committee dominated by businesspeople and other pro-Beijing figures a role in choosing the members of the Hong Kong legislature. Wang Chen, a deputy chairman of the congress, said the committee would choose a "relatively large" share of the Legislative Council and have the right to vet all candidates. He did not provide specifics. A spokesman for the congress said that Beijing wants "patriots ruling Hong Kong," fueling fears opposition voices will be shut out of the political process.

## BEEFING UP THE MILITARY

The government announced a 6.8% rise in military spending to 1.4 trillion yuan (\$217 billion), continuing a tradition of roughly tracking the economic growth target. Analysts say actual military spending is up to 40% more than the reported figure, the world's second-highest after the United States. Recent years have seen a massive expansion of China's naval capabilities as it seeks to assert its claims in the South China Sea. A deadly clash with India last year underscored the potential for conflict over their disputed border, while America's prominent role in Asian security and its support for Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that China claims, raise the threat of conflict with the U.S.

## NO ROOM FOR COMPROMISE ON TAIWAN

At an annual news conference on the sidelines of the session, Foreign Minister Wang Yi demanded the Biden administration reverse former President Donald Trump's "dangerous practice" of showing support for Taiwan. China's claim to Taiwan, which split with the mainland in 1949, is an "insurmountable red line," he said. Separately, Wu Qian, a spokesperson for the Defense Ministry and a delegate to the congress, said that China would not "renounce the use of force and reserve the right to take whatever measures are necessary." The U.S. State Department expressed concern about Chinese attempts to intimidate Taiwan and other neighbors and said, "Our support for Taiwan is rock-solid."

## PURSUING GREEN INITIATIVES

The party pledged to reduce carbon emissions per unit of economic output by 18% over the next five years, in line with its goal for the previous five-year period. Environmentalists say China needs to do more. President Xi Jinping, the leader of the Communist Party, pledged last year to ensure that the country would be carbon neutral by 2060. Achieving that will require huge investments in clean energy for an economy that gets 60% of its power from coal. Chinese leaders are also pushing to reduce waste, especially of food, and increase recycling to handle the mountains of paper and plastic produced by a burgeoning consumer economy.

## WHAT'S NEXT

The annual session, which has been reduced from two weeks to one because of the pandemic, finishes on Thursday. Li will give the premier's annual news conference after the congress closes.

## **With virus aid in sight, Democrats debate filibuster changes**

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With President Joe Biden on the verge of his first big legislative victory, a key moderate Democrat says he's open to changing Senate rules that could allow for more party-line votes to push through other parts of the White House's agenda such as voting rights.

West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin stressed Sunday that he wants to keep the procedural hurdle known as the filibuster, saying major legislation should always have significant input from the minority party. But he noted there are other ways to change the rules that now effectively require 60 votes for most legislation. One example: the "talking filibuster," which requires senators to slow a bill by holding the floor, but then grants an "up or down" simple majority vote if they give up.

"The filibuster should be painful, it really should be painful and we've made it more comfortable over the years," Manchin said. "Maybe it has to be more painful."

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"If you want to make it a little bit more painful, make him stand there and talk," Manchin added. "I'm willing to look at any way we can, but I'm not willing to take away the involvement of the minority."

Democrats are beginning to look to their next legislative priorities after an early signature win for Biden on Saturday, with the Senate approving a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan on a party-line 50-49 vote.

Final passage is expected Tuesday in the House if leaders can hold the support of progressives frustrated that the Senate narrowed unemployment benefits and stripped out an increase of the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Over the weekend, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, representing around 100 House liberals, called the Senate's weakening of some provisions "bad policy and bad politics." But Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., also characterized the changes as "relatively minor concessions" and emphasized the bill retained its "core bold, progressive elements."

Biden says he would sign the measure immediately if the House passed it. The legislation would allow many Americans to receive \$1,400 in direct checks from the government this month.

"Lessons learned: If we have unity, we can do big things," a jubilant Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., told The Associated Press in an interview after Saturday's vote.

Still, the Democrats' approach required a last-minute call from Biden to Manchin to secure his vote after he raised late resistance to the breadth of unemployment benefits. That immediately raised questions about the path ahead in a partisan environment where few, if any, Republicans are expected to back planks of the president's agenda.

Democrats used a fast-track budget process known as reconciliation to approve Biden's top priority without Republican support, a strategy that succeeded despite the reservations of some moderates. But work in the coming months on other issues such as voting rights and immigration could prove more difficult.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., pledged that Senate Republicans would block passage of a sweeping House-passed bill on voting rights. The measure, known as HR 1, would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to the campaign finance system. It would serve as a counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims about a "stolen" election.

"Not one Republican is going to vote for HR 1 because it's a federal takeover of elections, it sets up a system where there is no real voter security or verification," Graham said. "It is a liberal wish list in terms of how you vote."

The Senate is divided 50-50, but Democrats control the chamber because Vice President Kamala Harris can cast the tie-breaking vote. With 60 votes effectively needed on most legislation, Democrats must win the support of at least some Republicans to pass Biden's agenda.

When asked about the voting rights bill, Manchin on Sunday left the door open to supporting some kind of a workaround to allow for passage based on a simple majority, suggesting he could support "reconciliation" if he was satisfied that Republicans had the ability to provide input. But it was unclear how that would work as voting rights are not budget-related and would not qualify for the reconciliation process.

"I'm not going to go there until my Republican friends have the ability to have their say also," Manchin said.

On Sunday, the anti-filibuster advocacy group "Fix Our Senate" praised Manchin's comments as a viable way to get past "pure partisan obstruction" in the Senate.

"Sen. Manchin just saw Senate Republicans unanimously oppose a wildly popular and desperately-needed COVID relief bill that only passed because it couldn't be filibustered, so it's encouraging to hear him express openness to reforms to ensure that voting rights and other critical bills can't be blocked by a purely obstructionist minority," the group said in a statement.

Manchin spoke on NBC's "Meet the Press," "Fox News Sunday," CNN's "State of the Union" and ABC's "This Week," and Graham appeared on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures."

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Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## Authorities to seek charges after violent Boulder party

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

Authorities promised Sunday to pursue criminal charges after a massive party near the University of Colorado in Boulder devolved into a violent confrontation with police that left three officers injured.

Hundreds of people flooded the streets in an area known as the Hill on Saturday night and when told to leave threw bottles, rocks and other objects at police and firefighters, police said.

At least one car was damaged when the mob flipped it over, and police brought in a SWAT team and used tear gas to break up the crowd that numbered 500 to 800 people at its peak, said Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold.

Images shared by local media showed no social distancing and most without masks despite the coronavirus pandemic. Fireworks were set off in the middle of the street and a law enforcement armored vehicle and a fire truck were damaged, according to police and local media.

At one point Herold said a "tactical decision" was made to withdraw some officers when a group of about 100 people started to rush them. It took more than three hours to disperse the crowd, according to a timeline she provided.

Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty described the rowdy behavior amid the coronavirus pandemic as "shameful."

"I hear people refer to it as a party. I don't regard flipping over a car as a party and I don't regard people who throw bottles and rocks at firefighters and police as a party," he said. "Those are criminal acts and will be treated as such."

No arrests were made at the scene, police said.

Officers were reviewing officer body camera footage and shared social media videos and photos to identify the individuals involved. They also set up a portal on the city's website to allow the public to submit additional video footage or other evidence from the disturbance.

Herold said it was a calculated call not to make any arrests immediately, out of worry that sending in officers would agitate the large crowd. She added that the department had "excellent" video to help it pursue those responsible for the violence.

The three injured officers were recovering, including one who was struck in the hand and another who was hit in the face but was wearing a gas mask, Herold said. City vehicles suffered thousands of dollars in damages and private property also was harmed, she said.

The Hill neighborhood has been known for decades for sometimes raucous parties and there have been previous confrontations that resulted in violence, including 12 officers injured in a 1997 riot near the school.

But city officials said during a Sunday press conference that the stakes from Saturday's events are particularly high amid the pandemic, with potentially dire consequences. Health officials advised anyone who participated to quarantine for at least 10 days and to get tested for COVID-19.

CU Boulder students returned to campus for hybrid and in-person learning in mid-February.

University officials apologized to Boulder residents who live near the school and said students who were involved in violence, property damage or failing to disperse would be held accountable.

"If they can't meet our expectation, they are not welcome at the university," said CU Boulder Chief Operating Officer Patrick O'Rourke. He added that the university knows its students were involved and "We are not going to try to shift the blame."

After the party broke up, other students came to the scene with garbage bags to pick up the large amounts of trash left behind.

## Embiid, Simmons miss All-Star Game; Zion starts instead

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Philadelphia 76ers teammates Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons were ruled out of the NBA All-Star Game

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on Sunday after being flagged by coronavirus contact tracing, prompting some players to question again why the exhibition was being played during a pandemic.

The 76ers and the NBA learned of the situation with Embiid and Simmons — which stemmed from getting haircuts — on Saturday night and made the decision Sunday morning that neither could play about nine hours before the scheduled tipoff.

The game in Atlanta went forward as scheduled.

"It's just an unfortunate time in the world where our health and safety should be at the front of the helm," All-Star Paul George of the Los Angeles Clippers said Sunday from Atlanta, several hours before the game. "I personally didn't agree with the game but, you know, it is what it is."

A person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press that Embiid and Simmons have both tested negative for COVID-19, and that their barber has tested positive for it. Both players saw the barber a day or two before flying to Atlanta, according to the person who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Sunday because those details were not released publicly.

"It's kind of messed up," Washington All-Star Bradley Beal said. "It's unfortunate."

Embiid would have been a starter for Team Durant, which was coached by Philadelphia's Doc Rivers. Simmons would have been a reserve for Team LeBron. New Orleans' Zion Williamson started in Embiid's place, and both teams had 11 players on the active rosters instead of the usual 12.

Embiid and Simmons were in Atlanta, though were permitted to leave later Sunday. The NBA was providing private flights for all players to and from the All-Star Game.

A number of players — All-Star captain LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers among them — openly wondered in recent weeks why the game was being played. Sunday's news provided a reminder of why those concerns seemed valid.

"Obviously, I love our league and I love playing the game of basketball at the highest level and doing what I love to do," James said. "But I just think, under the circumstances and what we're going through still with the pandemic and everything with the season, I just thought we could have looked at it a little bit differently. ... And I hate the fact that Joel and Ben will not be able to play today."

The league and the National Basketball Players Association went ahead with plans for the game for multiple reasons, including because it will pay tribute to historically Black institutions and generate at least \$3 million for scholarship funds that aid Black students.

"Throughout this pandemic, we've sought to find the right balance between the health and safety of our players, the community that's involved in producing NBA basketball, and of course our fans, along with the economic interests as well of our community," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Saturday in his annual All-Star address. "Add into that social justice issues. ... Again, we feel we've struck the appropriate balance here, looking out for the interests of everyone involved."

The collective bargaining agreement between the league and its players also stipulates that the game be played, and Silver has said multiple times in recent weeks that millions of fans around the globe want to see the game happen.

"I don't want to say we didn't have a choice, but it's in our CBA and our CBA says there has to be an All-Star Game every year," Beal said. "There's a lot of language in there that can kind of get ugly if we didn't necessarily come down and go through with the All-Star Game. There's still guys reserved about it, I'm sure. I'm still reserved about it."

There have been 31 NBA games this season postponed because at least one team would not have enough players eligible to play due to virus-related reasons, including positive tests and contact tracing situations.

In past cases where contact tracing has detected an issue that was eventually confirmed as a positive case, players have typically had to sit for a week. That means Embiid and Simmons potentially could miss at least two games; Philadelphia, which has the best record in the Eastern Conference, opens its second-half schedule with games at Chicago on Thursday and at Washington on Friday.

No other All-Stars or members of the 76ers' coaching staff in Atlanta were affected, because they "were not exposed to the individual in Philadelphia," the NBA said.

AP Sports Writer Paul Newberry in Atlanta contributed to this report.

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

## US and South Korea agree on new cost-sharing deal for troops

By ROBERT BURNS and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and South Korea have reached agreement in principle on a new arrangement for sharing the cost of the American troop presence, which is intended as a bulwark against the threat of North Korean aggression, both countries announced.

The State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs said Sunday the deal includes a "negotiated increase" in Seoul's share of the cost, but it provided no details. The Bureau wrote on Twitter that the agreement, if finalized, would reaffirm the U.S.-South Korean treaty alliance as "the linchpin of peace, security and prosperity for Northeast Asia."

South Korea's Foreign Ministry on Monday issued a similar statement, saying the two countries are seeking to tentatively sign the deal. It said the agreement came after three days of face-to-face talks in Washington.

The U.S. keeps about 28,000 troops in South Korea to help deter potential aggression from North Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War. But how much South Korea should pay for the American military presence was a thorny issue in bilateral relations under the Trump administration, which often asked its Asian ally to drastically increase its share.

In 2019, the allies struck a deal that required South Korea to pay about \$924 million (1.04 trillion won) for the U.S. troops presence, an increase from \$830 million in the previous year. But negotiations for a new cost-sharing plan broke down over a U.S. demand that Seoul pay five times what it previously had paid.

The State Department said in a statement that the increase in the South's share of the cost was "meaningful" but was not more specific.

The Wall Street Journal, which was first to report the agreement, said it would last through 2025. South Korea's Foreign Ministry said it couldn't immediately confirm the report.

In its statement, the State Department said: "America's alliances are a tremendous source of our strength. This development reflects the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to reinvigorating and modernizing our democratic alliances around the world to advance our shared security and prosperity."

Many conservatives in South Korea worried that then-President Donald Trump might use failed cost-sharing negotiations as an excuse to withdraw some U.S. troops in South Korea as a bargaining chip in now-stalled nuclear talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The U.S. and South Korea had also halted or cancelled some of their military exercises in recent years to support the nuclear diplomacy, which eventually fell apart due to disputes over U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea.

On Monday, the South Korea and U.S. militaries kicked off annual military drills that would last for nine days. South Korea's military said the drills are command post exercises and computerized simulation and don't involve field training. It said the allies reviewed factors like the status of COVID-19 and diplomatic efforts to resume the nuclear talks with North Korea when it decided to hold the drills.

It's unclear how North Korea would respond to the drills. In the past, the North often called regular U.S.-South Korea drills an invasion rehearsal and responded with missile tests. Lee Jong-joo, South Korea's Unification Ministry spokeswoman, said Monday that Seoul hopes Pyongyang would act flexibly and wisely in response to its efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The prospect for a new cost-sharing plan has been heightened as the Biden administration has been seeking to bolster its alliance with South Korea and other countries.

South Korea began paying for the U.S. military deployment in the early 1990s, after rebuilding its economy from the devastation of the Korean War. The big U.S. military presence in South Korea is a symbol of the countries' alliance but also a source of long-running anti-American sentiments.

Associated Press writer Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea, contributed to this report.

## At least 20 dead, 600 wounded in Equatorial Guinea blasts

By SAM MEDNICK and JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (AP) — A series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea killed at least 20 people and wounded more than 600 others on Sunday, authorities said.

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema said the explosion at 4 p.m. local time was due to the “negligent handling of dynamite” in the military barracks located in the neighborhood of Mondong Nkuantoma in Bata.

“The impact of the explosion caused damage in almost all the houses and buildings in Bata,” the president said in a statement, which was in Spanish.

The defense ministry released a statement late Sunday saying that a fire at a weapons depot in the barracks caused the explosion of high-caliber ammunition. It said the provisional death toll was 20, adding that the cause of the explosions will be fully investigated.

The country’s president said the fire may have been due to residents burning the fields surrounding the barracks.

State television showed a huge plume of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled, with many people crying out “we don’t know what happened, but it is all destroyed.”

Images on local media seen by The Associated Press show people screaming and crying running through the streets amid debris and smoke. Roofs of houses were ripped off and wounded people were being carried into a hospital.

Equatorial Guinea, an African country of 1.3 million people located south of Cameroon, was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. Bata has roughly 175,000 inhabitants.

Earlier, the Health Ministry had tweeted that 17 were killed. The ministry made a call for blood donors and volunteer health workers to go to the Regional Hospital de Bata, one of three hospitals treating the wounded.

The ministry said its health workers were treating the injured at the site of the tragedy and in medical facilities, but feared people were still missing under the rubble.

The blasts were a shock for the oil rich Central African nation. Foreign Minister Simeón Oyono Esono Angue met with foreign ambassadors and asked for aid.

“It is important for us to ask our brother countries for their assistance in this lamentable situation since we have a health emergency (due to COVID-19) and the tragedy in Bata,” he said.

A doctor calling into TVGE, who went by his first name, Florentino, said the situation was a “moment of crisis” and that the hospitals were overcrowded. He said a sports center set up for COVID-19 patients would be used to receive minor cases.

Radio station, Radio Macuto, said on Twitter that people were being evacuated within four kilometers of the city because the fumes might be harmful.

Following the blast, the Spanish Embassy in Equatorial Guinea recommended on Twitter that “Spanish nationals stay in their homes.”

Joseph Wilson reported from Barcelona, Spain.

A previous version of this story was corrected to show that state television is TVGE, not TGVE.

## With virus aid in sight, Democrats debate filibuster changes

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With President Joe Biden on the verge of his first big legislative victory, a key moderate Democrat said Sunday he’s open to changing Senate rules that could allow for more party-line votes to push through other parts of the White House’s agenda such as voting rights.

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Democrats are beginning to look to their next legislative priorities after an early signature win for Biden on Saturday, with the Senate approving a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan on a party-line 50-49 vote.

Final passage is expected Tuesday in the House if leaders can hold the support of progressives frustrated that the Senate narrowed unemployment benefits and stripped out an increase to the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Over the weekend, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, representing around 100 House liberals, called the Senate's weakening of some provisions "bad policy and bad politics." But Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., also characterized the changes as "relatively minor concessions" and emphasized the bill retained its "core bold, progressive elements."

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"Lessons learned: If we have unity, we can do big things," a jubilant Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., told The Associated Press in an interview after Saturday's vote.

Still, the Democrats' approach required a last-minute call from Biden to Manchin to secure his vote after he raised late resistance to the breadth of unemployment benefits. That immediately raised questions about the path ahead in a partisan environment where few, if any, Republicans are expected to back planks of the president's agenda.

Democrats used a fast-track budget process known as reconciliation to approve Biden's top priority without Republican support, a strategy that succeeded despite the reservations of some moderates. But work in the coming months on other issues such as voting rights and immigration could prove more difficult.

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Manchin spoke on NBC's "Meet the Press," "Fox News Sunday," CNN's "State of the Union" and ABC's "This Week," and Graham appeared on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures."

Associated Press writers Alan Fram and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## Cuomo defiant as top New York lawmakers call on him to quit

By KAREN MATTHEWS and DAVID PORTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The two top Democrats in New York's legislature withdrew their support for Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Sunday amid mounting allegations of sexual harassment and undercounting COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins became the first senior Democrat in the state to say the three-term governor should resign. Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie stopped short of demanding that Cuomo quit, but said in a statement that "it is time for the Governor to seriously consider whether he can effectively meet the needs of the people of New York."

On Saturday, two more women who worked for Cuomo publicly accused him of inappropriate behavior, on the heels of other allegations in recent weeks.

"Every day there is another account that is drawing away from the business of government," Stewart-Cousins said in a statement. "New York is still in the midst of this pandemic and is still facing the societal, health and economic impacts of it. We need to govern without daily distraction. For the good of the state Governor Cuomo must resign."

Her public push for his resignation came shortly after a Sunday press conference where Cuomo said it would be "anti-democratic" for him to step down.

"There is no way I resign," Cuomo told reporters.

"They don't override the people's will, they don't get to override elections," he said. "I was elected by the people of New York state. I wasn't elected by politicians."

In a brief phone conversation Sunday prior to the press conference, Cuomo told Stewart-Cousins he wouldn't quit and they would have to impeach him if they wanted him out of office, according to a person who was briefed by someone on the call. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the call was intended to be private.

Cuomo said the next six months will determine how successfully New York emerges from the coronavirus pandemic. "I'm not going to be distracted because there is too much to do for the people," he said, noting that the state must pass a budget within three weeks and administer 15 million more COVID-19 vaccines.

Support for Cuomo has eroded with surprising speed as he's faced twin scandals, one over his treatment of women in the workplace, and a second over his administration's months-long refusal to release complete statistics on COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes.

Some lawmakers have been infuriated by revelations that Cuomo's administration delayed releasing some data about deaths of nursing home patients in hospitals, at least partly because of concerns it could be used against them by President Donald Trump's administration.

Several women have publicly told of feeling sexually harassed, or at least made to feel demeaned and uncomfortable. The state's attorney general is investigating. Cuomo has urged people to wait for that investigation to conclude before they judge him.

Others who have called for Cuomo's resignation include U.S. Rep. Kathleen Rice, a Long Island Democrat.

Former adviser Lindsey Boylan, 36, said Cuomo made inappropriate comments on her appearance, joked about playing strip poker and once kissed her on the lips at the end of a meeting. Former aide, 25-year-old Charlotte Bennett, said Cuomo asked if she ever had sex with older men and made other comments she interpreted as gauging her interest in an affair.

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Another former aide, Ana Liss, told The Wall Street Journal in a story published Saturday that when she worked as a policy aide to the governor between 2013 and 2015, Cuomo called her "sweetheart," kissed her hand and asked personal questions including whether she had a boyfriend.

Asked about Liss' story at his news conference Sunday, Cuomo said such talk was "my way of doing friendly banter."

Echoing comments he made in a news conference last week, Cuomo acknowledged he'd made jokes and asked personal questions in an attempt to be collegial and frequently greeted people with hugs and kisses.

"I never meant to make anyone feel any uncomfortable," he said. Cuomo has denied touching anyone inappropriately.

While Cuomo has been apologetic in recent days over his behavior, at least tacitly acknowledging that some of the things women have said are true, he's also singled out a few accusations as flatly false.

On Sunday he disputed a story told by about him by Karen Hinton, a former press aide to Cuomo when he served as the federal housing secretary under President Bill Clinton.

In a story published Saturday in The Washington Post, Hinton detailed an uncomfortable hotel room interaction she had with Cuomo when the two met in California years ago as they were trying to patch things up after an estrangement.

Hinton said that as she got up to leave, Cuomo gave her a hug that was "very long, too long, too tight, too intimate."

She described the encounter not as sexual harassment but as a "power play" for "manipulation and control." She was no longer an aide to Cuomo at the time.

Asked Sunday about Hinton's account Cuomo said it was "not true" and noted that the two had been longtime political adversaries.

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AP reporter Michael Balsamo contributed to this report from Washington, D.C.

## Report: Blinken offers plan to bolster Afghan peace process

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken is proposing a series of steps to help jumpstart Afghanistan's stalled peace process between the government and Taliban, according to a letter from Blinken to Afghanistan's president Ashra Ghani published Sunday by Afghanistan's TOLONews.

The letter calls for bringing the two sides together for a U.N.-facilitated conference with foreign ministers and envoys from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States "to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan."

Blinken also calls for holding talks between the Afghan government and Taliban in a senior-level meeting in Turkey in the coming weeks to hammer out a revised proposal for a 90-day reduction in violence. The secretary of state has also called on special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad to share with both the Afghan government and Taliban written proposals to help accelerate discussions, according to the TOLONews report.

Blinken also made clear in the letter that the Biden administration continues to consider a "full withdrawal" of the roughly 2,500 U.S. forces in the country by the May 1 deadline negotiated by Trump administration.

The State Department declined to comment on the TOLONews report.

"We have not made any decisions about our force posture in Afghanistan after May 1," the State Department said in a statement. "All options remain on the table."

Afghanistan presents one of the new administration's most difficult foreign policy decisions. The U.S. public is weary of a war nearly 20 years old, but pulling out now could be seen as giving the Taliban too much leverage and casting a shadow over the sacrifices made by U.S. and coalition troops and Afghan civilians.

Blinken urged Ghani to quickly embrace the proposal and underscored his concern that the security situation in the country could quickly deteriorate as the weather warms in Afghanistan.

"Even with the continuation of financial assistance from the United States to your forces after an American military withdrawal, I am concerned that the security situation will worsen and the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains," Blinken wrote in the letter.

## From vote to virus, misinformation campaign targets Latinos

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tom Perez was a guest on a Spanish-language talk radio show in Las Vegas last year when a caller launched into baseless complaints about both parties, urging Latino listeners to not cast votes at all.

Perez, then chairman of the Democratic Party, recognized many of the claims as talking points for #WalkAway, a group promoted by a conservative activist, Brandon Straka, who was later arrested for participating in the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

In the run-up to the November election, that call was part of a broader, largely undetected movement to depress turnout and spread disinformation about Democrat Joe Biden among Latinos, promoted on social media and often fueled by automated accounts.

The effort showed how social media and other technology can be leveraged to spread misinformation so quickly that those trying to stop it cannot keep up. There were signs that it worked as Donald Trump swung large numbers of Latino votes in the 2020 presidential race in some areas that had been Democratic strongholds.

Videos and pictures were doctored. Quotes were taken out of context. Conspiracy theories were fanned, including that voting by mail was rigged, that the Black Lives Matter movement had ties to witchcraft and that Biden was beholden to a cabal of socialists.

That flow of misinformation has only intensified since Election Day, researchers and political analysts say, stoking Trump's baseless claims that the election was stolen and false narratives around the mob that overran the Capitol.

More recently, it has morphed into efforts to undermine vaccination efforts against the coronavirus.

"The volume and sources of Spanish language information are exceedingly wide-ranging and that should scare everyone," Perez said.

The funding and the organizational structure of this effort is not clear, although the messages show a fealty to Trump and opposition to Democrats.

A nonpartisan academic report released this past week said most false narratives in the Spanish-language community "were translated from English and circulated via prominent platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as well as in closed group chat platforms like WhatsApp, and efforts often appeared coordinated across platforms."

"The most prominent narratives and those shared were either closely aligned with or completely repurposed from right-wing media outlets," said the report by researchers from Stanford University, the University of Washington, the social network analysis firm Graphika and Atlantic Council's DFRLab, which studies disinformation online around the world.

Straka said via email that nothing from the #WalkAway Campaign "encourages people not to vote." He declined further comment.

While much of the material is coming from domestic sources such as Spanish-speaking social media "influencers," it increasingly originating on online sites in Latin America, those studying it closely say.

Misinformation originally promoted in English is translated in Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua and elsewhere, then reaches Hispanic voters in the U.S. via communications from their relatives in those countries. That is often shared via private WhatsApp and Facebook chats and text chains.

"There's this growing concern that this is very much part of the immigrant and first-generation information environment for a lot of Latinos in the United States," said Dan Restrepo, former senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council. "A lot of it is seemingly coming through family and other group chats, whose origins are in-region rather than the United States."

WhatsApp and similar services are popular among Hispanics in the U.S. because the services allow for communicating with family and friends in Latin America free over the internet, avoiding costly long-distance charges. While those originating such campaigns in Latin America often cannot vote in the U.S., they can influence family in this country who do.

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YouTube, Facebook and other social media companies have cracked down on false claims since before the election and intensified such efforts after online conspiracy theories helped incite the Trump loyalists who attacked the Capitol.

"We are running the largest online vaccine information campaign in history on our apps in dozens of languages, including Spanish," said Kevin McAlister, a spokesman for Facebook which owns WhatsApp and Instagram. "We've removed millions of pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram that violate our COVID-19 and vaccine misinformation policies, and labeled more than 167 million pieces of COVID-19 content, including Spanish-language content."

WhatsApp now limits users' ability to send highly forwarded messages to more than one chat at a time; that led to a 70% reduction in the number of such messages. The company also partnered with Google to provide a feature allowing users to search the internet for the contents of forwarded messages to better check the veracity.

Still, those who monitor Spanish-language content online describe an information void, or dearth of reliable sources with large enough followings to consistently debunk falsehoods.

"The Spanish-language space has been a bit of a blind spot for researchers for awhile now," said Bret Schafer, a disinformation expert at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, which works to combat online efforts to weaken democratic institutions. "This field exploded after 2016 and, the vast majority of us who are in it, more of us speak Russian than Spanish."

With the election behind them, the proponents of these campaigns are now trying to spread chaos more broadly, notably by trying to create doubt about vaccines. That push is especially dangerous because Latinos have higher chances of being infected by, hospitalized from and dying of COVID-19 than do whites and African Americans or Asian Americans.

Maria Teresa Kumar, president and CEO of Voto Latino, which works to promote Hispanic voting and political engagement nationwide, has personal experience.

Her mother, Mercedes Vegvary, runs an elderly care facility in Northern California and spent weeks planning to forgo getting vaccinated against COVID-19 because a friend at a gym had showed her a video circulating on social media. In it, a woman wearing a lab coat and claiming to be a pharmacist in El Salvador says in Spanish that such vaccines aren't safe for use in humans.

A video with a similar message appears to have originated in Panama, and another came from the Middle East but had been translated into Spanish. All moved into the U.S. via text chains or internet messaging from people with family and friends in Latin America, Kumar said.

One chain features doctored video of the late, Nobel Prize-winning chemist Kary Mullis purportedly dismissing Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, as a "phony who knows nothing about virology." Another shows a crowded street that it claims is full of Italians flaunting social distancing and mask-wearing rules over the hashtag in Spanish #yonomevacuno" or "I won't be vaccinated."

The vaccine disinformation may revert to more election related falsehoods as the 2022 midterm elections come more clearly into view. Voto Latino and Perez have partnered with the liberal online watchdog group Media Matters for America on a \$22 million "Latino Anti-Disinformation Lab" that will seek to counter online falsehoods about the coronavirus vaccine and upcoming elections.

"You don't stop sowing chaos and misinformation in off years," said Restrepo, who was President Barack Obama's former principal advisor on Latin America. "You continue the steady drumbeat so that you're building your reach, you're building your capacity you're moving into a space that is amenable to further dis- and misinformation."

Democrats blame misinformation efforts for helping Trump win larger-than-expected shares of Latino support in normally reliably blue areas. But quantifying that is difficult.

Trump won about 35% support from Latino voters, according to VoteCast, an Associated Press survey of the national electorate. That helped him prevail in Florida and Texas, even as he became just the second Republican since 1948 to lose Arizona.

Kumar said that during the presidential race, misinformation in Spanish with Latin American roots would

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usually first hit Florida and “whatever sticks, spills over.” By mid-September, narratives had spread to Texas, popping up in Houston, San Antonio and the Rio Grande Valley, along the U.S.-Mexico border. By the week before the election, much had reached Arizona and New Mexico, she said.

Now researchers will be watching to see if misinformation — especially that meant to discredit COVID-19 vaccines — spreads among congressional districts. That could serve to ultimately discourage Latino turnout in the midterms.

Misinformation may have helped fuel significant gains in Latino support for Trump in some Venezuelan American and Colombian American areas, where voters were especially wary of claims that Biden was soft on socialism.

Biden won Florida’s heavily Hispanic, most populous county of Miami-Dade by only 7 percentage points compared with Hillary Clinton’s about 30-point victory in 2016, and precincts with large Colombian American and Venezuelan American populations were part of the reason why.

Biden prevailed about 25 miles to the north in Weston, Florida, which is part of Broward County and affectionately is known as Westonzuela because of its sizable Venezuelan immigrant population, but saw Trump narrow the gap in some precincts.

In Texas, Trump became the first Republican to carry sparsely populated Zapata County, on the U.S.-Mexico border, in a century and won 41% of the vote in Hidalgo County, the largest in the fast-growing Rio Grande Valley area, in 2020, compared with 28% in 2016.

That bump might be attributable to the heavy concentration of energy and law enforcement jobs in South Texas, and Trump’s promises to secure the border and promote fossil fuels. But misinformation also deeply penetrated the area, Perez said.

Evelyn Pérez-Verdía a Florida Democratic strategist who has been monitoring disinformation groups in Spanish, said that since the election, those spreading it have been watching the Biden administration daily and building false narratives around current events.

“The people who are making it have to understand the sub-cultures and cultures of the community,” Pérez-Verdía said.

Brazilian Americans, for instance, have gotten manipulated video from a Democratic presidential primary debate when Biden suggested he would raise \$20 billion to help Brazil battle Amazon deforestation that makes it sound like Biden is ready to send U.S. troops into that country.

Misinformation has continued at such a furious pace post-election that 20-plus Latino progressive groups drafted a January letter declaring “No Más Lies, Disinformation and White Supremacy” that urged Spanish-language radio stations and other outlets in Florida to crack down on spreading it. Pérez-Verdía, one of the signees, said afterward that “it hasn’t dropped off. I consider now that it’s actually doubled down.”

In response to Russian meddling in the 2016 election, Congress approved \$160 million for the State Department to lead efforts across the federal government to identify and counter foreign propaganda. Still, a 2018 report by the Senate Intelligence Committee found that such efforts had only increased following Election Day 2016 — a postelection pattern that is consistent with the one experts have tracked in Spanish after 2020’s vote.

So far, Congress isn’t investigating Spanish-language misinformation to see if its origins spread beyond Latin America.

“Was this a deliberate effort to suppress the votes of specific demographic groups? Was this orchestrated and funded by dark money groups or other organized actors?” said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. “These are all legitimate questions.”

## **Carla Wallenda, member of famed high-wire act, dies at 85**

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Carla Wallenda, a member of “The Flying Wallendas” high-wire act and the last surviving child of the famed troupe’s founder, has died at the age of 85.

Her son, Rick Wallenda, said on social media she died Saturday in Sarasota, Florida, of natural causes.

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She was the daughter of Karl Wallenda, who had founded the troupe in Germany before moving to the United States in 1928 to great acclaim. She was the aunt of aerialist Nik Wallenda.

Carla Wallenda was born on Feb. 13, 1936, and appeared in a newsreel in 1939 as she learned how to walk the wire, with her father and mother, Mati, looking on. But she said her first time on the wire was much earlier.

"Actually, they carried me across the wire when I was 6 weeks old," she said in a 2017 interview with a Sarasota TV station. "My father rode the bicycle and my mother sat on his shoulders, holding me and introducing me to the public."

She spent her younger years traveling the country as her father's troupe performed in the Ringling Bros. circus. She had a brother, Mario, and a sister, Jenny — all performed in the act.

She began appearing in the family's show in 1947, but not on the high wire at first, according to her biography on the family's website. In 1951, her father told her she could join the high-wire act if she could do a headstand on top of the family's seven-person pyramid. She was able to join the high-wire act later that year.

Carla Wallenda left the family act in 1961 to form her own troupe. The next season, two of the Wallendas were killed in an accident while performing the pyramid. Her brother was paralyzed.

Wallenda rejoined the family troupe in 1965, replacing an aunt who died doing a solo act.

Her husband, Richard Guzman, died in 1972 when he fell 60 feet (about 18 meters) during a performance in West Virginia. Her father died in 1978, falling while walking a wire across a street in Puerto Rico.

Still, she would not be deterred from performing.

"Accidents can happen anyplace," she told the Sarasota Herald-Tribune in 2014. "I have to make a living and this is the only way I know or want to. I've done waitress work and hated every minute of it. Why should I go and do a job that I hate?"

She worked through her 70s, including in a Miley Cyrus music video. She finally retired in 2017 at the age of 81 after appearing on a Steve Harvey TV special, doing a headstand atop a 80-foot sway pole.

"When I am out there, all of my pain and all that goes away and I am in a world of my own," she said in the 2017 TV interview.

She is survived by her son, two daughters, Rietta Wallenda Jordan and Valerie Wallenda, and 16 grandchildren. A second son, Mario, died in 1993.

## Biden marks 'Bloody Sunday' by signing voting rights order

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new executive order from President Joe Biden directs federal agencies to take a series of steps to promote voting access, a move that comes as congressional Democrats press for a sweeping voting and elections bill to counter efforts to restrict voting access.

His plan was announced during a recorded address on the 56th commemoration of "Bloody Sunday," the 1965 incident in which some 600 civil rights activists were viciously beaten by state troopers as they tried to march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama.

"Every eligible voter should be able to vote and have it counted," Biden said in his remarks to Sunday's Martin and Coretta King Unity Breakfast before signing the order. "If you have the best ideas, you have nothing to hide. Let the people vote."

Biden's order includes several modest provisions. It directs federal agencies to expand access to voter registration and election information, calls on the heads of agencies to come up with plans to give federal employees time off to vote or volunteer as nonpartisan poll workers, and pushes an overhaul of the government's Vote.gov website.

Democrats are attempting to solidify support for House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process. It was approved Wednesday on a near party-line vote, 220-210.

The voting rights bill includes provisions to restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows

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wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

Democrats say the bill will help stifle voter suppression attempts, while Republicans have cast the bill as unwanted federal interference in states' authority to conduct their own elections.

The bill's fate is far from certain in the closely divided Senate. Conservative groups have undertaken a \$5 million campaign to try persuade moderate Senate Democrats to oppose rule changes needed to pass the measure.

With his executive order, Biden is looking to turn the spotlight on the issue and is using the somber commemoration of Bloody Sunday to make the case that much is at stake.

Bloody Sunday proved to be a turning point in the civil rights movement that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Similarly, Biden is hoping the Jan. 6 sacking of the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Donald Trump mob will prove to be a clarion call for Congress to take action to improve voter protections.

"In 2020 — with our very democracy on the line — even in the midst of a pandemic — more Americans voted than ever before," Biden said. "Yet instead of celebrating this powerful demonstration of voting — we saw an unprecedented insurrection on our Capitol and a brutal attack on our democracy on January 6th. A never-before-seen effort to ignore, undermine and undo the will of the people."

Biden's also paid tribute to the late civil rights giants Rev. C.T. Vivian, Rev. Joseph Lowery and Rep. John Lewis. All played critical roles in the 1965 organizing efforts in Selma and all died in within the past year.

## Myanmar crisis heightens with police raids and strike call

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar careened deeper into crisis, as police occupied hospitals and universities and reportedly arrested hundreds of people involved in protesting last month's military seizure of power, while a coalition of labor unions called a strike for Monday.

Tension was high Sunday in the country's biggest city, Yangon, where for a second night running gunshots from heavy weapons rang out randomly in the streets of several neighborhoods after the start of an 8 p.m. curfew. The sounds of what apparently were stun grenades could also be heard on videos posted on social media.

The purpose for security forces using such weapons when protesters had left the streets appeared to be part of a strategy to strike fear in anyone who might think about defying the authorities. In a similar vein, there were many filmed incidents of police and soldiers in plain view savagely beating protesters they had taken into custody.

Some of the shooting was heard near hospitals, where reports said neighborhood residents sought to block the entry of police and soldiers.

Security forces have often targeted medical personnel and facilities, attacking ambulances and their crews. Members of the medical profession launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, which is the nominal coordinator of the protests, frequently hailed on demonstrators' signs by its CDM initials. Taking over hospitals would allow the authorities to easily arrest wounded people presumed to be protesters.

Large protests have occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests. At least 18 protesters were shot and killed on Feb. 28 and 38 on Wednesday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office. More than 1,500 have been arrested, the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said.

Protests in various cities and towns were again met Sunday by police firing warning shots, and employing tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades.

In a single Yangon neighborhood, Shwepyitha, at least 100 students were reported arrested, and many protesters were also said to have been detained in other cities, especially at universities.

Myanmar labor unions, meanwhile, issued a joint call for a nationwide work stoppage beginning Monday, with the goal of a "full, extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy."

"To continue the economic and business activities as usual, and to delay a general work-stoppage, will only benefit the military as they repress the energy of the Myanmar people," said the appeal, issued Sunday night.

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The statement called for the strike to continue "until we receive our democracy back."

Workers in several industries have joined the protest movement, most notably from the state railway and the banking sector.

Factory workers, mostly in the Yangon area, are largely involved in the garment industry, which generates major export earnings for Myanmar. The workers have participated occasionally in the campaign against the junta, but are unable to do so on a daily basis for fear of losing their modest incomes.

Advocates of sanctions against the junta have purposely avoided calling for comprehensive trade sanctions for fear they would hurt the general populace. Instead they have called for, and enacted, targeted sanctions aimed at hurting the military's leadership and military-linked companies.

Earlier Sunday, police in Myanmar's ancient former capital, Bagan, opened fire on demonstrators protesting the Feb. 1 coup, wounding several people, according to witness accounts and videos on social media.

At least five people were reported hurt as police sought to break up the Bagan protest, and photos showed one young man with bloody wounds on his chin and neck, believed to have been caused by a rubber bullet. Bullet casings collected at the scene indicated that live rounds were also fired.

The city, located in the central Mandalay region, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in recognition of the more than 2,000 pagodas or their remnants situated there, dating from the ninth to 13th centuries, when it was the capital of a kingdom that later became known as Burma and is now Myanmar.

Bagan is best known for being one of the country's top tourist attractions, but it has also been the scene of large protest marches against the junta.

Multiple reports from Yangon said there had been police raids Saturday night seeking to seize organizers and supporters of the protest movement. A ward chairman from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, which was ousted from power in the coup, was found dead in a military hospital Sunday morning by fellow residents of his Pabedan neighborhood, according to a post on Facebook by NLD lawmaker Sithu Maung.

Suspicion was rampant on social media that Khin Maung Latt, 58, died due to a beating in custody after being taken from his residence, but no official cause of death was immediately announced.

In Yangon and elsewhere, raids are carried out nightly after the 8 p.m. curfew by police and soldiers. The arrests are often carried out at gunpoint, without warrants.

The escalation of violence has put pressure on the global community to act to restrain the junta. 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.

Suu Kyi's party led a return to civilian rule with a landslide election victory in 2015, and with an even greater margin of votes last year. It would have been installed for a second five-year term last month, but instead Suu Kyi and President Win Myint and other members of the government were placed in military detention.

## Floyd's cause of death, ex-cop's force will be keys at trial

By AMY FORLITI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A Minneapolis police officer was swiftly fired and charged with murder after bystander video showed him pressing his knee into George Floyd's neck, ignoring the Black man's cries that he couldn't breathe. But even with that powerful footage, legal experts say the case isn't a slam dunk.

Jury selection begins Monday in Derek Chauvin's trial, which is expected to come down to two key questions: Did Chauvin's actions cause Floyd's death, and were his actions reasonable?

"It's hard not to watch the video and conclude that the prosecutors will not have any trouble with this case," said Susan Gaertner, the former head prosecutor in neighboring Ramsey County. "But it's not that simple."

Floyd was declared dead May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for about nine minutes, holding his position even after Floyd went limp as he was handcuffed and lying on his stomach. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond, and led to a

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nationwide reckoning on race.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree unintentional murder and second-degree manslaughter, and a panel of appeals court judges ruled Friday that the judge must consider reinstating a third-degree murder charge that he dismissed last fall. Three other officers, all of whom also were fired, face trial in August on charges of aiding and abetting the second-degree murder and manslaughter counts.

The second-degree murder charge requires prosecutors to prove Chauvin caused Floyd's death while committing or trying to commit a felony — in this case, third-degree assault. The manslaughter charge has a lower bar, requiring proof that Chauvin caused Floyd's death through negligence that created an unreasonable risk, and consciously took the chance of causing severe injury or death.

Exactly how Floyd died is shaping up as a major flashpoint of the trial.

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, argues in court documents that Floyd likely died from fentanyl he consumed, or a combination of fentanyl, methamphetamine and underlying health conditions — not as a result of Chauvin's knee on his neck.

But Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill wrote last fall that for the second-degree murder charge, prosecutors don't have to prove that Chauvin was the sole cause of Floyd's death — only that his conduct was a "substantial causal factor."

Still, defense attorneys who aren't connected to the case say all Nelson has to do is raise reasonable doubt in a single juror's mind.

"Although he had him pinned under his knee and he's yelling 'I can't breathe! I can't breathe!' there's an argument that (Chauvin) wasn't exerting pressure and his inability to breathe was due to the drugs in his system or something to that effect, or his anxiety," said F. Clayton Tyler, a prominent local defense attorney.

Defense attorneys say it also may not be easy to establish that Chauvin was committing the felony of assault — as required for the second-degree murder charge in this case. That's because Chauvin is authorized to use force as a police officer, and his attorneys will argue that his use of force against Floyd was reasonable.

Gaertner said the defense will face a challenge of trying to move the jury's focus off of the video and the strong emotion it generates. They'll instead try to focus on the medical evidence and Floyd's underlying conditions while trying to portray the circumstances of the arrest as "justifiable consistent with police norms," she said.

Brandt and Tyler said Chauvin will likely have to take the stand to explain why he felt he had to hold Floyd down for so long. Brandt said he'll likely say he followed his training, and that it was necessary because his experience with other suspects under the influence of drugs shows that things can suddenly become erratic and dangerous.

Prosecutors, however, have submitted a list of previous instances in which Chauvin used chokeholds or similar restraints on the job. Cahill ruled they can admit only one as evidence: a 2017 arrest in which Chauvin restrained a female by placing his knee on her neck while she was prone on the ground.

Cahill also ruled that prosecutors can tell jurors about a 2015 incident in which Chauvin saw other officers place a suicidal, intoxicated male in a side-recovery position after using a stun gun on him. Cahill said prosecutors can introduce that if they can show Chauvin was present when a medical professional said that the male could have died if officers had prolonged the detention.

Brandt said telling the jury about those events will allow prosecutors to show that Chauvin knew the proper way to restrain someone and provide relief, and that he had done it wrong before.

Brandt said the third-degree murder charge could be easier for prosecutors to prove if it's reinstated because they wouldn't have to show Chauvin intended to commit assault. Instead, they must prove his actions caused Floyd's death, and that they were reckless and without regard for human life.

The second-degree manslaughter count alleges Chauvin took a risk that a reasonable person would have known could cause death. To defend against that, Brandt said, Chauvin could argue that he had used the same hold in the past and didn't think it would cause a problem.

However, Brandt said "the whole case" against Chauvin is the video capturing the amount of time he

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restrained Floyd.

"You hear on the video the passersby, the onlookers saying, 'Dude, he can't breathe. Let him up. What are you doing? You are killing him,'" Brandt said. "I mean, it's almost like they are giving a play-by-play."

Tyler said if he were a prosecutor, he'd use a still shot of Chauvin's expressionless face from that video and keep it in view for the jury to see.

"I mean, the look on his face," Tyler said. "If I was prosecuting this case, I have to say, I'd have that picture up there. You want to show indifference? Just look at him."

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

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

## Where IS ruled, pope calls on Christians to forgive, rebuild

By NICOLE WINFIELD and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

QARAQOSH, Iraq (AP) — Pope Francis urged Iraq's Christians on Sunday to forgive the injustices against them by Muslim extremists and to rebuild as he visited the wrecked shells of churches and met ecstatic crowds in the community's historic heartland, which was nearly erased by the Islamic State group's horrific reign.

"Fraternity is more durable than fratricide, hope is more powerful than hatred, peace more powerful than war," the pontiff said during prayers for the dead in the city of Mosul, with the call for tolerance that has been the central message of his four-day visit to Iraq.

At each stop in northern Iraq, the remnants of its Christian population turned out, jubilant, ululating and decked out in colorful dress. Heavy security prevented Francis from plunging into the crowd as he would normally. Nonetheless, they simply seemed overjoyed that he had come and that they had not been forgotten.

It was a sign of the desperation for support among an ancient community uncertain whether it can hold on. The traditionally Christian towns dotting the Nineveh Plains of the north emptied out in 2014 as Christians — as well as many Muslims — fled the Islamic State group's onslaught. Only a few have returned to their homes since the defeat of IS in Iraq was declared four years ago, and the rest remain scattered elsewhere in Iraq or abroad.

Bells rang out for the pope's arrival in the town of Qaraqosh.

"The road to a full recovery may still be long, but I ask you, please, not to grow discouraged," Francis told a packed Church of the Immaculate Conception. "What is needed is the ability to forgive, but also the courage not to give up."

The Qaraqosh church has been extensively renovated after being vandalized by IS militants during their takeover of the town, making it a symbol of recovery efforts.

Iraq's Christian population, which has existed here since the time of Christ, has dwindled from around 1.5 million before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that plunged the country into chaos to just a few hundred thousand today.

Francis's visit, on its last day Sunday, aimed to encourage them to stay, rebuild and restore what he called Iraq's "intricately designed carpet" of faiths and ethnic groups.

Dressed in white, Francis took to a red carpeted stage in Mosul on his first stop of the day, surrounded by the grey hollowed-out shells of four churches — Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean — nearly destroyed in the war to oust IS fighters from the city.

It was a scene that would have been unimaginable years earlier. Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, was at the heart of the IS so-called "caliphate" and witnessed the worst of the group's rule inflicted on Muslims, Christians and others, including beheadings and mass killings.

He deviated from his prepared speech to emphasize the plight of Iraq's Yazidi minority, which was subjected to mass killings, abductions and sexual slavery at the hands of IS.

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"How cruel it is that this country, the cradle of civilization, should have been afflicted by so barbarous a blow," Francis said, "with ancient places of worship destroyed and many thousands of people – Muslims, Christians, Yazidis — who were cruelly annihilated by terrorism and others forcibly displaced or killed."

IS inflicted atrocities against all communities, including Muslims, during its three-year rule across much of northern and western Iraq. But the Christian minority was hit especially hard. The militants forced them to choose among conversion, death or the payment of a special tax for non-Muslims. Thousands fled, leaving homes and churches that were destroyed or commandeered by the extremists.

Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, became IS's bureaucratic and financial backbone. It took a ferocious nine-month battle to finally free the city in July 2017. Between 9,000 and 11,000 civilians were killed, according to an AP investigation at the time, and the war left a swath of destruction. Many Iraqis have had to rebuild on their own amid a years-long financial crisis.

The Rev. Raed Kallo was among the few Christians who returned to Mosul after IS was defeated. "My Muslim brothers received me after the liberation of the city with great hospitality and love," he said on stage before the pontiff.

Before IS, he had a parish of 500 Christian families. Now only 70 families remain, he said. "But today I live among 2 million Muslims who call me their Father Raed," he said.

Gutayba Agha, the Muslim head of the Independent Social and Cultural Council for the Families of Mosul, invited "all our Christian brothers to return to this, their city, their properties and their businesses."

Throughout his four-day visit, Francis has delivered a message of interreligious tolerance to Muslim leaders, including in a historic meeting Saturday with Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

But Christians say it will take real changes on the ground for them to be able to return and stay, saying they face discrimination and intimidation from Shiite militias on top of the economic hardships suffered by all Iraqis.

Qaraqosh resident Martin Auffee said he was overjoyed by the pope's visit and appreciated that he showed he was with Christians as he urged them to endure. But the 27-year-old said many of the young in his area have grown weary of lack of opportunity.

"We don't know for how long they can cling onto hope and continue to stay in Iraq because there's a lot of pain, unemployment and uncertainty," he said. "My whole life has been filled with pain, misery, war, persecution and displacement. Things are difficult for those living here."

At Qaraqosh, Francis urged its residents to continue to dream, and forgive.

"Forgiveness is necessary to remain in love, to remain Christian," he said.

One resident, Doha Sabah Abdallah, told him how her son and two other young people were killed in a mortar strike Aug. 6, 2014 as IS neared the town. "The martyrdom of these three angels" alerted the other residents to flee, she said. "The deaths of three saved the entire city."

She said now it was for the survivors to "try to forgive the aggressor."

Francis wrapped up the day — and his visit — with a Mass at the stadium in Irbil, in the semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region. An estimated 10,000 people erupted in ululating cheers when he arrived and did a lap around the track in his open-sided popemobile, the first and only time he has used it on this trip due to security concerns.

On the makeshift altar for the Mass was a statue of the Virgin Mary from the Mar Adday Church in the town of Keramlis, which was restored after IS militants chopped off its head and hands.

Few in the crowd wore facemasks, as was the case during all of Francis' visits Sunday in northern Iraq. The pope heads back to Rome early Monday morning.

Public health experts had expressed concerns ahead of the trip that large gatherings could serve as superspreader events for the coronavirus in a country suffering from a worsening outbreak where few have been vaccinated. The pope and members of his delegation have been vaccinated but most Iraqis have not.

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Kullab reported from Baghdad. AP Religion Correspondent Mariam Fam contributed.

**Swiss narrowly back proposal to ban face coverings in public**

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By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Swiss voters narrowly approved on Sunday a proposal to ban face coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women in the country and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters.

The measure will outlaw covering one's face in public places like restaurants, sports stadiums, public transport or simply walking in the street. It foresees exceptions at religious sites and for security or health reasons, such as face masks people are wearing now to protect against COVID-19, as well as for traditional Carnival celebrations. Authorities have two years to draw up detailed legislation.

Two Swiss cantons, or states, Ticino and St. Gallen, already have similar legislation that foresees fines for transgressions. National legislation will put Switzerland in line with countries such as Belgium and France that have already enacted similar measures.

The Swiss government had opposed the measure as excessive, arguing that full-face coverings are a "marginal phenomenon." It argued that the ban could harm tourism — most Muslim women who wear such veils in Switzerland are visitors from well-heeled Persian Gulf states, who are often drawn to Swiss lakeside cities.

Experts estimate that at most a few dozen Muslim women wear full-face coverings in the country of 8.5 million people.

Supporters of the proposal, which came to a vote five years after it was launched, argued that the full-face coverings symbolize the repression of women and said the measure is needed to uphold a basic principle that faces should be shown in a free society like Switzerland's.

In the end, 51.2% of voters supported the plan. There were majorities against it in six of Switzerland's 26 cantons — among them those that include the country's three biggest cities, Zurich, Geneva and Basel, and the capital, Bern. SRF public television reported that voters in several popular tourist destinations including Interlaken, Lucerne and Zermatt rejected it.

Backers included the nationalist Swiss People's Party, which is the strongest in parliament. The committee that launched the proposal is led by a lawmaker from the party, Walter Wobmann, and also initiated a ban on the construction of new minarets that voters approved in 2009.

A coalition of left-leaning parties that opposes the proposal put up signs ahead of the referendum that read: "Absurd. Useless. Islamophobic."

Wobmann told SRF that the initiative addressed both "a symbol of a completely different system of values ... extremely radical Islam" and security against "hooligans." He said that "this has nothing to do with symbolic politics."

Voters had their say on two other issues Sunday. They clearly rejected a proposed voluntary "e-ID" to improve the security of online transactions — an idea that ran afoul of privacy advocates, as it would have been issued by private companies — and narrowly approved a free-trade deal with Indonesia.

## Audiences hold back, even as more movie theaters open

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Theaters reopening in New York City this weekend did not set the box office on fire. North American theatrical grosses stayed relatively muted, despite some major new releases like Disney's "Raya and the Last Dragon" and Lionsgate's Tom Holland and Daisy Ridley action flick "Chaos Walking," according to studio estimates Sunday.

Walt Disney Animation's "Raya and the Last Dragon" earned an estimated \$8.6 million from 2,045 locations in North America. The well-reviewed fantasy adventure, featuring the voices of Awkwafina and Kelly Marie Tran, is also available for Disney+ subscribers to rent and stream at home for \$29.99. Streaming grosses were not reported.

Warner Bros. "Tom & Jerry," which is available to stream free for HBO Max subscribers, brought in \$6.6 million from 2,563 North American theaters in its second available weekend. Last weekend the animated film scored the best domestic opening of the year with \$13.7 million.

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"Chaos Walking," meanwhile, debuted with \$3.8 million. The future set film from "Edge of Tomorrow" director Doug Liman cost around \$100 million to make.

Approximately 80% of the domestic market is currently allowed to operate with limited capacity. Many areas in North America are not yet fully open, including Los Angeles, and most California counties, Washington D.C., and much of Canada.

Disney is hoping to keep "Raya" in theaters throughout the spring. There are scant major family films on the schedule until early summer and the company is hoping for increased play during spring breaks and as more territories reopen.

Internationally, "Raya and the Last Dragon" earned an estimated \$17.6 million from 32 territories -- the highest grossing of which was China with \$8.4 million.

## At Dubai airport, travelers' eyes become their passports

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Dubai's airport, the world's busiest for international travel, can already feel surreal, with its cavernous duty-free stores, artificial palm trees, gleaming terminals, water cascades and near-Arctic levels of air conditioning.

Now, the key east-west transit hub is rolling out another addition from the realm of science fiction — an iris-scanner that verifies one's identity and eliminates the need for any human interaction when entering or leaving the country.

It's the latest artificial intelligence program the United Arab Emirates has launched amid the surging coronavirus pandemic, contact-less technology the government promotes as helping to stem the spread of the virus. But the efforts also have renewed questions about mass surveillance in the federation of seven sheikhdoms, which experts believe has among the highest per capita concentrations of surveillance cameras in the world.

Dubai's airport started offering the program to all passengers last month. On Sunday, travelers stepped up to an iris scanner after checking in, gave it a good look and breezed through passport control within seconds. Gone were the days of paper tickets or unwieldy phone apps.

In recent years, airports across the world have accelerated their use of timesaving facial recognition technology to move passengers to their flights. But Dubai's iris scan improves on the more commonplace automated gates seen elsewhere, authorities said, connecting the iris data to the country's facial recognition databases so the passenger needs no identifying documents or boarding pass. The unusual partnership between long-haul carrier Emirates, owned by a Dubai sovereign wealth fund, and the Dubai immigration office integrates the data and carries travelers from check-in to boarding in one fell swoop, they added.

"The future is coming," said Major Gen. Obaid Mehayer Bin Suroor, deputy director of the General Directorate of Residency and Foreign Affairs. "Now, all the procedures have become 'smart,' around five to six seconds."

But like all facial recognition technology, the program adds to fears of vanishing privacy in the country, which has faced international criticism for targeting journalists and human rights activists.

According to Emirates' biometric privacy statement, the airline links passengers' faces with other personally identifying data, including passport and flight information, retaining it for "as long as it is reasonably necessary for the purposes for which it was collected." The agreement offered few details about how the data will be used and stored, beyond saying that while the company didn't make copies of passengers' faces, other personal data "can be processed in other Emirates' systems."

Bin Suroor stressed that Dubai's immigration office "completely protects" passengers' personal data so that "no third party can see it."

But without more information about how data will be used or stored, biometric technology raises the possibility of misuse, experts say.

"Any kind of surveillance technology raises red flags, regardless of what kind of country it's in," said Jonathan Frankle, a doctoral student in artificial intelligence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "But in a democratic country, if the surveillance technology is used transparently, at least there's an op-

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portunity to have a public conversation about it.”

Iris scans, requiring people to stare into a camera as though they're offering a fingerprint, have become more widespread worldwide in recent years as questions have arisen over the accuracy of facial recognition technology. Iris biometrics are considered more reliable than surveillance cameras that scan people's faces from a distance without their knowledge or consent.

Despite concerns about overzealous surveillance in the UAE, the country's vast facial recognition network only shows signs of expanding. Last month, Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who also serves as Dubai's ruler, announced the country would begin trials of new facial recognition technology to cut down on paperwork in "some private sector services," without elaborating.

During the pandemic, the skyscraper-studded city of Dubai has advanced an array of technological tools to fight the virus in malls and on streets, including disinfectant foggers, thermal cameras and face scans that check for masks and take temperatures. The programs similarly use cameras that can record and upload people's data, potentially feeding the information into the city-state's wider biometric databases.

## US states look to step up wolf kills, pushed by Republicans

By MATTHEW BROWN and IRIS SAMUELS Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Payments for dead wolves. Unlimited hunting of the animals. Shooting wolves from the air.

Wolf hunting policies in some states are taking an aggressive turn, as Republican lawmakers and conservative hunting groups push to curb their numbers and propose tactics shunned by many wildlife managers.

In Montana, lawmakers are advancing measures to allow shooting wolves at night and payments to hunters reminiscent of bounties that widely exterminated the species last century. Idaho legislation would allow hunters to shoot them from motorized parachutes, ATVs or snowmobiles year-round with no limits in most areas.

And in Wisconsin, just weeks after President Donald Trump's administration lifted protections for wolves in the Great Lakes region, hunters using hounds and trappers blew past the state's harvest goal and killed almost twice as many as planned.

The timing of the Wisconsin hunt was bumped up following a lawsuit that raised concerns President Joe Biden's administration would intervene to restore gray wolf protections. The group behind the suit has close links to Republican political circles including influential donors the Koch brothers and notable Trump loyalists — Kris Kobach, a former U.S. Senate candidate from Kansas, and rock star and gun rights advocate Ted Nugent.

Antipathy toward wolves for killing livestock and big game dates to early European settlement of the American West in the 1800s, and flared up again after wolf populations rebounded under federal protection. What's emerging now is different: an increasingly politicized campaign to drive down wolf numbers sometimes using methods anathema to North American hunting traditions, according to former wildlife officials and advocates.

"It's not a scientific approach to wildlife management. It's management based on vengeance," said Dan Vermillion, former chairman of Montana's fish and wildlife commission. Vermillion and others said wolves were being used to stoke political outrage in the same way Second Amendment gun rights were used in recent elections to raise fears Democrats would restrict firearms.

Hanging in the balance is a decades-long initiative that brought back thousands of wolves in the Rocky Mountains, Pacific Northwest and Great Lakes regions. Considered among scientists and environmentalists a major conservation success, the predator's return remains a sore point for ranchers whose livestock are sometimes attacked by wolves and hunters who consider wolf packs competition in the pursuit of elk, deer and other big game.

In Montana and Idaho, wolf numbers exploded after their reintroduction from Canada in the 1990s. Federal protections were lifted a decade ago. The states have been holding annual hunts since, and wildlife officials cite stable population levels as evidence of responsible wolf management.

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That's not satisfied hunting and livestock groups and their Republican allies in those legislatures, who contend 1,500 wolves in Idaho and 1,200 in Montana are damaging the livelihoods of big game outfitters and cattle and sheep producers.

"Too many wolves," Republican state Sen. Bob Brown said of his mountainous district in northwest Montana. He's sponsoring a bounty-like program that's similar to one in Idaho and would reimburse hunting and trapping expenses through a private fund.

A separate measure from Brown would allow the use of bait and night-vision scopes. Another proposal would allow snares, which critics say are indiscriminate and can accidentally catch pets or other animals.

In response to concerns that the treatment of wolves will drive away tourists hoping to glimpse one in places like Montana's Glacier National Park, Brown said their negative impact can't be ignored.

"I certainly believe there are people who come to look at wolves," he said. "But we are also hurting the outfitting industry."

Critics including Democratic Sen. Pat Flowers, a former state wildlife department supervisor, warned of a significant toll on Montana's wolf population. State Senate Minority Leader Jill Cohenour, also a Democrat, said the proposals would "take us right back to having them listed" as an endangered species.

Wolves lost federal species protections in the western Great Lakes in 2011, but they were re-imposed three years later under court order.

The Trump administration lifted protections again five days before the November election, when Interior Secretary David Bernhardt travelled to Minnesota to announce the move.

On President Joe Biden's first day in office, the White House said it would review the wolf decision.

Wisconsin officials already were planning a hunt in November when Hunter Nation, founded in 2018, sued to force a hunt immediately. The group cited a possible return of protections by the Biden administration.

Hunter Nation boasts its led by "America's greatest Hunters and Patriots" on its website, which also includes praise for Trump. Its leader, Luke Hilgemann, formerly served as CEO at Americans for Prosperity, a conservative advocacy group backed by industrialists Charles Koch and his deceased brother, David, that has spent tens of millions of dollars on Republican candidates.

Hunters and trappers killed at least 216 wolves of Wisconsin's 1,100 wolves over three days, nearly doubling the state's target of 119 animals and forcing an early shutdown of the season.

Hilgemann participated, and said in an interview that he chased a wolf with dogs for 60 miles (96 kilometers) but never caught it. It's up to states to decide what kind of tactics they use, he said, while Hunter Nation will fight any attempt to halt the hunts. He said group has quickly grown to 20,000 members, but declined to divulge its financial supporters.

"Conservative, traditional American values of God, family and country — that's what we intend to focus on," Hilgemann said. "We need to get ahead of our predator populations including wolves. They will quickly expand their range. They reproduce quickly, spelling trouble for other wild game, livestock and pets."

Adam Winkler, a UCLA Law professor specializing in gun policy, said the group's messaging appears aimed at mobilizing hunters to get behind conservative causes.

"I'm not surprised we're seeing hunting groups wrap themselves in the mantle of patriotism," Winkler said. "Patriotism has become the watchword of the right."

Former federal wildlife agent Carter Niemeyer, who killed wolves that preyed on cattle in the Northern Rockies and was later involved in restoration efforts, said wolves are too resilient to be easily eradicated. But he warned the tactics being used will alienate large segments of the public to hunting and trapping.

"They're running them down with hound dogs," he said. "That's wolf killing. That's not wolf trapping or wolf hunting."

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John Flesher contributed from Traverse City, Michigan.

Samuels is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues.

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On Twitter follow Matthew Brown: @MatthewBrownAP and Iris Samuels: @Iris\_Samuels

## **GOP pushes bills to allow social media 'censorship' lawsuits**

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

Republican state lawmakers are pushing for social media giants to face costly lawsuits for policing content on their websites, taking aim at a federal law that prevents internet companies from being sued for removing posts.

GOP politicians in roughly two dozen states have introduced bills that would allow for civil lawsuits against platforms for what they call the "censorship" of posts. Many protest the deletion of political and religious statements, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Democrats, who also have called for greater scrutiny of big tech, are sponsoring the same measures in at least two states.

The federal liability shield has long been a target of former President Donald Trump and other Republicans, whose complaints about Silicon Valley stifling conservative viewpoints were amplified when the companies cracked down on misleading posts about the 2020 election.

Twitter and Facebook, which are often criticized for opaque policing policies, took the additional step of silencing Trump on their platforms after the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Twitter has banned him, while a semi-independent panel is reviewing Facebook's indefinite suspension of his account and considering whether to reinstate access.

Experts argue the legislative proposals are doomed to fail while the federal law, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, is in place. They said state lawmakers are wading into unconstitutional territory by trying to interfere with the editorial policies of private companies.

Len Niehoff, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School, described the idea as a "constitutional non-starter."

"If an online platform wants to have a policy that it will delete certain kinds of tweets, delete certain kinds of users, forbid certain kinds of content, that is in the exercise of their right as a information distributor," he said. "And the idea that you would create a cause of action that would allow people to sue when that happens is deeply problematic under the First Amendment."

The bills vary slightly but many allow for civil lawsuits if a social media user is censored over posts having to do with politics or religion, with some proposals allowing for damages of \$75,000 for each blocked post. They would apply to companies with millions of users and carve out exemptions for posts that call for violence, entice criminal acts or other similar conduct.

The sponsor of Oklahoma's version, Republican state Sen. Rob Standridge, said social media posts are being unjustly censored and that people should have a way to challenge the platforms' actions given their powerful place in American discourse. His bill passed committee in late February on a 5-3 vote, with Democrats opposed.

"This just gives citizens recourse," he said, adding that the companies "can't abuse that immunity" given to them through federal law.

Part of a broad, 1996 federal law on telecoms, Section 230 generally exempts internet companies from being sued over what users post on their sites. The statute, which was meant to promote growth of the internet, exempts websites from being sued for removing content deemed to be "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable" as long as the companies are acting in "good faith."

As the power of social media has grown, so has the prospect of government regulation. Several congressional hearings have been held on content moderation, sometimes with Silicon Valley CEOs called to testify. Republicans, and some Democrats, have argued that the companies should lose their liability shield or that Section 230 should be updated to make the companies meet certain criteria before receiving the legal protection.

Twitter and Facebook also have been hounded over what critics have described as sluggish, after-the-fact account suspensions or post takedowns, with liberals complaining they have given too much latitude

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to conservatives and hate groups.

Trump railed against Section 230 throughout his term in office, well before Twitter and Facebook blocked his access to their platforms after the assault on the Capitol. Last May, he signed a largely symbolic executive order that directed the executive branch to ask independent rule-making agencies whether new regulations could be placed on the companies.

"All of these tech monopolies are going to abuse their power and interfere in our elections, and it has to be stopped," he told supporters at the Capitol hours before the riot.

Antigone Davis, global head of safety for Facebook, said these kinds of proposals would make it harder for the site to remove posts involving hate speech, sexualized photos of minors and other harmful content.

"We will continue advocating for updated rules for the internet, including reforms to federal law that protect free expression while allowing platforms like ours to remove content that threatens the safety and security of people across the United States," she said.

In a statement, Twitter said: "We enforce the Twitter rules judiciously and impartially for everyone on our service – regardless of ideology or political affiliation – and our policies help us to protect the diversity and health of the public conversation."

Researchers have not found widespread evidence that social media companies are biased against conservative news, posts or materials.

In a February report, New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights called the accusations political disinformation spread by Republicans. The report recommended that social media sites give clear reasoning when they take action against material on their platforms.

"Greater transparency — such as that which Twitter and Facebook offered when they took action against President Trump in January — would help to defuse claims of political bias, while clarifying the boundaries of acceptable user conduct," the report read.

While the federal law is in place, the state proposals mostly amount to political posturing, said Darrell West, vice president of governance studies at the Brookings Institution, a public policy group.

"This is red meat for the base. It's a way to show conservatives they don't like being pushed around," he said. "They've seen Trump get kicked off Facebook and Twitter, and so this is a way to tell Republican voters this is unfair and Republicans are fighting for them."

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Izaguirre reported from Lindenhurst, New York

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## Sunshine State dims for Dems amid election losses, cash woes

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Democrats may delight in their brightening prospects in Arizona and Georgia, and may even harbor glimmers of hope in Texas, but their angst is growing in Florida, which has a reputation as a swing state but now favors Republicans and could be shifting further out of reach for Democrats.

As the jockeying begins to take on Gov. Ron DeSantis and U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio in 2022, Democrats' disadvantage against Republicans is deeper than ever, as they try to develop a cohesive strategy and rebuild a statewide party deep in debt and disarray.

Former President Donald Trump's brand of populism has helped power a GOP surge in Florida, where Trump defeated now-President Joe Biden by more than 3 percentage points last fall — more than doubling the lead he had against Hillary Clinton. Republicans also snatched away two congressional seats and widened their majorities in the statehouse.

And that was despite \$100 million spent by Michael Bloomberg to help Democrats in the state. When the spending tally is complete, the last election cycle in Florida is expected to rank as among the most expensive in state history. The lack of return in Florida could point the national party and donors to invest

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their efforts and largesse elsewhere.

"I don't know anybody who's happy with investing \$100 million and not winning," said Manny Diaz, the new chair of the Florida Democratic Party.

"I've heard people ask: Do we give up on Florida? They say we won the White House with Georgia and Arizona, and we didn't need Florida," Diaz said. "I admit that shouldn't be where we are today."

Steve Schale, a Democratic strategist, said the state party needs to show that "things are moving in a positive trajectory."

"One of my concerns is that it's going to be a big lift to get people spending money here again," Schale said.

Meanwhile, Florida's Democratic Party ran up debts of up to \$860,000 and had to cancel health insurance coverage for party employees late last year — prompting the national party and other states' party organizations to provide some assistance.

It's clear Democrats are losing ground, said Michael Binder, the director of the University of North Florida Public Opinion Research Laboratory. Democrats have had many more high-profile defeats than wins in recent years and have not won a gubernatorial race in a quarter-century.

"Yes, we have all these close races — but it's the Republicans who are winning," Binder said.

In 2008, Florida Democrats enjoyed a nearly 700,000 voter-registration advantage over Republicans, providing a considerable cushion when then-Sen. Barack Obama beat Republican Sen. John McCain by fewer than 205,000 votes in the state. Republicans have narrowed that registration cushion considerably in recent years.

Now, the state has only one Democrat in statewide office, Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried, who is positioning herself for a run for higher office, possibly for governor.

Key Democrats argue it would be a mistake if national donors leave Florida to fend for itself. In presidential elections, the state has a bonanza of electoral college votes — currently 29 but likely to grow to 31 because of the state's booming population.

Diaz, the state party chairman, is trying to reverse the slide in its voter registration advantage over Republicans. As of Jan. 31, its lead had dwindled to only 110,000 voters. Meanwhile, the ranks of non-affiliated voters have swelled from 2.1 million in 2008 to more than 3.8 million today.

Over the past decade, the state has grown by nearly 2.9 million residents, many drawn by the state's climate and relative affordability. Many appear to arrive from more conservative parts of the country, like the Midwest.

"We're finding that these new registrants are more right of center," said Ryan Tyson, a Republican pollster and strategist, citing the party's data analysis. "Democrats are already at a disadvantage with money and candidates, and when you add the disadvantage of the influx of new participants, that's a tough hill to climb."

"I think they're asking people to step into a buzz saw," Tyson said of Democrats considering a statewide run.

Susie Wiles, who ran the Trump campaign in Florida in 2020, said Democrats could still win with the right candidate, a compelling message and sufficient financial backing. She warns her fellow Republicans about "resting on our laurels" and risk losing their own donors.

"I don't subscribe to the theory that Florida has gone red. I kind of roll my eyes, honestly, because I know how hard it is to win here, frankly, for either party," Wiles added.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, Republicans launched a voter registration blitz last year that went mostly unchallenged by Democrats, prompting criticism from among their own that Florida's Democratic Party was not fighting hard enough to win over voters.

"We need to be constantly present in minority communities, and not only show up when it's time to vote," said state Sen. Annette Taddeo, a Miami Democrat who is considering a run for governor and who has long criticized the state party for not doing more to boost its ranks. She pointed to a downturn in Democratic support from Hispanic voters in South Florida as decisive in the presidential race.

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Taddeo insists that Democrats can still win in Florida, even if Republicans might now have an edge. Other Democrats haven't given up either.

"If you walk past the roulette wheel and it's come up red nine out of the last 10 times, it doesn't mean the next spin is going to be red," said Don Hinkle, a Tallahassee attorney and Democratic fundraiser.

But should donors gamble on Florida's track record?

"The reality is we don't have a choice," he said. "You can't walk away from a fight — because the stakes are too high."

## **Etna keeps up its spectacular explosions; ash rains on towns**

ROME (AP) — A particularly spectacular blast from Italy's Mount Etna volcano belched out a towering cloud of ash and lava stone Sunday onto Sicilian villages, the latest in a series of explosions since mid-February.

Italy's national geophysics and volcanology institute INGV said the powerful explosion at 2 a.m. was the 10th such big blast since Feb. 16, when Europe's most active volcano started giving off an impressive demonstration of nature's fire power, coloring the night sky in shocking hues of orange and red.

Increasing tremors rattled the mountain throughout much of the night. Ash and small lava stones rained down on eight villages on Etna's slopes Sunday morning, while lava flowed from the southeast crater slowly down an uninhabited side, as it has been doing for the last three weeks, the institute said.

The column of ash and lava reached a height of 10,000 meters (33,000 feet) on Sunday, according to scientists who monitor volcanic activity with specialized instruments from an observatory at Etna in eastern Sicily.

Locals swept ash and lava stones from their front steps and balconies. They have taken to covering cars parked outdoors with carpets, blankets and sheets of cardboard to make cleanup easier after each blast. Winds helped carry the ash eastward, INGV said.

No injuries or serious damage have been reported after the recent blasts. Geologically active, Etna occasionally becomes particularly noisy and explosive as it has been lately.

By mid-morning, Etna's latest display of activity had slowed somewhat with the lava flow ending, although the volcano was still puffing out "weak emission of ash" from the southeast crater. A few hours later, the volcanic tremors picked up again, INGV said in a statement.

The INGV scientists say there is no way of predicting when this current round of particularly robust volcanic activity might subside.

## **Casting a wide intrusion net: Dozens burned with single hack**

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The SolarWinds hacking campaign blamed on Russian spies and the "grave threat" it poses to U.S. national security are widely known. A very different — and no less alarming — coordinated series of intrusions also detected in December has gotten considerably less public attention.

Nimble, highly skilled criminal hackers believed to operate out of Eastern Europe hacked dozens of companies and government agencies on at least four continents by breaking into a single product they all used.

The victims include New Zealand's central bank, Harvard Business School, Australia's securities regulator, the high-powered U.S. law firm Jones Day — whose clients include former President Donald Trump — the rail freight company CSX and the Kroger supermarket and pharmacy chain. Also hit was Washington state's auditor's office, where the personal data of up to 1.3 million people gathered for an investigation into unemployment fraud was potentially exposed.

The two-stage mega-hack in December and January of a popular file-transfer program from the Silicon Valley company Accellion highlights a threat that security experts fear may be getting out of hand: intrusions by top-flight criminal and state-backed hackers into software supply chains and third-party services.

Operating system companies such as Microsoft have long been bull's-eyes — with untold thousands of installations of its Exchange email server being violated globally in the past few weeks, mostly after the

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company issued a patch and disclosed that Chinese state hackers had penetrated the program.

The Accellion casualties have kept piling up, meanwhile, with many being extorted by the Russian-speaking Clop cybercriminal gang, which threat researchers believe may have bought pilfered data from the hackers. Their threat: Pay up or we leak your sensitive data online, be it proprietary documents from Canadian aircraft maker Bombardier or lawyer-client communications from Jones Day.

The hack of up to 100 Accellion customers, who were easily identified by the hackers with an online scan, puts in painful relief a digital age core mission at which both governments and the private sector have been falling short.

"Attackers are finding it harder and harder to gain access via traditional methods, as vendors like Microsoft and Apple have hardened the security of the operating systems considerably over the last years. So, the attackers find easier ways in. This often means going via the supply chain. And as we've seen, it works," said Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer of the cybersecurity firm F-Secure.

Members of Congress are already dismayed by the supply-chain hack of the Texas network management software company SolarWinds that allowed suspected Russian state-backed hackers to tiptoe unnoticed — apparently intent solely on intelligence-gathering — for more than half a year through the networks of at least nine government agencies and more than 100 companies and think tanks. Only in December was the SolarWinds hacking campaign discovered, by the cybersecurity firm FireEye.

France suffered a similar hack, blamed by its cybersecurity agency on Russian military operatives, that also gamed the supply chain. They slipped malware into an update of network management software from a firm called Centreon, letting them quietly root around victim networks from 2017 to 2020.

Both those hacks snuck malware into software updates. The Accellion hack was different in one key respect: Its file-transfer program resided on victims' networks either as a stand-alone appliance or cloud-based app. Its job is to securely move around files too large to be attached to email.

Mike Hamilton, a former Seattle chief information security officer now with CI Security, said the trend of exploiting third-party service providers shows no signs of slowing because it gives criminals the highest return on their investment if they "want to compromise a broad swath of companies or government agencies."

The Accellion breach's impact might have been dulled had the company alerted customers more quickly, some complain.

The governor of New Zealand's central bank, Adrian Orr, says Accellion failed to warn it after first learning in mid-December that the nearly 20-year-old FTA application — using antiquated technology and set for retirement — had been breached.

Despite having a patch available on Dec. 20, Accellion did not notify the bank in time to prevent its appliance from being breached five days later, the bank said.

"If we were notified at the appropriate time, we could have patched the system and avoided the breach," Orr said in a statement posted on the bank's website. Among information stolen were files containing personal emails, dates of birth and credit information, the bank said.

Similarly, the Washington state auditor's office has no record of being informed of the breach until Jan. 12, the same day Accellion announced it publicly, said spokeswoman Kathleen Cooper. Accellion said then that it released a patch to the fewer than 50 customers affected within 72 hours of learning of the breach.

Accellion now tells a different story. It says it alerted all 320 potentially affected customers with multiple emails beginning on Dec. 22 — and followed up with emails and phone calls. Company spokesman Rob Dougherty would not directly address the New Zealand central bank's and Washington state auditor's complaints. Accellion says fewer than 25 customers appear to have suffered significant data theft.

A timeline released March 1 by the cybersecurity firm Mandiant, which Accellion hired to examine the incident, says the company got first word of the breach on Dec. 16. The Washington state auditor says its hack occurred on Christmas.

The notification timing issue is serious. Washington state has already been hit by a lawsuit, and several have been filed against Accellion seeking class action. Other organizations could also face legal or other

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consequences.

Last month, Harvard Business School officials emailed affected students to tell them that some Social Security numbers had been compromised as well as other personal information. Another victim, the Singapore-based telecommunications company Singtel, said personal data on about 129,000 customers was compromised.

Too often, software companies with hundreds of programmers have just one or two security people, said Katie Moussouris, CEO of Luta Security.

"We wish we could say that organizations were uniformly investing in security. But we're actually seeing them just dealing with the breaches and then vowing to do better in the future. And that's been sort of the business model."

Dougherty, the Accellion spokesman, said the attacks "had nothing to do with staffing," but he would not say how many people directly assigned to security the company employed in mid-December.

Cybersecurity threat analysts hope the snowballing of supply-chain hacks stuns the software industry into prioritizing security. Otherwise, vendors risk the fate that has befallen SolarWinds.

In a filing this past week with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the company offered a bleak outlook.

It said that as supply-chain hacks "continue to evolve at a rapid pace" it "may be unable to identify current attacks, anticipate future attacks or implement adequate security measures."

The ultimate, painful upshot, the document added:

"Customers have and may in the future defer purchasing or choose to cancel or not renew their agreements or subscriptions with us."

Associated Press writer Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington, contributed to this report.

## UK schools to reopen, backed by frequent virus testing

By KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British students, backed by a robust coronavirus testing program, are gearing up to return to school Monday after a two-month closure, in what Prime Minister Boris Johnson says is a plan to get the country "moving closer to a sense of normality."

The reopening of schools is the first step in the U.K. government's plan to gradually ease COVID-19 restrictions as the country's vaccination drive gains critical mass, with all restrictions lifted by June.

As part of the plan, millions of high school and college students coming back to U.K. classrooms will be tested for the virus for the first few weeks. Authorities want to quickly detect and isolate asymptomatic cases in order to avoid sending entire schools home.

"We are being cautious in our approach so that we do not undo the progress we have made so far," Johnson said in a statement, urging everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated.

High schools and colleges will be allowed to reopen in phases to allow for three rounds of testing. Students will then get kits so they can test themselves twice more at home. The U.K. government has distributed nearly 57 million rapid "lateral flow" test kits to schools across the country, but there are concerns about the accuracy of the tests, which may result in pupils being forced to self-isolate unnecessarily.

A senior public health official, however, said Sunday that the risk of a false positive was very low. More than 5 million rapid tests have been carried out at schools during lockdown, including 1 million last week, the government said.

Evidence from testing over the past eight weeks indicates "the risk of false positives is extremely low, less than 1 in 1,000," Susan Hopkins, the COVID-19 strategic response director for Public Health England, told the BBC. "And a test that returns less than 1 in 1,000 false positives is a very good test."

To help children forced into online learning for months to catch up with their education, officials are considering extending school days, shortening the summer holiday or adding an extra term to the year. British students already have a much shorter summer holiday than American students, usually leaving for

summer break after mid-July.

"We're looking at a whole range of measures," U.K. Education Secretary Gavin Williamson told Sky News. "We've got to look at what is going to have the biggest positive impact on children's lives."

Britain has Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with nearly 125,000 lives lost so far. Its coronavirus vaccination program has, however, raced ahead of the United States and the European Union to give at least a first dose to nearly 22 million of the country's adults so far.

Britain has approved three vaccines for use: those made by Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, and plans to vaccinate all adults by July.

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

## Workers worry about safety, stress as states ease mask rules

By LEAH WILLINGHAM, MICHAEL LIEDTKE and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

JACKSON, Mississippi (AP) — Leo Carney worries that bigger crowds and mask-less diners could endanger workers at the Biloxi, Mississippi, seafood restaurant where he manages the kitchen. Maribel Cornejo, who earns \$9.85 an hour as a McDonald's cook in Houston, can't afford to get sick and frets co-workers will become more lax about wearing masks, even though the fast food company requires them.

As more jurisdictions join Texas, Mississippi and other states in lifting mask mandates and easing restrictions on businesses, many essential workers — including bartenders, restaurant servers and retail workers — are relieved by changes that might help the economy but also concerned they could make them less safe amid a pandemic that health experts warn is far from over.

Many business owners on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were glad Gov. Tate Reeves decided to eliminate mask requirements, limits on seating in restaurants and most other binding restrictions. "But the workers themselves... especially ones that have pre-existing conditions, they're scared right now," Carney said.

"This just puts us back in a situation where we're on the frontlines, under the gun again," said Carney, who sees Black Mississippians facing the greatest risks from the decision that took effect Wednesday. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Black and Latino people in the United States, and many Gulf Coast restaurants have a significant number of Black employees.

Public health experts tracking the trajectory of more contagious virus variants have warned that lifting restrictions too soon could lead to another lethal wave of infections. Although vaccination drives are accelerating as drug manufacturers ramp up production, many essential workers are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccines in Mississippi and other states.

Alabama's state health officer on Friday advised residents to keep following standard infection-prevention recommendations even though the governor is letting the state's mask mandate expire next month.

"There is nothing magical about the date of April 9. We don't want the public to think that's the day we all stop taking precautions," State Health Officer Scott Harris said.

The governors of Iowa, Montana, North Dakota also have ended mask requirements or plan to suspend them soon. The governor of South Carolina on Friday lifted an executive order requiring face coverings in government office buildings and restaurants, leaving it up to state administrators and restaurant operators to develop their own guidelines.

Governors in several other states, including Michigan and Louisiana, eased the operating limits for bars, restaurants and other businesses in recent days.

The National Retail Federation, the largest retail trade association in the U.S., issued a statement Wednesday encouraging shoppers to wear masks. Some retail chains, including Target and supermarket operator Albertson's, plan to continue requiring them for both customers and workers in states that no longer make them mandatory.

Texas Retailers Association President and CEO George Kelemen said he thinks many members will continue to require workers — but not necessarily customers — to wear masks and other protective gear.

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"Retailers know their customers best," he said.

McDonald's cook Cornejo, 43, said the end of Texas' mask mandate next week alarms her because several of her co-workers already were lax about keeping their faces covered. She said co-workers she has asked to pull their masks back over their noses politely acquiesced, but not always for long.

"There are just different attitudes," said Cornejo, whose 19-year-old son began working as a cashier at the same restaurant to help pay the family's bills. "Some say it's just too difficult to keep it on for eight hours, especially when it gets hot."

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, encouraged Americans to "do the right thing" by continuing to abide by recommendations for routine mask use and social distancing - even if their states lift restrictions.

Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, said individuals who wear masks still risk infection from unmasked shoppers and diners. He called Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's decision to lift COVID-19 restrictions starting March 10 "entirely too soon and entirely too carefree."

While deaths and new confirmed cases have plummeted from their January peaks nationwide, they're still running at high levels, while outbreak indicators in some states have risen in recent weeks. In Mississippi, for example, the 7-day rolling average of the virus positivity rate rose from 11.47% on Feb. 19 to 12.14% on March 5, and the state's 7-day rolling average of daily deaths increase during the same period from 15 per day to 20.71 per day.

Workers in cities that still have mask mandates or jobs at businesses that maintain their own virus-prevention rules anticipate defiance from customers emboldened by their governors' actions and weary of taking precautions.

Molly Brooks, 25, a barista at a Farmers Branch, Texas, coffee shop, said she has regularly dealt with customers who walked out or bullied her and her colleagues when they were asked to wear a mask. Brooks worries how they're going to enforce the rule, which the coffee shop plans to keep in place, now that Texas' governor lifted the statewide mask mandate.

"We are gearing up for the emotional toll that this is going to take," said the 25-year-old barista, who started working for the coffee shop in November while looking for a job in education. "The people who don't want to wear them are still going to fight...and now they are going to have even more ammunition."

Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi, home of the University of Mississippi, will require masks and allow only eight customers at a time. Although General Manager Lyn Roberts believes the rules will make many customers feel safe, bookstore employee Paul Fyke said he observed a change in Oxford almost as soon as the Board of Aldermen chose to follow the governor's lead and did away with the college town's mask mandate.

"I mean, really, even on the drive home, you can kind of already see there were places where, for a lot of people, it was triumph," he said on Thursday, the day after Oxford's mask requirement ended. "They were happy to be removing them."

Still, some workers are cautiously hopeful that fewer restrictions will bring more customers, tips and job security after a year short on all three.

In San Francisco, where the mayor last week announced the return of indoor dining and the reopening of movie theaters and gyms, Dino Keres had no qualms about serving drinks to customers bellying up to the bar inside Sam's Grill.

That's partly because he was about to get his second vaccine dose, but also because nobody on staff was infected when indoor dining was briefly permitted last fall. What's more, masks are required unless people are eating, and indoor seating is limited to 25% of capacity.

"We have already went through this once, and now the timing feels about right to try it again," Keres said Thursday.

Ro Hart, an assistant general manager and hostess at Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco, said the return of indoor dining in the city provoked a mixture of joy and anxiety.

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"We are happy to be bringing in more revenue, but we are little nervous, too, because we have to be more stringent about making sure everyone keeps their masks on when they're not eating," Hart said, adding that she would be far more worried if San Francisco didn't require masks.

"We feel for our brothers and sisters at all those restaurants in Texas," she said.

Associated Press writers Alexandra Olson and Joseph Pisani in New York; David Koenig in Dallas; Dee-Ann Durbin in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 8, the 67th day of 2021. There are 298 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 8, 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, vanished during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, setting off a massive and ultimately unsuccessful search.

On this date:

In 1618, German astronomer Johannes Kepler devised his third law of planetary motion.

In 1817, the New York Stock & Exchange Board, which had its beginnings in 1792, was formally organized; it later became known as the New York Stock Exchange.

In 1930, the 27th president of the United States, William Howard Taft, died in Washington at age 72.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, in *McCullum v. Board of Education*, struck down voluntary religious education classes in Champaign, Illinois, public schools, saying the program violated separation of church and state.

In 1960, Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard M. Nixon won the New Hampshire presidential primary.

In 1965, the United States landed its first combat troops in South Vietnam as 3,500 Marines arrived to defend the U.S. air base at Da Nang.

In 1979, technology firm Philips demonstrated a prototype compact disc player during a press conference in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

In 1983, in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals convention in Orlando, Florida, President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

In 1988, 17 soldiers were killed when two Army helicopters from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, collided in mid-flight.

In 1999, baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio died in Hollywood, Florida, at age 84.

In 2004, Iraq's Governing Council signed a landmark interim constitution.

In 2008, President George W. Bush vetoed a bill that would have banned the CIA from using simulated drowning and other coercive interrogation methods to gain information from suspected terrorists.

Ten years ago: Voters in Bell, California, went to the polls in huge numbers and threw out the entire City Council after most of its members had been charged with fraud. (Residents were infuriated to find out that former City Manager Robert Rizzo had been receiving an annual salary of \$1.5 million, and that four of the five City Council members had paid themselves \$100,000 a year to meet about once a month.)

Five years ago: Democrat Bernie Sanders breathed new life into his longshot White House bid with a crucial win in Michigan's primary while Hillary Clinton breezed to an easy victory in Mississippi; Republican Donald Trump swept to victory in Michigan, Mississippi and Hawaii, while Ted Cruz carried Idaho. Sir George Martin, the Beatles' urbane producer who guided the band's swift, historic transformation from rowdy club act to musical and cultural revolutionaries, died at age 90.

One year ago: Italy's prime minister announced a sweeping quarantine restricting the movements of about a quarter of the country's population. Two members of Congress, Sen. Ted Cruz and Rep. Paul Gosar, said they were isolating themselves after determining that they'd had contact at the Conservative Political Action Conference with a man who later tested positive for the coronavirus. The U.S. State Department

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issued an advisory against travel on cruise ships. U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams said communities would need to start thinking about canceling large gatherings, closing schools and letting more employees work from home. Actor Max von Sydow, who played the priest in the horror classic "The Exorcist," died at the age of 90.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz musician George Coleman is 86. Actor Sue Ane (correct) Langdon is 85. College Football Hall of Famer Pete Dawkins is 83. Songwriter Carole Bayer Sager is 77. Actor-director Micky Dolenz (The Monkees) is 76. Singer-musician Randy Meisner is 75. Pop singer Peggy March is 73. Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Rice is 68. Jazz musician Billy Childs is 64. Singer Gary Numan is 63. NBC News anchor Lester Holt is 62. Actor Aidan Quinn is 62. Actor Camryn Manheim is 60. Actor Leon (no last name) is 60. Country-rock singer Shawn Mullins is 53. Neo-soul singer Van Hunt is 51. Actor Andrea Parker is 51. Actor Boris Kodjoe is 48. Actor Freddie Prinze Jr. is 45. Actor Laura Main is 44. Actor James Van Der Beek is 44. R&B singer Kameelah Williams (702) is 43. Actor Nick Zano is 43. Rock singer Tom Chaplin (Keane) is 42. Rock musician Andy Ross (OK Go) is 42. Actor Jessica Collins is 38. R&B singer Kristinia (kris-teh-NEE'-ah) DeBarge is 31.